

The Plunderers and Challenges of Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Developmental failure in Nigeria like many other developing nations of the world is attributable to plunderers who have taken over the nation's administrative mechanism. Although Nigeria is richly blessed with substantial petroleum deposit and other natural resources, yet the nation is grossly underdeveloped. Therefore, the study identified the plunderers, examined the past and present efforts at tackling their activities; as well as analysed the effects of plundering of the nation's economy on Nigerians and Nigeria. The study relied greatly on secondary source of data. The study revealed that Nigeria's leaders are the number one plunderers, the Heads of State and Government, the Politicians and the Executives. Others are the Bureaucrats, the Bankers, the Insurance Brokers, the Lawyers and those in the areas of justice administration, the Press, the Religious Leaders and the Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Some of the anti-corruption agencies that have been put in place to checkmate the scourge of the economic and financial crimes in Nigeria at one time or the other include – Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, Code of Conduct Bureau, Code of Conduct Tribunal, and Public Complaints Commission. Others are the National Food and Drug Administration (NAFDAC); Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit; the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The consequences of economic and financial crimes on Nigerians and Nigeria are – increase in the cost of governance, increase in taxes and special levies on the citizens, borrowing and rising debt status of the nation. Corruption brings about inefficiency and negligence of essential services; injustice; poverty and citizens' low quality of lives; income inequality; poor health services delivery; poor infrastructural facilities and welfare services and poor quality of education. The study concluded that until proactive measure is taking against the plunderers no meaningful development will be achieved in Nigeria.

Keywords: Plunderers, Caucus of Plunderers, Socio-Economic Development, Plea Bargain, Treasury Single Account

1. Introduction

Developmental failure in many of the developing nations of the world is becoming more pronounced, as leaders without proven records of integrity continue to emerge into political stardom across African nations. This type of leaders are not only dominating African political scene like colossus, but also taking over the administrative mechanism of African states, Nigeria not exempted. These leaders are not only harbingers of "the scourge of poverty and crisis" that pervades developing nations (Agagu and Ola, 2011), but also the bane of its developments. The fact that Nigeria is richly blessed with substantial petroleum deposit and other natural resources leave one to wonder about its underdevelopment nature. The control mechanisms adopted for the nation's economy have however, provided answers to the questions of underdevelopment nature of Nigeria. For instance, the oil deposit represents 90 per cent of the nation's exports earnings and major part of the government's revenue (Herbst and Olukoshi, 1994). The oil and other resources are controlled by the state and invariably controlled by the political cliques who have been (mis)managing the accrued commonwealth and using it to benefit themselves and their cronies. It is not surprising that, the struggle to control the state has always been problematic among the overambitious political cliques who understood the economic importance of the state control. Therefore, anyone who intends to get more than his or her share of the nation's commonwealth easily engages in politics, which is far more profitable than any other businesses in Nigeria today.

Of all the problems confronting the nation's economic stability and development, economic and financial crimes remain the most devastating, as it continued to bite hard on the nation socio-economic developments. Several attempts have been made by successive governments in Nigeria at checking the scourge, and till date all the attempts have not yielded expected result or have not manifested in terms of the nation's general developments. Thus, the study identifies the plunderers, examines the past and present efforts at tackling the plunderers activities; as well as analyses the effects of plundering of the nation's economic resources on Nigerians and Nigeria.

2. The Plunderers

Plunderers in Nigeria have constituted themselves into cankerworm on the nation's economic resources as well as pandemic parasites draining the blood of the nation's economy. At this juncture, it is pertinent to identify who and who constitutes plunderers in Nigeria. To Achebe (1983), in his book titled; *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he

stated that, Nigeria's leaders are the number one plunderers. To him, the leaders have continued to fail in discharging their constitutional responsibilities; they do not live by personal example which is "the hallmarks of true leadership". The fact that these leaders remain unwilling or unable to rise to the challenges of the nation is another great problem to the nation.

