
Corruption and the Search for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Corruption is defined as a behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private relationships. In recent times in Nigeria, corruption seems to have gone beyond its normal limits to the level of impunity, and perhaps, ranking next to the highest in global rating. In this paper, using conventional historical sources, an attempt is made to interrogate the fundamental causes of this canker-worm which has eaten deep into our national fabric. The paper concludes that since corruption and peace are strange bed-fellows, any fight against it must therefore not only be total but should elicit the support of all well-meaning Nigerians, and in collaboration with our friends and well-wishers across the globe.

Keywords: Corruption, Impunity, Peace, Poverty and Governance.

Introduction

Corruption is a very negative phenomenon which seems to have become a part of our culture in Nigeria. It is known by various acronyms and Nigerianisms such as *awuf*, *gra-gra*, *magu-magu*, *thief-thief*, *wuru-wuru*, *lie-lie*, *wa-yo*, 419, etc. When we put all these terms and acronyms together, what we have is what some people refer to as the “Nigerian Factor”, which is simply the Nigerian way of describing corruption and greed. This greed can manifest in an individual as personal greed; it can do so in a group as nepotism and ethnicism; it can be the case of religious bigotry, as in the case of fanaticism or vandalism and terrorism. All these taken together are responsible for the general culture of violence, corruption and impunity in our society. Having become the staple of the Nigerian way of life (culture), they constitute the major impediments on the path of sustainable peace and development.

What we have been facing in Nigeria in recent times is systemic corruption and impunity. No less a personality than the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister for Justice during the Muhammadu Buhari regime, Mr Abubakar Malami (SAN), acknowledged this fact when he was quoted as saying:

In reality, it cannot be over-emphasised that systemic corruption and impunity are prevalent in Nigeria, and that they cut across all sectors of the society, unfortunately, including the judiciary – an institution that is universally believed to be the hope of the common man.¹

Also, in a recent Commonwealth event tagged, “Tackling Corruption Together: A conference for civil society, business and government leaders”, held at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, the convener, Prime Minister, David Cameron of Britain, was quoted as saying that Nigeria “is fantastically corrupt”. When President Muhammadu Buhari, who delivered a keynote address at that event was later asked to comment on Prime Minister Cameron's remark, the President simply pointed to the case of a former Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha of Bayelsa State, which he said was a clear pointer to Cameron's outburst.² Aside this open admittance, the correlation between corruption and poverty in Nigeria is not only disturbing but is also portraying corruption as a major factor responsible for the phenomenon of violent conflicts, insurgency and terrorism in the country.

Nigeria has, in recent times, been referred to as the fastest growing economy in Africa and one of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world, even though

this is a far cry from what has happened to the economy since President Tinubu Asiwaju came on board. But, ironically, the country also harbours some of the poorest in the world with as many as 69% of the population, which, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, translates to about 112.47 million Nigerians living below the poverty line.³ At the moment, the figure is on the increase, and nothing other than corruption can be responsible for this irony.

The Nigerian government, in admission of the urgent need to address the high level of corrupt practices in the country, enacted the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC) Act (2000) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to address issues of corruption in the country. But all of these measures are “morning yet on creation day” for corruption in the country. But the question that remains mind-boggling is: how did we get to this abysmal point as a country?

It is in the attempt to provide an answer to the above question that this paper, as suggested by its title, aims at inquiring into the causes, and in addition, the implication of corruption for the quest for sustainable peace in the country. A major finding of the study shows that the high incidence of corruption, which has resulted in low investment in citizen's welfare, militates against the achievement of sustainable peace in the country as we shall later see in this study. But first, we need to conceptualise and, possibly, historicize corruption for the sake of clarity and better understanding of the discourse.

