



OFFICIAL CORRUPTION AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT (2003-2010)

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Poverty is an endemic issue ravaging Africa as a continent. In Nigeria, poverty has been described as pervasive owing to the fact that as from 1981, the nation has witnessed a persistent increase in poverty level. This persistent rise in the nation's poverty level prompted the introduction of poverty alleviation programmes as from 1986. Though the nation has implemented not fewer than eight of such programmes, available data reveals that over 50% of the nation's population is still categorized as being poor. Countries like China and Vietnam whose poverty level was higher than that of Nigeria for about two decades ago have their poverty level between 5% and 20% as at today. It is being argued that corruption which has been seen as a way of life in Nigeria is largely responsible for the continuous poverty situation. This paper is anchored on the social exclusion theory and the feedback theoretical frameworks. The paper brings to the fore the synergy between official corruption, the efforts of the government and those of the citizenry in order to have a society free of poverty. We have attempted to evaluate the impact of corruption on the nation's poverty situation. Precisely, the paper tries to establish the extent to which official corruption has contributed in worsening the nation's poverty situation. In doing so, we employed historical analysis supported by empirical evidence. The paper has been able to establish that official corruption has negatively affected the operations of poverty reduction efforts in the country. Corruption has not only robbed the nation of finances that should have been used for development that will benefit all citizens including the poor; but in some cases led to hijacking of funds meant for the poor by the privileged class thereby denying the poor the opportunity to grow out of poverty. It is the position of this paper that one of the feasible options that can bring an end to official corruption in the country so as attain the needed level of economic development which is capable of reducing and possibly eradicating poverty in the country is capital punishment (death penalty) since all other options implemented so far have not been successful.

Keywords: Official Corruption, Poverty Reduction, Development, Anti-Corruption Bodies, Social Exclusion Theory and Feedback Theory of Poverty

Introduction

Poverty in Nigeria has been described as being pervasive and persistent despite the fact that the country is one of the richest countries in Africa. The nation's general picture depicts a continuous rise in poverty incidence. While in 1980 only 27.2% of the Nigerian population were said to be poor, there was a continuous rise in the proportion between 1985 and 1998 (Ogwumike, 2001). Though the trend according to National Bureau of Statistics (2005) declined from 66.5% in 1996 to 54.4% in 2004, the fact that over 50% of the Nigerian population has remained poor should be seen in the words of Kwanashie (2000) as an unacceptable situation.

In apparent confirmation of the clay-footed efforts at combating corruption by the Goodluck Jonathan administration, Transparency International, the respected global watchdog on issues pertaining to corruption, has just ranked Nigeria as the 35th most corrupt country in the world. Last year's Perception Index revealed that this government scored 27 out of a maximum 100 marks. This ranking cannot astound most Nigerians because the magnitude and dimension of corruption in the country is so scandalously high that even the 35th position looks unreal as it could be much worse than that! A lot of shady practices have taken place in the past two years in the country that Nigeria could sit comfortably in the first bracket of corruption notoriety. Even without the watchdog saying it, we know that corruption has become so endemic here that it is now seen as a way of life. In fact, the more wishy-washy attempts government makes at fighting the scourge, the more cases of outlandish corruption are recorded.

The high incidence of poverty in Nigeria has become a concern to policy makers and indeed all well-meaning Nigerians because, as asserted by United Nations Development Programme (2001), it has not only increased from 27.2% in 1980 to 54.4% in 2004 but it is estimated to be rising by 10% in every 3 years. In addition, despite several efforts by government, non-governmental organizations, international donor agencies, the nation's poverty situation has become worse judging by different indices. The nation's enormous wealth being the world's seventh largest exporter of oil, sixth largest producer in OPEC, Africa's largest oil exporter and the fifth biggest source of United States oil imports is a good potential for effective reduction and possibly eradication of poverty (National Planning Commission, 2004; Oil Statistics, n.d.; Thomas and Canagarajah, 2002). Yet, Nigeria is not only one of the poorest countries in the world but also in Africa and indeed in South Saharan Africa despite its abundant resources and various efforts toward reducing her poverty level.

According to Nkoyock (2012), "Corruption is a global phenomenon that causes poverty, obstructs development, and drives away investment. The issue of corruption has gained a prominent place on the global agenda since the mid-1990s with the creation of organizations that can promote models of stemming corruption; especially in developing countries where governmental corruption is widespread. International organizations have adopted conventions with the requirements that their members enact laws prohibiting bribery and extortion. In Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development calls for the setting up of coordinated mechanisms to combat corruption. Emerging structures and processes such as the African Peer Review Mechanism are designed to improve governance systems in Africa. At the sub-regional level, the international Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa elaborated various initiatives to strengthen cooperation among its member states.

In March 2009, countries in West Africa established a network of national anticorruption institutions in the Economic Community of West African States. Nigeria is the key driver of these sub-regional initiatives because of the country's vast experience in the fight against corruption and money laundering. Since the 1960s, the country has been undertaking broad approaches to tackle corruption through the adoption of measures in areas of enforcement, prevention, institutional reforms, and cultural changes (Nkoyock, 2012). The three main anticorruption agencies in Nigeria are the Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Offences Commission, and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). EFCC which was created by an enabling Act in 2004 is perceived as the most effective anticorruption agency in the country, and the results so far are not to be underestimated in the context of Africa, based on indicators such as public perception, investigation and prosecution, assets recovery, strengthening of Nigerian financial institutions, and international recognition. Nigeria was removed in May 2007 from the Financial Action Task

Force list of Non Cooperative Countries and Territories. The Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) became a member of the 106-Egmont Group in 2007. Nigeria's ranking in the Transparency International global corruption perception index moved from 142 in 2006 to 121 in 2008 and retrogressed to 130 in 2009 (Nkoyock, 2012). The Commission has mobilized external assistance to provide expertise, funding, and political assistance; and it is currently being assisted by bilateral and multilateral international agencies in various areas including the provision of advanced information technology (IT) systems.

In December 2009, according to Nkoyock (2012), the IT solution deployed in NFIU holds over 9 million records. NFIU receives data from the twenty-four Nigerian banks and other reporting entities in the form of cash transaction reports (CTRs), suspicious transaction reports, financial funds transfer reports, and list-based such as reports generated from lists of known terrorist identities. The deployment of the IT solution in NFIU has reduced the overall time the analysts spend on each suspicious transaction record, enabling increased performance and productivity. These technologies also improve the ability of the NFIU to provide investigators with new cases generated from huge volumes of CTRs. EFCC's involvement with the cleansing exercise of the financial system by the Central Bank of Nigeria has led to significant results. To date, classified bad loans of about USD\$1.4 billion have been recovered. The Commission has filed 188 count charges against four Chief Executives and eleven Directors of banks as well as one Chief Executive Officer of a stock broking firm. The Commission has also obtained marvel injunctions restraining assets of over \$1 billion belonging to two bank Chief Executives. In seven years of existence, over 20,000 cases were investigated and around 500 people convicted for various crimes including politically exposed persons. The Commission has recovered over six billion US\$ from criminals and has returned huge assets to victims of fraud abroad. Recent initiatives of the Commission include the anticorruption revolution campaign, a transactions clearing platform, tax investigations, and the fight against cybercrime. Despite these achievements, the Commission is being faced with various challenges which have impeded the successful implementation of its mandate. These challenges can be categorized into political, legislative, judicial, organizational, and technical. The existing and outdated Evidence Act, for instance, does not permit the admission of electronic and evidence generated by computers in court.

