



Mitigating Corruption in the Nigerian Public Service Via Sufficient Financial Remuneration: A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT

Corruption undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of public institutions, as the pursuit of immediate individual benefits distorts public decision-making processes. In order to salvage the Nigerian Public service from the dangers of the act, the paper x-rays sufficient financial remuneration as an antidote. As a qualitative study, the work used explanatory and discussion methods drawn from earlier researches. The paper identified poor remuneration as being responsible for corruption which severely undermines the state right and promote lack of effective and efficient public services delivery. It concludes that there is an inverse relationship between remuneration and corruption in the Nigerian Public service. In order to mitigate corruption and looting in the public service space, paper recommended among others that: public servants should be adequately remunerated so that they would avoid temptations of the social vice, Government should carry out enlightenment on discouraging excessive materialism and the culture of „get rich quick“, by Public servants; and Government should address the root causes of corruption and ensure effective implementation of the legal mechanisms already in place.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Public Service is the centerpiece of administration in Nigeria. As an important vehicle for national development, it initiates, formulates and implements policies and programmes for the government of the day. To achieve these, they are remunerated to be efficient, effective and transparent in the discharge of their official assignments. Studies however show that members of the service often engage in corrupt acts (Usman, 2013; Ribadu, 2013, and Oravee, 2022) to augment their income and make ends meet, most especially in the face of inadequate finances. This behaviour is worrisome as it affects ethics and values of the service. It is therefore, imperative to improve the wellbeing of members of the public service through sufficient financial remuneration so that they would be able to shun corruption. Corruption connotes the abuse or perversion of public power for private gain. It occurs when an individual is said to have illegal and illicitly put personal interest above those of the people and the ideals he or she is pledged to service. In Nigeria, the inability to pay adequate remuneration to workers is responsible for the level of corruption among workers in the public service (Osagede, 2015, Oravee, 2016, Adeshina, 2015). As a result, public servants finds it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to survive on their monthly pay in the face of changes in market conditions and ever increasing inflation. The outcome of inadequate remuneration in the public service can be seen in situations where top public officials are accused of embezzling pension and gratuities of their colleagues who had retired from service for improved standard of living. Similarly, poor remuneration is said to have promoted ghost workers' syndrome; just as it indicates the diminishing productivity that is influenced by high level of bribery, pilferage of organisation's materials, and misuse of government property, among others. The damage of the scourge of corruption to the economy and the fabric of the society, according to Adebayo (2013) and Malaye (2013) are seen in schools that are not built, the roads that are not passable, and the failure of our citizens to be inspired. Because of its sheer scale and level, corruption is no longer secret; it is celebrated (Aleminka, 2012).

Several measures have been adopted over the years in order to improve remuneration of public servants and mitigate corruption by same. Some of the efforts include the setting up of committees to carry out staff screening and verification exercises at various times, reformation of the pay structure in the public service, implementation of national minimum wage structure for public servants; and decentralised collective bargaining policy designed to achieve a realistic remuneration package and a crisis free industrial relation practice in the public service of the federation due to failure of previous salary determination processes in the public service.

However, these efforts have not been fruitful as corruption still persists as a result of the inability of the public servants to keep their body and soul moving together smoothly with their meager emoluments. The study has therefore explored the possibility of mitigating corruption in the public service through sufficient financial remuneration.

2 | METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and conceptual in its methodology. It made use of explanatory and discussion methods of its concepts originating from the works of various secondary sources and opinions of previous authors. To this end, the concepts of corruption and financial remuneration are defined, explained and juxtaposed as perceived by earlier works on the subject matter.

3 | LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 | Corruption

Corruption connotes a betrayal of trust resulting directly or indirectly from the subordination of public goals to those of the individual. The World Bank defines the concept as the abuse of public office for private gains. The Transparency International (TI) sees corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Public office is abused through rent seeking activities for private gain when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. Public office is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. A 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 (Basu, Bhattacharya, & Mishra (1992). A public official is therefore said to be corrupt if he accepts money for doing something that he/she is under duty to do or that he/she is under duty not to do. Corruption is a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, a constraint on education, health care and poverty alleviation, and a great impediment to the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the number of people living in extreme poverty (Terwase, 2010).

