



**EDITORIALS IN THE NIGERIAN  
MEDIA TRIGGERED BY THE  
OPERATIONS AND ACTIVITIES  
OF THE INDEPENDENT  
CORRUPT PRACTICES AND  
OTHER RELATED  
OFFENCES COMMISSION**

**JANUARY - OCTOBER, 2022**

## EDITORIALS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS TRIGGERED BY THE ACTIVITIES OF ICPC

S/N	MEDIUM	DATE	HEADLINE	SUMMARY	LINK TO REPORT
1	<b>BLUEPRINT Newspaper</b>	May 20, 2022	<b>On fighting menaces of money laundering</b>	President Muhammadu Buhari, this week, in Abuja, signed into law, three bills aimed at improving the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing/proliferation financing framework in Nigeria (Proceeds of Crime Act)	
2	<b>PUNCH Newspaper</b>	Monday, July 11, 2022	<b>Need for Probe, Accountability in Defence Spending</b>	Recurring allegations that a percentage of the military budgets ends up in the private pockets of some of the top brass, bureaucrats, contractors, and politicians have been given some credence. The recent arrest of a military contractor and recovery of huge sums from his Abuja residence by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission is the latest pointer to the pervasive corruption. In the operation, the ICPC said it recovered N175.7 million; \$220,965; luxury cars, including Mercedes G-Wagon, and 2022 edition of BMW units; customised mobile phones; several designer wristwatches, including three Rolexes, and some property documents.	<a href="https://punchng.com/need-for-probe-accountability-in-defence-spending/">https://punchng.com/need-for-probe-accountability-in-defence-spending/</a>
3	<b>PREMIUM TIMES</b>	Monday, 19 <sup>th</sup> September, 2022	<b>Taming the Scourge of Security Funds Theft</b>	A national policy dialogue on corruption and insecurity in Nigeria recently organised by the ICPC, exhumed what	<a href="https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/editorial/554793-editorial-taming-">https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/editorial/554793-editorial-taming-</a>

				does not regrettably command national attention. Funds for national security are brazenly stolen in the country by security top brass, contractors and bureaucrats. This is against the backdrop of the clamour for adequate funding of security agencies amidst rising security challenges that have resulted in wanton killings, kidnappings and maiming of thousands of citizens by non-state actors.	<a href="https://thenationonline.net/the-scurge-of-security-funds-theft.html">the-scurge-of-security-funds-theft.html</a>
4	<b>THE NATION NEWSPAPER</b>	Tuesday, 20 <sup>th</sup> September, 2022	<b>ICPC, name, shame, prosecute!</b>	Desperate ailments, as they say, warrant desperate remedies. That must be why in some countries, notably in the non-liberal Asian world, grand corruption carries the death penalty. Of course, some of those verdicts are in themselves corrupt designs of political repression, but the message that the culture of graft is intolerable does not get 'lost in translation.' In Nigeria, corruption is a deep-rooted malaise that has over the years defied remedial efforts, yet we seem to treat it still with kid gloves.	<a href="https://thenationonline.net/icpc-name-shame-prosecute/">https://thenationonline.net/icpc-name-shame-prosecute/</a>
5	<b>LEADERSHIP Newspaper</b>	Tuesday, 20 <sup>th</sup> September, 2022	<b>ICPC On Sexual Harassment</b>	ICPC recently disclosed plans to set up a special team/unit tasked with the responsibility of handling sexual abuse cases. This was revealed by the ICPC chairman, Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye at the national stakeholders' engagement and presentation of draft model policies on sexual harassment in educational institutions in Abuja.	<a href="https://leadership.ng/icpc-on-sexual-harrassment/">https://leadership.ng/icpc-on-sexual-harrassment/</a>
6	<b>THE NATION NEWSPAPER</b>	Wednesday, 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>A Wasteful Country</b>	If the report by Sunday Punch of September 10, 2022, is anything to go by,	<a href="https://thenationonline.net/a-wasteful-country/">https://thenationonline.net/a-wasteful-country/</a>

		September, 2022		we can clearly see an aspect of the country's life that is difficult to explain. According to the report, there are over 2,000 assets seized from politically exposed persons, civil servants and others, that are rotting away. And this at a time the government is facing an acute cash crunch and has resorted to massive borrowing to execute some capital projects!	
7	<b>PEOPLES DAILY Newspaper</b>	Thursday, 22 <sup>nd</sup> September, 2022	<b>Corruption Windows in MDAs</b>	An eerie indication of this happening emerged from a testimony the ICPC gave during last Thursday's public hearing held by the Senate Committee on Finance on the 2023 Federal Budget. ICPC Chairman, Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye testified that the 2021 and 2022 budgets were padded with duplicated projects worth N400bn by federal ministries, departments and agencies.	
8	<b>LEADERSHIP Newspaper</b>	Friday, 23 <sup>rd</sup> September, 2022	<b>Reforming The Civil Service</b>	Just when many Nigerians thought budget padding had become a thing of the past, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) recently disclosed that the 2021 budget totaling N13.59 trillion was padded by civil servants in the various Federal Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), with duplicated projects worth N300 billion.	<a href="https://leadership.ng/editorial-reforming-the-civil-service/">https://leadership.ng/editorial-reforming-the-civil-service/</a>
9	<b>THISDAY Newspaper</b>	Tuesday, 27 <sup>th</sup> September, 2022	<b>MDAs and Padded Budgets</b>	Financial 'padding' is increasingly becoming part of the nation's budgeting system. At a recent interactive session with the Senate Committee on Finance	<a href="https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/09/27/mdas-and-padded-budgets/">https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/09/27/mdas-and-padded-budgets/</a>

				on the 2022-2025 Medium Term Expenditure Framework, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) accused ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of government of fiddling with the 2021 and 2022 budgets to the tune of N400 billion by duplicating projects.	
10	<b>NIGERIAN TRIBUNE</b>	Thursday, 29 <sup>th</sup> September, 2022	<b>ICPC's Budget Padding Allegation</b>	By now, Nigerians must be tired of hearing and reading stories of graft and sleaze perpetrated by officials of the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the government. There just seems to be no end to these stories, with the culprits walking as free (wo)men while committing monumental crimes. In yet another corruption story, ahead of President Muhammadu Buhari's presentation of the 2023 Appropriation Bill to the National Assembly, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) told the Senate penultimate week that the N13.59 trillion 2021 budget was padded by the various MDAs with duplicated projects worth N300 billion, while duplicated projects worth N100 billion were also inserted into the N17.12 trillion 2022 budget by some MDAs.	<a href="https://tribuneonline.ng.com/icpcs-budget-padding-allegation/">https://tribuneonline.ng.com/icpcs-budget-padding-allegation/</a>
11	<b>PEOPLES DAILY</b>	Thursday, 6 <sup>th</sup> October, 2022	<b>ICPC Should Expose Budget Padding Culprits</b>	In March 2015, while campaigning for election as president, Muhammadu Buhari made a commitment to end corruption in public high places. He said, "If we don't kill corruption, it will kill	

				Nigeria.” As it turned out, he did not only win the election that year, he was re-elected in 2019. Now, three years into the President’s second and last term, corruption is giving as much as it is taking. If truth be told, it may outstay Buhari’s presidency.	
12	<b>NATION NEWSPAPER</b>	Friday, 7 <sup>th</sup> October, 2022	<b>An Officer and Gentleman</b>	It is a general belief at home and abroad that locating an honest Nigerian is like looking for a needle in a haystack. This is even more difficult, by general perception, in the Nigeria Police Force. But an exception was found in Daniel Armah, a Chief Superintendent of Police, who heads the Divisional Police Division in Bompai, Nasarawa Local Government Area of Kano State. Armah shunned an opportunity to benefit from the rotten system as he rejected a \$200,000 bribe.	<a href="https://thenationonline.ng.net/an-officer-and-gentleman/">https://thenationonline.ng.net/an-officer-and-gentleman/</a>
13	<b>THE SUN NEWSPAPER</b>	Saturday, 8 <sup>th</sup> October 22, 2022	<b>Unending Fraud in MDAs</b>	The padding of budgets by civil servants across the Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) has shown that the war against graft is not as effective as it should be. The unending fraud in the MDAs obtains because those involved have not been caught and adequately punished. The fact that some people get away with corruption has emboldened others to follow the evil way.	<a href="https://www.sunnewsonline.com/unending-fraud-in-mdas/">https://www.sunnewsonline.com/unending-fraud-in-mdas/</a>

14	<b>GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER</b>	Wednesday, 12 <sup>th</sup> October, 2022	<b>Management of Recovered Assets</b>	Revelation that over 2,000 assets confiscated from politically exposed persons, civil servants and other individuals are rotting away is not just alarming, it underscores the lack of political will and fluttering anti-corruption campaign of the Federal Government. Given also the huge loss the country is garnering as a result of the mismanagement of the assets, President Muhammadu Buhari has an onerous duty to address the gaping deficits, as the only course to redeem the waning reputation of his administration in this regard.	<a href="https://guardian.ng/opinion/management-of-recovered-assets/">https://guardian.ng/opinion/management-of-recovered-assets/</a>
15	<b>NATION NEWSPAPER</b>	Thursday, 13 <sup>th</sup> October, 2022	<b>Unhelpful Buckpassing</b>	President Muhammadu Buhari is known to be taciturn. Rarely does he communicate his views on burning national issues to the public. However, the National Summit organised by the Independent Corrupt Practices And Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) on graft in the public sector provided the public a chance to peep into the inner recesses of his mind on the long-drawn strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).	<a href="https://thenationonline.ng/unhelpful-buckpassing/">https://thenationonline.ng/unhelpful-buckpassing/</a>

## On fighting menaces of money laundering...

May 20, 2022 Blueprint

**P**resident Muhammadu Buhari, this week, in Abuja, signed into law, three bills aimed at improving the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing/proliferation financing framework in Nigeria.

