

# **A Psychological Analysis of Corruption in Nigeria**

**James T. Gire**

## **Abstract**

Corruption will likely appear on everyone's list of factors obstructing Nigeria's path toward sustainable development; yet, rather than decrease, corruption has proliferated to all segments of Nigeria, making it the "common cold" of Nigeria's social ills. Typical responses to corruption have involved the overthrow of whole regimes or removal of individual officials implicated in the incidences that have come to light. Unfortunately, these replacements often end up being more corrupt than their predecessors. However, a perusal of the literature has revealed a surprising dearth of psychological variables in the discussion of the mechanisms involved in corruption. In order for Nigeria to successfully combat corruption and pave way for sustainable development, the possible causes and proposed solutions have to be explored from the various facets that make up this complex phenomenon. This article attempts to fill that void by using Maslow's concept of hierarchy of needs, and Bandura's perspective of social learning theory to analyze the physical and psychological conditions in Nigeria today that tend to have predictable effects on behavior, including corruption. It is my argument that overlooking the psychological viewpoint is a major reason why current attempts at tackling corruption have failed.

## **Introduction**

Corruption is one of the most dangerous social ills of any society. This is because corruption, like a deadly virus, attacks the vital structures that make for society's progressive functioning, thus putting its very existence into serious peril. This is particularly true for developing countries in that limited but valuable funds and resources that are initially earmarked for industries, hospitals, schools, and other infrastructures are either outrightly embezzled, misappropriated, or otherwise severely depleted through kickbacks and over-invoicing by agents of government. Furthermore, corruption stifles businesses that are unwilling to engage in this nefarious activity; ironically, it also eventually destroys the companies that yield to this practice, thus halting or at least delaying considerably, the march toward economic progress and ultimately sustained development. Perhaps even more damaging than the foregoing is the fact that corrupt leaders tend to cling to power in the knowledge that their activities cannot withstand the scrutiny of an open government. This desperate desire for self-preservation ultimately results in very ruthless repression of individuals and groups that advocate for democracy and accountability.

At the individual level, allocation of jobs, and the assignment of responsibilities, are not based on merit or potential but rather on who has the resources and willingness to grease the palms of those in charge. Society loses in several ways: first, productivity is not at optimal levels because the most efficient people are not the ones doing the job. Second, being so flagrantly bypassed leads to frustration and creates a potential for the development of feelings of hopelessness, dejection, and low morale. When a sizeable portion of a society's citizenry perceives that it is not capable of producing positive and desirable outcomes through honest efforts, the result is either passivity or excessive cynicism; in either case, that society is headed toward self-destruction.

Why focus on Nigeria? Both anecdotal and documented evidence indicates that corruption is a serious problem in Nigeria. One is at a loss as to where to begin. From the numerous "white elephant" projects to the bribes received by the police officer on the road or the clerk in a government office, examples abound. Nigeria wanted to take the first strides toward industrialization by launching an ambitious program in iron and steel production. The Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited was established in 1979 as the major base for this iron and steel effort along with four steel rolling mills at Aladja, Jos, Katsina, and Oshogbo. All of these projects have problems, but the worst by far is Ajaokuta. Owing partly to corruption, lack of foresight, incompetence, instability at the federal government level as well as company level, about \$5 billion (approximately N410 billion) have been poured into this project, and it is yet to commence production. Meanwhile, property reportedly worth about N5 billion has been stolen over the years by all categories of thieves ranging from top managers to laborers and residents of nearby towns and villages. One source has estimated that \$1 billion (about N82 billion) is needed to complete the project (Ode, 1996).

On December 11, 1994, "60 Minutes" ran a program about corruption in Nigeria in which Mike Wallace suggested that there was more corruption in Nigeria than anywhere else he had seen in his professional life. He cited cases ranging from the hidden cameras of customs officials receiving bribes to successfully using a \$200 bribe to obtain a Nigerian passport. This generated some heated exchanges both in Nigeria and abroad. Some argued that Nigeria was being unfairly singled out for scrutiny, citing several cases of corrupt practices by law enforcement personnel and people in government in the United States. More recently, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that up to \$2 billion were allegedly stolen by Sani Abacha's government. As if to lend credence to this fact, another report suggested that Ismaila Gwarzo, Abacha's National Security Adviser paid back \$250 million that had been stolen from public accounts (BBC, 1998).

