

## **HOW TO TAME CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA**

**By  
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Excerpts of An Address on "Ethical Deficit, Corruption and the Challenges of Nation Building in 21st Century Nigeria" by Ekpo Nta, Esq., Chairman, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) at the 16th Wole Soyinka Annual Lecture Organised by the National Association of Seadogs in Uyo on Friday, 12th July 2013

I am always delighted when I have to speak on corruption because that's what I have been hired to do. When I accepted the invitation to speak at the 16th Wole Soyinka Annual Lecture organized by the National Association of Seadogs two things were on my mind. First, it is a rare privilege to for me to be part of any ceremony that would honour an International Icon of Nigerian descent: Wole Soyinka, in a world where to be described as of Nigerian descent connotes trouble except you are a footballer scoring goals in the European League.

The second and more compelling reason was the opportunity for the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to use this forum as the first public testing ground to discuss the draft of the Nigerian National Ethics and Integrity Policy which is undergoing finishing touches in partnership with the Justice For All (J4A) Programme of the DFID.

What is Ethics?

This is a set of societal rules which have international acceptance in terms of permissible behaviour or actions which promote good human values: honesty (accountability, transparency, etc.) justice, chivalry, respect for others, patriotism, etc. It guides conduct on the basis of do what I say and do and not what I say and do not do. An absence or low supply of ethical values leads to a deficit in moral well-being and limits the deficiency-prone individual in the delivery of good governance and promotes corruption. A high dosage of ethical values can also attract resentment for an upright individual operating within a morally bankrupt corrupt society. Societies have tended to address and maintain ethical balances through self-regulating conduct and sanctions through the use of Law Enforcement Agencies, and lately added Anti-Corruption Agencies.

Corruption is the subverting of public institutions, processes and goods for the benefit of a few persons or their associates. The substructures that fuel corruption indicate that it thrives where there is a high percentage of ethical and moral deficit in the populace. Societies with high inflation rates, lack of social safety nets, poor infrastructure, poor access to good quality health and educational services, high unemployment rates amongst the youth provide fertile grounds for corruption. Ill-paid

civil servants, public office holders and unregulated businesses will tend to exploit these situations to provide personal safety nets and eventually become rabidly greedy.

#### Types of Anti-Corruption Agencies

There are various types of Anti-Corruption Agencies in the world. Some are multi-functional (Universal) and have investigative/prosecutorial, preventive and educational/public enlightenment functions. A good example is the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) of Hong Kong established in 1974. Nigeria's equivalent is ICPC which combines all these functions and was established in 2000.

A second version of specialist ACAs are investigative in nature and address specific areas and needs. They may, or may not, have prosecutorial powers. When Nigeria had specific challenges in money laundering, terrorist financing, oil bunkering, internet-based fraud and related economic and financial crimes, it responded with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2004.

A third variant of ACAs are largely preventive in nature. They are known as Ethics (and Anti-corruption) Commissions especially in Kenya and Ethiopia addressed and concentrated more on ethical reformation as a basis for preventing corruption. Under this genre we have the National Orientation Agency and the Code of Conduct Bureau to address specific areas. The latter is part of the Nigerian Constitution and has elaborate ethical rules guiding those in the Public Service.

A fourth type is the multi-Agency approach where several distinct ACAs work in synergy to fight the common enemy (corruption) and each develops specialisations which come in useful during coordinated inter-agency operations. A good example of this is the United States Office of Government Ethics which has preventive functions. It works in concert with the Justice Department which has investigative and prosecution powers. With the aftermath of the September 11 bombing incident the Homeland Security Department came into being and coordinates several other Agencies like Customs, Immigration, Coast guards, Secret Service, etc.

#### How did Anti-Corruption Agencies evolve in Nigeria?

Some countries established Anti Corruption Agencies (ACAs) as a response to international pressures especially trading and donor partners. I doubt the effectiveness of their ACAs making any impact because of the perception that their local corruption is against outsiders.

However there is a higher opportunity for success in countries that have had severe corruption crisis and have themselves decided to do something about it domestically. The local population must buy into and sustain it for their own good and the good of all.

Which is our scenario? Each country must understand its needs and be careful not to dance to external music to the detriment of its internal cohesion. We react in a knee-jerk fashion and oftentimes throw out the baby with the bath water and begin to reinvent the wheel at great expense and arrive at comical results.

The theme of this 16th Annual Lecture is most appropriate and has come at a time when all Nigerians, or most Nigerians, are beginning to agitate and seek a change to the culture of impunity and corruption that has robbed all of us of good life and international respect. Have you of late tried ordering certain goods on internet and found out that you could not find "Nigeria" in the drop-down box for mail deliveries?