However, from the above analysis, we can deduce that corruption is one human vice which requires immediate tackling. Given its damaging consequence, it is not a problem whose solution can be put off to another day. That is why most countries like Nigeria have in place institutions charged with tackling the menace. In Nigeria, the challenge of corruption has been discussed, examined and dissected at various fora: seminars, high-powered committees, academic gatherings, and in the media (Abdul-Ismael, n.d.; Egwemi, 2012; Odekunle, 1986; Ibrahim 2003). All these efforts have been made so that solutions can be found to the problem. However, the problem of corruption as argued elsewhere seems to have defied solution (Egwemi, 2007). This intractability of the problem is captured by Mundt and Aborishade in the following words, "each political regime comes to power promising to eliminate the practice and punish offenders only to fall into the same pattern" (Mundt and Aborishade, 2004: 707). In Nigeria, metaphorical allusions like "long leg", "bottom power", "chop chop", "kick back", "scratch my back" are all euphemisms for official corrupt practice. Every government that has come to power has pledged that "there would be no sacred cows" and that it would "not be business as usual" (Nwezeh, 2011; Egwemi and Usman, 2010). Such promises have not done much to stem the tide of corruption and the phenomenon seems to have become *normal* in the country. It is against the above background that this seminar paper attempts to come to terms with the problem of official

corruption with a view to finding a solution to it in order to reduce the incidence of poverty in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Although Nigerian leaders in the last twenty to thirty years have made such a sing-song of fighting corruption, it does not appear that any serious effort has been made to address the real causes of corruption albeit official corruption. Thus without a proper diagnosis of the causes of official corruption, trying to fight it is akin to treating symptoms rather than rooting out the disease itself. This unfortunately appears to be the strategy adopted so far in fighting corruption in Nigeria.

It is often said that it is difficult to nail down corrupt officials, but it has to be observed that such circumstantial evidence as someone's luxurious or flamboyant lifestyles, could easily give away a corrupt person and lead to detection. Unfortunately, Nigerians are not in the habit of questioning the sources of sudden wealth. Instead those who flaunt unexplained sudden wealth are extolled. Moreover, it has to be understood that corruption is a crime of calculation not passion. When bribes are large, the chances of being caught small, and penalties if caught negligible, many officials will succumb to corruption. The problem in Nigeria is that when corrupt officials are caught, they are not punished severely. Most of the time, the authorities go through the motions (e.g., fanfare in the media about the apprehension and trial but then nothing happens). Severe sanctions that are actually required to act as a deterrent are not applied.

According to the report by US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 - S.4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency: The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Massive, widespread, and pervasive corruption affected all levels of government and the security forces. The constitution provides immunity from civil and criminal prosecution to the president, vice president, governors, and deputy governors while in office. There was a widespread perception that judges were easily bribed and that litigants could not rely on the courts to render impartial judgments. Citizens encountered long delays and alleged requests from judicial officials for bribes to expedite cases or obtain favorable rulings.

Police corruption remained rampant, particularly at highway checkpoints. Police routinely stopped drivers who did not commit traffic infractions, refusing to allow them to continue until they paid bribes. The Office of the Inspector General of Police attempted to strengthen the Police Monitoring Unit, which was charged with visiting police stations to search officers for signs of accepting bribes; however, the unit remained ineffective and made no arrests by year's end. Citizens could report incidents of police corruption to the NHRC; however, the NHRC did not act on such complaints during the year, and no other mechanism existed to investigate security force abuse (see section 5).

In August 2010 HRW released *Everyone's in on the Game*, a report on corruption and human rights abuses by the police. HRW compiled information from 145 interviews and documented pervasive police extortion with impunity committed by police officers throughout the country. Police demanded bribes, threatened arrest and physical harm, and enforced a system of "returns" in which officers must pay up the chain of command a share of the money they extorted from the public. This system undermined the rule of law and created a large disincentive for superior officers to hold their subordinates accountable for extortion and other abuses (US

Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2011).

Public officials, including the president, vice president, governors, deputy governors, cabinet ministers, and legislators (at both federal and state levels), must comply with financial disclosure laws, including the requirement to declare their assets before assuming and after leaving office. Violators risked prosecution, but cases rarely came to conclusion. On October 26, the Code of Conduct Tribunal commenced the trial of former governor of Lagos State Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who allegedly failed to disclose multiple foreign bank accounts he operated while serving as governor. There was no decision in the case by year's end (US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2011).

The EFCC's anticorruption efforts were largely ineffectual. The 2008 replacement of its internationally respected chairman, Nuhu Ribadu, and transfer of many of its senior personnel raised questions about the government's commitment to fighting corruption. On November 23, President Jonathan removed EFCC Chair Farida Waziri after credible allegations appeared that she was engaged in official corrupt practices. On August 25, HRW released *Corruption on Trial*, a report on the record of the EFCC. The report examined the EFCC's record of conviction and prosecution of members of the political elite implicated in corruption under Ribadu and his replacement Waziri. The report found that, although the EFCC had done a competent job of prosecuting apolitical financial crimes, it had less success in high-profile political corruption cases (US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2011).

Despite the arrest of several high-ranking officials by the EFCC, allegations continued that agency investigations targeted individuals who had fallen out of favor with the government, while those who were in favor continued their activities with impunity. Since 2005 the EFCC prosecuted 26 nationally prominent public officials and recovered 1.7 trillion naira (\$10.5 billion). However, only four of these officials--former inspector general of police Tafa Balogun, former Bayelsa State governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, former Edo State governor Lucky Igbinedion, and PDP chieftain and former Nigerian ports authority chairman Olabode George--were convicted. The courts granted bail to all the others. In May the EFCC arrested former minister of works and housing Hassan Lawal for the mismanagement of 50 billion naira (\$308 million). Their trials continued at year's end. In June the EFCC arrested Dimeji Bankole, former speaker of the House of Representatives, and Deputy Speaker Usman Nafada for the alleged misappropriation of one billion naira (\$6.2 million) and 40 billion naira (\$247 million), respectively (US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2011).

In October the EFCC arrested four former governors who vacated office earlier in the year, including former Ogun governor Otunba Gbenga Daniel, former Oyo governor Chief Adebayo Alao-Akala, former Nasarawa governor Alhaji Aliyu Akwe Doma, and former Gombe governor Muhammed Danjuma Goje. The four allegedly misappropriated or stole 58 billion naira (\$358 million), 25 billion naira (\$154 million), 18 billion naira (\$111 million), and 12.8 billion naira (\$79 million), respectively. Their trials began in December and continued at year's end. Former Delta State governor James Ibori was acquitted on 170 counts of official corruption charges. He continued to face court charges in the United Kingdom for money laundering and other financial crimes stemming from embezzlement during his government tenure. The United Arab Emirates extradited Ibori to the United Kingdom, where he was scheduled to stand trial in February 2012.

