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Gender and Corruption: Insights from Nigeria Democracy (1999 – 2008) (Pp. 1-12)

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Abstract

Corruption is one of the destructive banes behind the underdevelopment of the Nigerian society. The abuse of positions and privileges has become features of Nigeria's economic and political landscape. The coming of a democratic regime with all resources and policy in place to curb this scourge has produced no positive result. This paper is designed to increase understanding and offer suggestions with regard to improving gender sensitiveness in the implementation of anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria. The first part of the paper reviews literatures that identifies the link between higher levels of women in governance and public administration in Nigeria on one hand, and lower level of corruption on the other hand and discuss implication of such findings. The paper takes note of the fact that in Nigeria, there have been few cases of women occupying political positions, who have been found to be corrupt. The second part identifies and discusses the link between the high levels of corruption and gender inequality. The third part discuss and address gender sensitive policy options that might be recommended to Nigeria when designing anti-corruption strategies and action plans, or might otherwise be employed to facilitate gender awareness in the area of corruption.

Introduction

In recent past, corruption has become an issue that has attracted the interest of policy makers, academics and public officers. Several reasons have been given for this, which include its ability to undermine democracy and good governance; economic development and the fact that it generates economic distortions in the public sector by pulling public investment away from education and into projects where bribes and kickbacks are the order of the day.

Corruption as a universal issue cannot be destroyed but the effect can be reduced to barest minimum. According to USAID, corruption in elections and in legislative bodies reduces accountability and representation in policymaking; and it weakens government institutions by disregarding official procedures. In the end, it undermines the legitimacy of government and such democratic values as trust and tolerance.

Corruption has become a social disease plaguing almost every nation of the world. However, it has become so endemic in Nigeria that some people seek public offices to make money through dishonest means rather than serving the people who appointed or elected them into such positions. This problem is growing in leaps and bounds as recent events in the nation shows. Since the dispensation of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, Nigeria has been hit by corruption from all fronts. This menace has reached an alarming proportion.

The first part will review literature that links higher levels of women in governance and lower level of corruption. The second part will look at higher level of corruption and gender inequality while the last part will offer suggestions with regard to improving gender sensitivity in the implementation of anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria.

Conceptualising Corruption

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) defined corruption as abuse of public office for private gain. Shleifer and Vishny (1993) defined corruption as the sale by government officials of government property for personal gain. Akanbi (2001) described corruption as the abuse of public or entrusted power for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. This paper adopts Lipset & Lenz's (2000) definition as efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain at public expense; or a measure of public power for private benefit.

Looking at corruption in this light, it will be discovered that, this has become one of the greatest obstacles to national development today. In spite of various government efforts to curb this, there has not been any remarkable progress in the attempt to reduce or eradicate corruption in Nigeria. This is because those who should be at the forefront to fight this menace were at many times found to be engaged in the act. This has caused decay and dereliction within the infrastructure of government and the nation in physical, social and human terms (Aluko 2005). With corruption deeply entrenched, sustainable development and political stability comes to a halt.

According to Aluko (2005), corruption is problematic on three main fronts. First, corruption has destroyed the institutional capacity of the state by eroding public confidence and promoting inefficiency. Secondly, it has caused severe distortion of the efficient allocation of resources towards meaningful development. Thirdly, it deepens inequities and it is a crime against humanity because it encroaches into guaranteed constitutional rights and turns the rule of law to a rule of individuals pursuing their own self-interest.

Link between Gender and Corruption: A Review

In recent times, there have been attempts to establish a relationship between high levels of women in politics and less corruption resulting from their presence and influence. Key paper expounding on this theme are: A. Swampy, S. Knack, Y. Lee and O. Azfer, "Gender and Corruption" World Bank, 2001 and D. Dollar, R. Fishman, and R. Gatti "Are Women really the 'Fairer' Sex?" (Corruption and Women in Government", World Bank Development Research Group, 1999). These researches have documented systematic gender difference in behavior. They gave evidences that suggest that women may be more relationship-oriented, may have higher standard of ethical behavior and may be more concerned with the common good than men are. These studies observed that gender differences might be attributed to socialization, or to differences in access to networks of corruption, or in knowledge of how to engage in corrupt practices, or to other factors. In summary, their analysis of country-level data indicated that higher levels of women's participation in public life are associated with lower levels of corruption.

