



Prebendalism and National Development: *The Nigerian Experience*

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Abstract

Prebendalism is a situation where the state is personalized with authoritarian disposition mostly based on patron–client relation which benefits a few involved in the network and detrimental to a large segment of the society. Its mode of operation is to politicize ethnic, regional and religious differences, and through that process drag the system into growing irresolvable tension. The consequence of prebendal appropriation of public offices has posed a serious threat to the development of critical infrastructures in Nigeria. Thus, the plundering of national resources and underdevelopment in Nigeria could be said to be intertwined or inextricably connected. The reason, why, we are not developing irrespective of our superfluous human and material resources given to us by nature, formed the basis for this research. Hence, in this study, an attempt was made at establishing the nexus between prebendal appropriation and national development. The paper highlights the causes of prebendal appropriations and the role of the anti-corruption agencies in combating corruptions in Nigeria. Being a non-experimental design, the study adopted a documentary research design. The data of the study were sourced from secondary data (Text books, journals, newspapers, magazine, internet material, among many others. The study found that prebendalism has adverse effect on national development. The study recommends demotion or summary dismissal of any career officer found culpable with respect to colluding with a politician to siphon public fund, making political position less attractive, among many others

Keywords: Prebendalism, Appropriation, Corruption and National Development.

Introduction

The appropriation of state offices as prebend by office holders who use state offices to generate material benefits for themselves, their constituents and kins, has become a recurring decimal in Nigeria political history. In Nigeria, political power guarantees unlimited and uncontrolled access to the resources of the state and society that are appropriated for personal use and advantages. The Nigerian brand of politics is therefore, no more than a prebendal enterprise engaged largely for the crude

appropriation of national resources (Fawole, 2005).

Richard Joseph, the director of the programme of African studies at Northwestern University used the term “Prebendalism” to describe patron client or neo patrimonialism which is the sense of entitlement that many people in Nigeria feel they have to the revenues of the Nigerian state. The use of patronage, Ethnic groups and sub-groups are the basic clusters in the patron-client relationship that structure the prebendal competition for, and appropriation of the offices of the state (Joseph, 1987). The use of

patronage as observed by Anugwom (2000) is common in political circles and democracies. It creates a condition whereby the least qualified are elevated to positions of high responsibility with the attendant hydra-headed consequences.

In this study, we shall try to expose and examine the casual connection between prebendal appropriation of public offices and development of critical infrastructures as funds meant for development are diverted and used to service the patron-client relationship. We shall also, examine/x-ray or radiographies the role of the anti corruption agencies in combating corruption in Nigeria; find out the causes of prebendal appropriation; state the guiding theoretical framework and finally recommendations and conclusions.

Prebendal Appropriation and National Development

National Development for the purpose of this study could be conceptualized as the all round socio-economic, political, cultural and religious advancement of a county through harnessing all the country's human and material resources for the achievement of her set objectives aimed at positively changing the outlook of the country and bettering the lives of the citizenry. Biddle and Biddle in Bello et.al (2017a) defined development as social and personal change that moves towards consciously chosen goals. Any of such definitions on development must have a target/ set objectives or goals which if achieved, will change the outlook of the nation and improve the lots of the people. Prebendal appropriation is anti-developmental. It runs criss-cross to National Developmental plans of a country. It is because, the occupants of public offices in Nigeria are inertly corrupt and greedy that we have not made any meaningful progress with respect to developing our economy. How could development come in a country known

for perpetuating the organogram of religious bigots and tribalistic centred leaders who will always prefer getting drowned, rather than bringing "Mr fix" from another tribe/religion to fix a problem for the nation to move forward. In the words of Omenka (2013) cited in Bello et. al (2017) :

The ruling elites in Nigeria uses or misuses state powers to plunder resources which would have been used for the country's development for their personal gains. Most of the resources which are ear-marked for developmental projects develop wings and fly to peoples pocket (elites). It is sad to note that elites in Nigeria have established hegemonic circle that siphoned the country's wealth for personal use. They are composed of rather small elite of politically and economically dominating families. Their corrupt acts are responsible for Nigeria's underdevelopment.

