THE ROLE OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Corruption, which ever dimension, has tremendous negative implications for the development and growth of any society. Corruption in the public sector involves the looting and embezzlement of public funds for personal use. Corruption is Nigeria's biggest challenge. It is clear to every citizen that the level of corruption in the country is high. It is found in every sector of the society (both public and private sectors). The quest for self-preservation has outweighed national interest which brought about lack of national development in Nigeria. The focus of this paper is on the role of secretarial professionals in the fight against corruption. As secretaries are found in every organization, working closely with high and mighty, therefore, their roles in checkmating the excesses of greedy leaders, bosses or employees through good and thorough documentation cannot be overemphasized.

Keywords: Corruption, Public sector, Private sector, National development, Secretaries, Documentation.

Introduction
A Professional Secretary is first and foremost a leader in an office setting. The ears and eyes of the boss. He/she is in a position to exercise initiatives required in that office in the course of performing his/her duties. A secretary is knowledgeable in information and computer technology, typewriting and shorthand. A secretary must be somebody that is well organized by nature and by professional training, dependable as well as reliable. Thus, an effective secretary
should try to give his all in terms of skill and time management and self-disposition, ensure an effective and efficient functionality of his office environment. As a professional secretary, he/she delegate functions and duties to other secretarial assistants and clerical officers in accordance with their abilities and competence. These functions and duties includes filing, records management, typing, receiving of visitors, handling of mails (both incoming and outgoing), arranging his/her boss itinerary and managing other office finances.

It is in the light of the above-mentioned functions of secretary that this paper intends to highlight the role of a professional secretary in fighting against corruption in business organization, government establishments and educational institutions. As a record manager and close ally to the boss, he/she must be able to guide against infiltration of records/files under his/her custody, as well as to advice his boss appropriately.

What is Corruption?

The term corruption does not have a universally accepted definition. Several views have been put forward, stand points and framework about the concept. Corruption is a concept associated with unwholesome practices in the society with its attendant negative influence.

Corruption has many dimensions. It involves improper behaviour of public office holders such as enriching themselves, friends and loved ones to the detriment of the general populace. It is common place to see public officers divert monies that are meant for projects to their personal purse. Cases abound where public officers use public funds to acquire private property. They employ relatives and friends into government ministries and agencies under the auspices of replacement. Replacement is a situation where new staff is employed to fill a vacant position after death or retirement of the original occupant of that position without approval from relevant recruitment authorities. We can go on and on to mention many of such unwholesome practices in our public and private sectors.

Corruption is the dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. It is the illegitimate use of power to benefit a private interest (Morries, 1991). Corruption is the giving of a bribe to an official so that the truth will not be told. It involves the embezzlement of public fund for personal use and any act which is considered to be criminal act according to the law of a particular society.

Corruption is Nigeria's biggest challenge. It is clear to every citizen that the level of corruption in the country is high. It's found in every sector of society. “Corruption is potent cancer that has mercilessly eaten Nigeria to a state of stupor”. Prof. Peter U. Nwangwu. Be it small or big sector, there is every possibility of observing corrupt practices when critically examined.
Corruption: Present State in Nigeria

Nigeria, which is the most populated country in Africa, has been ranked high in corruption by Transparency International and other notable organizations that monitor corrupt practices around the world. Nigeria was the most corrupt country in the year 2000. The survey carried out on 90 countries by Transparency International in the year 2000, put Nigeria as the most corrupt in the ranking, which included Kenya, Cameroon, Angola, Nigeria, Cote-d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, India, Venezuela, Moldova, and others. Nigeria occupied the 90th position in terms of transparency.

Still from the same source, in the year 2002, Nigeria has again ranked the second-most corrupt country in the world, after the organization surveyed 102 countries. Nigeria was seen at the bottom, occupying the 101st position in terms of Confidence Interval (CI).

Ten years after, in 2012, Transparency International again deemed Nigeria one of the

The table below captures Nigeria’s ranking from 1996 to 2010.

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Corruption in Nigeria wears many kinds of unattractive and dirty clothes. The situation has made so many people feel a lot of pains as the money which would have been used to reduce poverty in the country are being channeled into the pockets of a small group of persons.

In the year 2016, more than two-thirds of the 176 countries and territories surveyed...
fall below the index mid-point of Transparency International scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). In that year's survey Nigeria sat at number 136 on the table with Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Myanmar, and Papua New Guinea. This shows Nigeria ranked along other countries as 40th most corrupt in 2016.