Perspectives

Corruption is a world-wide social malaise that has been viewed from different perspectives by scholars and public commentators alike. Some people view corruption as dishonest, illegal or wicked behaviours, especially by people with authority or power, who act in return for money or other personal gains. Others view corruption with specific emphasis on Africa as a problem of routine deviation from established standards and norms by public officials and parties with whom they interact. These two definitions tend to emphasize the dishonest and illegal behaviours that are usually put up by people in authority for their personal and/or group gains. Corruption, therefore, is viewed as the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit which has an adverse effect on the well-being and development of the entire society. It is sometimes defined in terms of the quantum involved and the status of the perpetrators as 'grand' or 'petty' corruption.⁴

Viewed from a religious perspective, especially among Christians and Muslims, corruption is not just a moral issue; it is a sin, an offence against God. In public life, both Christians and Muslims are called upon to uphold moral principles of justice, love and accountability. However, through the history of Islam and Christianity, corruption has been a major challenge both within the mosque and church, as well as in the world in which they are situated. It therefore manifests in different ways and in different sectors of the society. This is why it has been defined in several ways and qualified by several adjectives, such as 'economic', 'political', 'financial', 'administrative' 'bureaucratic', 'moral or ethical'.

Today, peace appears to be the most desirable valuable 'public good' in contemporary Africa, but yet the most elusive because of the increasing waves of active wars and armed conflicts ranging from ethno-religious violence, *coup de tats* to full-blown civil wars, insurgency and terrorism. They are not only fought in some of the world's poorest countries, but have also wreaked devastating consequences on Africa in terms of colossal loss of human life and suffering; state collapse and societal fragmentation; disruption of economic and social activities; the destruction of infrastructural facilities; and the regionalisation of these domestic civil wars which have affected regional peace and security. Peace is therefore the most pressing challenge faced by Africa in the 21st century. In order to have a full grasp of this statement of fact, it is important to have a clearer view of what constitutes peace in human society. And in order not to drag us into a plethora of definitional details, it will suffice to stick to the definition of peace offered by Francis, which appears more holistic and convincing too. According to him, peace is,

...the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence, and about peaceful coexistence. It is primarily concerned with the creating and maintaining a just order in society and the resolution of conflict by non-violent means.⁵

He goes on to name the six meanings of peace agreed upon by many peace researchers to include: peace as the absence of war (i.e. absence of direct violence); peace as justice and development (i.e. absence of structural violence); peace as respect and tolerance between people (i.e. peaceful coexistence); inner peace (i.e. spiritual peace); peace as 'wholeness' and 'making whole'; and peace as a balance in the ecosphere (i.e. social and environmental harmony). The all-embracing and unambiguous nature of this

definition seems to have closed any door for further explanation or elaboration. Be that as it may, we shall proceed to look at some of the major causes of corruption in Nigeria.

Some Fundamental Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

Several factors can be said to be responsible for the growing cases of corruption in Nigeria and indeed Africa. Such factors include the colonial legacy/neo-colonial political milieu; military intervention in politics; poor leadership style; corrupt constitution, social injustice and the cult of mediocrity; over-centralization of power; fraudulent electoral process; manipulation of religion and ethnicity; over-regulation and bureaucratic bottle-necks, among others. However, for want of space, we will proceed to discuss, though only in brief, a few of these factors here.

(i) The colonial legacy/the neo-colonial political milieu

The twin processes of capitalist articulation and the disarticulation of the African traditional societies during the colonial era has given rise to the poverty and arbitrariness of the state in Africa even after the achievement of political independence. The British colonial policy of divide-and-rule promoted ethno-religious and cultural differences which did not only lay the foundation for ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria but also created permanent mistrust and suspicion among the different groups in the country. The salience of ethnic-religious domains contends against the authority and autonomy of the African state, thus giving rise to the poverty of the state in Africa as can be seen in its shallowness or lack of depth in social formation. The reason for this phenomenon dates back to the era of slave trade and the type of violence that it generated, which was inhospitable to the formation of enduring state structures because externally, it could not sponsor empires as it was destructive of human beings. Internally, its dependence on external forces for inspiration has made it to become subversive of internal law and order. This scenario also entailed the importation of pre-packaged variables of the European state with a bias to the coercive elements of control and de-emphasis on those aspects of the state which are capable of integrating the state and society into one national mould. According to Ekeh,

The colonial state was relatively rich and 'overdeveloped' in the military, police, and bureaucracy,

but was poor, defective, and underdeveloped in legislative matters. States and society were thus set apart, not integrated into a common national mould.⁶