In May 2010 authorities arraigned former PDP national chairman Vincent Ogbulafor on 17 criminal counts of official corruption and money laundering in the amount of 2.3 billion naira (\$14 million). Ogbulafor filed a petition to dismiss the charges. There were no new developments in the case by year's end. In August 2010 Attorney General Mohammed Adoke announced that the government could not authenticate the Pius Okigbo Panel report on former military president and general Ibrahim Babangida, which charged that Babangida mismanaged 12.4 billion naira (\$76 million) during his administration. The civil society group Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) accused the attorney general of a cover-up. A federal high court was scheduled to announce a ruling on July 28, but did not do so by year's end. On October 20, the federal high court in Ado-Ekiti, re-arraigned former Ekiti State governor Ayodele Fayos. In 2006 he was accused of laundering 1.4 billion naira (\$8.6 million) while in office. The case continued at year's end (US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2011).

The House of Representatives passed the Bill for the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on February 24, 2011 and the Senate dialed up integrity on March 16 as it delivered on promise to pass it. The harmonized version was passed by both Chambers on May 26, 2011. It was conveyed to Jonathan on May 27, and he signed it on May 28, 2011. The law allows any person to request information from a government office. The office must grant access to the information or explain why access is denied within seven days of receiving the request, or transfer the request to the appropriate office within three days. The FOIA makes it the responsibility of all public offices to keep records and provides immunity for public officers against any form of civil or criminal proceeding for "disclosure in good faith of any information" pursuant to the FOIA. The act provides a 30-day window within which anyone denied access by any public institution can bring the matter to court for a judicial review. The act includes a fine of 500,000 naira (\$3,083) for any institution or public officer who wrongfully denies access to information or records. Destruction of records is a felony punishable with a minimum penalty of one year's imprisonment under the act. Civil society groups introduced a number of cases at the national and state level to test the FOIA during the year. For example, in September 2011, the (Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) brought a case against the Oyo State government after being denied access to information on state funding for primary education. The case continued at year's end.

It is often argued that fundamental reasons for the failure of poverty reduction efforts are corruption and implementation bottlenecks, which are responsible for the present situation where in the words of NPC (1995), Onibokun and Kumuyi (1996) have not only aggravated the level of mass poverty in Nigeria but that poverty has been continuous and worsening. This is affirmed by data from Federal Office of Statistics (1999). These data indicate that while no State in Nigeria had more than half of its population categorized as poor in 1980, by 1996, only one state (Rivers) had less than half of its population categorized as poor. The nation's general picture depicts a relative continuous rise in poverty level despite the fact that the nation has expended and is still expending huge sums of money in prosecuting poverty reduction/alleviation programmes. Since official corruption or what we can call bureaucratic corruption has been identified as one of the most crucial impediments to the attainment of the desired objectives of poverty reduction efforts, it is pertinent to take a closer look at this menace with a view to stemming the tide. This forms the basis of this paper.

From the foregoing, the following pertinent research questions become imperative:

- a. To what extent have the anti-corruption bodies in Nigeria fought the scourge of official corruption from (2003-2010)?
- b. To what extent has the poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria reduce the incidence of poverty from (2003-2010)?
- c. To what extent has official corruption impacted on poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria from (2003-2010)?

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically assess the impact of official corruption on poverty reduction in Nigeria from 2003-2010. Consequently, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the extent to which the anti-corruption bodies in Nigeria have fought the scourge of official corruption from (2003-2010).
- Examine the extent to which poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria reduce the incidence of poverty from (2003-2010)?
- Know if official corruption impacted on poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria from (2003-2010)?

Significance of the Study

The goal of any research is primarily to find solution to some problems. Consequently, we hope that our study will contribute substantially in proffering solutions to the problems of official corruption and the efforts towards poverty reduction in Nigeria as well as offer suggestions for sustainable socio-economic and political developmental growth in Nigeria. The policy relevance of this work is potentially relevant for Nigeria policy makers. It is a promising source of information for the government, the media and the citizens themselves in Nigeria.

The research findings will also be of invaluable benefit towards the developmental efforts in the country. Students of Political Science, Public Administration and the Social Sciences in general, we hope will also find the work useful in some ways. At least, it will be very informative and even provide a basis on which other studies with bearing on corruption and poverty reduction in Nigeria can be anchored.

Finally, by providing the evidence in Nigeria, the study will provide baseline data for national, regional and international organizations concerned with the elimination of corrupt practices in order to enhance developmental agenda in the country.

Scope of the Study

Geographically, this study covers Nigeria (2003-2010), comprising of the 36 States. In terms of the content, the study critically assesses the impact of official corruption on poverty reduction in Nigeria within the time frame. This is with regard but not limited to poverty alleviation programmes, and the bureaucracy in Nigeria.

Discussion

Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption is as old as civilization itself and in the particular case of Nigeria, it is as old as the history of the country itself (Aluko, 2009). Omotola traces corruption to colonialism. He argues that by all standards, colonialism in Nigeria was built on corruption. This is to the extent that “because of the colonialist’s corrupt disposition to exploit the state for their exclusive benefit, they liquidated social structure against corruption associated with pre-colonial Africa and replaced and or transformed them to their own purposes” (Omotola, 2006:217). The colonial era was characterized by allegations of corrupt practices against civil servants and police officers (Aluko, 2009). This colonial legacy of corruption was carried into the independence period. Chinua Achebe, the famous Nigerian novelist, has highlighted the incidence of corruption in some of his novels, (Achebe, 1960, 1966, 1988). Achebe’s literary presentation of corruption indicates the extent and damaging impact of the phenomenon on Nigeria and her people.

In Nigeria as indicated above, the incidence of corruption is quite high. Since the return to democratic rule in the country in 1999, the country has either been ranked first or second in global corruption rating by Transparency International. This has been a matter of deep concern for both ordinary Nigerians and the political leadership of the country. Before 1999, there were many attempts at stemming the spate of corruption in the country (Faloore, 2010, Igbuzor, 2008).

However, since 1999, there seemed to be a renewed determination to fight corruption. A number of anti- corruption bodies have been set up in this direction. For example the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). In spite of these agencies, corrupt activities have continued in the country almost making nonsense of the activities of these agencies and the war on corruption. This is quite unfortunate because it seems to have become an established pattern. For example, according to Mundt and Aborishade “each political regime comes to power promising to eliminate the practice and punish offenders, only to fall into the same pattern” (Mundt and Aborishade, 2004:707). Such a scenario qualifies Nigeria according to J.S. Omotola (n.d.:3), “to belong to the category of countries which Jeremy Pope classifies as those whose national integrity system has effectively collapsed”. In fact as argued elsewhere, the problem of corruption in Nigeria seems to have defied solution (Egwemi, 2009).