### Fixing Ethical Deficits

ICPC is in the forefront of providing a National Policy on Ethics and Integrity under its preventive mandate if we are to win the war against corruption in the 21st century and beyond. We want to engage the citizens and allocate shares to them as owners of the change. We need to identify Nigerian Core Values.

Do Christians, Muslims and idol worshippers/pagans in Nigeria share the same ethical values? Do they have different reactions to "dishonesty"? The culmination and acceptance of shared values become Core Values and over time become a basis for negotiating acceptable laws for all persons in the society.

### Do We Need Constitutional Guarantees for Ethics?

It must be noted that Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2011) dealing with Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy has been taken care of the need for national ethics. This is for "the purpose of promoting the good government and the welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the Unity of our people".

Poser: Do Nigerians need Servicom and Social Charters to be scrawled all over the walls before public officers serve with integrity and honesty? What are human rights if we do not have respect for human dignity and the sanctity of the human person especially when other human societies have stringent rules for treating animals well? Wherever you come from or whatever your religious belief is which mother would like to see her children die in hospitals because they were administered with fake drugs?

### ICPCs Intervention/Preventive Activities:

National Ethics and Civic Curriculum: Eight years ago, ICPC in collaboration with the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), developed a National Ethics and Civic Curriculum for our educational system starting from the Primary schools. Last month, we followed this with the launch of a Teacher's Guide. We have established Anti-corruption and Integrity Clubs in Secondary Schools and tertiary institutions across the Country and my present Board has approved increased funding and interaction to this vital sector.

University Systems Study and Review: ICPC is currently involved in a review of corruption-prone processes at the tertiary levels of education with a view of assisting that sector take command of our national development imperatives. We have placed strong emphasis on the principles of honesty, hard-work, etc and will help develop new thought processes. We have begun the shutting down of illegal degree awarding mills nationwide.

NYSC: ICPC has integrity partnership Associations with the NYSC and we have an ethics programme that we run during their camping. After camping the process is driven by the Corp Members as volunteer groups.

Town Hall Meetings: ICPC runs integrity programmes through town hall meetings throughout the nation where we interact with the local opinion leaders and citizens

National Anti-corruption Volunteer Corps and National Coalition of Civil Societies: Our most rewarding partnership that is citizen-run is in the area of volunteerism by citizens in the fight against corruption through sensitisation processes. We are now engaging Professional Bodies so that they can begin to proactively monitor their members and sanction them.

Promoting Ethical Conduct:

Patriotism: What will make me die for Nigeria if my children will become destitutes and will have no access to my death benefits? We need to and we have begun cleaning up the pensions system and enforcing new processes.

Access to Justice irrespective of tongue or status: Legal Aid Council to assist the poor. Expand it to provide National Legal Schemes to encourage and assist young Lawyers take up and defend the "defenceless" for a State determined fee.

Democratic Change in governance. - Strengthen democratic institutions like INEC and let the citizens buy into it as a protection of their rights.

Poverty alleviation programmes: will strengthen democratic rights - the hungry and needy cannot make choices.

Restitution and compensation for victims of crime and injustice and immediate retribution and punishment for criminal conduct: This is the best signal that can assist ethical conduct of citizens. Elaborate schemes, not adhoc ones, must be encouraged and developed.

Unity in diversity: Educational Institutions, NYSC, Military and paramilitary Organisations must be encouraged to be universal in nature so that all citizens can have a stake and buy-in that these are national institutions

Professionalism: holding professionals to the ethical values. Develop specialisations

and allow professionals to run their sectors.

Declaration of Interest - Code of Conduct for Public Officers  
Federal Character Principles: Inclusiveness or Exclusiveness.

Use of Technology: Our integration with the world is based on technological savvy and this must be done in line with international Ethical considerations. Internet banking and shopping is based on trust and we must remove the yoke of dishonesty that some of our country men have imposed on us.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I would like to posit that Nation building would benefit from a strong dose of citizen and leadership conducts driven by Ethics and Integrity. The substructures that will support genuine ethical conduct must be situated in a fair rewards system where there is access to minimum acceptable standards that provide a decent life to citizens. Our collective strength lies in the weakest Nigerian.

All levels of governance must key into a national ethical conduct and not play “politics” with our jugular arteries especially in the areas of education, health, agriculture, security, infrastructural development, utilities, community development and national elections. The ethics policy must be integrated into recruitment into the public service, procurements and must be binding on citizens and foreigners.

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