(ii) Military Intervention in Politics

The Military, as conceived in this paper, is an embodiment of violence in governance. While it is true that violence has been very much part of governance in Africa for centuries, as pointed out above, it seems to have only become institutionalized during the eras of slave trade and colonialism. Modern violence in governance therefore is not more than a continuation of a pattern that has deep roots in Africa's political history. That military rule has gained an upper hand in governance in Nigeria and many countries in Africa follows naturally from this kind of political history that the continent had experienced at one time or the other. In Nigeria, for instance, the military took over the mantle of political leadership in a coup d'état on 15th January, 1966, and only handed over to a civilian regime in 1979. When this happened, part of the reason for this take-over was said to be corruption on the part of the First Republic leadership⁷. Since that speech by Nzeogwu, almost all the military regimes had hung on the issue of corruption and the need to build a corrupt free society. Though Nzeogwu never lived to make his dream a reality, Nigeria was to be under the military for 13 years. Thereafter, the promise of corruption-free society by the military remained a fleeting illusion up to 1999 when the military handed over the mantle of leadership of the country to a civilian regime.

Today, out of almost fifty-six years of political independence in Nigeria, the military has ruled for over twenty-seven years, and the indices are showing clearly that the centralist approach of the military to governance and the arbitrariness of the laws she made (decrees) only provided fertile grounds for the monumental corruption of the military regimes that the country had experienced. Even as we are putting this down now, almost twenty-six years of democratic experiment, we are yet to shed off completely violence and the arbitrariness of the erstwhile military regimes, which this paper believes is at the root of the impunity that has become so pronounced today with regard to what can rightly be described as systemic corruption. The robust presence of retired military officers in the corridors of power today, under the present democratic dispensation, is a sign that impunity will continue to be part of our political transition in the foreseeable future. Even the initial posture of President Muhammadu Buhari in fighting corruption became eclipsed in what

turned out to be one of the worst governments in the history of the country in terms of the attempt to fight corruption and to promote democratic governance.

(iii) Poor Leadership Style

Very often, people tend to blame the high level of corruption in Nigeria on the fact that the average Nigerian or even African is a corrupt human being and go further to conclude that because corruption is endemic in the average citizen, the country or continent cannot be rid of this social malaise. The same erroneous notion is to be found among people who talk about the Nigerian factor or system in relation to the endemic nature of corruption in the country. The late Nigerian great novelist, Chinua Achebe, is usually quoted to have said, for instance, that: “Keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam”. This, as we all know today, is not the correct or proper way of putting the matter. As rightly argued by Achebe himself elsewhere⁸, a goat may not do without yam because yam is food for goats. But a Nigerian does not need corruption because corruption is not necessary nourishment for Nigerians. He goes further to observe:

Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable, they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient...Corruption goes with power; and whatsoever the average man may have [it] is not power. Therefore to hold any useful discussion of corruption we must first locate it where it properly belongs—in the ranks of the powerful.⁹

The failure of leadership has constituted a serious impediment in our search for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. Corruption and all other related ills that we find in our society today are the products of bad or poor leadership. This is a country where most of the people that ruled it since independence never sat down to plan, strategize and work themselves to leadership positions through a fair and free process. Rather, whether they are military or civilians they just found themselves in leadership either by sheer accident or by circumstances usually masterminded by some ethnic champions and religious bigots in the name of political God-fatherism. As a result, the political party that emerges to contest for political power relies heavily on mobilising primordial ethnic/religious sentiments and all other corrupt means including the manipulation of the electoral body and the judiciary to capture power at the centre.

