

The Ways Out of Corruption

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Abstract: The study investigated the possible ways by which corruption, a social problem, can be eliminated, in Nigeria. From series of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted among the old and the young people in Ado-Ekiti and Ayedun Ekiti (Yoruba speaking ethnic group settlements) in Western Nigeria; findings revealed that corruption can be eliminated through psychological engineering involving structural, institutional and subsequent behavioural manipulations and alterations.

Key words: Corruption, Nigeria, social problem

INTRODUCTION

There is no gainsaying in the fact that nations and peoples of the world are suffering because of their own handiworks. After all, the Holy Bible records that God created all things bright and beautiful. Suffice it to say then that the problems within our environment and societies are a result of our own explorations and exploitations. The explorations and exploitations culminates in behavioral patterns and they are usually motivated by a thought or need. Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult and Van-Lange^[1] posits that interactions between and among persons and objects is better conceptualized in terms of their needs, thoughts and motives in relation to one another and in the context of the specific social situation(s) in which their interactions transpire.

Several of our needs, thoughts motives and resultant behaviours often collude with those of others and result in some sorts of social problems. One of such areas of collusion is in the manifestation of some acts beneficial to one or a few but at the detriment of a larger people. Such act(s) is/are often referred to as corruptive act(s) or corruption. Corruption is a bane to national growth and development because it is a perversion or a change from good to bad. It involves the violation of established rules and deviation from formal duties of a public role because of private gains^[2,3]. Corruption is a cankerworm that introduces arbitrariness and discrimination in decision makings so that rules, regulations and procedures can be circumvented within a course of action for selfish gains.

Corruption is a concept, a harmful phenomenon to personal growth and the economic development and advancements of a nation. Act of corruption, among others, includes: bribery, misappropriation, nepotism, fraud, extortion,

embezzlement, examination malpractices, election malpractices and cultism.

Scholars have reasoned that the evil act is often caused by the absence of a strong sense of national community^[4]; desire for money, material and recognition; loss of moral reasoning, moral values and moral judgments; poor reward systems and greed resulting from peer community, extended family pressures and polygamous households^[5-7]. And that it spreads from the cities^[8]. Sigmund Freud the renowned psychoanalyst^[9] explained that psychological problems may arise in any person when the fixed amount of psychic energy a person has is unevenly distributed among the three structures of his personality (i.e the Id, Ego and super-ego). Inferring from Freud's analogy, it means then that a psychopath, who routinely lies and cheats to achieve his aims (a corrupt individual) has an unevenly distributed psychic energy in his personality components.

It is pertinent to note that whereas Freud locates the cause of misdemeanors in individual persons, Albert Bandura^[10] in his cognitive social learning theory explained that our behaviours are learnt within our environments through observations and imitation of models. According to this theory, an individual could acquire corruptive behavioural skills either through direct teachings or by mere imitation of models who are simply pursuing their own interests and are not trying to teach anyone anything. Thus, contrary to Freud's psychoanalytic theoretical view that corruption, for example, could be innate in an individual, Bandura's cognitive social learning theoretical position is that corruption, for example, can only be learnt through an individual's interactions with and explorations of, the environment. Abraham Maslow^[11] in his needs theory explained that human needs are varied and diverse and that they are in an order. According to him, humans strive

to satisfy the needs in their order starting from the lower order needs to the higher order needs. Maslow's opinion is that humans exert and dissipate energy at ensuring that their needs are met and this result in their fulfillment and satisfaction. In effect, a desire to gratify human's varied needs may propel corruptive acts. Sufficient unto the day, after all, is evil thereof (Mat. 6, verse 34b).

The explanations of these theorists and scholars, as mentioned above, regarding the causes of corruption and misdemeanours indicted both the environment and the persons. And behaviours results from the interactions of both [B=f(P,E)]. However, since corruption is a social problem that stunts national development and growth, it is worth the while therefore, to find out where correctional measures and interventions should be focused at; with a view to building a virile society.

The study thus attempts to find out whether corruption can be eliminated in the society by altering and manipulating the environment alone or by altering/manipulating individual persons within the environment, or through the manipulations of both the environment and individual persons within the environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: A total of eight (8) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising of 75 participants, in all was conducted in Ado-Ekiti and Ayedun Ekiti, respectively. The groups were composed of old males, old females, young males and young females with a minimum of seven (7) participants in each group. Participants who are below the age of 45years but up to 18 years were classified as young while those whose ages are above forty-five years were classified as old. The choice of Ado-Ekiti and Ayedun Ekiti are informed by the researcher's desire to tap information regarding rural and urban dwellers understanding of what constitute corrupt acts, its causes, effects and how it could be eliminated.

