

## **SOME CONCRETE AND PRACTICABLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY AND THE JOURNALISM PROFESSION**

**ONYEJELEM, TIMOTHY EKELEDIRICHUKWU**

**Department of Mass Communication,**

**Madonna University Nigeria**

**Phone: +2348033481465.**

**E-mail: onyejelemtimothyekele@yahoo.com**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The issue of corruption in Nigeria is nothing to write home about. This is because the name (Nigeria) can synonymously be used to represent a state where political office holders embezzle public funds to buy mansions overseas, operate fat accounts in foreign banks while a good percentage of the masses at home leave below one dollar per day, misappropriate project funds for selfish purposes, forge certificates to gain political offices, among others. Journalism practice in Nigeria on the other hand is not a sacred cow for this malignant cancer that has eaten and is still devouring the major fabrics of the nation's political, economic, social and cultural sphere. The fact remains that the profession that is charged with the responsibility of educating, informing, and entertaining the public, needs to take urgent measures in addressing the numerous issues of corruption saddling not only the nation at large but the noble profession itself in particular. To do this, the paper strongly suggests: **genuine democratization; tougher anti-corruption measures; redefinition of values; enhanced information flow from the government to the governed; and absence of sacred cow syndrome**, as some concrete and practicable solutions to the problem of corruption in the Nigerian society. Finding practicable panacea to corruption in Journalism profession, the paper further recommends that; **improvement of work conditions of Journalist; more vibrant peer review mechanism; professionalization; and networking with professional colleagues from other media organization as the practicable solutions to the menace of corruption in Nigerian journalism**. It is believed that if these ideas proffered in this study are put into practice, the society would be a better place for all.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The Fourth Estate in Nigeria remains comatose and is afflicted from the debilitating influence of corruption and brutality it took under the successive military and/or other regimes that suppressed or bought press freedom as the case maybe. Today many sections of this most important of estates have sold and continue to sell their obligations for money. They are now part and parcel of the malignant cancer that destroys any hope for Nigeria in that many of the home news houses are nothing more than self-censoring commentators for the 36 state capitals and Aso Rock. A most pitiable and sorry state. It is most revealing that virtually all important news emanating from within Nigeria is broken by Internet-based media organizations from outside Nigeria like Sahara reporters!*

**[Anonymous Blogger]**

The above statement, posted at 05:41:59 on March 8, 2010, on a blog site "Nigerian Village Square" aptly introduces our topic and discussion here. The writer was reacting to a revelation of corrupt practices within one of the leading news media in Nigeria, *The Punch* newspaper. The revelation followed a petition written by former editor of the paper's daily title, Mr. Steve Ayorinde against his former boss and Executive Director (ED) Publications, Mr. Azubuike Ishiekwene. The aggrieved Mr. Ayorinde had opened a can of worms following his forced resignation as masterminded by Mr. Ishiekwene, prompting the paper's management board to institute investigation on the allegations of brown envelope journalism and other unethical practices against the ED Publications. The investigation revealed some shady dealings against Mr. Ishiekwene, a respected journalist and a widely read columnist. That was not the end, this episode led to even more outrageous revelations; this time against *The Punch* Chairman, Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, who was said to be in the habit of collecting bribes from high-placed news sources to kill sensitive stories meant to be published in a medium that prides itself as "*Nigeria's Most Widely Read Newspaper*".

The scenario captured above illuminates the most regrettable status of ethical practice in the Nigerian journalism of today. The profession has been polluted by corruption manifesting in the various forms like bribery (“brown envelope” syndrome), sycophancy, lies, blackmailing, etc, all of which absolutely go contrary to what the Fourth Estate should represent.

**What then could be the practical and concrete solution to this anomaly?** Importantly, the press is part and parcel of the larger Nigerian society, and its corrupt status must have originated from the general culture of corruption in the country. Consequently, any solution that would successfully address this problem of the press must be such that aims at addressing the general problem of corruption in the society at large. Identifying some of these possible solutions is the focus of this paper.