The incidence of corruption is not limited to the public sector. Of late, the lack of facilities at government hospitals coupled with the high cost of health care at private hospitals and dwindling financial resources have led to the emergence of "private clinics" run by all categories of people ranging from underqualified medical personnel such as nurses and midwives, to quacks that have no evidence of training of any kind in modern medicine. This notwithstanding, these people not only issue medication, but have in some cases carried out surgical procedures on their unsuspecting

victims, often with tragic consequences. A task force formed by the Lagos state government to crack down on these illegal clinics resulted in the closure of 70 of these clinics in the Lagos metropolitan area alone. Further investigations revealed that the certificates of some legitimate doctors were used to open the clinics. The task force was going to forward the names of fourteen doctors to the Medical and Dental Council for disciplinary action (Olukoya, 1996). Obviously, the doctors allowed their credentials to be fraudulently used in exchange for financial or other personal benefits.

More recently, Transparency International (TI), a Berlin-based nonprofit, non-governmental organization established for the main purpose of combating corruption primarily in international business but also at national levels, published the results of the 1996 and 1997 survey ranking countries in terms of perceived corruption by a cross-section of business people across several countries. Of the 54 countries surveyed in 1996 and 52 countries in 1997, Nigeria was perceived as the most corrupt in two successive years (see Table 1 for the entire listing). In the 1996 survey, Nigeria was followed by Pakistan and Kenya. Cameroon was the third African country in the top ten most corrupt list. The country with the least perceived corruption was New Zealand, Denmark was rated second and Sweden came third; there was no African country in the top twenty least-corrupt nations list. The only other African country that was listed in the 1997 survey was South Africa which ranked 20<sup>th</sup> on the most corrupt list. This again drew some animated responses from some Africans on both sides of the issue. While some felt that it was appropriate to finally expose the level of corruption in these African countries, others countered that it was a classic case of Westerners singling out Africa for blame on a worldwide phenomenon and an attempt to use the survey as a premise to deprive Africans of much needed business patronage and financial assistance. Some wondered why there was no parallel survey utilizing samples from principally African and Third World nations regarding their perceptions of the most corrupt multinational companies (Namwamba, 1996).

The aim of this article is not to take sides with one view over the other. Corruption is obviously a global problem. One can find cases of corruption even among the countries that are consistently rated among the least corrupt countries in the world. The serious questions surrounding the fund-raising activities of the Democratic and Republican parties in the 1996 presidential elections in the United States clearly illustrates the pervasive nature of this phenomenon. As indicated earlier, however, the harmful effects of corruption are more likely to be devastating on a developing country, since corruption of the scale being discussed stands to prevent any chance that these countries have of achieving sustainable development. The fact that Nigeria is not the only place where corruption exists does not in any way minimize the harm that it has brought on Nigerians. It is a fact that people have to bribe their way to get even the most basic of services. For the international visitor, one of the first questions that one is asked by immigration or customs personnel is "what have you brought for me?" Within the country itself, drivers of commercial

vehicles routinely give money to the police at checkpoints so as not to be checked or delayed. It is also a fact that the situation today is worse than it was even a few years ago. From about midway into the Babangida regime (sometimes 1988) to present, corruption has become so blatant and widespread that it appears as if it has been legalized in Nigeria.

The following example may better illustrate the growing uneasiness that corruption is on the verge of becoming an officially sanctioned practice in Nigeria. A friend of mine related to me an incredible encounter involving his brother who went to get a loan from the bank to enable him complete a small project that he had started. He (the brother) approached the bank manager who speedily processed the request. However, before he could get the money, the manager wanted a sizeable percentage of the requested sum. This potential borrower was agonizing with the decision as to whether or not he should proceed with the loan request, not because the manager wanted a piece of the pie, but because not having anticipated the bribe, he was not sure that the now reduced sum would be sufficient for him to complete his project. This story would not sound very surprising were it not for the fact that this friend's brother (the potential borrower) was a magistrate! How else could one explain the fact that the magistrate did not proceed to take the appropriate steps to bring the manager to justice, other than that the manager's behavior was deemed as normal? This article uses two psychological theories to analyze the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria and attempts to shed some light on its current proliferation.