The crisis of corruption in Nigeria is difficult to tackle because it seems, as some argue, to be part of the culture of the country as in many other developing countries (Egwemi, 2009, Igbuzor, 2008, Audu 2008). The argument is usually that: What is regarded as corruption in Africa is a myth because it is expected that a beneficiary should show appreciation for a favour granted him/her. If a government official offers one a job or contract, the beneficiary would be obliged to show appreciation either in kind or cash to the government official just as he would do to a village chief if granted a land to cultivate crops or build a house. Corruption is a myth because in our cultures bribery is another’s mutual goodwill (in Igbuzor, 2008:9).

While the argument that corruption may be part of Nigerian culture is easily dismissed by many (see for example Maduagwu, Obasanjo in Igbuzor 2008) it is important to note that the fact that “corruption is very widespread in Nigeria. and (it) manifests itself in virtually all aspects of national life” (Ibrahim, 2003:3) tells a lot about the intensity of the phenomenon in the country. An attempt is made in the following section to proffer solutions to the menace of corruption in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Official Corruption and Poverty

From every perspective, corruption or corrupt practices has to do with fraudulent activity especially siphon funds that are meant for the general populace for one's aggrandizement only. Right from the beginning, corruption has been a vermin that has been killing and discouraging Nigeria from moving up or welcoming new innovations. From historical point of view, Nigeria governments had in the hands of those who only care for themselves, putting aside the yearnings of the entire populace.

According to Andrig and Fjeldstad (2001:4) and Ogboru (2009), "corruption is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects, as it takes on various forms and functions in different contexts". In fact, one of the major crises in conceptualizing corruption is that while it is difficult for it to disappear it has a capacity to take on new forms (Andrig and Fjeldstad, 2001; Girling 1997). Its nature as Ogboru (2009) puts it, has both ethical and normative dimensions. This is manifested in the difficulty in obtaining consensus as to what constitutes a corrupt behaviour. For the purposes of this seminar paper however, corruption is manifested by the use of the instrumentality of office by a government official for private gain. Corruption tends to flourish when standards are lax or poorly defined, regulatory institutions and enforcement practices weak, and government policies generate economic rent. The opportunity for corruption is a function of the size of the rents under the control of a public official, the discretion that official has in allocating those rents and the accountability that official faces for his/her decisions or actions. Any attempt to conceptualize corruption may seem almost a mere rehash of existing conceptions of the phenomenon. Rehashing old definitions would seem easy. However, after the rehash putting a finger on what constitutes corruption would still prove to be a difficult endeavour. Conceptualizing corruption is not an easy task. Indeed, it is a daunting and challenging venture. (Olugbenga, 2007, Odofin and Omojuwa, 2007, Ajibewa, 2006, Faloore, 2010, Igbuzor, 2008).

However, the difficulty of defining corruption is first a function of its being a secret and clandestine activity and secondly because it has many manifestations, dimensions and forms. That is why Johnston argues that studying corruption is a tricky business. According to him, "definitions are controversial, and solid evidence is often elusive". Descriptive accounts may be clouded by self-serving equivocations. Equally subtle is the question of the significance of a corrupt act – not only its consequences, but also its meaning as perceived by citizens and officials alike (in Ogundiya, 2009:282). Be that as it may Tanzi has argued that while it may not be easy to define corruption, the crisis associated with corruption is not difficult to recognize (Tanzi, 1998).

The word corruption is originally from the Latin verb *rumpere* which means to break (Abdul-Ismael, n.d.). Following from the above, corruption means the breaking of a certain code of conduct for the personal benefit of the perpetrator. Many definitions of corruption have been put forward. For example, Sen defines it as the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit (in Aluko 2009:2). Osoba defines it as "an anti-social behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the capacity of authorities to improve the living conditions of the people" (in Aluko, 2009:3) The World Bank defines corruption as, "The abuse of public office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantages or profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs, through

patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets, or the diversion of state resources (in Agbu, 2003:3).

In J.S. Nye's classical definition, corruption is "behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains" (Nye, 1967:416). What we can deduce from the definitions above is that corruption entails any behaviour that deviates from accepted norm especially in the public space. It is any behavior that goes against established rules, regulations, and established procedure. In short, corruption is behaviour that breaks the law or aid and abets breaking the law. Such behaviour usually confers undue and/or unmerited advantages on the perpetrator. Such behaviour also expresses the notion of a betrayal of trust especially in a democracy where public office is held in trust for the people.

Corruption has various forms and dimensions. Aluko has identified nine forms namely:

- Political Corruption (grand)
- Bureaucratic/ Official Corruption (petty)
- Electoral Corruption
- Bribery
- Fraud
- Embezzlement
- Favouritism
- Nepotism (Aluko, 2009:5)

Other categorizations which do not differ from that of Aluko exist (see Yaru, 2010, Adenugba, 2009; Omotola, 2006, Orngu, 2006, Aghemelo and Oarhe, 2003). What is important, however, is that in whatever form it manifests, corruption perverts public interest and unlawfully elevates private gain and advantage.

On the other hand, though, there seem not to be a universally acceptable definition of poverty, Sachs (2005), as well as Nweze and Ojowu (2002) opined that poverty can be categorized into three namely absolute poverty, relative poverty and subjective poverty. Absolute or subsistence poverty deals with basic human needs measured by resources required to maintain physical efficiency (Haralambos and Heald, 1980; Kuper and Kuper, 1996). Here, individuals, families or groups who are said to be in absolute poverty are unable to afford the resources particularly the real income to obtain the types of diets needed to enjoy some fixed minimum standard of living determined by a given society. This minimum standard of living considers some amount of goods and services essential and those who are unable to obtain them are said to be poor. Such goods and services include food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, potable water, sanitation and education. People considered to be in absolute poverty are determined through a yardstick known as poverty line. The poverty line which is based on the level of income or consumption of individuals, households or groups in a given society as Balogun, (1999) puts it, provides a threshold whereby those whose income falls below are said to be poor and those whose income is above are non-poor. The poverty line used by the World Bank for international comparison is one dollar (\$1) per person per day (Kankwenda et al, 2000; Sachs, 2005; Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke 2003). Those below the poverty line are grouped into two, namely, the poor and core or extremely poor giving rise to two poverty lines (upper poverty line and lower poverty line). While those whose income falls below the upper poverty line but above the lower poverty line are categorized as poor, those whose income falls below the lower poverty line are categorized as the core or extremely poor. The consequences faced by those who live in absolute

poverty include disease, poor feeding, inadequate education, low life expectancy, squalor as well as physical and mental retardation.

Relative poverty is a situation where an individual's or a household's income is less than the average income of the population in the society being considered. This means that the individual or household has goods and services which are lower than those of other persons or households in the country, state, community or society (Schiller, 1976; Oladunni, 1999; Kuper and Kuper, 1996). This implies that those who are in relative poverty have their resources far lower than those possessed by average individuals or households to the extent that, they are, in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. This definition is dynamic as it is based upon comparison with some measure (s) of prevailing living standards which in addition to varying from place to place must be related to the needs and demands of a changing society. The concept of subjective poverty which is "expressed in a range of non-material and intangible qualities" (Nweze, et al 2002:2), is based on respondents' perception of their standard of living. This feeling of whether one is poor or not depends on individuals/societies' psychology.