3.1.1 | Types of Corruption

Corruption can be classified into: Private corruption and Public corruption. Public corruption takes place in government or by government officials and their accomplices in the private sector. Thus, persons in positions of authority exploit such positions to take from their clients. Public corruption has the following dimensions: political corruption,

bureaucratic corruption, military corruption and other forms of institutional corruption as experienced in the media and entertainment industries. Political corruption involves the abuse of power (intimidation or torture), manipulation of regulation (falsification of election results, decision-making in favour of one group or person), electoral violations (buying votes, rigging election results), extortion (civil servants illegally set a fee for services or artificially create a deficit), clientelism and patronage (politicians provide material services in exchange for citizen support), and illegal contributions to election campaigns (transfer of gifts to influence the content of the policy). The legislative body can also indulge in corruption, for instance when it forsakes its oversight functions against the executive and judicial arms of government. The Judiciary also becomes vulnerable when it looks away from an obvious case of crime, tries to downplay the veracity of a crime, or commits a travesty of justice for a particular political interest. Bureaucratic corruption on the other hand involves technocrats and civil as well as public servants who implement government policies. The corruption at this level is the worst as the allocation, release and use of money is executed by government officials. The bureaucrats are the ones that propose and submit financial needs of their units or projects and they are the ones that transfer and effect payment. Corruption at this point becomes rife. We have heard cases of heads of ministries and parastatals arraigned before competent courts and tribunals on charges of high-profile theft and fraud.

Bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria also manifests in favouritism and nepotism in appointment, promotion and reward systems in public offices as some people get rapid promotion on the base of family, friendship, ethnic or religious affiliations to the boss; while others never get a promotion because of such frivolous considerations. The military which saw itself as a correction regime struck into politics in January 1966 to clear the Nation of bad leadership and festering corruption. However, we all know that the counter-coup of July in the same year was an ethnic-motivated coup meant to avenge the assassination of some persons of Northern extraction in the first coup. With this mentality, the professionalism that formed the fulcrum of the “corrective” notion of the institution began to fade out as corruption gradually crept in. By 1971, the army had become debased as all sorts of allegations were raised against General Gowon’s ministers and state governors. This became worse with the Babangida and Abacha regimes which came under the spotlight as the two most corrupt leaderships in Nigeria (Abayol, 2015). Other forms of corruption occur in the media, entertainment industries, and in the labour movement. The media in Nigeria is particularly known for the graft or “brown envelope” syndrome in which news report is only publishable when certain individuals or group in the story pay their way; or when an image publishing is done for those who can pay the reporter for it; or negative stories are stepped down when money has been paid to destroy such story. Similarly, in the entertainment industry, persons for musical or movie audition may have to “sort” or “settle” with money or sexual gratification to be given roles in films even when they are very bad actors. Labour groups are sometimes compromised by the government not to embark on industrial action or to betray the cause of the movement by “sorting” labour leaders through the fattening of their bank accounts. Private corruption exists if individuals outside government organisations commit acts of immorality (pervasion, a show of dementia, and acts of fraud or scamming) loot, or colludes with those in government to perpetrate sharp financial practices. It manifests in Nigeria as everyday bribery to obtain desired objectives, breaking of traffic laws, piracy, plagiarism, alteration of school grades, illegal inflation of petroleum pump prices by dealers, robbery, sexual gratification for higher grades or promotion, et cetera.

3.1.2 | Causes of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Service

The factors that cause corruption in Nigeria, as explained hereunder could be political, economic and social in nature. Politically, emphasis in Nigeria is laid on politics rather than administration. What has happened is that the sovereignty of politics is emphasised rather than impartiality, neutrality and anonymity of the administration. At the end, the practice of public administration is highly politicised and monetised despite the inherited structure and values of administration that are expected to be based on high degree of professionalism. People therefore, struggle for positions (political and administrative) through unethical means mainly for exploiting and using power for personal gains. Those who resist corruption are seen as suspects and dangerous; and those most corrupt are the most favoured and cooperated with by the political and administrative leadership.