### **Operational Definition of Corruption**

It is very easy to talk about corruption, but like many other complex phenomena, it is difficult to define corruption in concise and concrete terms. Not surprisingly, there seldom is a consensus as to what exactly constitutes this concept. Consequently, there is always a danger that several people may engage in a discussion about corruption while each is talking about a different thing completely. To avoid this confusion, we will provide an operational definition of corruption as conceptualized in this paper. Before doing that however, it is pertinent to describe some of the commonly used definitions. Brooks (1910) defined corruption as "the intentional misperformance or neglect of a recognized duty, or the unwarranted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal" (p.46). Senturia (1931) sees it as the misuse of public power for private gains. Alatas (1990) characterizes corruption as the abuse of trust for the sake of private benefits. These definitions are fairly embrasive of the issues subsumed under corruption but do not sufficiently bring out the prioritization process by the individual--that is, putting self above the collective. Therefore, in this article, corruption is defined as a betrayal of trust resulting directly or indirectly from the subordination of public goals over those of the individual. Thus a person who engages in nepotism has committed an act of corruption by putting his family interests over those of the larger society.

The factors subsumed in this definition are so broad as to warrant a further refining of the scope for the discussion in this article. In an elaborate analysis, Alatas (1990) divided corruption into seven distinct types: autogenic, defensive, extortive, investive, nepotistic, supportive, and transactive. Autogenic corruption is self-generating and typically involves only the perpetrator. A good example would be what happens in cases of insider trading. A person learns of some vital information that may influence stocks in a company and either quickly buys or gets rid of large amounts of stocks before the consequences arising from this information come to pass. Defensive corruption involves situations where a person needing a critical service is compelled to bribe in order to prevent unpleasant consequences being inflicted on his interests. For example, a person wanting to travel abroad within a certain time frame needs a passport in order to undertake the journey but is made to pay bribes or forfeit the trip. This person's corruption is in self-defense. Extortive corruption is the behavior of a person demanding personal compensation in exchange for services. Investive corruption entails the offer of goods or services without a direct link to any particular favor at the present, but in anticipation of future situations when the favor may be required. Nepotistic corruption refers to the preferential treatment of, or unjustified appointment of friends or relations to public office, in violation of the accepted guidelines.

The supportive type usually does not involve money or immediate gains, but involves actions taken to protect or strengthen the existing corruption. For example, a corrupt regime or official may try to prevent the election or appointment of an honest person or government for fear that the individual or the regime might be probed by the successor(s). Finally, transactive corruption refers to situations where the two parties are mutual and willing participants in the corrupt practice to the advantage of both parties. For example, a corrupt business person may willingly bribe a corrupt government official in order to win a tender for a certain contract.

The focus in this paper will be on the extortive, nepotistic, and transactive corruption, not only because they appear to be at the core of the corruption phenomenon, but also because the other forms appear to be the offshoot of these two fundamental types. Most complaints about corruption in Nigeria relate to the unfair advantage given to friends and relations over others in appointments, awards of contracts and so forth; the extortive practices of those in charge of vital services; and the collusion between corrupt private individuals and companies and public officials to deprive ordinary citizens of a fair chance at competing for goods and services. Moreover, other types such as supportive corruption arise as a protective shield to cover or defend the existing corruption. Also, there would be no defensive corruption in the absence of the extortive type.

### **Observational Learning Theory and the Prevalence of Corruption in Nigeria**

Before seriously considering the ways in which corruption can be effectively controlled, it is necessary to understand why it took hold in the first place. Corruption is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria--evidence of corruption predates the birth of the first republic in 1960 way into the colonial

era-- but these were usually isolated cases. The question is: why did it take hold in Nigeria? It is the position of this paper that Bandura's observational learning theory can account for part of the riddle. In order to facilitate our discussion of the link between observational learning processes and the prevalence of corruption, it is pertinent to give a brief description of the basic postulates of observational learning theory. According to Bandura (1986) much of what we learn is obtained by observing others, and that this is much more efficient than learning through direct experience because it spares us countless responses that might be followed by punishment or no reinforcement of any kind. The people whose behavior is observed are referred to as *models*.

Learning through modeling involves cognitive processes and is not based simply on imitation since the learner adds and subtracts from the observed behavior and generalizes from one observation to another. Certain factors determine whether we are going to learn from a model in a given situation or not. One of the key moderator variables is the characteristics of the model; we are more likely to model powerful people than inept ones, high status people rather those of low status, and so forth.

