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Rural Development and the Challenges of Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

The quality of life in the rural areas of Nigeria has been a major cause of concern to development experts with mass poverty and underdevelopment assuming a permanent feature of the Nigerian rural environment. This is in spite of the country's rich endowment in human and natural resources. As a result of Corruption, resources meant for rural development are often siphoned into private pockets and development projects and programs are consequently denied the needed resources for execution. The study, which focused on Owukpa community in Ogbadibo Local Government Area of Benue State was inspired by the belief that the secret of improving the material conditions of the vast majority of Nigerians who are rural dwellers lies in the successful implementation of rural development projects and programs. To this extent, the paper is concerned that corruption, which has been an impediment to rural development in the country must be tackled and reduced to the barest minimum if not totally eradicated. The paper relied on secondary source of data collection and adopted Modernization Theory as its analytical framework. The data were analyzed using Linker scale method. The paper found that Corruption had held-back meaningful rural development in the country and accordingly, recommended that Corruption in Nigeria must be fought to a stand-still for genuine development to be achieved in the rural areas of the country.

Keywords: Corruption, Environment, Impediment Population, Poverty, Rural development

Introduction

Rural development represents one of the critical contemporary issues and problems facing Nigeria. The present state of development in the Nigerian rural areas is unacceptably grim with slow overall economic growth and development, poor agricultural productivity, rapid population growth and gross

infrastructural deficit. This had culminated in visible de-humanizing rural poverty, destitution and underdevelopment in all facets of human development. The rural people live on the fringe of starvation, poverty and ignorance, which undermined their immunity and natural resistance to diseases such that epidemic killed thousands every year (Ekpe,

2006:19). It is an existence without grace in the present and without hope for the future, a state of misery and despair.

Modernized urban centers have therefore, constituted powerful attraction to the rural dwellers, especially the youth population. The rural-urban migration that such attraction has elicited creates various urban crisis of socio-economic development like congestion of the already inadequate urban facilities and infrastructure; unemployment; juvenile delinquency; high rate of crimes; and other forms of social vices. Conversely in the rural areas, rural-urban migration leads to depopulation and shortage of farm labor with the resultant decline in agricultural productivity and non-farm rural economic activities.

With about 80% of Nigeria's total population living in the rural areas it is commonly accepted that rural development is the real foundation upon which any meaningful and sustainable national development can be built in the country (Jega, 1995). In spite of the importance of rural areas in Nigeria in terms of their huge human and material potentials, they suffer from serious physical, economic and administrative neglect and are deprived of basic social amenities such as safe drinking water, electricity, good roads, schools, health-care services, among others. Besides these social

problems, the rural people are not always involved in decision-making on issues that affect them. Indeed, rural development is one area in Nigeria's development efforts that manifests a catalogue of failures and questions the country's quest for national development. This is because given the composition of rural Nigeria; whatever happens to the rural areas has monumental implications for the development of the entire country.

The performance of past rural development programs has not impacted much on social development indices such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and inequality which have remained high. The ultimate goal of rural development is to further the fortunes and welfare of the rural dwellers and their communities by creating equitable, healthy, efficient and attractive environment for present and future generations. Many past rural development programs in Nigeria such as the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Poverty Alleviation Programs, among others had all failed to achieve an all-round development of the rural people and society (Idada, 2006: 122). The Nigerian rural society continued therefore, to manifest such features

of underdevelopment like rural poverty, unemployment and absence of infrastructural facilities.

The greatest obstacle to successful rural development in Nigeria can be squared around corruption, which had continued to starve rural development programs of the needed funds for successful implementation. It is the recognition and concern with the devastating impact of corruption on rural development in Nigeria and its attendant growing discontent and social injustice among the rural people who form the vast majority of the population of the country that provoked the writing of this paper. The general objective of the study therefore, is to proffer solutions to the scourge of corruption and its debilitating effects on rural development in Nigeria. To this extent, the specific objectives of the study include:

- (a) To promote a framework for rural development in Nigeria;
- (b) To promote the tacit understanding that with as much as 80% Nigerians living in the rural areas, the rural sector cannot be regarded as antagonistic to rural development efforts as often erroneously claimed; and
- (c) To suggest strategies for tackling the problems of corruption, which

have been the banes of rural development in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts

The conceptualization of concepts is one of the imperatives of social sciences in the understanding of social phenomenon. Here the focal concepts are “Rural development” and “Corruption”.

