

## ROLE OF INFORMATION DISSEMINATION IN COMBATING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

BY

**Onome N. Alakpodia**

Department of Library of Information Science,  
Delta State University, Abraka

**Violet E. Ikolo & Laura E. Ogbah**

Delta State University Library, Abraka, Delta State

### Abstract

Nigeria is faced with a problem that has deprived her from achieving developmental goals. This problem has presented itself in the form of corruption. Corruption undermines basic social values, threatens the rule of law, and reduces trust in political institutions. This reality of corruption in Nigeria has posed a great challenge to any government or agency of government in Nigeria. It has caused a lot of menace that needs to be cleaned up. This paper therefore has attempted to X-ray the role of information in combating corruption in Nigeria. The paper looked at the concept and history of corruption in Nigeria, the nature and characteristics of corruption, causes of corruption, the effects of corruption, challenges as well as the efforts of various governments in eradicating corruption and how information provision and dissemination can be used as a tool for combating and probably eradicating the menace of corruption in Nigeria

**KEYWORDS:** Corruption; Social Values; Rule of Law; Information Dissemination

### Introduction

Corruption is undoubtedly the worst social vice confronting Nigeria today and it has eaten deep into the fabric of the society. Of the many unresolved problems in Nigeria, the issue of corruption is the most troubling. Ogoyi (2000) stated that there is hardly any area of our national life that lacks traces of corruption. Corruption can be found in almost all societies; however the magnitude differs from one society to another. Some societies are more corrupt than others and Nigeria can be said to be one of those societies that is more corrupt (Isa, 2009). The beginning of corruption in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-independence and

first Republic time, where the early leaders were either engaged or investigated for one corrupt practice of the other. Since then, corruption has grown to the point of becoming a lifestyle in the Nigeria society. The first step in fighting corruption is being transparent. As stated by IFLA Government Board (2008). Transparency is the basis of good governance and the first step in fighting corruption. IFLA has on numerous occasions made clear her belief in the positive role librarians and information managers have on any society. It has constantly linked the role to the principle of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression as set out in Article 19 of the United Nations universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (IFLA Government Board, 2008).

Dissemination of information can help bring about a less corrupt Nigeria. Despite the numerous provisions made in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to check this practice, fraudulent and corrupt practices still persist at all governmental, societal and business levels; it is against this backdrop that this paper will look at how the dissemination of information can help to combat corruption in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Corruption**

Corruption has no uniform or universal definition. According to Ogunlana (2007), the social and cultural contexts of different communities make a unique definition difficult. The World Bank (1997), defines corruption as the abuse of public power for private benefit. To the independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Act, (2007), corrupt acts include ‘bribery’, fraud, and other related offences”, while the Vision 2010 Committee (1997) defines it as all those improper actions or transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events, judgments and position of trust.

Corruption is also defined by Adelowo (2000) as a perversion or a change from good to bad. Specifically, corruption involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profits. Treisman(1997), sees corruption as the misuse of public office for private gain. To Lipset and Lenz in Dike (2005), corruption is an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense. It can also be seen as a behaviour which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of duties for private gains (Dike, 2005). Putting it plainly Yusuf (2008) sees corruption simply as giving or taking money to give something of a

public nature. From the above definitions, it is clear that corruption breeds selfishness and thrives on secrecy.

In effect, the motivation for corruption is to take undue advantage of position of trust which is not limited to pecuniary issues. It is also not limited to the public sector. The act is criminal when considered along with the existing legislations on the subject in Nigeria (Ogunlana, 2007)

### **Nature and Characteristic of Corruption**

Egbue (2006) asserts that the nature of corruption is such that overtime, it damages effective governance. He further stated that the characteristics of corruption include the following;

1. Consist of deliberate subordination of public interest to personal ones
2. Has the tendency of secrecy of execution
3. Consists of situations of mutual obligation and benefits in monetary and other forms
4. Requires interaction in a reciprocal framework between those who require certain decisions and those who can influence such decisions.
5. Involves process of covering up unlawful act under a cloak of lawful justification.
6. Involves contradictory dual functions. Correct official functions and incorrect corrupt ones.