(iv) Corrupt Constitution

Nigerians have been involved in constitution-making for the country since the General Conference that held in Ibadan in January, 1950. However, it was not until 1976 that a constitution-making exercise became an entirely Nigerian affair, without the British colonial overlords playing the supervisory role. Nigerians therefore had the opportunity for the first time to freely design a constitution entirely of their own choice in 1976.¹⁰

As far as the issue of corruption is concerned, the Nigerian constitution, from its first draft that was produced in 1976 to all the amendments that it has undergone so far, cannot be said to have sufficiently addressed the issue of public accountability. In a newspaper interview captioned: “Our laws make it easy for corruption to flourish”, the Executive Chairman of Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL), Mr. Debo Adeniran, observed:

The Plea Bargain and the Penal Code Act are nothing but corruption because they provide leeway for corruption perpetrators to escape stiffer penalties, which also encourage others to perpetuate more corruption.¹¹

Though the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill was a right step in the right direction, the approach to public accountability has always been very superficial. The drafters and promoters of the constitution have always paid lip service to the issue of public accountability without addressing the basic issues it entails, such as what is the precise purpose and objective of making the leadership accountable to the public and the purpose of public accountability? Is it essentially to prevent agitation and protest and keep the public quiet and pacified? Or is the purpose to enable the public to control the goals, nature, methods and operations of a political system through a continuous flow of information, discussion and decision in popular organs?

All types of leadership in society, without exception, are accountable in one way or the other to a public. But the issue is which public? Is it the one that consists of the shareholders or boards of directors of large multinational corporations? Or is it the Nigerian bureaucratic and business agents of these? Is it a public that consists of a collection of church or mosque congregations? Or is it a clan or tribal union of some such body? What this paper is saying here is that what we need is not just public accountability but a clear understanding that in a genuine democracy, this public should consist essentially of the common people, the exploited and humiliated masses of peasants and workers.

As rightly noted by Usman,

A public which consists essentially of peasant farmers and wage- earners cannot make a leadership or indeed anybody, accountable to it in a society built on the private ownership and accumulation of wealth; especially a society in which this private accumulation by a tiny minority is carried out almost entirely, through the manipulation of public office and institutions.¹¹

Unfortunately, the attention given to the issue of public accountability in Nigeria as far as the constitution is concerned leaves much to be desired. And unless something urgent is done to redress this situation, it is morning yet on creation day as far as corruption and impunity is concerned in Nigeria.

(v) Social Injustice and the Cult of Mediocrity

One major objection to the practice of ethnic politics and, to some extent, religious bigotry, is that they expose the citizen to unfair treatment and social injustice. And no less damaging to social morality is the advantage that ethnicism and religiosity may confer on mediocrity. Apart from this, the principle and practice of Federal Character and Quota System in the country, in recent times, seem to have created room for the institutionalization of mediocrity in the public service, thus creating a scenario of trying to put a round peg in a square hole or a square peg in a round hole, as the case may be. Such situation is not only capable of promoting corruption but is also capable of promoting sectional, ethnic and religious suspicion and violence. Unless we put merit and competence back on the national agenda, we are surely heading for eternal doom.

(vi) Over-centralization of Power

John Locke outlined the doctrine of the separation of powers, indicating the danger of oppressive and arbitrary rule when all functions of government are exercised by one person or one particular arm of government. The growing corruption in Nigeria is partly the result of the over-centralization which usually leads to over-concentration of power in a few hands across the three tiers of government. While the legislative assemblies in most states have become mere rubber stamps in the hands of State Governors, Local Government Areas have become Fiefdoms of the Governors. The National Assemblies are out to promote their narrow interests to the detriment of the general public. Corruption does not involve just people in government, but also people in both private and public positions and even traditional rulers. Herein resides the power to do or undo without recourse to due process and legality.

With unchecked, unbridled, uncontrolled power, humans naturally become corrupt.

(vii) A Fraudulent Electoral Process

A democratic system is one where rulers are held accountable by those they rule over through various means which include competitive multi-party elections held at regular intervals. Indeed, elections are the only mechanism by which a democratic government can be realized and entrenched. This is because in a democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. It is because of the importance of elections in the democratic process that any problem associated with the electoral process has direct impact on democratization. This is why virtually all the troubles that Nigeria has been going through, since the return of democratic governance in 1999, can be traced to our unbalanced and flawed electoral system which has been in operation for the past 25 years. It is on record that almost every election result has been contested in this country. Losers had refused to accept the results of elections, even when it was clear they did not win simply because the electoral system has not been as transparent as it should be. This creates doubt in the minds of those who subject themselves to its use.

