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Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector: Causes, Consequences and Sustainable Solutions

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Abstract

Corruption in Nigeria's public sector has long hindered the nation's development, stability, and prosperity. It permeates various facets of governance and society, leading to detrimental consequences, including economic stagnation, social injustice, and the erosion of public trust. Historical factors, such as the legacy of colonial exploitation and successive post-independence governments' mismanagement, have entrenched a culture of corruption. Despite efforts to combat it, including the establishment of anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), corruption remains pervasive. This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the complex dynamics of corruption in Nigeria's public sector. Using Albert Bandura's social learning theory as the theoretical framework, and it explores how corrupt behaviors are observed, imitated, and reinforced within the public administration. The research identifies multiple causes of corruption, including institutional weaknesses, economic pressures, and cultural norms, which create an environment conducive to corrupt practices. The consequences of corruption are enormous: It undermines economic growth and development, deters foreign direct investment, exacerbates poverty and inequality, erodes public trust in government, and fuels political unrest and instability. Addressing corruption requires a comprehensive approach involving the strengthening of institutional frameworks, promoting transparency and accountability, improving public sector management, and fostering a culture of ethical leadership. Sustainable solutions to combat corruption include; enhancing the capacities of anti-corruption agencies, to be independent of the executive body, implementing public procurement reforms, ensuring budget transparency, and enforcing stringent anti-corruption measures.

Keywords: Corruption, Public Sector, Public Sector Management, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission

Introduction

Corruption in Nigeria's public sector has long been a significant impediment to the nation's development, stability, and prosperity. The pervasive nature of corruption affects various aspects of governance and society, leading to a multitude of negative consequences (Banko, 2020) [11]. According to Nwokike, Achufusi and Abasili (2023) [26], it has become a persistent obstacle to the nation's growth, eroding the trust of citizens in government and hindering the effective delivery of public services. Corruption in Nigeria's public sector is a complex phenomenon with far-reaching consequences, affecting various aspects of national life, from economic growth and development to social justice and human well-being. The Nigerian public sector, which involves government ministries, departments, and agencies, is responsible for providing essential services, such as healthcare, education, infrastructure development, and security, to the citizenry (Nwokwu, Nwambe & Nwankwo, 2023) [27]. However, the sector has been marred by widespread corruption, manifesting in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and cronyism. This has resulted in the misallocation of resources, wastage, and inefficiency, ultimately affecting the quality of services delivered to the public.

The history of corruption in Nigeria's public sector can be traced back to the country's colonial past, when the British colonial administration exploited the nation's resources for their benefit. This exploitation laid the groundwork for a culture of corruption that persisted beyond independence, influencing subsequent governments and their interactions with public resources (Bönner, 2020) [12]. This legacy of exploitation and corruption continued after Nigeria gained independence in 1960. Successive governments perpetuated this culture of corruption, leading to widespread mismanagement of resources and stifling the country's socio-economic development. Various administrations, rather than rectifying the entrenched issues, often engaged in corrupt practices, resulting in a lack of accountability and transparency in governance (Ogunyemi, 2016) [29]. According to Iyaniwura (2014) [18], the military regimes of the 1980s and 1990s significantly contributed to the institutionalization of corruption in Nigeria. These regimes used state power not for the public good but rather to enrich themselves and their close associates. The leadership during these periods diverted public resources and funds into private accounts, creating a culture of impunity and unaccountability. Corruption became deeply embedded in the political and administrative structures, affecting all levels of government. This era saw a proliferation of corrupt practices such as embezzlement, bribery, and mismanagement of public funds, which had long-lasting negative impacts on the country's development and governance.

