

The Role of Media in Strengthening Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper examined the role of media in strengthening the fight against corruption in Nigeria. Since 1999 when the country returned to democratic rule, there has been a heighten expectation that the media in general will assume it's role of serving as the watchdog over the activities of government on behalf of the public. This paper therefore addressed the question: has the media lived up to the expectations of the public in the area of the fight against corruption by government officials. Using in-depth interview our findings revealed that the media has been playing the role expected of it in the fight against corruption. The work of investigative journalists has helped to expose incidences of corruption among public office holders. However, the study also found that much is expected from the media given that many media houses shy away from investigative journalism. Also, the study found that the Freedom of Information Act is grossly underutilized. The paper therefore recommends that Journalists should deepen their capacity to perform the watch dog function, and finally journalists can also explore the new media for publishing investigative news that are blocked in conventional media.

1. Introduction

Through their reportage of daily happenings in the country, Journalists serve as the bridge between the governed and government. Section 22 of the 1999 constitution describes them as “watch dog” of the society charged with regular and independent inspection of those in power

and publishing trustworthy information about government's activities ‘the Press, Radio and

Television and other agencies of mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to people’.

Tobechukwu (2000) describes media as the “fourth estate of the realm” and “watchdog of the society,” responsible for sourcing, dissemination of news, educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions collectively made the media an important link/factor in the relationship between the government and the governed and make them essential to societal growth and development.

This responsibility is predicated on the thinking that, for government to be seen as transparent and above board, its activities must be made known to the people it governs and must yield itself to scrutiny. It is thus the statutory responsibility of journalists to use all means and methods legal to bring the activity of government to the people.

This watch dog role is mostly discharged through news reporting of day to day happenings in the society with special focus on government's business. In Nigeria just like other societies, the mass media transmit ideas and new information to a target audience; thus playing vital role in the adjustments of behavioral pattern of people in the society that they serve.

In other words, the press serves as agents of change, and as watchdog of the society, it is expected to play a part in ensuring transparency and accountability in government as well as contribute to the efforts of crime-fighting institutions to curb corruption in the country (Nwuneli and Nwosu, 1990).

Supporting the above, Sambe (2005) asserts that ‘in performing its watch dog or surveillance function, the mass media in Nigeria keeps watch over government; its three arms and the entire society, so as to keep their performance up to the expected standard that would encourage the development of the country’.

Investigative reports seek to find information about a news event that may not be apparent to the public but could lead to revelations that the organization or people involved may not wish to be put in the public domain. As such it gives further insight into news and is often linked to campaigns by the newspaper for better protection of the rights of people from individuals, organizations or authorities. It also involves investigating issues through which evidence of neglect may be found and published in support of the victims. This of course is a very sensitive matter which will demand extensive verification of evidence of all the facts, eye witness accounts and interviews for or against a group of people to ensure accuracy.

Nigerian Newspapers and Magazines from time to time feature corruption related stories, editorials and articles exposing corrupt public officials and stating the dangerous effects of corruption on the socio-economic life of the nation. A typical example is provided by Dikko (2007) who alleges that Nigerian past leaders stole \$400 billion before transition to civilian rule in 1999. According to him, the eight years of former President Olusegun Obasanjo was full of corruption and even went ahead to cite some specific examples:

...various funds expended by Obasanjo’s government on revamping power N1.3 trillion; \$700m on refineries; N300b on our roads; N400 million fraud in the Ministry of Defense

uncovered by former Defense Minister General Theophilus Danjuma; N150b in the Nigerian Ports Authority; \$302 million oil revenue were unaccounted for by the NNPC as well as N800 million revenue paid by oil companies to NNPC in the first five years of Obasanjo’s government as reported by NEITI have become a source of concern for most Nigerians and called for studies on media’s role in the fight against corruption during the period.

Newspapers like *The Guardian, the Nation, Punch, Tribune, Vanguard, This Day, Leadership, Peoples’ Daily* and many others have also contributed in one way or the other in exposing corruption in high places by obtaining hard facts through painstaking investigative journalism.

Despite the above efforts, the position of Nigeria in annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is still low. The 2013 global Corruption Perception Index released by the Transparency International (TI) ranks Nigeria the 148 out of 180 countries in 2018.

This study becomes important, giving the fact that analysts have traced the root of underdevelopment worldwide to corruption; for instance Ribadu (2006) argues that corruption is responsible for perpetual collapse of Nigerian infrastructure and institutions; it is the cause of the endemic poverty in Africa; it is behind the under-development and cyclical failure of democracy to take root in Africa. Corruption is worse than terrorism. Stople (2008) also, argues that the cost of corruption exceeds by far the damage caused by any other single crime; corruption worsens the investment climate and undermines competitiveness of national economies.