Plunderers according to Ola (2011) are the Heads of State and Government, the Politicians and the Executives, as well as some civil servants who allied with the aforementioned. Similarly, different governmental organisations such as – the Nigerian Railways Corporation; and the law enforcement agencies (the Customs and Immigrations, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency; the Nigerian Police, the Army, the Road Safety officials, the Civil Defence, the Navy and the Air Force etc), that are enmeshed in endemic corrupt practices are plunderers (Ero and Oladoyin, 2000). Other plunderers could be found among the Bureaucrats, the Bankers, the Insurance Brokers, the Lawyers and those in the areas of justice administration, the Press, the Religious Leaders and members of the public. Suffice to say that, plundering activities transcend professions, gender, ethnic groups and beliefs.

3. The Initiation of Civil Servants into the Caucus of Plunderers

All over the world, civil servants could be seen as critical players in governance and governmental activities. Civil service is a governmental institution which plays critical roles in ensuring that governmental policies and programmes result in tangible services for the citizens. Therefore, civil servants are indispensable in the running of governmental affairs, and due to the fact that they are involved in designing, formulating and implementing public policies, as well as discharging governmental functions and developmental programmes in an effective way, they cannot be pushed aside in the nation's administrative system (Ogunrotifa, 2012). Arising from the foregoing, civil servants are supposed to be facilitator and partners in progress with the government in piloting the economy activities of the nation. They are expected to be a veritable vehicle through which governmental activities will be carried out. However, Nigeria's civil servants, instead of being a partner in progress towards the nation's general developments, have become collaborators in plundering the nation's economic resources.

Ero and Oladoyin (2000) affirmed that the two earliest military regimes have gone a long way to re-define the role of civil servants during their tenure of office; owing to their actions or inactions. For instance, Aguiyi-Ironsi's administration pampered corruption, while Gowon's administration actually dined and wined in corruption while the administration lasted. According to them

Despite the fact that corruption was one of the reasons given by the military for overthrowing the first civilian government (1960 – 1966), the succeeding military regimes of General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and General Yakubu Gowon did nothing to combat corruption. In fact, the Gowon regime itself was seen to be very corrupt. Corruption was one of the reasons given by the coup plotters who flushed him out of power in July 1975 (Ero and Oladoyin, 2000:282).

The administration of General Yakubu Gowon (1966-75) was actually reputed to have laid the foundation of corruption as well as initiated the civil servants to the plunderers groups for the first time, through the unholy alliance between the then nation's managers and civil servants. "The Gowon regime indeed brought the reputation of the Nigerian civil service to its lowest ebb" (Ola, 2011). The period of Gowon administration was special in that it marked the period when civil servants first enter into alliance of what Ola referred to as, "I rub your back, you rub mine". According to Ola

Symbiotic relationships existed on selfish bases between individual civil servants and top cream and rank of the military officers... The monopoly of power by the cabal of military officers and the so called super permanent secretaries was scandalous. Many Nigerians knew it was in pursuit of selfish economic interest in collaboration with some foreign compradors (Ola, 2011:38-39).

Governor of Ekiti State, Ayodele Fayose, while addressing members of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and their counterpart, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) under the auspices of organised labour, described their nationwide anti-corruption protests as a "mere jamboree". The organised labour that comprised the NLC and TUC recently embarked on National Rally on "Good Governance and Corruption", and carried their campaign to the Governor's office. Fayose unequivocally told the Labour Unions that, they cannot be exonerated when it comes to the game of corruption. According to him,

No political officeholders can steal without the cooperation of the civil servants...no governor, minister or top political officeholders can steal a penny from the treasury without the cooperation of the civil servants. We don't write papers as politicians, but we only approve whatever the civil servants came up with (<http://www.informationng.com>; 2015).