RESEARCH SETTINGS

The research settings are Ado Ekiti and Ayedun Ekiti. Ado-Ekiti is the capital town of Ekiti State with virtually all the indices of urbanization while Ayedun Ekiti is a community in Ekiti North Local Government Area of Ekiti State without pipe borne water, erratic power supply, no link with the outside world through telephone (either static or mobile) and no inter-city transportation; among other parameters of urbanization Ado-Ekiti and Ayedun Ekiti are predominatly occupied by the Yoruba ethnic group. However, the population is largely literate. This is

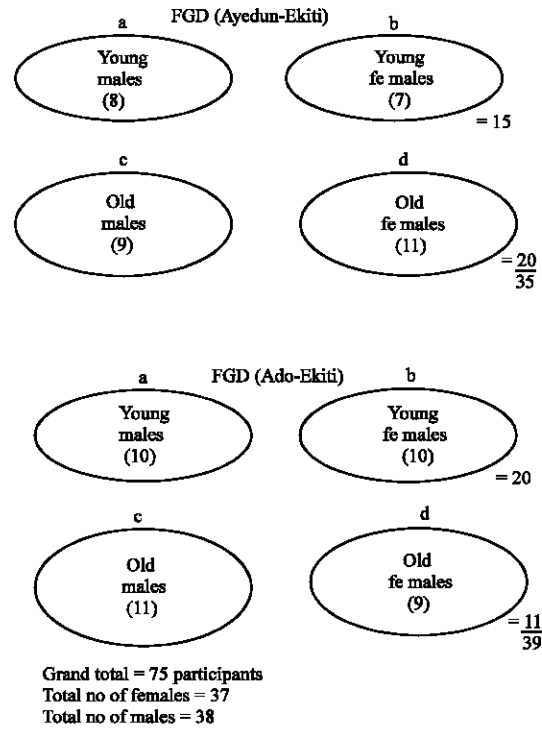


Fig. 1: Showing composition of FGDs in research settings

attested to by the appellation of Ekiti State as the fountain of knowledge.

MEASURE

A semi structured questionnaire was adopted for the study. Participants were first asked to discuss what they understand by corruption after a brief introduction of the research crew and an explanation of the need for note taking and voice recordings. The questionnaire used for the study was developed by the researcher and was consciously tailored to be funnel shaped. Some other discussions are such that has to do with their opinions as to the origin and causes of corruption, their perceived effect(s) of corrupt practices (if any); and what they ought should be done to eliminate corruption.

PROCEDURE

A crew of six researchers went to the research settings with two tape recorders and the semi structured questionnaire. The crew is composed of the lead researcher and five (5) research assistants trained in the act and art of conducting FGDs. After due consultations with authorities at incidentally chosen locations, research participants were recruited and screened for eligibility and

willingness to participate in the study. Each session of the eight (8) sessions conducted were moderated to last for about 15 minutes and small incentives were given to each of the participants with thanks after the sessions. The whole exercise of FGDs conduction was completed within two weeks spanning December 11th through to December 24th, 2005.

RESULTS

Findings from the study indicated that young or old, male or female and irrespective of the dwelling place, people understand what constitutes corruptive behaviours and its effects on communal or national development and growth and on peoples' social, political and economic well-being. For example, a participant in the study among the old female Ayedun Ekiti (Rural setting) inhabitants said:

“Ohun buruku ni iwa jegudujera, aibikita; Olori aisan sin ni ti o nko ba ara ilu ti ko mo kan. Awon bee kii mo wipe Olowo kan laarin Otosi mewa, oun gan naa a pada tosi gbehin ni”

That is corruption is an evil and disease that inflicts injuries on the innocents. Unfortunately, the corrupt people often forget that a rich man among ten poor people will also sooner or later become poor too.’

Another young male (Ayedun-Ekiti) participant said:

But for corruption that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerians and most especially our so called leaders, Nigeria wouldn't have been underdeveloped or still developing at age 45years. Or what could have been responsible for this gross unemployment if not that some privileged few have eaten Nigeria's 'yam sets' or what could have been invested to yield positively for the generality of Nigerians.

A young male participant in Ado Ekiti said:

“What description or name would you give the behaviour of a state Governor who bought cars in large quantity from the factory at controlled prices and is giving same to people at exorbitant prices; thus trading and making 'tear pocket' profits with government money. Of course, it is over invoicing; corruption made possible as a result of his opportuned position of trust. Or is a permanent secretary claiming to have bought a bag of rice for N8,500.00 now when no bag sells for more than

N6,000.00 not corrupt?. Is that not 419/? And is it possible for a farmer in the village tilling the ground with hard labour to make some produce available for sale? Of course even the sale of his produce will be hijacked by some so called elites within his environment’.

As to whether corruptive behaviours are more common among males or females, there appear to be a concensus across board that both males and females are corrupt. However, it is said that destructive and destructive corrupt acts are most common among the elites.

A participant (young female in Ado-Ekiti) said:

Ah, gbogbo wa ni ole jare. Eni ti ile ba ti mo ba ni 'barawo. Sugbon bi eyan ba se ri ita to nio maa se mo ole buburu i ja to

This means that we are thieves (corrupt). But that our level of corruptive acts is often dependent on our civilization and urbanization

When participants were asked of the assumed possible ways out of corruption, structural and institutional changes were advocated. Many of the participants are of the opinion that corruptive behaviour are learnt and therefore can be unlearned through environmental manipulations; rigorous public enlightenments and sensitization; enactment and head-long application of corruptive behavioural debarring rules; and stigmatization of corrupt individuals. These are assumed as the most vibrant means of eliminating corruption.

