



## CORRUPTION AS A PROBLEM IN NIGERIA: SOLUTION THROUGH POLYA-MODELING

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### Abstract:

The paper is an attempt to provide remedy to the menace of corruption in Nigeria which has hindered its development. From pre-independence era till date, the paper took a hard look at corruption cases in Nigeria with the attendant decline in the corruption perception rating by Transparency International. Efforts aimed at checking the menace seem not to have yielded the desired result leading to a situation where corruption has assumed problematic dimension. In response to this, the paper explored the work of Hungarian-American Mathematician, George Polya and presented an adaptation of Polya Problem Solving Model (Polya-Modeling) in fighting corruption in Nigeria. In doing this, some distinctions were identified between Polya-Modeling and the current efforts at fighting corruption in Nigeria. Arising from the submission, some recommendations are advanced some of which are: (1) All corrupts acts should be identified and explicitly made clear to Nigerians (2) there should be decentralization of intelligence for information gathering and trial courts for expedient trials.

**Keywords:** corruption, problem, Nigeria, solution, Polya-Modeling

### 1. Introduction

From independence in 1960 till date, Nigeria has transversed turbulent moments through military rule for 29 years (1966-1979, 1983-1999) and 27 years of civil rule (1960-1966, 1979-1983, 1999-date). The choice of the word 'turbulent' is because all these years, the various administrations were characterised by developmental friction occasioned by corruption. Corruption is one of those very common words in usage but tasky to comprehend and unravel because of its endemically pervasive nature and the perversity of the perpetrators. However, in the context of this presentation we shall look at corruption from the perspective of Morris (1991), who sees corruption as illegitimate

use of power to benefit private interest. Inherent in this definition is that corruption is the misuse of public resources for personal or group benefit.

Right from independence, Nigeria has a long and well-documented history of corruption that has hindered its development. During the First Republic, corruption was at sprouting stage in Nigeria. However, the establishment of the African Continental Bank in Lagos in 1944 by Azikiwe raised questions as to the sources of the funds. There were allegations that the paid-up capital of the bank was from the Eastern Regional Financial Corporation. Within the period, Adegoke Adelabu was investigated following charges of political corruption leveled against him. The report led to the demand for his resignation as district council head. In the North, there was allegation against some native authority officials in Bornu. The politicians were nicknamed 10 percenters by Major K C Nzeogwu for the ignoble practice of demanding for 10% of value of contract awarded. This led to inflation of contract costs and was one of the reasons for the first military coup d'état in Nigeria in 1966.

During Gowon administration (1966-1975), corruption was kept away from public view even though the military Governors acted like lords overseeing their personal fiefdom. But in 1975, the Gowon administration suffered major corruption scandal over importation of cement. The administration placed a cement order that amounted to two-thirds of the estimated cement need for the entire continent of Africa in exchange for a large kickback. This cost Nigeria 25% of the oil revenue for that year, a time when oil accounted for 98% of export earnings (Turner, 1976). Another major corruption scandal that characterised the Gowon administration was the Lockheed bribery where the military authorities reportedly received 3.6 million US dollars from Lockheed Corporation on purchase of six Fighter Jets in 1975.

Murtala Mohammed toppled Gowon in 1975 on charges of abuse of power and reneging on handing over date to civilian rule. Many government officials were sacked for corruption. Following the assassination of Mohammed in 1976, Olusegun Obasanjo took over and focused on the completion of the transition to democracy as well as implementing the national development plans which included building new refineries, pipelines, expansion of national shipping and airlines as well as hosting of FESTAC. In the course of all these, corruption was alleged as the projects were conduits to distribute favours and enrich connected politicians. There was also the ITT scandal during the administration (<http://www.piie.com/publications/chapterspreview/12/8iie2334.pdf>).

Corruption became pervasive during the Shagari administration (1979-1983). Mysterious infernos in public buildings, transfer of hard currency into foreign accounts by public officials through the defunct Johnson Mathey Bank of London and the shortage of rice were cases where corruption was manifest during the Shagari administration.