This research focuses attention on public corruption carried out by public office holders at all levels and organs of government.

2. The Concept ‘Corruption’

Salisu (2000) defines the term ‘corruption’ as the misapplication of public resources to private

ends. He proceeded to cite examples like: public officials collecting bribes for issuing passports or visa, for providing permits and licenses, for authorizing passage of goods at sea/air ports, for awarding contracts or for enacting regulations designed to create artificial scarcity. Tanzi (1995) defines it as 'the intentional non-compliance with the arm's-length principle aimed at deriving some advantages for oneself or for related individuals from this behavior.'

Transparency International (1996) sees corruption as any act or omission by any one (be he/she a public official or private individual) that deviates from acceptable norms governing the official duties with the intention of creating gain for personal or group advantage

Byrne (2009) identifies five types of corruption that media report in their daily news and publications. They include:

Systemic corruption - a situation where corruption has become an integrated and essential aspect of the economic, social and political system of a country i.e. the major institutions and processes of the state are routinely dominated and used by corrupt individuals and groups, and in which most people have no alternatives to dealing with corrupt officials.

Sporadic (individual) corruption- this is the opposite of systemic corruption. Sporadic corruption occurs irregularly and therefore it does not threaten the mechanisms of control nor the economy as such. It is not crippling, but it can seriously undermine morale and sap the economy of resources.

Political corruption- this type of corruption takes place at the high levels of the political system, when politicians and state agents entitled to make and enforce the laws in the name of the people are using this authority to sustain their power, status and wealth. Political corruption is when the laws and regulations are abused by the rulers, side-stepped, ignored, or even tailored to fit their interests. It is when the legal bases, against which corrupt practices are usually

evaluated and judged, are weak and furthermore subject to downright encroachment by the rulers.

Grand corruption otherwise called high level corruption takes place at the policy formulation end of politics. It refers not so much to the amount of money involved, rather the level in which it takes place i.e. at the top levels of the public sphere, where policies and rules are formulated to suite interest of a group. Petty corruption is everyday corruption that takes place at the implementation end of politics, where the public officials meet the public.

Petty corruption is bribery in connection with the implementation of existing laws, rules and regulations. It involves modest sums of money and has also been called "low level" and "street level corruption" taking place in public administration and services like hospitals, schools, local licensing authorities, police, taxing authorities and so on.

Oluwagbemiga (2009) advances five broad types of corruption that pervades Nigerian polity. He calls them: political corruption; economic or commercial corruption; administrative /professional corruption; organized corruption and working class corruption.

Commenting on the effects of corruption on national development, Dandago (2008) describes it as the greatest obstacle to Nigeria's development "corruption in Nigeria, just as in most other African countries, has currently become the greatest challenge to leaders and citizens, threatening to undermine effective governmental financial management. It is also a threat to both economic development and the process of establishing an enduring democracy in developing countries, like Nigeria".

The annual reports on global corruption released by anti-graft agencies like the Transparency International (TI), Action Aids (AA), World Bank and IMF etc have continued to portray Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations of the world e.g. the TI continues to list Nigeria amongst the most corrupt nations in its annual corruption perception index (CPI) since 1996.

This is a national embarrassment and cause for concern to the government and citizens of this country. This therefore justifies the need for a study on the role of Nigerian media in the fight against public corruption and how media can strengthen government anti-corruption crusade.

3. Role of Media in the Fight against Corruption

Alawode (2008) identifies key areas that media can contribute to the fight against corruption in Nigeria. They include news reporting through collaboration with the anti-graft and other law enforcement agencies like EFCC, ICPC and Police, etc., to expose corruption by highly and lowly placed officials. Such reports in the press has led to removal, resignation and prosecution of some highly placed officials including the former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun and the former Speaker Patricia Etteh and Senate Presidents Adolphus Wabara e.g. EFCC arrests Ondo Chairman OSOPADEC over N100bn fraud (Daily Trust 21st March 2012:6)

The press can also serve as whistle blower, capable of unearthing corruption through investigative reporting thereby prompting anti-graft agencies to launch investigation into such matters. A recent example is the allegation of fraud against Niger state pilgrims welfare board entitled “Hajj officials defraud Niger pilgrims” published by Daily Trust on 20th March 2012 pp6

Media also contribute to the fight against public corruption by publishing features, articles and editorials with a view to exposing corrupt practices by selfish public office holders and calling for action e.g. ‘Corruption in Nigeria: Facts before the case’ written by Abbas A. Dikko (Daily Trust 24th Dec 2008), and an editorial entitled ‘Government not serious in anti-graft crusade’ (Daily Trust 5th April 2012).