A second moderator variable concerns the characteristics of the observer. People of low status, education, or power are more likely to model than people high on these attributes. A third factor refers to the consequences of the observed behavior on the model. If the person greatly values the behavior being observed, there is a greater likelihood that it will be modeled. But even of more crucial importance for the paper is the impact on learning when a model is punished for a given behavior. Observers learn to refrain from modeling a behavior that produces severe punishment to the model. For example, a person who sees another being punished for corruption might not wait to receive the same punishment before deciding to refrain from this activity.

Finally, Bandura (1986, 1988) identified four main processes that are crucial for observational learning: attention, retention/representation, behavioral production, and motivation. In order to learn through observation, you must attend to the model. Factors that regulate attention include the frequency with which we associate with people, whether or not we are attracted to them, and whether we think the behavior is important and can yield some profit to us. Second, we must be able to make some mental representation of what we have witnessed in memory, since we may not have the occasion to use an observed behavior for up to several years. Behavioral production involves the process of converting the mental representations into appropriate actions. For instance, you may remember that someone cheated on his taxes or embezzled money that was entrusted under his care, but can you perform the same feat? Lastly, observational learning is most effective when observers are motivated to enact the modeled behavior. Your motivation may depend on whether you encounter a situation in which you believe that the response is likely to lead to favorable consequences for you.

So how does this explain the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria? Beginning with the basic processes, it is obvious that many Nigerians see cases of corruption everywhere. Many of the kickbacks received by top officials go through intermediaries, some of who are subordinates of

these officials. People who are hitherto living from hand to mouth often begin to build houses and are commonly seen driving around in flashy cars shortly after being appointed to "lucrative" positions that grant them access to money or influence. Therefore, attending to the behavior of the model is not a problem here. It is also certain that these people are able to remember the corrupt activities that they have observed.

A number of instances have shown that they are able to reproduce the observed behavior. In the early 1980s, there was reason to believe that some financial mismanagement or embezzlement had taken place at Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (Nitel). Just as a financial audit of the establishment began, there was a fire incident at Necom House, Nitel's headquarters in Lagos, that destroyed millions of dollars worth of property. Almost 15 years after, the renovations on the building have yet to be completed. Not surprisingly, the fire started at the floor on which the finance department was located. Shortly thereafter, there was a series of fire incidents involving ministries and parastatals with impending financial probes that coincidentally involved the burning of vital financial records. Also, there is a feeling of "dèja vu" in the way in which new top functionaries terminate contracts awarded by predecessors and issue new ones that attests to a pattern of kickbacks that derives from the ability to imitate the practices of illegal enrichment.

It is not difficult to see the motivation in modeling the corrupt practices that have been attended to, retained, and with which these people have an ample capacity to reproduce. This factor will be elaborated upon in the next section where we focus on why the phenomenon of corruption has proliferated to new levels. Suffice it to say at this juncture that there is the obvious need to take care of the several demands of the immediate and extended family. There is also the factor of simply aspiring to be like other big shots and generally get societal recognition through the award of traditional titles and other self-aggrandizing projects. But even more fundamental than these factors, we believe, is the basic insecurity from not knowing whether there would be any other opportunity to place one in a situation where worrying about basic problems such as feeding the family or fulfilling other basic obligations would no longer be a problem. We will return to this factor later.

The second important issue about observational learning involves the factors that determine whether or not a particular behavior will be modeled. We indicated earlier that one of the key determinants relates to the consequences to the model for engaging in a specific behavior. The question one may ask is: "what typically happens to people who engage in corruption in Nigeria?" The answer is, hardly anything at all. People clearly see individuals, not only including, but especially the military, whose only source of income is supposedly the salary, living up to several times above their means. Yet, few, if any of these people are ever questioned, let alone tried for these apparent corrupt practices. Once in a while when a top official is retired, rumors go on for some time that the retirement was due to embezzlement, but it remains at the level of rumors. The official announcements usually indicate something like "retired in the public interest," but these people are often allowed to keep their questionably acquired wealth.