In similar vein with Fayose is Ndukwe (2015), who identified civil servants as a critical player in the

game of corruption. He actually sees civil servants as a teacher; who teaches corruption, and politician as a teachable readymade student; who knows the best way to reward a good teacher. According to him

Civil servants are even the ones who introduce political officeholders to ways funds can be embezzled without being tracked... Civil servants are always the ones who prod and encourage them to be corrupt as they would always have their “cut” from whatever “deal” is done... Those who do not allow the funds allocated to our hospitals after being approved by the ministers/president are civil servants. Those who arrange ghost workers and ripped off our nation of a staggering N160bn in a short period leading to 2013 were civil servants.

4. Economic and Financial Crimes and Development

Economic and financial crimes have long been in Nigeria and with Nigerian. It has become a regular and recurring decimal in the nation’s daily activities. However, the most pronounced economic and financial crimes are the one in government circle, especially among the politicians and executives. This was so because, the politicians and executives are officeholders directly in-charge of all the accrued revenues of the nation. Going by their mad competition for political post, as always being witnessed during elections and electioneering campaigns, there is no doubting the fact that most of them seek the political posts with the intention of enriching themselves.

Economic and financial crimes are often times perpetrated in the course of rendering “service to the nation” which is tantamount to “disservice to the nation” as some of those who engage in it see nothing wrong in their actions. They see public offices and positions as official avenues to amass wealth, not only for themselves but also for their supporters or cohorts (cited in Okogbule, n.d.). In essence, economic and financial crime according to Section 46, of the EFCC Act 2004 is

the non-violent criminal and illicit activity committed with the objectives of earning wealth illegally either individually or in a group or organised manner thereby violating existing legislation governing the economic activities of government and its administration and includes any form of fraud, narcotic drug trafficking, money laundering, embezzlements, bribery, looting and any form of corrupt malpractices, illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking and child labour, illegal oil bunkering and illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractices including counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse, dumping of toxic wastes and prohibited goods, etc

The unrelenting perpetration of economic and financial crimes has continued to hinder the level of development in Nigeria. This is so because, the resources which could have been used in development are being pocketed by some cliques who are hell-bent to make life miserable for the teeming masses of Nigeria while they continue to live in affluence.

5. The Anti-corruption Agencies in the Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

Different anti-corruption agencies have been put in place to checkmate the scourge of corruption in Nigeria at one time or the other. These agencies include – Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau; Code of Conduct Bureau; Code of Conduct Tribunal; Public Complaints Commission; Public Accounts Committee and quasi-judicial bodies. Other measures include the use of – the criminal/penal codes; the police/allied enforcement agencies; the courts as well as anti-corruption agencies, such as – the National Food and Drug Administration (NAFDAC); the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON); the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit, (Due Process). The main focus of this section is to examine the measures taken at combating financial activities in the Nigeria’s fourth republic.

With the inauguration of the civilian government of President Olusegun Obasanjo on the 29th May 1999, the foundation of Nigeria’s fourth republic was laid. President Olusegun Obasanjo, in his speech after his inauguration as the first president of Nigeria’s fourth republic highlighted the severity of endemic and pandemic corruption on the nation’s economy. According to Obasanjo

Corruption, the greatest single bane of our society today, will be tackled head on at all levels. Corruption is incipient in human societies and in most human activities. But it must not be condoned. No society can achieve anything near the full-blown cancer it has become in Nigeria; the rampant corruption in the public service and the cynical contempt for integrity that pervades every level of bureaucracy will be stamped out.

Obasanjo, having understood the bane of the nation’s development, vowed to tackle the menace of corruption. True to his words, Obasanjo in less than 12 months into his administration enacted the Corrupt

Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000, which brought about the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). In addition to this was the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act of 2002. These two Commissions have been saddled with the responsibility of combating economic crimes in the country till date.

6. The Hunter becomes the Hunted: A Case of the EFCC Chairman Corruption Allegation

Economic and financial crimes remain clog in the wheels of the nation's development, as every effort at nation's development is always thwarted by it. Several government efforts at exterminating corruption has continued to suffer set back given the fact that many people at the corridors of power, *vis a vis* political actors and gladiators; "super public officials", the law enforcement agents, as well as some members of anti-corruption agencies were in support that the old system of siphoning public fund should continue. This is due to the fact that the aforementioned public officials are part of the plunderers who constitute themselves as parasite on the nation's economy (Ribadu, 2004).

The Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Lamorde was recently petitioned to have diverted the money recovered by the Commission from the politicians who have looted the nation's resources. The petitioner has written to the Senate alleging that the sum of N1 trillion recovered from the plunderers was pocketed by the EFCC Chairman. The Senate has however, instructed its Committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions to investigate fully the allegations against the chairman of the EFCC. Although the allegations levelled against Lamorde is still on going, but the fact still remain that, if he (Lamorde) has not plied the line of corruption, the allegations should not have been raised in the first instance. Thus, he that must come before equity must come with clean hands.

Ribadu (2004) as cited in Adegbe and Fakile (2012) has highlighted some key factors needed for effective prosecution of economic and financial crimes perpetrators to include – co-operation from persons and/or institutions for relevant information; effective investigative mechanism and quality evidence; transparency in investigation; and competency of the prosecuting counsels; unbiased presiding judge. All these factors up till now are not there, this perhaps is the major reason why anti-corruption activities have continued to fail. The perpetrators of economic and financial crimes have infiltrated all organisations. They have a formidable network that can upset any effort of anti-corruption agencies especially that, the nation's Managers lack the political will and total commitment to the war against economic and financial crimes. Lack of political will and total commitment on the part of the nation's Managers could be seen from the perspective that, they too are benefitting from the crimes, and many of the plunderers are their allies.

7. The Renewed Anti-corruption Campaign in Nigeria

Low developmental patterns in Nigeria have been so much attributable to poor leadership or leaders without proven records of integrity. In order to choose leaders with some levels of integrity, the present administration of President Muhammad Buhari has begun a new system of recruiting those who will work with him, based on "personal trust" in governing the nation. However, as a result of diverse and competing interests among the socio-political class, Buhari administration has been subjected to bashing and criticism; on the mode of selections of his cabinet. He was accused of ethnic sentiments and bias in his choice of appointments. The critics based their grievance on the fact that, the appointments made so far by Buhari was lopsided and have failed to reflect the nation's federal character. Buhari while defending his administration on the choice of the cabinet states

If I select people whom I know quite well in my political party, whom we came all the way right from the APP, CPC and APC, and have remained together in good or bad situation, the people I have confidence in and I can trust them with any post, will that amount to anything wrong?... They did not defect because of positions, they did not involve themselves in the pursuit of personal gains, and they accepted their fate throughout our trying moments. What is wrong if I make you the secretary (of the federal government) because I have confidence that things will go normal? (Buhari, 2015).

Buhari assertions could be said to be encouraging and that, if he remain focused and insists on good governance, perhaps things may be taking a new shape in Nigeria, especially in the areas of economic stability and nation's development. On his determination to rip the governance off the people of questionable characters, he presented the names of would be Minister for scrutiny, and out of the 36 nominees, only 3 passed the corruption test which was based on security reports. Buhari has since continued to search for other people to be presented as the Ministerial nominees to the National Assembly.

Also, Buhari's anti-graft war could be said to have started yielding positive dividends. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor, Godwin Emefiele, the blockage of leakages by Buhari's administration, has made Nigeria's foreign reserves to increase from \$28.57 billion as at the end of May, 2015

into \$31.53 billion as of July 2015 (Vanguard, 2015a). Similarly, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has become more efficient. For instance, in less than 100 days into his administration, the EFCC has filed 71 corruption cases in the various state and Federal High Courts. Besides, EFCC has seized

Over \$6.555m and €248, 340 from 55 money laundering suspects at the airports in Lagos, Kano and Abuja. The cash includes \$3, 902, 229 and €248, 340 from 49 suspects at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos; \$2, 198, 900 (Lagos Domestic Airport); \$454, 050 from four suspects at the Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport in Kano; and \$99, 000 from a suspect at the private wing of the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja. (<http://thenationonline.net/>)

