

COVERAGE OF AGRICULTURAL RELATED CORRUPT PRACTICES IN THE NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Corruption remains one of the most significant global issues in the 21st century, hence, its inclusion in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. In Nigeria, corruption is a central problem facing the government and one of the bureaucratic offices that massive scales of corruption thrive, is the agricultural sector. Recognizing the conferral and agenda setting status of the media, this research investigated the coverage of Agricultural Related Corrupt Practices (ARCPs) in Nigerian national newspapers. Using content analysis as methodology and multi-stage sampling procedure, four (4) national newspapers and four hundred and thirty two (432) editions from which 71 qualified as ARCPs news were selected for the study between January 2010 and December 2015. Results show inter-newspaper variation in the coverage of ARCPs stories. Vanguard Newspapers (34.4%) was found to have reported the highest volume of ARCPs stories amongst the dailies. No stories were found on either the back pages or editorial pages of the newspapers studied, which represent a lack of ideological inclinations of the newspapers on burning national issues. The majority (98.6%) of the news reports were found on the inside pages. The typology of ARCPs most reported were items grouped as “others” (33.8%) but silent on bigger issues of corruption like misappropriation, bribery, embezzlement and extortion. The major source of news reports was found to be government functionaries (36.6%), superseding anti-corruption agencies like the like Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (2.8%). There was no significant difference ($F= 1.294$, $P= 0.284$) in the occurrence of stories on ARCPs across the dailies. To effectively address corruption and agricultural underdevelopment, a robust reportage of bigger ARCPs around bribery and corruption will no doubt translate to awareness, responsiveness and accountability in the administration of agricultural programmes and policies.

Keywords: Corruption news, Content analysis, Nigeria's Agriculture, ARCP

INTRODUCTION

The manifest consequences of corrupt practices cannot be over-emphasized across sectors, public and private, in Nigeria. After the high cost of living and unemployment, Nigerians consider corruption to be the third most important problem facing their country, well ahead of the state of the country's infrastructure and health service (UNODC, 2017). Structurally, corruption violates the social contract between citizens and their elected representatives and elevates the interests of the few over many. Perceptions of rampant corruption also contribute to public disillusionment and undermine the legitimacy of governments. This is exemplified when public resources are diverted to finance personal endeavours such as re-election campaigns (USAID, 2005). Nepotism or cronyism which is a typology of corruption generates deep grievances that contribute to conflicts, agitations, or even state failure, particularly if these cleavages follow pre-existing fault lines in society such as economic, religious, or ethnic delineations.

Corruption is a complex social phenomenon with deep roots in bureaucratic and political institutions. While costs may vary among governments and institutions; systemic corruption may coexist with strong economic performance but experience suggests that corruption is bad for development (World Bank, 1997). It leads governments to intervene where they need not, and it undermines their ability to implement policies in

areas where government intervention is clearly needed. It also stifles entrepreneurship, professionalism and erodes the values of hard work, diligence and honesty.

An encompassing definition of corruption has remained contentious among scholars, and anti-graft agencies. Nonetheless, Transparency International (2016) defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It is the active or passive misuse of the powers of public officials for private financial or other benefits. The main element of the definition is that individuals, such as government officials, misuse the authority granted to them by their position for personal gain or that of their allies. It happens in many guises, ranging from the familiar experience of administrative bribery in daily encounters with public officials to clandestine grand schemes at misappropriating public funds.

Corruption in agricultural systems constitutes problems for large and small landholders or farmers around the globe and particularly, developing economies. Rural dwellers and farmers, who constitute the bulk of the nation's population, are often unduly subjected to demands for payments (extortion) along transportation routes of the value chain when transporting products to the markets. Nigerian agricultural sector is widely perceived and adjudged as corruption-prone which has sufficiently served as conduits for siphoning



public funds and encouraged different scales of corruption (Idachaba, 2014).

How society would deal with its social problems depends largely on how they are discussed, selected and presented – in other words, framed to the public. Social problems should be rightly given a face and a name, and without this, it might not be addressed with proper policy measures (Hilgartner, 1988). Therefore, the role of the media in addressing the scourge and pervasiveness of corruption cannot be over-emphasized. It plays significant roles in investigation, whistle-blowing, reportage and agenda-setting especially during prosecutorial phases in courts or investigative undertakings for public engagement.