There is lack of national political culture that guarantee the political leadership safety, nor survival on the seat of power, and hence, the tendency to bend the rules of fair play and administrative values to perpetuate in offices, or rig elections. This erodes cherished ethical values of our society. There is a general lack of national unity exacerbated by scarcity of material resources which leads to struggles among the different ethnic groups for political and administrative power. This leads to chaos as those in government want to shut those outside, and those outside want to come in by all means. People therefore resort to the use of unethical means to acquire political and/or administrative positions to control or have a stake in the states’ apparatus/resources. The over-centralisation of powers and resources at the center (FCT Abuja) to the detriment of sub-national units of states and local governments leads to alienation of people from government (or elite). This has generated powerful pressure towards sharing the nation’s resources rather than production. Those in government therefore resort to the use of unethical behaviours to access the national cake at the center. Economically, the decline in official earnings of public servants in the face of increasing cost of living has given rise to the perpetration of unethical behaviours by same. There is over-invoicing of stores, embezzlement of public funds, favouritism in the offer of tenders and contracts and the use of public property for personal selfish interests at the expense of others. The social forces that ignite corruption can be the display of ill-gotten wealth by the political class and the efforts by public servants to emulate the political leadership, and as well sustain needs of self-esteem and status. Similarly, the influence of extended family connections that over stretch the salary of a public servant makes him/her to look for extra means for survival through unethical and dubious means; just as the influence of polygamy compel public servants to indulge in unethical behaviours to enable them meet their family obligations.

3.2 | Financial Remuneration

Remuneration can be referred to as monetary or financial benefits in form of salaries, wages, bonuses, incentives, allowances and benefits that is accrued or given to an employee or group of employees by the employer (firm) as a result of services rendered by the employee(s), commitment to the organisation or reward for employment. Thomas (2008) defined remuneration as pay or reward given to individuals for work done. He further identified the indicators of remuneration to include: basic salary, wages, health schemes, pension schemes, transport allowances, overtime allowances; and responsibility allowances. Remuneration can be financial and non financial. Financial remuneration is the income received by employees in return for the services he or she has done/rendered (Bertelli, 2002). Remuneration could also be divided into direct and indirect types. Direct remuneration is the amount of money (salary, token gifts, fixed allowances, variable allowances, incentives and other facilities) received by an employee for a job well done, and which consists of fixed and variable remuneration. Indirect remuneration, on the other hand, are provided by the organisation for employees on the performance achieved with the aim to provide comfort and security to them, such as life insurance, health insurance, car, vacation, and other social insurance. Remuneration is usually implemented to motivate employees so that they will have better quality life, be more productive, not easily moved to other companies, establish a service-oriented behavior, and avoid corruption (Bialas, Joanna & Jaroslaw (2015).

3.2.1 | Determinants of Remuneration in the Nigerian Public Service

The determinants of remuneration in the Nigerian public service could be: the National economy, effective institutional framework, salary structure, and recruitment procedure. A national economy refers to the economy of an entire country and includes financial resources and management as well as the value of all goods and services manufactured within a nation. It (national economy) provides financial resources for the remuneration of her public service. According to the report published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the third quarter of 2016, the Nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria contracted by 2.24% (year-on-year) in real terms. This meant a poor/low economy status that could go a long way in negatively affecting remuneration in the Nation. This fact was corroborated by Mohammad (2014) who posited that poor state of the economy is responsible for the low level of remuneration and corruption in Nigerian Public Service. The National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC) as an institutional framework for salary administration was established by Act 99 of 1993 to deal with issues relating to remuneration, salaries and wages of Nigerian workers. The

Commission provides technical assistance to the drafting of white paper of Committees on the reports of the Salaries, Wages and Emolument, and Relativity Panel and Presidential Committee on Consolidation of emolument in the Public Service to enhance productivity. The NSIWC also interact fully with other government parastatals to ensure that their remuneration requirements are met through the optimisation of Nigeria public service. They have also been able to promote and facilitate the interface between government and the workers as well as harmonisation of workers remuneration in the Nigeria civil service. The efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission greatly influences remuneration of public servants in the Nation.

Salary structure is an important component of effective compensation programmes and helps to ensure that pay levels for groups of jobs are competitive externally, and equitable internally. This explains why successive public service reforms in Nigeria had one common objective of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the members of the Service through good salary structure. Clearly, there is a need to make the salary structure of the Public service more competitive in order to strengthen them for performance and to refrain from corruption. There have been several successive attempts to increase the public sector remuneration in Nigeria. For example, the military regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998 increased the minimum wage dramatically from \$1.20 to \$41.77 per month, using a parallel market rate of 83.8 Naira to a \$1. Similarly, in May 2000, President Olusegun Obasanjo raised the public sector minimum monthly wage to \$53.91 at the parallel market rate of N102.02 = \$1.00; that is by about 30 per cent in nominal terms. In the same vein, President Goodluck Jonathan raised the minimum wage of public servants to N18, 000.00 in 2010.

