

The Political Economy of Corruption and Sustainable Development in Nigeria, 2015–2024

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ABSTRACT

Corruption remains a significant barrier to sustainable development in Nigeria. It undermines economic growth, good governance, and social equity. It erodes public trust, deepens inequality, and contributes to persistent challenges such as poverty, infrastructural decay, and environmental degradation, thereby hindering progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study explores the relationship between corruption and sustainable development in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023, focusing on the anti-corruption efforts of the Buhari and Tinubu administrations. Employing a qualitative approach, it assesses the effectiveness of key policies and institutional frameworks such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and the activities of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in promoting economic stability and social development. Findings indicate that despite these initiatives, corruption remains entrenched due to systemic issues including weak enforcement, political interference, and judicial inefficiencies. The study concludes that achieving sustainable development requires comprehensive institutional reforms, greater transparency, stronger political will, and increased citizen engagement in governance.

Keywords: Corruption, Sustainable Development, Nigeria, Anti-Corruption Policies, Governance, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Corruption poses a major obstacle to sustainable development in Nigeria. It drains national wealth, leads to the misallocation of resources, slows economic growth and development, and deters both local and foreign investment. It also undermines the moral fabric of the state. Corrupt regimes often sustain themselves by rewarding supporters and perpetuating patronage networks (Ehiedu et al., 2020). At the 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit, global leaders laid out a roadmap for achieving sustainable development by promoting peace, political stability, and investing significantly in education, healthcare, and infrastructure to enhance human well-being (Abdullahi et al., 2023). The Summit further emphasised the importance of human rights, gender equality, and the growth of democratic institutions.

In addition, the Summit placed strong emphasis on good governance, poverty eradication, access to food, and reducing inequality. It aimed to accelerate Africa's development, create employment opportunities, and reduce social disparities (Dikko, 2020). Crucially, the fight against corruption and illicit financial flows was identified as a key strategy, recognising corruption as a destructive force that weakens the economic, political, and institutional foundations necessary for sustainable development. By addressing corruption, the Summit sought to empower individuals and communities to shape a better future (Dikko, 2020). Nigeria gained independence in 1960, following the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by British colonial authorities. As a multi-ethnic nation, Nigeria's post-independence journey has been fraught with complex challenges (Njoku, 2025). Despite its vast human and natural resources, the quest for sustainable development remains largely unfulfilled.

As a developing economy, Nigeria has benefitted from decades of oil revenues, growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), increased school enrolment, expanding infrastructure, and a growing middle class. Yet, sustainable development remains elusive. Resources earmarked for public services and infrastructure are

derived from a limited and non-renewable stock of mineral wealth, reflecting the paradox of resource abundance (Murshed, 2018). Put differently, Nigeria's overdependence on oil has brought about a resource curse, where the very resource meant to ensure prosperity has contributed to economic instability (Ngwu & Ugwu (2015; Ross, 2013). Oil revenues have driven growth, but the volatility of global oil prices has exposed the country to cyclical fiscal crises, undermining long-term planning and development. Thus, despite progress in education, infrastructure, and the emergence of a middle class, sustainable development continues to be an unfulfilled promise (Folarin, 2021).

The mismanagement of resources has significantly deepened Nigeria's development challenges. Corruption, embezzlement, and the misallocation of public funds have diverted critical resources away from sectors that are essential for sustainable growth. This persistent misuse of wealth has severely undermined the benefits that could have emerged from the prudent and equitable allocation of resources (Osuji et al., 2022). Although Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and natural resources, achieving sustainable development requires a more strategic and comprehensive approach. This includes reducing overreliance on finite resources, especially oil, and embracing economic diversification. Investment in agriculture, manufacturing, and technology is key to expanding the country's economic base and unlocking inclusive growth. Equally important are good governance, transparency, and accountability, which are necessary to foster a conducive environment for sustainable development (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023).

Addressing Nigeria's long-standing development challenges also involves tackling deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities. The equitable distribution of wealth and improved access to quality education, healthcare, and essential services are crucial for building an inclusive society. Bridging disparities across ethnic and socio-economic divides can turn Nigeria's diversity into a strength, encouraging national unity and collective progress (Njoku, 2025; Abdulai, 2023).

