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Effects of Public Procurement Corruption on Nigeria's Economic Growth and Development

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Abstract

Experiences around the world, especially in advanced nations have consistently demonstrated that the public procurement system is an indispensable tool in achieving rapid socioeconomic growth and development in any society. Regrettably, over the years, the Nigerian public procurement system has largely remained a major source of drain on the country's economy rather than an instrument for driving the wheels of the nation towards actualizing her highly desired development goals and objectives. This has generated great concern as government huge financial expenditures on the provision of public goods and services in the country over the period are yet to be matched with any meaningful corresponding development expectations or outcomes. In the argument of many, the salient factor that underscores the unimpressive situation is the phenomenon of embedded high level corruption in the country's public procurement sector. Against this background, therefore, this paper primarily examines the effects of public procurement corruption on Nigeria's economic growth and development, and suggests ways of eradicating the menace in the country's public procurement system in order to enhance its capacity to attain the desired level of development and progress in all spheres of the economy.

Key Words: Corruption, Economic Development, Economic Growth, Procurement, Public Procurement.

Introduction

The pivotal role of public procurement in the social and economic transformation of any nation either developed or developing societies cannot be overemphasized. Public procurement constitutes an important aspect of governmental activity upon which

the progress of every country rests. Efficient and effective public procurement practice is essential to the survival of any economy as it involves the management of huge financial resources, and accounts for the largest share of public expenditure at all levels of government. In fact, public procurement is the most active business activity of the government, the means by which essential public goods and services are provided to the citizens while ensuring adequate public expenditure management. It has been considered an indispensable instrument for developing societies owing to its unique role in harmonizing and utilizing societies' resources for maximum attainment of set development goals and objectives.

Despite these known facts, however, it is unfortunate that public procurement practices in most developing countries are mainly characterized by large scale corruptions and huge wastes of scarce resources. In Nigeria, particularly, public procurement has largely remained a major source of drain on the country's economy over the years. Indeed, procurement is a very problematic area where 80-90% corruption takes place in Nigeria because there are many little areas where there are loopholes (Ogar, 2012). Unethical practices in procurement account for the large chunk of the corruption bedeviling our country. Corruption in the procurement process has a serious negative impact on the development and well-being of a nation because outside of salaries and social benefits, procurement accounts for the largest share of public expenditure at all tiers of government. The enormous amounts of money involved in procurement present an almost irresistible lure for corrupt practices because of the tremendous opportunity for bribes, kickbacks and other payoffs (Okodwa, 2011).

The Nigerian government has lost unprecedented amounts of financial resources in an effort to provide basic social and economic goods and services to the public without achieving the expected corresponding value for money due to embedded corruption and other irregularities that permeate the country's public procurement sector. It is in view of this undesired development that this paper examines the effects of public procurement corruption on Nigeria's economic growth and development and recommends effective measures for combating corruption in the country's public procurement system so as to make the nation's development dreams and aspirations more realistic and achievable for the good and benefit of the country and the generality of her citizens. To achieve this, this paper is structured into six segments. The first segment is the introduction followed by the

second which is conceptual clarification. The third presents a general overview of public procurement corruption and how it undermines the economic growth and development of Nation-States. The fourth examines the effects of public procurement corruption on Nigeria's economic growth and development, while the fifth section suggests strategies for combating the menace of public procurement corruption in Nigeria. The sixth segment consists of the final conclusion of the paper.

Conceptual Clarification

It is a common practice in the social science for proper clarification and analysis to be offered in favour of the terms that are central to the issue under consideration in order to enhance general understanding of the subject matter. In the light of this, the concepts that demand proper elucidation in this paper are the following: Public Procurement, Corruption, Economic Growth and Development. We shall consider these terms one after the other.

Public Procurement

The term 'public procurement' has obviously received considerable degree of attention by different scholars and authors who have offered vast array of definitions in an attempt to explain the meaning of the concept. However, it is pertinent to note that the concept 'public procurement' is apparently a co-joining of two words namely 'public' and 'procurement'. Thus, in order to enhance our understanding of the term, there is the need to distinctively define the two words that constitutes the term before merging and defining them as a single concept.