The various concepts of poverty discussed above reveal that absolute poverty deals with those who find it difficult to live a meaningful decent life due to financial constraint. This implies that they are poor because they lack the financial resources needed for them to obtain the basic necessities of life. Relative poverty has to do with a situation where a household or a person compares itself or himself/herself with another household or person. This means that even if the household or person is able to meet its/ his basic necessities of life, the household or individual could still be comparatively poor. Since subjective poverty is concerned with the feelings of individuals, even those who are able to acquire basic necessities of life and much more might be categorized as poor depending on the yardstick being used.

This seminar paper focuses on absolute poverty as efforts made by the government in Nigeria to reduce poverty are aimed at attacking absolute poverty. It is pertinent to note at this point that the poor in Nigeria are more concerned with obtaining the basic necessities of life (which is a concern of absolute poverty) than meeting up with the living standards of the non-poor (a concern of relative poverty). Thus, absolute poverty which forms the nucleus of this paper can be described as a situation where an individual is constrained by financial resources and thus unable to meet his basic necessities of life such as food, clothes, shelter, health, etc.

Poverty Reduction Efforts in Nigeria

In dealing with the problem of poverty reduction, Archibong (1997) opined that two opposing measures (direct measures which tackle poverty issues and indirect measures of promoting welfare through economic growth) exist. The direct approach assumes that economic growth by itself is too slow to provide substantial benefits to the poor in a reasonable period. Thus, it posits that governments should provide goods and services directly to the population in order to ensure that the poor receive an equitable share. On the other hand, the indirect approach is of the view that policy makers should reduce government role in the provision of goods and services and rather concentrate on increasing long – term economic growth. Archibong continued that poverty alleviation programmes implemented so far in Nigeria tend to reflect a mixture of the direct and indirect approaches.

Over the years, successive governments in Nigeria have attempted to tackle the problem of poverty through various programmes having identified poverty as the main obstacle to rural development in the country (Egware, 1997 and Ekong, 1997). In a bid to tackle this impediment to development, the Nigerian government, responding to World Bank's recommendations and

based on its agricultural survey, embarked on the implementation of three pilot integrated agricultural and rural development projects by early 1970s in Funtua, Gusau and Gombe but later spread to other states of the federation. These projects were mainly to stimulate increased food production and enhance the income of the rural population. Ekong on his part, further argued that apart from the Agricultural Development Projects, an integrated rural development strategy proposed by the United Nations comprising three main models (rural-urban integration, intersectional and/or zonal coordination, and the package approach) was adopted. This development strategy saw the emergence of Operation Feed the Nation in 1976 and later the Green Revolution in 1979, and then the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund among others. This strategy failed to meet the food aspirations of the nation neither did it improve the condition of the poor. Other programmes designed to facilitate development and impart on the poor include, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), the National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI).

However, Archibong (1997) and Egware (1997) argued that the anti-poverty effect of these projects remains marginal. Egware (1997) opined that although NALDA encouraged small holder farmers to bring more land under cultivation, improvement in agricultural output did not significantly reduce poverty. In addition, special relief programmes targeted at poverty reduction include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE); Family Support Programme which was later replaced by the Better Life Programme and again changed to Family Economic Advancement Programme; the People's Bank, Community Banks, rural health schemes and the Expanded Programme on Immunization and National Orientation Agency whose purpose is to mobilize and encourage the participation of rural people in development. Also, the Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPP), the Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (National Planning Commission 1994; Ogwumike 2001; Obadan 2001; Ali- Akpajiak and Pyke 2003) have been put in place by the government to help in poverty reduction.

Agbu (1997), posits that efforts by government to tackle poverty situation were addressed within the broader policy objectives of national development as the following targets were set in the nation's rolling plan:

- a. Reduction of overall incidence of poverty to 20 per cent by the year 2010;
- b. ensuring adequate availability of infrastructure and access of the poor to land, credit and technology; and
- c. ensuring increase in primary school enrolment from the current level of 69 percent to 100 per cent and adult literacy rate from 52 percent to 76 per cent by the year 2010.

It is important to note that all of these targets (particularly the first target) are far from being met since over 50% of Nigerians are still living in absolute poverty. This implies that the nation's poverty reduction efforts have not been able to attain the desired results.

Attempts to Fight Corruption in Nigeria.

The nature of corruption in Nigeria is as Kolade (1999) and Ogboru (2009) put it, such that corruptible transactions take place i.e. where award of government contracts which are grossly inflated by government officials to friends, their family members or even to themselves directly

for self enrichment at the expense of the populace and the nation. Transparency International, 2000 global report rated Nigeria as the 2nd most corrupt country on earth, among 89 countries in the world, using its corruption perception index (CPI). The spate of corruption in Nigeria necessitated the setting up of the following:

- (a) The Justice Anthony Okuribido panel to probe the contracts awarded by the Federal Ministry of works between 1979 and 1983. Nothing came out of the report, although it was discovered that numerous contractors owed the federal government over N24million for contracts paid but not executed.
- (b) The late Sani Abacha was hard on corruption. He declared War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), but it was all lip service to the social malaise.
- (c) The Christopher Kolade's panel which was constituted by Obasanjo to review contracts, licenses and appointments. The tribunal was to try fraudulent officers of the Abdulsalam Abubakar's Military administration. The panel's final report was not implemented.
- (d) The Justice Kayode Eso panel to clean up the steep corruption in the nation's Judiciary. The panel indicted 47 Judges whom the report stated were not worthy to retain their seats on the bench. Only a few of them were dealt with.
- (e) The government established the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and the Economic and Financial Crime commission in 2000 and 2003 respectively. Though many state governors have been indicted by these commissions for misappropriation of public funds and personal enrichments they are yet to be brought book. This major lapse has eroded the confidence of the masses in the commissions.

The Impact of Official Corruption on Poverty Reduction Efforts in Nigeria

Corruption invariably increases transaction costs, lowers efficiency and diverts available resources into private pockets/accounts by way of misallocation/appropriation and distorts investment priorities. It weakens the state and its ability to promote development and social justice. The implication of this as Kaufam (1999) asserts, is that corruption is entrenched and systemic in developing countries of the world. Given this phenomenon therefore, in a corruption-entrenched society like Nigeria citizens become very helpless because they have little or no practical alternatives for dealing with it. Like ignorance, official corruption is a great enemy of development and eventually to efforts towards poverty reduction. When government officials mismanage huge amount of resources meant for welfare and provision of infrastructures, the effect on the national economy is great. The result is great regressive impact on the economy by way of worsening the living standard of the vast majority of the populace thereby increasing the poverty incidence in the country. In a nutshell, it has three basic debilitating effects on any economy where it is pervasive.

First, it aggravates capital shortages problems in the economy by making less money available for developmental purposes. Secondly, it accentuates capital flight with political and other elites competing for private accumulation of public capital meant for welfare and developmental purposes which is often deposited in overseas banks where they are deemed to be safe. Such monies are therefore, unavailable for capital formation purposes. Thirdly, it debases the value system of the society by placing emphasis on wealth accumulation, irrespective of the method and process, as an index of success.