Despite Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, corruption has remained a persistent challenge, with the country consistently ranking low in global corruption indices (Olojede, 2024) [31]. This enduring issue undermines the effectiveness of democratic governance and erodes public trust in political institutions. Various forms of corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, continue to plague different sectors of the Nigerian economy and public service (Adamaagashi, Awakessien & Awakessien, 2024) [1]. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index has repeatedly placed Nigeria among the most corrupt countries in the world, reflecting deep-seated issues that hinder the nation's development and prosperity. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), published annually by Transparency International, has consistently ranked Nigeria among the most corrupt countries in the world. In the 2020 CPI report, Nigeria ranked 149 out of 80 countries, with a score of 25 out of 100, indicating a pervasive corruption problem (Owuamanam & Agbaenyi, 2021) [32]. Efforts to combat corruption, such as the establishment of anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), have yielded limited success (Jamiu, 2021) [19]. The pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria necessitates more robust and comprehensive reforms to strengthen institutional frameworks, enforce accountability, and promote transparency across all levels of government.

Research has linked corruption in Nigeria's public sector to various negative consequences. These include impacts on economic growth and development, foreign investment, poverty, and inequality (Makar, Ngutsav, Ijirshar & Ayaga, 2023; Ezeudu, 2023) [22, 16]. Corruption has been linked to decreased public trust in government, disillusionment, and disengagement from the political process (Aina & Shamsuddin, 2023) [4]. Furthermore, corruption has been associated with compromised public institutions, challenges to the rule of law, and a culture of impunity. In the light of above, it is essential to understand the causes, consequences, and sustainable solutions to address corruption in Nigeria's public sector. This will require a multifaceted approach that involves, independent operations of anti-corruption agencies, strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting transparency and accountability, enhancing public sector salaries and benefits, and fostering a culture of integrity and zero tolerance for corruption.

Conceptual Clarifications: Corruption and Public sector

Understanding the concepts of "Corruption" and the "Public Sector" is essential for grasping the dynamics of governance, economic management, and societal development. Corruption, involving the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain, poses significant challenges to transparency and fairness in public administration. Meanwhile, the public sector comprises government entities and services crucial for societal well-being, involving sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. According to the United Nations' Global Program against Corruption, there is no single, comprehensive, universally accepted definition of corruption (UNODC, 2004, cited in Brooks, Walsh, Lewis, Kim, 2013) [13]. This highlights the diverse interpretations and contextual variations in defining what constitutes corrupt practices across different regions and jurisdictions worldwide. Transparency International cited in Edmond (2023) [15], defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." The organization elaborates on the severe consequences of corruption, stating; "Corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division, and the environmental crisis." This definition encompasses a wide range of unethical behaviors that undermine societal foundations. Examples of corrupt behavior are diverse and pervasive. Public servants may engage in corruption by demanding or accepting money or other forms of bribes in exchange for providing services that should be available to the public for free or at a nominal cost. This type of corruption directly impacts the efficiency and reliability of public services, creating a culture of distrust and inefficiency. Politicians may misuse public funds or grant jobs and contracts to companies and individuals, based on personal relationships rather than merit. This not only misallocates resources but also perpetuates nepotism and cronyism, further weakening institutional integrity and governance.

Nwokike, Achufusi and Abasili (2023) [26] affirmed that corruption has proven to be a pervasive and formidable barrier to development, economic growth, and the establishment of effective governance in Nigeria. Its detrimental effects are extensive, contributing to widespread poverty, exacerbated inequality, and hindered socio-economic progress. Corruption undermines public trust in institutions, distorts resource allocation, and stifles investment, ultimately impeding efforts to achieve sustainable development goals and improve quality of life for the populace. Addressing corruption remains a critical challenge for Nigeria's path towards equitable growth, social justice, and effective governance. The Economic Times (2024) defines corruption as the misuse of public power for personal gain, which can manifest through various individuals in authority, such as elected politicians, civil servants, journalists, school administrators, and others. This misuse extends beyond public sectors to include private corruption occurring between individuals and businesses in areas such as education, heritage preservation, marriage, and more. Thus, corruption encompasses a broad spectrum of unethical behaviors across both public and private domains. Rose-Ackerman (2008) [35] defines corruption as the improper use of public office for personal gain. This definition acknowledges that determining what qualifies as misuse can be complex. It also acknowledges that there are situations where public officials may legitimately receive private benefits through their positions, such as appropriate compensation for their work or permissible fringe benefits. Thus, the definition seeks to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of public office for private gain, protecting the so called elites, emphasizing the importance of transparency, accountability, and ethical standards in governance.