The demise of the First Republic was partially blamed on the massive rigging that characterized the elections of that period. The Yoruba West experienced ruthless rigging, which resulted in the wanton destruction of lives and property. The surviving victims of that unfortunate incident are yet to recover fully from its psychological and other effects till this day. Since then, election rigging seemed to have been institutionalized in this country, to such an extent that politicians no longer feel ashamed to engage in it.

The 2007 elections, considered by many as the most compromised, has so far produced the highest number of litigations and annulments in recent times¹². For instance, the PDP Governors that emerged in Edo, Osun, Ondo, Anambra and Ekiti in 2007 elections were sacked at different times by the Court of Appeal Election Panel and replaced by their counterparts in the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), except in Anambra State where Peter Obi emerged on the platform of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). In the opinion of the Court of Appeal Election Panel, the process that returned them elected, in the first place, was irregular and heavily manipulated. In fact, it was for the fear of this episode repeating itself in the appeal against Governor Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto State and other PDP Governors that the Jonathan Presidency, using

the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) then, Justice Katsina Alu, slammed what has come to be regarded as an 'unjustifiable suspension' on the then President of the Court of Appeal, Justice Ayo Salami.

There were similar court rulings in many other petitions regarding the conduct of elections into both State and National Assemblies. Countless number of legislators were sacked by the courts and replaced by those that petitioned against them. In several other cases, the courts ordered the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct fresh elections. All these point to one thing, namely, the controversial nature of our electoral process, which leaves room for corruption and all forms of political gerrymandering, as well as the abuse of due process. In the 2023 General Elections, for instance, after announcing the results of the elections, the INEC Boss, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, emphatically told those who were not satisfied with the results to go to court. When that happened, what eventually came out from the courts as a result of the numerous electoral litigations that accompanied the elections only went to confirm the connivance between INEC and the Judiciary to once again rob Nigerians of the opportunity to install a government of the people, by the people and for the people. There has always been a sort of 'Triple Alliance' entered into by the electoral body INEC with the security operatives during elections, and the Judiciary after elections through the instrumentality of corruption, which seems to have remained one of the banes of democracy in our country.

(viii) Over-regulation and Bureaucratic bottle-necks

With so much concentration of power in the hands of government officials and institutions, over-regulation and bureaucratic bottle-necks that are usually experienced in the day-to-day operation of governments, especially in the underdeveloped countries, create room for corruption. For instance, trade restriction on the importation of automobiles, food and drugs, among others, which is one common form of regulation, has turned out to be an avenue where government officials and politicians make quick money through rent seeking/corruption. On the contrary, when government allocates scarce resources to individuals and firms using legal criteria other than the ability or willingness to pay, corruption is likely to be the result. Corruption can thrive under industrial or trade policies that allow poorly-targeted subsidies to be appropriated by firms and individuals under whatever guise. The recent petroleum subsidy scandal, non-remittance or under-remittance of revenue, diversion of local government allocations, pension funds scandals, crude oil

theft, petroleum subsidy payment/removal and the armed funds probe, etc., have become a can of worm in the Nigerian corruption profile that will always be remembered by the people.

Bureaucracy and the unnecessary delays that are usually experienced in governmental ministries, parastatals and agencies when carrying out or pursuing one project or programme for government only goes to promote corruption in the system. Whenever people experience unnecessary delays when trying to get certain things done in government, the impression they get is that either somebody within the set-up or the entire bureaucratic hierarchy wants some money dropped as the file passes gets to their tables. Bribery, being one of the vices characterizing corruption in Nigeria, is constantly played out in government cycle as a way of inducing government officials to perform certain functions that ordinarily would have taken longer time to do or not done at all.

Bribery has eaten so deep into the fabric of the civil and public services in Nigeria that today the demand for it among government officials is so open as to create the impression that without it nothing that is needed to be done in government or any private organization can be done successfully. Today, even a messenger would demand for a bribe before moving certain files from one office to the other.

By way of concluding this section of the paper, it should be noted that the list of factors that promote corruption in Nigeria cannot be said to be exhaustive. What has been done in this paper, therefore, is to isolate certain major cases for the purpose of this discussion. One thing that seems to stand out clearly in the analysis of each factor that we have just examined is that without having to draw attention to the interconnections that exist between one factor and the other, that there is interconnectivity among all the factors in promoting corruption in our society is highly indisputable.

