



## ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON CORRUPTION CONTROL IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Corruption is a universal problem for all societies and governments at different levels. The magnitude seems to be at its peak in some African countries, generally and in Nigeria specifically. Unfortunately, the menace affects both the leadership and the led. This is rooted from the moral and religious laxity of majority of the adherents of Islam, Christianity and Traditional religion. Corruption in Nigeria has permeated the fabrics of its society causing myriads of political, social, economic and cultural problems because of unrepentant attitude of the citizens towards corruption. Efforts put in place by Nigerian government in order to fight corruption have not been completely successful. To fight corruption, therefore, it is not only an existential necessity but also a divine imperative in view of the evil of this practice not only on human physical life but also on spiritual development. Religion, therefore, has a crucial role to play in the fight against this obnoxious practice. Corruption in Islam refers to a broad spectrum of human behavioural digressions which are not compatible with Islamic principles and threatens the social, economic and political balance of the society. It covers a wide range of illegal practices which undermine fear of Allah the Almighty, morality, harmony, peace, progress and development. Using qualitative methodology, the study examines the effects of corruption and the different ways of curbing it in Islam, and proffers a likely solution using the Islamic model as exemplified in the glorious Qur'an and the Sunnah of the noble Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The paper concludes that Islamic approach which looks at corruption holistically calls for the fear of Allah the Almighty as one of the best approaches to solving the problem in Nigeria. The success of every society both in this world and the hereafter is structured under the fear of God and belief in accountability which should be a pillar in controlling the menace of corruption in Nigeria.*

**Keyword:** Islam, Corruption control, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Corruption has different dimensions; economic, social and environment as well as ethical. The definition of corruption depends on the context it is being used. (Myint 33) corruption is a worldwide phenomenon which has been with societies throughout the ages. It has caused political and economic instability in societies and depending on the scale, it has led to societal conflict and violence, as competing groups vie for state power which is a source of distribution of resources and other amenities in society (Odunuga, 55).

Evidence of corruption is apparent from the way many Nigerians today seem to live above their visible legitimate incomes. So worrisome is the fact that corruption has permeated security personnel and even religious leaders who are ordinarily expected to be free from corruption and instil sense of honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, integrity and forthrightness to

people (Ali, 26). Corruption saturates all aspects of public life and the entire Nigerian society because of the general opinion and belief that public and private business and even religious matters cannot make progress without indulging in some corrupt practices. Many strategies have been put in place to fight corruption in Nigeria but none has been effective so far. (Liman, 14).

Certainly, corruption can be said to have shaped Nigeria's political, culture from colonisation through independence to the military rule and up till today. Corruption is a complex and persistent cancerous global phenomenon, which bedevils Nigeria. In Nigeria, corruption, in the form of misappropriation, bribery, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, money laundering, 419 syndromes, inflation of contract, kick-back and so on by public officials, has permeated the fabric of the society.



Corruption in Nigeria remains prevalent because of the soaring indiscipline perpetrated by virtually every segment of the political system, ranging from the public authorities, private organizations, individual, citizens, religious bodies and so on. Perhaps that explains why it is unequivocally averred that corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria. Consequently, these negative trends constitute a great deal of challenges to the development prospect in the country.

The aim of this paper is not only to look at corruption from Islamic perspective but also to explore ways of stemming it out. The paper argues for the application of religious guidelines in the fight against the epidemic known as corruption. This is done by looking at the meaning of corruption from the Islamic viewpoint and exploring its antidote from the same perspective.

### **Concept of Corruption**

In the light of the points raised in the introduction, it becomes pertinent to clearly define this concept and its various branches so as to understand what it actually means. Corruption has received considerable attention in the developed societies, and perhaps, due to the fact that it has been overflooded in the academic circles, corruption has received varied definitions. Corruption has broadly been defined as pervasion or change from good to bad (Obuah, 25). Specifically, corruption or corrupt behaviour is involving violation of established rules for personal gain and profit (Shah, 35). Corruption could be seen as the effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefit. (Lipset and Lenz, 201 – 202). Thus, corruption means any abuse of a position of trust in order to gain an undue advantage. This involves the conduct of both sides, that of the person who abuses his position of trust as well as that of the person who seeks to gain an undue advantage through this abuse. Corrupt practices range from small favours in anticipation of a future advantage to the payment of large sums of money to senior members of government.

