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Corruption, Governance and Political Instability in Nigeria

Omololu Fagbadebo

Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. E-mail: tomololu@oauife.edu.ng or otomololu@yahoo.com.

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The Nigerian State is a victim of high-level corruption, bad governance, political instability and a cyclical legitimacy crisis. Consequently, national development is retarded, and the political environment uncertain. The country's authoritarian leadership faced a legitimacy crisis, political intrigues, in an ethnically - differentiated polity, where ethnic competition for resources drove much of the pervasive corruption and profligacy. While the political gladiators constantly manipulated the people and the political processes to advance their own selfish agenda, the society remained pauperized, and the people wallowed in abject poverty. This invariably led to weak legitimacy, as the citizens lacked faith in their political leaders and by extension, the political system. Participation in government was low because citizens perceived it as irrelevant to their lives. In the absence of support from civil society, the effective power of government was eroded. Patron - client relationships took a prime role over the formal aspects of politics, such as the rule of law, well-functioning political parties, and a credible electoral system. In order to break this cycle and ensure good governance, accountability and transparency must be guaranteed.

Key words: Corruption, legitimacy, patron – client relations, political stability, oil revenue, accountability, transparency.

INTRODUCTION

It was Ake (1995) who painted a gloomy picture of the African continent saying: "Most of Africa is not developing." This apt description of the decline in nearly all African countries underscores the depth of underdevelopment ravaging the people in the midst of abundant natural resources. While most of these countries gained independence in the 1960s, the struggle to ensure national development and political stability proved negative. According to Ake (1995).

"Decades of efforts have yielded largely stagnation, regression or worse. The tragic consequences of this are increasingly clear: a rising tide of poverty, decaying public utilities and infrastructures, social tensions and political turmoil, and now, premonition of inevitable drive into conflict and violence".

Several factors have been identified for this dysfunctional state of the African state and the third world. Kesselman et al. (1996), blamed this on three principal factors- scarce resources, weak legitimacy and patron-client or what

is commonly known in Nigeria as "godfather" politics. Scarce resources engender poverty, inequality and a weak position in the international economic system. State control of the limited resources provide the leeway for officers, political and bureaucratic, to manipulate government spending to advance their personal fortunes. This led to weak legitimacy, as the citizens lack faith in their political leaders, and, by extension, the political system. Participation in government is low because the citizens perceive it as irrelevant to their lives. In the absence of the support of the civil society, the effective power of government is eroded. Patron-client relationships take the primacy over the formal aspects of politics such as the rule of law, well-functioning political parties, and a credible electoral system. Ake (1995) locates the genesis of this problem in the inclement political and social conditions in the developing countries. This manifests in poor planning and implementation, lack of entrepreneurial abilities, the stifling of market forces, falling commodity prices and unfavourable terms of trade, poverty of ideas, the dependency syndrome, corruption and indiscipline.

He specifically identifies two major governance issues that proved to be more debilitating impediments to development performance (Ake, 1995). One is the lack of participation and consensus - building, which Mayer et al. (1996) and Kessleman et al. (1996) called the lack of a sense of national community. Meaningful development and political stability require the collective identity of the citizenry. Where this is lacking,

“well-meaning development projects are regarded with suspicion, indifference or even hostility and at best, as an exploitative resource, something to be taken advantage of rather than something to be committed to (Ake, 1995)”.

Secondly and closely related to this, is the lack of accountability and transparency. This has a grave effect on development, as corruption and inefficiency are concealed; as observed with the spate of abandoned projects. The African State, according to Ayittey (2006),

“has evolved into a predatory monster or a gangster state that uses a convoluted system of regulations and controls to pillage and rob the productive class-the peasantry. It is common knowledge that heads of state, ministers, and highly placed African government officials raid the African treasury, misuse their positions in government to extort commissions on foreign loan contracts, skim foreign aid, inflate contracts to cronies for kickbacks and deposit the loot in overseas banks. The very people who are supposed to defend and protect the peasants' interests are themselves engaged in institutionalized looting”.

These governance issues have produced a baneful structure in an environment that engenders instability in the political system as the people yearn for the elusive dividends of good governance.

