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Automation as a Weapon to Sieve out Corruption in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has increasingly faced numerous set back in its governance , among which corruption is the one of the major destructive agent that puts the country down economically, to leverage the effect of corruption in the country an information and communications technology (ICT) will play a vital role at both federal, state, and local government levels, thereby deploying technological means to help the government at various levels, civil societies and activists to monitor and track any deviation in public/civil services to enable transparency and accountability through variety of technological platforms i.e. using gadgets to reduce human intervention in sensitive areas like finance, by using mobile applications and websites to facilitate corruption reporting and allows for official dissemination of information related to government and its services to humanity.

Keywords: Technology, Mobile, Corruption, Transparency, Accountability, and Automation

Introduction

This paper focuses on the possible technological innovative ways to help Nigerian government to leverage corruption in various ministries, agencies, and particularly the judiciary which is one of the three (3) arms of government i.e. It has also been suggested based on the research conducted by the authors that Nigeria should embark on e-governance thereby automating its financial transactions to reduce human involvement on governmental financial transactions for effective auditing and analysis. Therefore, using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could also facilitate the investigation of financial crimes which

is usually monitored by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and other agencies that are engaged in fighting corruption and corrupt practices in the country. The study suggested an integration or linkage of all the databases of related agencies to allow for quick access and retrieval of citizens' bio data.

Source of Data Collection

Journals, Conference Papers, Reports, Newspapers, Textbooks, and Websites were carefully used as both primary and secondary source of obtaining data that ultimately lead to successful formation of this document. Although, un-official interview was also

conducted at random with respondents from different professions and disciplines.

Positive Result of Automation in Nigeria 2015

Nigerians have witnessed a drastic change in the electoral system in the country, the card reader played a vital role that could never be forgotten in the history of Nigeria's democratic system. Without the involvement of technology (automation) the election would not have been such miraculous. In Delta State governorship election there was inconsistency and unclear disparity between the number of accredited voters recorded by the card reader which was sent to the central data collation system in Abuja, and the records of Delta State INEC office which shows that the number of registered voters was 1,017,796 in contrast to card reader's record which reported only 709,700 which reflect a whopping difference of 308,096 ghost registered voters. Sahara (2015).

Nigerians and Use of Internet

According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) the number of Internet users' in Nigeria's telecommunications networks has increased to 91.6 million in June, The NCC made this disclosure in its Monthly Internet Subscribers Data for June, 2017 on its website on Wednesday in Abuja. According to the data released, Internet users increased to 91,598,757 in June as against 91,565,010 users' earlier recorded in May, 2017; showing an increase of 33,747 users'. Vanguard, (2017).

Corruption in Law Enforcement Agencies and other Sectors

Corruption had its way to penetrate into law enforcement agencies, which made it hard to crack and demolish by government's effort, it was gathered that higher ranking officers were found guilty of looting public funds. According to Jimoh, (2013) the case of John Yusuf Yakubu for looting over Thirty-Two Billion Naira (₦32.8b) police pension funds hits the front page of almost every newspaper in Nigeria, precisely on 23rd of January 2013 leaving thousands of police pensioners in hunger and starvation due to lack of transparency in the Board's operation.

Similarly, on Tuesday 17th November, 2015 the Presidency orders the arrest of former National

Security Adviser (NSA) Retired Col. Sambo Dasuki and others who were involved in the arms scam. The President took the decision based on the interim report of 13 member committee inaugurated to investigate financial transactions for NSA office from 2007 to date. It was gathered that over a billion dollar had been looted in the name of arms acquisition, for fighting insurgency in the country. All these happened as a result of lack of transparency in financial transactions. Premium (2015).

Public Sector Salary

"Some commentators argue that a more fundamental cause of corruption is the inadequacy of public sector wages, particularly in developing economies". David, W. (n.d.).