Accordingly, the virtues of dignity, labour and hard work becomes relegated to the background. This results in the younger generation adopting "inappropriate" methods for

attaining success in life (Ogboru, 2009). Corruption and poverty reduction are intimately related. When the common wealth is misappropriated by a few through corruption, the resultant effect is the aggravation of the poverty level of the populace who become easily manipulated for political and other personal purposes of the leadership which all things being equal constitute a denial for poverty reduction efforts. This leads to a vicious circle of more corruption and worsening poverty, and infinitum.

The striking effect of corruption on the Nigerian economy can be gleaned from the circumstances in which the country found itself in the last two decades. The fundamental issue about this menace according to Olayiwola (2001), rests on its effect on poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria like in other developing countries is so pervasive that it undermines the state, worsens the poverty level of the populace and hinders economic development. Specifically, its effects on poverty reduction efforts include:

- i. rapid regression into deep poverty and deprivation in spite of the enormous amount of resources which have not only been at the disposal of the country but have been and are substantially spent on poverty reduction efforts;
- ii. a society that is gradually losing its social capital of trust, devotion to duty, and communal interdependence with consequences on the poor being total exclusion, powerlessness and hopelessness; and
- iii. a polity in which no government which started out pursuing an anti-corruption agenda which is capable of restoring hope for the poor has been known to last and/or knows no peace or is somewhat, destabilized. While in contrast, others with demonstrable overt preference for the venal have tended to survive much longer and enjoyed relative peace.

The fight against corruption and official corruption in particular must therefore be intensified and sustained in order to bring budget sums within realistic limits and further ensure that projects (particularly projects that are targeted at the poor) are appropriately and timely completed. This position has been accented to by the Minister of State for Communications Labaran Maku while briefing the media at the end of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) Meeting of Wednesday, May 26th 2010 where he highlighted that costs for executing projects in Nigeria are 20-30% higher than those of the world and other African countries in the sub-Region and that there was no reason for that (Chiedozi, 2010).

Cost and Consequences of Corruption

Corruption has a lot of negative impact on every sphere of societal development: social, economic and political (Igbuzor, 2008). As Ikubaje (2004) has argued, corruption is a global phenomenon and its effects on individual, institutions, countries and global development have made it an issue of universal concern (Igbuzor, 2008). According to the Lima Declaration, the impacts of corruption include: the erosion of the moral fabric of society, violation of the social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, undermining of democracy, subversion of the rule of law, retardation of development and denial of society, particularly the poor, denial of the benefits of free and open competition (Igbuzor, 2008).

Bello-Imam (2004), in the same vein, has outlined the negative consequences of corruption to include:

- i. Retardation of Economic Growth: corruption lowers investment and retards economic growth.
- ii. Misallocation of Talent: Where rent seeking proves more lucrative than productive work, talent will be misallocated. People will be lured to rent seeking rather than productive work.
- iii. Limitation of Aid Flows: Where corruption is rampant, donor agencies are unwilling to put in their money.
- iv. Loss of Tax Revenue: Revenue is lost through tax evasion or claiming improper tax exemptions.
- v. Adverse Budgetary Consequences: When corruption is rampant budgeted amounts will not deliver the required services.
- vi. Negative Impact on Quality of Infrastructure and Public Services: When public contracts are procured through a corrupt system, it results in lower quality of infrastructure and public services.
- vii. Negative Composition of Government Expenditure: corruption often tempts government officials to choose government projects less on the basis of public welfare than on the opportunity they provide for extorting bribes. Under such a situation, large projects, whose exact value and benefit are difficult to monitor, usually present lucrative opportunities for corruption while returns on teachers' salaries and textbooks could be zero for the same set of officials. As the Chairman of Transparency International, Peter Eigen correctly noted, corruption doesn't just line the pockets of political and business elites; it leaves ordinary people without essential services such as life saving medicines and deprives them of access to sanitation and housing. In short, corruption costs lives (See Igbuzor, 2008:12-16). Therein lies the problem of corruption.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of Poverty

Just as there is no universally acceptable definition of poverty, so it is with theories of poverty. However, this seminar paper considers six perspectives of poverty theory. They are: the Conservative, the Liberal Reformists, the Radical Structural/Marxists, the Social Exclusion theory and the feedback theory also known as the vicious cycle of poverty. The conservative theories (individualistic and culture of poverty) posit that the poor are responsible for their poverty. This theory is viewed from the angle of the individual's or household's inability to be productive so as to get out of poverty. The individualistic theory on its part attributes poverty to individual pathology or weakness which emphasizes that: the poor were poor because they did not work hard, they squandered money on gambling, drinking and unnecessary luxuries and they had disorder of family life. They had no ambitions, no inner call for work, were fatalistic and suffered an intractable in-educability (Islam, n. d.:2).

This theory is founded on self help and survival in which case those who work hard succeed while, the weak fail to succeed giving rise to the non-poor and the poor respectively. Efforts made in Nigeria in line with this theory are: poverty alleviation programme (PAP), the on-going national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP), Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Nomadic Education Programme. This is because the first two programmes have been characterized by payment of stipends (in the case of PAP) and granting of loans to individuals

under NAPEP while the last two attempt to address those who have not been able to acquire the needed education. In the case of Culture of poverty, it involves a sense of resignation and fatalism; and a strong disposition to authoritarianism with cultural attitudes tending towards undermining imposed reform.

The culture of poverty thus flourishes under a low wage, profit oriented economy and inadequate government assistance for the poor (O'Donnel, 1997). It is the view of this theory that the poor need voluntary or state support to psychologically gear them up to take advantage of the opportunities that may come their way. In Nigeria, government efforts towards averting the culture of poverty theory are noticed by awareness creation through the media via the nation's National Orientation Agency (NOA) in addition to allowing the formation of associations by groups and individuals.

The liberal reformists' perspective which deals with situational theory of poverty is hinged on the fact that poverty results from experiences that individuals or groups pass through. It views poverty as a reaction to situational constraints rather than an issue of culture. Thus, poverty results from imposed constraints such as low income, unemployment and illness (O'Donnell 1997; Haralambos and Heald, 1980). The theory holds that people are poor due to the fact that they find themselves in a situation of no resource and opportunities for them to advance their welfare. This theory underpins the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment where school leavers who are unemployed are engaged.

On their part, the radical structural/Marxist perspective which is also known as the power theory argued that capitalism produces poverty due to its exploitative syndrome. The theory is hinged on the fact that capitalism brings about fundamental social problems including severe inequality which leads to poverty. That is, the poor are often subjugated by the bourgeoisie so as to glean (collect undeserved) profits and capital via exploitation. It is thus the macro-structure of a capitalist society that produces inequality and consequently poverty. Institutions and class exploitation account for poverty as people suffer in the hands of the privileged class and institutional arrangements. The poor are unable to attain higher living standards and thus they cannot come out of poverty because the capitalist arrangement is biased against them (Archibong, 1997 and Uniamikogbo, 1997). This theory explains the situation in Nigeria where there is co-existence of low political consciousness due largely to high rates of illiteracy on the part of the masses, and a high degree of centralization of resources which the exclusive ruling political class exploit. This theory forms the basis of Nigeria's anti-corruption crusade via the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) which is a direct intervention towards ensuring that corrupt enrichment of public officers is curbed. The success of this action, all things being equal is expected to make more resources available for execution of projects and consequently raise standard of living of Nigerians including the poor.