It is noteworthy that research attention is growing on corruption, even if, slowly among social scientists across disciplines. However, studies in Nigeria with reference to corruption in the agricultural sector are scarce. Taking cognizance of status conferral of the media in addition to her agenda-setting prominence, this research investigated the coverage of Agricultural Related Corrupt Practices (ARCPs) in Nigerian national newspapers. This is to offer an explanation to agricultural-related corruption as a socio-economic problem as reported in the dailies. The specific objectives included:

- i. investigate the frequency of the coverage of ARCPs in the Nigerian newspapers;
- ii. determine the placement or prominence given to ARCPs in Nigerian newspapers;
- iii. investigate the typologies of ARCPs reported in the Nigerian newspapers and;
- iv. determine the sources of ARCPs news in the Nigerian newspapers.

Hypothesis of the study, stated in null form, is as follows;

There is no significant difference in the frequency of the coverage of ARCPs news in the Nigerian newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study comprises of all news articles or stories on ARCPs reported in the newspapers.

The period covered by the study was from January 2010 to December 2015. The period matched an administration characterized by allegations of corruption and sharp practices. It also coincided with the period of implementation of the highly-rated Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of Nigeria's government where huge resources were invested for agricultural revolution, transformation and development.

In a multi-stage sampling procedure, purposive sampling was employed to select four (4) national newspapers – Vanguard Newspaper, The Guardian Newspaper, The Punch Newspaper and The

Nigerian Tribune, in the first stage. Principally, these dailies have columns dedicated to agriculture, natural resources and rural development news. Stage two employed a systematic technique to select three years- 2010, 2012 and 2014 out of the six-year period under investigation. In each of the years, stage three systematically selected six months: January, March, May, July, September and November. In stage four, two weeks were systematically selected out of the four weeks in each month. And finally, stage five was for the selection of the newspaper editions. For a true representation, editions were purposively selected to correspond with days dedicated to the reportage of agricultural issues. In all, to a total of four hundred and thirty two (432) editions were generated for the study. Out of the 432 editions of newspapers that emerged from the sampling procedure, four hundred and seven (407) editions were found at the research library. Although 407 editions were studied, only seventy one (71) stories qualified as ARCPs. All the qualified stories were used for statistical analysis.

The unit of analysis was the individual news item or a story in the selected newspapers. A news item or story was any article which reported ARCPs in the selected dailies.

Data were collected from the sampled newspapers from the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan, Oyo State. To achieve this, a coding sheet detailing conceptualization and operationalization of variables was developed. It contained all the variables under investigation with their appropriate response categories.

Data were analysed using both descriptive-frequency, percentage; and inferential statistics-test of difference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Determination of occurrence and frequency of ARCPs in the dailies

Results in Table 1 show spatial (yearly) variations in the frequency of the coverage of ARCPs in the dailies. Specifically, the Nigerian Tribune (35.5%) recorded the highest coverage of ARCPs in 2010, The Guardian (36.8%) in 2012 and the Vanguard (42.9%) in 2014. This suggests a fluctuation in the coverage of ARCPs in the newspapers. Notwithstanding, on the aggregate, Vanguard (32.4%) reported the highest percentage of ARCPs stories, followed by The Punch (23.9%), while The Guardian (21.1%) was the least. In related research on constructing corruption as a social problem in Nigeria (Chikwendu, 2015), Vanguard recorded the highest coverage when compared to other dailies considered. This suggests that Vanguard pays higher attention in terms of proportion to corruption and other social problems when compared to other national dailies.

However, the total number of cases and stories found in the newspapers represents only but 17.4% of the total number of editions used for the study. This connotes inadequate coverage of ARCPs across the selected newspapers and concomitantly, low awareness on ARCPs. The extent to which corruption and fraud affect policy and programmes is difficult to fully estimate because it is not commonly detected or reported to official sources (Charles, 2010). Data are difficult to obtain and governments are usually unwilling to publicize

occurrences of corruption out of fear of bad publicity or public concern at their lack of oversight. In addition, the fact that certain actors, especially in government circles, can generate substantial amounts of illegal money from shoddy activities explains why they often resist reforms and calls for greater transparency. These actors, especially politicians also dislike and are often uncooperative with research into expenditure framework and actual spending of the government and relevant agencies or parastatals.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of the number of stories reported across selected Nigerian dailies

Dailies	2010		2012		2014		Total	
	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
Nigerian Tribune	35.5	11	15.8	3	9.5	2	22.5	16
The Punch	25.8	8	15.8	3	28.6	6	23.9	17
The Guardian	12.9	4	36.8	7	19	4	21.1	15
Vanguard	25.8	8	31.6	6	42.9	9	32.4*	23
Total	100	31	100	19	100	21	100	71