During the 18 months of Buhari's first administration (1983-1985), many corrupt officials were convicted but the administration suffered a corruption scandal in what is popularly known as "53 suite cases scandal" in 1984 during currency change exercise. The 53 suite cases were believed to belong to Atiku Abubakar who used his power as Area Controller General of Customs in charge of Murtala Mohammed Airport to

repatriate illegally acquired fund against the order of the military junta that every case arriving the country during the currency change exercise should be inspected irrespective of the status of the owner (<http://www.vanguardng.com/2011/03/53-suitcases-saga-buhari-blasts-atiku-jonathan/#sthash.NBNULIRI.pdf>)

The administration that has acquired the notoriety of legalising corruption is that of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993). The Gulf war oil windfall of about 12.4 billion US dollars is yet uncounted for. The Gloria Okon scandal which led to the assassination of Newswatch Editor, Giwa Dele, and the sleaze from privatisation initiative, were among the corruption cases hanging on the administration (<http://naijarchives.com/gloria-okon-the-story--of-nigerias-most-mysterious-drug-pusher/>). If Babangida legalised corruption, Sani Abacha administration (1993-1998) advertised and perpetuated it. French investigation of the bribes paid to government officials to ease the award of a gas plant in Nigeria revealed the level of official graft in Nigeria. About 100 million US dollars was involved and the accounts frozen by the Swiss authorities (Hector, 2004) . In 2000, two years after his death, the Abacha accounts in Swiss banks were overflowing with 600 million US dollars and more than 1 billion US dollars were found in his accounts throughout Europe (Pallister, 2000).

The administration of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998-1999) which emerged after the death of Abacha was primarily focused on political transition to civil rule which came May 29, 1999 when he handed over to the democratically elected President, Olusegun Obasanjo. Within the eight years of Obasanjo administration (1999-2007), major corruption scandals were: the Transcorp Shares scandal that violated the code of conduct standards for public officers and the Presidential Library donations at the eve of his exit from power that pressed associations to donate (<http://www.informationng.com2013/02/things-you-never-knew-about-mike-adenua-nigerias-second-richest-man.html>), and not the least, was the widely published lobby of the National Assembly for the failed attempt to secure 3<sup>rd</sup> term (<http://www.vanguardng.com/2011/05/the-third-term-bribery-allegation/>).

The Shehu Yar'adua administration (2007-2010) was also cut in the web of official corruption as many of his appointees seized the ignoble opportunity of his poor health to expand the frontiers of corruption in the country. Notable among the corruption cases during the administration was the use of his Attorney General to frustrate ongoing local and international investigations of his powerful friends like Governors Ibori, Igbinnedion and Odili which led to massive losses to their states. In addition, there was widely publicised allegation that the Supreme Court Justices were bribed to legitimise the election that brought him to office as President (<http://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/usaafriadiologue/OtWrbYOKHK>).

The death of Yar'adua May, 2010 led to the administration of Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015). The summary of the level of corruption during Jonathan's administration is the Transparency International's (2015) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) rating of Nigeria in 2015 in the 136<sup>th</sup> position out of 168 countries sampled in the world. It is this position that attracted the ignoble qualification of Nigeria as one of the "fantastically corrupt nations" by the then British Prime Minister, David Cameron. The corruption

details that ravaged Jonathan administration were: the unaccounted 20 billion US dollars which NNPC did not remit to Federation Account (<http://aguntasolo.com/2015/04/29/this-yam-this-goat-this-country-part-1/>); the 250 million US dollars security contracts to militants in Niger Delta, the BMW purchase scandal by his Aviation minister, among many others.

Since the inception of the present administration led by Mohammad Buhari in May, 2015, other corruption cases against Jonathan administration have emerged and are still emerging, some of which are: the 2.2 billion US dollars public fund drawn in the guise of fighting Boko Haram but used to finance the campaigns for Jonathan's 2<sup>nd</sup> term bid (<http://www.bellnaija.com/2015/07/14/adams-oshiomole-accuses-okonjo-iweala-of-spending-1-billion-of-nigerias-money-on-jonathan-election-campaign-she-denies-allegations/>), the theft of 60 million barrels of oil valued at 13.7 billion US dollars under the watch of NNPC between 2009 and 2012, the diversion of 60% of 1 billion US dollars loan obtained from the Chinese by the Ministry of Finance (<http://www.nta.ng/2015/08/10/president-buhari-queries-diversion-of-foreign-loans/>), among other numerous cases many of which are currently in courts.

From the review above, it is clear that corruption in Nigeria has become endemic and is the nation's biggest developmental challenge. Enormous financial resources that would have otherwise been used to provide infrastructure, boost employment and reduce poverty, are diverted into the pockets of a tiny few.

Before the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2004, Nigeria had laws relating to financial crimes to combat corruption and financial offences. These laws include the Money Laundering Act 2004, the Failed Banks and Financial Malpractice in Banks Act 1994, among others. The EFCC Act mandates it to combat financial and economic crimes. The commission is empowered to prevent, investigate, prosecute and penalise 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 already in place. There was also the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) which was the pioneer anti-corruption agency set up by the Federal Government in 1979 with the sole mandate of checking corrupt practices in public service. The CCB has a special court, the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) to prosecute those who breach the codes of conduct of civil service.