The history of Nigeria is tainted with the absence of good moral and ethical values in the conduct of the ruling elites. This has adversely affected economic growth and development. As corruption impacts negatively on economic growth, it is also politically destabilizing. Corruption and the abuse of power have long been features of Nigeria's economic and political landscape. The National Planning Commission has identified systemic corruption, which engenders low levels of transparency and accountability, as the major source of development failure (National Planning Commission, 2005). As Toyo has rightly noted, the underprivileged are the victims of this failure while the ruling class hypocritically engages in the condemnation of acts that benefit its fold (Toyo, 2006). An analyst attributes the prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian polity to the “criminal silence” of political elites (Tell, 2006). Thus, behaviours that are openly suggestive of large-scale corruption are not condemned outright, but treated with utmost cynicism.

This paper will highlight the contradiction, which impeded national development but promoted political instabili-

ty within the context of the Nigerian state. The analysis is under three categories - leadership, corruption, and political intrigues, with reference to the institutional and systemic structures where they operate.

Leadership and political instability

Scholars have described Nigeria, as an “unfinished state”, (Joseph et al., 1996), and as “a truculent African tragedy” (Ayittey, 2006) in the midst of abundant human and material resources, which are propelled in the vicious cycle of poverty and autocracy. Efforts at building a democratic polity further entrapped it at the “political crossroads” (Kew, 2006). With enormous wealth from oil resources, and economic, social and political strength, Nigeria is qualified to be called the giant of Africa. As (Kew, 2006). has noted:

“The giant was brought to its knees by 20 years of brutal and corrupt military rule, which left a legacy of executive dominance and a political corruption in the hands of Nigeria's so-called “godfathers”-powerful political bosses sitting atop vast patronage networks who view the government primarily through the lens of their own personal enrichment”.

Because of this instability, the focus of the leadership became parochial with the overriding consideration for personal survival rather than national development. Attempts at promoting “democratic consolidation” were hampered by the personality cult of the emerging political gladiators who exploited the instrument of state power to promote their personal agenda. Nigeria's political elites, as Sklar et al (2006) have rightly observed, “vie for power and control over the vast spoils of office”. The centralized political and economic structures “made the military and civilian individuals who controlled key state posts fabulously wealthy, while 70% of Nigerians fell into abject poverty” (Sklar et al., 2006). These leaders have in common brazen disregard for the rule of law, lack of an independent judiciary and the legislature. Poor leadership has led to stagnation, and alienation of the citizenry, causing a low level of system affect - the sense of belonging to and identifying with the political system (Mayer et al., 1996). According to (Kew, 2006):

“The Nigerian government remains distant from serving the interest of its people. Politics at the federal, state, and local levels of the Nigerian federation are dominated by the powerful mandarin who built vast patronage networks during the military days and who now use political office to expand these networks and their personal fortunes. Moreover, many of these so-called “godfathers” have been cultivating personal militias to secure their positions, prompting a local arm race in some regions...even though several governors are under indictment for money laundering abroad and others are being investigated at home, the bo-

nanza continues at public coffers for these power holders, while basic infrastructure in many parts of the country remains as dilapidated as it was under military rule”

This situation, as Ake (1995) has indicated, was the product of the pattern of state affairs in the developing world. According to him, the high premium on political power, and the attendant intense struggle for it, marginalized national development for the promotion of the personal interests of the political leaders.

“Besieged by a multitude of hostility forces, most of the leaders in Africa are politically insecure. They are so completely engrossed in the struggle for survival that they are hardly able to address the problem of development (Ake, 1995)”.

It is instructive to note that the leadership problem in the Nigerian polity was a manifestation of the dysfunctional pattern of the years of military interregnum (Omo-Bare, 1996; Kirk-Greene and Rimmer, 1981; Mundt and Aborisade, 2005; Mayer et al., 1996; Joseph et al., 1996). The leadership pattern in Nigeria lacks the necessary focus capable of instilling national development and promotes political stability (Sklar et al., 2006). Rather, Nigerian leaders are preoccupied with their desires for the appropriation and privatization of the Nigerian state (Sklar et al., 2006; Ake, 1995). The fall of the Second Republic, for instance, was precipitated by the pervasive corruption and, the attendant political violence that greeted electoral manipulations, in a bid to stick to power (Ayeni, 1988). Similarly, the military coups and counter coups were also plagued by bad leadership, although their successors did not fair better. Consequently, development performance was slowed down, and political instability continued to pervade the polity, as focus was shifted to combat the looming forces of insecurity and internal regime instability.