The social exclusion theory is predicated on poverty resulting from people who are excluded from effective participation in a society's activities due to segregation. This theory which was officially adopted in a World Summit which took place in Copenhagen in 1995 holds that certain people within the society become more vulnerable to poverty because of discrimination. This approach which has been described as "people centred" as against "goods centred" is characterized by three paradigms namely: solidarity, specialization and monopoly (Anyanwu, 1997). The solidarity paradigm stresses moral integration and cultural boundary in which those who do not belong suffer exclusion. Specialization paradigm emphasizes the interdependence of specialized spheres of the society in terms of exchange of goods and services. Here, the conduct of individuals depends on interests and capabilities such that the social structure is based on a

specific form of division of labour which determines the extent of individual interaction. In the monopoly paradigm, different interest groups based on class, status and political power exert control over available resources. By so doing, they create inequality and form monopoly groups who tend to perpetuate power and privileges through social closure and labour market segregation thereby enforcing exclusion. This means the poor are not the problem but rather, the inaccessibility of realistic opportunities as a result of exclusion that prevents them from getting out of poverty. Nigeria’s advocacy and promotion of community based poverty alleviation programmes emphasized by the nation’s National Economic Development Strategy (NEEDS) as well as formation of self-help projects by communities and

NGOs are aimed at tackling poverty that results from the claim of this theory.

The feedback theory also known as the vicious cycle of poverty has it that poverty breeds poverty. The breeding process occurs through time and transmits its effects in a cyclical manner with no beginning and no end to the cycle (Moynihan, 1968) the main thrust of the theory is represented in figure 1 below

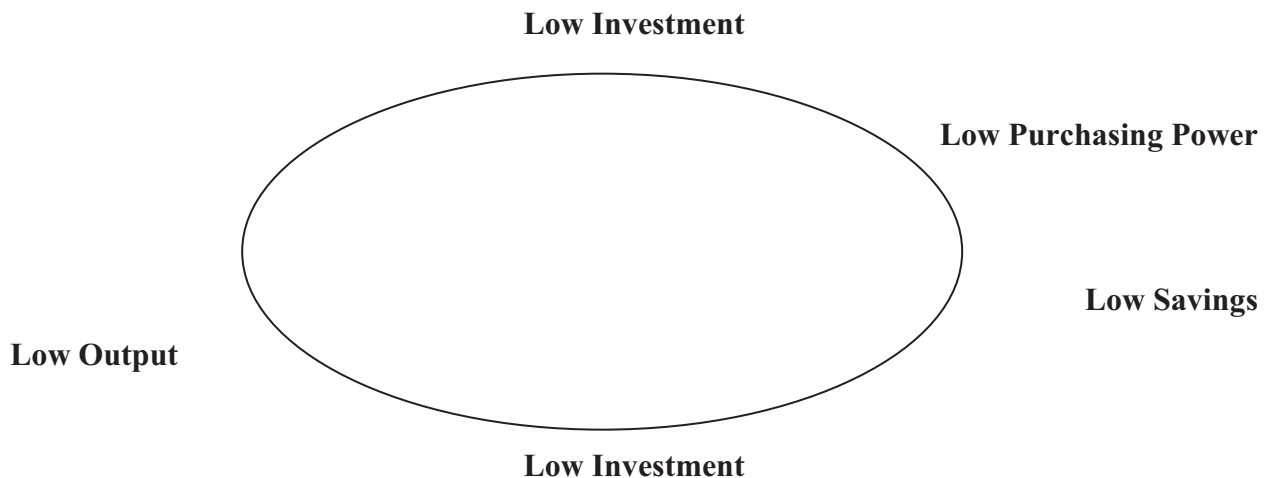


Figure 1. The cyclical nature of Poverty.

Within the positive feedback perspective, poverty is seen as a system in which each unit reinforces the other and thus maintains the system as a whole in a cyclical manner. At the beginning of the cyclical process is low income that impact on the purchasing power and their ability save. As a result of the low savings, the propensity to invest is equally very low, thereby leading to very low output and this in turn breed low income. In this cyclical manner, poverty begets poverty. The positive feedback system that perpetuates poverty is what the American anthropologist, Oscar Lewis refers to as the culture of poverty. Lewis (1966) argued that the culture of poverty is a response of the poor to their marginal position in a class stratified and highly individualistic society. He further stressed that the culture of poverty goes beyond a mere reaction to a situation. It takes the force of culture because its features are guides to action that are internalized by the poor and constitute a design for living that is transmitted from one generation to another.

The theoretical frameworks that sufficiently explains the rising poverty profile in Nigeria is the social exclusion theory and the feedback theory also known as the vicious cycle of poverty. In relating these theories to the Nigeria situation, it shows that most Nigerians are already in the

poverty trap. This is explicated by the poverty correlate of the occupation of household that is predominately agriculture with large household sizes. This peculiar circumstance makes it not only difficult for them to escape from poverty but they also bequeath it to their children. Thus, a culture of poverty in which people, resign to fate is being perpetuated in the Nigerian society. The culture is being reinforced and sustained by bad leadership, corruption, unemployment, impotent poverty reduction strategies put in place by those in charge of governance.

It is disheartening to note that with thirteen years of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and two years to the deadline of 2015, the poverty profile is consistently on the increase. Unarguably, a greater proportion of the population still lives within the poverty line. This is characterized by widespread unemployment, insufficient income, inadequate food, lack of basic health care, lack of shelter, safe drinking water, access to basic education and a host of others. This portends a fundamental challenge to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty by 2015.

The various attempts made over the years to eradicate poverty have not yielded practical outcome that have alleviated poverty. Lack of commitment and continuity, policy inconsistency, corruption, weak institutional support among others hindered the efforts of government at reducing poverty. This evidence points to the fact that Nigeria is not prepared to and cannot win the war against poverty within the target line of 2015. In as much as the war against poverty cannot be won, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains a mirage. This seminar paper therefore has been anchored principally on the social exclusion theory and feedback theory since Nigerians have almost lost count of the nation's efforts towards poverty reduction while the poverty level remains high. These efforts have merely succeeded in perpetuating power and privileges by the ruling class to the exclusion of the poor.