The term 'public' originates from the Latin word 'populus' or 'poplicus', and in general denotes some mass population ('the people') in association with some matter of common interest. Dwight (1955) uses the term in relation to such words as government and state. The state or government in this context is conceived to represent the public realm or sector, which involves the entire citizenry.

On the other hand, the Public Private Development Centre (2011) conceives 'procurement' as the complete action or process of identifying, defining and acquiring or obtaining personnel, material, services, works needed by means authorized in pertinent directives. In its own view, the Public Procurement Act (2007) defines 'procurement' simply as 'acquisition' while Transparency International

amplifies the meaning as the acquisition of consumption or investment, goods or services.

In view of the meanings of the terms 'public' and 'procurement', public sector procurement is therefore, according to NPPU (2005), the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. The World Bank (1995) broadly defines it as the purchasing, hiring or obtaining by any other contractual means of goods, construction works and services by the public sector. Alternatively, public procurement is defined as the purchase of commodities and contracting of construction works and services if such acquisition is effected with resources from state budgets, local authority budgets, state foundation funds, domestic loans or foreign loans guaranteed by the state, foreign aid as well as revenue received from the economic activity of state. Public procurement thus means procurement by a procuring entity using public funds.

Alluding to the above differing definitions and views, therefore, this paper conceives public procurement as the most active business part of government, the means by which essential goods and services are provided to the public while ensuring adequate and efficient public expenditure management. It is the aspect of governmental activity that brings it into face-to-face contact with the private sector, either locally or internationally, for the exchange of goods, works or services for financial or monetary considerations.

Corruption

There are several definitions of corruption but a simple one provided by Transparency International may be the most practical as it captures the substance and general meaning of the term in both the private and public sectors. According to Transparency International, corruption, in simple terms is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Shipman, 2005). Specifically, as it relates to the public sector in general, the definition currently most widely applied is "the use of public office for private gain" (Gray and Kaufmann, 1998; cited in Thai, 2008).

Corruption in public procurement process has become increasingly critical to many organizations both public and private, (Cooper et al., 1997; Turner, Taylor and Hartley 1994; Carter 2000) and has attracted significant attention from governments, civil society institutions and international bodies (Thai, 2008). Essentially,

corruption in public procurement means the offering, giving, receiving, or soliciting of anything of value to influence the action of a public official in the procurement process or in contract execution (FRN, 2007). In our own submission, therefore, public procurement corruption refers to any acts or practices by contractors and procurement officials aimed at manipulating and truncating the procurement process in order to advance their private interests at the expense of the interest of the country and the general public.

Economic Growth and Development

Economic growth and economic development are closely related but different concepts. The two terms seem to imply similar things albeit with little differences. **Thus analyzing the terms involves both definition and somewhat brief comparison and contrasting for proper understanding. In actual sense of the word, economic growth** is a narrower concept than economic development. It is an increase in a country's real level of national output which can be caused by an increase in the quality of resources, increase in the quantity of resources and improvements in technology or in another way an increase in the value of goods and services produced by every sector of the economy. Economic Growth can be measured by an increase in a country's GDP (gross domestic product) (Diffen, 2014). Of more importance to the term is the growth of the ratio of GDP to population (GDP per capita), which is also called *per capita income* (Bjork, 1999).

On the other hand, the definition of economic development given by Michael Todaro conceives it as an increase in living standards, improvement in self-esteem needs and freedom from oppression as well as a greater choice. The most accurate method of measuring development is the Human Development Index which takes into account the literacy rates and life expectancy which affects productivity and could lead to Economic Growth. It implies an increase in the per capita income of every citizen (Diffen, 2014).