The series of the Nigerian's National Development plans went down the drains without; holistically achieving the stated set objectives. Shall we talk of the seven point Agenda of the immediate past administration of Gen. Muhammed Buhari (Rtd) and his vision 2020? Infact, it was within the period of vision 2020 that we learnt of python swallowing huge amounts of billions ear-marked for projects without any trace of either the python or the money. The Nigerian state is a scam. It is a criminal enterprise whereby the more you plunder or appropriate public funds, the more you are revered. Prebendalism has a destructive effect on the formal institutions of democracy as funds budgeted for development finds their way into private pockets of very few individuals, as observed by Imegwu (2003) that "career officers normally collude with elected officers to loot government treasury for private uses".

Causes of Prebendal Appropriation

The major reasons adduced to why people appropriate public offices are summed up in greed, corruption and lack of self

discipline or self-restraint. The fact, that the majority of “kickbacks” are requested by public officials and are paid in advance of a service are strong indications that such “kickbacks” are paid by citizens in exchange for a service which the official would have provided for free by the virtue of the officials position as a government official. Some kickbacks are received for the purpose(s) of speeding up or finalizing an administrative procedure, while some are paid to avert the payment of fine, like the ones received by the

officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps, which contravenes the rule of law and reduces the amount of money (income) that goes into government treasury. Below is a table of percentage distribution and mean scores of “kickbacks” paid to public officials and the reasons for such payments as collected from the focal group discussions and interviews conducted on twenty independent respondents residing within Awka capital territory

Percentage Distribution and Mean Scores of kickbacks paid to Public Officials

| S/N | ITEMS | SA(5) | A(4) | UD(3) | D(2) | SD(1) | MEAN | DECISION |
|-----|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| 1 | Fasting up actions on applications | 50% 10 | 30% 6 | 15% 3 | 5% 1 | 0% 0 | 4.25 | Accepted |
| 2 | Show of Appreciation | 15% 3 | 35% 7 | 20% 4 | 10% 2 | 20% 4 | 3.15 | Accepted |
| 3 | Award of contracts | 75% 15 | 20% 4 | 5% 1 | 0% 0 | 0% 0 | 4.7 | Accepted |
| 4 | Preferential treatment | 50% 10 | 35% 7 | 15% 3 | 0% 0 | 0% 0 | 4.35 | Accepted |
| 5 | Release of classified information | 25% 5 | 30% 6 | 10% 2 | 10% 2 | 25% 5 | 3.2 | Accepted |
| 6 | Effect/ perfect police bail | 80% 16 | 10% 2 | 0% 0 | 5% 1 | 5% 1 | 4.55 | Accepted |
| 7 | Good Public Relationship | 10% 2 | 25% 5 | 15% 3 | 30% 6 | 20% 4 | 2.75 | Accepted |
| 8 | Passing an Examination | 10% 2 | 20% 4 | 15% 3 | 45% 9 | 10% 2 | 2.75 | Accepted |
| 9 | Approval for payment when project is not yet completed | 70% 14 | 25% 5 | 0% 0 | 5% 1 | 0% 1 | 4.6 | Accepted |
| 10 | Avert the payment of fine | 50% 10 | 20% 4 | 10% 2 | 5% 1 | 15% 3 | 2.85 | Accepted |
| | Total | 87 | 50 | 21 | 23 | 19 | 38.15 | Accepted |
| | Grand mean | | | | | | 3.82 | Accepted |

Source: Researcher's Field work, 2023

From the above table, we observed that the greater percentage of the populace will give bribe for award of contracts; to effect or perfect a police bail; for preferential treatment; to give approval for payment when project is not yet completed and to fasting up actions on applications etc. while not many people would like to give bribe to pass an examination of for the maintenance of good public relationship. In summary, the above table showed, that an average Nigerian is corrupt, thereby lending credence to the

reasons, why, state offices are appropriated in geometrical progression.