It is common knowledge today that the best time to embezzle money in Nigeria is during a military regime because the military is never probed. To the present day, no probe has covered an era in which the military was in power. A number of people claimed to have identified General Obasanjo's ballot during the 1979 elections and suggest that he voted for the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). They go on to suggest that his electoral choice was based on his fear of the publicly stated intent of the presidential candidate of the Unity Party of Nigeria, Chief Awolowo, that he would probe the Obasanjo regime. We may never be able to verify this claim, but thus far nothing has happened to warrant an outright dismissal of that viewpoint. Even the so-called no-nonsense Buhari/Idiagbon administration limited their probe to the period between October 1979 and December 1983. The various tribunals made a joke of what started off as a good idea. But even then, all those who were jailed during those trials are not only out, but some are holding key positions in government today. Even the General Abdulsallam Abubakar regime that is supposedly cleaning up the corruption that took place under Abacha's reign does not seem to have punished those who were not only caught, but made to return large sums of the money they had allegedly stolen. It is our argument that a good deal of the prevailing corruption is due, at least in part, to the processes of observational learning discussed above, especially regarding the fact that this behavior yields a high modeling rate owing to the absence of punishing consequences to the models. What is the deterrent to corrupt behavior in Nigeria?

### **Relating the Theory of Hierarchy of Needs to the Proliferation of Corruption in Nigeria**

There is a general consensus that corruption in Nigeria is at an all-time high. It is common to hear people remark that you can not trust anyone in Nigeria anymore. Why this dramatic increase in the rate of corruption in Nigeria? Although the prevalence of corruption can be explained in part by observational learning, this theory seems inadequate to explain this steep rise in corruption. It is our contention that the concept of hierarchy of needs gives a better account of this proliferation. As with observational learning theory, a brief description of the concept might be necessary to effectively espouse this connection.

The concept of hierarchy of needs derives from Maslow's (1943, 1970) more general theory of motivation and is based on the assumption that people are persistently motivated by one need or another. When one need is satisfied, it ordinarily loses its motivational power and is replaced by another one. Thus, as long as people's hunger needs are frustrated, they will strive for food, but once they have enough food, they move to other needs such as housing. According to Maslow, basic or lower-level needs must be satisfied at least to some reasonable degree before higher-level needs become motivators. What this means essentially is that needs are arranged on a sort of a ladder, with each ascending step representing a higher need, but one less basic to survival. Lower needs must be satisfied in order for people to strive for higher needs. Thus, a person who holds an



office job may be satisfying higher-level needs such as esteem, but if he becomes hungry, will leave his work in search of food. The following are Maslow's needs in order of prepotency (predominance): physiological, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization.

Physiological needs include food, water, oxygen, and so forth. They are the most basic or prepotent of all. People who are truly hungry are motivated to eat, not make friends or gain prestige. People from affluent societies have their hunger needs satisfied as a matter of course, so when they say they are hungry, they are really talking about appetite; a hungry person is unlikely to be fussy about the temperature or texture of food. Physiological needs are different from other needs in at least two important ways. First, they are the only needs that can be completely satisfied. However, they also have the attribute of recurrence. Even when we have had more than enough to eat, we will eventually get hungry and have to eat again. The other needs do not constantly recur.

When the physiological needs are fairly satisfied, we become motivated by safety needs, including physical security, law and order, freedom from threats of illness, danger, anxiety, and so forth. Love and belongingness needs are next after safety and include the desire for friendship, the wish for a mate and children, the need to belong to a club, etcetera. Once these are satisfied, people then move to pursue esteem needs, such as confidence, self-respect, and the esteem of others. The final step is the move to self-actualization which Maslow suggests is not an automatic step. In fact, he contends that very few people step over this threshold. A very essential component of this postulation relates to the fact that even if one attains the upper-level needs, once the lower, more basic needs are deprived, the person ignores the higher needs in order to address the basic one.

How does one apply this to the proliferation of corruption in Nigeria? Until a few years ago, most of the basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy were adequately satisfied by a majority of Nigerians. People had enough food to eat, and could fulfill their basic needs. In fact, in the case of a majority of officer-level personnel, most of the safety and to some extent, belongingness needs were also met. A sizeable proportion of the people were striving for esteem needs, it would seem. Then, beginning gradually during the waning days of the Shagari regime in 1983, and through the various structural adjustment programs involving devaluation of the naira, the resultant inflation, massive reduction in the work force, and so forth, the quality of live for most Nigerians reduced by a quantum leap.