Despite all these legislative and legal establishments, records as captured above, have shown that the fight against corruption over the years by these bodies, is far from being won, confounded by the fact that the activities of some of these bodies have been widely alleged to be tainted by political considerations. In consequence, they are ineffective as corruption rating of the country continues to fall. There is therefore the need to explore alternatives to confront this crime against humanity as corruption issue in the country has, indeed, become a problem. The alternative explored in this paper is a derivative of the work of a Hungarian-American mathematician, George Polya (1887-1985), who produced a model for solving problem in mathematics, known as Polya Problem Solving Model. Packaged in this paper is an adaptation of the Polya Model (Polya-Modeling) in combating corruption in Nigeria.

## 2. Corruption as a problem

What readily comes to mind anytime anywhere the word 'problem' is used is a situation where something is needed but not available. This kind of situation presents some difficulty, physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, politically, etc depending on the situation. Where there is a problem, there is a gap that needs to be filled. This is vividly captured by Dino (2010) when he defined problem as the difference between what is observed and what is expected, the discrepancy between what we get and what we want. The keyword in any problem situation is 'difficulty'. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines problem as something that is a source of trouble, worry etc ([www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/problem](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/problem)). If something is difficult to deal with, it implies a method of tackling it is not known at the point in time. We can therefore say that a problem is a condition or situation or circumstance for which there is no algorithm or method of solution.

From the concept of 'problem' above, it is easy to see that corruption in Nigeria has become a problem because where there is corruption there is a gap that needs to be filled. Corruption presents some difficulty and inflicts pains, economically, emotionally, socially, etc on individuals and members of society and hinders overall development. Because of wide scale corruption in Nigeria, the resources that would have otherwise been used to provide critical infrastructure like roads, power, water, housing etc are diverted to private pockets, thus leaving a wide gap in their availability. As a result, Nigerians are subjected to deprivations and all forms of economic, mental and social agonies while the nation suffers stagnated development. Also, corruption has become a problem in Nigeria because it has become a phenomenon very difficult to deal with. From the pre- independence era to date, from one regime to another, from military to democracy, the common string is corruption and all efforts to provide solution seem to have ended on a starting note. This has created the need to look at the model propounded by George Polya for solving problem.