Political corruption as state of affairs where politicians formulate policies to benefit them (Doig and Theobald, 86). It is a form of corruption perpetrated by elected officials saddled with the responsibilities of making policies, but not to isolate public interest. Furthermore, it involves all processes and efforts of acquiring power or control of state apparatus unconstitutionally. Thus all forms of flaws emanating from electoral process are termed political corruption. Bureaucratic corruption, on the other hand, refers to that form of corrupt practices perpetrated by public administrators when implementing public policies either for their personal ends, or serving the interest of their political masters. (Ismaila, 202)

### **Historical Assessment of Corruption in Nigeria**

Nigeria, which is the most populated country in Africa, has been ranked high in corruption cases by Transparency International and other notable National and International Organizations that monitor corrupt practices around the world. High corruption rankings affects many Nigerians who migrate to foreign countries, as foreigners have the perception that since Nigeria is corrupt, so are all Nigerians.

In the year 2000, Transparency International carried out a survey on the corruption levels of 90 countries, including Kenya, Cameroon, Angola, Nigeria, Coted'voire, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, India, Venezuela, Moldova, and others. At the end of the ranking Nigeria occupied the 90<sup>th</sup> position in terms of transparency. Therefore, by the ratings of TI, Nigeria was the most corrupt country in the year 2000.

In 2001, Nigeria was ranked the second most corrupt nation in the world out of 91 countries, falling only to Bangladesh. This shows that corruption in Nigeria improved by one step when compared with that of 2000. Still from the same source, in the year 2002, Nigeria was again ranked the second most corrupt country in the world, after the organization surveyed 102 countries. Nigeria was seen at the bottom, oc-



cupying 101 position. In 2003, Nigeria received the same ranking, making no improvements from 2003.

In the ranking of 2004, where 146 countries were surveyed, a little improvement was seen when compared to the past four years. Nigeria was ranked the third most corrupt country in the world, performing better than Bangladesh and Haiti. The record on the corruption in Nigeria really improved in 2005. The number of countries surveyed by the Transparency International was 158. Nigeria was ranked eight most corrupt country in the world. In 2006, 163 countries were surveyed with some improvements, and Nigeria was ranked the 21<sup>st</sup> most corrupt country in the world. Haiti was the world's most corrupt nation that year.

Among the 180 countries surveyed in 2007, Nigeria ranked 147 on the table alongside with Angola and Guinea – Bissau. This result shows that Nigeria was 33<sup>rd</sup> most corrupt country in the world. An analysis of the anti-graft/anti-corruption laws in Nigeria shows that corruption will continue in spite of the law, because the perpetrators do not fear any consequences (Oyinola 2011). In 2012, Transparency International again deemed Nigeria one of the most corrupt nations in the world again (Uzochukwu 13). In that year, the country ranked 144 out of 177 surveyed countries in terms of transparency. The score made Nigeria 33<sup>rd</sup> most corrupt country in the world that year. The result published by the organization also showed that Nigeria scored 25% out of 100% in terms of transparency. In the year 2014 ranking, Nigeria was ranked 136 out of 174 surveyed countries (Transparency International 24). The result shows that there was improvement, though things were still bad. Nigeria was the 38<sup>th</sup> most corrupt country in the world in 2014.

With the emergence of new government in the year 2015, many Nigerians were having great faith that corruption in the country will be minimized. In that year power left the hands of People Democratic Party (PDP) to All Progressive Congress (APC). One of the campaign promises made by president Muhammadu Buhari

was the fight against corruption in the country, irrespective of the campaign promises, Nigeria ranked low in transparency and high in corruption in that year. In the year 2015, out of the 168 countries surveyed, Nigeria was seen at the bottom of the table in the category of number 136. This implies that Nigeria was the 32<sup>nd</sup> most corrupt country in the world in 2015.

In summary, Nigeria failed when it came to transparency in the country. By contrast, in 2013, Denmark and New Zealand scored highest at 91% each meaning the countries are clean and have higher confidence intervals than Nigeria. Nigeria is highly corrupt.

