

## TACKLING AND CURBING CORRUPTION THROUGH YORUBA PROVERBS IN ACHIEVING NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

The chief problem of Nigeria's sustainable development has been identified as corruption. The situation is such that corruption has eaten deep into every aspect of the nation such as politics, education, morality, entertainment among others. The situation is so bad that the image of the country has been soiled and dented in the international community. Scholars have advised that it is important to tackle the menace of corruption head-on if the country is to prosper and flourish. Hence, the focus of this paper is to examine how corruption can be tackled and curbed using an insight from the Yorùbá traditional perspective on corruption as reflected in Yorùbá proverbs. It is observed that the Yorùbá traditional society identifies and frowns at corruption. The paper concludes that for Nigeria to achieve national sustainable development, it is important that stakeholders borrow from the ways by which corruption is curbed in the Yorùbá traditional society.

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**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable Development, Corruption, Proverbs, Yorùbá Society

### INTRODUCTION

The Yorùbá people have a rich system of thought and belief which is borne out of wisdom and intelligence concerning their day to day experiences. The sum of their thought and belief is what can be regarded as folklore from which their proverbs, taboos, idiomatic expressions among others emerges. They are often times means by which the Yorùbá people form their traditional constitutions which is a reflection of their wisdom of how their society is to be organised. This traditional constitution includes taboos and laws which has established punishments for wrong doers and reward for what is considered good deeds. Over time, the Yorùbá traditional societies have been able to tackle several ills of the society in which corruption is one, thereby, achieving an organised society with these in place. How Yorùbá traditional society tackle corruption through proverbs is the concern of this paper.

According to Robert, Thomas and Anthony (2005):

Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.

From the excerpt above, it can be deduced that sustainable development is the duty as well as right of humanity. It is a duty because according to the above excerpt, humanity has been endowed with the ability to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable development is the right humanity because they are entitled to it.

There are some vital areas in the various sectors of the nation which need to be sanitised such as education, religion, justice system, morality among others to build the nation's

sustainable development. It is evident that the aforementioned sectors have shifted from their traditional background to modern ways which is a product of colonialism on African traditional affairs. This is to say that the society is now religiously corrupt, educationally bankrupt, morally unappealing to the level that when these sectors are viewed, they are viewed from the western perspectives to the neglect of traditional perspectives. An immediate tackling of this issue is the best solution. If western influenced solutions have not been able to help, we can try the traditional perspective-influenced solutions as alternative method of tackling the menace of corruption.

The questions now are on whether corruption is recognised in the Yorùbá society (traditional or modern), what specifically is the ways by which the Yorùbá attempt to deal with corruption and has it been successful? To vividly answer these questions, it is pertinent and germane to look into the Yorùbá culture and philosophy which is contained in their folklore. This can be done by understanding the Yorùbá proverbs which happens to be the pot of knowledge and a path of mirroring their total way of life.

### Yorùbá People Tackling Corruption Through Proverbs

In the Yorùbá traditional setting (as it is in the modern time) recognises corruption and its adverse effects. The Yorùbá people considers any action that is against the norms of the Yorùbá society which can affect the balance of the society as corruption. This is where the concept of *omólúàbí* comes in. According to Majasan (1967:37), it etymologically, means *omótí ó olú iwá bí* which means the child born by the chief of (good) character. This is why Ajibade (2013:89) is of the opinion that

... the principles of Yorùbá education are based on the concept of *Omólúàbí*. This portends that a genuine *Omólúàbí* must

manifest the aforementioned qualities and continues to learn more of them in order to be a complete person.

The aforementioned qualities identified by Ajibade (2013) above are the qualities of a good character which Awoniyi(1975:364), considers to include respect for old age, loyalty to one's parent and local authority, honesty in private and public dealings, devotion to duty and many other desirable qualities. Which means that being an *omolúàbí*, one can be considered as the opposite of being corrupt and it entails conforming with the norms of the society. Some of the perceived actions of corruption are stealing (ranging from petty stealing, robbery to embezzlement of public funds), immorality, injustice among others.

The Yorùbá people usually have measures put in place to guide against and curb corrupt practices . Among these measures are proverbs which are wise sayings reflecting the attitude and position of the Yorùbá society concerning corruption. It can be observed that the Yorùbá society frowns at corruption. This is not a surprise since proverbs are borne out of their experiences which corruption is of one . Let us examine below some corrupt practices and the Yorùbá proverbs that express the attitude of the Yorùbá society to them.

