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# CORRUPTION AND ECONOMIC RECESSION: THE NEED FOR CIVIC LEARNING

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## **Abstract**

*The national values of honesty, obedience, hard work, tolerance and faith are germane to stabilising national life. These values are important for determining the development and progress of a nation. They regulate the life of the nation and project good image for the country. However, these values are now eroding, resulting into various social, political and economic vices. Corruption is one of these societal vices of the 21st century. One of the problems facing most Third World, developing countries, including Nigeria today, is corruption. Thus, to a large extent corruption affects development. In Nigeria, for example, this problem has become endemic such that the entire fabric of the society is affected. Currently, Nigerians are facing financial crisis and this has been attributed to mass unemployment and general loss of confidence in the government. The causes and solution of economic recession in Nigeria has become the major topic of discussion in Nigeria and beyond. This study aims at analyzing the potentials of civic learning for combating current social, political and eroded value system in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Corruption, Economic recession, unemployment, Civic learning*

**Word count:** 180

## **Introduction**

Given the state of underdevelopment in Nigeria since independence, several attempts have been made by scholars, global policy makers and institutions to understand the cause(s) and the continued prevalence of the development crisis. Among the factors identified that undermined Nigeria's development are colonial legacy and corrupt leadership (Umez, 2000). One of the problems facing most Third World, developing and or underdeveloped countries, including Nigeria today, is corruption (Uji, 2015). According to Egharevba and Idowu (2012), the corrupt leadership perspective believes that corruption on the part of the leadership has been the bane of development in Nigeria. This is significantly so because the greatest challenge to Nigeria's development are Nigerians themselves as represented by the political leaders who should be held responsible for the present pathetic state of underdevelopment in the country (Falola, 2005). According to Mashal (2011), corruption is dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially by people in official positions (misused power of the officials). While economists largely view corruption as a sand in the gear of the economy, political scientists view it as the grease in that gear.

Another social issue facing the nation is financial crisis, also known as economic recession. It can be defined as a negative real GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters (say first and second quarters). Judging by the above definition, Nigeria is experiencing economic recession currently, since its first and second quarters growth in 2016 are -1.7% and -2.06% (Noko, 2016). Studies have revealed that this has affected both political, social and economic sectors of the country. This has led to mass unemployment and general loss of confidence in the government. Unemployment has been recognised as one of the economic indicators of a recession. Unemployed people can be defined as those persons who do not have a job but are willing and available to work during a certain period of time.

The social ills identified above have pervaded all sectors and constitute the essential problems with which in reality, Nigerians have to contend. These ills are likely to have been caused by what Chinsman (1996) summed up as the seemingly perpetual subservice

of the Nigerian population; their incapability to empower themselves and put themselves in the driver's seat of the vehicle for development, their powerlessness to engineer political, social and economic change and transformation have collectively created the environment that led to this present poor conditions. Authors such as Akpan (2001) and Edozie (2009) agreed that the absence of an informed and participatory citizenship is responsible for these problems. This implies that a good number of Nigerians are yet to understand and demonstrate the type of citizenship qualities necessary for the human and material development of the country. Civic education, therefore, should be a prime concern. There is no more important task than the development of an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry. Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In the absence of a reasoned commitment on the part of its citizens to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, a free and open society cannot succeed.

It is imperative, therefore, that educators, policymakers, and members of civil society make the case and ask for the support of civic education from all segments of society and from the widest range of institutions and governments (Branson, 1998). Hence, Ali (2008) and Oluniyi (2011) opined that the best way to change the Nigerian situation, strengthen her democracy and meet the challenges of this millennium is to guarantee a universal, qualitative and excellent citizenship education for every child in this country. This is in line with Walson-Jack (1999), who noted that a world-class citizenship education is essential to combating the fear, the ignorance, the prejudice, and apathy that undermine freedom today in form of ethnic, religious, racial and economic depressions. Civic learning in its ideal form seeks to engage citizens in their communities and schools by teaching them the skills necessary to effectively participate in civil society. It is relatively easy for a society to produce technically competent people. But the kind of society Nigerians want to live in and the kind of government they want to have requires effort and commitment on the part of its citizens (Branson, 1998).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Education is the major instrument for civilization and national development, every nation aspiring to be civilized and developed must invest in its educational sector. The neglect of civic education at the school of learning may have effect on the civic knowledge, behavior and national values. It is therefore, not surprising, today to see people engaging in indiscipline, antisocial behaviour, political and election corruption and violence. In line with this, the re-introduction of civics in the Nigerian educational sector may encourage morals and national ethics. However, this paper examines the necessity for civic learning in combating economic recession, corruption and unemployment towards building a better nation.