Money laundering refers to the process of taking illegally obtained money and making it appear to have come from a legitimate source. It involves putting the money through a series of commercial transactions in order to “clean” the money.

For example, money may be placed in a business and disguised as sales revenue in order to camouflage its origin. Money laundering is illegal in itself.

The bills signed by the President to check money laundering are the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Bill, 2022; the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Bill, 2022; and the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Bill, 2022.

Speaking at a signing ceremony at the Council Chamber, State House, the President said the bills are in tandem with his administration's commitment to fight corruption and illicit financing activities.

And, crucially, he added that the bills are critical to the governance agenda and the development of Nigeria. “The new laws have provided enough punitive

measures and containment strategies against abuses and compromises,” he said, noting that the inadequacy of the repealed acts had impacted legal actions against offender.

Crucially, too, the President said: “We will not rest until we rid the nation of the menace of money laundering, terrorism and other financial crimes.”

Why should government rest in its anti-money laundering campaign that is so important to the continued peace and survival of the country?

The effects of economic crime can be more damaging than what analysts often describe, especially in a developing country like Nigeria. For a long time, money laundering has become another terror threatening the growth of the economy such that it drags the wheel of governance and economic development.

It is estimated that amount of money laundered globally in one year is 2% to 5% of global GDP, or US\$800 billion to US\$2 trillion – and that's a low estimate. Money laundering often accompanies activities like smuggling, illegal arms sales, embezzlement, insider trading, bribery and computer fraud schemes. It's also common with organised crime including human, arms or drug trafficking and prostitution rings. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crimes estimates that annual illicit proceeds total more than \$2



trillion globally and proceeds of crime generated in the United States were estimated to total approximately \$300 billion in 2010, or about two percent of the overall U.S. economy at the time.

However, for an illegal enterprise to succeed, criminals must be able to hide, move and access the proceeds of their crimes. Without usable profits, the criminal activity cannot continue. This is why criminals resort to money laundering.

Money laundering involves masking the source of criminally derived proceeds so that the proceeds appear legitimate, or masking the source of monies used to promote illegal conduct.

Money laundering generally involves three steps: placing illicit proceeds into the financial system; layering, or the separation of the criminal proceeds from their origin; and integration, or the use of apparently legitimate transactions to disguise the illicit proceeds. Once criminal funds have entered the financial system, the layering and integration

phases make it very difficult to track and trace the money. Money laundering affects indigenous entrepreneurs which the Buhari-led administration has tried to assist. The illicit funds gotten from money laundering activities are used in bringing goods to the market and such goods are being sold at prices below the cost prices.

This will, undoubtedly, affect the business of other entrepreneurs in the same business. Money laundering promotes none or low profit making enterprises which tend to discourage indigenous entrepreneurs who got their funds from legitimate sources.

This development, eventually, frustrates these indigenous entrepreneurs out of the system leaving the economy of the countries into the hands of launderers. The resultant effect of this is that the economy of the country depends on the unsteady operators of its economy, the launderers, who have no intention of making profit, thereby jeopardising the economic stability of the country.



Another effect of money laundering on the Nigeria economy is that it attacks the reliability of the people on financial institutions. It was observed that between the 80s and 90s the reputation of the financial institutions in Nigeria was very low because the financial institutions relied extensively on the illicit proceeds of economic and financial crimes.

These financial institutions only enjoyed these funds for a very short period, before they became disintegrated and some liquidated because they could not stand the test of time. Banks like the National Bank, Allied Bank, Bank for Credit and Commerce International were some of the banks that were affected during these periods.

Foreign investors find it extremely difficult to invest in any venture in the country during these periods due to obvious reasons which are the effect of financial and economic crimes on the economy of the country. These also hindered the growth of the economy of the country.

Money laundering could lead to increase in liability and heighten the risks for assets quality in the financial system. When this happens, it may create systemic risks for the financial services industry and consequently lead to loss of confidence and credibility in the financial institution.

On the international level, the socio-economic effect of money laundering on Nigeria is that the reputation of the country had been negatively affected with such development imposing

some constraints on Nigeria in international economic relations.

In fact, until recently, Nigerians were treated with disrespect in almost every entry points of western countries on account of the country's association with money laundering and other crimes.

The negative impact of money laundering and other financial and economic crimes on the country can be attributed to the reduction of international opportunities extended to the country which had prevented foreign investors to invest into the financial and economic growth of the country.

For example, a report written by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) says that a great decline in capital importation for investment purposes into Nigeria has occurred. According to NBS, the total value of capital imported into Nigeria in the first quarter of 2016 was \$710.97 million, the lowest level since the series began in 2007. This represents a decline of 54.34% since the final quarter of 2015, and a year on year decline of 73.79%.

However, Nigeria must not be allowed to continue to suffer due to actions of some few dubious people. In fact, it is based on the need to check the illegal activities of these few that the recent signing of the three bills aimed at improving the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing/proliferation financing framework in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Still, it is desirable that Buhari

reappraises the roles of established institutions fighting corruption and economic crimes such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), with a view to strengthening them and boosting their capacities.

Of course, the National Assembly members should be commended for their tenacity, courage and commitment in ensuring that Nigeria has put in place effective measures to address the menace of money laundering, terrorism and terrorism financing.

ASUU, end the strike for Nigeria's sake

This week, President Muhammadu Buhari appealed to the members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to consider the plight of students and call off the ongoing strike.

The President also urged students in the country's public tertiary institutions to exercise patience as the government strives to address the nagging issues in the university system within the ambit of the resources available.

He made the appeal at the event marking the 19th National Productivity Day and the conferment of the National Productivity Order of Merit Award (NPOM) on 48 eminent Nigerians and organisations in both the public and private sectors, for their high productivity, hard-work and excellence.

Although the need for the lecturers to end their industrial action cannot be overemphasised, it, logically,

seems that they, alone, without the government playing its own part, cannot bring the strike to a successful end.

To end the strike, the two parties need to agree to do so and agree as soon as possible. Specifically, the two parties should honour agreements willingly and sanely entered into for academic activities to commence in the affected universities.

No doubt, it is with a view to finding a way to achieve that objective that the President directed his Chief of Staff, Minister of Labour and Employment, Minister of Education, Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning to meet relevant parties at the negotiation table to critically look at the grey areas in the demands of the striking ASUU and other university-based labour unions.

Therefore, it is hoped that the government's delegation and the unions should, actively and meaningfully, participate at the ongoing negotiations process and, at the same time, realise that the nation and its youths, who are leaders of tomorrow, look up to them to amicably resolve their disagreements and pave way for reopening of the universities.

Above that, the disputing parties must not feel shy or refrain from, where necessary, shifting position, lowering demands and expectations and make compromises all with the intention to peacefully and successfully bring to an end the needless closure of our universities.

## Need for probe, accountability in defence spending

11th July 2022

By Punch Editorial Board

**F**RESH setbacks in the long-running war against insurgency raise posers on how the huge defence allocations of the past few years are spent. A report said allocations to the defence sector averaged \$1.9 billion annually in the past 10 years, a tidy sum that should have translated to a more effective military campaign. Alas, while it is acknowledged that the military is stretched and fighting on multiple fronts, it is tragic that the Armed Forces are performing below par in the counter-insurgency campaign. It is time to probe defence spending and entrench accountability.

