



## **Corruption as an Encumbrance to Nigeria's Development and Security: The Role of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission**

**<sup>1</sup>Habila Ezekiel Pokes, <sup>2</sup>Richard Fomben Glong & <sup>3</sup>Jibrin Nanzing Bani**

Department of Legal Studies, Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi

### **Abstract**

Corruption, which ever dimension has tremendous negative implications for the growth and development of any society and also breeds serious security threats. The failure of Nigeria to achieve a modicum of development has largely been blamed on corruption. Thus, corruption seems to be the bane of development of the country and its attendant consequences is security threats such as kidnapping, terrorism, cybercrime, banditry, etc. The relevance of security in relation to human survival, national stability and sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized. No wonder the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended has provided that the security and welfare of citizens shall be the paramount responsibility of government. As part of the efforts to combat corruption in Nigeria, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission was one of the institutions established to fight the menace. It has very wide powers to fight corruption and financial crimes. This paper discusses the activities of the Commission in the war against crimes, some factors that militated against its success equally identified and appraised. The analytical method of research has been adopted. The paper concludes that the major albatross encountered by the Commission in the performance of its functions lies not in the legal framework with which to carry out its functions but the will-power, weak implementation and enforcement machinery of the Commission.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, development, security.

### **Introduction**

Corruption is one of the most socio-economic vices affecting the Nigerian society which is manifested in high rate of unemployment, poverty, hunger, disease, insecurity, infrastructural decay and default in other development efforts. The gloomy picture of corruption in Nigeria is like cancer that destroys the basic structures of the socio-economic, political, cultural and moral conscience of Nigerians. Corruption undermines the country's integrity, security and is being responsible for misery among, the general population (Ake, 1996; Osuma & Nzimande, 2025). The frightening state of insecurity creates fear, anxiety among the populace (Chukwuemeka, 2012; Afolabi, 2022).

Corruption is a recurrent decimal in Nigeria and has contributed in no small measure to the underdevelopment of Nigeria. There is corruption is high and low, places ranging from embezzlement of public funds, diversion of monies meant for infrastructural development to giving bribes for contracts and bribes in public offices.



In the past years, efforts have been geared towards eradicating and totally eliminating corruption in Nigeria but sadly, little have been achieved in the fight against corruption. These efforts led to the establishment of such bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Offences Commission (ICPC), etc. These bodies are charged with the responsibility of arresting and prosecution of individuals found misappropriating public funds. Let it be clearly stated that the efforts of these institutions in fighting, corruption have yielded little result. The aim of this paper is therefore is to investigate the negative effects has had on Nigeria's development and security and the role of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in curbing corruption in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Corruption**

The word 'corruption' is derived from the Latin word "Corruptus" which means "corrupted" and in legal terms, the abuse of a trusted position in any of the branches of power (executive, legislative and judiciary) or other organizations with the intention of material benefit which not legally justified for itself or for others (Richard, 2020).

There is no comprehensive and acceptable definition of the term "corruption". However, corruption has been used to describe conduct that reflects abuse of public office for private gain. The notion of corruption as the abuse of public power for private gain could be seen as a conflict between the obligation to exercise a public, power on the public interest and self-interest of an individual to use or exploit them for private gain. Corruption in Nigeria has been linked to the political and social problems that have bedevilled Nigeria for decades now.

Marriam-Webster (2025) defines corruption as inducement offered to someone which wrong, improper or unlawful means such as bribery. Corruption according to Tamunosiki & Basil (2019) is insidious involving often the bribery and extortion cases, the giver and the taker both of who are unwilling to reveal the occurrence of corruption. Adeyemi, (2021) argued that corruption exists with specific conditions in any society, although it is not peculiar, its incidence is more severe in developing countries. Cletus, (2022) in his broad view of corruption, defined it as the unlawful use of official power or influence by an official of the government either to enrich himself or further his course and/or any other person at the expense of the public in contravention of the oath of office or contrary to the conventions or laws that are in



force. It is very unfortunate that this menace knows not any time or period; it happens anytime or period of any country's history. According to Yagboyaju, (2017) in support of the above contended that corruption is not a characteristic of a one period in political history nor of any one country. It is endemic in both authoritarian and party systems of government. Black Law Dictionary however defines corruption thus: An act done to give some advantages in consistent with the official duty and rights of others or official's use of a station or office to produce some benefits either personally or someone else contrary to the rights of others.

