

# **The Youth and Education Sector Corruption in Nigeria**

**By**

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Paper delivered at the National Conference on Youth against Corruption, organized by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), at the International Conference Centre, Abuja, November 24-26, 2015.

The Chairman,  
Chairman, Honorable members, Heads of Departments/Units, and  
Staff of ICPC  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

### ***Introduction***

I like to start by thanking the organizers (Chairman, ICPC and members organizing Committee) of this event for putting up such an important even at this auspicious time and also for inviting me to deliver a lecture on this day, being the 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2-015. I consider it a rare privilege to be in the midst of such eminent and respected personalities, especially patriotic citizens of Nigeria working in the anti corruption sector, men and women who have chosen to sacrifice their precious resources and time in the battle to ride our nation of corruption. This is why when I was contacted to be part a speaker in this conference I accepted it without reservation.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the title of my lecture as you know is **The Youth and Education Sector Corruption in Nigeria**. Am sure you all of you will agree with me that corruption is by far the most topical issue facing our country today. As previous speakers before me have emphasized, it is the most serious challenge confronting our nation today. While it is true that other nations are also affected by corruption, in our own case what is very disturbing is that corruption appears to be growing by the day despite concerted efforts by recent governments to fight it. The negative consequences of corruption on our nation have also been enormous. Corruption is responsible for our bad roads, unstable electricity supply and the poor standard of our public schools because contractors and public officials divert part of the money into their private pockets. Many parents are forced to pay so much of their hard earned resources to see that their children acquire qualitative education in private schools because of poor quality of education in public schools, no thanks to corruption, while the unfortunate masses who cannot afford private schools for their children are condemned to sending

their children to bad public schools only for them to become unemployable. Whereas some corrupt elements in the society, especially among public servants and politicians use stolen public funds to educate their children and wards abroad.

While many of us present here we easily agree that new approaches are necessary to curb corruption, it will probably be difficult to agree on what exactly should be the best approach to be adopted. As you are all aware in the last 16 years or so, the Federal Government of Nigeria have taken significant steps to fight corruption. Generally, the approach taken to until now had relied on anti-corruption laws and law enforcement agencies put in place by governments. The underlining assumption in this approach is that it is the responsibility of the government and law enforcement agents to fight corruption by outlawing it and punishing offenders. Indeed this thinking is very much in agreement with Chapter II (5) of the 1999 constitution which says that as part of the fundamental objectives and Directive Principles of State policy “the state shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power”

But as past experience in many countries, including Nigeria has shown, corruption and crime control generally, cannot be left to the government alone, however well-meaning and equipped the government may be. As I will be arguing instead, the war against corruption must be the responsibility of all citizens, either acting alone or as a group. Unfortunately, not many Nigerians have fully bought into the argument that there is need to re-examine the role of citizens acting as agents in the war against corruption. This is why I consider the topic of my lecture this morning, **The Youth and Education Sector Corruption in Nigeria**, very apt and timely. This topic fits perfectly well into my own position on the anti-corruption, which has been informed by my past academic researches, that fights against corruption are more successive when they are comprehensive and all embracing. That is to say that curbing corruption successfully will require participation of all critical stakeholders in a country.

One of such critical stakeholders is the youth. Who are the youth? For the sake of this lecture, I will define the youth as individuals who are between the ages of 18 -35, and are often characterized by energy, dynamism, adventurism and passion. These qualities are believed to make the youth susceptible to many social vices, including corruption and all sorts of financial crimes that are plaguing the

Nigerian society today. Yet, and as I will be arguing, these same qualities are also vital to the progress of any nation. More importantly, they can also be a potent tool for dealing with the same vices (corruption and financial crimes) if their potentials are fully harnessed and positively utilized.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, any discussion of any given type of corruption or anti-corruption effort in a given country requires that the concept of corruption itself first be generally clarified and its causes and devastating effects explained. This is necessary because corruption can mean different things to different people, depending on their cultural and professional background. This is why I will start this lecture by providing a working definition of corruption and a brief explanation of its manifestation in our society.

## **Meaning of Corruption**

Despite all the attention corruption has attracted, the search for a common and all-embracing definition of corruption has remained elusive. There are at least two explanations for this paradox. Firstly, corruption is expressive of a multitude of deviant behaviours. Consequently, attempts to offer a precise definition have tended to confuse corruption with other related offences. On the other hand, attempts to produce a more simplified definition have produced the opposite effects: definitions that exclude several important corrupt practices. Secondly, the meaning or understanding of corruption does often vary from one culture to another, and even within the same culture over time.