In contradistinction, economic development differs from economic growth. Whereas economic development is a policy intervention endeavor with aims of economic and social well-being of people, economic growth is a phenomenon of market productivity and rise in GDP (Wikipedia, 2014). Economic Growth does not take into

account the size of the informal economy. The informal economy is also known as the black economy which is unrecorded economic activity. Development however is concerned with sustainability which means meeting the needs of the present without compromising future needs. Thus, Economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition of economic development (Diffen, 2014). Consequently, as economist Amartya Sen points out: "economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development" (Sen, 1983). Be it as it may, however, the submission of this paper is that economic growth and economic development can simply be referred to as the overall progress in all spheres of a country's national life usually reflected in the general well-being and living conditions of the citizens.

General Overview of Public Procurement Corruption and how it undermines the Economic Growth and Development of Nation-States

All over the world, public procurement activities are characteristically and intrinsically prone to corruption. Thus, the phenomenon of public procurement corruption (PPC) is not the feature of a particular country or continent, nor a feature of a particular category of countries (i.e. developed or developing societies). Rather, it manifests in all societies, nations or countries in different forms and at various levels or degrees. Lending credence to this, Arrowsmith, Linarelli and Wallace (2000) posits that there is hardly any country in the world that has escaped the incidence of corruption in Public procurement; a reality that generated a wave of reforms driven by the imperative to improve the performance and cost effectiveness of the public sector (Self, 1993). It should be noted, therefore, that a common and enduring challenge being faced by both developed and developing nations is how to combat the firmly embedded and wide-spread corruption in the public procurement sector.

Nevertheless, the spate and magnitude of public procurement corruption in developing countries obviously transcends that of developed societies with its resultant far reaching and devastating effects on the yet fragile and weak economies. It is in view of this that Thai (2008) maintains that public procurement is a function of government that is most prone to corruption, particularly in developing countries, where there is insufficient transparency and competition in procurement processes. On the whole, however,

corruption in the public procurement process constitutes a major source of drain on the economies of the countries where it thrives unabated irrespective of whether they are developed or developing nations. In fact, it constitutes a massive drain on the global economy.

Explaining the remote causes of corruption in public procurement, an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report (2007) pointed out that the procurement process can be divided in the five following phases: (i) procurement planning and needs assessment, (ii) product design and document preparation, (iii) tender process (including advertising, invitation to bid, prequalification, bid evaluation, post qualification), (iv) contract award and implementation, and (v) final accounting and audit. The risk of corruption exists at every stage of the process. According to the same OECD report, the major risk of corruption comes from a lack of transparency, limited access to information and lack of accountability and control at each stage of the procurement process. Similarly, Transparency International (2006) found that corruption at the stages at which it occurs could be due to: limited or restricted access to information; abuse of exceptions to open public bidding; limited or ineffective control and monitoring within the contracting process; and particularly during the contract implementation phase; and deficiencies and lack of transparency during the budget phase. Notwithstanding, it goes further to argue that public procurement procedures are often complex and transparency of the processes is limited, and manipulation is hard to detect.

This argument is supported by Matechak (2005) (cited in Turyahikayo, 2008), who observes that corruption opportunities abound at all stages of the procurement process. It therefore becomes clear the reason Bashelka (2009) notes that "public procurement has increasingly become one of the dominant fertile grounds for corruption". This further underscores the argument by Daniel Kaufman (2004) of the World Bank, who estimated that more than US\$1,000 billion is paid annually in bribes; and the volume of bribes exchanging hands for public sector procurement alone is roughly 200 billion dollars per year. In a different report, some World Bank studies have also shown that more than \$1 trillion were paid in bribes a year (Kaufman, 2004) in the public procurement sector.

Stemming from the above, the reason why corruption in the public procurement practice has huge negative implication for the economic growth and development of a nation becomes

unambiguous. Ultimately, at the most basic level, the state of corruption is a very fundamental health check on the quality of society. Corruption may be one of the factors, together with political instability, terms of trade, etc., that holds back economic development. One may speak of a vicious circle of corruption, whereby corruption contributes to a low rate of economic development, leading to continued poverty, where corruption may thrive (Shipman, 2005). To be precise, *bribery and corruption in public procurement may have multiple negative effects, leading notably to unnecessary, unsuitable, uneconomic or even dangerous projects*. Corruption undermines markets and welfare, and exerts a corrosive effect on society by eroding trust in government, institutions and business itself. It destroys values. With bribery, no-one really wins (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007).