Corruption and the Nigerian State

Divergent views on corruption agree that it is bad behaviour. Corruption may not be easy to define but, according to Tanzi (1998), it is “generally not difficult to recognize when observed”. The most simplified and popular definition adopted by the World Bank is “the abuse of public power for private benefit” (Tanzi, 1998; Gray and Kaufmann, 1998). The different perspectives through which corruption is viewed, notwithstanding, a common ground of opinion conceives it as the perpetration of a vice against the public well-being. Lipset and Lenz (2000), define corruption as an “effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means-private gain at public expense. Tanzi (1995) defines it neutrally as the “intentional noncompliance with arm’s length relationship aimed at deriving some advantages from this behaviour for oneself

or for related individuals.” This definition takes care of the exclusion of vital issues, such as corruption in the private sector and in private activities. Tanzi believes that corruption occurs in every human endeavour and “often difficult to observe because acts of corruption do not typically take place in broad daylight” (Tanzi, 1998).

Alatas et al. (2006), briefly define corruption as a “situation where two people can act to increase their own pay-off at the expense of a third person”. This does not mean, however, that an individual cannot perpetrate the act. The point here is that, most often, it takes at least two people to perfect an act probably conceived by an individual. Gray and Kaufmann (1998) define acts of corruption to include “bribery and extortions, which necessarily involve at least two parties and other malfeasances that a public official can carry out alone including fraud and embezzlement.” To them, it manifests in governmental activities through the “appropriation of public assets for private use and embezzlement of public funds by politicians and high-level officials.”

This description combines political and bureaucratic officials. People might assume that only politicians in government are corrupt. Most often, bureaucrats provide the templates for perfected corruption. In fact, most corrupt practices are only exposed by bureaucrats when they are excluded from sharing in the proceeds. Thus, corruption in government cannot be a unilateral action. Therefore, corruption manifests in all facets of governmental activities - contracts, the allocation of benefits, collection of public revenues, and judicial pronouncements. Officials involved in performing these duties partake at one stage or the other, in the abuse of the processes.

Dike contends that corruption is a function of great inequality in wealth distribution, the perception that political offices are the primary means of gaining access to wealth, conflicts between changing moral codes, weakness of social and governmental enforcement mechanism and a lack of a strong sense of national community. Gray and Kaufmann (1998), identify seven factors that engender corruption. These are the value of wages and salaries, presence of strong opportunities and awareness of how to perpetrate corruption, weak measures against accountability, population, natural resources wealth, lack of political will and indecisive pressure and assistance from the global community. These corruption-enhancing factors vary from one culture to the other and from one political system to the other. One key point to note, however, is that it is possible to identify an act of corruption when it is perpetrated irrespective of cultural or political background. Corrupt practices are obvious.

Nigeria presents a veritable case for understanding the connection between corruption and political malaise. Ribadu (2006) gave a graphic summary of the situation. He termed the period between 1979 and 1998 “the darkest period” in Nigeria’s history of corrupt regimes. The civilian administration of 1979 - 1983 was bedeviled with profligacy, “wanton waste, political thuggery and coercion...

disrespect for the rule of law...bare faced, free for all looting of public funds through white elephant projects" (Ribadu, 2006).

"Corrupt public servants and others in the private sector bestrode the nation, masquerading as captains of business and power brokers with tainted and stolen wealth and demanded the rest of us to kowtow before them. The period of military regime was pathetic. Under them, corruption became the sole guiding principle for running affairs of state. The period witnessed a total reversal and destruction of every good thing in the country (Ribadu, 2006)".

The Nigeria's economic and political landscape is pervaded by corruption and abuse of office. The National Planning Commission has noted that:

"Systemic corruption and low levels of transparency and accountability have been major sources of development failure. Illegal activities such as the advance fee-fraud (known as 419) and money laundering have torn the fabric of Nigerian society (National Planning Commission, 2005)".

Unconventional and fraudulent trade, misappropriation or diversion of funds, kickbacks, under and over invoicing, bribery, false declarations, abuse of office, and collection of illegal tolls, among other malfeasant practices, are the forms that corruption take in Nigeria. In the international system, Nigeria is rated as one of the most corrupt nations of the world, a ranking that has denied the country its pride of place in the international economic system (Transparency International, 2006). It has been noted that, "Corruption is far more dangerous than drug trafficking or other crimes because when it goes unpunished, the public loses confidence in the legal system and those who enforce the law" (Adeseyoju, 2006).