According to Sofia (2013) in 2009 the Afghan National Police test paying salaries through mobiles instead of cash, using a text and interactive voice response system. Most policemen stated that they had been given a significant raise in salaries, while they were simply receiving their full pay for the first time. The new system revealed that in the past at least 10% of payments had been going to ghost policemen and that middlemen in the police hierarchy commonly pocketed a percentage of other policemen's salaries. Similarly, in Nigeria most of ministries, agencies are not paying salary directly to the workers, the salaries underwent various stages of unnecessary deduction in the name of taxation and unionism, and no description of such taxation or unionism was highlighted in the offer of appointment. The deduction of 8% from staff salaries of both State and Local Government workers in Jigawa State is a clear example.

Deficiency in Judiciary/ Legal system

Legal causes of corruption in Nigeria include some deficiencies in the legislation, as well as the lack of efficient mechanisms of legislation implementation. Akintokunbo (2013) had this to say "Corruption is all over the world, the difference is how various countries approach, manage and deal with it. In China, the penalty is capital punishment. In the US, Bernard Madoff who committed a fraud of \$65 Billion Dollars (£38bn Pounds Sterling) was sentenced to 150 years in jail. Nigerian judiciary is no longer the last hope of a common man, but rather, the destroyer of the Nigerian hope". He added that Nigeria's judiciary in dealing with high profile

corruption cases in Nigeria – “the case of JohnYakubu Yusuf; Olabode George committed a fraud of over ₦85 Billion Naira and was only given 2-5 years’ imprisonment. Mrs. Cecilia Ibru (former MD/CEO of Oceanic Bank) was jailed for six (6) months for stealing ₦54 Billion Naira. Former Inspector General of Police Tafa Balogun was convicted of ₦20 Billion Naira fraud, and was sentenced to only six (6) months imprisonment. Both Tafa Balogun and Cecilia Ibru had their sentences spent in their homes or chosen hospitals. Another former Inspector General of Police, Sunday Ehindero was caught trying to smuggle out ₦200 Million Naira from Abuja. Sunday Ehindero was not even sent to court, and unfortunately the case died like that. So many Ex Governors between 1999 to 2011 have been granted bails on their alleged corrupt cases. For example: Peter Odili former Governor of Rivers State have a court injunction stopping their trial on corruption cases, and James Ibori Former Governor of Delta State was discharged and acquitted in a Nigerian court, but was sent to jail in UK, for the same offences he was discharged and acquitted here in Nigeria. Just to mention but a few, the list is endless.

Way Forward

Automation: in this context automation refers to the use of computer technology to alter the traditional way operations are being conducted in both governmental and public institutions resulting in reduction of corruption and corrupt practices. The use of information and communications technology will according to Sofia (2013) improve transparency, thus a room for discretion will be reduced in public and private sectors, by changing the processes into computer way of dealings anomalies and under-performances in public service operations will be detected by the authority concerned. Moreover, automation will provide an avenue for preventive detection of irregularities through individual and network monitoring. However, in this digital age the use of internet and its associate resources become a tool for raising public awareness through social media/websites, blogs, and discussion forums. It has been gathered that government could use such means to create complaint channels where individual(s) or organization(s) can report corruption or any sort of financial misappropriation/abuse(24 hours /7 days a week).

Even though automation may take different dimensions, this paper focuses on automating the three (3) major pillars that government stands-on e.g. Administration, Finance, and Judiciary. The steps to be taken may include the following:

- Conversion from traditional method of operation to an e-governance (e-government).
- Provision of electronic means for Identification (National Identity Card).
- Integration/harmonizing related government agencies databases to avoid duplication in the citizens’ biometric data. Vanguard (2015).
- Agencies/Commissions/Ministries has to post and keep updating (continuously) their financial status on their website for transparency.
- Each and every Ministry should provide an avenue for reporting corruptions through their website or mobile applications.
- Use of social Network.
- E-taxation.
- E-judiciary.
- Electronic asset declaration to replace the existing paper based system.

E-government

E-government is all about bringing government services closer to the citizens through the use of technological platforms such as pervasive computing, and facilitates access to government information and services easily via online platforms. Most of the government initiatives place a barrier between citizen and those officials who intend to extract bribe from them.