### Causes of Corruption

The causes of corruption in Nigeria according to Umar as cited by Muhammad Koko, are broadly, political instability, weak legislative and judicial systems and institutional inefficiency (Koko 215). Undoubtedly therefore, the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is attributed to the following factors:

- i. Inefficient and non-self-enforcing rule
- ii. Lack of devotion to public interest
- iii. Absence of commitment to public service
- iv. Relatively low public service compensation
- v. Economic woes and chronic poverty
- vi. Indiscipline and inefficiency

On the strength of the above submission, one could agree with the National Integrity Systems Transparency International Country Study Report (2004) which locates the causes of corruption in Nigeria within the following listed cases, (Ismail 204).

1. Prolonged military rule and the culture of impunity, which became institutionalized.
2. Absence of commitment on the part of government to fight corruption evidenced by the “Sacred cow syndrome”, as well as failure to investigate and prosecute glaring cases of corruption.
3. Weak anti-corruption and watch dog agencies and other enforcement mechanisms.



4. Inadequate legal framework with the absence of freedom information and whistle blowers, legislation.
5. The effect of tribalism/ethnicity and Religion on National Politics. Ethnicity and Religion breed divisive tendencies, making it difficult to nurture true cohesion and to build resistance to corruption.
6. Elastic tolerance for corruption fostered by socio-cultural norms and attitudes towards public property that were nourished under colonialism.
7. Distortion of the Africa Principles of hospitality and exchange of gifts.
8. Poverty and death of public service, infrastructure and utilities, leading to the denial of a platform for self-actualization due to the corrupt diversion of the nation's resources.
9. Mismanagement of oil resources evidenced by the ostentatious life styles and flooding of wealth by the political elite and their apologists.

The World Bank report also documents that corruption occurs when the action of individuals, groups or firms in both public and private sectors influence the formation of laws, regulation, decrees and other government policies to their own advantage by means of illicit and non-transparent provision of private benefits to public officials. It could also occur when changing and altering the implementation of existing laws, rules and regulations to provide advantages to either state or non-state actors as a result of illicit and non-transparent provision of private gain to public officials.

#### **Implications of Corruption on Nigeria**

The act of corruption is, however, not limited to public officials; private sector players are neck-deep in it too. Private sector is beleaguered by bank distress, fraud, insider-trading, dirty foreign-exchange, false declaration of profits, creative accounting, concealment of liabilities as a ploy to deceive existing and prospective share-holder. Indeed, the private sector is actively involved in quite a bit of the corruption that goes on in government circles.

The evil that corruption portends are many, specifically for Nigeria, corruption undermines national growth, politicians and some highly placed individual have stolen money in Nigeria and took it to countries abroad, thereby contributing to those countries economic growth by investing such money abroad at the expense of the nation.

Nigeria has witnessed corruption in its electoral process, through massive rigging. The consequences of which has been political instability. Corruption in the education sector has also been witnessed. Above all, the rich in Nigeria had continued to be richer, while the poor continued to be poorer because the wealth of this nation has perpetually being in the wrong hands, thus leading to uneven distribution of amenities and national wealth.

In Nigeria, corruption has become the principal means of private accumulation of wealth during the post-independence period, all subsequent regimes military and civilian have been pervaded by corruption. Aided and enhanced by oil revenues, this has created a deepening crisis of kleptocracy (corrupt and dishonest government), shown in its extreme form since 1984. It results in a combination of scandalous wealth among the ruling class with growing poverty, misery and degradation among the mass of Nigerians.

Political life has been dominated by winner-take-all factional struggles, political cynicism and violence, while the economy and social institutions have been driven into decay. Corruption has thus become a way of life in Nigeria, one which existing government neither wishes to, nor can control. Combating corruption requires a popular participatory democracy able to monitor and hold to account those in charge of the state and the treasury.

#### **Islamic Concept of Corruption**

Justice is a central value in Islamic teaching and is considered to be the foundation for all God's creation (Surty, 170). According to the teachings of the Qur'an, any action and deeds of mankind that flout justice are an act of corruption on earth, and therefore, Qur'anic teachings focus on

promoting and enforcing a code of ethics and morality for human behaviour. Social justice is central to the concept of development in Islam (Dugbazah, 34). In Islamic teaching, social justice includes the fair and equitable distribution of wealth, the provision of basic necessities, and the protection of the weak against economic exploitation by the strong (Badawi, 196). Furthermore, values of fairness, honesty, ethics and mercy should be evident in the application of justice regardless of race, colour or creed (Khan, et-al 207). Therefore, all behaviours that undermine those values and distort Islamic moral framework are not acceptable in Islam.