Rural Development

Rural development is a concept that cannot easily be defined in an exhaustive manner. Ordinarily, rural development implies positive change or transformation of a rural situation and people from one state to another in a progressive manner (Idada, 2006:125). In this respect, it encompasses the ability of a rural people to live a modern or civilized existence through access to such facilities as good roads, potable water, electricity, health-care services, and schools among others. Rural development could therefore, be seen as a process by which the standard of living of the people at the grassroots level is enhanced politically, socially and economically.

Rural development seeks to achieve among other things improvement in the quality and standard of living of the vast majority of the people in the rural areas through improvement in the quality, value and

nutritional balance of their food intake, raising the standard and quality of rural housing, improving the rural health standards, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing better purchasing power of the rural communities (Musa, 1986:29). Also, Akpala (1986:4) defined rural development as the process of bringing improved level of living to the grasp of the rural population. The overall goal of rural development in Nigeria is to improve access to services for human development by the rural dwellers on a sustainable basis through the provision of rural basic infrastructures.

Lele (1975) cited in Dahida (2011:31) sees rural development as not only a means of increasing production and incomes in the rural areas but also a means of broadening political participation, to enforce political patronage or to realize ideological objectives. According to Yahaya (1980), also cited in Dahida (2011:31), rural development as a conscious and well-articulated development program, is a relatively new development strategy in Africa. He asserted that, many social and political problems can be solved if rural development is given the attention it deserves. Also, Decree No. 4 of 1986, which established the Directorate for food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) defined rural

development as a process through which rural needs are identified, human and material resources mobilized and exploited to meet such needs like food, raw materials, roads, water supply, electricity, schools, health facilities as well as ensuring greater social participation and economic self-reliance of the rural population. The pursuance of community development activities through self-help projects is therefore, necessary for rural development in Nigeria given the apparent neglect of the rural sector, which had produced conditions of social injustice.

Rural development must bring about changes in the social, political and economic relations of society to ensure that the rural dwellers or the peasantry can get for themselves the following:

- (a) Guarantee that he and his family will benefit fully from the products of his farm and that these are not extorted away;
- (b) Security of tenure for his farmland;
- (c) Guaranteed access to agricultural inputs at fair prices, in good time and without any debt-burden;
- (d) Guaranteed prices for his products against price fluctuations caused by hoarding and other forms of profiteering;

- (e) Guaranteed access to seasonal, and long term credit at low-interest rates and not involving any additional social and political burden; and
- (f) Mass literacy for himself and all the adults in the household to enable them improve their knowledge of farming, commerce, finance, and know-how to defend his rights and those of others (Musa, 1986:22).

Corruption

Like most social science concepts, there are divergent views on what corruption is or what constitutes a corrupt act? Corruption is misuse of office for unofficial ends while corrupt practices include bribery, extortion, abuse of public property, nepotism, rigging of elections, fraud, embezzlement, among others (Bolarinwa, 2011; 327). Although corruption manifests in various forms such as political, economic and bureaucratic, the motive of all corrupt practices is to use the instrumentality of one's official position for personal gains or that of relations, tribal groups or friends at the expense of the public good. Ndubisi (1986) cited in Akubor (2011:302) contends that corruption is any act by a public official which violates the accepted standards of behavior in order to serve private ends.

Corruption is as old as human history but in recent times it has assumed more diverse forms resulting in the emergence of different definitions of the phenomenon. According to Ango Abdullahi (1986) cited in Agber (2011:285), corruption is a loss of purity in the minds of actors or a given individual or society. Corruption is a form of anti-social behavior by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrator(s). It goes against established norms of behavior and contributes to the subversion of the prescribed moral ethics of the society and the fulfillment of governmental obligations (Ifamose, 2005) cited in Agber (2011:288).