**Causes of Corruption**

1. Bad leadership – In a country where the leaders are corrupt, the tendency for the followers to be corrupt is very high. Hence, when the leadership is corrupt the political will may not be there to fight against corrupt practices.

2. Military Rule – from independence in 1960 comparatively, the military has ruled the country for 35 years out of 57 years of Nigeria's Independence. With the tendency for dictatorship, military regimes in the country administered the state without adhering to the principles of rule of law and accountability. Decisions were taken in a manner that neglected due process and accountability, therefore, giving avenue for corrupt practices to prevail.

3. Lack of strong legal framework and upright judicial system that gives opportunity for prolonged and delayed legal processes in the judicial system also accounts for this.

4. Inequality in the society – the desire for the poor to be like the rich in the society makes them to embezzle public funds when they have the opportunity.

5. Jumbo pay for politicians – compared to what civil servants in both Federal and State governments, receive monthly, political office holders are heavily paid hence civil servants who have access to government finances embezzle the funds of government in order to compete favourably with the politicians in the society.

6. The granting of office immunity to President, Governors and other public office holders in the country encourage them to steal from government treasury. Cases abound in Nigeria.

7. Extreme and excessive materialism, weak ethical environment, erosion of moral values and lust for power are some of the factors that encourage corruption (Ogunlana, 2007).

**Effects of Corruption**

Corruption has had adverse effect on both public and private sector which in turns had political, economic and social implication in the developmental process in Nigeria. It is a hindrance in the development and progress of any business organization and the country because it results in high cost of project, widespread poverty, poor quality service delivery, poor access to public goods. All these invariably undermines the concept of development and put Nigeria in a stage of underdevelopment. The impacts of corruption include:
1. Negative Effect on Economic Development: in every society, the economic structure is usually assumed to be the superstructure. Hence, all other structures rest on the economic structure for survival. The decline of economic base of a country inadvertently results in the decline of all other sectors. The diversion of public funds by politicians and public office holders will result in incapacitation of the government to embark on huge projects that would have alleviated the sufferings of the masses. This explains why we have uncompleted projects scattered across the country. Also, some of the government revenue generating agencies misappropriate the resources that would have been channelled into government account resulting in loss of government revenue. More worrisome is the fact that these stolen monies are not always invested in Nigeria as most of them transfer the money to foreign accounts and acquire property outside the country with no attendant benefit to the domestic economy. These activities continue to retard development in Nigeria.

2. Implication on Security: the act of corruption has the tendency to instigate insecurity challenges. Militancy in the South-South region of the country came as a result of the embezzlement of the funds meant for the development of the region by political office holders prompting the youth of the area to take up arms in order to take part of the resources. This act has degenerated to the extent of disrupting gas supply thereby resulting in poor electricity supply across the country. Some youths have decided to take their destiny in their own hands by engaging themselves in kidnapping and political thuggery. All these are crises which corruption has promoted.

3. Implication of Corruption on the Political System: the Nigeria political system is so corrupt to the extent that elections are seen as “do or die affair” where political office seekers use every means possible to win elections. Stolen monies are used to pay delegates in the case of primary elections, voters are bribed to vote for a particular political party. In recent times, the electorate no longer regards government as theirs and the acceptability of government is usually contestable because a greater number of the eligible voters are sometimes not part of the electoral process because of them, their participation will not change anything. It is instructive to note that out of 68,833.476 million registered voters in the 2015 general election in Nigeria less than half of those who registered voted in the presidential election representing 29,432.083 million. This clearly shows the level of apathy prevalent in the country's political system. The electoral instruction in the country are manipulated to favour certain persons especially the government in power and this weakens the opposition to the disadvantage of the citizen.
Public Sector and Corruption

Corruption has proved to be one of the problems seriously confronting Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999. In fact, considering various cases of financial corruption being perpetrated in governance since 1999 till date, we can categorically say that corruption has actually been institutionalized in the country. This is so because institutions of government bribe legislators in order to pass budgets of their organizations and ministries collect bribe before contracts are awarded, politicians give money to the electorate to vote them into power, contract inflation, and some lecturers collect money from students to pass examination. The dimensions of corruption are so numerous that this paper will not be able to exhaust. This, therefore, means that the negative impacts of corruption are also countless and this has inadvertently affected the political economic and social development of Nigeria.