The new edition of the Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines the term beyond the pilfering of public funds. The amassing of fortunes by illegal or corrupt means does not seem to necessarily disturb the average Nigerian as to make him lose sleep over it. Ibrahim and Ahmad (2017) attempts at describing corruption as the "mother of all crimes" and identifies four forms of corruption as bribery, prebendalism, graft and nepotism. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission – a commission that deals with economic issues through Okorie (2018) defines corruption from economic perspective as "The non-violent criminal and illicit activity committed with objectives of earning wealth illegally either individually or in a group or organized manner thereby violating existing legislation governing the economic activities of government and its administration".

From the various foregoing definitions of corruption, one can see that there is hardly consensus on the meaning of the term. However, one thing is certain about those various definitions are that they lack precise elements that constitute corruption. Nonetheless, they all have indicators as to conducts that might be "judged as corrupt and the distinguishing element of such conduct is some moral failing or depravity" (Chimene & Wonah, 2022).

### **Causes Of Corruption in Nigeria**

Corruption thrives in environment where rent seeking tendencies abound and rent (especially government induced ones) is considered to be the major cause of rent – seeking behaviour (Ummah, 2019; Osuma & Nzimande, 2025). Government intervention in economy leads to policy induced sources of corruption such as: government subsidies, price control, multiple exchange rates, low wages in civil



service, natural resources endowments and social factor. Such government pervasive regulations and the excessive degree of discretion allowed government officials; private parties' willingness to pay bribes to government officials in order to obtain any rent that the regulations may generate continues to promote corruption in both public and private sector (Hague & Sahay, 1996; Mugellini et al., 2021). The nature of the Nigerian economy and the way it has been managed largely account for the mode of economic behaviour of the various actors in Nigeria. The following are the causes of corruption in Nigeria:

### **Exemplary Leadership**

This is a central cause of corruption in Nigeria. Lack of exemplary leadership is a problem that has lingered since Nigeria's independence. Both civilian and military leaders have had selfish motives for their decisions and policies instead of the interest of the nation. As Adekunle and Alokpa (2023) expressed: "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. The Nigerian problem is unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility or challenge of personal example which are hallmark of leadership". This assertion reveals that, there is problem of leadership in Nigeria. The successive leaders that have ruled this country lack the will of fighting corruption rather they indulged in corrupt practices to better their living at the expense of the masses.

### **Poverty**

The current poverty rate of Nigeria is very high. Therefore, people believe that corruption is heightened by the pervasive and chronic poverty high level of material deprivation and other structural inequalities. Considering this, Ummah (2019) asserts that corruption is a mechanism adopted by Nigerians to cope with or avert poverty, particularly in the urban centres where the high cost of living may be an inducement for corruption. In a situation where there is inadequate wages and non-payment of salaries in most cases to workers, corruption provides a means of augmenting one's legitimate income. To justify the above, Brien et al., (2023) notes that, there is low and declining civil service salaries and promotion that is not based on performance, dysfunctional government budgets and delays in the release of budget funds including



pay. He asserts that under such conditions and circumstances; officials deliberately refuse to act or delay action in order to coarce some payments out of citizens or firms.

### **Government Sanction**

Peteradu (2024) observed that, the seeming reluctance of government to sanction corruption creates the impression of support. Media report shows that government is found of setting investigation panels and commissions of inquiries whose investigations or findings and recommendations are never made public nor implemented.

### **Cultural Foundations**

Tamunosiki and Basil (2019) in an attempt to contextualize Nigerian corruption identifies tribal loyalties as the foundation of corruption. Therefore, our culture seems to fuel some corrupt practices. The sharing of bribes and favours has become the order of the day; there is hardly the motivation to become honest. This has become a subculture where corruption is accepted to be the normal course of life with the obvious risk of it becoming institutionalized. The traditional culture has internalized the concept of the “big man” marked by ostentations wealth and numerous clients, retainers and hangers-on. The concept of “Big Man” here refers to a person with several dependents that he must provide for them, own houses and fleet cars appropriate to his status. This explains why many Nigerians indulge in corrupt practices. Again, pressure from extended families combined with ethnic loyalties provides fertile grounds for the growth of corruption. These pressures forced officials to indulge in sharp practices in order to find employment for their kinfolk whether they have requisite skills or not. Ethnic groups also jostling for previous administrative and economic positions usually force by whatever economy. Once in these positions, all methods (whether legal or illegal) are employed to ensure that their kinfolk have what is referred to in Nigeria’s parlance as your share of the “national cake” not minding whether it is fair or whether the imbalance so created is blatantly unreasonable (Ijewereme, 2015)