As noted by Nuhu Ribadu, former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), cited in Agber (2011: 288), corruption has taken on the complexion of an industry in Nigeria. The manifest outcome of this include instances of killings of innocent motorists and commuters on the road by policemen for refusal to part with some money; false detention by the police and the award of marks by lecturers in return for sex or other forms of reward. Other manifestations of corruption include voters who would not cast their votes unless induced with monetary rewards from politicians; the civil servant who

does everything to assist his unqualified brother to get a job. The Nurse, who hides a syringe and demands for money to buy another only to bring out the hidden one as soon as money was advanced, is as corrupt as the judge who receives monetary inducements before passing judgment in a case before his court. Corruption has permeated all strata of the Nigerian society. It has resulted to the gross mismanagement of resources by top officials of government who are accused by the EFCC of siphoning billions of naira into personal accounts. In an editorial, The Guardian Newspaper cited in Agber (2011:289) noted thus:

History reveals that a high proportion of Nigeria's external loans vanished as well as export earnings vanished into private foreign accounts while the projects for which the loans were procured were either untraceable and uncompleted or non-performing where they were executed.

In the Nigerian lexicon, corruption is a process of getting things done through illegitimate means.

Some popular descriptive terms for corruption in the country include “settlement”, “Nigerian factor” “chua-chua”, etc. The sentiment of corruption is so pervasive among Nigerians that it is believed that the Nigerian-ness of an

individual was only visible when that individual transacts business in a manner that promotes certain corrupt practice, which seemingly had become condoned by the wider Nigerian society, hence the phrase “Nigerian factor” (Magbadelo, 2006:47) cited in Oyedele (2011:253). According to Rick Stapenhurst and Shahzard Sedigh (1999) cited in Oyedele (2011:253) corruption means:

...the abuse of power most often for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. It can be motivated by greed, by the desire to retain or increase one's power, or perversely enough, by the belief in a supposed greater good.

Paul Cothier also cited in Oyedele (2011:254) sees corruption not only as being morally wrong but as a behavior that is also economically harmful. To him, the betrayal of public trust for private gain is an economic problem for the society, and not simply a moral one. Onigu Otite cited in Oyedele (2011:254) defines corruption as:

The pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favor or moral depravity ...when at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or processes of society or the behavior of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled

situations, we may say that corruption has taken place. Corruption is found in the various spheres and stages of development, political, economic, judicial, etc.

It is obvious from these views that the essence of corruption or every corrupt act is for private gain.

This will include gains in cash or kind for one self, one's relative or friend. It should be noted, however, that there are various types of corruption, which include financial corruption, moral corruption, electoral corruption, etc. The financial corruption is the focus of this paper because of its obvious implications for rural development in Nigeria.

Modernization Theory

Modernization theory is looked upon as a template that was generally followed by societies that have achieved modernity. Hence, modernization theory is used to identify dynamics of social change in societies from their agrarian modes to industrial one or from the traditional to the modern (Igwe, 2010:54). It further attempts to identify the social and economic variables that contribute to social evolution, progress and development of societies taking into consideration historical, socioeconomic and political thrust of the societies in question. In other words, the role of states, their effectiveness or ineffectiveness is

integral to either economic development or absence of it. On yet another note the theory simply speaks of progress from a given stage to another hence, it may be averred that all inventions and every paradigm of human development all gear towards modernization. Like living organisms, societies progress through several stages generally starting at a simplistic level and then developing into a more complex stage. Societies adapt to their surrounding environments but they interact with each other for progress and development.

Modernization theorists advocate effective adaptation of western economic paradigms as key to unlocking the gates of development to the Third World countries whose underdevelopment result from internal contradictions within their societies. These contradictions are evident from the way and manner resources are allocated in these societies; the parochial beliefs, attitudes and values of the people which together with the character of the policies of governance are incongruent to development (Igwe, 2010:55). In summary, modernization theory underlines the necessity of developing countries borrowing the experience of western countries as requisite for obtaining equal development with the west and even advancing more than they already have. This is an appropriate

analytical tool for this paper which border on the transformation of rural Nigeria from its present state of underdevelopment to modernity with improved standard and living conditions for the rural dwellers.

Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption, which has taken on the complexion of an industry in Nigeria, is caused by several factors. One of these factors is greed. This is an uncontrolled excessive burning passion to have more of anything that one needs or desired. Many Nigerians are undisciplined in the pursuit of their set objectives or in acquiring what they are determined to have (Ezonbi, Wuam and Changwak, 2017:72). They are therefore, inclined to employ all sorts of dishonest and crooked ways to satisfy their inordinate selfish ends or ambitions. Other causes of corruption in Nigeria include misplaced sense of values, erosion of ethics and accountability in governance. The unequal distribution of wealth in the nation's resources to meet the basic needs of the citizens leads to financial misappropriation and bribery.