Corruption and bad governance were the two major reasons often cited by the military to rationalize their incursion into politics in Nigeria (Adekanye, 1993; Ikoku, 1985; Ojiako, 1980; Luckham, 1971). However, the succeeding military regimes could not stem the tide of corruption, and insatiate good governance. Rather, with the wholesale deployment of force, the Nigerian polity passed through phases of deepening corruption and political instability.¹ For a period of 29 years, the praetorian character of the Nigerian political system stifled the polity of all democratic ethos. The new set of political actors who had experienced military rule also imbibed an autocratic political culture, which provided a veritable environment for corrupt practices. These include the mentality of force, intolerance of opposition, and an unbridled appetite for wealth through the appropriation of state resources for private gain.

Its leaders' appetite for the soul of the Nigerian state was exacerbated by government control of the resources² (Joseph et al., 1996). Because of the enormous resour-

ces, government officials took advantage of the state machinery to manipulate collective wealth for their personal use³. For instance, former military head of State, late General Sani Abacha "paralysed the machinery of governance and pauperized the citizenry in five years of dictatorship and frenetic looting (Tell, 2006). He was reputed to have stolen US\$1.13 billion and 413million British pounds sterling, apart from US\$386.2million defrauded through fictitious and inflated contracts (ibid). This, Ake insists, should ordinarily not happen to a state "because when they happen the state effectively ceases to exist as a state and compromises its ability to pursue development" (Ake, 1995). The Nigerian state is a victim of high-level corruption causing the retardation of national development and a ceaseless cycle of crisis arising from peoples' discontent against the government.

Corruption became legitimized, especially during the Babangida and Abacha regimes (1985-1998), with huge revenues, but wasteful spending, and nothing to show in terms of physical developments. The culture of corruption through what Nigerians have come to know as settlement syndrome became part of the country's political culture. All the positive values for development were jettisoned. Governmental agencies that were the pilots of socio-economic developments were decimated.⁴ The decline in the education sector today has its roots in this period (Nwaka).

The "kamikaze" plunder by military bandits reduced the "giant of Africa" to a comatose midget...As money flowed into Nigerian government coffers, military dictators went on a spending spree. They frittered away the oil bonanza on extravagant investment projects..." (Ayittey 2006). In 1988, a Dedication and Other Special Accounts was established by the Federal Government at the Central Bank to "house the proceeds of the sale of crude oil dedicated to special projects and to receive the windfall oil revenues from the Gulf War" (Okigbo, 1994). The staggering revelation in this report was that out of the 124 billion US dollars realized in the accounts, 12.2 billion US dollars:

"was liquidated in less than six years: that they were spent on what could be neither adjudged genuine high priority nor truly regenerative investment that neither the president nor the governor accounted to anyone for these massive extra budgetary expenditure; that these disbursements were clandestinely undertaken, while the country was openly reeling with a crushing eternal debt-overhang that represent a gross abuse of public trust (Okigbo, 1994)".

This kind of troubling revelation, in a country with decedent leadership, should serve as a base for apprehending the culprits with a view to bringing them to justice. On the contrary, however, the culprits are presently active 'power brokers' in Nigeria's 'godfather politics', seeking democratic avenues to perpetuate their rule (Sklar et al., 2006). Corruption in Nigeria is systemic. As Gray and Kaufmann (1998) posited,

“where there is systemic corruption, the institution values, and norms of behaviour have already been adapted to a corruption *modus operandi* with bureaucrats and other agents follow the predatory examples of, or even taking instruction from, their principals in the political arena”.

In such a polity, the likelihood of detection and punishment decreases, and incentives are thereby created for corruption to increase. This is exactly what happened after the revelation. The military took corruption to its highest levels ever. Ironically, as previously stated, when they seized power from democratically elected governments, pervasive corruption was cited as the justification (Akinseye-George, 2000). It is clear that military regimes were worse than the civilian regimes as far as corruption was concerned. This explains the reasons for the multiplicity of corruption and the further decimation of available resources and potentials for national development. Hence, political activities assumed a dangerous dimension as contestants see their victory as the ticket to loot and amass wealth.

