

Required: A Roadmap for Eliminating Corruption in Nigeria

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Introduction

A roadmap that could be developed and used as a tool to combat, minimise and eliminate corruption in Nigeria, should be such that it could help eradicate all the ills in every aspect of the professional, business and economic endeavours in the nation. These invariably include the ills that militate against project management practice in Nigeria. This roadmap could be a framework.

The following outline is used for this paper:

1. Definition of the problem
2. Current measures being used or suggested for its resolution
3. Necessity for a roadmap for eliminating corruption
4. Concluding remarks

1. Definition of the problem

1.1 Absence of a well-defined, consistent and proven national framework for fighting corruption and seeming poor performance of the current presidency to combat it.

This is said to be exemplified by the inability to match actions with pronouncements. For example, there was a statement said to have been made by President Jonathan at the graduation ceremony of the Senior Executive Course (No 34, 2012) of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, near Jos on Saturday, 24 November 2012. He reportedly stated categorically that no corrupt person, regardless of their standing in society, would avoid punishment. He said: "We are vigorously fighting the endemic corruption at all levels and in all sectors of our country. I can assure you that there will be no sacred cows. Whoever is found to have transgressed will be made to face the full wrath of the law."

However, his detractors claim that the current government cannot point to high profile persons who have been successfully prosecuted in the courts for corrupt practices. It is claimed that ever since news broke on the oil subsidy fraud, the government has not successfully prosecuted any of the alleged offenders. It is alright to hear that some people have been taken to court. It is observed that going to court is not the same thing as getting a conviction against accused persons.

1.2 Absence of legal framework to fight corruption

To be fair to President Jonathan, it has been observed that there is an unfortunate absence of legal framework for fighting corruption effectively. The writer continues: “Unknown to many Nigerians, there is no way any President will succeed in the fight against corruption in Nigeria without a proper legal framework being in place. Apart from the fact that most of the laws against corrupt practices in Nigeria are obsolete, especially the provisions found in the Penal Code(North) and Criminal Code(South), the Procedural Act allows pre-trial matters (and these include all manner of injunctions) to travel to and fro Supreme Court through the Court of Appeal, from the courts of first instance”. Chinweizu wrote that “anybody who thinks that, under Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution, any government, party or president can eradicate corruption is like a man who expects a worm to give birth to a lion, or who wants to go to heaven but doesn’t want to die. If Nigerians are at all serious in their endless noise against corruption, they must, as a first step, get rid of their 1999 Constitution. Anybody who is claiming he can end corruption but who isn’t campaigning to get rid of the 1999 Constitution is a fraud “[6].

1.3 Accountability of State Governors

State governors are practically unaccountable to anyone; they are uncontrolled and covered by immunity while in office. “No Nigerian is a Federal Indigene”, this is a statement credited to Mr. Peter Obi, a former governor of Anambra State. He wrote that "one of the ironical features of general elections in Nigeria is the tendency to encapsulate the fate of the nation in the post of President. In this election year, a talking point is about the People's Democratic Party [PDP] being in control of the centre since the return to civil rule in mid-1999 - with the attendant realistic and unrealistic expectations. Perhaps, understandably so; but it will bear repetition to draw attention to the real fact that the administration of the states of the federation largely determines the lot of the people. No Nigerian is a federal indigene, but each of us has a state of origin. The performance of the state governors is not controlled by the President. And yet, the unwary voters will quietly cast their ballots for good and poor performers alike - while looking up to the central government to literally solve all their problems which the President cannot do”.

Many state governors run their states as their personal property. Their respective Houses of Assembly are supposed to check their excesses but generally they fail to do so. Interestingly, Nigerian states are run mostly by two political parties - the PDP and APC (All Progressives Congress). Without getting involved in a political controversy, it is only fair to acknowledge that some of the best performing governors include Governor Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom State, a PDP Governor, and Governor Fashola of Lagos State, of APC. There are other good performing governors from both parties. In the same vein, some of the very poor performing governors occur both in the PDP and APC. Some of them owe the salaries of their workers, including their teachers for many months and refuse to pay even though they have received their allocated subventions from the Federal Government.