Moreover, computerized procedures allow tracking decisions and actions and thus serve as an additional deterrent to corruption. Australia, Hong Kong, China, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Singapore have undertaken extensive efforts to implement e-government. In Korea, for instance citizens can real-time monitor the progress of an application for permits and licenses online. In Pakistan, the entire tax department is currently being restructured; and information technology is being introduced with the purpose of reducing contact between tax collectors and taxpayers. In India and the Philippines, documents related to public procurement must now be made available online. Cambodia enhanced the use of information technology to provide administrative services. Bansal (2012).

Identification

The Nigeria government should give more emphasis on the importance of obtaining a national identity card for by all its citizens' as a unique identifier, and then linked the citizens' biometric data to both the government and non-governmental sectors e.g. Banks, Insurance Companies and other institutions where user's authentications are required.

The registration for Bank Verification Number would have been at ease when such amalgamation has been made earlier.

Harmonizing Biometric Data

It is of a great importance for the country to have access to unique and consistent record of its citizens', by so doing it will definitely be going to help the country to authenticate and verify each and every individual, track and monitor their movements through variety of ways. Government organizations that collect biometric data in Nigeria include the National Population Commission, National Identity Management Commission, Federal Road Safety Commission, Independent National Electoral Commission, Nigerian Immigration Service, and Nigeria Police Force among others.

In his statement the current President of Nigeria Muhammad Buhari stated that the integration of the agencies' databases is crucial and necessary for planning and development in any country. Vanguard (2015).

Use of Website to Post Financial Status/Operations for Transparency

For the first time, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) announces its intention to make its activities readily available on their official website for public scrutiny. A weekly broadcast of issues concerning the cooperation will also be posted online. Dr. Emmanuel Kachikwu the Group Managing Director (GMD) added that "contracts will be made open to the public and we will choose the best module that works for us, and that will help us save money".Leadership (2015).

In its attempt to make its promises fulfilled on 11th October, 2015 the cooperation posted on its website monthly publication of its provisional financial and operational reports which summarizes all of its

activities from January to August, 2015 (Ohi, 2015). Similarly, Nigeria will move forward when revenue and non-revenue generating institutions engaged in posting their activities on their official website at both Federal, State and Local government level. e.g. Federal Inland Revenue, Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria Custom Service, Federal Ministry of Finance, etc.

Reporting Corruptions through Website or Mobile Application

Bribenigeria.com is an example of a website platform used for reporting or sharing the citizens' bribery and corruption experiences in the form of text, images, audio or video clips to support the reporter's claim. Some of such reports could be picked up by the media for onward scrutiny and possible arrests and convictions. Sofia (2013).

Therefore, Nigerian government should provide:

- (i) Single official website or mobile application to users for the purpose of reporting corruption and corrupt practices in public service, abuse of office, bribery, and any form of public fund mismanagement.
- (ii) Enforce a standard by which governmental and non-governmental institutions should establish a channel (website, Mobile application, SMS, or MMS services) to receive a corruption report from its citizens' based on services offered, and take further necessary action to punish offenders accordingly. In India, *I Paid a Bribe* works to defy widespread tolerance of bribery as a normal way of dealing with corrupt government officials by encouraging citizens to refuse to pay bribes, and investing in the capacity of civic engagement to support shifts in public attitudes. Bekri et al., (2011).

Use of Social Network for Public Access to Information

Social media nowadays becomes an avenue for raising public awareness, these tools have been introduced to strategize public relations, respond to emergencies, improve public service provision, and provide public access to information. Government and private sectors uses such means to clear any misconception regarding their products and services, and sensitize the general public on possible corrupt practices that are likely to occur outside their

jurisdiction. On the other hand, social media allows for public discussion and sharing of ideas among many other features of social networking websites, such as Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, etc.