### **Causes of Corruption**

Corruption in most African countries has become a great challenge to leaders and citizens, threatening to undermine effective governmental financial management. It is also a threat to both economic development and the process of establishing an enduring democracy. Africans widespread corruption has historical roots that we should critically reflect on if we are to succeed in controlling and aggressively eliminate it (Isa, 2009).

According to Dike (2005), the causes of corruption are numerous, and there are evidences that points to a link between corruption and social diversity, ethno-linguistic fractionalization and the proportions of country's populations adhering

to different religious traditions. Isa (2009) states that some authors have traced the causes of corruption in Africa to: prevalence of dictatorial rules, monetized or materialized economies, poor economic and educational empowerment of the citizenry.

In Nigeria, the causes of corruption can be pinpointed to poverty, struggle for power, especially the political class's obsession for wealth and material gain (Dike, 2005). Dandago (1997) identifies causes of corruption in the country's public service, to include: economic factors, political factors, socio-cultural factors, poor reward system, poor accountability, lack of moral values and soft punishment. Ogunlana (2007), captures some of the root causes of corruption in Nigeria as:

1. Long period of military rule: military regimes controlled the government for about 35 out of the 50 years of the country's independence. They ruled without regards for democratic principles that could provide checks and balances. The manner decisions were taken without accountability provided avenue for corruption in the country.
2. Weak legal and judicial process: the porosity of this arm of government was so much that it gave room for either miscarriage or delay in dispensation of justice.
3. Public officers' immunity: immunity granted some public office holders from prosecution while in office gave room for many of them to loot the country's treasury with question or persecution. For instance state governors cannot be prosecuted while they are in office even when they openly loot public funds.
4. Weak law enforcement mechanism: this often arises from inadequate capacity on the part of law enforcement agents to investigate and prosecute cases.
5. Weak internal controls: the weak nature or total absence of internal administrative controls in many government and public offices meant that fraud could not be prevented; this in turn meant that many officers got away with theft easily. An example is the recent case of the former

managing director of Oceanic Bank Plc., who was found guilty on a three count charge of giving loans beyond her credit limits, giving wrong accounts and giving out loans without following due process (Tell, 2010).

6. Extremely poor staff welfare and working conditions: the welfare of Nigerian workers was for a long time not an issue of priority for government. Poor working conditions which do not allow for decent living often encourages officials to pilfer and obtain bribe. Also, the removal of subsidies on many services by government and subjecting pricing of virtually every service to market forces often left the low and medium income group poorer thereby making them susceptible to corruptive tendencies.
7. The increased and widespread loss of jobs made public servant to become socially insecure, together with the attitude of government towards regular payments of retirements benefits and pension. This situation led many to grab what they could while they were still in the system.
8. Another major cause of corruption is poverty. Widespread and pervasive poverty provoked social pressure on citizens to go to any lent even as far as ritual murders to become rich. This remains a major motivation of corruption in Nigeria.
9. Greed and high societal tolerance for corruption: it is common to see traditional rulers' award chieftaincy titles to people whose sources of wealth are questionable. Society cares less for how people became rich, giving room for fraud and looting of national funds. According to the Nigerian Tribune (2001), in Nigeria most of the kidnapping, money ritual and bank robberies are linked to the inordinate ambitions of youths who are influenced by flambount life styles.
10. Excessive materialism, weak ethical environment, erosion of moral values and lust for power are some of the factors that also encourage corruption.

11. Inadequate education: as a result of inadequate education most members of the public lack knowledge of their rights as well as penalties and the consequences of corrupt practice.

### **Effect of Corruption**

Corruption has found its way into every facet of human activities in Nigeria thus constituting serious problem such as lack of development. Corrupt practices undermine the developmental efforts of any nation. Its effect on Nigeria's economy can be seen in the diversion of public resources by way of inflated contracts, this means that fewer projects are executed with government earns as revenue. Similarly, obtaining 'grease payments' on contracts awarded either result in low quality of job or non-completion of such contracts (Ogunlana, 2007). Dike (2005) also stated that corruption causes a reduction in the quality of goods and services available to the public as some companies cut corners to increase profit margins. It affects investments, economic growth, government expenditure, and; reduction of private investment.