Reflecting on the causes of corruption in Nigeria, Adebayo (1996) cited in Ezonbi, et al (2011:72) noted that Nigerians worship material success no matter by what means the success is achieved. Indeed, in Nigeria, becoming corrupt is almost unavoidable

because morality is relaxed in the society and many people struggle for survival without assistance from the state (Oyedele, 2011:263). Obsession with materialism, compulsion for a short-cut to affluence, glorification and appropriation of ill-gotten wealth by the society are among the reasons for the persistence of corruption in the country. Also, the influence or pressure of polygamous households and extended family system and pressure to meet family obligations are part of the causes of corruption.

Poor reward system is another cause of corruption in Nigeria. Nigeria's reward system is perhaps, the poorest in the world (Oyedele, 2011:263). Nigeria is a society where national priorities are often turned upside down, which means her values are most at times wrong. Also, lack of economic opportunity among many Nigerians explain the upsurge of corrupt practices in the society e.g. many civil servants work for months without getting paid, yet the Nigerian society expects them to be honest and productive. This is detrimental to the socio-economic development of the Nigerian nation.

The Nigerian political leadership has always wielded political power and succeeded in expropriating national resources at the expense of development in the country. There is no modesty or sense of selfless and sacrificial

service to the Nigerian people among the political leaders in the country. In comparing the Nigerian situation with Tanzania, Magaji (2005) noted thus:

When the former President of Tanzania, Late Julius Nyerere, retired as President, he possessed not more than ten jackets and no single personal house. The President had to request for a three-bedroom flat from the government of Tanzania for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, his vice-president resorted to teaching English in a community school.

Most political leaders in Nigeria do not possess these qualities hence they are part and parcel of the problem of corruption in the country. As Achebe (1981:1) rightly observed, the problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.

The role of the international community in providing safe havens for looted funds from Nigeria helps to aid and abet corruption in the country. The monies realized from high scale corruption in Nigeria are often stashed in the individual's foreign accounts. The practice serves as a stimulus for massive looting of government treasury in the country since such monies are secured for the perpetrators in

foreign banks. For example, the Federal government of Nigeria is to date dialoguing, with foreign friendly governments on the repatriation of monies looted from the country by the political leadership.

Impact of Corruption on Rural Development in Nigeria

At the heart of Nigeria's rural development challenges is the fundamental crisis of corruption. Nigeria has failed, especially when compared to some developing countries at a similar stage of development in the 1960s to build a sustainable economy that could address the basic needs of her population, especially the vast rural majority. Yet, a cursory examination of her endowments would show that in natural and human resources and other conventional prerequisites for development and growth, Nigeria remains one of the most endowed countries in Africa and indeed, the world (Oyedele, 2011:252). However, the observed endowments have not translated into material well-being for the vast majority of the population who are rural dwellers. Nigeria has therefore, proved incapable of transforming the enormous resources at its disposal into positive achievements that would impact on the lives of the mass rural dwellers.

The Owukpa case History

An impressive example of a rural community where concerted efforts at developing the

community had failed due to corruption is Owukpa District in Ogbadibo Local Government Area of Benue State. The people of Owukpa are predominantly farmers, palm wine tappers and petty traders. The District is endowed with mineral resources such as coal. The whole community is organized into clans with each floating “Development Association” in addition to a “Mega Development

Association “called Owukpa Development Association (ODA).

The Owukpa community has achieved some rural development through a built-in competition among the clans. This includes community secondary schools, health-care centers, and community halls, among others. However, attempts by successive governments in Benue State to develop Owukpa community through the provision of basic rural infrastructures like feeder roads and rural electrification have been stunted by corruption. For instance, contracts for the construction of rural feeder roads in the community and rural electrification were awarded to some political party stalwarts under the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) regime in the state. The contractors littered some roads and streams in the community with ring-culvert cycles without construction of roads to date. In the same vein, Electric poles were erected and wired in some

places within the community without Electric Transformer and without electric light. According to records at the District Headquarters, Ukwo, the contractors were fully paid without completion of the projects. The community has thus been groping in perpetual darkness and without motorable roads to transport its agricultural produce to markets.