### **Qur'anic Exposition on Corruption**

Under Islamic law, corruption refers to a broad spectrum of human behavioural digressions which are not compatible to Islamic principles and threaten the social, economic balance of society and individuals as can be deduced from its broad meaning and usage in the Qur'an. Thus, this section will look at the explanation of the word '*fasad*' from the Qur'an and the works of the exegetes. In Arabic, corruption means '*fasad*' which means unlawful warfare, or crimes against law and order in the Muslim community (Liman, 14) Allah the Almighty Says:

*And when it is said to them; make not mischief on the earth. They said we are only peacemakers. Verily! They are the ones who make mischief, but they perceive not.*

From the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir '*Fasad fil ard*' (mischief or corruption in the land/on earth) is the act of disobedience to God. (Ibn Kathir, 133). In his Tafsir, As Suyuti said that Ibn Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud commented, as for (Do not make mischief on the earth) i.e disbelief and acts of disobedience. Abu Ja'afar said that Al-Rabi'i bin Anas said that Abu Al-Aliyah said that Allah's statement, (And when it is said to them, do not make mischief on the earth), means "Do not commit acts of disobedience on the earth. Their mischief is disobeying Allah, because whoever disobeys Allah on the earth or commands that Allah

be disobeyed, he has committed mischief on the earth. Peace on both the earth and in the heavens is ensured (and earned) through obedience (to Allah), (Ibn Kathir, 133). Similarly, Allah the Almighty says:

*And (remember) when your Lord said to the angles, verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations after generations on earth. They said will you place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood, while we glorify you with praises and thanks (exalted be You above all that they associate You as partners) and sanctify You. He (Allah) said, I know that which you do not know. (Qur'an 2:30)*

And Allah the Almighty states that:

*And of mankind there is he whose speech may please you (O Muhammad SAW) in this worldly life, and he calls 'Allah to witness as to that which is in his heart, yet he is the most quarrelsome of the opponents. And when he turns away from you his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crop sand the cattle and Allah T. Likes not mischief. (Qur'an 2:204 – 205).*

Allah the Almighty said:

*And O my people! Give full measure and weight in justice and reduce not the things that are due to the people, and do not commit mischief in the land, causing corruption (Qur'an 11:85)*

Analysis of these verses quoted above among many others dealing with corruption reveals that the word corruption in its broad sense comprises of assorted crimes which include hypocrisy, spilling of innocent blood, destruction of crops and livestock, theft, armed robbery and depriving people of what is legally theirs. All these have the capacity of grounding a nation completely. (Liman, 16)

### **An Islamic Approach in Controlling Corruption**

The quality of a society depends largely upon the qualities of its members. As seen in the discussion above, corruption encompasses all acts of wrongdoings. As such, the first thing in the fight against corruption is to appeal to our personal character first. Both men and women were endowed

with the capacity to carry out Allah's commands on the issues of social and religious responsibilities as the Qur'an establishes in chapter 9 verse 71

*The believers, men and women are Auliya (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another, they enjoin (on the people) Al-Ma'aruf (i.e Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do), and forbid (people) from Al-Munkar (i.e Polytheism and disbelief of all kinds, and all that Islam has forbidden), they perform salat, and give the Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have His mercy on them. Surely Allah is All-mighty, all-wise.*

Islam laid great emphasis on God – consciousness (Taqwa). *Taqawa* refers to an attitude of mind, the awareness of God and consciousness of one's responsibility to him. As such, it is mentioned in the Qur'an as being the foundation of a Muslims character. Allah states in Qur'an 49 verse 13.

*O mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that believer who has Taqwa (Pious).*

A Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) narrated by Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud also states: "..... the Prophet SAW has said if, through fear of God, tears, even a small drop, fall from any believer's eyes, he will be kept away from Hell by God". (Bukhari) What this means is that Islam places great emphasis on humility, modesty, control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience and steadfastness. As Muslims, we are enjoined to fulfil all our promises and contracts, to keep all trust, to meet our agreements and to repay our debts (Liman 17-18).