So does this mean that there is no widely accepted definition of corruption? One of the most widely accepted definition of corruption is the one offered by Transparency International and the World Bank, which sees corruption as “the abuse of public power”. Two critiques can be easily be made against this definition. The first is that the notion of corruption cannot be justifiably restricted to public office or officials alone. To do so will amount to ignoring similar abuses in the private sector. Secondly this definition is vague and not comprehensive enough to offer a useful guide to our understanding of corruption in places like Nigeria, where the phenomenon is multifaceted. This then implies that we need a definition that avoid such limitations, and is more inclusive, exhaustive and useful for analysing the wide spectrum of corruption observable in countries such as Nigeria.

For this purpose I shall be relying on a definition offered by Khan. According to him, corruption means any act which deviates from the rules of

conduct, including normative values, governing the actions of an individual in a position of authority or trust, whether in the private or public domain, because of private- regarding motives, (that is non public or general) such as wealth, power, status etc (Khan, 1996:12). Khan's definition is useful for analysing corruption in Nigeria for many reasons. It captures the most important, if not all, the dimensions of corruption in the country. Most importantly, it is devoid of value judgement, having been constructed on three (3) empirically verifiable and measurable criteria. An act will be corrupt only if it involves all of the following conditions –

- i. It is done by or involves an individual holding a position of authority, trust or responsibility, whatever may be the domain or sector of activity (public or private)
- ii. The act committed contravenes any rule, law or regulation, including existing norms and values of a community or an institution
- iii. The act or behaviour is done intentionally to advance narrow private interests and or objectives, whether they are material or not.

## **Manifestations and Forms of Corruption in Nigeria**

The actual manifestations of corruption do often vary from country to country, and even across different regions in the same countries. In Nigeria, the manifestation cut across several malfeasances,

### ***Bribery***

Bribery is the commonest form of corruption in most countries both developing and developed. The term bribery can be explained as the improper use of money, gifts and forms of favours in exchange for personal gain which one is ordinarily not entitled to. This is also known by many other appellations kickbacks in public procurement sector, in the Middle East, baksheesh, grease money, . It is the most common form of corruption. The types of favours given are diverse and include money, gifts, sex, company shares, entertainment, employment and political benefits. The personal gain that is given can be anything from actively giving preferential treatment to having an indiscretion or crime overlooked (Klitgaard, 1998). Bribery can sometimes be part of the systemic use of corruption for other ends, for example to perpetrate further corruption such as in the areas of fraud, examination and electoral malpractices.

### ***Extortion***

Bribery is sometimes used inter-changeably with extortion. The two are however not the same. While bribery is the use of positive inducements from the giver for specific gains which he expects to receive from the receiver of the bribe, extortion on the other hand centre around the use of blackmail and threats by the receiver to extract some benefits. This can be the threat of violence or false imprisonment as well as exposure of an individual's secrets or prior crimes. This act is more common with law enforcement agents. Other examples include an influential person threatening to go to the media if they do not receive speedy medical treatment (at the expense of other patients), threatening a public official with exposure of their secrets if they do not act in a particular manner, or demanding money in exchange for continued secrecy (Forgues-Puccio, 2013).

### ***Embezzlement***

Embezzlement is a form of theft which describes a situation which involves someone in position of trust or authority with access to funds or assets illegally taking control of such funds or assets for personal use. This type of corruption is more common in developing countries where there is little or no transparency in government and weak institutional mechanisms for checks and balances.

### ***Fraud***

Fraud involves using deception to convince the owner of funds or assets to give them up to an unauthorized party. Examples include the misdirection of company funds into "shadow companies" (and then into the pockets of corrupt employees), the skimming of foreign aid money, scams and other corrupt activity Taylor (2010). It also involves the criminal falsification of records and documents in order to further the interests of oneself or others.

### ***Nepotism***

The act of nepotism according Taylor (2010), involve the favouring of not the perpetrator of corruption but someone related to them, such as a friend, family member or member of an association. Examples would include hiring a family member to a role they are not qualified for or promoting a staff member who belongs to the same political party as you, regardless of merit.

### ***Election malpractices***

This particular act of corruption includes promises of office special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election, buying of votes, disenfranchisement, snatching of ballot boxes, victimizing and maiming, mutilation of election results in favour of losers and votes turn up in area where votes were not cast (Taylor, 2010).

### ***Judiciary corruption***

Judicial corruption simply refers to corruption related misconduct of judges, through receiving or giving bribes, improper sentencing of convicted criminals, bias in the hearing and judgment of cases and other such misconduct (Omotola, 2008). Governmental corruption of judiciary is broadly known in many transitional and developing countries because the budget is almost completely controlled by the executive. The latter undermines the separation of powers, as it creates a critical financial dependence of the judiciary. The proper national wealth distribution including the government spending on the judiciary is subject of the constitutional economics (Shumba, 2007).