The anti-corruption campaign under Buhari has also received a boost as the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) staged a nationwide protest to condemn the endemic corruption among the public officers in Nigeria. The organised Labour while embarking on National Rally on “Good Governance and Corruption” demanded that death penalty should be meted on corrupt public officeholders. The Labour Unions further emphasised that the Congress is ready for a showdown with any of the law enforcement agents; including judges that are sabotaging the efforts of anti-corruption crusaders. They argue that granting unnecessary injunctions to public officers who engage in corrupt activities is tantamount to protecting plunderers from facing the full weight of the law.

The Labour Union also called for the immediate review of the law guiding the conduct of public officeholders in the nation. This is with a view to checkmating and making them accountable for their activities while still in office. The NLC argues that the nation’s anti-corruption laws are weak and ineffective, and needs urgent overhauling to be able to effectively tame the nation’s economic plunderers.

However, the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) has risen in opposition to the call for capital punishment to be meted on public officers found guilty of economic and financial crimes in the course of their service to the nation. The President of the NBA in a meeting with the National President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in Abuja argues that, in the contemporary time; countries across the globe are doing away with capital punishment; hence, it will not be ideal for Nigerians to be advocating for it. Thus, it would have been better if corruption is dealt with through proactive as well as preventive measures.

Another step taken by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari to check the menace of corruption was the introduction of Treasury Single Account (TSA). A Treasury Single Account (TSA) is a financial instrument for consolidating and managing governments’ cash resources, with the intention of minimizing borrowing costs (International Monetary Fund, 2010). TSA was introduced by the Jonathan’s Administration in 2014, with the intention to block revenue generation leakages, but there was no total compliance with the directive on the part of the Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs); while his tenure lasted in spite of the deadline set for the exercise.

However, after President Buhari had been sworn in, he unequivocally vowed that, he will “kill corruption” in Nigeria, and that all revenue leakages used by the revenue generating agencies in plundering the nation’s revenues will be blocked. The MDAs without further delay, has complied totally with TSA policy. Consequently, the MDA’s has since maintained TSA with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Buhari has further given directives to the National Economic Council, (NEC), to ensure that the MDAs comply with the laws on accounting, allocation and disbursement of nation’s funds.

There was also the introduction of “plea bargain”. Plea bargain is an agreement between defendant and prosecutor, where defendant agrees and pleads guilty to some or all of the charges against him or her in exchange for concessions from the prosecutor. It is a justice system where there is a plea deal, or agreement between the prosecutor and defendant, where the defendant agrees or pleads guilty mainly to a less serious charge. Plea bargain is another measure being proposed by the present administration to recover stolen money from the plunderers without resulting to serious litigation. Buhari has said that he will introduce plea bargain, which will allow those who have stolen from the government to return them. However, those who fail to make use of the opportunity will be prosecuted in the law courts.

The renewed anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria has begun to restore some confidence to Nigerians. The eventual trial of the sitting Senate President, Senator Bukola Saraki by the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) is a strong signal of the seriousness of Buhari’s anti-corruption war. Saraki was alleged to have made false declaration of his assets while he was the governor of Kwara state. He was alleged to have lied in the forms he filled and submitted to the Code of Conduct Bureau. Saraki was not only accused of false declaration of assets, but also accused to have acquired assets more than his legitimate earnings as governor; as well as operating and maintaining foreign accounts while in office as a public officer. Saraki has earlier been summoned by the Code of Conduct Tribunal, but he refused to honour the invitation, instead he approached the Courts for injunctions with the view to restricting the Tribunal from trying him. The consequent upon which the Tribunal ordered the Inspector General of Police to arrest him. Saraki went further to file a case at the Appeal Court in Abuja where he asked the court to grant him stay of execution, against the arrest order which the Chairman of the Code of

Conduct Tribunal issued against him. The Appeal Court however rejected his application and this made him to appear before the Tribunal 3 days later. The Senate President, Bukola Saraki, however, pleaded “not guilty” to the allegations and was released on bail while new date was fixed for the next hearing of the case.