As for those in leadership, Islamic approach to fighting corruption is through

transparent and honest leadership with strong emphasis on restraining from evil, illegal enrichment and any other form of corrupt practices prevented by Islam. A leader is a role model and can only fight any vices, inclusive, when he demonstrates exemplary leadership skills. He must understand the overreaching objectives of Islamic law which are; establishment of justice, educating the followers, upholding morality in public and private. Preventing hardship on the followers and prevention of oppression in the society (Liman, 18).

The acceptance speech of caliph Abu Bakr (RA) is very apt to drive home this point:

*I have been given the authority over you and I am not best of you. I have never sought this position nor has there ever been a desire in my heart to have this in preference to anyone else. If I do well, help me, and if I do wrong, set me right. Sincere regard for truth is loyalty and disregard for truth is treachery. The weak among you shall be strong with me until I have secured his rights. If God will and the strong among you shall be weak with me until I have wrestled from him the rights of others, if God will. Obey me so long as I obey Allah the Almighty and His messenger (PBUH). But if I disobey Allah and His messenger you owe me no obedience. Arise for your prayer, God have mercy upon you. (<https://www.umjmah.com> forum)*

This is the kind of leadership that Islam preached and that which Nigerians should inculcate and exhibit. A major form of corruption rocking Nigeria at the public domains is bribery. Islam sees bribery as epitomizing corruption as something given by the briber and received by the bribed irrespective of whether it is a material or a moral thing, money or a benefit. Thus, having canvassed the opinions of Muslim scholars, we can describe corruption as covering the matters of governance, decision making, rules through acts reproaching the abuse of trust placed in officials by the states, such as accepting gifts, outright theft of public funds, and undermining

rules in exchange for bribes, or due to family and tribal considerations (Liman, 19). Finally, individuals in general are prohibited from making recommendations in exchange for gifts as such behaviour falls under *rishwah* (corruption).

The prophet (PBUH) used to appoint a number of his companions as the collectors of zakat, during the Madinah period. They were to make proper assessments on the items where zakat becomes payable, collect the proper amounts and distribute to the recipients in the same locality. One of these collectors of zakat came back and told the prophet (PBUH) "This amount is what I have collected less what I have distributed to the rightful recipients, but this is mine". The noble prophet (PBUH) was very upset and rebuked him saying "What right have you to put aside something that does not belong to you. If you were to remain in your father's house, would you get what you are taking?". (Bukhari, 286). The noble prophet (PBUH) had also been reported to have said, "If you get from the people because of your position, it is bribery. Would you get it if you are not holding that position, or if you stay in your father's house?".

These ahadith provide us with the strict definition of bribery and corruption in Islam. Gifts that we get could be considered as bribery if it is meant to oblige us to abuse our position or power. However, if it is customary for those in power to receive gifts because of the respect, love and services that they are rendering to the people, then of course, it cannot be regarded as bribery. We know that the noble prophet (PBUH) himself used to accept gifts of various forms from heads of states in his time. He also used to give similar gifts to others. This is surely not bribery because it is customary to do it. Moreover, it is often given out of love and respect for the person.

On the strength of the divine guidance on corruption, Muslims are advised to live between Kwaf (fear) and Rajaa (hope). This mean fear of Allah the Almighty and hope in His bounties and providence. Muslim should be contented with what they have. Adoption of Islamic ethics which

give no room for a confirmed liar, hypocrites and criminals to be entrusted with any political power or event to give testimonies in courts of law should be adopted in this country. (Sulaiman, 518).

### Conclusion

It is clear in Nigeria that corruption is actually the bane of good governance. Corruption no doubt remains endemic, pervasive and systematic in virtually all areas of our public and corporate life. The consequences of corruption for the nation, continue to be devastating to the extent that it is killing the polity religiously, economically, politically, socially, morally, culturally, educationally and psychologically, resulting in unjustifiable under-development all round.

It is pertinent to understand that living in accordance with the laws of Allah brings peace, harmony and stability to individual no matter what his circumstances may be. For human society, then, adherence to these principles has the effect of transforming people from self-seeking greedy, proud, unjust and dishonest individuals into a community of brothers and sisters living together in mutual respect. Harmony, cooperation and consideration of one another's welfare, co-operation rather than compilation, mutual consultation rather than domination, are the guiding principles of Islam in social, economic and political affairs and we see a clear example of these ideals in the way of life of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions.

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