Sad enough, the civilian government that took over in 1999 could not even take any positive step towards recovering the loot of the Gulf War windfall, in spite of its resolve to deal with corruption. Instead, corruption continues to grow and the “abuse of public office for private gain, coupled with nepotism and bribery, has killed good governance” (Lawal, 2006).

It should be noted that the developed countries are hypocritical about their avowed commitment to discouraging corruption in developing countries. Recent revelations in Nigeria attest to this. One of the conditionalities for debt forgiveness and improved development aid from abroad was the reduction in the level of corruption. However, foreign missions in Nigeria were alleged to have mounted pressures on the budget office to ensure that the due processes for contract selection and approval were circumvented in order to favour their choice candidates. The bait was that such favour would induce them to pressure their home countries to support debt forgiveness for Nigeria and, or, give additional development aid (Odion, 2005). What a contradiction!

This is the kind of situation that might have prompted Hawley, (2000) to condemn the activities of the multinationals that aid corruption in the developing countries. He therefore proposed that

“Effective action against corruption has to involve effective sanction by developing countries against multinationals, which engage in corrupt practices; greater political transparency to remove the secrecy under which corruption flourishes; and resistance to the uncritical extension of privatization and neo-liberal economic policies (ibid)”

The argument here is that multinationals, supported by Western governments (which are supposedly waging a

vigorous war against corruption in order to promote good governance) and their agencies, were surreptitiously engaging in corruption on a grand scale in the developing countries. This is an absurdity. Ake (1981) believes that this type of corruption was caused by the promotional activities of unscrupulous multinationals, with the active connivance of local politicians, to encourage useless industrial ventures in order to sell plants and machinery.

“Such ventures invariably cost money and worsened the country’s balance of payments problems. They were often tied to exploitative management agreements which not only threatened their economic viability but also their ability to promote self-reliance (ibid)”

Governance and Political Instability

One of the major factors responsible for political instability is the failure of the political class to sufficiently adhere to the basic tenets of democracy and constitutionalism (Kew, 2006). As Harriman (2006:2) has rightly noted, this situation “has given rise to abuse of power, brazen corruption, disregard for due process and the rule of law, intolerance of political opposition, abuse of the electoral process and the weakening of institutions.” This contradicts the tenet of governance, which presupposes “the process of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a political community” (Adejumobi, 2004). Good governance could be accomplished when the operation of government is in line with the prevailing legal and ethical principles of the political community. When this is the situation, system affect will be high, and the people would collectively aspire to participate in the activities of the state, knowing fully well that adherence to the rules and procedures would serve the interest of the greatest number of the population. Deprivation of benefits and selective justice would not be encouraged, as individuals’ rights would be protected within the ambit of the law. Political leaders would hold dear the watchwords: transparency and accountability in governance.

Successive governments in Nigeria have indicated their awareness of this as a way of ensuring stability and legitimacy. The Jaji Declaration of the Murtala/Obasanjo administration, Ethical Re-orientation Campaign of Shagari’s Second Republic, War Against Indiscipline (WAI) of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, Babangida’s Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes, the numerous probe panels of the Abacha years and the current War Against Corruption (Diamond, 1991; Bello-Imam, 2004), are a façade of genuine measures to promote good governance through the eradication of corrupt practices. Between 2000 and 2003, two anti-corruption agencies were established to complement Obasanjo’s administration’s crusade (Kew, 2006). However,

“the overall system remains deeply compromised. Federal government contracts are routinely inflated to provide kickbacks for officeholders, and contractors

frequently provide substandard or nonexistent services. State and local – level of corruption has been far more brazen (Kew, 2006)."

The rules were not observed by the leaders except in its application to frustrate the opposition (Kew, 2006; Adeyemo, 2006). The deeper motives of introducing these measures were rarely nationalistic; they were primarily motivated by self-interest for the acquisition of wealth and power. And the scourge of bad governance persisted thereby isolating the political elite from the generality of the citizenry. Sklar et al sum it up thus: "The growing distance between this political elite and the general public, however has undermined accountability...poverty and frustration over the slow pace of change fan public anger..." (2006).

The fallout of the hypocritical postures towards corrupt practices has been a ceaseless cycle of political and legitimacy crises. Citizens expressed their discontentment against irresponsible governance, and invariably lost their faith in the system. This situation gained wider currency in the Niger Delta region, where oil exploration had further impoverished the people. The region produced the bulk of the wealth of Nigeria, yet the communities are highly undeveloped. Since 1965 when oil was discovered in Oloibiri,

"the Niger Delta Basin has produced 30 billion barrels of crude oil and about 30 trillion cubic feet of gas. Deep-water exploration commenced in the early 1990s and currently its reserves account for 39 percent of world deep-water reserves (Harriman, 2006)."