### **Corruption**

Corruption occurs when the actions of individuals, groups or firms in both public and private sectors influence the formation of laws, regulation, decrees, and other government policies to their own advantage by means of illicit and non-transparent provision of private benefits to public officials. It could also occur when changing and altering the implementation of existing laws, rules and regulations to “provide advantages to either state or non-state actors as a result of illicit and non-transparent provision of private gain to public officials (Egharevba and Idowu, 2012).

The World Bank (1997) and Transparency International (TI) (2008) defined corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gains”. This includes when public officials accept, solicit or extort bribes to subvert or circumvent public policies for competitive advantage and profit”. Similarly, the UNDP (2004) defined corruption as the “misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement”. It is usually an activity that is outside of constitutional government process, which involves the sale of publicly produced goods and services by government employees for payment or bribes not sanctioned by the government. Corruption is a form of rent-seeking enterprise or activity, which is illegal, or an unauthorized transfer of money from one person to another (group to group), or an in-kind substitute

(Egharevba and Idowu, 2012). The literature on corruption in developing countries generally suggests five strands of hypotheses as explanations for the causes of corruption, namely, rent-seeking, cultural relativity, low salary, imitation and institutional/political centralization. Based on existing studies on corruption, the following types of corruption are discernable in Nigeria: political corruption, bureaucratic corruption, electoral corruption and corporate corruption.

Corruption is widespread in developing countries, not because their people are different from people elsewhere but because conditions warrant it (Mauro, 1996), such as:

1. Motivation to earn income is extremely strong, due to poverty, low and irregular salaries, unemployment. Opportunities to engage in corruption are numerous and more regulations lead to higher opportunities for corruption.
2. Weak legislative and judicial systems and poorly developed laws and principles of ethics
3. Population, relative to natural resources, is large and there is political instability with weak political will.

Mashal (2012) summarised the consequences of corruption as follows: lower investment, including foreign direct investment; reduced economic growth; a shift in the composition of government spending from more productive to less productive activities; greater inequality and high incidence of poverty; reducing the efficiency of aid; and exposing the country to currency crises.

### **Economic Recession**

A financial crisis is often associated with one or more of the following phenomena: substantial changes in credit volume and asset prices; severe disruptions in financial intermediation and the supply of external financing to various actors in the economy; large scale balance sheet problems (of firms, households, financial intermediaries and sovereigns); and large-scale government support (in the form of liquidity support and recapitalization). As such, financial crises are typically multidimensional events and can be hard to characterize using a single indicator (Stijn and Kose, 2013).

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) defined recession as “a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in a real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail sales.” Economic recession can also be defined as a negative real GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters (say first and second quarters). Judging by the above definition, Nigeria is experiencing economic recession currently, since her first and second quarters growth in 2016 are -1.7% and -2.06% (Noko, 2016).

The major cause of economic recession in any economy (lesson from great depression, 1981, 1991, 2008 economic recession) may include, high inflation, a general rise in price of goods and services – leading to low purchasing power; accumulation of debt servicing especially foreign debts and High-interest rate – discouraging investors fall in aggregate demand, fall in wages, income and mass unemployment, and general loss of confidence on the government (Noko, 2016).

### **Impact of Civic Learning in Combating Corruption and Economic Recession**

Education for citizenship is essential to the development of well-informed students who can think critically about society’s issues and, in turn, make important contributions to society (Gould, 2011, Enos, 2015 and O’Meara, 2016). Levine (2007) identifies civic learning as a “behaviour that influences public matters, which, in turn, include the commons, the distribution of private goods, and decisions about what action to prohibit or promote”. Levine (2007, 2013) also recognizes civic participation as a characteristic of civic learning through involvement in community affairs nationally and locally.