### ***Academic corruption***

This is corruption occurring in the educational system such as colleges and universities. It can be seen as an act of corruption in itself, as well as an outcome of other forms of corruption such as bribery or sorting as it is known in Nigeria, extortion or fraud. In developing countries, such as certain African, eastern European countries and Asian countries, corruption occurs frequently in universities (Heyneman, et al. 2008). These include plagiarism, falsification of research results, doctoring of academic records, examination malpractices and bribes offered either to non-teaching staff to bypass bureaucratic procedures and or to faculty for a higher grade. The willingness to engage such corrupt practices decreases if individuals perceive such behavior as very objectionable, i.e. a violation of social norms and if they fear sanctions in terms of the severity and probability of sanctions (Graeff, 2014). When we speak of youth and corruption in the educational sector, what often comes to mind is *sorting* and other forms of examination malpractices. In reality however, youth in the educational sector are also engaged in several, if not all of the other forms of corruption I have identified, including embezzlement, financial fraud, electoral malpractices, just to mention a few.

These are not the only form or manifestation of corruption in Nigeria, but only an example of some of the most common forms of corruption occurring in Nigeria.

## **Causes of Corruption in Nigeria**

Several theories have been advanced to explain the widespread nature of corruption in some countries, such as Nigeria. These include the cultural, historical, functional, developmentalist/modernisation, institutional and neo-patrimonial theories of corruption. In this lecture, I will dwell on only the cultural and institutional theories of corruption which, in my view, are the most relevant to understanding of the causation of corruption in Nigeria.

### ***Cultural Explanations***

Cultural theorists generally emphasize the central role of culture as a dominant determinant of behavioural patterns found among any set of people. Accordingly, several researchers have conducted studies showing that cultural legacies or existing cultural practices do to a large extent explain why corruption is very prevalent in Nigerian society. In Nigeria, for instance, we have in some cases more of corruption of the social exchange type, in form of nepotism, tribalism and clientelism etc, more than the economic type of corruption. This is due to the place of primary group relations in Nigeria's cultural practices. However, these social types of corruption often lead to corruption of the economic type, when for instance, social pressures on public officials to fulfill social obligations drive them to embezzle public funds.

One of the earliest culturalists to work on Nigeria was Smith, M.G. (1964; 1979), who examined the origin and nature of corruption in the northern part of Nigeria. From his studies, Smith established that the widespread corrupt tendencies among northern political elites are largely derived from what he calls the cultural condition of political corruption among Hausa during the period colonial era. According to him, oppression and corruption increases among Hausa with political centralization and increase of governmental tasks. He concludes that to fully understand the emergence of political corruption in among the Hausas, historical and structural factors which define these behaviours and their context should be taken into full account. Another notable proponent of this theory Ekpo (1979) have also examined the supportive values of the culture of corruption in Africa generally, and Nigeria in particularly. Ekpo looked specifically at how the Africa



culture of gift giving and taking have metamorphosed into the generalized practice of bribery and extortion in Nigeria. Some others have examined the issue from the perspective of kinship ties and obligations which places enormous obligations on individuals in positions to divert official resources to advance the cause of members of their social groups (Smith, 2007)

### *Institutional Causes*

This theory borrows from (neo)institutional theory in the Social Sciences which argues that the structure and character of a country's institutions are the major determinants of political behaviour. The major assumption for the institutionalists, therefore, is that contrary to some scholastic belief, corruption in developing countries, such as Nigeria, is not only a culturally embedded phenomenon but also an institutional problem which can be contained, to a reasonable degree, by institutional restructuring (Enweremadu, 2012:xvii).

In Nigeria, for instance, some scholars have laid the blame on the door step of Nigeria's governmental institutions, like democracy, political parties, public services or even federalism. Nigerian federalism has been characterized by two factors namely politically fragmental political order and regular creation of political sub-units. To begin from with the latter, regular resort to creation of new states and local councils, which was capped with a specific formula for the distribution of federal revenue among the federating states and local councils, and the institutionalisation of the 'federal character' principle, provided opportunities to spread development to previously inaccessible regions and for increased local political participation, but also for excessive corruption and rent-seeking on the part of the ruling elites and their cronies in the private sectors. This process has been termed the 'boomerang effects of Nigerian federalism (Bach, 1989; Suberu, 1998),

The second factor is highly fragmented political system with multiple layers of antagonistic semi-autonomous political authorities. Frequent changes of government witnessed in the country as a result of intra-elite struggle for positions and resources encouraged the political leaders to be short-sighted in their calculations, and to place their individual survival above the exigencies of national development (Lewis, 2007). For instance, officials fearing that their stay in office could be cut-off at very short notice were encouraged to steal what they could as fast as they could. In other words, the nature of corruption and governance in Nigeria, is not only informed by the decentralized institutional arrangements in

place, but also the country's notoriously volatile political atmosphere, punctuated by violent ethno-religious competition for power (Enweremadu, (2013).