Corruption in procurement markets involves a different process of allocation of contracts than would have been obtained through a competitive process. Corruption either leads to a situation where the contract is not awarded to the lowest bidder (or the bidder who has offered the best solution from price and qualitative standpoints) but rather to the firm who has offered a bribe (or the highest bribe), or to a situation in which there are fewer bidders than would otherwise have been the case. In most cases, the end-user will end up paying more than he would have without the bribe and/or will receive lower quality services. In this sense corruption in public procurement implies a distortion of the competitive process (Corsi, Guinina & Ciriaci, 2006) that should ordinarily make for efficient allocation and utilization of resources. To add to this, public procurement corruption in developing countries also results in huge wastages of scarce public resources, devaluation of money, lack and deplorable condition of social and economic infrastructures, creates extreme hardship, increases poverty level and results in poor living conditions for the masses.

A 2006 study by Transparency International makes interesting findings on public procurement. It found that public procurement amounts, on average, to between 15% and 30% of GDP or more. It also found that few activities create greater temptations or offer more avenues for corruption than public procurement. The study estimates damage from procurement-related corruption at normally between 10% and 25%, and in some cases as high as 40 to 50%, of the contract value (Public Private Development Centre, 2011). Nevertheless, Thai (2008) asserts that it is very difficult to measure accurately losses to

procurement corruption as it is difficult to calculate accurately procurement budget. He argues that it is difficult to know accurately the average percentage of procurement budget lost to procurement corruption as vendors offer different percentages of contract values to different corrupt officials. Indeed, even at national levels, it is difficult to ascertain the exact amount of values lost in the procurement process in any country. It however involves high amounts of societies' scarce resources. In any case, however, corruption in the procurement process has huge devastating consequences for the economy as well as for the provision of essential social and economic services to the citizens or general public. It is a cog in the wheel of progressive effort to evolving a robust and vibrant economy globally and nationally, especially in developing countries.

Effects of Public Procurement Corruption on Nigeria's Economic Growth and Development

The effects of public procurement corruption on the socioeconomic growth and development of Nigeria are colossal and cannot be accurately measured. However, we in this paper attempt to examine some of the implications of corruption in the public procurement sector for the country's social and economic progress under the following sub-headings or themes:

Budgetary Inefficiency and Ineffectiveness

Corruption in public procurement causes huge dislocation to the budgetary allocation of resources, affects value for money and destabilizes government annual fiscal plans and programs for the well-being of the masses. According to the World Bank's Country Procurement Assessment Report (CPAR) elaborated in 1999, out of every 1.00 Naira spent by Government 60 kobo was being lost to underhand practices. It is not surprising therefore that the estimated public procurement loss (in millions USD) is greater than the official development assistance for the period between 1960 and 2011 (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 2013). Corruption in public procurement accounts for over 70% of Nigerian government's total budget and therefore affects the efficiency of public spending and the opportunities to improve the quality of life (Atta, 2009). Moreover, experts in public expenditure management affirm that corruption in the Nigerian public procurement practice usually reduces the value for money and public procurement economy in our yearly Appropriation

to about 40% (Onyema, 2012). Relying on the foregoing information, it is clear that the budgetary cost of corruption in Nigeria is not only massive, but also impactively overarching and devastating.

High Costs of Government Contracts

Another major effect of public procurement corruption on Nigeria is the apparent outrageous costs of executing government contracts in comparison to other African countries. Indeed, outside crises-ridden parts of the world, Nigeria pays more for construction contracts than any other country in the world. Construction of basic infrastructure such as roads and other physical structures and supplies also takes up almost 65% of all annual budgets. Virtually all reliable estimates show that Nigeria pays at least three times what it costs for equivalent projects in most African countries. Corruption is the single biggest contributor to the high cost of government projects as contractors build in huge margins into contract sums because they are expected to pay those who award them the contracts (Ahmed, 2011).