Jacoby (2015) and O’Meara (2016) recognise learning through engagement as students acting upon heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities through both political and non-political means. Campus Compact (2015) also recognizes civic learning through civic engagement as a combination of individual and organizational elements in which individuals form habits that

allow them to access knowledge and abilities to improve communities. The Carnegie Foundation (2015) explains civic learning, through community involvement, as “...collaboration between institutions of learning and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (How Is “Community Engagement” Defined? section, para. 1). *A Crucible Moment* (2012) recognizes “collective action” as a characteristic of civic learning and civic participation through “moral discernment and behaviour,” “navigation of political systems,” and “compromise, civility, and mutual respect”. Centre for Civic Education (1994) and Saltmarsh (2005) understands civic learning to have three parts. The first is civic knowledge (knowledge from course content and communities), the second is civic skills (socially focused problem solving and civic action), and third is civic values (social justice, civic participation, and inclusion).

### **Combating Corruption**

Multilateral initiatives can be helpful after being studied carefully before they are conducted (Mashal. 2012). Therefore, it is necessary that people are aware of the procedure and the impact of such initiatives on their wellbeing. Public awareness is useful; the definition of corruption needs to be clarified, including the types, the elements, and the legal penalties associated with it. This can be possible through civic learning by exposing citizens to knowledge about their cultural and religious traditions and by disseminating information related to discipline, which can allow individuals to come together and make positive change (Hatcher, 2011).

### **Possible Economic Policy Measures to end Economic Recession in Nigeria**

The major measure is to reduce tax rate and increase aggregate demand. This can be done through civic learning, achievable through the development of intellectual skills essential for informed, effective, and responsible citizenship, by developing competence in explaining and analyzing; the ability to analyse enables one to distinguish between fact and opinion or between means and ends. It also helps

the citizen to clarify responsibilities, such as those which are personal or public responsibilities, in providing solutions to some economic issues.

### **The Place of Civic Knowledge, Skills and Values in National Development**

The historical conceptualization of civics is most similar to civic knowledge. For Branson (1998) civic knowledge, is concerned with the content or what citizens ought to know and the subject matter. In a *Crucible Moment*, the National Task Force (2012) provides a framework for civic knowledge in the 21st century. Citizens of communities need to know the cultural and global contexts in which a community exists, understand the historical and sociological relevance of important social movements, have exposure to multiple cultural and religious traditions, and understand how their political system works. Civic knowledge often deals with “actionable” information, related to a discipline, which can allow individuals to come together and make positive change (Hatcher, 2011).

Civic Knowledge helps citizens make informed judgments about the nature of civic life, politics, and government, and why politics and government are necessary~ purposes of government~ essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government~ nature and purposes of constitutions, and alternative ways of organizing constitutional governments (Branson, 1998). Civic knowledge entails an understanding of the historical, philosophical, and economic foundations of the Nigerian political system~ distinctive characteristics of Nigerian society and political culture~ and values and principles basic to national constitution, such as individual rights and responsibilities, concern for the public good, the rule of law, justice, equality, diversity, truth, patriotism, federalism, and the separation of powers. It helps citizens to understand the major elements of international relations and how world affairs affect their own lives, and the security and well being of their communities, state, and nation (Branson, 1998).

Civic knowledge helps citizens to understand that through their involvement in political life and in civil society, they can help to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods, communities, and nation (Branson, 1998). That is, if they want their voices to be



heard, they must become active participants in the political process. Although elections, campaigns, and voting are central to democratic institutions, citizens should learn that beyond electoral politics many participatory opportunities are open to them. Finally, it helps citizens to understand that the attainment of individual goals and public goals tend to go hand in hand with participation in political life and civil society (Branson, 1998). Thus, they are more likely to achieve personal goals for themselves and their families, as well as the goals they desire for their communities, state, and nation, if they are informed, effective, and responsible citizens.

The second essential component of civic learning is civic skills. If citizens are to exercise their rights and discharge their responsibilities as members of self-governing communities, they not only need to acquire a body of knowledge, they also need to acquire relevant intellectual and participatory skills. Intellectual skills in civics and government are inseparable from content. To be able to think critically about a political issue, for example, one must have an understanding of the issue, its history, its contemporary relevance, as well as command of a set of intellectual tools or considerations useful in dealing with such an issue (Branson, 1998).