The Role of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Combating Corruption in Nigeria

There are diverse policy measures and legal instruments designed to combat corruption in Nigeria. These include the criminal and penal code; the criminal justice (miscellaneous provisions) Decree, which established the corrupt practices investigation Bureau; the Ethical Revolution of Shehu

Shagari's administration; The war Against Indiscipline of Buhari's Administration; Mass mobilization for social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER); the code of conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act; Money Laundering Acts; the failed Bank Tribunals; Advanced fee fraud and other related offences Act; Budget monitoring and price Intelligent Unit; Independent corrupt practices and other Related offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)

However, it is disheartening, that, in spite of government initiatives and efforts to fight corruption, corrupt practices still pervades our national life and society. The fight to totally eradicate corruption seen to have failed, because, the most corrupt amongst us are among the ruling class, or at least covered by the ruling class.

Secondly, we have weak institutional framework to fight corruption in Nigeria. The EFCC and its sister agency, the ICPC, have not proven the required capacity to holistically fight this incubus. The ICPC and EFCC seem to have come under severe criticisms owing to what appeared as "Selective prosecution" in handling corrupt related matters. For instance, Iyare (2008) argued, that, EFCC derailed completely as it became the tool of the Obasanjo Government to silence and witch hunt Obasanjo's political opponents. This in mind, it is no gainsaying the fact, that, the present romance of the immediate past CBN Governor Godwin Enoefiele, with the EFCC is politically driven. Thus, to say that such an agency that is supposed to be at the vanguard of combating corruption in Nigeria is a mere tool for political vendetta is stating the obvious.

Theoretical Framework

We adopted the theory of "Prebendalism" as the theoretical framework for the topic "Prebendalism and National Development: The Nigerian Experience". The major proponent of this theory is Richard

Joseph. He used the term Prebendalism to describe a system of primitive accumulation of wealth where public offices are regarded as "Prebends" and appropriated by public office holders in Nigeria, just to service their patron-client relationship. Joseph(1987) explained his theory of Prebendal politics as follows:

- Firstly, Prebendal politics pinpoints to the defining institutional flaws, namely, the absence of truly, independent and resilient institutions, which can effectively mediate the inter-group struggles for power and resources. He opined further that, until institutions which are not susceptible to being captured by fractions of civil society are established, any hope for a constitutional democracy is certain to be regularly frustrated.
- Secondly, that, vicious struggles over the distribution of political offices and award of contracts, etc are articulated along culturally defined lines.
- Thirdly, that the innovative Nigerian principle of "Federal character" according to which the country's ethno-regional diversity must be reflected in all governmental appointments and disbursements, has effectively transformed prebendalism (or the personal, factional and communal appropriation of public offices) from an informal norm of political competition into a directive principle of state policy.

Finally, Joseph's reflection on the recurrent agitation for re-organization of the federation's constituent units, made him to assert, that, "indeed, the constant pressure for the creation of more states is fuelled to a significant extent by the unrelenting pursuit of prebendal offices.

Thus, we applied this theory to have a clearer understanding on why the nation is not moving forward with respect to National Development. Public office seekers engage themselves in a sort of do or die gladiatorial battle just to get hold of public office and dispense to others as benevolent lords.

Recommendations

In order to ameliorate the ugly trend associated with prebendal appropriation of state offices, we proffer the following recommendations.

- We advocate that elected offices should be made to be less juicy/attractive through the payment of paltry sum as sitting allowance. This will discourage criminals from vying for political positions.
- We also advocate for the demotion or summary dismissal of any career officer found culpable with respect to colluding with a politician to siphon public fund.
- Finally, we advocate that the right type of values such as political tolerance, honesty, the principles of equity, justice and fair play be part of social studies and civic education curriculum in our Schools. In other words, there should be value orientation through social studies and civic education curriculum.

Conclusion

It is no gainsaying the fact, that prebendal appropriation of state offices, as a caterpillar, has eaten deep into the fabrics of our national life, in such a manner, that, any hope of meaningful national development devoid of tribal sentiments is a mirage. The reason Nigeria is still developing or for clarity sake, what I can call a “tomorrow developed

nation”, is because of corruption. Thus, our take home is that, we have not developed because we are corrupt, and unless, corruption is holistically nipped at the bud in our private and public lives, our generations yet unborn, shall continue to live in borrowed gowns”

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