Corruption has had a particularly damaging effect on Nigeria's ability to meet sustainable development goals. The country has fallen short of the 2030 targets outlined by the United Nations Development Programme. Development efforts have been compromised by corruption, which has denied the state the resources needed to provide basic social services such as healthcare, education, roads, and electricity. This study investigates these issues through a political economy lens, focusing on how institutional design affects policymaking, implementation, and reform over time. Institutions, whether formal, like the constitution, or informal, such as customs and norms, play a central role in shaping governance outcomes (Ibrahim, 2020).

Despite numerous policies and interventions by both the Nigerian government and development partners, many initiatives have failed due to corruption. For instance, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) allocated ₦1.1 billion (approximately \$7.5 million) in 2006 to train 6,446 rural workers in vocational skills. However, by 2007, it was reported that over 258,590 individuals had abandoned the programme without engaging in any productive activity (Ehiedu et al., 2020). Similarly, the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) has faced major setbacks, with over 64% of Nigerian children of school-age still lack access to formal education (Idoko, 2022). This alarming figure reflects the deep-rooted failures in policy execution and highlights how corruption undermines fundamental rights, such as access to education (Abdullahi et al., 2023). These examples underscore the destructive impact of corruption on Nigeria's developmental efforts. From poverty eradication to education, corruption weakens institutional effectiveness and stalls progress.

Despite its endemic nature in Nigeria, existing studies on corruption and sustainable development in Nigeria often treat both issues separately or focus mainly on anti-corruption campaigns, without adequately considering the broader institutional and political contexts (Onimisi, 2021; Osuji, 2015). Very few adopt a political economy approach that interrogates how power relations, institutional weaknesses, and elite interests sustain corruption and undermine sustainable development. This study addresses that gap by critically examining the complex relationship between corruption and development within Nigeria's socio-political structures from 2015 to 2024. By adopting a political economy lens, the study provides a more holistic understanding of why many anti-corruption initiatives fail, and how deep-rooted reforms can support inclusive and sustainable growth. It also evaluates the impact of existing anti-corruption policies and proposes practical strategies for strengthening governance and driving sustainable development. Furthermore, the research seeks

to stimulate national reflection on how corruption continues to impede socio-economic progress in Nigeria, and to offer actionable solutions to this hydra-headed challenge.

This study makes two key contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First, it investigates the specific channels through which corruption affects Nigeria's economy, with particular emphasis on the period from 2015 to 2023. Second, it analyses the broader implications of corruption on development, with a sharp focus on critical issues such as worsening poverty and rising unemployment, both of which are direct consequences of entrenched corruption. The limited number of in-depth studies that link corruption directly to sustainable development in the Nigerian context highlights the importance and relevance of this research.

Research Questions

While generally aiming to highlight the interplay between corruption and sustainable development within Nigeria's socio-political structures from 2015 to 2024, the specific questions of this work are as follows: To what extent and in what nature has corruption been prevalent in Nigeria from 2015 to 2024? What impact has corruption had on key sustainable development indicators in Nigeria from 2015 to 2024 and how effective have the anti-corruption measures between 2015 and 2024 been in reducing corruption and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria?

Conceptualisations

Corruption

Corruption can be broadly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, manifesting in various forms such as bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and nepotism (Transparency International, 2023). This definition captures the essence of corruption as a violation of ethical standards and legal norms, driven by the pursuit of personal advantage at the expense of the public good. Corruption involves the misuse of public office or a position of trust, either in the public or private sector for personal gain. It often entails the diversion of public funds and resources meant for the collective good to serve the selfish interests of a few individuals. Omotola (2006) describes corruption as both a political and economic phenomenon with intertwined effects. According to him, political corruption occurs when policymaking and governance are characterised by the manipulation of power, intimidation of interest groups, abusive patronage, fraud, and the exchange of money or material rewards for political influence.