Recurring allegations that a percentage of the military budgets ends up in the private pockets of some of the top brass, bureaucrats, contractors, and politicians have been given some credence. Several former

and serving military and security personnel have been investigated for embezzling funds and some arraigned by law enforcement agencies. Many others suspected of fraud are walking free.

The recent arrest of a military contractor and recovery of huge sums from his Abuja residence by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission is the latest pointer to the pervasive corruption. In the operation, the ICPC said it recovered N175.7 million; \$220,965; luxury cars, including Mercedes G-Wagon, and 2022 edition of BMW units; customised mobile phones; several designer wristwatches, including three Rolexes, and some property documents.

Though a former Chief of Army Staff linked to the

seizures has since denied it, the incident once again re-echoes the need for a thorough and comprehensive probe into the defence allocations and spending in the country.

Nigerians are doubly afflicted; hundreds are being killed, kidnapped, raped, and maimed by terrorists and sundry criminals, and homes, worship centres, the highways and waterways are unsafe. Some communities have been overrun by Islamic terrorists, bandits/terrorists, random killers, Fulani herdsmen/militants and kidnappers. Sadly, the billions of naira and dollars are often not properly accounted for, with some stolen outright.

Despite the huge allocations and drawdowns, the anti-

insurgency war has continued to falter. Apart from allegations of financial malfeasance, there are frequent reports of ill-motivated, ill-equipped troops, opaque procurement processes and zero accountability.

The humanitarian and economic costs of this fiasco have been monumental. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2020, Nigeria incurred the largest economic impact from insurgency from 2007 to 2019 at \$142 billion.

Yet, Nigeria's military budgetary allocation dwarfs the defence budgets of all other West African states put together. Niger Republic's is less than \$190 million; Chad, \$24 million; Benin Republic, \$116 million and Cameroon at \$244 million.

The Centre for Democracy and Development estimates that a whopping \$15 billion has been squandered through fraudulent arms procurement deals in the last 20 years. It alleged that "the political and security elite monetised the conflicts and the resultant humanitarian crises." Meanwhile, the GTI ranked Nigeria as the world's third most terrorism-prone country with no improvement since 2017.

Lack of accountability has evolved into a bureaucratic web where money voted to fight terrorists and bandits is allegedly being filched by insiders and contractors.



Multiple investigations should be launched to instil accountability, expose the thieves, and facilitate the recovery of stolen assets.

Weapons procurement is opaque and this provides a cover for inflation of contract costs, and purchase of obsolete items. A paper published on the ReserachGate platform claimed that the annual budgetary allocations to the Army, Navy and Air Force were inflated using different expenditure headings 2014 through 2018. Troops are reportedly denied modern weapons and basic welfare. These allegations deserve thorough investigation.

The Speaker, House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila, complained last year that the expenditure on military hardware and training in the previous five years hovered between just nine and 11 per cent of the total budgetary allocation to

the Armed Forces. About 91 per cent is spent on overheads, salaries, and welfare.

An alert by the National Security Adviser, Babagana Monguno, in March 2021 on the disappearance of the arms procurement funds resonates. He told the BBC Hausa Service, "The funds are nowhere to be found and the weapons have not been seen, and the newly appointed service chiefs have declared that they have not seen the weapons." His hint that a probe was underway has not manifested 17 months after, and the culprits uncovered. A former General Officer Commanding, 8 Division, a major-general, was exposed for authorising the transportation of N400 million cash by road from Sokoto to Abuja.

The government should initiate investigations by the anti-graft agencies, and simultaneously, forensic, and materials audits. All monies

released should be accounted for. In 2018, the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), approved the release of \$1billion from the Excess Crude Account for the military. Between 2020 and 2021, Nigeria reportedly raised its military spending by 56 percent to reach \$4.5 billion. The service-wide vote is regularly raided to fund the military. Disappointingly, Nigerians have not seen the fruits of these drawdowns.

The National Assembly has failed in its responsibility to demand accountability. Each chamber should conduct probes into specific funding heads. The NASS should stop hastily approving requests for funds without undertaking due diligence and insisting on accounting for previous appropriation.

In other climes, accountability, monitoring and evaluation and transparency in

procurement rank high in administering the defence sector. In 2017, a three-star general, Ronald Lewis, was demoted by two rungs by the United States authorities for using a government credit card to pay for bills at strip clubs in Italy and South Korea. In 2015, China sentenced a three-star general, Gu Junshan, to death for embezzling military funds.

Transparency and accountability should be instilled in military budgeting and procurement processes in Nigeria too. Effective oversight by the Ministry of Finance and the Budget Office, as well as the NASS must be institutionalised.

The military should ensure that funds are used effectively, while showing corrupt and incompetent officers the door, prosecuting them and recovering all stolen monies.

## EDITORIAL:

### Taming the scourge of security funds theft

By Premium Times September 19, 2022

PREMIUM TIMES believes that treating security funds as booty, as it appears to be customary today, will persist until opacity in spending is removed.

A national policy dialogue on corruption and insecurity in Nigeria recently organised by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), exhumed what does not regrettably command national attention. Funds for national security are brazenly stolen in the country by security top brass, contractors and bureaucrats. This is against the backdrop of the clamour for adequate funding of security agencies amidst rising security challenges that have resulted in wanton killings, kidnappings and maiming of thousands of citizens by non-state actors.

The convener of the dialogue and Chairman, ICPC, Professor Bolaji Owasanoye, bemoaned the fact that the Police Trust Fund, set up just three years ago, specifically in 2019, by an Act of Parliament, is aggressively being raided by denizens of public corruption in high places, thereby undermining government's effort to retool or reposition the Force. In the 2021 budget, N74 billion was provided for the PTF and meant for training and retraining of police personnel. But this objective is about to be derailed if the abusers are not effectively checkmated. It is for this reason that

PREMIUM TIMES views the "investigation for abuse, fund diversion, questionable welfare packaging that is not for the police who are the beneficiaries of the fund and sundry corrupt practices" by the ICPC as most salutary.

The Nigeria Police Force is totally dysfunctional, compelling the Federal Government to shift its statutory responsibilities to the military. Professionally, this is damaging as the military have been overstretched in the 36 states of the federation. It is most disturbing that some elite cohorts want this status quo to continue. Therefore, the ICPC inquest should be thorough, open and conclusive; and those with questions to answer must be made to speak up in accordance with the law.

The malfeasance is not only in the police, it cuts across other security services. A former service chief embezzled N4 billion from the military budget, which he deposited into the accounts of two companies he is a beneficial owner of and sole signatory to, with which he bought properties in the name of cronies and proxies. Already, ICPC has recovered N220 million from the N1 billion civil servants in a line ministry transferred to four shell companies; funds meant for special operations. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) had recovered N2.4 billion and \$156 million from an ex-service chief, as testified by a prosecution witness, Tosin Owobo, in a Federal High Court trial in March 2018. The wife of the

said officer coughed up N382 million.

It will also be recalled that a former Chief of Defence Staff, Alex Badeh, was tried for alleged theft of N3.97 billion as the Chief of Air Staff but the trial was struck out following his sudden death in 2019. Before then, a prosecution witness had told the court, how he stole N558 million monthly from the payroll, converted it to dollars and pocketed this.

We have also learnt how \$2.1 billion set aside for arms procurement was allegedly shared to apparatchiks of a political party through 78 companies, during the Goodluck Jonathan administration. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) estimates that about \$15



billion has been squandered in the last 20 years through compromised arms procurement deals.

Incidences like these explain why non-state actors like Boko Haram, Islamic State of West African Province, bandits and kidnappers wield weapons superior to those our security operatives' possess. Thus, Nigeria has emerged as the second most terrorised country after Iraq, according to the 2022 half-year report of the Global and International Terrorism Research/Analysis group. On several occasions, bandits, insurgents or separatist agitators have sacked police stations, military locations and communities with their superior firepower without any resistance.

There are reports of security personnel on the frontlines in the North-east confirming the sophisticated nature of arms and ammunition the insurgents carry. In some instances, the state operatives wilted or took to their heels during combat with them. This was evident in the ISWAP invasion of Kuje Medium security prison in July, during which 888 inmates were freed, among them 64 Boko Haram members. Public fury arising from this was why the House of Representatives Committees on Internal Affairs and Security, probing the incident recently, sought

to know from the Minister of Internal Affairs, Rauf Aregbesola, the calibre of arms at the disposal of the 65 security personnel at the facility during the attack. He could not specify, preferring to speak only on camera.

It is a no-brainer that ill-equipped cops and military personnel shy away from battle, just as they are in bad mood when their welfare provisions and allowances are trifled with. Periodically, the armed services experience this unacceptable behaviour, not necessarily because funds are not available, but because corrupt senior officers often divert security funds into their private pockets. About 480 police constables in Osogbo, Osun State, recently protested with placards over the non-payment of their salaries for 18 months. These are young cops who completed their training in May 2021. We recall also that in July 2018, the non-payment of allowances of mobile police personnel for six months in Maiduguri sparked street protests and gunshots, in an area under siege by Boko Haram.