*Agbepo laja ko jale bí ẹni to gba a.*  
*(The person who steals palm oil from the roof top is not a thief compared to the person who collects it from the thief)*

The above proverb is a reflection of the belief of the Yorùbá that stealing in all form is bad because it negates the principle of *omolúàbí* which is the character guiding principle. It can be observed from the proverb that the Yorùbá people consider the person who benefits from stealing and encourages stealing to be more a thief than the person who actually stole . This means that the Yorùbá society considers encouraging a corrupt act such as stealing to be as if one has actually committed the crime. Which implies that the punishment for a person who encourages stealing will be greater than that of the person who actually stole. This will subsequently discourage stealing as people will not want to be punished for encouraging stealing or even attempting to enjoy the spoils from stealing.

If the Nigerian nation at large can borrow an insight from this proverb, the country will be able to tackle the menace of corruption and subsequently achieve a sustainable national development. Laws that states that those who encourage corruption as well as the people who are involved in the act of corruption will be punished need to be made and enforced. A subsequent result of this will be a reduction in stealing ranging from petty thieving to stealing of public funds. People will be conscious of the fact that if their family or relative who intends to or involving in the embezzlement of public funds is apprehended, they are going to be punished along with the person. This will change the ideology of people expecting their relative in power to suddenly become rich as a result of holding a political post or post of authority. The situation will be such that families of people in places of

authority in which embezzlement of public funds can take place, will be warning them not to engage in any fraudulent activity.

*Ẹnibajale lo bomoje*  
*(It is the person who steals that commits a crime)*

This is another proverb reflecting the attitude of the Yorùbá society to stealing. The above proverb shows how the Yorùbá people perceive stealing in all its forms . They consider stealing to be a crime, which is reflected in one of the Yorùbá popular songs which goes thus:

*Iṣé orí ran mi nimo n ẹ*  
*Ẹniba jale lo bomoje...*  
*Bi moje alagbafo*  
*Iṣé ni iṣé ńj ẹ (It is what(job) that my destiny assigned for me that am doing*  
*It is the person who steals that commits a crime...*  
*If am a wash man*  
*A job is a job*

The above excerpt further shows that the Yorùbá people considers stealing to be an abominable act and frowns at it as it is against the principle of *omolúàbí*. It is believed that to engage in petty jobs such as laundry services which the Yorùbá usually looks down on as a demeaning job is more honourable than to be a thief.

To effectively tackle corruption at the national level, it is important that the citizenry is made to understand that to be a thief is to commit a crime in a criminal offence and a highly ignoble thing to do. This means that the policies makers especially in the educational sector include the impartation of this ideology in the curriculum such that students at all levels can understand this. Students are the target because they are considered the future leaders of the country and it is what is inculcated in them that they will grow up with.

*Íwá rere ni eṣo ẹniyàn*  
*Good behaviour is the adornment of a person*

The above proverb means that a good behaviour makes a person adorable. This implies that a person with a good behaviour is highly respected in the society. Good behaviour in this context means that the person actions and deeds conform with the norms of the society concerning the principle of *omolúàbí*, making it to be generally accepted standard of behaviour upheld by the Yorùbá society . Going by this, having a good behaviour means that one does not indulge in activities that the society frowns at such as corruption.

This is one of the ideals of the Yorùbá society concerning corruption that the stakeholders in the country ought to borrow an insight from. This will ensure the achievement capacity building for Nigeria's sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

This paper identified the problem hindering the achievement of national sustainable development as corruption and also examined how corruption can be tackled and curbed using an insight from the Yorùbá traditional perspective on corruption

as reflected in there Yorùbá proverbs . It is observed that the Yorùbá traditional society identifies and frowns at corruption. It also examined how this problem is tackled in the Yorùbá Traditional society through the use of proverbs . The paper concludes that for Nigeria to achieve national sustainable development, it is important that stakeholders borrow from the ways by which corruption is curbed in the Yorùbá traditional society.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper recommends that for Nigeria to achieve capacity building for national sustainable development:

1. The policies makers especially in the educational sector include the impartation of the ideology of *omolúàbí* they borrowed from the Yorùbá society concerning corruption discussed in this paper in the curriculum such that students at all levels can understand and conform with. This is because students comprise the upcoming generation and also considered the future leaders of the country. Schools are the best place and avenue to inculcate these ideals in them.
2. Law makers and stakeholders concerned with the laws of the country also have roles to play. They are to make sure that laws that states that those who encourage corruption as well as the people who are involved in the act of corruption will be punished need to be made. They should also make sure that these laws are enforced too.
3. The leaders at the various levels of the institutions of the country, policy makers and stakeholders in the affairs of the country must also make sure that they lead by example. Leading by example entails that these leaders do away with corrupt practices and strive to make the country a better place as that is what is best for the progress and image of the country.
4. Parents as stakeholders in the lives of their children are not left out too. They should train their children the way the want to grow up with.

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