Similarly, Osoba (1996) defines corruption as anti-social behaviour by individuals or groups that confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on the perpetrators. Such actions violate legal norms and moral values, thereby undermining the overall wellbeing of society. Within the policy cycle, corruption emerges when public officials accept bribes, whether in cash or kind, for personal benefit. This behaviour negatively affects both the integrity of the policy process and, more importantly, the effective implementation of policies. The causes of corruption in Nigeria are complex and multi-dimensional, cutting across weak governance structures, economic hardship, and deep-rooted cultural practices. Weak institutions such as ineffective legal systems, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and poor regulatory oversight, create a fertile ground for corruption to thrive unchecked (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013).

In many developing countries like Nigeria, the absence of strong institutional checks and balances increases vulnerability to corrupt practices. Economic conditions also play a significant role. Widespread poverty, unemployment, and underemployment push many individuals into corruption as a means of survival (Hough, 2013; Njoku & Sidhu, 2021). Low wages in the public sector further incentivise civil servants to engage in bribery, embezzlement, or other forms of illicit enrichment. In contrast, in wealthier countries, corruption is often driven by the quest for more power and influence rather than basic survival. Cultural factors cannot be overlooked. In some societies, including Nigeria, corruption has been normalised through informal practices like gift-giving, favouritism, and patron-client relationships (Blundo & Sardan, 2006). These cultural norms blur the lines between acceptable behaviour and corrupt practices, thereby weakening the enforcement of anti-corruption measures.

The effects of corruption are far-reaching and deeply damaging. Economically, corruption distorts markets, discourages foreign investment, and increases the cost of doing business (Tanzi, 1998). It operates like a hidden tax, siphoning public resources away from developmental projects and into private pockets. This not only weakens economic growth but also worsens inequality and underdevelopment, especially in a resource-constrained economy like Nigeria. Socially, corruption erodes public trust in government institutions, fuels political discontent, and may lead to civil unrest (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). When citizens see their leaders engaging in corrupt acts without consequences, public confidence in the system deteriorates, resulting in apathy and disengagement from civic responsibilities (Njoku & Mmuogbuo, 2025). In extreme cases, unchecked corruption can destabilise societies and contribute to conflict and insecurity. Politically, corruption undermines democratic governance by distorting electoral processes and reinforcing inequality (Diamond, 2007). When corrupt politicians manipulate elections through vote buying or influence-peddling, it compromises the legitimacy of democratic institutions and entrenches a vicious cycle of bad governance and impunity.

Development

Development is a multi-dimensional and dynamic process that involves the transformation of economic, social, political, and cultural systems to improve the quality of life and general well-being of individuals and communities. While development is often associated with economic growth, it goes beyond just increases in income or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It also includes the expansion of human capabilities, reduction of inequality, enhancement of access to opportunities, and the promotion of environmentally sustainable practices for the benefit of future generations (Sen, 1999). Traditionally, development has been measured by indicators such as GDP growth, industrialisation, and infrastructural development (Todaro & Smith, 2015). However, modern development thinking acknowledges the need to also address poverty, ensure fair distribution of wealth, and provide basic amenities such as quality education, healthcare, shelter, and potable water.

Over the years, the focus of development has shifted towards human development, which emphasises expanding the richness of human life rather than simply the richness of the economy, focusing on people and their opportunities and choices (UNDP, 2023). Sen (1999) argues that development should be viewed as a process of expanding real freedoms rather than merely increasing income. In this light, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures progress based on health, education, and living standards, highlighting the importance of human welfare in development (UNDP, 2023; UNDP & OPHI, 2017). In line with the above, for any society to be regarded as developed, it must be able to provide those basic amenities that would prolong the life of its inhabitants, education for the majority of its citizens as well as good jobs that can fetch them enough income to live a quality life (Njoku, 2021).

Social and political aspects are equally central to meaningful development. Social development focuses on building strong social institutions that promote justice, fairness, and the welfare of all people. This includes ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, and gender equity, as well as safeguarding human rights (UNRISD, 2010). Political development entails strengthening democratic governance, enhancing the capacity of institutions to respond to the people's needs, and promoting transparency, accountability, and participation in decision-making (Leftwich, 2000).