Corruption, as defined by Manion (2004 cited in Okpara and Koumbiadis, 2013) [30], involves the deliberate misuse or abuse of public power entrusted to an individual or entity. It typically manifests as actions undertaken for personal or private gain, which contradict established rules and norms within a society. Such practices undermine the integrity and fairness of governmental, economic, and social systems, eroding public trust and distorting equitable allocation of resources. Liu (2016) [21] argues that the government serves as the executor of sovereign power, entrusted by the people. This authority is derived from the fundamental trust placed in it by the populace. However, when public officials veer from their intended responsibilities and begin to misuse their authority, issues such as corruption and abuse of power is inevitable. Such deviations from the original purpose of public power undermine the foundational trust between the government and its citizens, posing significant challenges to governance and societal well-being.

On the other hand, public sector, Popa (2017) [33], refers to government entities, government-controlled public enterprises, or government agencies that play a pivotal role in the state's economic framework. These entities are instrumental in implementing and regulating policies, providing essential public services, managing national resources, and fostering economic development. The public sector's influence extends across various sectors, impacting infrastructure development, social welfare programs, healthcare, education, and overall national economic stability. The public sector comprises a broad range of organizations and entities tasked with providing essential goods and services to society at large. These include not only crucial services like national defense and law enforcement, but also infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, and public transportation systems. Additionally, the public sector plays a pivotal role in safeguarding public health and safety through initiatives focused on environmental protection, food safety regulations, and public health programs. These efforts are aimed at benefiting the collective welfare of communities and society as a whole, rather than catering exclusively to individual needs or interests.

The public sector encompasses a broad range of entities that are owned, controlled, and operated by the government, including national, regional, and local governments, as well as institutional units controlled by government units (Task Force on Harmonization of Public Sector Accounting, 2006) [36]. This includes federal agencies, national institutions, state-owned enterprises, public schools and hospitals, and regulatory bodies, among others. These entities are established and managed by the government to provide essential services, regulate economic activity, and promote the public interest. The public sector plays a vital role in the economy and society, and its activities have a significant impact on the lives of citizens. Morim, Inácio and Vieira (2020) [24] described the public sector as a critical component of the economic system that is under the control of national, state or provincial, and local governments. This sector is responsible for delivering a wide range of services essential for the well-being and functioning of society, ensuring that communities have access to necessary resources and support. Typically, the public sector includes services such as infrastructures, which involve the construction and maintenance of facilities like roads, bridges, public transportation systems, and public buildings. These infrastructures are vital for economic activities and the mobility of goods and people. Waste management, another key service, involves the collection, treatment, and disposal of waste materials, crucial for maintaining public health and environmental sustainability. Water management is also a significant public sector service, ensuring the provision of clean and safe water for drinking, irrigation, and industrial use, as well as wastewater treatment and flood management systems to protect communities from water-related hazards. Health care services provided by the public sector aim to offer accessible and affordable medical care to all citizens, including hospitals, clinics, public health campaigns, vaccination programs, and emergency medical services. Security services are essential for ensuring the safety and security of the populace through law enforcement, fire services, emergency response teams, and disaster management agencies, playing a crucial role in maintaining public order and protecting citizens from various threats. Anti-corruption agencies are saddled with investigating, prosecuting and recovery of stolen assets and properties derived from corruption. On the other hand, the public sector provides accommodations for homeless people, offering shelters, transitional housing, and social services to help them reintegrate into society and improve their quality of life.