The intellectual skills essential for informed, effective, and responsible citizenship sometimes are called critical thinking skills. National Assessment of Learning Progress (NAEP) (1998) categorize these skills as identifying and describing~ explaining and analyzing and evaluating, taking, and defending positions on public issues. A good civic learning enables one to identify or give the meaning or significance of things that are tangible such as the flag, national monuments, or civic and political events. It also enables one to give the meaning or significance of intangibles, such as ideas or concepts including patriotism, majority and minority rights, civil society, and constitutionalism. The ability to identify emotional language and symbols is of particular importance to citizens. They need to be able to discern the true purposes for which emotive language and symbols are being employed. Another intellectual skill which good civic learning fosters is that of describing. The ability to describe functions and processes, such as participation in civic life, legislative checks and balances or judicial review is indicative of understanding.

Good civic learning seeks to develop competence in explaining and analysing. The ability to analyse enables one to distinguish between fact and opinion or between means and ends. It also helps the citizen to clarify responsibilities, such as those between personal and public responsibilities or those between elected or appointed officials and citizens. In a self-governing society, citizens are decision-makers. They need, therefore, to develop and continue to improve their skills of evaluating, taking, and defending positions. These skills are essential if citizens are to assess issues on the public agenda, to make judgments about issues and to discuss their assessment with others in public or private. In addition to the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual skills, learning for citizenship in a democratic society must focus on skills that are required for informed, effective, and responsible participation in the political process and in civil society. Those skills can be categorized as interacting, monitoring, and influencing. Interacting pertains to the skills citizens need to communicate and to work cooperatively with others (Branson, 1998).

The third essential component of civic education, civic dispositions, refers to the traits of private and public character essential to the maintenance and improvement of constitutional democracy. Traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self discipline, and respect for the worth and human dignity of every individual are imperative. Public traits include public spiritedness, civility, respect for the rule of law, critical mindedness, and willingness to listen, negotiate, and compromise are indispensable to democracy's success (Branson, 1998).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Civic learning is well-conceived, mostly now that Nigeria seems to be bedeviled by social issues like Book Haram, kidnapping, child trafficking, value degeneration, child labor, youth incivility, cyber crimes and other social evils in the high and low places. The subject will help inculcate the right form of citizenship training to the citizenry at their youthful age so that they grow with loyalty and patriotism that the nation demands for its development. This is because no country can develop in face of crisis, social incoherence

and disrespect to the ideals of the nation. This study concludes that if people were given sound civic learning, this could reduce corruption rate, combat economic recession and unemployment rates. According to Center for Civic Education (1998), those dispositions or traits of private and public character might be described as:

1. Becoming an independent member of society. This disposition encompasses adhering voluntarily to self-imposed standards of behaviour rather than requiring the imposition of external controls, accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions and fulfilling the moral and legal obligations of membership in a democratic society.
2. Assuming the personal, political, and economic responsibilities of a citizen. These responsibilities include taking care of one's self, supporting one's family and caring for, nurturing, and educating one's children. They also include being informed about public issues, voting, paying taxes, serving on juries, performing public service, and serving in leadership positions commensurate with one's talents.
3. Respecting individual worth and human dignity. Respecting others means listening to their opinions, behaving in a civil manner, considering the rights and interests of fellow citizens and adhering to the principle of majority rule but recognizing the right of the minority to dissent.
4. Participating in civic affairs in a thoughtful and effective manner. This disposition entails becoming informed prior to voting or participating in public debate, engaging in civil and reflective discourse, and assuming leadership when appropriate. It also entails evaluating whether and when one's obligations as a citizen require that personal desires and interests be subordinated to the public good and evaluating whether and when one's obligations or constitutional principles oblige one to reject certain civic expectations.
5. Promoting the healthy functioning of constitutional democracy. This disposition encompasses being informed and attentive to public affairs, learning about and deliberating on constitutional values and principles, monitoring the adherence of political

leaders and public agencies to those values and principles and taking appropriate action if adherence is lacking. This disposition also inclines the citizen to work through peaceful, legal means to change laws that are thought to be unwise or unjust.

6. Federal government should make a policy that will enhance training and re-training of civic education teachers for successful implementation of civic education. This, if done, would promote teaching and learning of the Civic Education.
7. Governments at all levels, individuals, corporate organizations should participate in the provision of relevant instructional materials for effective teaching and learning of Civic Education as this would make for easy teaching and practical learning of Civic Education for citizenship development.
8. Governments should organize workshops, seminars and symposia for citizens in order for them to know the relevance of civic learning, through the provision of useful knowledge, skills and values that will help them to be effective beneficiaries of civic learning.

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