Many senior civil servants and even people in the private sector can barely make ends meet. A good proportion of workers' salaries cannot adequately cover the food costs, tuition fees, transportation to work, and other basic amenities. Prior to now, a good percentage of people had climbed up the ladder of needs and were striving for such upper-level needs as esteem and recognition. University lecturers could think of publishing and being competitively placed with colleagues at similar levels in other countries. People within the regular civil service could aspire to reach the top in their various areas of service in order to have that sense of fulfilment. It was conceivable then to see how these kinds of people would ignore the corrupt route to the top, because it would tarnish that for which they fervently aspired. It would appear that these most basic

needs are now deprived and therefore, people are no longer worried about self-respect or recognition to the same degree, since the lower needs must first be satisfied.

I had pondered about the astronomical increases in corruption in Nigeria and examined them in this light, but never got around to giving it serious consideration in terms of writing a paper until an incident that occurred in a small city in the United States. This city of predominantly upper middle-class, white-collar residents, is "civilized" and fairly laid back. People are prudent and for the most part act within the realms of reason and common sense. It is usually cold in the winter, but very little snow falls in this vicinity. The winter of 1996 was unusual in the sense that unexpectedly one day, there was this massive snow storm that kept people in for about two days. Within this time, some people may have encountered mild deprivations because of their inability to get to the grocery stores. About two weeks after this first snow storm, a forecast was made for another snow storm that would last about a day or so. I casually walked into one of the grocery stores to pick up some bread and was astounded. There was nothing. All the essential food items such as bread, eggs and milk were sold out. I went around to other grocery stores and it was the same story. These people must have known that in a matter of days, all the stores would be open and they could buy whatever they wanted. Yet, they frantically bought and accumulated a huge stock of food supplies that would definitely outlast the storm. This made me to reexamine more seriously the power of the lower needs and their prepotency over the higher needs.

Compare this little scenario to the situation in Nigeria today. In addition to the salaries being inadequate for their current needs, most people do not feel secure about their jobs. Even the most stable of civil service positions have become very unstable. People who successfully worked through the service, retired and were doing well during early retirement are now seriously impoverished. Inflation has grown at rates way beyond the pensions. Therefore, even those not threatened in terms of job security do not find solace in the fact that they will work until they retire. It is the position of this article, that this kind of uncertainty has led to a perceived deprivation of the basic needs and has resulted in the very high rates of corruption that is being witnessed in Nigeria today. It is as if people working in jobs that offer some opportunity for embezzlement or extortive corruption reason that this may be their only chance, and if not taken, they will suffer deprivation of food and the other essential things basic to survival. And since these needs predominate over those of esteem, loss of self-respect is no longer a sufficient deterrent.

Some would argue that quite a few of those who indulge in corrupt practices are not impoverished, and might even be classified as well off. How does the theory of hierarchy of needs account for corruption among this segment of the society? There are two main responses to this query. The first regards the general misconception that corruption is more prevalent among high status members of society. The reality is that a good deal of corruption goes on at the low levels - from local government employees to community-level personnel. The difference derives from access to the resources at their disposal.

Second, even the involvement of people who appear to be well-off can still be explained under this theory because of the perceived uncertainty of their situation. According to Maslow, thwarting of basic needs leads to some kind of pathology that can result in people lying, cheating, stealing, or even killing. It appears that what is important is not so much the availability of the resource necessary to satisfy the need in question, but the confidence that it will be there when needed. People who live in areas that are at war live in constant fear even when their homes are not in the process of being attacked because they know that this can happen at any time. In like manner, the person who seems to have enough money but continues to engage in corrupt activities may be doing so because of the uncertainty of his or her position and thus may want to accumulate as much as possible so that even when the job or status is not there tomorrow, he may still have the means to support self and family. Thus, the accumulation constitutes a pathology arising from the fear of being deprived of physiological and safety needs. Since job security was high and pensions were adequate for the basic needs of most retirees in the era prior to the proliferation of corruption, it is plausible that this factor may be responsible, at least in part, for the current proliferation of corruption in Nigeria.

### **Integrating the above theories in the efforts at curbing corruption**

In what way can these approaches be helpful in the efforts to eliminate or at least control the level of corruption in Nigeria? Presently, when one is found to have engaged in a corrupt act such a person, if he or she is in the civil service or in government-owned corporations, is either retired or dismissed from service. Usually, that is the end of the story. In some cases, people are tried by some special tribunals on charges of economic sabotage and sentenced to lengthy jail terms, sometimes in excess of 100 years. However, most of these people are released after serving only a fraction of their prison terms. Not only have most of the politicians who were sentenced in 1984 shortly after the coup d'état of December 1983 been released from jail, but some of them held high level jobs in the Abacha regime.