The Federal Government has spent over N6 trillion on security in the last 11 years, much of it by the Muhammadu Buhari regime. Yet, the impact is not being felt sufficiently. We note however that in the North-

east lately, Boko Haram and ISWAP forces are facing crippling aerial bombardments from Tucano jets. The government should be conscious of the correlation between the massive theft of security funds and insurgency, carnage and kidnappings ravaging the country. Kaduna State government has reported that information at its disposal revealed that 645 persons were killed in the first half of this year. In 2021, over 1,192 Nigerians died from banditry and terrorism across the country, one estimate stated. Government has to make the increase in defence budgets to N874 billion in 2020 and N840 billion in 2021 count.

Buhari's National Security Adviser, Babagana Monguno should be up and doing. His March 2021 BBC Hausa Service leak that funds meant for arms procurement "are nowhere to be found... and the newly appointed Service Chiefs have declared that they have not seen the weapons" exposed gaping holes in the procurement process. Is there nobody in charge? There should be clear fiscal and administrative templates for the spending of security funds if accountability is to reign. The EFCC and ICPC should redouble their efforts in making security personnel or bureaucrats who turn security funds they

administer into their private pockets pay dearly for the abuse of public trust. A breach of trust in these circumstances gives armour to insurgents and gunmen, which undermines the very essence of any government – the protection of lives and property.

PREMIUM TIMES believes that treating security funds as booty, as it appears to be customary today, will persist until opacity in spending is removed and oversight of the funds enthroned in the system. The plea-bargaining policy through which parts of looted funds are recovered and the looters are left with the rest should be jettisoned. It does not serve as a good enough deterrent! These morally bankrupt public officials whose actions lead to Nigeria having ill-equipped and badly motivated fighting forces and who by extension bear responsibility for the mass killings of Nigerians, deserve to be properly investigated and sanctioned. The anti-graft agencies, therefore, must be empowered to perform their duties untrammelled. The Nuhu Ribadu-led EFCC was enamoured of this liberty to nab a sitting Inspector-General of Police, Tafa Balogun, and try and convict him in a N5.7 billion official corruption. This type of action, we believe, is the path to sanity.

# ICPC, name, shame, prosecute!

By Hardball on September 20, 2022

**D**esperate ailments, as they say, warrant desperate remedies. That must be why in some countries, notably in the non-liberal Asian world, grand corruption carries the death penalty. Of course, some of those verdicts are in themselves corrupt designs of political repression, but the message that the culture of graft is intolerable does not get 'lost in translation.' In Nigeria, corruption is a deep-rooted malaise that has over the years defied remedial efforts, yet we seem to treat it still with kid gloves. Sensitivity to human rights would not permit us to take after tyrannical models as cited afore, but we at least could abstain from gratuitously providing comfort zones to verified graft dealers.

suspects, even if its intention is to be procedural. There's a sense in which officialdom takes out the bite from what should be a sting agency and render it tame, which is wholly unhelpful in the

year 2022 was found padded to the tune of N100billion upon ICPC's scrutiny of projects already approved for the MDAs. According to the anti-graft czar, some N49.9billion was also

running into intercepted billions of naira and fictitious payrolls are available and will be forwarded to the (Senate) committee. The good thing about the preemptive moves made by us is that monies for the fraudulent acts were prevented from being released to the affected MDAs and it is gratifying that the Finance Ministry and the Accountant-General's Office cooperated with us." He advised relevant committees of the National Assembly to be on the watch for project duplications in the proposed N19.76trillion 2023 budget.



The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) is a frontline Nigerian anti-graft agency whose official findings could be taken as reflective of truth. Hence, it gives concern when the agency fudges about findings that warrant a crackdown on

Nigerian context. No less than ICPC Chairman Professor Bolaji Owasanoye disclosed last week that the 2021 Federal budget was found padded by Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) with duplicated projects worth N300billion. In like manner, the budget of the current

preempted from being lost on salaries of ghost workers put on fraudulent payrolls by MDAs between January and June, this year. Speaking during an interface with the Senate Committee on Finance in Abuja, Owasanoye said inter alia: "Names of MDAs involved in projects duplications

It is good that ICPC headed off the funds from being disbursed. But one wonders why the identities of affected MDAs are being confidentially handled – even so at the interface with lawmakers. With the credibility stock of ICPC, we expect it is certain of its findings; so affected agencies and officials found culpable should be exposed and timeously dragged before the law. That is how to fight corruption.



# our stand

## ICPC On Sexual Harrassment

**I**ndependent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Crimes Commission (ICPC) recently disclosed plans to set up a special team/unit tasked with the responsibility of handling sexual abuse cases.

This was revealed by the ICPC chairman, Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye at the national stakeholders' engagement and presentation of draft model policies on sexual harassment in educational institutions in Abuja.

At the event, the chairman said the programme is aimed at engaging stakeholders from civil society, government agencies, public and private educational institutions and other sectors to critically review draft policies on sexual harassment.

For emphasis, he said the past three years have been peculiar for the education sector and that COVID-19 pandemic, resultant lockdown and forced adjustments in the academic calendar have all exacerbated the situation in an unprecedented manner.

"It would be a travesty of justice if students in schools who have weathered all the above storms finally resume only to become victims of another challenge-sexual harassment."

"The purpose of this engagement is to brainstorm and review the draft documents which the commission and Gender Mobile have drafted in the hope that these documents would eventually be adopted as templates for educational institutions when drafting individual organizational sexual harassment policies."

It goes without saying that the initiative is commendable. This is more so that this task fall within the jurisdiction of the anti-graft agency.

A Federal High Court sitting in Calabar ruled that the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), has the right to investigate a former Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Calabar, Professor Cyril Ndifon, over an allegation of abuse of office.

Justice I. E. Ekwo who delivered judgment 2nd of

March, 2017 in a suit brought against ICPC by the Professor of Law, in which he sought to restrain the Commission from investigating the alleged offence of demanding for sexual gratification from a female student of the University, maintained that it was within the purview of ICPC to investigate the case in accordance with the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000.

The trial judge held that the police report which exonerated Ndifon had no bearing on the Commission's investigation of an allegation of abuse of office against him.

He added that the offence of sexual gratification was contrary to Sections 8, 9, and 19 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000, which refer to any public officer who receives benefit of any kind in the discharge of his duties or uses his position to confer corrupt advantage upon himself.

It would be recalled that a final year law student had petitioned ICPC alleging that the Professor had sex with her in his office without her consent, after inviting her to the office to rewrite an earlier cancelled test.

Evidently, the commission has the mandate to take on the task especially in a society where victims rarely report sexual harassment.

According to statista.com, In 2019, there were 59 reported cases of sexual violence in Nigeria. The majority of the victims were female, which accounted for 56 cases. Compared to 2017, the number of cases reported to the authorities increased.

Also, a poll conducted by NOIPOOLS in July 2019, revealed that most Nigerians (85 per cent) believe that there is a high prevalence of rape in Nigeria. This, in our opinion, is a worrying situation!

According to the report, "about three in 10 Nigerians

(26 per cent) disclosed that they know someone who has been raped in the past and the rape victims were particularly minors and young adults aged between 1 - 15 years (72 per cent) and 16 - 25 years (24 per cent) respectively. This statistic implies that one in every three girls would have experienced at least one form of sexual abuse by the time they reach 25 years".

As disclosed by NOIPOOLS, "there are perceptions that rape cases have been under-reported especially to the Police, findings showed that slightly more than half (53 per cent) of the respondents mentioned that rape incidents were reported to the Police. Out of this proportion, 67 per cent acknowledged that the offenders were arrested, while 33 per cent claimed that the offenders were not arrested. This implies that about 3 in 10 perpetrators of this atrocious crime often don't face the drum or the dictates of the law against the crime even when reported to the police"

As a newspaper, we support any initiative that aims at addressing this oppressive act. The abuse of students in academic institutions has remained a major cause for concern in the country. Sex for marks scandals have remained another sore point of the nation's academic institutions history, especially in the universities.

We hold that the commission, however, should operate in such a way that abused persons will be confident enough to come forward to report cases. So it will be equally important that it embarks on robust social awareness and also put structures in place to protect the abused.

Also, we suggest that the commission be mindful of operating in such a way that innocent persons will not be victimised. The tendency to embark on media trials should be tamed or else the whole essence of the initiative will be defeated.

A balance between exhaustive investigations and swift dispensing of justice will be key.