Despite these positive strides, development remains a contested and challenging concept, especially in the Global South. One major critique is that many development models are based on Western perspectives that do not always align with local realities or cultural values (Escobar, 1995). There is also growing concern that overemphasis on economic growth often undermines other vital aspects like equity and environmental sustainability. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are calling for alternative approaches that prioritise indigenous knowledge systems, community-led solutions, and inclusive development processes tailored to local contexts (Pieterse, 2010).

Sustainable development

Although sustainable development lacks a widely accepted definition, it can be said to be Sustainable development is an approach to social, economic, and environmental planning that seeks to balance the needs of present and future generations while ensuring the protection and preservation of the natural environment from excessive harm or degradation. (Brundtland Commission, 1987; UN, n/d). This concept emerged as a response to the growing awareness that traditional models of development, which often prioritise short-term economic gains, can lead to environmental degradation, social inequality, and the depletion of natural resources. The core principles of sustainable development include intergenerational equity, integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives, and participatory governance.

As shown below, development is multi-dimensional. It goes beyond economic growth to include human capabilities, equity, environmental stewardship, and good governance. This underscores the interconnectedness of the SDGs as progress in one area often supports others.



Figure 1: Development Dimensions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Source: Created by authors.

Table 1: Linking Development Dimensions with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Dimension of Development	Key Focus Areas	Relevant SDGs
Economic Development	Income growth Employment creation Productivity	SDG 1 (No Poverty) SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth) SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure)
Human Development	Education Health Empowerment	SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) SDG 4 (Quality Education) SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

Social Development	Equity and inclusion Social protection Justice	SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)
Environmental Sustainability	Resource management Climate resilience Biodiversity protection	SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) SDG 13 (Climate Action) SDG 14 (Life Below Water) SDG 15 (Life on Land)
Governance & Institutions	Anti-corruption Rule of law Citizen participation	SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Source: Linked & compiled by authors

As seen from the above table, economic growth underpins poverty reduction (SDG 1) and sustains livelihoods (SDG 8), while innovation (SDG 9) fuels long-term productivity. Similarly, education (SDG 4) and health (SDG 3) are foundational to human capability, while gender equity (SDG 5) ensures equitable progress. On the other hand, inclusive policies (SDG 10, 11) and accountable governance (SDG 16) mitigate social fragmentation while sustainable resource use (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13) are critical to planetary health. In a word, these dimensions are interdependent. As economic growth (SDG 8) funds education (SDG 4), environmental protection (SDG 15) sustains livelihoods (SDG 1) while governance (SDG 16) ensures equitable progress across all goals.

Theoretical Framework

This article employs **institutional theory** to analyse how Nigeria's governance structures, both formal (laws, agencies) and informal (norms, clientelism) shape corruption and hinder development. Institutional theory posits that organisations and governments operate within frameworks of rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive systems that dictate behavior (Scott, 2014). It argues that path-dependent institutional legacies and elite capture perpetuate a vicious cycle where corruption erodes public trust, distorts economic policies, and exacerbates inequality. This paper identifies three institutional pillars that explain corruption's persistence in Nigeria:

(1) **Regulatory Pillar (Formal Institutions):** Anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were strengthened post-2015 (Okwe, 2015). However, selective enforcement such as targeting opposition figures and low level officials while shielding allies limit efficacy (Sanni, 2022; Onoiribholo, 2023). (2) **Normative Pillar (Informal Institutions):** Patronage networks and "godfatherism" prioritise loyalty over merit which results in embedding corruption in politics (Nnajiето & Ihejiето, 2024). An example is the "stomach infrastructure" phenomenon where politicians exchange bribes or material rewards for political support and votes in Nigeria (Ojoye, 2019). (3) **Cultural-Cognitive Pillar:** Public cynicism normalises corruption as "the Nigerian way" and reduces collective action for accountability (Transparency International, 2023).