There are some names that could be easily given here but, it is not necessary to name and shame any person. Rather, the thrust of this example is that the current arrangement by which some governors can mismanage money belonging to their states and get away scot-free should be changed. Immunity from prosecution should not confer on state governors the licence to misuse public fund with the attendant suffering of their people who they have sworn to serve to the best of their abilities during their inception into office. From this example, it is certainly clear that no party, neither the PDP nor the APC, has any monopoly of virtue or vice, or freedom from corruption, in Nigerian politics.

1.4 Exorbitant salaries and allowances by members of the National Assembly (NASS) and State Houses of Assembly

It has been variously quoted that “The (UK) Economist magazine revealed that Nigeria federal legislators, with a basic salary of \$189,500.00 per annum (N30.6m), are the highest paid lawmakers in the world. It looked at the lawmakers' basic salary as a ratio of the Gross Domestic Product per person across the world. According to the report, the basic salary (which excludes despicable allowances); of a Nigerian lawmaker is 116 times the country's GDP per person of \$1,600.00.

In another report, the 469 federal lawmakers (109 senators and 360 members of the House of Representatives) cost Nigeria over N76 billion on annual salaries, allowances and quarterly payments. Each member of the 54 standing Senate committee, receives a monthly imprest of between N648 million and N972 million per year, while, a member of the HOR (House of Representatives) receives N35 million or N140 million as quarterly or yearly allowances; which means conservatively the 25 per cent of the overhead of the nation's budget goes to the NASS.”

This quotation has been taken from an article by Professor Femi Ajayi, a columnist of Nigerianworld. He writes that a “Nigerian Senator makes N498,630.13 a day, which a Nigerian university professor does not make in a month”[12]. It does not appear realistic to ignore this wage packet, which is said to be the highest for law makers in the world when the elimination of corruption in the country is being considered. This package is not controlled by the Presidency. It is therefore the case that corruption transcends the Executive (Presidency) to the Legislature and the Judiciary in the country.

1.5 Cases of corruption exist in the public service and in the judiciary.

With regard to the situation in the judiciary, the Nigerian Bar Association once acknowledged the challenges facing the judiciary include "debilitating corruption eating into and corroding the entire judicial system". [2]

2. Current or suggested measures for resolving corruption

2.1 “Buhari – a man of integrity that will eliminate corruption in Nigeria”

APC leaders use Buhari as the game-changer; they and his friends talk of his personal integrity, and this will win the election for them. What is more? They claim that

he will eradicate corruption in the nation. Some examples of this claim include the following:

- **A former running mate of General Buhari in his 2011 presidential election, Pastor Tunde Bakare, the** General Overseer of Latter Rain Assembly, has lauded the leadership qualities and integrity of the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, but he says he doubts the political environment where the man has found himself. "Buhari is a man of integrity and I have no doubt about what he can do and achieve, but his environment, I doubt," he said. He questioned the source of wealth of some of the politicians in Buhari's camp. "How can those who want to bring change be with so many excess baggage?" he queried. [1]
- **Addressing an audience in Kaduna in mid March 2015, Buhari said:** "On the issue of past corrupt leaders facing trials in various courts across the country, I would allow the courts to decide on those cases, but whoever that is indicted of corruption between 1999 to the time of swearing-in, would be pardoned. I am going to draw a line, anybody who involved himself in corruption after I assume office, will face the music." [2] It has been observed that "it is not up to Buhari to probe or not to probe past governments. No President has the constitutional mandate or legal authority to execute such fiat as this is within the orbit of the National Assembly. [2]"
- **The Imo State Governor, Owelle Rochas Okorochoa of APC said:** ".... Corruption is from the head. Once the presidency is not corrupt, nobody will be corrupt. This is why we are saying Buhari, Buhari. He does not carry knife, but from the head you won't see corruption, so everybody will behave well. Corruption in Nigeria is corruption from the head of Nigeria - from the Presidency" [5]
- **The Rivers State Governor and Chairman of Buhari's campaign organization, Mr. Rotimi Amaechi,** said on Wednesday Feb. 2, 2015, that corruption would disappear from Nigeria if the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), emerged the winner of the presidential election [6].

Comment: As the enormity with universality of corruption in Nigeria is being examined in this article, it should become clear that the constitution does not give any single individual, not even the President, the legal powers to take unilateral action against an individual or a group in trying to combat corruption. Even if such a power had existed, no such action can eliminate corruption that is widespread and has been deeply ingrained in the moral fabric and practices of the nation. It is difficult to find any aspect or section of the nation that has been insulated from the malaise of corruption.