The Nigerian ruling elites have impoverished the country by looting and plundering it (Oyedele, 2011:252). The paradox of Nigeria’s situation is that with all its resources, the country remains one of the poorest nations in the world, in fact, rated as the world capital of poverty (Sanusi, 2019). Nigeria is today faced with system collapse manifested by the institutionalization of corruption, lack of transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs and grand rent seeking among others (Oyedele, 2011:253). As a result of these, the Nigerian rural sector has remained underdeveloped and the quality of life of the average rural dweller has worsened progressively. After decades of grand corruption and plundering of the economy by successive military and civilian administrations, the Nigerian rural sector has been left with a traumatized people and a plundered rural economy.



The persistent inability of the country to achieve meaningful transformation of its rural areas can best be explained by the fact that the local governments that could have been the real agent for rural development were starved of funds due to massive corruption in the system. Due to corrupt practices, the local governments have failed to rise up to the challenge of channeling the diverse potentials of the rural economy and its people towards rural development. Corruption has thus, remained a major stumbling block for Nigeria's developmental quest. Even in the few sectors where some semblances of development appeared to have occurred, they were never sustainable due to the corrupt practices of public officials (Nwanegbo, et al 2011:114). The Nigerian state, to all intents and purposes, has become a victim of high level corruption, which has continued to retard both rural and national development in the country. According to the Nigerian National Planning Commission Report (2005:17) cited in Nwanegbo, et al (2011:114), systemic corruption and low levels of transparency and accountability at all levels of governance have been the major sources of development failures in the country. This is because corruption does not only deny the people resources meant for the successful execution of development

projects and programs but it also, denies external assistance to the people.

Corruption promotes economic decay and social and political instability, perverts the ability of the state to foster the rule of law and eventually corrodes trust and undermines legitimacy (Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (2001:6). According to the former U.N. Secretary General, late Kofin Annan, quoted in Nwanegbo, et al (2016:122), corruption causes enormous harm by impoverishing national economies, threatening democratic institutions, undermining the rule of law and facilitating terrorism. Since Nigeria attained independence in 1960, corruption has remained the bane of the un-impressive socio-economic and political development of the country relative to its contemporaries in the 1960s and 1970s such as China and a host of the Asian Tigers (Abimboye, 2010:18). The country's rural poverty and poor human development performance are no doubt avoidable given the country's immense potentials in human and national resources but for corruption. Corruption distorts development at all levels of governance be it rural or at national level.

Decrying the state of corruption in Nigeria, a one-time Governor of Anambra State

(Nigeria), Chris Ngige cited in Chigbo (2010:15) noted thus:

Corruption is so pervasive because when you come to an office, a messenger will ask you, what do you have for me? At a check point, the police will ask, what do you have for me? If you call an artisan to work for you, he will inflate the cost. It is a vicious circle.

The spate of robbery, kidnapping, assassination and the general insecurity in Nigeria today is not unconnected with corruption by people who cannot find a place to indulge in financial corruption. The militancy in the Niger-Delta and other places, for instance, is no more than a revolt induced by the general corruption with attendant breakdown of law and order. Under a state of insecurity of life and property, there can be no meaningful rural development in the country.

Corruption has damaged the external image of the country in no small way. In the electoral process, corruption has robbed Nigeria of credible and patriotic leadership. As a result of corruption, people's votes do not count and all manners of people impose themselves on Nigerians as leaders at the federal, state and local governments. Corruption has inflicted rural poverty and

hardship on the Nigerian rural inhabitants. This is because public resources which would have otherwise been invested into infrastructural development, provision of social services, promotion of human development and alleviate various forms of poverty are stolen out-rightly or diverted to causes other than the public cause by officials entrusted with those resources. There is therefore, a tragic interplay between corruption and rural development. As Obasanjo, quoted in Bolarinwa (2011:344) observed:

With corruption, there can be no sustainable development or political stability. By breeding and feeding on inefficiency, corruption invariably strangulates the system of social organizations. Infact, corruption is literally anti-thesis of development.

The Fight against Corruption in Nigeria

The present global concern about corruption hadled to the adoption of United Nations Convention against corruption, which is intended to provide effective control of the ever spreading phenomenon. Corruption has become a major challenge to governance and development in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The Transparency International Perceptions Report on Corruption (2006:92) cited in Nwanegbo, et al(2011:113) observed



that Nigeria is among the most corrupt countries of the world. Since the country's political independence in 1960, one of the issues that had gained considerable attention at both public and private conversations is corruption. Akindele (2005) cited in Nwanegbo, et al (2011:113) noted that corruption has permeated so deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society.