### 2.1 Polya model of problem solving

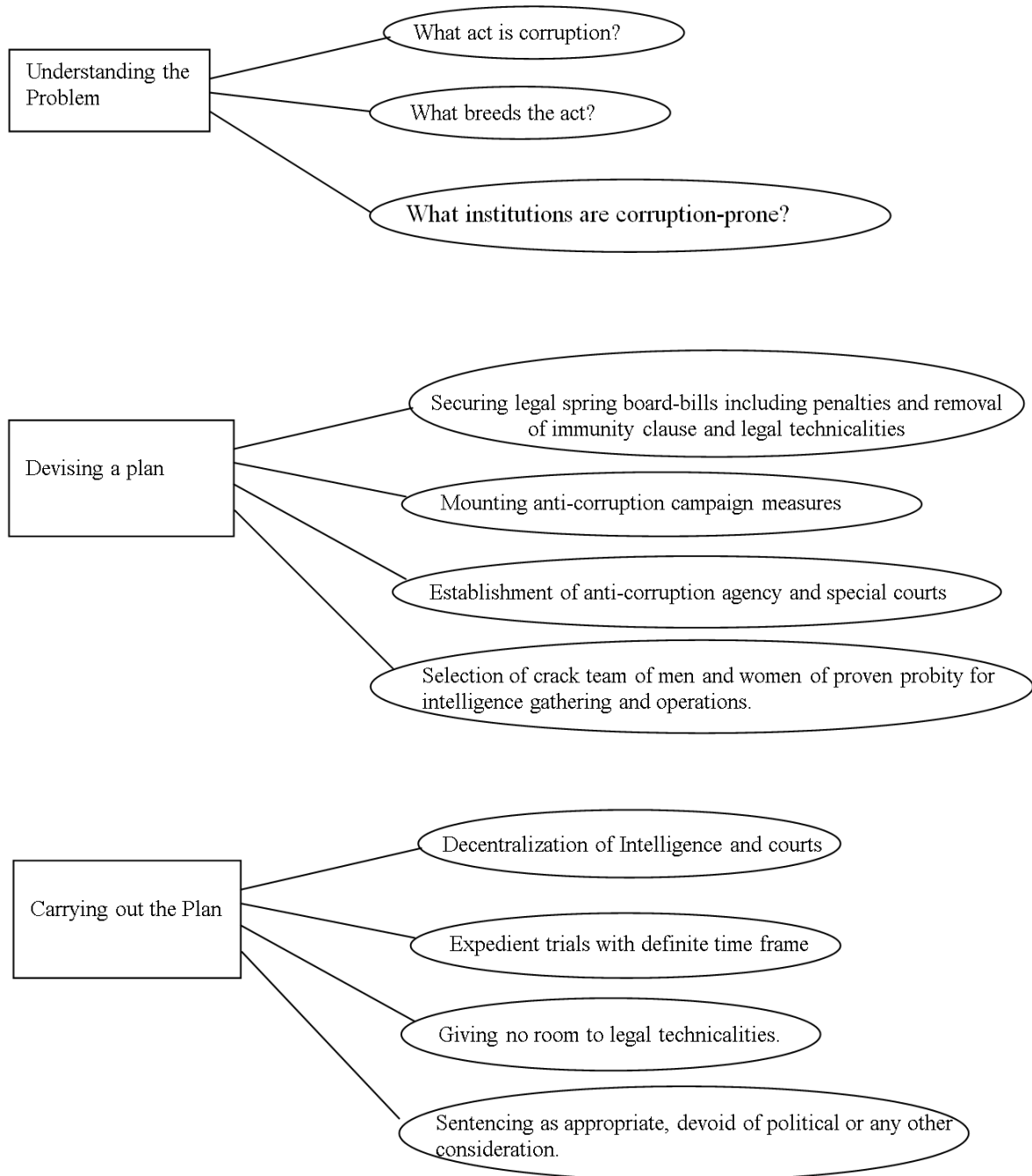
Ability to solve problem in any area of human endeavour requires some higher order thinking skills such as reasoning, abstraction, analysis etc. George Polya (1887-1985) was a Hungarian-American mathematics educator who devoted substantial amount of his time on attempts to unravel the skills needed to solve problems in mathematics. Polya (1957) came up with the following 4-step process or model:

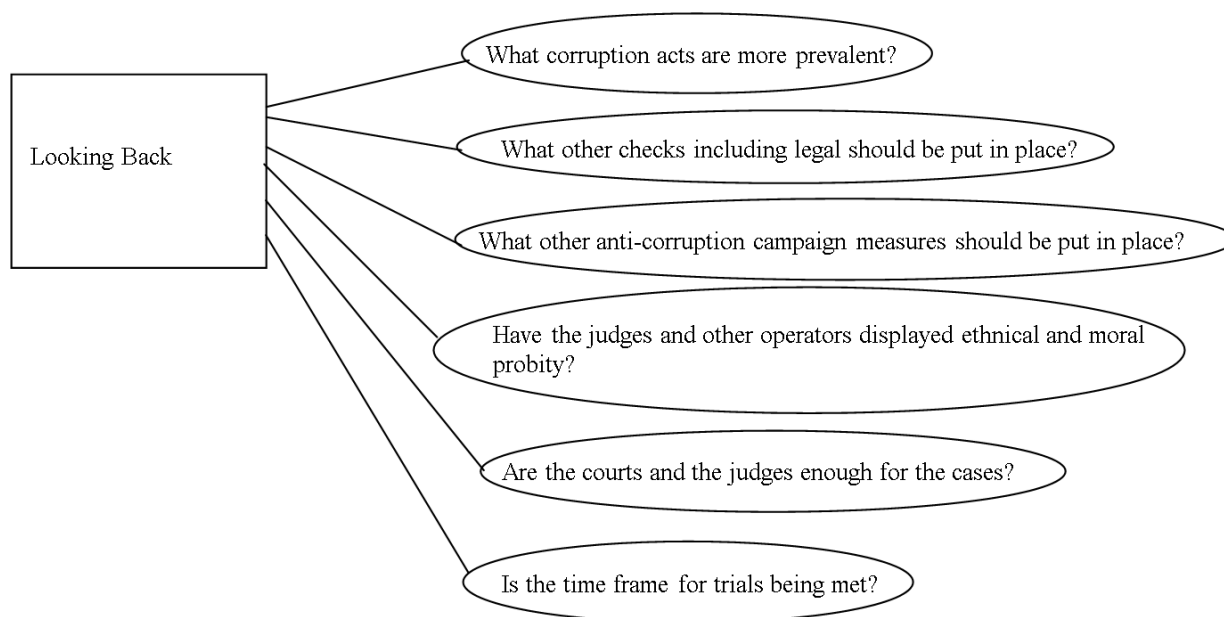
- Understanding the problem - defining the problem and ensuring that the words and terms and what is to be found are well understood.
- Devising a plan - determining what is needed to tackle the problem.
- Carrying out the plan - executing or using what is needed to tackle the problem.
- Looking back - checking result or examining solution to determine the justifiability or otherwise of the steps taken.