Environmental degradation and lack of basic needs like good roads, potable water was the lot of the people. Notwithstanding the establishment of government agencies like the 1965 Niger Delta Basin Development Board (ND-BDB), Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), in 1992, and the current Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), there has been little to show, in terms of physical infrastructural development in the area to justify the quantum of wealth the region produced to the coffers of the federal government. Eventually,

"problems of legitimacy, transparency and mismanagement tainted by political jobbery have crippled these agencies that were established to deliver development in the region. This is aggravated by faulty institutional framework and poor technical and managerial capacity for effective programme delivery (Harriman, 2006)."

Nigeria's oil revenue by 1980 stood at 25 billion US dollars (Mayer et al., 1996). Though there was a decline by the late 1980s, the initial proceeds from the oil boom were expended on projects with no positive impact on the economy (Mayer et al, 1996; Joseph et al, 1996). This

triggered off debt and corruption. By 1989, Nigeria's external debt stood at 30 billion US dollars. By 1994, it rose to 36 billion US dollars, including the repayment arrears that were due at the end of the year. The oil boom in reality was nothing but a vehicle for no development. It was a source of income and yet a "source of dependence". As Robinson (2004), has noted:

"The Nigerian government exported 20 billion (US dollars) worth of oil last year, (2003) but its people still scrape by on an average wage of just a dollar per day—oil money has often been wasted in kickbacks and bribes. The country's economy has struggled with years of mismanagement."

The impoverishment of the Niger Delta area had begun since the first republic. Adaka Boro's struggle was a response to the situation (Darrah, 1995). The extreme deprivation peaked during the years that followed the emergence of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), in the Abacha years, and intensified with the "judicial murder" of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists. The people demanded an equitable share of the proceeds of oil revenues to improve their living and environmental conditions. An observer noted that:

"The poverty level in the Niger Delta in spite of their oil keeps growing. The youths are aggrieved and radicalized by the activities of government and oil firms. No roads, water, light, schools, hospitals. People are tired of talking because nothing is coming out from many years of talking. So, the youths feel the only thing to do now to get the attention of government and oil firms is to become militant... I think the problem was created by government, which, for many years, failed to address the unacceptable poverty and total neglect of the oil-producing communities."⁵

The demands of the oil producing communities were met with repressive force. A select few, mostly the political elites, were given a foretaste of the booty through the game of political intrigues of divide and rule tactics. The more the use of repressive force were used, the more the instability in the polity and the more the people distance themselves from political participation. The cycle of crises and chaos, which has engulfed the Niger Delta region today, with its multiplier effects on the national politics, began as a result of deprivation and bad governance. For instance, it was discovered that Nigerian leaders have looted over US\$500 billion since independence (Epia, 2006). Nigeria's former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, confirmed that the country's indebtedness to the London Club as at November 2006 was N270 billion (Daniel, 2006), so, the amount of misappropriated funds is more than the totality of Nigeria's indebtedness.

"The London Club debt portfolio currently comprises Par Bonds and Promissory Notes. The residual prin-

cipal outstanding on these instruments amounts to US \$1,441,793,302 and US\$544,528,914 respectively. In addition to these liabilities, the Par Bonds have associated oil warrants that require payments to be made when oil prices rise above per barrel consistently for six months. The Par Bonds have their origin in the arrears of term loans owed to foreign commercial banks as well as some arrears of letters of credit, bills of collection, open accounts, etc which were accumulated by Nigeria in the 1980s. These Bonds are expected to be fully paid off on November 15, 2020 (Daniel, 2006)".

According to another analyst, with 75% of the citizens living on less than US\$1 per day while about US\$ 300 billion oil wealth has disappeared from the country, Nigeria presents a classical example of how people in a resources rich country could wallow in abject poverty' (Adeniyi, 2006).