### **FINDING PRACTICABLE AND CONCRETE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY AND JOURNALISM PROFESSION**

Towards solving the above noted problem, the writer believes the Nigerian nation as a polity ought to rise on its feet and call a spade a spade; taking some fundamental bold steps that would correct some loopholes that have kept the country receptive to corruption and resistant to moral rectitude over these years. These loopholes are embedded in the nation’s political, economic, social, cultural and legal realms. In the words of Adamu (2005), “Corruption has become systematic... (it) is still institutional at all levels in such a way that it has become an integral component of the administrative, social and political culture in Nigeria.” The effort, therefore, should be to tackle these institutionalized forces of corruption in Nigeria and her press would become free from the slavery of corrupt practices as advocated by Ibitoye (2011):

*When a dominant, preponderant or leading social order is corrupt, oppressive or no longer positive, it requires a massive overhaul. In other words, the people and the social order in which it has developed or is evolving, have to produce counter-hegemony. Hegemony takes place when socio-political and economic structures like political systems (executives, legislators, and civil servants), educational systems, mass media, religious institutions, social clubs, cultural values and the likes, take on a dominant form and become the norm. So as bad practices become endemic, they translate into negative hegemony.*

The way to do this is discussed under the sub-heads below.

#### **Genuine Democratization**

There is the need for genuine democratization if Nigeria would emerge from the murky waters of corruption she has been swimming in all along. This is with more precise reference to elections through which the citizenry select those who would lead them. According to Igbokwe (2005), a nation survives the kind of decay which Nigeria has found herself in today if the citizens are truly empowered to determine who governs them. He writes:

*No society rises above its leaders whether in the social, intellectual, moral or cultural character. Every society is a reflection of the personal qualities of its leaders. Where leaders are morally strong, the society is bound to be morally strong, and where leaders are morally weak, the society is bound to be morally weak... This has been the most fundamental secret of the progressive nations of our world. And of course, their citizens have the privilege of free and fair elections to throw away morally bankrupt leaders and recruit credible ones. Where such electoral transparency is lacking, rogues masquerading as leaders would invariably impose themselves on the society.*

The above observation underscores the need for Nigeria to entrench the culture of true democratization as fundamentally characterized by free and fair elections as a way of giving the citizens the power of choosing credible leaders and throwing out bad ones. Leadership in Nigeria has successively fallen into the hands of morally unqualified individuals. “The credibility of those in high places could never have been lower than what it is today despite effort to eradicate corruption” (Adamu, 2005).

#### **Tougher Anti-Corruption Measures**

Anti-corruption fight in Nigeria needs to be stepped up to reflect the urgency of the current pitiful situation which the nation has found itself in. Some persons like the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mrs. Farida Waziri, has even suggested that death penalty should be introduced for corrupt practices as a way of mounting sufficient deterrent to potential offenders. However, to Ibitoye (2011), whether capital punishment or not, what matters is that someone who should be punished for corruption be punished. He says: “What I am suggesting is a surgical ‘paradigm shift’, punish those corrupt politicians and it will serve as an example to others.”

Above all, there is need to make this fight fully sincere by ensuring absence of sacred cow syndrome, favoritism, bribery and all sorts of ungodliness in the process of combating corrupt practices.

### **Redefinition of Values**

Currently, the value system in Nigeria is upside down. People who are notorious, and morally bankrupt are being daily honoured simply because of their wealth – which are usually ill-gotten any way. What is bad is now good, and what used to be good is now bad. A redefinition of value system would ensure that good deeds are properly rewarded and reprehensible acts are condignly punished. This way the society would be firmly set on the path of morality and progress.

### **Enhanced Information Flow From the Government to the Governed**

Better flow of information from the realm of the government to the realm of the governed is most essential to combating corruption in Nigeria. The reason is that when the people have access to the information about the happenings in the government, transparency is encouraged as government officials act with greater caution, being more sensitive to the feelings and judgments of the people who they govern. Ibitoye (2011) comments aptly on this:

*There should be rules and criteria simple to understand and administer and the information made readily available: For instance, several activities in Nigeria undertaken by the government put it in a monopolistic position. And if a number of criteria have to be taken into consideration in arriving at a decision, then an element of subjectivity and judgement is involved. The problem may not necessarily be the degree of discretion but the extent to which the process is opaque and shrouded in mystery. Therefore, if the rules and criteria are simple to understand and administer and information about them is readily available, then the government’s decisions could be challenged or improved by the citizens... There should be appropriate reporting systems and supervisory controls and legislation on people’s right to information on decisions taken or actions initiated by the Government. For example power corrupts when it is wielded without fear of accountability and reprisal.*

In this regard, many are of the view that a law promoting people’s access to public information would be ideal in ensuring transparency in government. It therefore remains for the recently passes Freedom of Information Act to be appropriately implemented.