In addition, media can reinforce anti-graft values through consistent reports and news analysis on the dangers of corruption and promote values of honesty and integrity in the society. The constant exposure of corruption by the Nigerian

printed press has emboldened increasing number of the civil society groups in the country to join and identify with the anti-graft war. The reports in the media about corruption have provided these groups with the needed tools to demand prosecution of leaders perceived as corrupt and to demand greater transparency in government businesses.

Stressing the critical role media play in the fight against corruption, Na’Allah (2013) maintains that “through investigative journalism, manipulation, exploitation and destruction of lives and properties that have become prominent features of the Nigerian society would be addressed, and by doing that, journalists would be assisting the three arms of government in discharging their mandates”.

The Transparency International, (TI) Zimbabwe (2012:1) provides three major roles of the media in fighting corruption which includes unearthing major cases within a broader social climate were graft involving the abuse of entrusted power by government officials and persons in positions of authority are involved; stimulating investigation into the alleged stories; and also setting agenda to stimulate the public by prioritizing issues of corruption involving government officials and other senior ruling party officials, the public will treat the issue with value and importance and creates discourse.

Given that, people in power whether in government, in business, or any other group in society can abuse that power; they can be corrupt, steal money, break laws and do all sorts of things which harm other people and will usually try to keep this knowledge secret. Societies thus need investigative journalism because “people have a right to know about the society in which they live; they have a right to know about decisions which may affect them, even if people in power want to keep them secret (Ingram and Henshall, 2008).

Journalists also have a duty to watch how well people in power perform their jobs, especially those who have been elected into public offices. They should constantly ask whether such people

are keeping their campaign promises. To do that, investigative journalists must be unafraid, determined, patient, watchful, fair, as well as dog minded.

The Transparency International (2013) conducted an extensive survey of business people in 30 countries on the best tools to fight public corruption. The result indicated that business people in 20 of the 30 countries chose investigative journalism as the most effective tool for fighting public corruption. In 27 countries, it was ranked even higher than international agreements, and in 24 countries higher than national anti-bribery laws. In Brazil for instance, 70 percent of the respondents described investigative journalism as the most effective tool against private sector corruption. This sentiment was evenly spread to various sectors like: oil and gas (58%), pharmaceutical and healthcare (56%), transportation and storage (54%) as shown below.

Investigative journalism is still in its infant stage in Africa; because African media generally filed in their reports on public corruption in either straight news reporting or commentary formats. The straight news reporting involves coverage from arrest of suspected corrupt official to courts' judgment as released by government sources. The commentary on the other hand, includes x-raying and analyzing some issues in corruption cases in the court or in police custody that are reported by the media for prompt action (Alzubayr, 2011).

Kontagora (2011) maintains that the press has contributed immensely in reporting arrest and prosecutions by anti-graft agencies like EFCC and ICPC or Code of Conduct Bureau. He however argues that the Nigerian press has done very little in the area of investigative journalism i.e. independent investigations to uncover scandals and only wait for EFCC, ICPC, Code of Conduct Bureau or the Police to expose the corrupt public office holders which they subsequently report. He cited examples of corruption stories involving former Speaker Bankole, Governors Aliyu Akwe Doma, Danjuma Goje and Gbenga Daniel which was

first broken by EFCC before media reported or published.

Baba-Ahmed (2011) argues that as a watch dog of the society, journalists are duty bound to always highlight the extent of the havoc corruption wrecks on the society and to also expose the activities of corrupt officials with a view to putting halt to them. He further argues that while Journalists are free to investigate all corrupt practices to logical conclusions, they apparently lack the capacity to do so, either because of their inexperience or lack of encouragement from their superiors. Instead they dwell on reporting allegations of corruptions in the courtrooms and even at that, they don't diligently cover them to final judgement. He however admitted that despite the challenges, Nigerian media have to some extent contributed to the fight against corruption especially in the area of public enlightenment.

Gimi (2011) however commended Nigerian media for their contributions to the fight against corruption in their reportage. He identified four ways the print media contribute to the fight against corruption in Nigeria which include reporting the activities of anti-graft agencies like the EFCC, ICPC and the Code of Conduct Tribunal e.g. 'EFCC arrests of OSOPADEC chair over alleged N61.63b fraud' (*The Nation* 21st /03/2012); carrying out investigative journalism to expose corrupt public officials to follow up and establish a case e.g. '1200 ex-lecturers protest non-payment of pension, gratuity' (*The Guardian* July 1st 2012), editorials of Newspapers have been consistent in condemning public corruption. Whenever a corrupt act is discovered, editorials came out to strongly condemn it and called for decisive action against the suspects e.g. 'Death in EFCC Custody' (*The Guardian* 1st -July 2012); carrying opinion articles that people write on corruption. Editors contribute by giving prominence to corruption issues on their papers e.g. 'Poor as House Mouse' (*Daily Trust* 2nd -7-12). He concluded that the fight against corruption wouldn't have reached where it is now, without the contribution of the print media.