### **Effects Of Corruption on Security and Development in Nigeria**



Corruption plays a negative role in the maintenance of national security irrespective of the way we choose to conceive it. If we construe national security as the protection of national survival, then it may either be seen as the desire and capacity for national self-defence (Danung & Dalan, 2024) or the preservation of the borders of a state and the power to maintain government's sovereignty within its territory (Igbogo, 2015). In short, national security will be variously seen as the confrontation of threats to peace in the society (Danung & Dalan, 2024) or the avoidance of conflicts in the society.

It has been assumed that some corrupt individuals or organizations can initiate government's attempt to entrench national and human security. Thus, Mela et al., (2024) suggest that government will have to be a smart buyer and be more careful if it is to avoid creaming and corruption among private contractors and public bureau who tend to avoid difficult work. A government that cannot effectively entrench its civic charter and promote the public good is weak and a danger to itself and the generality of the citizens. Corruption sustains inequality and reproduces existing pattern of privilege (Ijewereme, 2015). Worse still, corruption ensures that contract appointments are not got on the basis of desert, thus discouraging honest effort. The impact of corruption on Nigerian development and security has been very upsetting; there is massive decline in practically all aspects of our national life underscored by the depth of deficiency in progress amid abundant natural endowments (Chimene & Wonah, 2022). This serves as basis for the distasteful momentous challenges in contemporary Nigeria. Security in Nigeria is endangered by several causes with consequent harmful force on a nationwide scale which has pulled all and sundry in perpetual fear and anxiety. The disastrous consequences of these are increasing level of rottenness in public utilities and services, social disorder and political mayhem, an omen for inevitable conflict and violence (Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021). Corruption leads to accumulation of both local and foreign debt; loans acquired were stolen and are not used in executing projects for which they were borrowed. Donor nations and multinational companies who came to invest in Nigeria became reticent to continue doing business which ultimately exacerbated capital flight from Nigeria. According to Ibrahim & Ahmad, (2017) corruption decreases opportunity for investment because investors consider it as superfluous liability. It depresses foreign aid and makes donor



countries struggle with how to ensure that funds obtained from foreign aid is not swindled (Mela et al., 2024).

Security is the major responsibility of government, but most times the finances given to security are hardly accounted for. According to Adegoke (2020), good evidence of insecurity in Nigeria is the apparent incapability and inefficiency of the Nigeria security agencies to provide adequate security to the citizens. Despite all the sacrifices, more frightening evidence for the collapse of national security in Nigeria currently is the inability of government to protect themselves and the citizens from the blight of armed robbers, criminals, hoodlums, kidnappers, ethnic militia groups, assassins, etc. For example, confirmed cases of the convoys of government officials and most recently the convey of the President coming under gunfire from snipers, robbers, bandits or assassins. Scholars such as Mugellini et al. (2021) are of the view that corruption can be growth enhancing in the sense that with the help of corruption efficiency in the economy is improved. This is so because strict measures that are imposed by the government that impede investment and other economic decisions favourable to growth are removed. Therefore, corruption according to these scholars “greases the wheel”.

### **Concept of Security**

The concept of ‘security’ generally is a crosscutting and multi-dimensional concept which has over the last century, been the subject of great debate. However, long before that, the history of mankind was interspersed by the frenzied search for the best way of ensuring the security of the people, their properties, territories, states and institutions among others. In all places and countries, security has been considered as a “first order value” worth preserving. The aforementioned notwithstanding there is no consensus on the definition of security. This is not surprising because as a social phenomenon, it is often approached from different perspectives.

Security has been seen as a situation where a person or thing is not exposed to any form of danger or risk of physical or moral aggression, accident, theft or deterioration. Some security experts argued that the concept of security has always been associated with the safety and survival of the state and its citizens from harm or destruction or from dangerous threats. Those concepts generally hold that the state is





the only institution with the primary responsibility and power for the safety of its territory and its people (Enemuo, 2020).