E-taxation

Automating tax collection and payments are essential for developing countries like Nigeria. Governments use ICT to improve the effectiveness of tax collection, thereby accelerating the tax collection and payment processes through the use of electronic medium to ensure transparency and prevent corrupt practices. Most of our cities use toll-gate for tax collection from incoming and outgoing vehicles manually, which require human intervention throughout the process, no doubt corruption is bound to take place in such process. Singapore has engaged in using Electronic Pricing System (ERP) multi-lane automatic toll-gate tax collection system; an efficient and convenient way to charge motorists the cost of using the roads. Under this system, all vehicles will be fitted with a Smart card reader, called the in-vehicle unit (IU), which accepts a stored-value Smart card. Upon entering a Pricing Zone, the ERP system will automatically transact with the Smart card reader using Radio Frequency (RF) communications to debit the appropriate value. To assist law enforcement, the system also includes a camera unit to capture the image of violators' vehicles. Electronic Road Pricing for Singapore (n.d.)

Electronic Asset Declaration to Replace Paper Based

The use of ICT can greatly contribute by reducing data entry errors in the submission, processing, verifying, and automatically authenticating asset declaration information of both Politicians and Public servants, to enable the general public access to asset declaration information; this will greatly improve transparency in public service, thereby reducing illicit enrichment by public civil servants/officials. By automating asset declaration several benefits could be derived such as: calculating numerical in-balance by the software, making the publication of declared information easier to access online by public and investigative journalist, and also easy to conduct formal review of such information. In Nigeria, the database of Code of Conduct Bureau could be linked with that of EFCC and commercial

banks to keep track of financial misappropriation of public fund by public officers. Therefore, all civil servants and officers of Federal, State, and Local governments should fill-in and submit the asset declaration form online whenever the need arise. For example, in Mexico as stated by Kossic (2002) cited by Marie (2015) it has been mandated that all Federal Public Servants of Mexico are required to complete and present their declarations through the Declarant System.

E-judiciary

E-judiciary simply means using technological platforms to facilitate filing, archiving, protection of evidences, and speeding up of court proceedings to improve quality of justice delivery to the citizens'. Therefore, Nigerian courts should establish a website that will publish or post all their activities for the general public to access. Furthermore, Nigerian courts need to embark on Digital Audio Recording of all court sessions and proceedings for the purpose of posting them online for public consumption and reviews. On the other hand, court sessions and proceedings would be recorded in the form of video clip (i.e. multimedia) using Closed Circuit TV Surveillance Camera System.

Recommendations

Based on the research conducted by the authors for the formation of this document, it was gathered that to fight corruption in Nigeria an alignment with telecommunication service providers is highly needed to achieve possible implementation and utilization of tools, machineries or computer system in order to fight corruption in Nigeria.

Nigeria Communications Commission should enforce a standard by linking Subscriber Identification Module Card (SIM Card) with National Identification Card (National I.D.), and also restrict the number of SIM cards to be acquired by each and every citizen of the country to at most only three (3) SIM Cards per single person.

Similarly, in order to sanitize and make reporting of corrupt practices as genuine as possible, the use of website could not be the final solution because it has a limited security, where email address is required as a means of authentication to have access to share one's bribe and corruption experiences. Hence, to overcome this problem a mobile phone application

would be a better option. The mobile application which will be designed in such a way that users can only be allowed to register with his/her mobile phone-number so that the details about user reporting a corruption can easily be accessed from the database of the Mobile Network Service Providers in the country by Corruption Report Receiving Officers at the other end, for further verification, before moving forward to investigate the case and abuse associated with such report.

Conclusion

Implementing ICT in tackling corruption is crucial to any nation for National development. Therefore, developing countries like Nigeria need to be awoken, current, and be up to date with the new trends in technology to put a stop to innumerable challenges posed by corruption. It is well understood that Information technology will not bring a long lasting solution without reshaping government policies. When government reshape its policies and implement ICT in its operations, this will surely pave the way for success. The role that automation plays will cut down to the lowest minimum if not eliminating corruption in Nigeria legal system and finance when carefully implemented. The study has also reveal that some public officials faces challenges like demotion or losing their positions over the stance they have taken against corrupt practices, but using computer machinery to handle some of these task will save the positions of such good citizens.

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