Additionally, some of the key services provided by the public sector include law enforcement, which ensures public safety and upholds the rule of law; national defense, which protects the country from external threats; public transportation systems, which facilitate the movement of people and goods; and transit infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports that supports economic activities and daily commuting. Educational institutions, ranging from primary schools to universities, are also a crucial part of the public sector. These institutions provide education to the populace, fostering knowledge, skills, and personal development, which are vital for the social and economic progress of a nation. Additionally, health services, including hospitals, clinics, and public health campaigns, play a significant role in maintaining public health, preventing diseases, and providing medical care to all citizens, irrespective of their financial status. Unlike the private sector, the public sector does not aim to make a profit from the services it provides. Instead, its primary objective is to ensure that essential services are accessible and affordable to the general public. The funding for these services typically comes from taxpayers' money, which is collected through various forms of taxation. The focus of the public sector is on serving the public interest, promoting social equity, and enhancing the quality of life for all members of society (MasterClass, 2022) [23].

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to elucidate the complex dynamics of corruption in Nigeria's public sector. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this inquiry as it enables an in-depth examination of the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of various stakeholders regarding corruption, thereby providing rich insights into the phenomenon's nature and character. The qualitative approach also enabled the exploration of the social and cultural norms that perpetuate corruption, as well as the ways in which power dynamics and institutional weaknesses contribute to the persistence of corrupt practices. Furthermore, the study's qualitative design allowed for the identification of subtle patterns and themes that might have been overlooked through quantitative analysis, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complex issues surrounding corruption in Nigeria's public sector.

Theoretical Framework

This study is domiciled within the social learning theory, pioneered by Albert Bandura, which posits that knowledge acquisition is a complex process involving observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory acknowledges the interplay between environmental stimuli, cognitive processes, and emotional experiences in shaping individual learning outcomes (Cherry, 2022) [14]. Bandura's social learning theory proposes that knowledge acquisition is a vicarious process, where individuals learn by witnessing the outcomes of others' actions, thereby transcending the boundaries of traditional behavioral and cognitive theories. By acknowledging the interplay between observational experiences, environmental factors, and psychological processes, this theory offers a comprehensive understanding of learning, surpassing the limitations of conditioning and cognitive influences alone.

Corruption in the Nigerian public sector is a deeply ingrained issue, perpetuated by a complex interaction of factors. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, public officials learn corrupt behaviors by observing their colleagues and superiors engaging in corrupt practices, and reinforce these behaviors through the benefits and rewards that come with them. The lack of effective oversight, weak institutions, and absence of consequences for corrupt behavior create an environment that perpetuates corruption. For instance, a young public official may observe their superior accepting bribes from contractors and learn that that it is an easy and acceptable way to supplement incomes. As they rise through the ranks, they may adopt similar practices, reinforcing the culture of corruption within the organization. Meanwhile, the public becomes disillusioned with the government's inability to address corruption, further entrenching the cycle of corruption.

Causes of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

Corruption in the Nigerian public sector is a pervasive issue that undermines governance, hinders economic development, and erodes public trust. It manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and favoritism, affecting all levels of government and public institutions. Understanding the causes of corruption is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat it and promote transparency and accountability. This examination probe into the myriad causes of corruption in the Nigerian public sector, exploring the interplay of institutional weaknesses, economic pressures, political influences, cultural norms, legal deficiencies, administrative challenges, and external factors.

Gbadamosi and Ajogbeje (2018) [17] argue that the intense desire for material wealth is a significant driver of political corruption in Nigeria. Their study explore how materialism fuels corrupt practices among political leaders and public officials. The authors suggest that the pursuit of luxury and financial gain often takes precedence over ethical considerations and public service. This passion for materialism leads to the misuse of power and resources, as individuals in positions of authority engage in bribery, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption to accumulate wealth. The study highlights the need for a cultural shift towards valuing integrity and transparency in governance to combat the pervasive issue of political corruption in Nigeria. In their analysis, Akah and Uzoh (2019) [5] explored into the broader implications of this phenomenon, highlighting its impact on societal norms and individual aspirations. They suggested that the normalization of extravagant material desires among young people reflects a shift towards prioritizing conspicuous consumption and status symbols over other forms of personal or communal achievement. This trend, they argue, not only distorts values but also fosters a culture where material wealth is equated with success and fulfillment, potentially undermining the development of more holistic and sustainable societal goals. By framing this trend as a "social sickness," the authors underscore the urgency of addressing these values within educational, cultural, and policy frameworks to promote more balanced and inclusive definitions of personal and societal well-being.