Government Responses to Corruption

Successive Nigerian governments have sought to address the challenges posed by corruption by putting in place legal and institutional measures which include the Criminal and Penal Codes, the Code of Conduct Bureau, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and other transparency initiatives. These and other efforts aimed at fighting corruption have a history which is worth noting briefly in this discussion.

Nigeria's response to corruption dates back to the pre-colonial era, when offences relating to corruption and abuse of office were included in the Criminal Code. The present provisions came into force in 1966 when the military administration stipulated further offences and included judicial officers as potential offenders. Chapter 12 of the Criminal Code Act deals with official corruption.

The Code of Conduct Bureau was established as a Federal Executive Body under Section 153(1) (a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Third Schedule to the Constitution sets out its composition and powers. With the coming into force of the 1999 Constitution, the incoming civilian administration under President Olusegun Obasanjo established the ICPC. Section 3 of the ICPC Act (2000) established the Commission. Apart from its enforcement or prosecutorial duties, the ICPC has prevention duties with regard to advising on the institution of practices, systems and procedures which will militate against corrupt practices. It also has a duty of educating the public on and against bribery, corruption and related offences, as well as enlisting public support in combating corruption.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission was established by Section 1 of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act 2004. According to Section 6 (b), the functions of the Commission are defined to cover the investigation of all financial crimes including advance fee fraud, money laundering, counterfeiting, illegal charge transfers, futuremarket fraud, fraudulent encashment of negotiable instruments, computer credit card fraud, contract scam, etc.¹³

Apart from the limited moves towards transparency in the Code of Conduct provisions, the above legislation and institutions are mostly reactive tools in the hands of the Nigerian government. Civil society has long championed the idea of transparency as a weapon to prevent and respond to corruption. In 2004, however, the Obasanjo regime inaugurated the National Stakeholders Working Group of the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and in 2007 enacted the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Act to provide a framework for all companies in the extractive industries to disclose the amount of revenue that they pay to the Federal Government. In 2010, the Freedom of Information Act was enacted into law by the Federal Government. Other forms of transparency include the release by the Federal Government of details of the amounts paid from the Federation Account to each State, to itself

and for its Local Governments.

On the whole, these measures have had limited effects on Nigeria's corruption level. Thus, despite having enacted several laws and established several institutions dedicated to fighting corruption, this canker worm has continued to eat deeper and deeper into the national fabric. There is therefore a strong need to strengthen the existing institutions and create new ones in the fight against corruption. Our leaders must also brace up to lead by example for as the saying goes: if we do not kill corruption, corruption will kill us. Corruption is killing Nigeria now and openly too.

The Implication of Corruption on the search for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria

Given the widespread manifestations and dimensions of corruption in Nigeria, its negative impact on the search for sustainable peace in the country cannot be over-emphasized. The upshot of the above developments which we have just preceded from discussing gives credence to the fact that the political behaviour of Nigerians is still greatly influenced by the hyperbolic assumption that one's political destiny is intrinsically and exclusively linked with one's ethno-linguistic and, to some extent, religious identity. It is this political culture, shrouded in mutual suspicion that the Civil War (1967-1970) was precipitated in Nigeria. In a similar vein, series of religious crises were brewed in various parts of the country, especially the northern parts, including the *Maitatsine* of 1980s and on-going Bokko Haram insurgency, among others. These crises, though religious in nature, have a tinge of ethnic confrontation in them.¹⁴

The breach of the peace caused by both ethnic and religious crises has been so great that political alignments and the formation of political parties seemed to have been characterized by what could be regarded as the ganging up of ethnic champions. It was this that made Professor Humphrey Nwosu, one-time Chairman of the National Electoral Commission, to observe:

Our party system, from its inception in the late 1940s and early 1950s, reflected the injection of ethnicity into our political system. In due course, the major political parties and minor ones became vehicles for the representation, protection and aggregation of ethnic interests. Our political leaders, by and large, exploited ethnic ties and symbols to promote their selfish interest and to consolidate themselves in power in their regional enclaves.¹⁵