Untimely Completion of Project and Delivery of Sub-Standard Works or Services

A common feature of the Nigerian public procurement practice is acute delay in the execution of government contracts and delivery of poor quality projects, works or services funded with tax payers' money. As rightly observed by Ahmed (2011), it takes at least four times as long to complete projects in Nigeria than in most African countries. It is also the case that projects rarely meet the agreed or specified standard as contractors usually deliver low quality projects as a means of maximizing profits or gains. This is common in road, bridges and other construction contracts as assessors usually receive gratification and give approval to sub-standard projects for public use.

High Rate of Project/Contract Abandonment

Nigeria is one of the countries with the highest rate of the cases of abandoned or unfinished projects in the world. Although there are no reliable statistics for the collateral damage to existing infrastructure which these high costs, delays and abandoned projects in Nigeria cause, it is however safe to assume that they constitute the most important reason why the nation's basic economic and social infrastructure is not developing (Ahmed, 2011). Abandonment of projects and re-award of such accounts for the greatest wastes and

misallocation of resources that currently bleeds the Nigerian economy and stagnates the nation's development effort.

Decay and Lack of Basic Socioeconomic Infrastructures

The most visible effects of corruption in the procurement practice in Nigeria can be seen in the apparent lack and pitiable conditions of few available social and economic infrastructures across the country. For example, it is a known fact that Nigerian does not have enough standard and well-planned road networks linking every parts of the country to boost commercial and economic activities. Also, there is no gain saying the fact that the few available roads in Nigeria are in deplorable states as most of them were constructed during the colonial era and now need rehabilitation or outright replacement by reconstruction. Away from road, majority of the citizens do not also have access to safe drinking water neither do they enjoy constant electric power supply. In fact, the power sector alone has gulped unprecedented amounts over the years without having any impressive evidence to account for it due to large scale corruption besieging the sector. Reforms in the power sector has obviously not led to any meaningful outcome or improvements as those who initiate and implement public sector reforms in Nigeria are themselves the major obstacle and impediment to the country's development.

Effects on the Growth of Industries and Commerce

Not only that the poor states and absence of social and economic infrastructures in Nigeria has been detrimental to the growth of small, medium and large scale local industries, it has also discouraged foreign investors from investing in the country's industrial sector. As a matter of fact, a good number of foreign firms formerly based in Nigeria have relocated to Nigeria's neighboring countries - Ghana, Benin Republic, etc. since lack of amenities especially electricity increased the costs of keeping their machines running in their industries. Relying on own sources of power supply does not only affect the production costs, it also results in high costs of goods and services produced by these industries. And with high production costs, the firms have had to battle with huge wastes of resources resulting from low patronage and demand for their costly produced goods and services by the consumers. At the home front, many local industries have completely been forced out of business as they could not cope with these high overhead costs, especially given the fact that most of

them do not have strong financial base or operating capital. This has contributed to the high rate of unemployment and poverty level in the country as well as a drastic reduction in the proportion of government income from company tax.

Increased Poverty Level and Hardship

It is a paradox that Nigeria is a rich country inhabited by the poor. Her poverty profile in statistical figures according to a recent study indicates that Nigeria is poverty endemic. Poverty incidence increased between 1980 and 1985 and between 1992 and 1996. Out of over 140 million population at 3.2% population growth rate, 5.3% unemployment rate, real GDP growth rate of 5.7%, oil sector growth rate of 4.31%, non-oil sector growth rate of 8.93%, inflation rate of 8.50%, about half of the total population (68.7million) live below poverty line (Ladan, 2009). All over the world, the public procurement system is essentially the means by which the governments provide the basic necessities of living to their citizens with the aim of alleviating their sufferings and improving their living conditions. But in Nigeria, huge amounts of resources meant for the provision of basic life essentials to the public are usually diverted into private purses of contractors and procurement officials. This increases hardship and poverty among the masses who are the supposed primary beneficiaries of government projects or programs. No wonder the point has been stressed that, Nigeria despite its oil wealth has one of the largest populations of poor people on the African continent and one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world at 800 per 100,000 births according to the World Health Organization (Public Private Development Centre, 2009).

