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Nigerian government, the public sector and the fight against corruption: The role of information and communication technology

Edikan Nnabuk Eddy^{1*} and Emem Etok Akpan²

¹National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP) No 1 Blantyre Street, Wuse II, P. M. B. 5074, Wuse, Abuja, Nigeria.

²Department of Computer Science, Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, Nigeria.

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The role of information technology in controlling and preventing corruption in Nigeria has been examined. Functions and types of corruption existing within the different public sectors (the civil service, tertiary institution/examination bodies and research institutes, the police, the power holding company, the executive/legislature and the judiciary) in Nigerian government are found to vary from one sector to another. Existing information technology steps needed to prevent or control such levels of corruptions are summarized to include the design of a computerized data base, the use of biometric features and a complete switch over from manual to electronic method of purchasing forms, bidding of contracts and carrying out transactions corruption in Nigeria is viewed as a serious impediment to the socio-economic growth of a country. The author has recommended information and communication technology (ICTs) education as a major step to foil most of these policies.

Key word: Public sector, fighting corruption, ICTs.

INTRODUCTION

Information Technology is the use of computers and computer software to convert, store, process, transmit and retrieve information (Ayodotun, 2004, 2006; Inmon, 1986). In every sector, information and communication technologies (ICTs), are powerful tools for controlling corruption (Heeks, 1998).

According to Heeks (1998), corruption is defined as inducement to wrong by bribery or other unlawful or improper means. As an issue, corruption tends to stir strong reactions (Altos, 1990) e.g. corruption is a culture-bound concept. Corruption has remained one of the most complex problems that have impeded development in Nigeria. According to Ogundun (2007), between 1960 and 2007, nothing more has ravaged the foundation of the nation than corruption. Ribadu (2006) also stated that corruption is one of the most dangerous social ills of any society because corruption, like a deadly virus,

attacks the vital structure that makes for society's progressive function, thus putting it very existence into serious perils Corruption involves a deliberate use of one's position to get illegitimate benefit and undue advantage which could be financial or in other forms (Ribadu, 2006).

The history of corruption in Nigeria is strongly routed in the over 29 years of military rule, out of 46 years of our statehood since 1960. Between 1960 to date that is, 48 years after independence, military rule has lasted for 25 years, leaving 19 years for civilian rule.

Between this period, various governments have attempted to fight corruption through establishment of agencies, commission of enquiry. However, the role played by some of these agencies still leaves food for thought with respect to corruption.

CASES AND FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

(i) The Coker Committee made some revelation which indicted a Federal Representative and Minister of Avia-

*Corresponding author. E-mail: nabukeddy@yahoo.com.

tion (K. O. Mbadigwe) and the pioneer Minister of Finance (Chief Festus Okotie Ebo) of corrupt practices.

(ii) During Late Major General Aguiyi Ironsi's regime, a Committee of enquiry into the affairs of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) and other government agencies found some top government officials guilty of financial misappropriation.

(iii) By 1975, the Late Gen. Murtala Mohammed government set up a Federal Asset investigation tribunal which found 10 out of 12 state governors guilty of corruption.

(iv) At the collapse of the 2nd republic, the government of Major Gen. Muhamadu Buhari, launched the 'War Against Indiscipline', and more than 70% officials that served in the 2nd republic were arrested and convicted for looting various sums of money. However, some of these people were released under the regime of Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and some were reappointed to serve in some government offices.

(v) Worst situation occurred during Late Gen. Sani Abacha's regime. After his government, it was revealed that the Late President siphoned \$2.3bn from the government treasury, awarded contracts worth \$1bn to his personal companies, and took \$1bn as bribe from foreign contractors.

During the 3rd republic, the government of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2004, the Independent Corrupt Practice and other related Commission (ICPC) in 2000, and the due process office. These agencies have recorded tremendous achievements in their attempt to fight corruption. Some of them are listed below:

(i) Chief Dieprieve Alamesieya was arrested, prosecuted, and convicted of corruption by EFCC (Ribadu, 2006),

(ii) Former Inspector General of police (Tafa Balogun), was convicted and found guilty of 8-count charge related to corruption (Ribadu, 2006).

(iii) Jolly Nyame, former Taraba State governor, Orji Uzor Kalu, former Abia State governor, Saminu Turaki, former Jigawa State governor, Chief Joshua Dariye, a former governor of Plateau State, are currently facing trial for allegation leveled against them (Soniya et al, 2007).

(iv) Prof. Adenike Grange (Minister of Health), Mr. Gabriel Aduku – (ex-Minister of State for health), Prof. Ogandi (Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Health), and others are currently facing trial for a N300m scam leveled against them (Soniya et al., 2008).