Alli (2012:3) described investigative journalism as a national service:

It is a national service when it is used to correct the ills of the society, the powers that be, may not be happy, but the end will justify the sacrifice. The wrong assumption some journalists have on investigative journalism that it is synonymous to poverty is wrong, because good investigators are paid heavily and are promoted as at when due' e.g. Aremu Segun Osoba who later became a Governor, Chief Tony Momoh (former Minister of Information), Alhaji Lateef Jakande (former Governor of Lagos) and Labaran Maku (serving Minister of Information) and many others who stepped on toes, yet the society rewarded them.

For a successful investigative journalism Alli (2012) advises media proprietors to only recruit journalists who are ready to take the risk of investigative journalism. To him, with investigative stories newspapers will survive extinction despite the emergence of on-line journalism.

4. Objectives of the Study

- Identify the role the media plays in the fight against corruption in Nigeria
- To identify the various ways media can be used to strengthen the fight against public corruption in Nigeria
- To identify the most viable media instrument that can be used to fight corruption in Nigeria

5. Methodology

The research methodology employed for this research is in-depth/ intensive interview. The researchers used purposive sampling techniques to select five Kaduna based registered journalists who are involved in investigative journalism and interviewed them on the relationship between media and public corruption, and how media can be strengthened in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The data generated were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

6. Discussion

On the Correlation between Media and Public Corruption

All respondents agreed that a strong relationship exist between corruption and investigative journalism. They concur with the fourth estate of the realm concept which declared that “the only way reporters can fight corruption is through investigative journalism”. Also “I believe if Nigerian journalists will properly monitor public office holders and be brave enough to expose any corrupt practice, corruption in Nigeria will reduce.” They added that ‘the very consciousness among the public office holders that there exists a vibrant press that is ever watching to report corruption could be a deterrent to corruption as observed by Alawode (2008) that Nigerian politicians no matter how corrupt they are always portray themselves as ‘saint’ and so will not like anything that could tarnish their own image.’ This implies that the presence of a ‘vibrant press’ that is up and doing; with qualified and dedicated journalists who can investigate and report corruption can serve as deterrent to corrupt public office holders. A respondent argues that a typical Nigerian politician wants to be in the corridors of power as long as he/she lives and he knew that exposing his corrupt practices will go a long way in ending his political career, therefore he will not be comfortable with investigative journalists.

Another respondent states that strong relationship does exist between public corruption and investigative journalism, he however identifies ‘Godfatherism’ as the main obstacle to the realization of the link saying Nigerians do not appreciate the relationship because of the frequent cases where corrupt public office holders go scot-free when exposed by the press. For instance, the Minister of Petroleum, Diezani Alieson Madueke, her counterpart in the interior ministry, Abba Moro and many others have been accused of corrupt practices and were not punished by the former President Goodluck Jonathan.

On the Various Ways Media can be used to Strengthen Public Corruption

Speaking on the various ways media can contribute to the government fight against corruption, respondents said the media can assist by exposing corrupt practices in public offices. Journalists can make use of the opportunity provided by the freedom of information act to request for information and publish reports, news commentaries, articles, editorials, etc. for public consumption. This concurs with Alawode (2008) views who identify news reporting through collaboration with the anti-graft and other law enforcement agencies to expose corruption by highly and lowly placed officials

On the Most Viable Media Instrument that can be used to Fight Corruption

All the five respondents are unanimous that investigative journalism is the only viable media instrument that can be used to fight corruption in public offices. This supports Filkov (2012), who insists that the only way reporters can fight corruption is through investigative journalism.

7. Conclusion

The study is of the belief that media can only play its role in the fight against corruption by exposing corrupt public office holders as emphasized in the fourth estate of the realm concept. This concurs with Filkov (2012) who insists that the only way reporters can fight corruption is through investigative journalism.

This study is of the view that investigative journalism is the most effective tool to fight corruption in both private and public offices and that investigative journalists face security challenges globally.

This research agrees with the 'fourth estate of the realm concept' and the views expressed by majority of the journalists interviewed who stated that a relationship between public corruption and media exists which is inversely proportional in nature i.e. the higher the

uncovering of scandals the lower the rate of corruption and vice versa in Nigeria.

8. Recommendations

Journalists should deepen their capacity to perform watch dog function in form of investigative journalism

Media stations should device new means of generating revenue to enable them exercise full editorial independence.

Also, government should punish officers of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) that violate the provision of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Journalists should explore the new media to publish investigative news that are blocked in conventional media

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