This has necessitated the promulgation of some decrees and acts between 1966-1996. These include: the Public Office Investigation of Assets Decree No. 5, 1966; the Corrupt Practices Decree of 1975; the Jaji Declaration of 1979; the Ethical Revolution of 1981-1983; the War Against Indiscipline of 1984; the National Orientation Movement of 1986; the Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery and Self-Reliance (MAMSER), 1987; and the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), 1996 (Nwanegbo, et al 2011:123). The politicization of some of these anti-corruption agencies at the behest of the ruling elites impaired the success of the fight against corruption in the country. By 1999 when the country returned to civilian rule, several anticorruption initiatives were introduced. These include the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC); the Economic

and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives (NELTI); the Money Laundering Act of 2004; the Due Process Mechanism in Public Procurements, among others. These were all aimed at combating corruption in the country.

However, in spite of the emergence of these institutions and laws, incidences of corruption in Nigeria have remained unabated. The fight against corruption has been seriously hampered by the selective and partial application of the laws. For instance, governments in power have always used some of the agencies like EFCC to witch-hunt opposition politicians while their cronies and allies flourished in corrupt practices (Nwanegbo, et al (2011:126). Nigeria has therefore, severally won for itself the unenviable position as one of the world's most corrupt nations. Corruption encourages unnecessary waste, diverts resources and sustains ineffectiveness. The consequence of all this for rural development in Nigeria is not only that rural development projects and programs are impeded; corruption destroys and truncates the functionality of the existing structures of development at the grassroots level. It is not surprising therefore, that rural

areas in Nigeria have perpetually remained underdeveloped.

With the return to civilian governance in 1999, the Obasanjo led administration declared zero tolerance on corruption. The major steps taken by the government to enforce the policy were the introduction of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). The new order succeeded to a large extent by daring to arraign some high profile state officials especially ex-governors, ex-police chiefs, ex-ministers, amongst others. However, political desperation and greed severely depleted the efforts of these agencies in their fight against corruption (Nwanegbo, et al(2011:115). Hence, state managers since 1999 have substantially narrowed the scale of corruption mostly for opponents or perceived enemies while those favored have continued to flourish and re-establish new links and avenues unchecked. Corruption in Nigeria appeared to have become a permanent feature of the society and institutionalized into the realm of culture and value system of the country.

The Buhari administration had spent all its time fighting corruption in a manner, which brings about sensational news headlines without any discernible benefit for the ordinary

citizens especially, the rural dwellers who are the vast majority of the country's total population. Corruption is therefore, the reason for rural underdevelopment in Nigeria and also, appeared to have disconnected the rural populace who constitute the vast majority of the population from the Nigerian state. Those who have benefited immensely and who derived political power from fraud are morally, politically and otherwise too weak and too compromised to deal ruthlessly with corruption. However, the irony of the Nigerian situation remains the fact that it is this morally and politically compromised leadership that has been waging anti-corruption war. This has spawned severe credibility problems and handicaps in the struggle to defeat the monster called corruption.

Conclusion

The most dominant and common features of the rural areas of Nigeria are rural poverty, unemployment and inequality. The transformation of these handicaps at the rural areas holds the key to any meaningful program of rural development in the country. This is most compelling and urgent given that the vast majority of Nigeria's populations are rural dwellers performing agricultural and non-farm activities to earn a living. Rural development has therefore, a significant role in the overall



development of the country hence; it deserves to receive more attention. Rural development institutions should therefore, be rationalized, realigned and strengthened to provide optimal services at the rural areas. Considering the centrality of rural development in the overall development of the country, the paper strongly argued that Nigeria should re-think its strategy toward fighting corruption and design a general amnesty program that could offer the needed break with the failed, un-productive, selective justice and vendetta-driven strategies of the past.