D. Dollar, R. Fishman and R. Gatti (1999) analyzed data for more than 100 countries, and found a strong negative and statistically significant

relationship between the level of female participation in politics—measured by the percentage of seats occupied by women in the lower and upper chambers—and a corruption index. They used the International Country Risk Guide's Corruption Index. Using such findings, the authors hypothesized that increasing participation of women in government and legislature would negatively and significantly influence the level of perceived corruption.

Three variables of women's participation in public life were used. The first is number of women in legislature. They expected that large number of women reduce the level of bribes given to MPs; positively influence legislature by voting for laws that deter corruption; and place issues of wider public concern on government's agenda such as health and social issues. The second variable is number of women in government, such as those in ministerial positions and high-level civil servant appointments. They expected that female heads would reduce level of tolerance for petty corruption. The third variable is number of women in labour force, which correlate with previous variables, that is, the higher the number of women in labour force, the more likely their higher representation in public life.

The result showed that both female participation in governance and the level of corruption are highly correlated with a level of socio-economic development; the more developed is the country, the more women participate in governance and the lower the level of perceived corruption.

Several authors have criticized these studies. One of such is Anne Marie Goetz (2003) who questioned the notion that women in governance will result in lower levels of corruption. According to Goetz, these studies failed to acknowledge the very real way in which gender relationship may limit the opportunities for corruption, particularly when corruption functions through all-male networks and in fora from which women are socially excluded. Goetz believes that as workplace becomes more feminized and women take the top leadership jobs it cannot be assumed that women will choose less corrupt behavior.

The “women are less corrupt” thesis has also been challenged by V. Alatas, L. Cameron, A. Chaudheuristic, N. Erkalb and L. Gangadharanb (). They investigated gender difference attitudes toward corruption, by using experimental methodology. Attitudes towards corruption play a critical role in the persistence of corruption. Based on experimental data collected in

Australia (Melbourne), India (Delhi), Indonesia (Jakarta) and Singapore, they showed that while women in Australia are less tolerant of corruption than men in Australia, there are no significant gender differences in attitudes towards corruption in India, Indonesia and Singapore. Their findings suggest that the gender differences found in the previous studies may not be as universal as stated and may be more culture specific. They also explored behavioral differences by gender across countries and found that there are larger variations in women's attitudes towards corruption than on men across the countries in their sample.

This paper will not attempt to argue for or against any of the above studies, but will provide evidence of case in Nigeria of women who have made great marks in governance and those who have been found to be corrupt.

Gender and Corruption: Insight from Nigeria

Nigeria as a country is located in West Africa and has an estimated population of 135 million, according to 2006 census figure, and more than 250 ethnic groups. This population consists of Muslim religion worshippers and Christian worshippers in the majority, but there are smaller minorities of the population who are traditional religion worshippers.

As the leading oil producer in Africa and the 10th largest global producer, Nigeria exports some 2.4 barrels of crude oil per day. The country earns an approximate of 95 percent of foreign exchange from export of oil and one third of GDP. But despite the abundance of natural resources, The United Nations (UN) Development Index ranks Nigeria 158 out of 177 countries and it is also estimated that 70 percent of its population live below the UN poverty indicator of US \$1 per day.

Though Nigeria got her independence in 1960, it has experienced prolonged periods of military rule and numerous military coups. In 1999, Nigeria finally had a transition to democratic rule through an elected civilian government under President Olusegun Obasanjo. He won a second term in office in 2003 and in 2007, there was a hand over of power to another democratically elected government, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the president.

Corruption has emerged as one of the main impediment to development in contemporary Nigeria. As corruption manifest in Nigeria today, it can be more appropriately termed endemic or systemic. This is not to say that the

democratically elected government of past and present administration in Nigeria did not recognize this fact, or has done nothing about it. Corruption in Nigeria has become so institutionalized that it will take decades to make any meaningful change to curb this menace in the Nigerian society.

Irrespective of the above corruption profile, we have had cases in Nigeria of women in position of governance who have acted as drivers of change. One of such is Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo – Iweale. She was the Nigerian Minister of Finance from July 2003 to June 2006. On assumption of office as the Minister of Finance, she facilitated the formation of the Economic Reform Team and formed the platform for negotiating for debt reduction for Nigeria.

Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili joined the Obasanjo administration in 2000 as the Director of the Harvard–Nigeria Economic Strategy Programme. She is a foundation member of Transparency, International and served on the board of the foremost global coalition against corruption. Though she faced a lot of challenges especially as the Minister of Solid Minerals and Minister of Education, yet she was able to successfully manage her office.

The Director General of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Professor (Mrs.) Dora Akunyili commenced work in April 2001 and promptly embarked on an overhaul of the system by introducing new measures. The resonance of Professor Akunyili works at NAFDAC has earned both her and the country Local and International accolades. She has received over two hundred and fifty awards for her commitment to the values of honesty and transparency.

In recent past, Nigeria has had few cases of women in position of authority who have been found guilty of corrupt practices. Two women readily come to mind. And these few cases have made people to begin to question the theory that the more women we have in governance the lesser the incidence of corruption.

The first female speaker of the House of Representative, Mrs. Patricia Etteh was elected to the position of speaker unanimously in June 2007, and is the only woman to have held that position in Nigeria (Daily Independent Newspaper, June 6, 2007). Mrs. Etteh and her Deputy, Nguroje Babangida resigned on Tuesday October 30, 2007, over a corruption scandal (International Herald Tribune, October 30, 2007). In September 2007, she

faced a committee of MPs over accusations that she had authorized the spending of ₦628 million (about US \$5 million) on renovations of her official residence and that of her deputy's and the purchase of 12 official cars meant for the House of Representatives.

The second case of corruption involved Professor (Mrs.) Adenike Grange. Until her appointment on July 25, 2007 as the first female Minister of Health in Nigeria, she was (and still is) the President of the International Paediatrics Association; the first African woman and second person from sub-Saharan Africa to hold the office.

Charges of corruption were brought against her by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). There were two versions of the incident. One states that the sum of ₦300 million unspent part of the Health Ministry's budget for 2007 which was suppose to have been returned to the treasury was shared among officials of the ministry. The other version said rather than return the money, contracts were awarded from which the officials benefited (Kingdom Watch 2008). Whatever version is correct, the paper is only bringing out cases of corruption among few Nigerian women.

From the examples cited above, within the Nigerian context particularistic behavior of a public servant is regarded as highly rational, at least from the individual's personal point of view. "Since to violate social expectation in a society where social relations are centrally valued and in which individual existence outside of group membership is practically unthinkable, would be to court social psychological, and even mutual disaster" (Price 1975). Therefore according to Nawamu (2006) which this paper also subscribes to, institutionalizing a policy to integrate women into public realm as a potential anti-corruption remedy without addressing the collectivist culture is likely to prove futile, as women may succumb to these social ethics at the expense of public sector ethos as in the case of the Minister of Health Prof. Grange.

Gender Inequality and High Level of Corruption

Gender inequality is not simply an African or Nigerian phenomenon but a global one. It is only more prominent as has lasted for too long in this part of the world. But it is imperative to analysis this issue and see how it can help to address the issue of corruption in our nation. This is because despite the fact that we have had few cases of corruption among some women who have occupied positions of leadership, majority of reported cases of corruption is

among our male leadership and the few cases from women have been in collaboration with the men.

In the case of Nigeria, the percentage of women who are knowledgeable enough to participate in the process of governance needs to be looked at in ratio to that of men. When talking about gender equality we have to look at the percentage of women who are ready to stick out their necks into governance and have the required qualification to meet up with the challenges of the great task. There is therefore a need for a thorough examination of the cultural and political milieu of our society to help identify and isolate factors that work against women's participation in the process of governance. Any attempt to remove gender inequality in governance, must start with efforts to identify and remove impediments keeping them out of this process. Changes in institutional culture, societal power relations, social values and stereotypes are inevitable in this effort.

Given the nature of Nigerian politics which some refer to as "dirty", with cases of political assassinations, god-fatherism and political thuggery, women often avoid getting involved for the risk of exposing their family members to danger. This is because socialization in traditional societies often includes risk aversion for women. The march towards gender equality will be better served with strategies that assist women to unlearn years of belief that risk-taking is improper for the female gender.

Being able to give up what one "is" for what "one could become" is the essence of risk-taking. Women are by tradition more likely to avoid risk taking than men for the fear of danger they could be exposed to. But it is important to point out here that risk-taking itself is an important aspect of life. The Director General of NAFDAC has been exposed to a lot of challenges from those who benefited so much from corrupt practices before she was appointed. There were several attempts made on NAFDAC laboratories, on her life but she has remained strong despite pressure from her family and friends to resign from her job.