### **Absence of ‘sacred cow’ syndrome**

If corruption should become a thing of history in the Nigerian lifestyle, then, it is important that implementation of law and order should start from political leaders and top public office holders, particularly, *men-in-uniform*. When the provisions of the constitution of the country is strictly adhered to, and offenders brought to justice without minding who is involved, I strongly believe that the Nigerian society will be a better place. This is better explained in the case of miss Uzoma Okere and her friend, Abdulahi Abdulazeez, against Rear Admiral Harry Arogundade of the Nigerian Navy and four naval ratings. As Adetayo (2010) reports:

*On November 3, Nigerian Navy officers pulled Uzoma Okere from her car and beat and stripped her for allegedly failing to move out of the way of the navy officers’ vehicle. The incident was filmed by a bystander. President Yar’Adua called for an investigation into the incident and for a report to be submitted. A Board of Inquiry was established and on November 26, Chief of Defense Staff Paul Dike submitted its findings to President Yar’Adua. The report was not made public, but there were allegations that Okere was not allowed to provide testimony. There were no further developments at year’s end.*

According to the story, after the death of Yar'Adua, Miss Okere instituted a case against Arogundade, After the THE PUNCH's report, the Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola (SAN), also hosted the victim in his office where he promised the state government's support in her quest to get justice. Fortunately enough, and aided by an evidence of the film which was made public, she was granted justice. The naval officer was mandated to pay Okere the sum of 100 million naira damage (Jibueze, 2010). With this case, now, it is evident that some *siren-driven* men will learn their lessons, corruption of this nature will now have a litmus test towards a better society.

### **THE JOURNALISM PROFESSION IN PARTICULAR**

While the above general measures would go a long way in cleansing the society and the journalism profession, there are still some particular measures that would precisely address those forms of corrupt practices peculiar to the journalism profession. These are considered below.

#### **Improvement of Work Conditions of Journalists**

As it is today, work conditions of journalists in Nigeria is generally poor and which exposes them to all sorts of temptations to compromise the ethics of their calling. According to Adamu (2005), "Low salaries coerce most public servants into corruption. Whereas one would concede that salaries of public sector personnel need to be increased, one does not subscribe to the view that this measure alone will be enough for tackling the issue of corruption."

Better salary packages and other forms of job motivation would go a long way in encouraging journalists to overcome any form of ethical temptation as they go with their work. This is evident in the words of Okunna (2003: 183):

*The importance of attractive salary and conditions of service for journalists as a mechanism for maintaining ethical standards in mass communication is undoubtedly very well understood. Many ethical problems in mass communication arise from materialism. When employers adequately provide for the material well being of employee-journalists, such journalists are placed in a better position to resist the temptation to be unethical.*

#### **More Vibrant Peer Review Mechanism**

There is also need to device vibrant mechanisms for peer review among media professionals. Currently, a publication like *Media Review* serves this purpose as it helps members of the profession to review the activities of their colleagues, criticizing wrong approaches to journalism and lauding acts worthy of emulation. According to Kasoma (1996), "Media people have a duty to speak out and condemn those of their colleagues who step out of line before their bad professionalism spreads to the whole 'family' of journalism. They should not wait for society to do this for them."

More of such mechanisms ought to be in place if the journalism profession would purge itself of corruption without inviting the "iron" fist of the government which would invariably constitute a threat to their freedom. For instance, blog sites dedicated to peer review could be opened wherein journalists could (even on anonymous basis) make comments on the conduct of their fellow practitioners with the view to illuminating right and wrong practices towards uprooting them.

#### **Professionalization**

The journalism profession has been so much debased by the influx of untrained hands into the profession. This has been blamed as partly responsible for the high rate of unethical practices in the industry. Citing her review of studies in professionalism conducted in both developed and developing countries, Okunna (2003: 177) writes:

*... journalists with higher formal education exhibit more professional orientation in the performance of their duties and are generally classified as high and medium professionals in contrast to their low professional colleagues most of whom have not had formal higher education.*

By ensuring that every intending practitioner is sufficiently trained, the monster of corruption in the profession could be effectively tamed.

### **Networking with professional colleagues from other media organizations**

From time to time, journalists face the fear of being fired by their employers as there is no alternative source of livelihood due to high level of joblessness in the country. In other instances, some face the temptation of taking brown envelopes filled with Nigerian currencies in order to tailor the news to the taste of the politician or punter who called for such stories. In the case of big time advertisers on whose subscription, some of the media organizations rely for their survival, the press also face another challenge of trying to cover certain issues that needed to be uncovered especially for public interest. This way most journalists succumb to pressure from such client thereby undermining ethical standards of the noble profession.