The way forward

In Nigeria, rural development has its acknowledged place of importance within the broader framework of national development. In so far as majority of Nigerians are rural dwellers, rural development becomes a complementary and necessary partner in the national development of the country. However, in spite of increasing public outrage and reneged political resolve by successive governments to combat corruption as an obstacle to effective rural development, it has not abated and its costs continued to ravage rural developmental activities. We saw an empirical situation in the case of Owukpa Community where contracts were awarded for rural development projects and paid for without

execution. The people were therefore, left without good roads and electricity. Corruption has remained one of the serious challenges of development in post-independence

Nigeria. It has not only wrecked incalculable damage on the conduct of government business in Nigeria, it has also undermined developmental efforts. The consistent prominent position Nigeria occupies in the league of most corrupt nations of the world underscores the pervasion of the scourge in the political economy of the country. The big question which is a major concern of this paper is how to get the country out of the quagmire and who will the messiah be, given that successive leaders have failed to tackle successfully the problem of corruption. The solution to corruption in Nigeria appeared not in sight as many Nigerians seemed to be waiting for the right opportunity to indulge in corrupt acts since most of those engaged in it get away with it. As Chigbo (2010:16) observed, the popular belief in the Nigerian circle is that when you get into government, steal more than you need so that when the EFCC and ICPC are after you, you will have enough to bribe them to get them off your back.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing analysis, the paper suggested measures to address the challenges of corruption in Nigeria.

This is with a view to guarantying successful implementation of future rural development projects and programs. The first and foremost step is for government to reset the whole fight against corruption by granting conditional amnesty to all persons accused of corruption. This becomes imperative when it is realized that beyond the rhetoric and the optics, the EFCC is losing the war against corruption. For instance, as Adibe (2019:56) queried:

...is the EFCC really doing anything similar institutions before it did not do? I do not think so. Obasanjo's Jaji Declaration (as Military Head of state), Shagari's Ethical Revolution, Babangida's MAMSER, Abacha's Failed Bank Tribunals and Buhari's War Against Indiscipline (as Military Head of state), all did the same "gra-gra" in their days before they closed shop.

The ICPC and EFCC, just like their predecessors erroneously treat corruption as a problem of moral lapse rather than an inherently systemic problem, hence the scourge had continued unabated. This calls for the resetting of the whole war against corruption to allow for a new beginning. The first stage in the new beginning is to grant conditional amnesty

to those accused of corruption or suspected of having indulged in corrupt practices. An amnesty program for corruption cases will encourage repatriation of the much needed funds hidden in different parts of the world to help

develop Nigeria's economy and in particular the rural setting. The recommendation of amnesty is informed by the success stories of similar amnesty programs in other parts of the world where it had been applied to tackle intractable problems of societies such as corruption. In 2004 for instance, the then President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, enacted tax amnesty program, which allowed US corporations to bring home, tax-free, the billions of dollars they had stashed away in tax havens (Adibe, 2019:56). In Nigeria, former President, late Musa Yaradua, offered amnesty to militants of the Niger-Delta in exchange for their laying down their arms.

Another rewarding experience of the use of amnesty was in Turkey. The Turkish government gave amnesty and all the monies corruptly taken out of the country abroad were repatriated (Krishi, Terzungwe and Ozibo, 2019:5). The only conditionality the Turkish Government attached was that all such monies must be invested in manufacturing, technology

and real estate. According to Atiku Abubaka (2019) quoted in Krishi, et al (2019:5), looking at Turkey today, it is like any other European country in terms of development.

Furthermore, to combat corruption successfully in Nigeria the government must strengthen the anti-corruption agencies in the country by making them independent and capable of responding promptly to reported cases of corruption. Anyone found living above his means and earnings should be investigated and made to account for the source(s) of the extra income. Also Public enlightenment programs to increase awareness on the evils of corruption should be mounted and sustained in the mass media as social marketing tool to change people's attitudes, opinions and behaviors. Under the policy of investigating alleged corruption cases, whistle blowers on corrupt acts should be protected by the law. The government must declare a war on corruption in which all Nigerians must be together to stamp out the evil and ensure that accountability and good governance are enshrined in the Nigerian society.

Finally, a serious re-orientation exercise of the Nigerian public service should be carried out with all sincerity of purpose to disabuse the minds of public servants and the general public

against the wrong perception that fraud is a share of the country's national cake. The government must also put in place good welfare packages for public officers, which should be constantly reviewed against prevailing economic situations to ensure that public officers need not to cut corners to survive. The paper submits that Nigerians must believe in their capacity and be determined to win the battle against corruption. To give up is not an option as no society that treats public funds with disregard and cares only for private accumulation on the principle of "steal and go" can make any meaningful progress whether in rural or national development.

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