ABSTRACT

The most serious obstacle to the achievement of sustainable economic development in Nigeria is corruption. Even as the world is fast becoming a global village, majority of the Nigerian masses are denied the opportunity to benefit from the “goodies” provided by the process of globalization due to the endemic corruption in the country. This paper reviews reasons why corruption is too endemic in Nigeria, with a view to finding appropriate measures for combating it so as to give way for sustainable economic development. The paper is a literature-survey type, relying on documented facts and research findings. It reveals that all involving measures must be taken by the government if she is serious about combating corruption in the country. The paper, therefore, recommends that whistle blowing should be encouraged in the country by enacting adequate laws to protect the whistle blowers and that they should be provided with incentive in the form of payment of an agreed percentage of any amount recovered from fraudulent officers through their whistle blowing efforts.

KEY WORDS

Corruption, Combating, Globalization, Sustainable Development
INTRODUCTION

Corruption is described as an act of evil or wrong doing for the purpose of money-making (Michael & James, 1991). This shows the rush for money-making as the basic cause of corruption. Auyo (1998) described corruption as the destruction or dissolution of a constitution or the perversion of anything from an original state of purity. Rossouw (1999) defined corruption as inducement by improper means to violate one’s duty towards one’s principal resulting in harm to the interest of another party and in financial benefit for the perpetrator. In other words, corruption is said to have taken place when there is aberration in the way of doing things normally. In public affairs, corruption includes embezzlement of public funds, theft, bribery or any attempt to steal or unlawfully obtain or misuse any asset or power.

Corruption is, therefore, demonstrated by perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties through bribery or favour, or any other forms of influence or malpractice. It is, accordingly, considered as a social or psychological situation in which the right or correct manner of doing things or handling responsibilities is abandoned for the improper manner as a result of certain internal or external stimuli.

Corruption is a serious problem slowing down the process of achieving sustainable economic development in Nigeria. Various efforts have been made or are being made, by different governmental and non-governmental organisations to combat corruption in Nigeria, all to no avail. For many years now, the rating of Transparency International, an independent organisation assessing the level of corruption in countries of the world, has been showing Nigeria among the topmost corrupt nations.

In Nigeria, government efforts such as the establishment of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Code of Conduct Bureau, Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission, Public Complaints and Anti-Corruption Commission and National Orientation Agency suggest commitment to the fight against corruption. The presence of some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), like The Nigeria Chapter of Transparency International, Civil Liberty Organisation, Campaign for Democracy, Business Ethics Network of Nigeria (BEN–Nigeria), professional bodies, religious organizations, trade unions, mass media and other perceived whistleblowers should be deterrent to corrupt practices in the country. It is, however, clear that
government efforts and the presence of corruption fighting organizations do not make any significant impact in combating corruption in the country.

The rest of the presentation is in four sections. Section 2 is about the causes and challenges of corruption in Nigeria; Section 3 reviews the concept of whistle blowing; Section 4 proposes the protection and incentive needed for effective whistle blowing in Nigeria; and Section 5 concludes the paper.

CAUSES AND CHALLENGES OF CORRUPTION IN AFRICA

Corruption in most African countries has currently become the greatest 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 in the African continent. Africa’s widespread corruption has historical roots that we should critically reflect on if we are to succeed in controlling and aggressively eliminating it.

Scholars like Callaghy (1986), Nukunya (1992), Groenendijk (1997), Ruzindana (1998), Waliggo (1999), Osei (1999) and Rossouw (1999) traced the root causes of corruption in Africa to: prevalence of dictatorial rules, monetized or materialised economies, poor economic and educational empowerment of the citizenry, the “politics of the belly”, making the public sector as the “prime mover” of economic development and the absence of national ethical and moral values and true patriotism. Appropriate measures, no matter how bitter, have to be adopted to off root these causes of corruption, if African countries are really serious about the fight against corruption.

There are many branches or dimensions of corruption in Nigeria, which need stringent measures in practice for effective prevention and control. Auyo (1998) highlights some of them to include: abuse of power; ill-treatment of subordinates and indecent treatment of people’s needs; self-award of contract; malicious withdrawal or ‘carpeting’ of personnel files; unnecessary delay of actions on certain demands; fraudulent distortion of facts and figures; nepotism; embezzlement and other financial misappropriation; ghost worker systems; 10% syndrome; transfer of public funds to private accounts; over-invoicing; over-pricing of contracts; arson, usually to cover-up corrupt practices.
The above 14 dimensions of corruption in Nigeria are not exhaustive, more could be identified. The corrupt practices could, however, be narrowed down to two main types: vertical and horizontal. According to Konie (2003), vertical corruption, which involves managers and decision makers, is being more emphasised in less developed countries than the horizontal corruption (signifying fraud), which involves all the official, informed and laymen groups in the society. The two should be seriously addressed and eradicated if any meaningful economic or political progress is to be made. Governments’ commitment towards the eradication of corruption has been a matter of serious concern in Nigeria.