Governance in Nigeria has often been undermined by institutional failures, including poor enforcement of anti-corruption laws, weak judicial independence, and political interference in regulatory agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC (Alabi & Matthew, 2017). These institutional weaknesses create environments where corrupt practices are tolerated or even rewarded, making it difficult to implement policies that promote sustainable development. Corruption distorts resource allocation, limits access to basic services, and widens inequality which directly undermines Nigeria's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which is most suitable for examining complex social issues and gaining a deep understanding of the subject matter. The qualitative approach enabled a thorough exploration of the relationship between corruption and sustainable development by focusing on the contextual and subjective factors that shape these issues. It provided an interpretative lens through which themes and patterns within the data could be uncovered, offering insights that may not be easily captured through quantitative methods. The choice of qualitative research was informed by its ability to reveal the nuanced and multifaceted nature of corruption and its impact on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Data for this study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources. These include academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, reports from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and documents from international agencies. Drawing on these sources provided the study with a broad and credible perspectives that enhanced the quality of the analysis. The data were analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA), a qualitative method that involves identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). TA helped to uncover the key drivers, implications, and recurring issues around corruption and sustainable development by systematically coding and categorising information from the reviewed documents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nature of corruption and its prevalence in Nigeria from 2015 to 2024

Political corruption remained rampant in Nigeria in 2015, characterised by embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds. High-profile cases, such as those involving former public officials, highlighted the extent of political corruption. According to Dimuna (2023), the pervasive nature of political corruption significantly hindered infrastructural development in Nigeria, as funds intended for development projects were often diverted for personal use.

Bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria's civil service was evident through widespread bribery and favoritism in 2016. Civil servants often demanded bribes to perform basic services, undermining public trust in government institutions. Ibrahim (2023) noted that bureaucratic corruption severely affected the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery, leading to widespread public discontent and reduced governmental legitimacy.

Judicial corruption was prominent in 2017, with numerous cases of manipulation of court rulings and judicial processes (Ayobolu, 2016). Ahen (2022) argued that judicial corruption undermined the rule of law and contributed to a culture of impunity, where influential individuals could manipulate legal outcomes to their advantage, further eroding public confidence in the justice system. In 2018, electoral corruption, including vote-buying and manipulation of election results, was prevalent. According to Ehiedu, Onuorah, and Mbagwu (2023), electoral corruption compromised the integrity of democratic processes, leading to the election of unqualified candidates and fostering a cycle of corruption and poor governance.

Corporate corruption became a significant issue in 2019, with numerous cases of corporate fraud and tax evasion. Nomishan, Tubi, and Gubam (2023) highlighted how corporate corruption not only deprived the government of essential revenue but also distorted market dynamics, creating an unfair competitive environment that discouraged legitimate business practices. Corruption in infrastructure projects was also rampant in 2020, leading to the mismanagement and poor execution of construction projects. Adindu et al. (2020) emphasised that corruption in the construction sector resulted in substandard infrastructure, project delays, and inflated costs, thereby stalling economic growth and sustainable development efforts in Nigeria.

In 2021, corruption in public services, particularly in healthcare and education, was widespread. Hoinaru et al. (2020) discussed how corruption in these critical sectors led to inadequate service delivery, poor health outcomes, and compromised educational standards, which in turn affected the overall quality of life and human capital development in Nigeria.

Environmental corruption, including illegal mining and deforestation, was a major issue in 2022. Usman (2022) explained that environmental corruption not only degraded Nigeria's natural resources but also exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, as communities reliant on these resources for their livelihoods were disproportionately affected.

Technological corruption, including cybercrimes and misuse of information and communication technology (ICT), emerged as a significant problem in 2023. Sahoo, Sethi, and Padilla (2023) notes that technological corruption posed new challenges to sustainable development, as it undermined digital infrastructure, eroded public trust in digital services, and required substantial resources to combat effectively. These various forms of corruption have collectively impeded Nigeria's progress toward sustainable development by undermining the effectiveness of governance, distorting economic policies, and exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. Efforts to combat corruption must therefore be multifaceted and address the root causes to foster a sustainable development trajectory for Nigeria

Impact of Corruption on Sustainable Development Indicators in Nigeria, 2015-2024

Corruption significantly impacted Nigeria's economic growth in 2015 by reducing GDP growth due to widespread embezzlement of public funds. Dimuna (2023) highlighted how the diversion of funds meant for development projects into private accounts stifled economic activities and slowed down the overall economic progress of the country. The misallocation of resources hindered investments in critical sectors, thereby reducing Nigeria's economic competitiveness on a global scale. In 2016, corruption in public service delivery led to a noticeable decline in the quality and accessibility of essential services. Ibrahim (2023) observed that bribery and favoritism in the civil service meant that resources were not distributed based on need but rather on the ability to pay bribes. This skewed the distribution of services, exacerbating inequalities and diminishing the effectiveness of public institutions.