Political Intrigues as a cover for Corruption

In a bid to stem the rising tide of opposition, political leaders, both civilian and military, exploit and manipulate the entrenched ethnic divide in Nigeria for political purposes. The forces of ethnic nationalism, therefore, have provided the platform for a refreshing opportunity to develop a more national agenda (Fagbadebo, 2000). Nigerian governments over the years lacked popular participation and consensus building. This has the effect of intensifying the exploitation of the hostile ethnic nature of the Nigerian state in the struggle to enforce legitimacy. Enforced legitimacy cannot, especially in an ethnically-differentiated society, stimulate national development. Rather, the polity continuously moves in a vicious circle of instability that proceeds in a ceaseless tide which threatens its existence.

Various tactics were employed for regime survival. This was worsened by a prolonged experience with dictatorial military rule. The common political intrigue associated with the civilian era was the propensity of the political elites to hang on to power through electoral malpractices, and, lately, orchestrated manipulation of the constitutional rules (Sklar et al., 2006). Intra and inter party squabbles, defection, threats of assassination and assassination among other political vices, leading to threats and counter threats of impeachment are employed to ensure the continuity of patron-client politics. Thus, meaningful developmental programmes were neglected, as efforts were concentrated on how to curtail the rising opposition forces.

The military leaders also exploited public opinion, by defusing inherent potential sources of opposition, suppressing and placating, employing reversal and insistence tactics in a bid to ensure a delicate balance of legitimacy. The period, (1985 - 1998) witnessed several transition programmes like "trains without locomotion", all to

ensure an unstable political environment to facilitate self-perpetuation in power while corruption took the new dimension of becoming a national virtue rather than vice.

Abacha's regime was even more terrible. Terror became a potent political weapon to legitimize his reign. While the government was implicated in the reign of terror that characterized the period, pro-democracy and human right activists were framed as the culprits (Albert, 2005). The series of bomb attacks during this period were a deliberate ploy to divert the attention of the people from the chronic government failures and subsequently curry the favour of both domestic and international actors for legitimacy. As Albert (2005) puts it:

"The bomb attacks also became a veritable vehicle by which the government diverted the attention of the people from substantive issues in politics. Each blast was reported and discussed in the NTA and Radio Nigeria news for several weeks...all these were aimed at attracting sympathy for the government and ...through this kind of diversionary tactics Nigerians were led to forget about the fundamental issues in their nation's development while 'sympathizing' with the Head of state 'whose genuine efforts towards lasting democracy' were being thwarted by 'subversive elements'".

The employment of political intrigues was facilitated by an inconsistent federal structure. The promise and implementation of state and local government creation exercises were employed as political weapon to induce beneficiaries to forget about the increased arbitrariness and political oppression, and encourage them to throw their support behind the government. In essence, the more the exercise to presumably create new states and local government areas, the less powerful and viable the component units of the federal structure, and the more the corruption networks in the system. National development suffers while personal enrichment increases.

Thus, dysfunctional impediments to development were fueled by the use of political intrigues to disempower the civil society. Power consolidation through the manipulation of the fragile ethnic relationships made the overriding objectives of national development a failed project while a few individuals emerged as power brokers and "godfathers". Unfortunately however, the civil society lacks the capacity to engage the government on the need to promote good governance through accountability and transparency. As Kew (2005), has rightly observed, the dearth of basic resources, institutional capacity as well as professional skills in functional areas of expertise had weakened the ability of the various organizations to sustain the struggle and campaign against bad governmental policies. Consequently, neo-patrimonial power relationships flourished with its attendant undemocratic political culture. The "authoritarian hangover" of neopatrimonialism had stifled the political system of the essential virtues of accountability and effective representation.

The neopatrimonial power politics that pervaded the political landscape had subsequently entrenched *clientelistic* hierarchies among the political elites. This is a manifestation of the nature of politics in the society, which Kew (2005) sees as a negative phenomenon that should be altered.

“The neopatrimonial contract between the Big Man (usually a patron either in or outside the government) and his supporters is based on a shared perspectives of how both see the relationship: in this hierarchical arrangement, legitimacy and power flow from the top down, and both patron and client presume that these privileges are inherent with power. The social position of the Big Man is seen as the source that creates the relationship, such that the patronage flowing downward is a favor that demands loyalty in exchange (ibid).”

The parlous state of the national economy and its attendant effects on the economic well being of the individuals created the template for this development and weakened the collective bargaining power of the civil society. The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), in 1986 by the Babangida military administration which “left a profound imprint on civil society” (Obadare, 2003), further reduced the cohesive spirit of the people as individuals seek avenues to meet their economic demands.