8. Effects of Plundering Activities on Nigerians and Nigeria

The consequences of corruption on Nigerians and Nigeria are complex and diverse. For instance, corruption has far reaching impact on the economic, political, and administrative activities of the nation (Hope, 2000), as well as on Nigerians’ psychological and philosophical natures (Osei-Hwedie and Osei-Hwedie, 2000).

Corruption involves the abuse and misappropriation of scarce resources which directly or indirectly have multiplier effects on the nation’s economy; as well as development of the nation’s socio-infrastructures. Corruption impacts negatively on the developmental goals of the nation. It also has adverse consequences on economic development vis-a-vis Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and Per Capital Income (cited in Igbo, 2011).

Corruption increases the cost of governance, for instance, all the percentages of money given to officials in charge of contracts, before contracts could be awarded are indirectly added to the real costs of contracts. Thus, government expenditures will continue to increase as the nation’s revenues continue to go into the pockets of plunderers. The effect of which is the need to increase revenues generation which could be through increase in taxes, special levies on the citizens, borrowing or forfeiture of developmental programmes (Hope, 2000).

Corroborating Hope (2000), is Agagu (2011) who states that, the damaging effect of the plunderers on citizens and the nation’s economy could be seen in the area of the nation’s rising debt. The level of Nigeria debt has reached its crescendo, such that the nation is ranked favourably among the poorest nations of the world. This is reflected in the living conditions of the masses, as the masses continue to wallow in abject poverty, despite heavy annual budgets of all the levels of government (Agagu, 2011). These are the case of many states in Nigeria now. Many of the States in Nigeria have turned bankrupt; they have borrowed beyond their capacity. Consequently, the civil servants as well as their retirees’ counterparts could not be paid their monthly stipends, while the teeming masses are paying through their noses for social services which ought to be provided by the government. This is also one of the reasons adjudged for the privatization of many public enterprises and corporations during the Obasanjo tenure of office.

Corruption brings about inefficiency; this is because many hardworking people find it difficult to make ends meet, while indolence but corrupt people are living in affluence. Corruption brings about injustice, people bribed to receive certain services, while those who could not afford to pay will not have access to such services. Corruption equally leads to neglect of essential services, which has to do with public welfare (Osei-Hwedie and Osei-Hwedie, 2000). Negligence could bring about diseases, accidents and disasters into the state. For instance, series of plane crash recorded in Nigeria, where a large number of people lost their lives was as a result of corruption influenced negligence.

Corruption generally leads to citizens low quality of lives, *vis a vis* low health care facilities in the hospitals, poor infrastructural facilities and welfare services, poor quality of education, increase in income inequality and poverty among the citizenry (Shah, 2007 cited in Igbo, 2011).

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite Nigeria’s economic wealth, the nation is still struggling to meet up with expected developments, especially in the areas of economic and social services delivery. The study thus concluded that until proactive measure is taking against the plunderers, no meaningful development will be achieved. Flowing from the above, the study recommended that Nigerians should always see to the emergence of transparent and honest leaders. This could be achieved by scrutinising any candidate standing for both elective and selective posts. Citizens should also strive hard to always elect leaders with integrity; knowledge in governance and managerial efficiency, who will base governance on accountability and the rule of law. This could be achieved if the aspiring leaders are subjected to thorough scrutiny by people of impeccable characters. Freedom of expression should be enhanced such that citizens will be able to stand-up, challenge and expose corrupt public officials without any fear of persecution. Finally and importantly, the anti-corruption law should be overhauled. Plunderers should be made to face full weight of the law, and their ill-gotten properties be confiscated; barred from holding public office; and even made to spend sometimes in jail. Any accomplice who tries to shield plunderers or trying to pervert justice should be equally dealt with in line with the Constitution.

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