Despite these pay rises, the remunerations have continued to be poor and induced corruption as they are quickly eroded by inflation; and were sometimes beyond the budgets of state governments. Recruitment procedure refers to the process of finding and hiring the best qualified candidates from within or outside of an organisation for a job opening in a timely and cost effective manner. The recruitment procedure in Nigeria Public service includes analysing the requirement of a job, attracting employees to that job, screening and selecting applicants, hiring and integrating the new employee to the organisation. The Federal Civil Service which was regarded as being highly principled in the 1970s and early 80s are currently being plagued by a number of issues, and cannot therefore, avoid unethical temptations. Apart from the indolent nature of some of the members of the service, corruption has also been discovered to have eaten deep into the structure of the service. Presently, the government cannot confidently claim to know the exact population of those in the service. There are also many ghost workers that receive salaries at the end of every month in the Nation. Worst of all, the fraudulent practices of recruitment ends up affecting the productivity of its members since the competence of any labour force is determined by the caliber of employees recruited.

3.3 | Public Service

The Nigerian Public service, often referred to as core service, consist of line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies; the public bureaucracy or the enlarged Public Service made up of services of the State and National Assembly, the Judiciary, the Armed Forces, the Police and other security agencies, paramilitary services (i.e. Customs, Immigration, Prisons Services, Civil-Defense Corps etc); parastatals and agencies (i.e. regulatory agencies, educational institutions, research institutions, social services, commercially oriented agencies) etc. Members of the Service are referred to as Public Servants who are direct employees of those ministries, extra-ministerial agencies, parastatals, corporations and institutions. Employees of the above mentioned organisations carry out daily running of activities of the Government of the day. The productivity/performance of members of the service therefore, affects the opinion and image people have about the government of the day. This explains why there is need for the government of the day to remunerate them adequately so that they will not indulge in corrupt activities during the discharge of their official assignments.

3.4 | Nexus between Financial Remuneration and Corruption in the Nigerian Public Service

Financial remuneration involves payment or compensation including fringe benefits, bonuses, incentives and salaries received for employment/services rendered. Corruption however involves the abuse of public office for personal benefits. A clearer relationship exists between financial remuneration and corruption in terms of the effects the former

has on the later. This implies that poor remuneration contributes to corruption. Equally, improved remuneration, as discussed herein would lead to employee satisfaction which in turn leads to reduction in corruption. Hence, there is an inverse relationship between sufficient financial remuneration and corruption, as adequate remuneration would mitigate corruption in the public service. Adequate remuneration to public servants can enhance the attractiveness of employment in the sector and deter members of the service from indulging in unethical vices. But if wages remain much lower than those of the private sector, or such that public service workers can't conveniently make ends meet, the probability to indulge in corrupt practices becomes very high. In another dimension, if public jobs are well paid, apart from other financial attractions like bonuses, gifts and retirement pensions that can only be earned at the end of a flawless career, corrupt officials will have a lot to lose if they are discovered, tried and forced to seek a lower paid job in the private sector.

Accountability and transparency as good ethical values connotes the timely, reliable, clear and relevant public reporting on its status, mandate, strategy, activities, financial management, operations and the performance of government activities in general. This enjoins the Nigerian public service to adhere to procedures and actions that ensure legal obligations with regard to their audit mandate; and the required reporting system of the government budget are met and also evaluate their own performance as well as the impact of their audit. Without accountability and transparency, open competition cannot prevail; corrupt dealings can proliferate, and other failings in the Nigerian public service may be covered up, thereby weakening the system (Abubakar, 2018). Thus, accountability and transparency would make significant contribution to remuneration in mitigating corruption for enhanced public service in Nigeria. Improving workers welfare such as catering for their social, health, physical and psychological needs; and a guaranteed minimum income to avoid living in poverty and having the capabilities to ensure that the workers enjoy good life would also mitigate corruption in the public service. In fact, a high level of welfare to workers would boost their morale and enable same to shun corruption in their official dealings. Therefore, strong relationship exists between financial remuneration and corruption, as the welfare of workers is an important consideration in deciding the remuneration for Nigerian public Servants.