Yusuf (2014) [38] argues that the poor reward system in Nigeria represents a critical factor contributing to widespread corruption within the country. The author contends that Nigeria's reward system is widely regarded as one of the most deficient globally, characterized by inadequate incentives and recognition for public servants and officials who demonstrate integrity in their roles. This lack of a robust reward mechanism, according to Yusuf, creates an environment where corrupt practices can flourish with impunity. The absence of sufficient incentives for ethical behavior among public officials is believed to undermine efforts to combat corruption effectively, perpetuating a cycle where dishonest practices are often seen as the only viable means of advancement or survival within bureaucratic and governmental structures in Nigeria. The study conducted by Bakare-Aremu, Mamman, Baba-Umar, and Salisu (2021) [10] extensively examines the state of the public rewards system in Nigeria. It underscored that the current system operates well below the subsistence income level, rendering it insufficient to meet the basic needs of public servants. This stark reality has unfortunately fostered a pervasive culture of corruption, where individuals resort to illicit means as a coping strategy or to fill the income gap left by inadequate public rewards. The study's findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing the transparency, adequacy, and fairness of Nigeria's public rewards system to combat corruption effectively. Promise (2011) [34] noted that the reward system in Nigeria is arguably one of the poorest globally. This observation underscores the significant deficiencies and challenges inherent in Nigeria's reward structure, particularly in comparison to international standards. The inadequacy of the reward system not only affects public sector workers, but also has broader implications for the overall socio-economic development of the country. Addressing these shortcomings is crucial for fostering a more equitable and sustainable economic environment in Nigeria.

Kabiru, S. A. (2019) [20] states persuasively that corruption is not merely a product of individual moral failings, but is intricately linked to the strength or weakness of governmental institutions. He posits that corruption thrives most prominently in environments where governmental institutions are characterized by profound weaknesses. These weaknesses can manifest in several forms, including inadequate regulatory frameworks, ineffective enforcement mechanisms, dependency on power that be, and a lack of transparency and accountability. At the heart of Kabiru's analysis is the idea that corruption flourishes when there are significant gaps in the institutional capacity to prevent, detect, and punish corrupt practices. When institutions tasked with governance lack the necessary resources, independence, and political will to uphold ethical standards and enforce legal frameworks, they become susceptible to capture by vested interests and susceptible to rent-seeking behavior. According to Gbadamosi and Ajogbeje (2018) [17], the weak enforcement mechanisms in Nigeria stands out as a significant cause of political corruption. Their analysis emphasizes that while Nigeria may have laws and regulations in place to combat corruption, the effectiveness of these measures is often undermined by inadequate enforcement. This inadequacy allows corrupt practices to persist largely unchecked, contributing to a pervasive culture of impunity among political actors and public officials. Weak enforcement mechanisms create loopholes that can be exploited by individuals and groups seeking personal gain at the expense of public welfare. This situation is exacerbated by factors such as inadequate funding for anti-corruption agencies, lack of political will to prosecute high-profile cases, and judicial inefficiencies that delay or derail corruption trials. As a result, perpetrators of corruption often face minimal consequences for their actions, if any, which further emboldens others to engage in similar illicit activities. In Yusuf's analysis (2014) [38], the lukewarm attitude of key enforcers of the law, such as EFCC, ICPC, police officers, and public officials, significantly contributes to the prevalence of corrupt behavior in society. This lukewarm attitude refers to a lack of commitment, diligence, or impartiality in enforcing laws and regulations designed to combat corruption. When those entrusted with upholding the rule of law exhibit indifference or compromise their integrity, it creates an environment where individuals engaging in corrupt practices believe they can act with impunity. He argues that when corrupt individuals perceive that enforcement agencies and judicial authorities are unwilling or unable to hold them accountable, they are emboldened to continue their illicit activities. This perception not only undermines the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures but also erodes public trust in the fairness and impartiality of the justice system. Moreover, the complicity or inaction of enforcement officials can perpetuate a cycle of corruption by reinforcing a culture where unethical behavior is tolerated or even rewarded within certain circles of influence.