The Way out of Corruption

The following may help in adding value to the fight against the menace called corruption.

1. Special courts should be established to try corruption cases. This will give speed and quick judgment to corruption cases.
2. Our criminal and penal laws need 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 “systemic with the institutionalization of corruption motivation among various bureaucratic, political and business elites” (Ayua 2001).
3. While laws and law enforcement are indispensable, the sustained reduction of systematic corruption requires committed leadership that solves the socio-economic problems of the people and in turn gets support from the citizens and the civil society.
4. Honesty and transparency should be publicly rewarded. This will serve as an encouragement to the society and the upcoming generation that it pays to be honest.
5. The family is the micro unit of the society. The message of value re-orientation should begin from the family. Parents should endeavour to inculcate in their children and wards the character of honesty, dedication and uprightness.
6. There should be stringent punishment for those convicted of corrupt acts in our law court. If possible let us take a cue from China where harder punitive measure are placed on convicted criminals. This may definitely serve as a deterrent to those that may want to be motivated by largess from sharp and corrupt acts.
7. The teaching of moral studies or instruction in all tiers of education in the
country should be emphasized on. Our children should be taught that there is God in heaven who watches and rewards every good acts. So, they should embrace discipline and godly contentment, which to me is great again.

**Present Effort of the Government Against Corruption**

Recent efforts of the Anti-graft Agencies, that is both Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) cannot be over-emphasized in investigating, arresting and prosecution of fraudulent persons in the country both in public and private organization and societies.

The leverage given by the present administration in the country to these agencies to operate is highly commendable against the past administration that made them redundant. Nigeria Government collaboration with foreign countries and plea to them, most especially those that have Nigeria looted funds for recovery is a good move in good direction. This singular action of recovering the looted funds is also serves to discourage those people who may be thinking of looting our money and take it abroad to think twice and desist from such journey.

**Concept of Secretarial Profession**

The secretarial profession is one of the oldest professions in world. The role of the secretary is so vital to the development of an organization. There is hardly any organization where there is no need for the secretarial staff.

Who is a Professional Secretary - A Professional Secretary is the one who coordinates the daily routine of an office and organizes office schedules and paper work. A Secretary works in small and large office settings, conducting and supporting the daily business operations. Duties may range from answering phones and greeting clients/visitors, to scheduling meeting and managing the database. There are different levels of secretarial positions; some may work as an Executive Secretary, while others may receive additional training to become legal or medical secretaries. The latter's two positions typically need specialized training in terminology and processes particular to the legal or medical field.

**Roles and Duties of a Professional Secretary**

The role of a professional secretary involves working with Managers, Executives and other personnel in a business or organizational office setting such as higher institutions. In a general office environment, secretary's duties will typically consist of data entry, word processing, office management, document preparation and filing, presentation creation, and performing basic office accounting tasks. Some of the major duties of a professional secretarial staff in an office include:

A. Communications – A Professional Secretary, more commonly known as an Administrative or Executive Assistant, acts as a gateway between clients and
employees of a business or organization. He/she might screen visitors and phone calls and arrange callbacks or appointments. Additionally, a professional secretary might conduct phone surveys or make inquiries on behalf of his/her employer.

A professional secretary also must handle written communications. He/she generally sorts the mail. Sometimes he/she will prepare responses for the boss' signature. A professional secretary also prioritizes work based on deadlines and communicates with others in the office.

B. Files – Secretaries often manage customer files and records in an office. He/she maintains accurate and good filing systems. Keeping files in alphabetical order and using a local filing system for easy storage and retrieval are keys to successful file organization.

C. Correspondence – Secretaries are the common liaison for incoming and outgoing phone and mail correspondence. They receive calls from clients, business partners, workers or community members, and either answer questions or forward the calls. They also make calls on behalf of managers to communicate information to customers, to schedule appointments of follow up on inquiries, taking notes from a manager/boss, preparing a memo or letter, and screening mails.

D. Documents – Secretaries are often tasked with copying documents for mailings or for internal distribution. They also must fax documents from the company to clients or customers, and receive incoming faxes to pass on to the appropriate person. Some secretaries use email, word and excel to create spreadsheets or documents and pass them on to employees or customers. Proofreading documents before they are sent out of the office is another duty.

E. Reception – In general office positions, secretaries commonly assist new employees and visitors in finding their way around. This includes directing visitors to the people they came to meet and showing new employees where to go on their first day. In general, the secretary projects the image of the business by offering a friendly and professional reception to people who come into the office.