**LEADERSHIP**

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**We shall stand up for good governance. We shall defend the interest of Nigerian people even against their rulers, and we shall raise our pen at all times in defence of what is right. These are the values by which we intend to be assessed.**

**We shall never, ever for any reason forget the noble reason of our coming into being:**

**FOR GOD AND COUNTRY!**



## A wasteful country

How else do we describe a nation that allows forfeited assets worth trillions of Naira to rot away?

By Editorial On September 21, 2022

**N**igeria is a jigsaw puzzle. It is a country that has crude oil but cannot refine it. A country where vital electrical equipment needed to enhance power supply are abandoned to rot away for years at the ports.

A country where government would threaten to name and shame ghost workers' and terror sponsors but would not carry out the threat. A country where government goes a-borrowing even when it has assets lying fallow all over the place. We can go on and on listing the country's queer characteristics.

If the report by Sunday Punch of September 10, 2022, is anything to go by, we can clearly see an aspect of the country's life that is difficult to explain. According to the report, there are over 2,000 assets seized from politically exposed persons, civil servants and others, that are rotting away. And this at a time the government is facing an acute cash crunch and has resorted to massive borrowing to execute some capital projects!

The items are those recovered by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related

Offences Commission (ICPC), Nigeria Customs Service, the Nigeria Police Force and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), among others. They were seized from high-profile Nigerians, including a former Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh, former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke, etc., following their convictions by competent courts, for corrupt practices.

We are here talking of more than 90 sea vessels, exotic cars, residential and commercial buildings, several fuel-laden tankers, trucks, machinery, phones, laptops, jewellery, furniture, etc. Because of the little or no attention paid to these items, some of them were re-looted or sold at rockbottom prices to cronies

of some highly placed public officials.

For instance, a 2020 report by the Presidential Committee on Audit of Recovered Assets titled, 'Final Report of the Presidential Investigation Committee on the EFCC Federal Government Recovered Assets and Finances from May 2015 to May 2020', said that the former chairman of the EFCC, Ibrahim Magu, an assistant inspector-general of police, could not account for 332 out of the 836 recovered properties, in March 2018. The same way he could not tell what happened to the interest generated from cash recoveries by the commission from 2015 to 2020, which must have been quite substantial.

The report also alleged that

two ships "....were allowed to sink in spite of several warnings from the Navy on the need to evacuate the petroleum products in the vessels."

But it is doubtful if Nigerians would ever be surprised about these items that are perishing when the country could have reaped substantial financial benefits from them. That culture did not start today. When the federal capital moved from Lagos to Abuja, a lot of properties were abandoned. Many other public facilities, including stadia, have been similarly abandoned.

That is the way public properties are treated in the country. Public property, here in Nigeria, is like a mad man's leg that anyone desirous of a piece of the action could go cut his or her own pound of flesh. Perhaps it is so because of the easy way the country makes money from crude oil. Many people have argued that our governments would have been more careful with public funds if they actually labour to get revenue to finance their programmes and projects.

Our carefree attitude, even to the country's cash cow, is such that we even rely on foreigners doing the oil exploration for crucial statistics concerning the





quantum of crude that is pumped.

Well, perhaps we should not blame the present government for complete inaction on this matter. At least it set up an inter-ministerial committee on forfeited assets in November 2020, following approval by President Muhammadu Buhari. The problem is that despite his legal background, the attorney-general and

minister of justice, Abubakar Malami, who set up the committee did not follow due process and so, the committee as well as all its actions were declared illegal by a Federal High Court sitting in Lagos.

But the government cannot just fold its arms following this judgment. It should do the rightful by following due process in solving the problems militating against

prompt disposal of these prime assets that are said to be able to fetch the country about N4trillion. At least this is better than the debt unlimited option that the government is pursuing. One of the things it must do is to ensure the cooperation of the judiciary so that those wishing to use frivolous judicial processes to stall their cases would not find favour in the eyes of the courts.

We must put a stop to this demonic and tragic lackadaisical attitude on the part of our public officials. Here again, Nigerians must wake up to demand responsible and responsive governance, using all legally available means. We cannot have water in abundance and continue washing our hands with spittle.

**EDITORIAL**

**Corruption windows in MDAs**

In March 2015, while campaigning for election as president, Muhammadu Buhari made a commitment to end corruption in public high places. He said, "If we don't kill corruption, it will kill Nigeria." As it turned out, he did not only win the election that year, he was re-elected in 2019. Now, three years into the President's second and last term, corruption is giving as much as it is taking. If truth be told, it may outstay Buhari's presidency.

An eerie indication of this happening emerged from a testimony the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) gave during last Thursday's public hearings held by the Senate Committee on Finance on the 2023 federal budget. ICPC Chairman, Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye testified that the 2021 and 2022 budgets were padded with duplicated projects worth N400bn by federal ministries, departments and agencies. He also said N49.9bn was earmarked as salaries for ghost workers in the first half of 2022.

Prof. Owasanoye did not name names, but said duplicated projects worth N300bn were inserted into the 2021 budget and N100bn projects in the 2022 budget. According to him, "thorough scrutiny" of budgets approved for MDAs saved the government from wasting billions of naira on "fictitious projects". "The same pre-emptive move saved the country from spending N49.9bn for salaries of ghost workers put on fictitious payrolls by the fraudulent MDAs between January and June this year," he said.

"Names of MDAs involved in project duplication running into intercepted billions of naira and fictitious payrolls are available and will be forwarded to the committee. The good thing about the pre-emptive

moves made by us is that monies for the fraudulent acts were prevented from being released to the affected MDAs and it's gratifying that the Finance Ministry and Accountant General's Office cooperated with us."

Owasanoye urged the relevant committees of the National Assembly to watch out for similar project duplications in the proposed N19,76trn 2023 budget. "From our own end, detection of such projects is done by verifying their locations and names, upon which we tell the appropriate authorities not to release wrongly budgeted monies to them,"



**We commend the ICPC chairman and his eagle-eyed staff for preventing such a colossal daylight robbery of the nation's till. Project duplications as a way of stealing from the treasury has gone on for years.**

he added. Responding, the chairman of the committee, Senator Solomon Olamilekan Adeola, said the operational expenditure of the ICPC would be increased from N1.8bn in the 2023 budget.

We commend the ICPC chairman and his eagle-eyed staff for preventing such a colossal daylight robbery of the nation's till. Project duplications as a way of stealing from the treasury has gone on for years. Noises have been raised but it persists because those who perpetrate the crime manage to dodge all budget control mechanisms because they know the system only too.

They also exploit the naivety and inexperience of their immediate political heads. Still, they will have been stopped by parliamentarians who have the power of oversight but which they don't exercise because they too benefit from the fleece. It's courageous of the ICPC to have come up with those disclosures, seeing they are dealing with powerful interests in the business. They have placed the ball on the court of our lawmakers. Let's see if they will play it or not.

**Letter to the Editor**

**Nigeria: Avoiding Lebanon's sectarian trap**

By Abachi Ungbo

We need to be circumspect in driving on the road of religion. Lebanon is a pathetic picture of the ravages of the exaltation of religion - the country has melted like wax under intense heat. Since independence in 1943 the country had had to be held together by a national pact to accommodate its religious diversity.

Religion is well entrenched in our mixed society. Its centrality in the lives of Nigerians is eloquently illustrated by the 2006 survey conducted by Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life which reported that a preponderance of the population puts their religious identity above nationality.

And, over so many years, it has constituted a highly radioactive matter that has torn us apart. We cruelly violated the sanctity of life as we spill blood under its banner. The stream of blood nurtured the deep prejudice that was formed. Thereupon, ensuring the partitioning of some our cities along religious line which made interaction distant; foreclosing the possibility of locking hands together in dealing with the mountain of challenges that exist in form of hunger and poverty.

Together with its cousin- ethnicity; religion has reduced the best of us to the basest level. And, have constrained many into viewing things only from religious-coloured spectacles that lead not only into being intolerant but also to purveyors of bigotry.

It goes without saying that religion is gradually shorn of its spiritual essence due to its immersion into hot political discourse and rhetoric that is often riddled with incendiary conspiracy theories. The unhelpful consequence is its use as a tool of mass mobilization and a pawn for political ambition. Once again, the wind of the 2023 election is revealing our atavistic instincts. The signs are all over that citizens would line up behind religion in determining who leads the country.

Of course, the choice of leaders based on such primordial consideration has proven to be well and truly counterintuitive. So, we should know better from experiences that the cascade of leaders that were tacitly offered religious ladder to climb to the top never turned out to be meaningful in turning the tide against chronic poverty, insecurity, infrastructural deficit or improvement on health and education.