The decay in social services such as the education sector is not only because of inadequate financial allocation but also as a result of corruption. The incidence of 'ghost teachers' absenteeism and situations where teachers sell question papers to students who can pay symptoms of corruption, all of which have not helped in building or sustaining standards education sector, rather services have deteriorated. The health sector also has its own problems as stated by Isa (2009). Drugs provided by Non-Governmental Organizations which are donated free or at highly subsidized rates are sometimes found in the open market after they were from government hospital stores. This has made medical service delivery expensive and beyond the reach of the poor.

Nigeria's inability to generate and distribute enough energy is largely due to the high level of corruption. It has been estimated that the allocation to the sector between 2001 and 2007 stood at about 1,300 billion naira; in spite of this power supply has declined from about 3200 to barely 2600 mega wafts during the period. This situation has limited economic growth and resulted in high cost of production. The recent crisis in the Niger Delta is largely an offshoot of

corruption. State resources were being diverted by the ruling elite which left the people with little option other than taking up arms in order to get more of state resources.

Corruption also affects the political system in the country. According to Ogunlana (2007), the use of stolen money in political campaign and in corrupting electoral process has weakened the electorates' faith in democracy. While, countries are usually rated by the level of transparency and good governance, governments that are perceived to be corrupt always lack cooperation that can promote development. Consequently, the rate of development is slow. Corrupt practices in Nigeria has also led to the increased level of poverty among the populace where funds meant for economic and social development projects are often embezzled leaving the masses in abject poverty.

### **Information as a Tool for Combating Corruption**

As the saying goes information is power. A person who is informed has knowledge; it removes ignorance, fear and brings about a sense of security and peace. Wagacha (2005) posited that information gives opportunities to understand issues and be able to express one's own views and ideas; information also helps an individual take up interest in key national issues as well as gives practical suggestions. In many developed countries, information is regarded as a key national resource for development. Unlike most resources, information does not get depleted through use; instead it can quickly be created, processed, shared, transported, stored, updated and disseminated. In fact, the more information is utilized the more valuable it becomes (Khamadin in Wagacha, 2005). It is therefore obvious that the presence or absence of information can make a lot of difference to an individual.

In the fight for instituting effective budgeting system and governmental financial management and the war against fraud, corruption and mal-administration, philosophers, sociologists, economists, political scientists and accountants have found the term "whistle blowing" as a concept describing the actions of courageous individuals who disclose wrong doings. Whistle art is the disclosure of

information on any illegal or immoral act. It is mainly about ethical resistance. It is the disclosure of illegal, unethical or harmful practices in the workplace to parties

Who might take action. Whistle blowing occurs when an individual (inside or outside) either the prescribed channels of communication or resorts to contacting an external agency, which include the media. A citizen of a country might also resort to contacting the press on noticing some wrongdoing in public offices.

Isa (2009) further stated that the benefits of carefully considered whistle blowing can lead to the end of unethical practices in Nigeria. Whistle blowing can save society from government officials who spend public money outside budget appropriation, abandonment of projects, glaring connivance among anus of government to defraud the country's treasury, poor governmental financial reporting, pollution of the environment, and many other corrupt practices.

Corruption thrives under secrecy and according to Dike (2005) nothing chills evil more than exposure. While the act of whistle blowing has gained international recognition as an effective tool in the fight against unlawful and unethical conduct in governmental and business organization, through the disclosure of information to higher authority, the major weapon of this disclosed information lies in the provision of facts, figures, and data and how this information is processed and disseminated. Information disclosed by whistle blowers need to be made public through the media houses, libraries and information Centers. Public officers who become aware that their fraudulent acts and decisions are made public as soon as possible will be ashamed and not comfortable in public especially if they are punished immediately by the court of law.