Source: Newspapers survey, 2017

*National daily with the highest volume of stories on ARCPs

Placement and prominence given to ARCPs in Nigerian dailies

Table 2 presents the prominence and placement given to ARCPs in Nigerian dailies. On the overall, the largest proportion (98.6%) of the news articles were found on the inside pages, 1.4% was found on the front pages, while no story was found on both back pages and editorial pages of the dailies studied. This suggests that ARCPs were not given the befitting prominence and status as an insignificant proportion (1.4%) of news articles were found on the front page. In print journalism,

stories considered important usually appear on the front page with very important ones appearing as lead stories. Front page is used to present readers with all the important, attractive, eye-catching and major headlines. News stories trusted with the potential to interest the general public or boost sales are allocated to front pages of national dailies (Ofuoku and Agumagu, 2008). Uninterestingly, no news story on ARCPs was found on the editorial page. Editorial pages represent the ideological positions or standpoints of the dailies (Chief-Editors) on current and burning national issues.

Table 2: Placement/prominence of ARCPs stories in the dailies

Prominence	Nigerian Tribune		The Punch		The Guardian		Vanguard		Total	
	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
Front page	6.2	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	1.4	1
Back page	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Editorial page	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Inside page	93.8	15	100	17	100	15	100	23	98.6	70
Total	100	16	100	17	100	15	100	23	100	71

Source: Newspapers survey, 2017

Typologies of ARCPs reported in Nigerian dailies

In a standardised typologies (Table 3) for the study, others (a category of ARCPs, taking up rent-seeking behaviours, pork-barreling and product adulteration and influence peddling) recorded the highest coverage in three newspapers in the following order: The Punch (52.94%); Nigerian Tribune (37.5%); The Guardian (33.33%), while the most reported form of corruption in the Vanguard was fraud (34.78%). On the aggregate,

others (33.8%) remain the most reported. This is in tandem with the postulation of Idachaba (2014) that when government policies are corruption-prone, rent-seeking behaviours and round-tripping will be 'profitable' and inevitable. This presents a sharp contrast to the findings of UNODC (2017) that bribery is the most familiar and widespread form of corruption directly experienced by Nigerians. Although nepotism was second to the least form of ARCPs reported in the dailies; the consequences speak volumes. Technically, nepotism brings



incompetent people into power, weakens performance on delivery of services and ultimately

stifles development (OECD, 2014).

Table 3: Percentage and frequency distribution of the forms of ARCPs in the Nigerian dailies

Forms of corruption	Nigerian Tribune		The Punch		The Guardian		Vanguard		Total	
	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
Contract inflation	0.0	0	0	0	6.67	1	4.35	1	2.82	2
Embezzlement	12.5	2	17.65	3	6.67	1	13.04	3	12.68	9
Extortion	6.25	1	5.88	1	6.67	1	8.70	2	7.04	5
Bribery	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Favouritism/Nepotism	6.25	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	4.35	1	2.82	2
Fraud	12.5	2	0.0	0	33.33	5	34.78	8	21.13	15
Looting	12.5	2	5.88	1	0	0	8.70	2	7.04	5
Misappropriation	12.5	2	17.65	3	13.33	2	8.70	2	12.68	9
Others	37.5	6	52.94	9	33.33	5	17.39	4	33.8*	24
Total	100	16	100	17	100	15	100	23	100	71

Source: Newspapers survey (2017)

* Typology of ARCPs most reported

Sources of ARCPs stories reported in the Nigerian newspapers

From Table 4, it became obvious that majority: 56.2%, 52.9% and 26.7% of news sources quoted in the Nigerian Tribune, The Punch and The Guardian, respectively, came from government officials whereas in the Vanguard, EFCC (21.%) discriminated as the major news source quoted. In the final analysis, political parties (0%), Nigerian Police Force (NPF) (1.4%), ICPC (2.8%), anonymous sources (2.8%) and EFCC (7%) were the least quoted sources of news stories in the selected dailies. This finding does not depict a direct association with the mandate of the Nigerian law enforcement and anti-corruption agencies - NPF, ICPC and EFCC, as regards investigation, arrest and prosecution of offenders as these agencies are primarily charged with corruption detection and prosecution. Interestingly, civil society organisations (21.1%) have fared relatively well in their activities by creating awareness or enlightenment to discourage corruption. It challenges the investigative, watchdog and

gatekeeper functions of the media and even the NPF. The results are apt or fitting because corruption is controlled only when citizens no longer tolerate it (World Bank, 1997).