Kabiru (2019) [20] asserts that fear of poverty plays a significant role as a major contributor to corruption within the Nigerian public sector. According to Kabiru's analysis, the pervasive fear of living in poverty drives many individuals within governmental institutions to engage in corrupt practices. This fear stems from the perceived inadequacy of official salaries and benefits to meet basic needs and sustain a desired standard of living. Consequently, public officials may resort to bribery, embezzlement, or other forms of corrupt practices as a means to supplement their income and ensure financial security. Kabiru's findings underscore the complex interplay between economic insecurity and ethical conduct within Nigeria's public administration, highlighting the systemic challenges that contribute to corruption in the country.

In his analysis, Ogunyemi (2014) [28] highlighted a tumultuous period from 1950 to Nigeria's independence in 1960, characterized by a pervasive atmosphere of competition among various government departments and agencies. This competition, unfortunately, was not centered on productive governance, but rather on the misuse of public funds. Numerous instances arose where governmental entities engaged in practices that diverted public resources for personal gain or other non-official purposes. Despite existing legal provisions intended to promote cooperation among agencies for detecting and prosecuting corrupt behaviors, these regulations often fell short in practice. Interagency collaboration, crucial for identifying and addressing instances of corruption, frequently languished due to institutional rivalries, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, or political interference. As a result, the enforcement of anti-corruption measures remained inconsistent, allowing malfeasance to persist largely unchecked within the government apparatus. The period leading to Nigeria's independence was therefore marked by significant governance challenges, where the efficient allocation and management of public resources were compromised by internal competition and insufficient regulatory oversight. This historical context underscores broader issues in administrative accountability and transparency, highlighting ongoing efforts needed to strengthen institutional frameworks and foster a culture of integrity within Nigeria's governance structures. Angeles and Neanidis (2015) [8] argued that corruption in developing countries is deeply rooted in their historical experiences, particularly tracing back to their colonial periods. The colonial era often established bureaucratic structures and governance systems that were susceptible to corruption due to centralized control, lack of transparency, and limited accountability to local populations. These systems prioritized the extraction of resources and the maintenance of colonial authority, often at the expense of local development and welfare. Colonial administrations frequently operated under dual legal systems, where informal norms and practices coexisted with formal legal frameworks. This duality contributed to ambiguity and opportunities for rent-seeking behavior among both local elites and colonial officials. Practices such as bribery, favoritism, and embezzlement became entrenched during this time, shaping post-colonial governance dynamics in many developing countries. According to Ali, Fjeldstad and Shifa (2021) [7], there is an empirical evidence that British colonial rule in Africa fostered the corruption of local elites (chiefs), with the lasting effect of perpetuating clientelism and undermining the legitimacy of post-colonial governance structures. This historical legacy has entrenched informal networks of patronage and undermined efforts towards accountable and transparent governance in many African countries.

Consequences of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

1. Corruption undermines economic growth and development

According to Nwankwo (2014) [25], corruption in the Nigerian public sector not only diverts public resources away from productive investments and infrastructure development, but also significantly hampers the creation of a conducive business environment. This misallocation of resources undermines the government's ability to foster economic growth and development, as funds that could be used to improve infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and healthcare, are instead siphoned off through corrupt practices. Consequently, the lack of adequate infrastructures and the uncertain business environment deter both local and foreign investment, stifling economic progress and perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment. Addressing corruption in the public sector is thus critical for Nigeria to realize its full economic potential and enhance its attractiveness as a destination for sustainable business activities. Makar, Ngutsav, Ijirshar, and Ayaga (2023) [22] conducted a comprehensive study examining the impact of corrupt practices on economic growth in Nigeria. Their findings reveal that while increases in the prevalence of corrupt practices have a significant negative effect on long-term economic growth, particularly through channels such as reduced investment, inefficiencies in public spending, and undermined institutional quality, the immediate short-term effects appear statistically insignificant. This suggests that while corruption may not immediately disrupt economic activity in measurable ways, its cumulative impact over time poses substantial challenges to sustainable development and economic stability.