Because corruption succeeds most under conditions of secrecy and general ignorance, it is important that the public become aware of corrupt practices being perpetuated by public officers as soon as possible. It is difficult to lie to and deceive an enlightened populace. Before now in Nigeria different administrations have tried without success to combat corruption through diverse measures and policies. Dike (2005) observed that the nation has experimented with many policies among which are the Judicial Commission of Enquiry, the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Public Complaints Commission, Mass Mobilization for Social Justice

and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), and the National Open Apprenticeship. Others include the War against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), all of which seems to have power only over the corrupt poor.

In trying to combat corruption in Nigeria the key to the struggle will lie in the hands of transparency and openness. A sincere willing effort from those in authority to the least Nigerian to expose all acts of corrupt practices. Information on past and corrupt leaders and public personnel should be made available and accessible to all even to those in the villages, while they are brought before the law, serving public officials will guard against such acts. While the act of whistle blowing by an honest individual exposes wrongdoings in offices and parastatals, a proper compilation of facts, figures and data by the media is a must. At this point, the indispensable services of information managers and librarians comes to play. Due to reasons which range from poverty to lack of electricity, many Nigerians are ignorant of information from televisions, radio and newspapers, but there is the wealth of knowledge and information, and the information managers can provide at the most reduced costs. IFLA asserts that libraries and information centers are in their very essence agents and institutions of transparency, dedicated to making available the most accurate, unbiased, educational, scientific, technical and socially relevant information to everyone. The information materials stored in them can enlighten and increase the knowledge base of citizens.

One of the major responsibilities of the information managers is the dissemination of information materials, and in this information age with the help of information and communication technologies, libraries, media centers and information centers are no longer just Store houses of information but can now be looked at as the center around which public decisions making should revolve. Proper documentation, compilation and dissemination of facts is what is needed to bring about transparency in Nigerian government, this information will give opportunities to present leaders to understand the mistakes and flaws of past administrations and armed with current information on world trends can stir the

nation out of the deep waters the menace of corruption has dragged us into, to a safer and better Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Although the nation has experimented with different policies and programmes, there is still hope in winning the war against corruption in Nigeria. Whistle blowing is an important and internationally accepted tool in fighting the illegal or immoral acts and the ethical laxity that accompanies the act (Isa, 2009), however, for whistle blowing to be fully effective there is the need for proper organization and dissemination of facts and truths exposed by whistle blowers. The weapon of information provision which are facts and data should be used in every office (government or private) and on all to bring about prudence, transparency and accountability in all aspects of our national lives.

It is therefore recommended that whistleblowers need to be protected against retaliation and victimization, it is the role of the government to ensure that citizens exercise their right of effective participation in the fight against corruption by offering whistle blowers adequate protection (Isa, 2009).

To combat corruption, good record keeping is an activity that librarians and information managers can help to achieve. In an environment where records are poorly kept, proper audit is practically impossible and good governance requires that records are kept efficiently. Librarians and information managers must be up and doing in this aspect so as to ensure proper records management.

Also librarians and information managers must realize their duties to educate users. When information is available there is the need to educate users of their availability so that they can exploit these resources for their benefit. Libraries and information services should extend their missions so as to become more active components in good governance and the struggle against corruption. In particular they can perform a significant role in informing citizens of their rights and entitlements. Librarians and information managers should collect information materials issued by official bodies particularly those that deal with citizens' rights. They should seek to make information that is issued by official bodies more

comprehensive and accessible through indexes, abstracts, search support etc. Also, libraries can be used as venues for the promotion of information rights while librarians should seek to raise awareness of the right to information.

Libraries can also create or cooperate in the creation of anti-corruption portals which link content from official sources, anticorruption NGOs and other relevant sources. Supporting existing and planned citizens advice centers provided by anti-corruption NGOs with databases and all other relevant aspects of their professional expertise. It is imperative for the Nigerian government to at this time appreciate the importance of libraries in the national development. There should be an investment in the provision of library based information system in the country. The library profession has for too long been poorly perceived. Except in universities where the library profession is paralled with the academic profession, it is hardly recognized. Adequate funds should be made available to public and national libraries so that they can live up to expectation in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

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