The impact of corruption on judicial integrity was profound in 2017, eroding public trust in the legal system. According to Ahen (2022), manipulation of court rulings and judicial processes by corrupt officials created a culture of impunity. This situation discouraged citizens from seeking justice through legal channels and undermined the rule of law, which is fundamental for sustainable development.

Electoral integrity was compromised in 2018 due to corruption, including vote-buying and manipulation of election results (Abayomi, 2018). Ehiedu et al. (2023) argued that such practices distorted democratic processes, leading to the election of candidates who were often more interested in personal gain than public service. This undermined the democratic foundations necessary for stable and inclusive development. Corporate governance was significantly affected by corruption in 2019, leading to market distortions and unfair competition. Nomishan et al. (2023) discussed how corporate fraud and tax evasion not only deprived the government of essential revenue but also created an uneven playing field for businesses. This discouraged legitimate enterprises and hindered economic innovation and growth.

Corruption in infrastructure development in 2020 resulted in substandard and delayed projects. Adindu et al. (2020) noted that the mismanagement of construction projects due to corrupt practices led to poor-quality infrastructure, inflated costs, and prolonged timelines. This not only wasted public funds but also impeded economic activities and development projects crucial for sustainable growth. In 2021, the quality of healthcare in Nigeria was adversely affected by corruption, leading to poor health outcomes and service delivery. Hoinaru et al. (2020) pointed out that corruption in healthcare meant that resources were often diverted from their intended purposes, resulting in inadequate facilities, shortages of essential medicines, and a general decline in the quality of care available to the public.

Environmental sustainability suffered in 2022 due to corruption, particularly in the form of illegal mining and deforestation. Usman (2022) explained that corrupt practices facilitated environmental degradation, which not only harmed biodiversity and ecosystems but also exacerbated socio-economic inequalities. Communities dependent on these resources for their livelihoods were disproportionately affected, further entrenching poverty and inequality.

In 2023, corruption impacted Nigeria's digital infrastructure by eroding public trust in digital services and increasing cybercrime. Sahoo et al. (2023) highlighted how corruption in the ICT sector led to the misuse of digital technologies and a rise in cybercrimes, posing new challenges to sustainable development. This not only affected the security and reliability of digital services but also required substantial resources to combat, diverting funds from other critical development areas. Overall, corruption has had far-reaching impacts on various sustainable development indicators in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to reduce corruption and promote good governance, ensuring that resources are utilised effectively to support sustainable development goals.

The effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in Nigeria (2015 and 2024)

In 2015, the Nigerian government established the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC) to enhance policy coordination and advisory on anti-corruption reforms. This measure aimed to streamline anti-corruption efforts across various government agencies and ensure a coherent strategy. According to Dimuna (2023), PACAC played a significant role in advising the government on best practices and policy directions, leading to more coordinated and effective anti-corruption measures. The Whistleblower Protection Policy introduced in 2016 was a landmark measure to encourage the reporting of corrupt activities by ensuring the safety and protection of whistleblowers. Ibrahim (2023) noted that this policy led to a significant increase in the reporting of corruption cases, as individuals felt more secure in coming forward with information about illicit activities. This surge in reporting contributed to a more transparent and accountable governance environment.

In 2017, Nigeria's membership in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) marked a critical step towards enhancing transparency and accountability in government operations (Igbuzor, 2017). Ahen (2022) observes that OGP membership required Nigeria to implement reforms aimed at increasing public access to government information and promoting civic participation. These efforts improved government transparency and allowed for greater public scrutiny of government actions. Similarly, the strengthening of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2018, including increased powers and resources, led to more effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Ehiedu et al. (2023) reported that the enhanced capabilities of the EFCC resulted in a higher number of high-profile convictions, sending a strong message about the government's commitment to tackling corruption. These convictions also helped deter potential offenders, thereby reducing corruption levels.