2. Corruption deters foreign direct investment

Makar, Ngutsav, Ijirshar, and Ayaga (2023) [22] argue that corruption acts as a significant deterrent to both foreign direct investment (FDI) and domestic investment within the country. They highlight that pervasive corruption undermines investor confidence, increases business costs through bribery and inefficiencies, and creates an unstable business environment. As a result, countries grappling with high levels of corruption often experience reduced FDI inflows and diminished domestic investment, hindering economic growth and development prospects. Akinlabi, Hamed & Awoniyi (2011) [6] affirmed that corruption has a significant negative impact on foreign direct investment (FDI) in Nigeria. This means that corruption acts as a deterrent for foreign investors who are considering investing in the country. The presence of widespread corruption undermines investor confidence by increasing perceived risks, such as unfair competition, unpredictable regulatory environments, and the potential for extortion or bribery demands. Consequently, countries with high levels of corruption often experience reduced inflows of FDI compared to nations with stronger anti-corruption measures and more transparent business practices. Thus, addressing corruption becomes crucial for fostering a conducive investment climate that attracts foreign capital and promotes sustainable economic growth.

3. Corruption perpetuates poverty and inequality

Corruption exacerbates income inequality and poverty through several mechanisms: It stifles economic growth by diverting resources away from productive investments into personal gain; it maintains biased tax systems that often favor the wealthy and well-connected, reducing government revenue needed for social programs; it leads to the inefficient targeting of social programs, diminishing their effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable; and it enables the affluent to influence government policies in their favor, perpetuating inequality in asset ownership and opportunities. Babayo, Saalah & Abdulkadir (2018) [9] assert that political corruption in Nigeria constitutes a critical factor in the exacerbation of poverty levels, as evidenced by robust empirical findings. They contend that the prevalence of corruption directly correlates with escalating poverty rates: As corruption becomes more pervasive, poverty levels demonstrably rise. This phenomenon occurs because resources earmarked for socioeconomic development are systematically misused and siphoned off by a privileged ruling class, thereby perpetuating and intensifying artificial impoverishment among the populace. Aina (2014) [3] strongly asserts that corruption perpetuates poverty and inequality in Nigeria. This perspective is supported by several examples illustrating how corrupt practices divert resources intended for poverty alleviation programs and essential infrastructure. The scholar argues that grand corruption, particularly the embezzlement of significant public funds, leaves communities without adequate health facilities, educational institutions, and basic infrastructure like roads. As a result, poverty deepens as resources that could have been used for development are misused or stolen. Moreover, corruption in sectors like banking and energy further exacerbates socioeconomic disparities, leading to a cycle where the poorest segments of society suffer the most. Therefore, the scholar's stance underscores the critical link between corruption and the perpetuation of poverty and inequality in Nigeria.

4. Corruption erodes public trust and confidence in government

Adamaagashi, Awakessien and Awakessien (2024) [1] argued that in the long run, the pervasive nature of corruption profoundly impacts societal cohesion and governance integrity. Corruption not only undermines public trust in governmental institutions but also corrodes the foundational fabric of society. When citizens perceive that public resources are consistently mismanaged and public officials are enriching themselves at the expense of societal well-being, it breeds a deep-seated cynicism about the government's ability to fulfill its obligations. This erosion of trust can have far-reaching consequences, leading to widespread disillusionment and a breakdown of civic engagement. Social unrest may ensue as disenfranchised citizens' protest against perceived injustices and inequities perpetuated by corruption. Democratic norms and principles of accountability are compromised, further entrenching governance challenges and hindering sustainable development efforts. The cycle of corruption becomes self-perpetuating. As corruption persists unchecked, it reinforces negative perceptions of government legitimacy and exacerbates inequality. Efforts to build transparent and accountable governance structures are undermined, hindering progress towards achieving inclusive development and equitable societal outcomes. Aderoju (2023) [2] states that corruption subverts these core principles and erodes public trust in government institutions and the legal system. When public officials engage in corrupt practices, such as bribery, embezzlement, or favoritism, they undermine the fundamental principles of accountability, transparency, and fairness upon which democratic governance relies. This erosion of ethical standards not only distorts decision-making processes but also perpetuates inequalities and impedes socio-economic progress. As a consequence, citizens lose confidence in their government's ability to serve their interests impartially, weakening the social contract essential for a stable and functioning society.