As indicated by the principles of observational learning, consequences of an act on a model are key determinants of whether or not a particular behavior will be modeled. When people seen to be glaringly corrupt go unpunished, there is no reason for others not to copy their corrupt activities. One of the ways of effectively combating corruption would be to render appropriate punishment for those guilty of this practice. However, for punishment to be effective, it has to be uniformly applied to all that are guilty of corruption and not limited to people of low status. If punishment is selective, people will likely note the exceptions and find ways to join this exclusive club, and not desist from corrupt behavior.

Providing appropriate punishment for corruption in and of itself is not sufficient to eliminate corruption. The phenomenon of corruption has multiple causes, and is determined by more than just seeing people go unpunished for engaging in corrupt behavior. The theory of hierarchy of needs

has shown that people have needs that range from basic survival needs all the way to esteem and self-actualizing needs. In order for the higher needs to be in place, the lower ones must be satisfied. A person who has no means to feed self and family is not likely to be worried about integrity. No matter how severely others are punished for taking bribes or embezzling money, this is unlikely to serve as a deterrent to a person who cannot fulfill his or her basic obligations of feeding, housing, and the means of getting to work. Most workers in Nigeria today can hardly keep up with these basic needs entirely from their salaries. To make things worse, the salaries are sometimes not paid for several months at a stretch.

Furthermore, the sometimes arbitrary manner in which people are removed from their jobs is likely to create a high level of insecurity among workers. When you combine the above factors with the reality that there are no existing social programs such as unemployment benefits, it is easy to see why this might trigger the survival and safety needs on Maslow's hierarchy. Thus aroused, people will take any step necessary, including corruption, to satisfy these needs. To this end, government must put in place economic policies that can enable people to meet up with their basic needs and make honest work profitable. In addition, government should enact unemployment insurance programs that should be compulsory for most employees with the premiums deducted directly at the source. As it now stands, there is nothing for people to fall back on when they lose their jobs and are in the process of looking for alternative sources of earning a livelihood. This program should help serve as a buffer for people during the times that they may need to look for new jobs. Also, pensions should be regularly reviewed to keep track with inflation and fluctuations resulting from such factors as currency devaluation. This will have the effect of allaying fears of those currently working as to the uncertainty of their situation after retirement and reduce the tendency to grab whatever they can now against a rainy day. People who are secure of their basic needs can look forward to attaining higher needs such as self-esteem, integrity and pursuit of excellence.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

A case has been made that corruption is a serious impediment to sustainable development, especially in developing countries, and that it is not only prevalent in Nigeria, but has proliferated over the past few years. Two psychological theories have been put forth - Bandura's observation learning theory and Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs - to explain why corruption took hold in Nigeria and its current proliferation. The main position of this article is that a poor record of punishing corruption may have led to other people emulating the corrupt activities of others. Furthermore, the increasingly worsening economic situation has led to a corresponding decrease in the standard of living of most Nigerians. This situation, coupled with the increased uncertainty about jobs and anxiety in many people about their ability to fend for self and family, may have contributed to the present escalation of corruption in Nigeria. It is recommended that in addition to other measures being taken to reduce corruption, the leadership must demonstrate the willingness to

track and punish corrupt officials and citizens as well as create a conducive economic climate that would raise the standard of living of the citizenry. Finally, programs such as unemployment insurance should be instituted among the working class in order to reduce the worry about basic survival in the face of growing insecurity about the job situation.