Battered Image and Integrity of Government

The cost of corruption in public procurement in Nigeria also has far reaching implication for the image and integrity of the government at both local and international levels, and creates citizens' distrust and lack of confidence in government. Nigeria has been at various times ranked among the world most corrupt nations and this has constantly posed strong challenge to the country and her citizens abroad. Indeed, the continuous low rating of Nigeria by Transparency International (TI) and other international anti-corruption organizations, among the most corrupt nations of the world are also located within the ambit of weak governance embedded in a weak

public procurement system that has blighted the development of many parts of Africa to date (Atta, 2011). Thus at home and abroad, Nigeria's image and reputation has been dragged to the mud and the implication of this for her external relation with other countries in the international community cannot be accurately measured. Hence, Nigeria must employ everything at her disposal to fight and ensure she wins the war against the hydra-headed dragon and menace of corruption in all sectors of the economy so that her road would be smooth to achieving its development agenda and dreams for the betterment of the country itself and the entire citizens.

Towards Combating Public Procurement Corruption in Nigeria

To surmount the challenges posed to Nigeria's growth and development by the inherent high level corruption that permeates the country's public procurement system and practice, we in this paper recommend the following measures:

To start with, for the war against procurement corruption to be successfully fought and won in Nigeria, the presidency must demonstrate the political will and determination to combat and exterminate the menace as the federal government has all it takes to rid the sector of the evil of corruption.

The provisions of the Public Procurement Act, 2007 should be speedily and fully implemented, and the National Council on Public Procurement (NCP) quickly appointed and inaugurated so as to checkmate and complement the role of the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) as provided for in the Act.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should be given full access and adequate public procurement education and orientation so as to improve their capacity and knowledge for proper monitoring of the procedures and to enthroned the desired degree of transparency and equality in the country's procurement sector.

The country's anti-corruption agencies- the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission have enormous task to perform in this regard. They should swing into actions, doing more of biting rather than mere barking.

Applying the tactics of deterrence would also go a long way in combating the heinous disease of corruption in our procurement sector. Those caught in procurement corruption, regardless of whom they are, should be adequately prosecuted and properly punished so that would be offenders can learn their lessons.

Another step in the right direction that would demonstrate the zeal and commitment of the government to salvage the nation from the damaging effects of procurement corruption is the setting up of a specialized court for handling cases of corruption in public procurement. This would not only help to reduce work-load on the country's regular courts, it would also make for quick and timely prosecution and dispensation of verdicts on procurement cases so that erring individuals would immediately begin to dance to the drum of the law instead of the usual freedom they enjoy while they have cases standing against them in the law courts.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have made effort to examine the causes and effects of public procurement corruption on the economic growth and development of Nigeria. As observed in the body of the paper, corruption in the public procurement sector is a major drain on Nigeria's economy and has largely contributed to the low development profile the country has retained over the years. Despite the recent reforms meant to reposition the sector and cure it of the evil disease of corruption that has for long hampered its efficiency and effectiveness, the virus continues to spread within the procurement system due to various reasons such as officials' collusion with contractors, weak procurement laws and institutions, opaque procedures, lack of political will to deal with corruption, partial implementation of the Public Procurement Act, among others.

Corruption in the procurement process is the cause of budgetary inefficiency and ineffectiveness, increased volume of abandoned public projects and deplorable state of social and economic infrastructures across the country, extreme poverty and hardship among Nigerians, damaged image of Nigerian government at home and abroad to mention a few. Notwithstanding, the problem of corruption in the Nigerian public procurement system and practice and its ugly impacts on the country and the citizens is surmountable and there is hope for the evolution of a more vibrant and efficient system that would enhance the nation's effort towards the full attainment of its socioeconomic development goals and desires if the recommendations put forward by this paper are fully adopted and adequately applied.

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