5. Corruption fuels political unrest and instability

In the view of Ugbudu (2020) [37], corruption has profoundly harmed Nigeria by undermining fundamental pillars of society such as trust, fairness, and justice. This erosion of ethical standards has directly contributed to escalating levels of political instability across the nation. The prevalence of endemic political violence, ethno-religious conflicts, and widespread terrorism can largely be attributed to the socioeconomic consequences of corruption. Rampant unemployment and pervasive poverty, exacerbated by corrupt practices, have created a fertile ground for social unrest and disenchantment among the populace.

Conclusion

Corruption in the Nigerian public sector stands as a formidable barrier to sustainable development and integrity in governance, fueled by a complex dynamics of institutional weaknesses, favoritism, economic pressures, cultural norms, and inadequate legal frameworks. The consequences of corruption are profound and enormous, undermining economic growth, deterring foreign investment, perpetuating poverty and inequality, eroding public trust in government institutions, and fueling political instability. Addressing corruption requires comprehensive reforms that strengthen institutional capacity and independence, enhance transparency, enforce stringent anti-corruption measures, and promote a culture of integrity and accountability. Sustainable solutions must prioritize robust enforcement mechanisms, equitable reward systems, and civic engagement to foster a diplomatic governance and environment that serves the interests of all Nigerians equitably and transparently. By tackling corruption decisively, Nigeria can unlock its full economic potential and build a foundation for inclusive development and lasting societal progress.

Recommendations / Sustainable Solutions to Address Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

Corruption remains a formidable challenge in Nigeria's public sector, undermining development, eroding public trust, and impeding socio-economic progress. Addressing this pervasive issue requires comprehensive and sustained efforts across various fronts. The following recommendations propose strategic interventions to combat corruption effectively:

1. **Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:** Implementing robust regulatory frameworks and strengthening institutional capacities to enforce laws and regulations effectively is essential. This includes ensuring independence, adequate funding, and technical expertise for anti-corruption agencies like EFCC and ICPC.
2. **Enhancing Transparency and Accountability:** Promoting transparency through open governance practices, such as public procurement reforms, budget transparency initiatives, and asset declaration requirements for public officials, can mitigate opportunities for corrupt practices.
3. **Improving Public Sector Management:** Reforming public sector management to enhance efficiency, meritocracy, and professionalism can reduce patronage-based appointments and nepotism, which are fertile grounds for corruption.
4. **Promoting Ethical Leadership:** Fostering a culture of ethical leadership through training, mentorship, and accountability mechanisms for political leaders and public officials is crucial. Emphasizing integrity and ethical conduct in governance can shift norms towards more responsible and accountable behavior.
5. **Empowering Civil Society and Media:** Strengthening civil society organizations and independent media to act as watchdogs can increase public oversight and accountability. Supporting investigative journalism and citizen engagement initiatives can expose corrupt practices and hold perpetrators accountable.
6. **Engaging International Cooperation:** Collaborating with international partners to recover stolen assets, share best practices in anti-corruption measures, and promote global standards of governance can bolster domestic efforts to combat corruption.
7. **Reforming Legal and Judicial Systems:** Reforming legal frameworks to expedite corruption trials, ensure impartiality, and strengthen penalties for offenders can deter corrupt practices and restore confidence in the justice system.
8. Reforming or enact a law that will make the anti-corruption agencies to be independent of the executive body.

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