The concept of insecurity according to Ali (2013) is “the state of fear or anxiety, stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection”. It refers to lack of inadequate freedom from danger. This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity, and it fits into many forms of other insecurity such as economic and social insecurity. Insecurity connotes absence of danger, hazard and lack of protection. As affirmed by Afolabi (2022), it is a state of fear or anxiety as a result of absence of protection. Adeala and Oluyemi (2012) provide two definitions of insecurity. First, as the condition of being subject to danger or threat, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury and secondly, as the condition of being vulnerable to risk or anxiety where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in expectation of unfortunate incident. These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when it occurred.

### **The Role of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) In Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria**

Successive governments in Nigeria since independence have put in place several anti-corrupt measures and strategies such as Ethical Reorientation Campaign of Shagari's Second Republic, War Against Indiscipline (WAI) of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, Babangida's Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes and War Against Corruption (Azeez & Ajibowu- Yekini, 2018). Other efforts include setting up of probe panels, commission of inquiries and tribunals e.g., Failed Bank Tribunal to try corrupt individuals. These did not achieve much result.

The success or failure in Nigeria in fighting corruption became important for Nigeria and the people of Nigeria. If Nigeria failed then the cynics and the pessimists will have their day. They would take a stand that it is impossible to deal with corruption, consider it a normal thing. If Nigeria succeeds in dealing with corruption, it will not only succeed to build a basis for prosperity and for democracy and for freedom in our polity. With the realization that political, economic and social development cannot be sustained in Nigeria without first tackling or eradicating





corruption, the then President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo made the anti-corruption campaign a priority programme for his administration. This led to the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The EFCC is an inter-agency commission comprising a 22-member board drawn from all Nigerian Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and regulators. The commission is empowered under Section 26 EFCC Act, 2004 to investigate, prevent and prosecute offenders who engage in “Money laundering embezzlement, bribery, looting and any form of child labour, illegal oil bunkering, illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange and privacy, open market abuse, dumping of toxic waste and prohibited goods”.

From the practical point of view, the EFCC sees its mandate as the provision of financial security for the Nigerian economy. It implements the mandate through tackling those menaces such as official corruption, tax evasion, bank fraud, advanced fee fraud, illegal bunkering and several other shades of economic crimes that can distort key economic indices and inhibit growth, development and security. It also seeks to create a level playing field for all stakeholders within the economy.

The EFCC is empowered to enforce all the pre-1999 anti-corruption and anti-money laundering laws. Punishment prescribed in the EFCC Act range from a combination of payment of fines, forfeiture of assets and imprisonment depending on the nature and gravity of the offence. Conviction for the terrorist financing and terrorist activities attracts life imprisonment. The Commission is empowered to prevent, investigate, prosecute and penalize economic and financial crimes including economic and financial crimes and is charged with the responsibility of enforcing the provisions of other laws and regulations relating to economic and financial crimes including: Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Establishment Act 2004, the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act 2004, the Advance Free Fraud and other related offences Act, the Failed Banks (Recovery of Debts) and Miscellaneous Offences Act.

Since the establishment of EFCC in 2003, the Commission has been preoccupied trying to fumigate the country saddled among others with the responsibilities of combating financial and economic crimes. There is no gainsaying the fact that EFCC has impacted positively in the fight against corruption. It has made the country more attractive and safer to foreign investors, assets worth millions of



dollars recovered from fraudsters and hundreds of suspects being prosecuted in court are evidence of the Commission imprints. The aggressive manner in which EFCC fought against advance fee fraud “419” and identify theft led to the prosecution and conviction of kingpins including the celebrated £242 million case involving a Brazilian bank. Much of the amount was recovered and returned to the bank in Brazil. The EFCC also recovered and returned the sum of £4 million to a victim of “419” in Hong Kong and has seized and returned over \$500,000 to sundry citizens. It is in the process of returning \$1.6 million (already blocked) to a victim in Florida (Ribadu, 2006). The EFCC has arrested and prosecuted several public officers for abuse of office and corruption. Such officers include past Governors, former Inspector General of Police, Legislators and Ministers.