Laws also are another type of institutions that are said to predispose people to corruption. This depends on whether the laws are sufficient in number and strength. Akinseye-George, (2000) provides insights into this perspective while trying to establish the relationship between the Nigerian legal system, corruption and Governance. He argues that the phenomenon of corruption nurtured by weak legal system has posed a serious threat to good governance in Nigeria. After reviewing the existing anti-corruption provisions, he concludes that these legislations especially the outdated criminal and penal codes are not effective or sufficient for dealing with the problem posed by corruption, necessitating an urgent review.

### **Involvement of Youth in Corrupt Practices in the Education Sector**

From our definition of youth as those individuals falling within the age bracket of 18-35, it is obvious that corruption involving youth in the education sector corruption will be referring mainly to the activities of students in the colleges, polytechnics or Monotechnics, and universities. Over the years some of the corrupt activities of these groups of individuals and their impact on the educational sector have received the attention of both the media and researchers. Some of these malpractices including plagiarism, falsification of research results, doctoring of academic records, examination malpractices and bribes offered either to non-teaching staff to bypass bureaucratic procedures and or to faculty for a higher grade, need no further clarification. What perhaps needs to be emphasized here is first, that these practices have now become the norm in many higher institutions in Nigeria. Secondly, when we speak of youth and corruption in the educational sector, what often comes to mind is *sorting* or *blocking* and other forms of examination related malpractices. In reality however, youth in the educational sector are also engaged in several, if not all of the other forms of corruption I have identified, which afflict the larger society, including embezzlement of public funds, financial fraud (AKA 419), electoral malpractices, just to mention a few.

If you permit me, I will like to use my personal experience at the University of Ibada, UI, as an example. During three years (2011-2014), I served as Chair of Undergraduate Committee/Examination Officer, which placed me in charge of supervising the activities of the National Association of Political Science Students (NAPSS), as Staff Adviser. While in that position, I was constantly inundated with

endless petitions against the officials of NAPSS alleging one form of fraud or the other. Most of these cases, which are not baseless anyway, bordered on diversion of donations (e.g ICPC Chairman's in 2014) or students dues; award of contracts without following due process often at inflated rates; spending above approved limit, and outright embezzlement of funds. Once such cases are reported, out practice at UI is to put the graduation of the accused student leader on hold until the cases made against him or her have been cleared.

Mr. Chairman, distinguish ladies and gentlemen, one question I am sure must be agitating your mind by now? And that is: what explains the prevalence of such scale or level of corrupt practices among our youths in the educational institutions, where they are supposed to be groomed not only in the area of learning but also character, I mean proper values?

- (a) Ignorance, lack of proper socialization and inadequate orientation
- (b) Widespread poverty due to absence of scholarships/grants and inadequate funding of the educational sector, a factor which can erode their autonomy of youth groups and associations.
- (c) the absence of government policy empowering youths to fight corruption (e.g. regulations granting free access to information in the educational sector, lack of protection for potential whistle blowers)
- (d) Increasing materialism or preoccupation with material issues
- (e) Lack of commitment and poor integrity of the leadership of the educational institutions (or rent-seeking behaviour of those at the helm of affairs in these organizations),
- (f) Corrupting influence of politicians, who do not shy away from instrumentalising the youths for political gains.

### ***Conclusion: Tackling Youth Corruption: The Way Out***

From the forgoing discussion, it is clear that our youth have now become part of the corruption problem, and therefore urgent steps needs to be taken to save them, if the future of our country must be anything different from what it is today. The question that arise then, is How can youth be made to shun corruption and contribute to the fight against corruption? What challenges confront the Nigerian government in their quest to fight corruption in the educational sector? In theory youths can be made to shun corruption to a large extent, and become important

allies in the current fight against corruption. However, in practice the effectiveness of their contributions can only be enhanced if the right policies and programmes are put in place by the government and the leadership of educational institutions. While not foreclosing any other relevant measures, I am convinced that the following five policy changes will go a long way in helping to deal with the problem. The government must:

- design and implement programmes that will inculcate in the youths the virtues of honesty, integrity and transparency as early as possible in the academic career.
- design policy that will encourage youths to participate more actively in the ongoing campaign against corruption and by so doing helping to complement the efforts of the government, especially in the area of advocacy, public enlightenment and whistle-blowing (exposing corrupt acts in their domain)
- institute an efficient scholarships/grants/Loans scheme to support students from poor background and address the issue of inadequate funding of the educational sector
- take concrete steps to check the corrupt practices being perpetrated by the heads of educational institutions, including financial and non financial corruption
- design a policy to regulate the relationship between students in the higher institutions and politicians, in order to insulate the students from the corrupting influence of politicians who may seek to instrumentalise them for political gains.

I urge all present here today to consider these policies are measures seriously in the interest of the future of our country, which very much depends on what we do with our youth today.

Thank you