F. Scheduling Duties – Secretaries use calendar-based planners to manage clients' schedules. Software programs help with the task. Private Secretaries often communicate with others to confirm or cancel meetings and other scheduled events. Secretaries must adapt to ever-changing schedules and must prioritize to make sure the most important meetings are planned and organized with care. He/she also plans trips, which require to book reservations for flights, rent vehicles and hotels.

G. Office Tasks – Especially in small offices, a secretary may be asked to carry out routine clerical tasks and errands to assist others. This may include cancelling or rescheduling appointments, ordering office supplies, taking
notes during meetings, keeping of office imprest and getting drinks for the supervisor and guests.

In addition, as a Professional Secretary, companies, independence business executive and public figures often hire them to help them manage their affairs. These secretaries, who are hired by an individual or his company, work exclusively for the individual and perform a variety of tasks to help him manage his business and private life. A secretary must handle multiple tasks with precision and must develop a good rapport with the individual.

**Role of Secretary in the Fight Against Corruption**

There is a consensus about the position of corruption as our major impediment to greatness. It is a malady that has unfortunately gone deep into our national fabric. Corruption is the major reason why we are where we are today as a country. It is also the reason why we are unable to address a lot of our problems and challenges.

Years of mindless stealing and waste of public resources have brought bad name to Nigeria and reversed the hope and aspirations we had as a country at the time of Independence. The haemorrhage of corruption has dragged this country to a brink in spite of various efforts at different times, to get the country away from the monster. Fighting corruption, therefore, is key to the survival and progress of our country.

In the fight to emancipate Nigeria from corruption, secretarial professionals have a great role to play. The role in this crusade is conferred by the potent of the weapon that is in the hand of secretary.

The accessibility of secretary to nearly all confidential matters in the office and his/her closeness to the boss makes it more easier to protect and guide against corruption in the organization and the country at large. However, for professional secretaries to effectively fight against corruption, there must be professionalization of the secretarial line. A professional body that seeks to the monitoring and conducting professional examinations in authenticating a qualified Personal Secretary should be in place such as in Accounting profession, the ICAN (Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria) to guide against quacks in the profession.

There is this belief that, “corruption cannot fight corruption”; he who is morally challenged has no moral right to sermonize on morality. And when the morally deformed person attempts to rise against immorality, hardly would he ever succeed and often he ends up ridiculing such moral responsibility.

As so called secretary, who knows nothing about his/her roles, duties or functions in an office, to have good records system and guiding against the infiltration of document will be a problem which can encourage corruption. Good filing and easy access to information when needed must be part of the duties of a qualified secretary.

Moreso, effective monitoring of financial involvement in the office
discourages corruption and thus remove the minds of subordinate from cutting corners in terms to purchase and other financial transaction in the office.

Effective managing of the boss: A secretary that is alive to his/her responsibility in managing and advising the boss wisely, should he wants to derail, so as to bring his mind to the right perspective of job ethics.

**Documentation and Good Records Management As Major Instrument In The Fight Against Corruption**

A Secretary in an office has wide knowledge of information about his/her office which was due to his pivot role play in the day-to-day running of the office. As a Secretary to the manager/boss as well as secretary to different departmental meetings, committee meetings and other statutory and adhoc meetings, he is in a vintage position to have access to vital information on all activities going on in the organization.

Documentation and good records management is the bases for good decision making for the managers/bosses, in term of referencing. Secretary playing a functional role of doing this, is always at the position to come up with information that can guide a manager/boss in an office aright both in documents and personal advice. In case of any grey areas in information supplies in some documents, Secretary can clarify his boss's doubts on such matters in which he may have privileged information that might not have been recorded or as reminder.

Secretary's actions in guiding and supplying information and advice to his boss may clear any act of temptation on the part of the boss on any identified areas of likely wanting to maneuver in enriching himself unjustly or employing people (majorly relatives and friends) illegally which constitute an act of corruption can be avoided. As the heartbeat, live wire as well as thinking tank of any business organisation, Secretary determines the life expectancy and health condition of any business entity through his role to fight against corruption with the instrument of information in his possession.

**Conclusion**

Conclusively, based on the aforementioned, employing a qualified, competent and professional secretary is germane to the existence of any organization as any iota of corruption will be nipped at the bud, before it is even been conceived. Any good documentation and records keeping is an antidote to corruption, in which Secretary plays a major role.

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