### **Challenges of EFCC in Fighting Corruption in Nigeria**

Undeniably, the war against corrupt practices in Nigeria has been hampered by a number of factors. These include the Nigerian political system which encourages corruption, presence of overburdened weak judicial system, fraudulent practices by prosecuting and defense counsel and therefore, the performance of the EFCC in the war against corruption has been undermined both by factors beyond the control of the EFCC as well as internal challenges within the Commission.

The EFCC operates in an environment that makes the achievement of its mandate very difficult. These are factors beyond the control of the EFCC. One of the difficulties lies with the Nigerian legal system that is described as outdate, limited by insufficiency of judges and unpatriotic nature of the Nigerian Lawyers (Shehu et al., 2018). This can be seen in the length of time taken to dispense justice. This also poses a serious challenge to the EFCC (Obuah, 2010; Mugellini et al., 2021).

Although, the EFCC is said to be independent body to fight corruption, interference by government has undermined its effectiveness. For example, the removal of the Chairman of the Commission at will signify tempering with the activities of the commission (Inokoba and Ibegu, 2011). In addition, analysts also reported the possibility that the commission has been used as a weapon of oppression by the ruling class (Samuel, Chinoye & Prosper, 2013). The EFCC is being criticized for been selective and discriminatory so as to meet the need of certain parties.



The existence of multiple anti-graft agencies has also made the fight against corruption a waste of time and resources. Competition among these agencies has been a major challenge of the to the EFCC. Instead of concentrating on their roles in combating corruption, the commission has been used as “white elephant” and center of expenditure (Shehu et al., 2018).

The job of fighting corruption requires competencies in legal, financial, investigative and forensic skills which is lacking in the EFCC. A major obstacle to the success of the commission lies with inadequate funding. A media report indicates that the commission is financially incapacitated by the budget provision (Johnbosco & Joseph, 2013). The media quoted the chairman as saying that the commission cannot even pay staff salaries and other administrative expenses due to the budget shortfall. Inadequacies in funding can affect virtually every segment of the commission. This has made the commission ineffective because it is incapable of hiring competent lawyers, accountants or other investigators to achieve the commission’s goal.

## **Conclusion**

Corruption is the major obstacle to development and security in Nigeria and tackling it is essential to the survival and progress of Nigeria. It is no exaggeration that corruption as a phenomenon has impacted negatively on the political system, economic development, peace and security as well as resulted in the decline in social services in the country.

There is a clear-cut correlation between corruption, development and security and it stringent measure is about it. The development of the country would be impaired. Corruption which is equal to monopoly plus discretion, minus accountability has serious impediments to sustainable development especially in developing countries. It is stolen the wealth of resource-rich nations like Nigeria thereby making people to be trapped in poverty which is the major cause of insecurity. Corruption is a stigma that destroys the reputation of affected country. It lowers investment thereby lowering economic growth of the country.

Despite the existing challenges facing Nigeria after the establishment of the EFCC by the government in 2003, the reform has yielded some concrete results with a reduction of corruption level when compared to when EFCC was not established.



### **Recommendations**

Corruption is the bane of development and an encumbrance to security threats in Nigeria. The danger posed by endemic corruption to the survival of Nigeria as a socio-political and economic entity should compel all stakeholders in Nigeria project to device more proactive measures to arrest the scourge. Therefore, to win the war against corruption, we recommend as follows:

1. To win the war on corruption and achieve meaningful development, special courts should be established to try corruption cases. This will give speedy and quick judgment to corruption case. Also, our criminal law and penal laws needs review. This is because they were not initially designed to solve the kind of problem we are experiencing in our contemporary society where corruption has become systematic with the institutionalization of corrupt motivation among various bureaucratic, political and business elites.
2. The failure of the institutional approach in Nigeria cannot be located in the approach itself but in its operations by state leadership whose vested interests have sabotaged the effectiveness of the approach. The EFCC should be made independent and adequately funded to be able to effectively carry out its functions without influence from the government. The habit of publicly rewarding honest and transparent people should be encouraged by government. This will serve as encouragement to the society and the upcoming generation that it pays to be honest. Unemployment should be reduced to its' barest minimum. This is because corruption is the major cause of unemployment and those welding arms on innocent citizens are the jobless people in the country.
3. Our anti-corruption laws should be reviewed to make corruption a capital offence whereby any person convicted of corruption should be made to face death penalty.

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