Commenting on how journalists can redeem their profession and take steps to strengthen independent reporting and government accountability in Nigeria, Aiyetan (2011) writes:

*...working with colleagues around the globe to: share journalistic, managerial and technical expertise; provide the latest information on media developments, journalism ethics and professional practices; offer support services relevant to changing needs; and encourage vital and independent media that are professionally, ethically and financially grounded, will help combat corruption in Nigerian press*

He further recommends investigative journalism fellowship program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State as an example of such kinds of networking.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This work is built within the framework of normative ethics which attempts to arrive at practical moral standards that tell us right from wrong, and how to live moral lives. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, whether there are duties that we should follow, or whether our actions should be guided by their consequences for ourselves and/or others. Closely related to this is the study of value, which asks what is value, what things are valuable, and why? Are things valuable intrinsically (in-themselves), or instrumentally (because they serve some purpose or goal)? From this school of thought, Aristotle (n.d) writes:

*"The Good of man is the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue...Moreover this activity must occupy a complete lifetime; for one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one fine day; and similarly one day or a brief period of happiness does not make a man supremely blessed and happy."*

[**Nicomachean Ethics**]

Viewed from this point of view, Nicomachean Ethics is of the view that "every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them".

### **CONCLUSION**

Stemming the problem of corruption in the Nigerian society and journalism in particular is indeed a daunting challenge given the deep-rooted nature of the problem. However, with commitment, sincerity and tenacity, the goal would be attained. The society in general has to look at the problem of genuine democratization with the view to empowering the people for deciding who lead them. Similarly, it has to address the problem of insincerity, favoritism and selective justice in the fight against corruption, as well as the problem of free access to government information. For the journalism profession in particular, attention should be paid to the work conditions of practitioners, mechanisms for peer review, professionalization, and networking with professional colleagues from other media organization.

**REFERENCES**

- Adamu, B. J. (2005). "Methods of Tackling Corruption in Nigeria." Retrieved 02/08/2011 from <http://www.dawodu.com/adamu2.htm>.
- Adetayo, "Meanwhile, in Nigeria: Naval ratings beat, strip lady naked." Retrieved 04/08/2011 from [http://www.punchng.com/article\\_comme...00903124322576](http://www.punchng.com/article_comme...00903124322576).
- Alyetan, D. (2011) "Combating Corruption in Nigeria: The Promise of Investigative Reporting" Retrieved 20/08/2011 from <http://orgs.tigweb.org/investigative-reporters-association-of-nigeria>.
- Anonymous (2010). "Re: Punch Editor's Bombshell On Corruption In The Nigerian Media." Retrieved 17/08/2011 from <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/guest-articles/punch-editors-bombshell-on-corruption-in-the-nigerian-media-2.html>.
- Aristotle, (nd) Nicomachean Ethics. Retrieved 19/08/2011 from <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.mb.txt>
- Ayorinde, S. (2010). "Corruption In The Nigerian Media- Case of Azubuike Ishiekwene." Retrieved 17/08/2011 from <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/guest-articles/punch-editors-bombshell-on-corruption-in-the-nigerian-media-2.html>.
- Epistemelinks (nd). *Ethical Theory*. Retrieved 19/08/2011 from <http://www.epistemelinks.com/main/Journals.aspx?TopiCode=Ethi&Format=Print>
- Ibitoye, M. K. (2011). "How to deal with corruption in Nigeria." Retrieved 17/08/2011 from <http://www.dellsocialinnovationcompetition.com/ideaView?id=0878000000DdwsAAC>.
- Igbokwe, J. (2005). *Igbos 25 Years After Biafra*. Lagos: Vision Communication.
- Jibueze, J. (2010) "Uzoma Okere: Court orders Navy, Rear Admiral to pay N100m" *The Nation*. Retrieved 18/08/2011 from <http://nigeriavillagesquare.com/forum/main-square/26494-meanwhile-nigeria-naval-ratings-beat-strip-lady-naked-32.html>.
- Kasoma, F. (1996). *Journalism Ethics in Africa*. Nairobi: African Council for Communication Education.
- Okunna, C. S. (2003). *Ethics of Mass Communication*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Enugu: New Generation Books.