2.2 A dubious method of fighting corruption: Allegation of "stolen \$20 billion" by highly placed former public servants and academic

It was sad to read in the papers allegations of stolen sum of \$20 billion made against the government of President Jonathan and his finance and economic team. The allegations were being made by highly respected former public officers who were erstwhile Governors of the Nigerian Central Bank. They were trading insults with the serving Minister of Finance. It was shameful that Nigerian world-renown and highly respected academics and professionals engaged themselves in such sorry diatribes.

The accounting firm Price Water House Coopers revealed that the allegedly missing \$20 billion in NNPC was a mere fabrication of the author that such humongous amount was stolen. However, some royalties and signature bonuses were actually to be accounted for and oil minister, the Minister of Petroleum, Alison-Madueke ordered a refund of \$1.48 billion which the auditing firm identified as unremitted to the public coffers. It was therefore the case that the allegation that \$20 billion was missing has been proven to be groundless and at best a half-truth [10][11].

Comment: All that the allegation did was to provide ammunition for the opposition to use against the government. It is certainly no way to combat corruption effectively especially as it was based on misinformation. It is not in accordance with internationally recognised professional code of ethics. Section 5 of the Project Management Institute (PMI) **Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct contains the following clauses:**

Quote:

Honesty: Mandatory Standards: *As practitioners in the global project management community, we require the following of ourselves and our fellow practitioners:*

5.3.1 We do not engage in or condone behaviour that is designed to deceive others, including but not limited to, making misleading or false statements, stating half-truths, providing information out of context or withholding information that, if known, would render our statements as misleading or incomplete.

5.3.2 We do not engage in dishonest behaviour with the intention of personal gain or at the expense of another.

Comment: The aspirational standards exhort us to be truthful. Half-truths and non-disclosures intended to mislead stakeholders are as unprofessional as affirmatively making misrepresentations. We develop credibility by providing complete and accurate information.

Unquote

One of the lessons to take away from the sad behaviours of the highly placed Nigerian economists is that we should not copy unprofessional behaviours irrespective of who is doing them.

3. Roadmap for eliminating corruption

Throughout this article, efforts have been made not to castigate or commend the government of President Goodluck Jonathan or the Opposition Leader, General Buhari,

except when their stance on issues are examined in the light of the points being discussed. The current government has notched up success in various areas such as the privatisation of the power industry, road construction, agriculture, rail transportation, etc. Their roadmap for the privatisation of electricity has been very effective. It is such a structured roadmap for combating corruption that the country needs. The problems of corruption are numerous and multifaceted, therefore a structured and comprehensive roadmap should be introduced by the incoming administration. As has been discussed, fighting corruption should involve the following:

- Some constitutional modifications to provide the necessary legal framework.
- A review and amendment of the powers of the state governors in order to make them more amenable and responsive to the needs of their people.
- A review and reduction of the exorbitant wages of our law makers.

These are just examples of what could be done. A thorough investigation is required. The incoming government should set up a body to work on the establishment of a framework for combating corruption. It is also the case that no political party can do it on its own, it should be a national assignment with all hands on deck in order to produce a sustainable, comprehensive and long-term framework that will not depend on individuals or political affiliation.

4. Concluding Remarks

Corruption is endemic in Nigeria. It is institutionalised and there is hardly any aspect of the society that it has not permeated. It is practised in the public and private sectors of the economy. It could be found in all facets of national and state governments, the legislature and the judiciary.

One of the findings of this article is that a national constitutional reform should be required to provide the necessary legal framework that could enable the government to combat corruption by removing the current encumbrances that militate against successful prosecution of suspects. Corruption is so institutionalised and widespread that a structured and comprehensive programme is required to address the problem effectively. It should require the discipline and practice of project management to develop a framework for its eradication in the country. The framework has to be sustainable and not just a passing fad. If there should be a national ministry for corruption eradication, so let it be.

Any attempt by a President to carry out an unplanned and structured solution devoid of the processes of project management could amount to tinkering the problem at its edges. In the past, our country had a military head of state, General Mohammed, who made efforts to instill discipline and eliminate some unacceptable practices but these fizzled out when the general was removed. Therefore an institutionalised and structured programme that is not dependent on any individual is recommended to ensure its long-term sustainability.

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