Anti-money laundering measures introduced in 2019 aimed to tighten regulations on financial transactions to combat illicit financial flows. Nomishan et al, (2023) highlighted that these measures were effective in curbing money laundering activities by implementing stricter monitoring and reporting requirements for financial institutions. This helped in reducing the volume of illicit funds circulating within the economy and promoted financial integrity.

E-governance initiatives in 2020 focused on the digitalisation of government services to minimise human interference and reduce opportunities for bribery. Adindu et al, (2020) explained that the adoption of digital platforms for various government services reduced direct contact between officials and citizens, thereby lowering the chances of corrupt practices. This initiative not only streamlined service delivery but also enhanced transparency and accountability.

Judiciary reforms in 2021 were aimed at ensuring judicial independence and integrity to restore public confidence in the legal system. Hoinaru et al, (2020) observed that these reforms included measures to safeguard judicial appointments, improve case management, and enhance the overall efficiency of the judiciary. As a result, there was an increase in public trust in the judiciary, which is essential for upholding the rule of law and fighting corruption.

Public procurement reforms introduced in 2022 sought to increase transparency and accountability in the procurement process. Usman (2022) highlighted that these reforms included the implementation of e-procurement systems and stricter oversight mechanisms to reduce procurement fraud. These measures helped ensure that public resources were used efficiently and that procurement processes were fair and competitive.

In 2023, corporate governance reforms were implemented to strengthen corporate governance codes and improve the business environment. Sahoo et al. (2023) noted that these reforms aimed at promoting ethical business practices and enhancing the transparency of corporate operations. Improved corporate governance practices helped in creating a more stable and predictable business environment, which is crucial for sustainable development. Overall, the anti-corruption measures implemented between 2015 and 2024 have shown varying degrees of effectiveness in reducing corruption and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, corruption remains a major obstacle to sustainable development in Nigeria. It weakens economic growth, undermines good governance, and deepens social inequality. Although several anti-corruption measures were introduced since 2015 such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), the whistleblower policy, and increased prosecutions by agencies like the EFCC and ICPC, systemic corruption still prevails (Salihu 2020; Daily Trust, 2022). In other words, while anti-corruption measures introduced post-2015 have had some positive outcomes, such as improved revenue tracking and initial recoveries, systemic corruption remains deeply embedded. Persistent weaknesses in enforcement, legal protection for whistleblowers, and fair prosecution point to the need for stronger institutional reforms (Jannamike, 2025). These challenges have severely limited the impact of such interventions, allowing corrupt practices to continue unchecked. As a result, critical development issues such as widespread poverty, infrastructural decay, and poor service delivery remain unresolved, frustrating Nigeria's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Ogbuagu Ubi, Effiom, 2014). It is essential to strengthen institutional frameworks, ensure transparency and judicial independence, and encourage active citizen participation in governance. Without these foundational reforms, corruption will continue to stall Nigeria's national development efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening anti-corruption measures, promoting institutional transparency, and encouraging ethical conduct are key steps towards reducing the negative impact of corruption in Nigeria. One important approach to tackling corruption-induced poverty is the promotion of anti-corruption education at all levels. This will help to instill values of integrity, ethical governance, and active citizenship, especially in areas such as budget monitoring and public expenditure tracking. In addition, increased investment in corruption-prone sectors, particularly infrastructure and public services, can support economic growth and improve social welfare. Collaborative partnerships with international bodies are also essential for addressing cross-border corruption and promoting global accountability standards.

Equally important is the need to strengthen institutional frameworks by enhancing the independence and operational capacity of anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC and ICPC. These agencies must be empowered to function without political interference, with the authority to enforce sanctions such as travel bans and asset recovery from corrupt officials. Transparency and accountability can also be improved by adopting digital public financial management tools, such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), to ensure proper tracking and usage of public funds. These measures are necessary to fast-track Nigeria's journey towards sustainable development.

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