We need to be circumspect in driving on the road of religion. Lebanon is a pathetic picture of the ravages of the exaltation of religion - the country has melted like wax under intense heat. Since independence in 1943 the country had had to be held together by a national pact to accommodate its religious diversity.

The resultant unity was later rocked by huge discontent which snowballed into the 1975-1990 Civil War pitting the religious power bloc against themselves. The Taif Agreement had

to tweak the balance of power among the religious blocs before eventually pulling the plug on the conflict. Under the arrangement the President must be a Maronite Christian, Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament a Shiite Muslim.

The state of affairs is such that allegiance is to the various power blocs and not Lebanon. The commonly brandishing of flags of the different religious groups and not that of the country typifies the great divide; and, the power blocs are known to have built bridges with extraneous powers which come with unstinting support at a huge cost for Lebanon. The country has effectively become an appendage to the foreign interests.

The control over government meant not just having access to resources but funding coreligionists and sects which ultimately fanned the massive corruption and poor governance that exist. Nothing escapes the pull of religion in Lebanon from politics to appointment into offices which are divvied for personal gains. The case manifestly proves the word of Frank Herbert that "when religion and politics ride in the same cart, the whirlwind follows."

The power arrangement has serially been implicated as a huge challenge for its development. The entrepreneurial and hardworking Lebanese citizens have effectively lost a beautiful country to work and live in peace with pride- a place once described as the Paris of the Middle East. The challenging state of affairs hasn't discriminated against any religious group pointing to the fact that poverty and hunger knows no religion.

The scenario playing out in Lebanon provides a glimpse to the paranoia of not a few countries that have placed religion on a tight leash in the name of national security. Religious activities hardly go on under their radar and they are keen on insinuating their 'doctrine' into the operation various groups.

I think, it's apt to liken religion to a knife- which could be a tool for good or bad depending on how it is deployed. Make no mistake, that religion have a place in public square- it can be a boon for development owing to its merits for sharpening the conscience of adherents and as arbiter of morality if rightly deployed. Its role in provision of social services, human capital development is well known.

Also, it has a place as an agent of social change not in least holding the conscience of leaders to the fire, ensure accountability, justice, equity, and speak against corruption and abuse of power. However, the moral right to perform such role is easily eroded when religion goes to bed with politics.

Managing our religious diversity is key to departing the world of illusory nationhood the we live in. Our successful walk to development is reposed on the attempt at circumventing religion as a test for leaders and political offices.

*Abachi Ungbo is a Public Policy Analyst.*

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# our stand

## Reforming The Civil Service

Just when many Nigerians thought budget padding had become a thing of the past, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) recently disclosed that the 2021 budget totaling N13.59 trillion was padded by civil servants in the various Federal Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), with duplicated projects worth N300 billion.

Additionally, the anti-graft agency also disclosed that projects' duplication worth N100 billion were also inserted into the N17.12trillion 2022 budget by some MDAs.

The ICPC further disclosed that a whopping N49.9 billion was tracked as salaries paid to ghost workers between January and June this year.

We recall that, recently, a former Accountant-General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris, was arrested and is on trial for his alleged involvement in a N174 billion fraud.

Compounding these rings of sleaze, last year, ICPC informed the nation that it successfully recovered 301 houses from two public officers in the nation's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

The Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions recently said its findings after interfacing with government agencies revealed that corruption is more endemic in the civil service than in other sectors.

According to the chairman of the committee, Senator Ayo Akinyelure (PDP, Ondo), civil servants are more corrupt than the political class. Though this ought not to be a comforting statement, it however gives the citizens who have to bear the brunt of this misapplication

of funds a lot of food for thought even if there is none for the stomach.

In the opinion of this newspaper, it is trite to even begin to wonder how civil servants are able to steal these humongous amounts of money with reforms like the treasury single account (TSA) and Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIIS) in place.

Curiously, it is the the civil servants who are expected to drive the agenda of any administration. However, the biggest malfeasance and corrupt practices seem to be going on in the same civil service.

Needless to say, no country has ever truly developed without a first-class civil service. It's no secret that many choice properties in the FCT are owned by civil servants.

Indeed, the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari cannot successfully

fight corruption with a compromised civil service.

It is instructive to note that Nigeria earlier this year dropped five places in the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranking released by Transparency International (TI).

The country, scoring 24 out of 100 points, ranked 154 out of 180 countries surveyed, falling back five places from the rank of 149 in 2020 placing as the second most corrupt country in West Africa.

It is Nigeria's second consecutive year of a downward spiral on the TI's CPI ranking, the country's score has dropped from 26 in 2019 to 25 in the 2020 assessment, and further to 24 in the latest 2021 record.

The CPI is TI's tool for measuring the levels of corruption in the systems of various countries around the world. The maximum

points a country can score is 100 points, and the least is zero. Zero signifies the worst performing countries and 100, the best-ranked.

The ranking may be an indicator that corruption in the country has gotten worse over the years.

According to experts, the reasons for corruption in the civil service include weak institutional structures, cumbersome administrative procedures, lack of a culture of accountability, negative attitude of the civil servants to work, and individuals' insatiable appetite for wealth at all costs.

Others are weak institutional structures, cumbersome administrative procedures, negative attitudes of civil servants, and non-disclosure of information unless someone pays for it.

Sadly, despite the various reforms taken by successive administrations, the story has not changed, it is a case of all motion and no movement.

In our considered opinion, there needs to be stricter punishment for corrupt civil servants. Most people are not punished for bad behaviors to serve as a deterrent and when they are eventually prosecuted, it is usually a slap on the wrist. This has to stop.

Enforcement of rules and laws will go a long way in curbing corruption in the civil service.

We, therefore, call for the speedy digitalisation of the civil service. Also the elevation of meritocracy over nepotism. Building strong institutions will also serve as checks and balances for corrupt individuals.

Consequently, the cleansing and reformation of the civil service are essential for Nigeria to achieve its potential.

LEADERSHIP  
**friday**

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## EDITORIAL

## MDAS AND PADDED BUDGETS

There is need to ensure adequate consequences for proven perpetrators of the crime

Financial 'padding' is increasingly becoming part of the nation's budgeting system. At a recent interactive session with the Senate Committee on Finance on the 2022-2025 Medium Term Expenditure Framework, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) accused ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of government of fiddling with the 2021 and 2022 budgets to the tune of N400 billion by duplicating projects. "From our own end, detection of such projects is done by verifying their locations and names, upon which we tell the appropriate authorities not to release wrongly budgeted monies," said ICPC chairman, Bolaji Owasanoye.

While we commend the ICPC for this recent discovery, it is important to note that this was not the first time that the commission would be accusing MDAs of involvement in fraudulent acts. At one of its recent summits, ICPC disclosed that it had uncovered gross abuse of personnel budget and inflation as well as padding of nominal role by some MDAs. According to Owasanoye, in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the balances recorded for personnel were "wrongfully utilised by MDAs for other purposes due to lack of pro activity by late enforcement and related agencies. That sum amounted to N18.39 billion."

Indeed, the corruption and lack of accountability in many of the agencies of government are mindboggling. They inflate contracts, fail to remit tax, divert pension and National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) deductions, and aggravate the sufferings of many Nigerians. The financial impropriety in several of the MDAs has led to loss of huge revenues running into trillions of naira. Owasanoye also revealed that N2.67 billion meant for the school feeding programme in some federal government colleges during the COVID-19 lockdown ended up in the pockets of top officials of MDAs. Another N2.5 billion was reportedly misappropriated by a senior civil servant in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and his cronies.



### The financial impropriety in several of the MDAs has led to loss of huge revenues running into trillions of naira

These allegations are not coming only from the ICPC. In 2017, the office of the Auditor-General of the Federation (AuGF) gave a damning report on the financial records of the MDAs. The audit report showed that there were deficiencies in the processes for consolidating the balances of MDAs into one economic entity. In addition, 160 government agencies defaulted in the submission of audited accounts for 2015, 2016 and 2017, while some others had never bothered to submit any financial statements since inception. Some agencies had consistently breached the extant laws, guidelines and regulations in remission of money to the Treasury Single Account (TSA). Indeed, the Fiscal Responsibility Commission (FRC) revealed in its

2017 report that the MDAs defrauded the country of over N1trillion in seven years. Perhaps to crown the impunity, the former Accountant General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris, was himself fingered, and indeed recently arraigned over N109 billion charges.