Conclusion

It is obvious that governance issues are the bane of national development and political instability in Nigeria. The authoritarian leadership faced a legitimacy crisis; political intrigues in an ethnically-differentiated polity became the cover-up for corruption and profligacy. Immunity from accountability and transparency, accentuated by the enormous oil revenues, further impoverished the inhabitants of the oil producing areas. Thus, the underdevelopment or no development syndrome became cyclical.

In order to break this cycle, accountability and transparency have to be guaranteed and the people have to be involved in issues that affect their lives and immediate environment. In this regard, the position of Chief Okrika, on the problems in the Niger Delta region is pertinent.

“But the issue is that the people are aggrieved. They want to have a direct involvement in the development of their region. The people are sitting on top of oil yet they are poor. That is why we, the oil bearing communities, are agitating for the quick passage of the oil Revenue Formula Bill at the National Assembly, which would give communities direct access to certain percent of monies accruing from the oil derivation fund. When the oil communities become directly involved in the management of funds emanating from oil got from their backyard, they become partners and

would put structures in place to protect the oil facilities allegedly being destroyed by militants. They do so because they are not benefiting anything from such facilities, which only pollute their environment (The Guardian, 09/09/06)”

Transparency and accountability in governance will increase the sense of national community as well as the level of system affect. Ake (1981) has rightly suggested that “democratization of considerable depth” would be necessary to halt the impediments created by the problems of poor governance. To ensure more and better government responsiveness, civil society actors who have all the capacity to compel their leaders to be accountable to them should brace up for the challenge.

Sadly enough, the civil society has been largely disempowered, and invariably had lost its positions to the international donors and development agencies, the neo-colonialists, who define and determine what democratization entails. While they insist on good governance, they shy away from the core value of accountability and transparency. As the president of Transparency International, Peter Eigen, alleged, the ravaging corruption in the developing world was contracted through the developed world.⁶

A failed, corrupt and inept leadership coupled with inclement domestic socio-political environment have plunged development performance in Nigeria into the abyss. Development is no longer what the people desire, but what the creditor nations and international financial institutions dictate. The domestic policy-making process is now imported from abroad, perhaps, to further the interest of the international hegemony in a desperate scramble, for the second time, of the “newly” found state. This has to be resisted with an active participation of the civil society in the oversight function within its sphere.

Deliberate and conscious efforts, borne out of patriotism, are needed to ensure the emergence of a virile civil society. An informed civil society is necessary to balance the power of the Nigerian State. This could be a solution for ending the brazen abuse of powers and privileges by public officials and stimulate a psychological reorientation towards meaningful development. A genuine monitoring of government policies and programmes could lead to the detection of corrupt practices. The consequence is the near possibility of alteration in the perception of government as the instrument of the elites to acquire and retain power at the expense of the people. In the long run, non-elites could come to the realization that the ruling elites owe their positions to the mandate of their constituents for the purpose of good governance. Thus the state could be seen as the servant of the public, rather than the preserve of the elites. This would create a high level of system affect. Moreover, the public would be reconnected to the elite-dominated, neopatrimonial state. By the time the public interest is reasserted in governance, the polity would exhibit the potential for growth and stability.

Notes

1. Recent revelations on flagrant disobedience to governmental decorum depicts the continuity syndrome in the appropriation of the Nigerian state by the elected leaders.
2. In Nigeria, oil resources have had a great impact on the level of corruption that pervaded the political scene. Between 1980 and 2000, even beyond, government appointments became the short cut to riches.
3. For the details, see "The Role of Government in the Economy" <http://www.-country-studies.com/nigeria/the-role-of-government-in-the-economy.html>, accessed on May 9, 2006.
4. During this period, major governmental companies such as Nigeria Airways, Nigerian National Shipping Line, Refineries, and Steel Rolling Mills were destroyed. For the details, see Ribadu (2006), "Corruption: the Trouble with Nigeria" <http://www.gamji.com/articl500/NEWS5630.html> accessed May 9, 2006
5. Chief Wellington Okrika, the Bolowe of Gbaramatu Kingdom expressed this view in The Guardian of September 9, 2006.
6. Mr. Eigen, in August 2005, alleged that foreign citizens imported corruption into Nigeria through their business dealings. For the details, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/07/international/africa/o7lagos.ex.html>

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