For example an adult male participant in Ayedun Ekiti said:

“Our youths learn corruptive behaviours from their older counterparts and from the cities. So to deal with the evil is simple. Nobody wants to be ridiculed in his village but any corrupt person nabbed must be dispossessed, genuinely, of his amassed wealth, ridiculed among his kin men and stigmatized. This way, his family members, children and relations will either become checks or get themselves and their names soiled”.

Another person (female adult) said:

“If government could ensure provision of all the basics of life, there wouldn't be any basis for oppression because peoples desire to provide the basics of life for themselves and

thus oppress others lacking culminates in their corruptive acts”.

Yet another participant (Young female, Ado-Ekiti) said:

“The provision of a conducive environment for equal operations through the enactment and application of rules without bias and irrespective of class and caste is the antidote to corruption”

Another adult female participant in Ayedun Ekiti said:

“If government can sensitize the populace of her genuine desire to tackle corruption and go head on implementing anti-corruption rules; not minding whose ox is gored; then corruption will be eliminated. Also, if stigmatization could work magics with HIV/AIDS patients, then it would work even better if used as a tool for dealing with corrupt persons in addition to ridding them of their ill-gotten wealth and taking them back to ‘square one’

Discussion, conclusion and recommendation: From the results of this study, it is clear that corruption, as a concept, is not alien to Nigerians and that generally, people understand all those behaviours that constitute corruptive acts and their effects on national and individual growth and development.

Although, the evil is said not to be peculiar to any particular sex: nonetheless, there appear to be a general believe that it is most rampant among the elitists in the cities and thus permeates through the cities into the interlands. The believe corroborates the observation of who wrote that one’s consolation in thought on the incidence and cases of Fraud, swindling, theft and other forms of dishonesty and corruption practices in Nigeria is that the cases are limited to Lagos and a handful of other big and civilized towns of Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it may not be out of reason to posit that anti corruption campaigns should be most intensified in the cities since it appears corrupt behaviours are most manifest in the cities. It may not be out of place, too, to reason that the elitists should be mostly focused as this clique is usually more opportuned at occupying positions of trust.

Discussions on the possible ways out of corruption led into quite interesting suggestions. Most interesting is the fact that none of the suggested ways out of the evil lost sight of the fact that behaviours, generally, are a result of the interplay between an organism and its environment and that the behaviours lies at the core of

current social problems. The non-controversial roles and importance of psychology and psychologists as nation builders and professional human helpers is therefore brought to bear. Uguru-Okorie^[12] have advocated conscious application of psychological principles and technique at environmental manipulations and institutional reconstructions through enlightenments and sensitizations for value appreciation and a resultant enhancement of the quality of life and a constructive match of civilization. These, the scholar have called psychological engineering. The views is shared by the participants in this study. It may therefore be most vital that psychologists be mostly involved in the activities of the National Orientation Agency in Nigeria; for example and such other machineries of government and parastatals saddled with the responsibility of public enlightenment campaigns for value appreciation; since these professionals are most knowledgeable in the rudiments of behavioural changes and psychological engineering.

It may be quite vital too that the suggestions of stigmatization of corrupt individuals be considered alongside those of enactment and promulgation of rules without bias. Akanbi^[13] noted, with dismay, that rules in Nigeria are often not taken seriously by, even the stakeholders and , those at the helm of affairs. In such instances, good and stringent anti-corrupt laws will not work. Hence disorderliness, dishonestly and all sorts of corruptive acts will be the order of the day.

Stigmatization of corrupt individuals and genuine seizure and confiscation of their ill-gotten wealth may also be a vibrant way out of corruption. One may be apt to reason, most especially going by recent happenings with nabbed corrupt persons however, that stigmatization in itself might not be a debarring factor in corruption despite that it has been working miracles in HIV/AIDS related issues and patients. This is so because the process of contracting HIV/AIDS is usually associated with promiscuity and infidelity. These acts in themselves are societally regarded as filthy, unscrupulous and ridiculous. This is not the case, however, with wealth accumulations. Thus, whereas an HIV/AIDS patient may not want to be seen as such, one who is being accused of corruption, or white collar criminality, as often is the case, may care less so long as the riches or wealth are there to flaunt and sooner or later attract accolades. A case at hand, in this instance, is that of Mr. Tafa Balogun; the former Nigeria Inspector General of Police Or what do we say of Late General Sanni Abacha, the Nigeria proclaimed maximum dictator, accused to have starched away about a 500 billion Dollars in foreign accounts; and his family? How about Mr. Lawrence Agada, the cashier of the Lagos

Sheraton Hotels and Towers and the N39million saga. It is the candid opinion of this paper therefore that psychological engineering be adopted so that corruption, a behavioural pattern lying at the core of current social problems, can be tackled by inculcating both the leadership and the led, the elites and non-elitists, males and females against the virulent attack of the evil.

Sight is not lost of the influence of biology on behaviour though, but it is strongly opined that a sane world would inevitably produce a sane peoples in larger magnitude and leave the few insane manageable to the larger sane.

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