A leading professional services firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in a recent report titled "Impact of Corruption on Nigeria's Economy" stated that failure to stem corruption in Nigeria could cost up to 37 per cent of Gross Domestic Products by 2030. The questions therefore persist: Why is it so difficult to closely monitor the operations of the MDAs, and seal the sources of corrupt practices which have undermined economic growth, and causing a steady decline in the availability and quality of essential public services? Why is it that the National Assembly has habitually failed to vet projects properly? And why is a government that came to fight corruption be so ironically eroded in it?

If the fight against corruption in the MDAs will take the nation anywhere, then there is need to ensure adequate consequences for the proven perpetrators of the crime. Besides, we need to invest in the cultivation of enlightened values by ensuring that those who go into public service are content with their legitimate wages.

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## LETTERS

## OPEN LETTER TO IGP ON AJUWON POLICE STATION

Sir, there is no doubt that the nation has continually witnessed significant turn-around in the improvement of security architecture since your assumption of office on April 6, 2021. It's evident that you've brought your high level of educational attainments to bear on all the gamut of security apparatus in the country.

This is in particular reference to the huge improvement in the rescuing of kidnapped victims, curtailing the cult-related activities and armed robberies across the country, as well as continual recovering of firearms from hoodlums and impatriotic zealots.

But, the expectant nation is asking for more policing initiatives around the country particularly in these Ember months to ensuring the general protection of life and property.

Meanwhile, I need to bring to your notice the obvious inadequacy in general policing of Akute, Alagbale, Lambe and Ajuwon communities, all combined to represent the largest political bloc in Ogun State. These communities together constitute about 25-30% of the population of Ogun State, yet there is presence of just one police station in the whole areas. So, technically the communities are grossly under-policed.

Worsening the matter is the proximity of the communities to Lagos State, a development that necessitates the influx of hundreds of young upward mobile Nigerians from the State of Excellence to the

areas on daily basis in order to avoid the high cost of living in Lagos and most especially, astronomical rents. Of course, there are attendant security challenges in terms of criminality- cultism, advent of Yahoo boys and girls, armed robberies, drug peddling, and burglary.

The sudden exponential increase in the population of the areas has put Ajuwon police station, the only one serving the entire communities under tremendous pressure so much that citizens of the areas are not guaranteed effective and efficient treatment of their cases anytime they lodge complaints.

The police personnel are always eager to discharge cases or refer them to the law courts because their hands are always full. This is the present situation at the police station and it's the people of the communities who are bearing the brunt.

In view of this obvious challenge, it would therefore be appropriate for the Police Authority under your watch as Inspector General of Nigeria Police Force to urgently consider breaking the Ajuwon Police Station into at least three for the purpose of efficiency, effectiveness, orderliness and adequate policing of the aforementioned communities.

Kola Amzat (FCA, FCIB)  
CEO, WKA Consulting, Lagos

## TINAPA: A WASTED PROJECT

It is shocking that the good attempt to industrialize Nigeria is always destroyed by lack of vision. Vision is simply the possibility that good things can happen to any location. I recently saw a video on the deplorable state of TINAPA and I was shell-shocked at the extent of damage. TINAPA had the trappings of what Las Vegas or any other tourist site in the world today could give but because of the lack of leadership, that project Donald Duke invested in to turn things around has become a waste. I was talking to a friend and he said Nigeria should focus on the small things like fixing education and healthcare before it focuses on things like TINAPA.

He further told me the story of how Flagler built Miami and how a good mindset has carried on those legacies, adding that the workability of projects like TINAPA will be hard in a country with over 20 million out-of-school children.

But I would love to ask and let's debate please: Why is that projects like TINAPA, Obudu Ranch and other government-run resorts never thrive in Nigeria?

Rafai Oseni,  
[rafaiseni@gmail.com](mailto:rafaiseni@gmail.com)



## EDITORIAL

# ICPC's Budget Padding Allegation

By Tribune Online On Sep 29, 2022

**B**y now, Nigerians must be tired of hearing and reading stories of graft and sleaze perpetrated by officials of the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the government. There just seems to be no end to these stories, with the culprits walking as free (wo)men while committing monumental crimes. In yet another corruption story, ahead of President Muhammadu Buhari's presentation of the 2023 Appropriation Bill to the National Assembly, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) told the Senate penultimate week that the N13.59 trillion 2021 budget was padded by the various MDAs with duplicated projects worth N300 billion, while duplicated projects worth N100 billion were also inserted into the N17.12 trillion 2022 budget by some MDAs. This was in addition to the N49.9 billion tracked as salary for ghost workers between January and June this year. The ICPC chairman, Professor Bolaji Owasanoye, made the revelations during an interaction with members of the Senate Committee on Finance. According to the ICPC boss, the duplicated projects were tracked

through thorough scrutiny carried out on approved projects for the various MDAs.

He said: "The names of the MDAs involved in project duplications running into billions of naira and the fictitious payrolls are available and will be forwarded to the committee. The good thing about the preemptive moves made by us is that funds for the fraudulent acts were prevented from being released to the affected MDAs and it is gratifying that the Finance Ministry and the Accountant General's office cooperated with us. From our own end, detection of such projects is done by verifying their locations and names, following which we tell the appropriate authorities not to release wrongly budgeted money to them." The ICPC boss urged the relevant committees of the National Assembly to be on the lookout for similar project duplications in the proposed N19.76 trillion 2023 budget. On its part, the committee expressed satisfaction with the presentations, adding that the operational cost of the agency would be increased to enable it to roll out more proactive measures against corrupt practices

across the various MDAs.

Just like the Senate committee did, Nigerians definitely must be impressed by the proactive ways in which the ICPC is fighting corruption. It is indubitable that, as noted by the committee's chairman, Senator Olamilekan Adeola, the ICPC's submissions "clearly show that all hope is not lost for our dear country as far as fighting corruption is concerned." But then, it is apposite to ask why these infractions escaped detection at the National Assembly in the first place. Members of the National Assembly's committees which have oversight functions over the various MDAs saw copies of the budget proposals and vetted them, so how did they fail to detect and stop potential sleaze of such a huge proportion? What were the committee members doing? Were they on a safari?

Besides, at the level of the executive arm of government, individual estimates are also supposed to undergo scrutiny, so why was this not done? It is clear that were it not for the eagle-eyed ICPC, the nation would have been robbed blind by the criminals behind the budget charade at the MDAs.

The conclusion is therefore inescapable that both the executive and the legislative arms of the government are short-changing the country through laxity or outright connivance. It is a shame that it has taken the ICPC to alert the National Assembly to the grand larceny that it should have prevented in the first place.

If anything, the revelations by the ICPC boss, who together with Brigadier-General Buba Marwa (Retd) of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and Professor Ishaq Oloyede of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) seems to be virtually the only bright spots in public service under the current administration, should be of serious concern to all Nigerians. It puts into bold relief the manner in which the country has always been shortchanged and served fraudulently by its so-called leaders with their corrupt outlook on the processes of governance. The budgets in question were presented as having gone through the painstaking processes of the executive and the legislative arms of government, yet they were suffused with corrupt duplication of projects to show that there



was really nothing thorough or above board about the governance processes in the country.

There is no special way that the ICPC came up with identifying and isolating duplicated projects in the budget that the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), which was supposed to be the clearing house for all budget proposals and the Federal Ministry of Finance, which

was to finally crosscheck the budget before final presentation at the National Assembly, and the National Assembly itself that was supposed to scrutinise every budget through its various committees at the level of the two chambers, could not have done before unleashing the fraudulent budgets on the country. Evidently, the budgets went through shoddy scrutiny and cross-checking at all levels due to incompetence and corruption, creating the

current spectacle of dubious and duplicated projects that the ICPC is publicly calling out.

There is certainly a need for a radical restructuring of the processes of governance in the country. There must be a focus on overcoming the massive corruption characterising the whole government structure. The ICPC has a responsibility in this regard to come up with more precise details surrounding the duplicated

projects alluded to in its report and to be ready to continuously beam a searchlight on the processes in order to put a stop to the corruption underpinning governance in the country. On their part, Nigerians, the ultimate victims of the corruption perpetrated by the MDAs, should demand accountability and further reports on the actions taken to prosecute the perpetrators of the crimes already identified by the ICPC.

**EDITORIAL**

**ICPC should expose budget padding culprits**

In March 2015, while campaigning for election as president, Muhammadu Buhari made a commitment to end corruption in public high places. He said, "If we don't kill corruption, it will kill Nigeria." As it turned out, he did not only win the election that year, he was re-elected in 2019. Now, three years into the President's second and last term, corruption is giving as much as it is taking. If truth be told, it may outstay Buhari's presidency.

An eerie indication of this happening emerged from a testimony the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) gave during a public hearing held by the Senate Committee on Finance on the 2023 federal budget. ICPC chairman, prof. Bolaji Owasanoye testified that the 2021 and 2022 budgets were padded with duplicated projects worth N400bn by federal ministries, departments and agencies. He also said N49.9bn was earmarked as salaries for ghost workers in the first half of 2022.