Today, peace appears to be the most desirable valuable 'public good' in

contemporary Africa, but yet the most elusive because of the increasing waves of active wars and armed conflicts ranging from ethno-religious violence, *coup de tats* to full-blown civil wars, insurgency and terrorism. They are not only fought in some of the world's poorest countries, but have also wreaked devastating consequences on Africa in terms of colossal loss of human life and suffering, state collapse and societal fragmentation, disruption of economic and social activities, the destruction of infrastructural facilities, and the regionalisation of these domestic civil wars has affected regional peace and security. Peace is therefore the most pressing challenge faced by Africa in the 21st century.

The religious and ethnic crises we have been experiencing in the country have not only seriously threatened national security but have also made the desire for sustainable peace a fleeting national illusion in Nigeria. And the saying cannot be disputed that we cannot divorce national security from natural justice because natural justice implies equity and fairness for all in the society. It is clear to see therefore that what corruption has brought to bear on our national politics is tantamount to natural injustice meted out to the majority of the populace. As a result, national security, which relates to people and issues surrounding their well-being; their safety and that of their property; and the development of their society, all anchored on natural justice, has been thrown overboard by the so-called leaders of the people. Thus, a society with political injustice, economic deprivation, social discrimination, religious or/and ethnic antagonism, human rights violation, etc. is greatly insecure and cannot therefore boast of sustainable peace.

In the final analysis, it will be seen that corruption which has negative effects on the welfare of the masses of the people in the sense that the poor will receive lower levels of social services; infrastructural investment will be tilted against projects that may benefit the poor; and the poor may be disadvantaged in seeking an improvement in agricultural production and as a result may find it difficult to escape poverty using indigenous small scale enterprises.¹⁶ Corruption therefore can be said to be the source of Nigeria's woes as it is the bane of her citizens' welfare. All these problems threaten the peace of any society. In Nigeria, for instance, several studies have shown that some of the ethno-religious and political crises that have been punctuating the history of the country since independence can be linked to poverty, economic deprivation and political repression of the majority of the citizens. In such circumstances, we cannot meaningfully talk about sustainable peace because the oppression of

the poor by the ruling class is a clear invitation to violent conflicts.

Conclusion

Public funds which should have been used to provide essential services, infrastructural facilities and employment for the teeming youths of Nigeria have been siphoned and mismanaged by the so-called leaders masquerading as Presidents, State Governors, Ministers, Legislators, and Heads of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at national, state and local government levels who control the machinery of government and are responsible for the deployment of resources for welfare and development. Consequently, Nigeria scores high in the Corruption Perception Index and scores low in the Human Development Index, implying that because the incidence of corruption is high, investment in citizens' welfare is low. The foregoing situation has created poverty, frustration, apathy and all forms of social disequilibrium among the poor masses who perceive their living standards, by both income and non-income measures, to be stagnating and worsening. The National Bureau for Statistics (NBS) reported that the percentage of people living in poverty increased from 27.2% in 1980 to 46.3% in 1985, 65% in 1996 and 69% in 2010, indicating that about 112.7 million Nigerians are living below the poverty line.¹⁷ Recent statistics as reported in several national dailies have shown that over 80% of Nigerians are living below the poverty line of 2 dollars per day.

Finally, the relationship between endemic corruption and the high incidence of poverty in the country therefore can only create a situation of social injustice, economic deprivation and political discrimination, as well as ethnic and religious intolerance; all of which are antithetical to peace and peaceful co-existence amongst people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, thus, making systemic corruption a strange bedfellow of sustainable peace in Nigeria and, indeed, the whole world.

Endnotes

1. This statement from the Minister for Justice is carried on page 8 of the *Punch* Newspapers of Wednesday 20 January 2016 under the caption: 'Corrupt judges will be prosecuted, forfeit assets – FG'. The occasion, according to the paper, was the presentation of the latest report of a civil society group, Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, in Lagos on Tuesday 19 January 2016 under the title: 'Go home and sin no more: Corrupt judges escaping justice in Nigeria'.
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