Looking at the Nigerian peculiarities, Dandago (1997) identifies five causes of corruption in the country’s public service to include [i] economic factors; [ii] political factors; [iii] socio-cultural factors; [iv] soft-punishment; and [v] poor accountability. It is clear that the poor salary and condition of service of almost all public servants cannot keep pace with the inflationary trend in the country, which erodes purchasing power of the Naira. It is also clear that the process of getting power in Nigeria is either by the force of gun or the force of Naira and that social values in Nigeria are obviously related to wealth accumulation, and this leads to widespread moral decadence as many Nigerians are struggling to get recognition and status symbol by amassing dirty wealth. Traditional chieftaincy titles and memberships of boards of government corporations/agencies are only for the ‘influential’ individuals in the society who have ‘made it’ economically or politically. Most of those people ‘made it’ through enriching themselves fraudulently, but enjoy public respect and accolade. The most annoying thing is that honest and dedicated public servants, who have not accumulated dirty wealth, do not command much respect from the government and the society because they are regarded as paupers! These societal attitudes serve as encouragement to some new-breed public servants to engage in corrupt and fraudulent practices.

In most cases, recommendations of panels, commissions or committees of inquiry into corrupt practices are not being implemented. In some cases, the penalties meted out to the corrupt officers are not commensurate with the gravity of their offences. These soft penalties and, sometimes, total absence of punishment against confirmed corrupt officers encourage like-minded public servants to follow their footsteps.
If public servants, at all levels, are to be sincerely declaring their wealth before and after holding offices, corrupt practices might be eradicated or reduced to the barest minimum level. Again, those holding positions of authority are expected to be giving explanations and reasons to the interested parties (the public in general) as to how they are discharging the responsibilities entrusted on them. This is not the case in Nigeria because of too many corrupt practices that would be exposed with such culture of transparency and accountability in place.

When the immediate past president (IPP) of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, was sworn-in in 1999, he promised to make the fight against corruption a major focus of his administration. As part of this commitment, he requested the Federal Ministry of Finance to sponsor a governance and corruption survey study. Borrowing from a methodology successfully applied in many countries around the world, the study consisted of the application of three standard complementary survey instruments (households, enterprises and public officials) to assess issues associated with government service delivery and related corrupt practices (overall Summary Report, 2003).

Having assessed the gravity of corruption in the country and found it to be distinctive of any move towards sustainable national development, the study calls for a frontal assault on corruption and the introduction of transparency and accountability in the governmental mind set. It calls for the citizens, at every socio-economic level, to come together in opposition to corruption and in support of needed reforms, voicing their opinions persistently, until their collective call for action is heeded.

The sixth purpose of the survey study was to provide the impetus to engage in a national dialogue about corruption, thereby focusing attention on the issue and creating windows of opportunity to pursue targeted reforms. The intent of the study, however, was to assist the government of Nigeria in developing effective accountability/anti-corruption strategies. One means of sincerely tackling corruption in Nigeria is to effectively involve the citizenry in the fight; encouraging them to serve as whistleblowers!

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF WHISTLE BLOWING

Whistle blowing is an act ordinarily associated with referees, officiating football, basket ball, volley ball, etc, matches to indicate, mostly infringement of game rules and regulations so that appropriate
corrective actions could be taken to prevent re-occurrence. In this act, the whistle blowers are highly respected, as they are ‘judges’ in their own right.

In the fight for instituting effective budgeting system and governmental financial management and the war against fraud, corruption and maladministration, philosophers, sociologists, economists, political scientists and accountants have found the term ‘whistle blowing’ as a concept describing the action of courageous individuals who disclose organizational wrongdoings. These individuals could be insiders or outsiders to the organization (private or public).

According to Uys (2002), whistle blowing occurs when an employee (or former employee) either circumvents the prescribed internal channels of communication or resorts to contact an external agency, which could include the media. A citizen of a country might also resort to contact the press on noticing some wrongdoing in public governance, especially budget indiscipline and financial mismanagement, as against the government wish. Whistle blowing; therefore, has to do with disclosure of information on any illegal or immoral act. It is about ethical resistance. It is generally defined as “the disclosure of illegal, unethical or harmful practices in the workplace to parties who might take action” (Rothschild and Miethe, 1994:254).

The benefits of carefully considered whistle blowing can lead to the end of unethical/corrupt practices. The lives of individuals and the whole communities could be saved by whistleblowers. Several damages to the environment could be stopped by the actions of one individual who blows the whistle on an unethical employer or government functionary. Examples of some serious ethical violations that should result to whistle blowing are: spending government money outside budget appropriation, extravagance spending of public money, abandonment of projects that would touch the lives of the masses, glaring connivance among arms of government to defraud the treasury, poor governmental financial reporting, the dumping of toxic waste, violating laws about hiring and firing, violating laws about workplace safety and violating health laws. The citizens should be up to the task of rightly blowing their whistles on all these.