In what follows, we illustrate how we can solve corruption problem by adapting the Polya model (Polya-modeling).

## 2.2 Solving corruption through Polya-Modeling

We present the following adaptation of Polya model for solving corruption problem in Nigeria.





**Figure 1:** Adaptation of Polya Problem Solving Model in Combating Corruption (Polya-Modeling)

A close examination of Polya-modeling in combating corruption in comparison to what is obtained in the current fight against corruption reveals wide gaps. In the first step of understanding the problem, there is a gap in determining exactly what constitute corrupt acts. For now, corruption seems to be perceived as offence committed by only high-profiled political office holders. Corruption is yet to be redefined to capture the fact that anybody, anywhere can fall victim, no matter how much is involved. For example, acts such as leaking examination paper, extorting money from students for higher grades, demanding gratification to perform official jobs etc should be clearly hammered into the consciousness of Nigerians as corrupt acts along with the appropriate sanctions. One other gap is the lack of the consciousness of the causes of corruption. The third gap lies with identification of institutions that are corruption-prone. Currently, the corruption war in Nigeria is fought mainly on the political fronts where the fight is largely targeted at the opposition. The Institute for Development Research, IDR (2003) of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, published a report on Nigerian Corruption Survey Study indicating first ten most corrupt institutions with their rankings as follows:

- Nigeria Police
- Political Parties
- National and States Assemblies
- Local and Municipal Governments
- Federal and States Executive Councils
- Traffic Police And Federal Roads Safety Corps
- PHCN
- NNPC
- Nigerian Customs

- Federal Inland Revenue Service.

The pertinent question is: since this report was released, what has the EFCC done in these public agencies? The report ought to serve as a compass on the major directions to go in the fight against corruption but as at today, nothing visible has been done in these institutions.

In the second step of devising a plan, the major gaps between what is currently obtained in the fight against corruption and Polya-modeling can be seen in the area of removal of immunity clause and legal technicalities, establishment of special courts, assemblage of men of proven integrity and probity and setting time frame for trials. Probity should be emphasised because some top echelon of the EFCC have been fingered for aiding and abetting corruption.

In the third step of carrying out the plan, we can also see some gaps in the area of decentralisation of intelligence and courts, expedient trials within time frame and zero tolerance to legal technicalities. In the current configuration of EFCC, the major concentration of the operatives and courts is in Abuja and Lagos. The current war is being hampered by inexpedient trials and confounded by legal technicalities.

In the fourth step of looking back, there are obvious gaps between the current modus operandi and Polya-modeling. No serious questions have been raised on the appropriateness or otherwise of the time frame for trials and no mechanism put in place to ascertain probity or otherwise of the judges or whether the number of judges can cope with the number of cases. There is also a gap in the area of sufficient research on determining what corrupt acts are more prevalent and other checks that should be put in place in view of unfolding realities.

### **3. Conclusion**

Nigeria has existed with corruption right from the pre-independence era. It would appear that the quantum of revenue accruing from the massive oil wells in the country blindfolded our leaders as well as gave impetus to the spate of corruption over the years. The slump in the global oil market and the consequent decline in the revenue seem to have awoken the consciousness of Nigerians to the long existence of corruption and its damage to the nation and its people. With the roots deep in the ground, fighting the scourge of corruption has been an unwinning battle even with all the legislative and legal establishments to confront it.

It is hoped that the submission in this paper, if put to use, will serve as an effective instrument in combating corruption in the country.

#### **3.1 Recommendations**

Based on the submission of the paper, the following recommendations are put forward:

- The National Assembly should come up with legislative and legal framework that will properly capture what constitute corrupt acts in all their ramifications and the appropriate sanctions for the breach of each.



- With (1) in place, the appropriate government agency, like the National Orientation Agency, should mount sensitisation/awareness campaigns to educate the citizenry on behaviours that amount to corruption.
- The anti-corruption structures already in place should be strengthened through decentralisation of intelligence and assemblage of men of proven probity as operators.
- Special Anti-corruption courts should be created with time frame for trials and zero tolerance to legal technicalities.

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