At a presentation to the United State House Committee on International Development, Ribadu (2006) explained

that 56 conviction have been recorded on corruption, money laundering, oil pipeline vandalisation and other related offences. Assets worth more than N600bn have been frozen and seized from corrupt officials. Other development from other agency include;

- Suspension of Oyo State Chief Judge (Justice Isaiah O.), by the Nigerian Judicial Council for alleged corrupt practices (The Punch, 2008),

- Arrest of the Chairman, Police Equipment Foundation (Chief Kenny Martins) for mismanaging N50 bn (Onwuemenyi, 2008).

- The arrest of Mr. Henry Okundija, a Deputy Director in the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation by ICPC, for using his position to convey, support and induce advantage on himself, having inflated the figure for the award of contract (Adesanmi, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

From the above analysis, several arrest, prosecution and recovery of public properties have been made and yet corruption is still increasing rapidly. However, it is worth stating that the policy of preventing/protecting public sector corruption is better than the medicinal approach of curing the problem. Most Nigerian are of the view that the fight against corruption is sometime selective, some believe that the security agent shields some people from arrest while others believe that some people can carry out the corruption without being noticed. For example, the Chairman of the Code of Conduct bureau stated that political leaders of the country dodge prosecution (Punch, 2008), the speaker of the House of represent-tative has also complained about the habit of chairman of committee running aware from submitting reports even after several attempts (Aneh, 2008; Nwankwo and Aneh, 2008). The Attorney General of the federation also stated that the fight against corruption is selective (This Day, 2008).

In view of the above listed and other related reasons, it is necessary to seek for other approaches of preventing or fighting corruption. One of such measures is the adoption of ICTs. Generally, ICTs in controlling corruption operates by shining a bright light on institutional processes. ICTs enhances transparence particularly at the transparency level, while offering opportunities for easier access to public records and establishing linkage among geographically separated system for better accountability (Heek, 1998). ICTs have been successfully used to control or at least minimize corruption in developed countries of the world. In Nigeria, the use of ICTs is limited and scarcely applied. The present study seeks to examine the role of information and communication technology in fighting corruption.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

During the study, the following research questions were proposed,

- i, is there corruption in the Nigerian public sectors?
- ii, What are the different types of corruptions common in the different public sectors?
- iii, Can ICTs be used to control or prevent corruption in these sectors?
- iv, Does ICTs have disadvantage on the employee?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Materials used for the study were structured questionnaire, Newspapers, textbooks, Journals, etc. Simple percentage statistics was used to analyse data obtained from the questionnaire. The questionnaire were administered to 100 staff working in the Federal secretariat, 50 staff working with the Nigerian Police, 20 staff working with the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, 30 staff working with the West African Examination council and National Examination Council of Nigeria, 30 staff working with the University of Abuja, 30 staff of Federal High Courts in Nigeria, 50 employee of the National Assembly, 30 staff of National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion, 100 staff working in various banks within Abuja, 100 staff working with the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa and 50 staff working with Independent Electoral commission. All the questionnaires were retrieved immediately after the candidate has concluded filling the responses.

RESULTS

Research question 1: Is there corruption in the Nigerian public sectors?

On analyzing data obtained from respondent, 100% admitted that there is corruption in different public sectors in Nigerian.

Research question 2: What are the different forms of corruptions that are common in your sector?

100% of respondents in the different sectors highlighted different forms of corruption common in their sectors.

Research question 3: Can ICTs technology be used to control or prevent corruption in the Nigerian public sector?

100% of the respondents admit that ICTs can be used to prevent or control corruption in the public sector.

Research question 4: Does ICTs has disadvantages on the employee?

100% of the respondent agreed that ICTs has disadvan-

tages ranging from loss of job, redundancy and incompetency.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Information obtained through the questionnaire are used to discussed the results as follows. The discussion of the results is complimented by information obtained from other sources.

Forms of corruption in different sectors

Civil service

- (i) Reported cases of ghost workers deliberately introduced by top government officials are dominant
- (ii) Delay in processing individual's or public documents without undue inducement is prevalent in the Civil Service.
- (iii) Falsification of records, issuance of false documents such as receipts booklets, are also prevalent in the Civil Service.
- (iv) Inflating quotation prices and collaboration with contractors for such reasons are common cases in the Civil Service.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

- (i) Non-delivery of voting materials on time for voters to cast their votes abound. Delivery of fake voting materials in some States also exist.
- iii) Alteration of voting results in favour of a candidate of their choice (Oyedele and Aborisade, 2008).
- iv) Announcement of a wrong candidate after election; all of which tantamount to corruption in the system.

Police Service

Several cases of corruption also exist in the Nigerian Police Force like:

- (i) Extortion of money from motorists on the road.
- (ii) Wrongful detention (Adeyemi et al., 2007)
- iii). Looting or indicting innocent citizens in an attempt to carry out a search in one's house,
- iv).Destruction/loss of case files (Adetayo, 2007).

Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN)

- (i) The senior officers tend to sell of transformers that were meant for public use,
- (ii) Giving bills that are not in line with meter readings,
- (iii) Cancellation of bills (Ameh et al., 2008)
- (iv). Award of illegal contracts (Ameh, 2008)

Educational Institutions/Research and Examination Bodies

- (i) Leakage of examination papers (Punch, 2008)
- (ii) Arbitrary award of marks or certificates under financial or sexual inducement
- (iii) Operation of illegal universities/Polytechnic/College of Education campuses (Sam, 2008)
- (iv) Falsification of result and other data
- (v) Corruption through copyright and plagiarism
- (vi) Appointment of unqualified officials under favouritism or undue process
- (vii) Registration of examination through the internet to avoid exam fee being carted away by their coordinators.

Banking Sector

Corruption in the banking sector takes the following forms:

- i) Conspiracy offering of ratification to influence judgment or attract favour (Soniya and Amokido, 2007).
- ii) Cheating of customers

The Judiciary, Executive and the Legislative Arms of Government

This sector has recorded protracted cases of corruption in addition to the others. Other forms of corruption engagement among these classes are:

- (i) Issuing of wrong judgment as a consequence of bribe
- (ii) Sponsoring or passing bills under ethnic, party or financial interest ()
- (iii) Using of their position to influence award of contract, job employment, undue promotion/appointment, etc (Nwankwo et al., 2007).
- (iv) Making unlawful claims for self enrichment
- (v) Counterfeiting (Sam and Godwin, 2007).
- (vi) Report from Code of Conduct Bureau has it that most people from National Assembly and Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, do not declare their asset which is also a form of corruption (Nwankwo and Alechenu, 2008)

Educational Institutions/Research and Examination Bodies

- i. leakage of examination and other classified information
- ii. Awarding of marks under financial or emotional inducement
- iii. Inflation of figures in lieu of prices for awarding contract or sponsored research.
- iv. Inflation of traveling expenses
- v. Undue favoritism in promotion and selection for award or study leave.

ICTs and the fight against corruption

The applications of ICTs in fighting corruption can be implemented through any of the following:

Civil Service: Elimination of ghost workers in the system can be done by setting up a database with biometric features such as finger print, age, year of first appointment, promotions, expected years in service, etc. Such a database should be designed with the understanding that only assigned officers or consultant have access to modify or add data to the database.

Adoption of internet services such as e-mail can act as a confirmatory status to circulars issued from a specific office.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC):

In order to check diverse forms of corruption occurring in INEC, the author recommends that the following should be adopted.

Systematic adoption of electronic voting system:

Such voting system should be able to transmit the thumb print of the voter to a central data base which can be assessed by restricted or qualified INEC officials. Under such condition, multiple voting can be eliminated and through a properly designed website, INEC officials as well as voters can monitor the progress. This system has been successfully utilized in most countries of the world.

Developing a Database for Indigenes of the Country:

this database should contain personal data such as date of birth, place of birth, sex, biometric features, etc. Under such design, it is not necessary for voters registration to be conducted annually hence duplication of registration or enlargement of numbers or values for political reasons would be eliminated because the database contains information on the eligibility of voters.

Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN):

The PHCN can get rid of corruption by complete replacement of manual metres with electronic metres which will enable users to buy cards for their use. This will strongly reduce the extent of corruption associated with staff of PHCN. In some cases, the loading of such cards should be controlled by the use of communication technology.

Banking sector: Although ICTs has been greatly remarked in this sector, there is need to expand the security features in the electronic banking. Such features include, inclusion of biometric features such as finger print in addition to the use of password and ATM cards. This can sustain the security of the customer if there is password or ATM number leakage. There is also the great need to make the account of all customers to be accessible to security agents electronically so that the issue of bank aiding corruption can not be feasible.

The Judiciary, Executive and the Legislative Arms of Government: In making decisions that has to do with the public, the public should be allowed to contribute through:

Online public review if tender documents can assure appropriate competition and public scrutiny of procedures,

The registration of permit online with fees paid separately to a commercial bank can also reduce fraudulent construction practices that lead to human failures and casualties. This implies that ICTs in the form of electronic procurement system can inhibit the ability of government to solicit bribe from bidders,

The code of conduct bureau requires that all public officers declare their assets. ICTs can enhance this system by making such declarations to be available to the public via the internet which can be assessed through the community information centre.

DISADVANTAGES OF ICTs

From the above assessment, design and management decisions, environmental factors, etc are some of the factors that determine the impact of corruption in our country. It is therefore necessary to point out that introduction of information technology into a system may be strongly rejected by the populace due to fear of loss of jobs, redundancy, health and safety reasons. Therefore, proper education is also needed before the introduction of ICT into any system.

Conclusion

From the result of the present study, it is worth concluding that:

- (i) Despite improvement in the corruption perception order measured by the international world, corruption is still endemic in the country.
- (ii) The fight against corruption is strongly resisted by those that are corrupt.
- (iii) Information technology provides powerful tools that can be used to curb, control and eliminate corruption in Nigeria.
- (iv) The use of information technology in controlling corruption in different sectors is advocated in this work.

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