Therefore, the notion of doing things for instead of with women, the result of the social and cultural orientation of our society, present a problem in that it denies them the change to acquire vital knowledge and contacts. To sincerely work towards a society of gender equality, women have to have access to political and economic networks required to enable them familiarize themselves with the nitty-gritty of the process of governance. There is also

the need to train women and help develop strategy in them to achieve their real potentials in life.

Anti-Corruption Statutes in Nigeria

- **The Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act:** In 2000, the National Assembly enacted The Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (“Anti-Corruption Act”). Section 3 of the Anti-Corruption Act establishes the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). Under section 6, the duties of the ICPC include the investigation of acts suspected to have violated any law prohibiting corruption, review of the procedures of public bodies that aid or facilitate fraud and corruption, educating the public against bribery, corruption and related offences, as well as soliciting public support to combat corruption. The role of ICPC could thus be summed up as prevention and criminalization of corruption. There are many provisions of this anti-corruption Act, but our scope cannot accommodate this.
- **The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act:** In June 2004, the National Assembly enacted the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act. This Act repealed the Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act of 2002. Section 1 therefore establishes the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) with diverse functions and powers under section 6 and 7. Among other things, the EFCC shall investigate “...all financial crimes including advance fee fraud, money laundering, counterfeiting, illegal charge transfers, future market fraud etc”. It is also responsible for the “co-ordination and enforcement of all economic and financial crimes laws” and enforcement functions conferred on any other person or authority.
- **Global Action against Corruption and United Nations Convention against Corruption:** Nigeria became a party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption on December 9, 2003. The Convention addresses three anti-corruption measures. They are introduction of national anti-corruption policies and mechanisms, promotion of integrity in the public and private sectors, and denying corrupt persons as well as organizations the proceeds of corruption as well as facilitating the recovery of illicit assets (UNODC, 2004). A fundamental principle of the convention... “that is of utmost importance to developing countries ‘where high level corruption has plundered the national wealth...needed

for reconstruction and rehabilitation of societies...” is corruption asset recovery for which article 51 provides. To facilitate this, states parties are to extend the widest possible cooperation to each other.

Recommendations on Mainstreaming Gender into the Anti-Corruption Policy

There are some gender sensitive policy options that need to be taken when designing anti-corruption strategies and action plan in Nigeria. The paper makes the following suggestions:

- There is need to have gender-oriented participatory budgetary planning and analysis
- Using anti-corruption regulations to improve governance in pluralistic legal system
- A policy of appointing more women to the higher bench as judges throughout the nation. This will help to improve access to justice and improve gender balance
- Policy strategies which are sensitive to the impact of corruption on women
- There is the need to provide gender expertise in workshop on drafting anti-corruption strategies and action-plans to help achieve gender mainstreaming in anti-corruption policies
- Consider other options for assistance based on consultations with women’s group and anti-corruption activities in regard to gender research and analysis.
- Involve gender specialists and experts in activities targeting law makers, parliamentarians and anti-corruption agencies and NGOs to educate and raise awareness on the link between gender and corruption.

Conclusion

There are diverse challenges to gender mainstreaming of anti-corruption policies. Promoting women in political life both at national and local levels will not in itself be sufficient to reduce corruption. This is because there are some complex interactions of socio-economic, political and institutional factors that contribute to corruption. There is therefore the need to have an in-depth culture-based gender analysis that will provide basis for custom-designed gender sensitive policies in Nigeria.

Building links and dialogue between women inside and outside political structure to build accountability particularly in periods of legislative changes would be a very useful tool. In addition, developing technical and political skills of women representatives to intervene in legislative processes, irrespective of their number is a very useful tool. Finally, there is need to review the mechanism employed in pursuing gender and anti-corruption goals.

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Table 1: Nigeria’s corruption profile from 2000 – 2006.

S/N	YEAR	CPI RANKING	CPI SCORE
1	2000	90/90	1.2
2	2001	90/91	1.0
3	2002	101/102	1.6
4	2003	132/133	1.4
5	2004	144/146	1.6
6	2005	152/158	1.9
7	2006	143/163	2.0

Source: (Ekeanyanwu, 2006, 6)