Apart from the above, the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) holds some projections for remuneration to mitigate corruption in Nigeria Public service. It (NACS) identifies and closes existing gaps in the anti-corruption initiatives currently in place and emphasises the institutionalisation of results-based systems and structures, as well as appropriate incentives for increasing and sustaining citizen's participation in the fight against corruption. The ethical reform value of the anti-corruption crusade can only be realised through adoption and acceptance by all stakeholders, leading to the effective implementation, management and enforcement of the provisions and recommendations of the strategic plan of NACS. The strategy places emphasis on cross-government approach in executing the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

The restructuring of the economy to discourage dependence on importation of foreign goods by the immediate past President (Mohammed Buhari) of Nigeria also show a link between remuneration and corruption in Nigeria. The implementation of the ban of bureau de changes, and ban on some items considered inimical to Nigeria economy have resulted in the growth of production and consumption of local goods. The restructuring of the economy, as assumed would enhance remuneration and mitigate corruption in the public service of Nigeria. In Nigeria, salaries and wages are below sustenance level and most of the workers in the country cannot take care of their basic needs from their emolument. This development tends to de-motivate the public employees from putting in their best in the course of producing goods and services. It is essential to say that the low income paid to public servants is considered as the minimum wage that an average employee is paid for their productivity activities. To increase productivity, minimum wage should focus on labor management relations, social and psychological conditions of works, and adequate wage incentives given to workers. Therefore, minimum wage has a significant contribution to remuneration in reducing corruption for enhanced public service in Nigeria.

4 | IMPACT OF SUFFICIENT FINANCIAL REMUNERATION ON CORRUPTION IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Sufficient financial remuneration would positively mitigate corruption in the Nation's public service because competent and motivated

staff are the backbone of an effective public service. To achieve this, the public service should be subjected to competitive pressures to weaken the bargaining power of every public servant. This situation can be achieved by setting up overlapping and competing levels of administration to undermine the strong position of civil servants, and if the former demands a surcharge, no agent will be ready to pay a high price for the requested service, and hence switch to the other alternative source of service provider. Secondly, one way to reduce corruption is to reduce the benefits and costs that are under the control of civil servants at all levels of the administrative hierarchy. Thus, transparency and fairness of rules, and the introduction of competition within the administration are also means of reducing the role of the State in the Economy. In general, any reform that will open up the economy to competition will reduce temptations for corruption. Therefore, the easing of foreign trade restrictions, the removal of barriers to private market entry and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises in a manner that exposes them to competition are all measures that will help mitigate corruption in the Public Service. Thirdly, the opportunities for corruption can be reduced by ensuring that the tax, public expenditure, and institutional regimes are simpler and do not confer discretionary powers. Some risks are sometimes tolerable when the benefits of a discretionary programme management policy outweigh the cost of corruption.

Furthermore, increasing the credibility of law enforcement Institutions will go a long way to enabling them to effectively and efficiently discharge their obligational responsibilities in checkmating corruption. In fact, the sustainability of development generally involves the establishment of mechanisms that make the state and its servants responsible for their actions. Similarly, a viable legal system that enforces the law without favoritism or arbitrariness is a condition for controlling corruption. To make a serious commitment to reform, a country must have effective inspection and prosecution bodies, as well as a judicial system that is not itself corrupt. Judicial reform requires more than just a change of staff. Finally, recruitment and promotion based on merit and the development of esprit de corps and the system of supervision and sanction are also important in reducing corruption in the public service. The adoption of a meritocratic system in the public service attracts high-level staff and enhances the prestige of the functions and contributes in a large measure to the motivation of the Public servants. This makes it possible, on the one hand, to limit corruption and political patronage, to attract and retain competent people; and on the other hand, to encourage identification with the objectives of the organisation, to reduce the cost of monitoring and develop internal cooperation and loyalty.

5 | CONCLUSION

Sufficient remuneration has a significant and inverse relationship with corruption which erodes impact of individuals and the Public service at large. Poor remuneration, is however responsible for violation of the operating rules of the administration, which severely undermines the state right and roles in development.

6 | RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reduce corruption and looting in the public service space, it is recommended that:

- Public servants should be adequately remunerated so that they would avoid temptations of the social vice, in and outside their places of work.
- Government should carry out enlightenment on discouraging excessive materialism and culture of „get rich quick“, by Public servants. In fact, Public servants should be reminded that as servants of the people, they have to keep to their professional callings and be transparent and upright on their jobs.
- Government should address the root causes of corruption and ensure effective implementation of the legal mechanisms already in place.
- Government should demonstrate the willingness to track and punish corrupt officials in the public service and as well create conducive economic climate that would raise the standard of living of the citizenry. Programs such as social safety net should be instituted among the non- working class in order to reduce their worry about basic survival in the face of growing insecurity about the job situation.
- there is the need for the provision of adequate resources for anti-corruption agencies and non-interference of government on the mandate given to same so as to make them effective.

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