Furthermore, from the standpoint of theories of the press, the emergence of government officials as the major source of news stories on ARCPs is worrisome. It is retrogressive and surprising evidence that authoritarian theory of the press is thriving in Nigeria. The essential characteristic of an authoritarian society is that the state controls the media and ranks higher than individuals in the control or ownership of the media and in the scale of social values (Siebert *et al.*, 1956 in Flor, 2007). Being that this work was conducted in the 21st century- 2017, the picture expected in terms of media control and ownership is a libertarian scenario. In libertarian societies, the press is not appropriated as an instrument of the government but as a watchdog, a mechanism, through which a people check or balance the activities of government (Siebert *et al.*, 1956 in Flor, 2007).

Table 4: Distribution of sources of news articles in Nigerian dailies

News sources	Nigerian Tribune		The Punch		The Guardian		Vanguard		Total	
	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
EFCC	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	21.7	5	7	5
ICPC	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	8.7	2	2.8	2
NPF	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	4.3	1	1.4	1
Political parties	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Government	56.2	9	52.9	9	26.7	4	17.4	4	36.6*	26
CSOs	37.5	6	17.6	3	20.0	3	13	3	21.1	15
Reporters & whistle blowers	6.2	1	11.8	2	26.7	4	34.8	8	21.1	15
Anonymous	0.0	0	5.9	1	6.7	1	0.0	0	2.8	2
Others	0.0	0	11.8	2	20	3	0.0	0	7.0	5
Total	100	16	100	17	100	15	100	23	100	71

Source: Newspapers survey (2017)

* Most quoted source of ARCPs

Test of hypothesis

The result of the hypothesis as presented in Table 5, reveals that there was no significant difference ($F= 1.294, P= 0.284$) in the occurrence (frequency) of ARCPs stories in the dailies. This implies that the occurrence of ARCPs cases was not determined by the name of the daily. This finding is interesting arguing from the standpoint of

media ownership, loyalties, affiliations, ideological backgrounds and audience or market share. The ownership, patronage, loyalties, affiliations, ideological backgrounds, etc. against popular impressions in the public opinion, did not reflect on the occurrence and frequency of ARCPs across the dailies.

Table 4.11: Results of ANOVA analysis of frequency/occurrence of ACRPs in the dailies

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	20.821	3	6.940	1.294	0.284	Not significant
Within Groups	359.376	67	5.364			
Total	380.197	70				

Source: Newspapers survey (2017)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

News stories were not strategically placed in the dailies as none of the stories was reported on the editorial and front pages of the newspapers. Editorial and front pages of newspapers are usually reserved for attractive, eye-catching and outstanding stories. Majority of the news reports were found on the inside pages. Consequently, in all the newspapers, no story was reported on bribery as a form of ARCPs. The salient typology of ARCPs promoted in the dailies was items grouped as others. Against the conjecture that ARCPs stories would come from law enforcement and anti-corruption agencies- EFCC, ICPC, NPF or even civil society organisations, the major source of news reports was found to be government functionaries. Frostily, statements or pronouncements from government officials are usually taken with a pinch of salt because of the officials' predilection or propensity for propaganda and blatant falsehood in their public relations.

Based on the findings of the study, it was deduced that there were obvious variations in the frequency of stories on ARCPs; both across the years and newspapers. ARCPs news reports did not receive strategic placement in all the dailies. Perhaps, it was politics, economics, sports and entertainment that received advantageous placements in comparison to ARCPs. The emergence of government functionaries as the major source of news reports is worrisome in relation to media independence. Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are prescribed:

- i. Given the insubstantial occurrence of ARCPs news stories in the dailies, comprehensive attention should be given to ARCPs stories. This is because if the agricultural sector remains compromised, our industries cannot grow.

- ii. Attention should be given to the placement of stories on ARCPs on the editorial pages and front pages by law enforcement and prosecution agencies. Evidence has it that development communication is the current paradigm in media practice and in a strict sense; the essence of the media. Reportage on corruption should never be sidestepped if the menace of corruption must be checked.
- iii. Civil societies and the media should rise to the occasion; reclaim the center stage in the reportage of ARCPs. This can be achieved by mainstreaming and undertaking investigative journalism and multidisciplinary research on corruption in the agricultural sector.
- iv. Government functionaries as the major source of news reports should be challenged or addressed with robust engagement as the focus or interest is to see corruption suffocated in all the agricultural value chain. This is one way the media can be instrumental; working for food security and national development.

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