The actions of whistleblowers are potentially beneficial to society. The weakness or absence of prudence, transparency and accountability in any economy deserves whistle blowing by courageous individuals. Prudence is about the exercise of balancing expenditure against income, showing good
judgment. The principle of transparency is that of making sure that the trust or confidence reposed on an officer is not abused through secret deals; it is about straight forwardness and honesty. Accountability is the ability to give explanations or reasons as to what one does at any given time; it is about the ability to satisfactorily account for whatever has been entrusted to an officer’s care (Dandago, 2002).

If all the three concepts are properly observed in public financial management in the African continent, there would be no cases of mismanagement of public funds or any illegal/immoral acts in governance and, so, the continent would be fraud-free! African citizens have to take the “bull by the horn” to ensure the observance of the three concepts in all the three-tiers of government in the country; they have the right to ensure observance of the three concepts by those in public governance. In Nigeria, which is currently plagued by a culture of corruption and other fraudulent practices, whistle blowing is an important tool in fighting all the illegal or immoral acts and the ethical laxity that accompanies the acts. However, for whistle blowing to be an effective tool, the whistle blowers themselves should have untainted personality, righteous behavior and fear of God for them to be able to blow the whistle well. They should develop strong ‘shock-absorbers’ and be ready to rebuild their lives, where temporarily destroyed by the harsh retaliatory measures of corrupt government functionaries.

THE NEED TO PROTECT WHISTLEBLOWERS

It is clear that any attempt to ensure sound governmental financial management and reduce fraud, corruption, and maladministration and to insist on observing prudence, transparency and accountability, through whistles blowing, by the citizens, has to be supported by measures to protect whistleblowers against retaliation and victimization. The government, therefore, has an important role to play in ensuring that the citizens exercise their right of effective participation in the fight against corruption by giving them adequate legal protection.

Whistle blowing has gained recognition internationally as an effective tool in the fight against unlawful and unethical conduct in governmental and business organizations, through the disclosure of information to an authority figure (boss, media or government official). Appropriate legislations are
being put in place to adequately protect the citizens’ right to good governance in different countries of the world, especially as they fight for their right, acting as whistle blowers.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, Public Concern at Work, an independent charity organization, was instrumental in the introduction of the public interest Disclosure Act, in 1998. The Act provides that concerns raised by whistleblowers in organizations must be properly considered and addressed in the workplace. It has been successfully used in many occasions to protect whistleblowers from reprisals and also to secure compensation for those victimized for revealing serious organizational wrongdoings.

An interest in whistle blowing is also developing in Africa. In South Africa, for example, the Protected Disclosure Act (Act No. 26) was passed by parliament in 2000. It makes provisions for the protection of whistleblowers in the private as well as public sectors. The Act is an illustration of the way South Africa is being transformed into a society in which people’s rights are protected in a context of transparency and accountability. It is also interesting to note that the Immediate Past President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, is one African leader who feels that whistle blowing should be institutionalized (Uys & Nico, 1999).

In Nigeria, the upper chamber of the National Assembly (the Senate) has made some effort, in 2003, at passing a bill seeking to encourage Nigerians to disclose the improper conduct of public officers and public bodies into law, so as to protect those making such disclosures from reprisals (Omunu, 2004). The bill also seeks to ensure that any improper conduct reported against any public officer or public body is properly investigated without the investigating organ disclosing the identity of the informant. It is not clear whether or not the bill would be passed into law, about eight years after its first reading on the floor of the Senate!

**CONCLUSION**

It is the conclusion of this paper that the constitutional provisions and other existing laws of Nigeria are not strong and stringent enough to successfully tackle corruption in the country, especially as the country’s leaders appear reluctant towards combating it. To actually tackle corruption in Nigeria, a lot of sacrifice must be made by the political class and the generality of the Nigerian masses.
It is, therefore, recommended that the following measures should be taken by those responsible for their actualization in Nigeria:

(a) Whistle blower Act should be enacted and be publicized for interested whistle blowers to be aware of the adequacy of protection available to them as they develop courage to expose fraudulent and corrupt practices.

(b) The whistleblower Act should make provision for monetary incentive on the disclosure of financial misappropriation. It could be that apart from making the identity of the whistleblower confidential, he/she would be entitled to 10% of the amount recovered from the fraudulent or corrupt functionaries on whom the whistle is blown.

Where government functionaries fail to be responsive to their role of safeguarding public funds, the citizens should be given all the necessary encouragement to take their “whistle”/their right and blow it as sound as possible so that those functionaries could be made to return to their senses. Whistle blowing is a vital right of the citizens, all over the world, deserving all necessary incentive and legal protection.

REFERENCES