Methodology

The research design used for this study is historical research design. This design was used so as to capture the entire domain of the study. Historical research is a type of secondary data analysis to determine past social attitudes and community structure and how these have changed over time. Historical research gives social scientists a much better picture of who uses the area and how it has been used. Understanding the history of the area will often give a much clearer picture of how communities and groups have evolved regarding attitudes, perceptions, and uses. Historical research gives a social scientist a better context for making realistic decisions. Historical research can be accomplished with several types of sources, including

- a. **Historical Literature:** Historical resources may include library materials, special collections, and museum collections. They are often the most effective means of gaining information.
- b. **Archival Literature:** Materials in archives are useful for studying cultural processes through time and finding specific material from original documents.
- c. **Oral Histories and Traditions:** Oral histories help gain insight into an event or situation by gathering personal accounts from informants who recall events, places, or incidents. Traditions are information and beliefs handed down through generations by word of mouth or by example. An understanding of oral traditions is often key in communicating with different cultures.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this seminar paper reveal that official corruption has seriously contributed to underdevelopment and consequently the persistent high level of poverty in the country. Our results show that areas addressed by the government so as improve the welfare of Nigerians and the poor in particular did not achieve desired objectives due largely to corruption. Projects/activities in these areas were either abandoned or the fund earmarked were not “eye marked” and thus remained illusive. From our analysis of the variables in this seminar paper, it is clear that official corruption has negatively impacted on poverty reduction efforts thereby rendering the numerous poverty reduction programmes ineffective. It is expected that an economy like Nigeria which has witnessed relative growth in its gross domestic product over the years should all things being equal have been characterized by steady decline in poverty level since the part of the proceeds of this growth are channeled into funding poverty reduction efforts.

Government expenditure whose trickle down effects should be able to mitigate poverty has been bedeviled by official corruption thereby constituting an obstacle in efforts for poverty reduction. Poverty reduction efforts associated with payment of stipends, such as NDE, PAP and NAPEP have been criticized on the ground that the stipend approach has been hijacked by corrupt privileged members of the society in the bureaucratic set-up, who confiscated the fund and denied the intended beneficiaries access to such fund (Anakpej, 2001).

In addition, corruption has fueled unemployment as funds that should be used to broaden the nation’s economic base end up in private pockets/accounts. Even in the case of the NDE whose principal objective is to solve the problem of unemployment, its contribution in this regard is not noticeable as many beneficiaries have simply embraced it as a way of participating/sharing in the national cake. This is because in a field survey conducted in 2003, in Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states, Abimiku (2006) observed that the proportion of beneficiaries of NDE programmes who were latter engaged in unrelated occupations ranged from 20.83% to 64.63%. This implied that they were more interested in any financial benefits they could obtain than in the programmes of the directorate.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The government is not helping matters with its kid-glove handling of established cases of corruption. Indeed, there seems to be a form of legitimization of corruption with the introduction of plea-bargaining to our judicial lexicon, which makes apprehended corrupt Nigerians to walk away with their loot after paying peanuts from the misappropriated national patrimony. Our legal system, too, has not helped our circumstance as all forms of judicial bottlenecks are deliberately put forward to truncate dispensation of justice. It has gone so bad that there have been calls for the empanelling of special courts to try corruption cases.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has lost its bite, unlike a few years past when it did sting anyone who was implicated for committing any economic or financial crime. Government’s attitude towards battling corruption is so weak, unserious and reeks of duplicity. Those who bleed this country through all sorts of nefarious activities are friends of those in the corridors of power, especially the Presidency whose officials backslap with corrupt public and private Nigerians. There is no doubt that citizens of other countries look at us with scorn and relate with us like everyone here is a criminal. This explains why our countrymen and women are subjected to more security measures whenever they travel out. Official pronouncements and behaviour continue to entrench corruption in Nigeria. The situation

has so deepened that it appears insurmountable. Those in authority and power seem to be at their wit's end-hapless, confused and almost clueless on the way out. Indeed, not to be corrupt in Nigeria attracts a toga of foolishness! In local parlance, public funds are regarded as national cake that must be grabbed by the few who have no business with morality or sanctimonious preachments on the need for propriety. The question is: what are we doing to curb the ogre of corruption? It is not enough to make puerile declarations without any visible commitment to addressing the menace.

For now, we have not begun the fight against corruption. That is, sadly, the truth of the matter. The first step is to get top corrupt persons jailed. Until this is done, we will not sit up. It is annoying for the government and its megaphones to issue rebuttals and condemnatory speeches whenever these international reports are released.

This administration can only escape the sledgehammer by taking the right steps. If Abuja is serious about reducing corruption in the country, all the reports of commissions of enquiries, judicial panel recommendations and allied outcome of probes should be implemented to the letter. Sweeping them under the carpet or dumping them in some dusty cabinets does not do anyone any good. Let us responsibly confront the corruption monster instead of indulging in verbal acrobatics with local critics and global agencies.

Despite the fact that the nation has embarked on several poverty reduction efforts, majority of Nigerians remain poor, accompanied by limited social development, the nation's great natural wealth notwithstanding. It is sad to note that over 50% of Nigerians are still living on less than one dollar per day amidst efforts to ameliorate their plight. This implies that these efforts have failed to attain the desired results due largely to official corruption as funds meant for projects/activities targeted at the poor have been misappropriated, misallocated or out rightly embezzled with impunity. This seminar paper is of the view that as far as fighting corruption in Nigeria is concerned, it stops at mere lip service and as such, poverty reduction efforts no matter how well designed will remain a mirage. For these efforts to make the desired impact and attain the needed targets, the paper recommends as follows:

- a. Instituting good governance: There is the need to entrench good governance in every sphere of government activity which according to Odusola (1997) is a sine-qua-non for poverty reduction in every Nigerian society.
- b. It is not enough for political office holders and other government functionaries to preach that the government has zero tolerance for corruption. They should visibly exhibit accountability, transparency, fiscal responsibility and respect for the rule of law while carrying out their official responsibilities. It is important to note that instituting good governance entails replacing the existing weak institutions in the country with strong ones which when anchored by a committed leadership to poverty reduction as was done in China and Vietnam which led to drastic reduction in poverty levels in these countries.
- c. Fighting Corruption: Fighting corruption should be frontally confronted instead of merely setting up institutions that have been accused of selective treatment. Since this "monster" in the words of Ekpo (2009) remains a permanent vice thereby making accountability, transparency and probity in the conduct of government business at all levels problematic for the economy, it must be fought to a stand still for the country to move forward. Since it has defied all "human face" public policies, the only way out is to adopt the death penalty option. This implies that there is the need to enact a law to the effect that once a public office holder is found guilty of corruption (Official Corruption), he/she should be made to face death penalty irrespective of who he/she may be. The death penalty option has successfully worked

in China and Vietnam to “free” the fund meant for poverty reduction efforts in the areas of agriculture and rural development. The result according to Ravallion and Walle (2008) is the reduction in poverty level from 53% in 1981 to 5% in 2005 for China and 50% in 1993 to 20% in 2004 for Vietnam.

- d. Rationalization of poverty reduction efforts: Overhauling of existing poverty alleviation programmes will ensure that in the words of Adeyemi (2008) they are strengthened so as to make the desired impact becomes pertinent. A close examination of the activities of National Directorate of Employment and National Poverty Eradication Programme reveal that they are doing virtually the same thing and only aid in escalating corruption. It will be better to merge them as maintaining the two is not only duplication but a waste of public fund.

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