## References

- Alatas, H.S. 1990. *Corruption: its nature, causes and functions*. Kuala Lumpur: S. Abdul Majeed & Co.
- Bandura, A. 1986. *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. 1988. Social cognitive theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of child development* (Vol. 6). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- BBC News. 1998. *Nigeria recovers Abacha's cash*. World Wide Web: ([http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid\\_211000/211324.stm](http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_211000/211324.stm)), November 10.
- BBC News. 1998. *Nigeria probes into former regime*. World Wide Web: ([http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid\\_166000/166542.stm](http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_166000/166542.stm)), September 7.
- Brooks, R.C. 1974. *Corruption in American politics and life*. N. York: Arno Press.
- CBS News. 1994. *60 Minutes: Corruption Inc*. Volume XXVII (14). New York, December 11.
- Maslow, A. H. 1943. *A theory of human motivation*. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396.
- Maslow, A.H. 1970. *Motivation and personality (2nd ed.)*. N. York: Harper & Row.
- Namwamba, F. 1996. *E-mail reaction to the 1996 rankings on the corruption index*. World Wide Web (<http://www1.gwdg.de/~uwww/press/papaf.htm>).
- Ode, J. 1996. See Ajaokuta and weep. *Newswatch*,\_23 (3), 12-16.
- Olukoya, S. 1996. Doctors against doctors. *Newswatch*,\_23 (3), 8-9.
- Senturia, J.J. 1931. Political Corruption. *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (Vols 3-4)*. New York: Macmillan.
- Transparency International. 1996. *Internet corruption ranking - Ranking 1996*. World Wide Web (<http://www1.gwdg.de/~uwww/rank-96.htm>).
- Transparency International. 1997. *Internet corruption perception index - 1997*. World Wide Web (<http://www1.gwdg.de/~uwww/rank-97.htm>)

Table 1 Corruption Perception Index (1996/1997)

	1996				1997		
Rank	Country	Score		Rank	Country	Score	
1	New Zealand	9.43		1	Denmark	9.94	
2	Denmark	9.33		2	Finland	9.48	
3	Sweden	9.08		3	Sweden	9.38	
4	Finland	9.05		4	New Zealand	9.23	
5	Canada	9.86		5	Canada	9.1	
6	Norway	8.87		6	Netherlands	9.03	
7	Singapore	8.8		7	Norway	8.92	
8	Switzerland	8.76		8	Australia	8.86	
9	Netherlands	8.71		9	Singapore	8.66	
10	Australia	8.6		10	Luxemburg	8.61	
11	Ireland	8.45		11	Switzerland	8.61	
12	United Kingdom	8.44		12	Ireland	8.28	
13	Germany	8.27		13	Germany	8.23	
14	Israel	7.71		14	United Kingdom	8.22	
15	USA	7.66		15	Israel	7.97	
16	Austria	7.59		16	USA	7.61	
17	Japan	7.05		17	Austria	7.61	
18	Hong Kong	7.01		18	Hong Kong	7.28	
19	France	6.96		19	Portugal	6.97	
20	Belgium	6.84		20	France	6.66	
21	Chile	6.8		21	Japan	6.57	
22	Portugal	6.53		22	Costa Rica	6.45	
23	South Africa	5.68		23	Chile	6.05	
24	Poland	5.57		24	Spain	5.9	
25	Czech Republic	5.37		25	Greece	5.35	
26	Malaysia	5.32		26	Belgium	5.25	
27	South Korea	5.02		27	Czech Republic	5.2	
28	Greece	5.01		28	Hungary	5.18	
29	Taiwan	4.98		29	Poland	5.08	
30	Jordan	4.89		30	Italy	5.03	

31	Hungary	4.86		31	Taiwan	5.02
32	Spain	4.31		32	Malaysia	5.01
33	Turkey	3.54		33	South Africa	4.95
34	Italy	3.42		34	South Korea	4.29
35	Argentina	3.41		35	Uruguay	4.14
36	Bolivia	3.4		36	Brazil	3.56
37	Thailand	3.33		37	Romania	3.44
38	Mexico	3.3		38	Turkey	3.21
39	Ecuador	3.19		39	Thailand	3.06
40	Brazil	2.96		40	Philippines	3.05
41	Egypt	2.84		41	China	2.88
42	Colombia	2.73		42	Argentina	2.81
43	Uganda	2.71		43	Vietnam	2.79
44	Philippines	2.69		44	Venezuela	2.77
45	Indonesia	2.65		45	India	2.75
46	India	2.63		46	Indonesia	2.72
47	Russia	2.58		47	Mexico	2.66
48	Venezuela	2.5		48	Pakistan	2.53
49	Cameroon	2.46		49	Russia	2.27
50	China	2.43		50	Colombia	2.23
51	Bangladesh	2.29		51	Bolivia	2.05
52	Kenya	2.21		52	Nigeria	1.76
53	Pakistan	1				
54	Nigeria	0.69				

Source: Transparency International , Internet Corruption Perception Index, 1996, 1997. Note:  
The range is from 10 (least corrupt) to 0 (most corrupt)