Prof. Owasanoye did not name names, but said duplicated projects worth N300bn were inserted into the 2021 budget and N100bn projects in the 2022 budget. According to him, "thorough scrutiny" of budgets approved for MDAs saved the government from wasting billions of naira on "fictitious projects". "The same preemptive move saved the country from spending N49.9bn for salaries of ghost workers put on fictitious payrolls by the fraudulent MDAs between January and June this year," he said.

"Names of MDAs involved in project duplication running into intercepted billions of naira and fictitious payrolls are available and will be forwarded to the committee. The good thing about the pre-emptive

moves made by us is that monies for the fraudulent acts were prevented from being released to the affected MDAs and it's gratifying that the Finance Ministry and Accountant General's Office cooperated with us."

Owasanoye urged the relevant committees of the National Assembly to watch out for similar project duplications in the proposed N19.76trn 2023 budget. "From our own end, detection of such projects is done by verifying their locations and names, upon which we tell the appropriate authorities not to release wrongly budgeted monies to them," he added. Responding, the chairman of the committee, Senator Solomon Olamilekan Adeola, said the operational expenditure of the ICPC would be increased from N1.8bn in the 2023 budget.

**“ Prof. Owasanoye did not name names, but said duplicated projects worth N300bn were inserted into the 2021 budget and N100bn projects in the 2022 budget.**

We commend the ICPC chairman and his eagle-eyed staff for preventing such a colossal daylight robbery of the nation till. Project duplications as a way of stealing from the treasury has gone on for years. Noises have been raised but it persists because those who perpetrate the crime manage to dodge all budget control mechanisms because they know the system too well.

They also exploit the naivety and inexperience of their immediate political heads. Still, they will have been stopped by parliamentarians who have the power of oversight but which they don't exercise because they too benefit from the fleece. It is courageous of the ICPC to have come up with those disclosures, seeing they are dealing with powerful interests in the business. They have placed the ball on the court of our lawmakers. Let's see if they will play it or not.

**Letter to the Editor**

**The Bastardisation of Nigeria's National Flag**

By Philip Nyam

A national flag represents and symbolises a given nation. It is flown by the government of that nation, but usually can also be flown by its citizens. In Nigeria, shortly before our independence in 1960, a 23-year-old Ibadan-born student, Mr. Michael Ojo Akinkunmi designed the nation's national flag of green and white green in 1959. In this flag, two vertical stripes of equal green-white-green, green stands for agriculture and white for unity and peace. The Nigerian flag is mounted in both government and private offices, and schools and government officials, politicians, students, etc. during festive periods, such as Independence Day celebration, Democracy Day, Children's Day celebration and other public functions.

Many citizens fly the flag as a mark of patriotism either by mounting it on their cars or their homes.

Unfortunately, there has been a bastardisation of the beautiful Nigerian flag with the embossment of the coat of arms on the white. This is a clear debasement of the nation's identity and ethos. I do not know where this strange addition to the national flag came from but it has been in existence for sometime now. The most disturbing aspect of this corruption of the national flag is the outright ignorance exhibited by highly placed government and elected officials who have unfortunately adopted the fake flag to fly. It is even more appalling that some renowned television stations in the country are guilty of this inexplicable and shocking.

It is most surprising that schools where students and pupils are taught that the nation's flag is "green white green" have not found it expedient to provide the necessary enlightenment but continue to condone the same students displaying these flags at school functions with no one drawing their attention to the anomaly. How do we now call this? The school is teaching students that the colours of the nation's national flag are green white green, yet, the flag being

brought to the school by students is green white green embossed with the coat of arms. Is this not a contradiction? Does it mean the teachers and school authorities have not seen this?

In fact, staff of government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) are equally culpable of flying this adulterated flag in their cars and driving to government offices without being cautioned by anyone. Even some lawmakers are not left out in this despicable behaviour as some in the states and National Assembly fly the corrupted flag in their cars. Some traditional rulers are also guilty of promoting the wrong flag. The question I want to ask is, when was the Nigerian national flag redesigned? Who redesigned the flag? When was the decision taken to change the flag from its original form? Why do we continue progressing in error in even things that should be clear to all? Is the minister and management staff of the ministry of information and national orientation not aware of this? One will not be surprised to find staff of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), an agency that should be at the forefront of educating Nigerians about our values and ethics, also embracing the wrong flag.

In the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and in most state capital cities, hawkers and vendors sell this flag at traffic hold-ups, party conventions and even religious crusades, yet there has been no reaction from the government. In other climes, this grave violation of the national flag would have incurred the wrath of the authorities but certainly not here. Just imagine someone producing the USA flag and embossing it with the coat of arms and flying such a flag in any state in the country. The law enforcement agencies will stop and question you.

The time has come for the federal government to come clean on this and stop this aberration. If the flag has been changed, let it be made official so that people will know. What is happening is not good for Nigeria's image.

**Nyam, is a Media/Communication Expert and writes from Abuja**

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## COMMENTARY

## EDITORIALS

## An officer and gentleman

•We need more Daniel Armahs in the police force.

IT is a general belief at home and abroad that locating an honest Nigerian is like looking for a needle in a haystack. This is even more difficult, by general perception, in the Nigeria Police Force. But an exception was found in Daniel Armah, a Chief Superintendent of Police, who heads the Divisional Police Division in Bompai, Nasarawa Local Government Area of Kano State. Armah shunned an opportunity to benefit from the rotten system as he rejected a \$200,000 bribe.

He is, indeed, the proverbial white pap that was produced in a very black pot. The Nigeria Police Force is infamous for being the most corrupt institution in the country. It should be recalled that some officers have been convicted for participating in armed robbery or renting out guns to criminals, or deliberately muddling up investigation to frustrate justice. Others

'Armah shunned an opportunity to benefit from the rotten system as he rejected a \$200,000 bribe. He is, indeed, the proverbial white pap that was produced in a very black pot'

have been implicated in stealing from accident scenes. The probe panels instituted into the 2020 #ENDSARS riots that rocked the country did not do the institution's image any good as witnesses came up with proofs of not just brutality, but other sordid acts. In other cases, exhibits are tampered with to enrich senior officers. Properties of suspects seized illegally were ordered released by the panels. It is a notorious fact that, while it is boldly written in all police stations that bail is a right and free, detainees are regularly made to part with hard earned money.

Yet, the same institution produced Armah who rejected such a huge sum from a robbery suspect. This gives hope that the situation is not irredeemable. The case of Abba Kyari, an Assistant Commissioner of Police once reputed to be a super cop in charge of the Inspector-General's Response Team is well known. He is being sought to answer to charges in the United States of America, even as the anti-narcotics agency in Nigeria is prosecuting him for providing cover for local and international drug cartels.

We commend the Independent Corrupt Practices (And Other Related Offences) Commission (ICPC) for its annual summit at which people identified as being of impeccable character are given awards. This is practical advocacy to promote virtues in the public

sector. Anywhere there are bad eggs, there must also be a few people who have refused to soil their fingers.

It is commendable that President Muhammadu Buhari made it a point of duty to attend the ceremony to show his administration identifies with ICPC in the crusade. This is expected to encourage more Nigerians to join the ranks of men and women of integrity.

It should, however, be taken a notch higher by extending similar honours to such persons once identified. Equally, they should be encouraged in line of professional career progression. Nigeria deserves to have police officers who have distinguished themselves not only in the line of duty, but also of proven integrity.

The starting point is at the recruitment stage. Every intending officer should be probed with regard to character, learning and background. Never again should any arm of our security agencies be a dumping ground for just anybody. It must be realised that unless we get the investigation of crimes right, justice is already compromised.

State governments and the private sector should join the Federal Government in promoting ethical behaviour in the public sector; the public should also join in ensuring that illicit acquisition is no longer applauded.

The task of sanitising the society is for all. We need more Daniel Armahs.

## LETTER

## Noma, a deadly but neglected infection

**S**IR: Noma, otherwise known as necrotising ulcerative stomatitis, is a bacterial infectious but non-contagious infection resulting from poor oral hygiene, lack of sanitation and malnutrition, affecting both soft and hard tissues of the mouth and face, rapidly progressive and more often than not fatal.

Most common sign and symptom is the development of ulcer in the mucous membrane of the mouth before spreading to other parts of the face. If detected early, condition can be arrested with antibiotics, proper nutrition and oral hygiene while late diagnosis even if treated does not restore disfigured or damaged tissues.

Affecting children between 2-6 years of age, the disease is prevalent in impoverished communities in Asia and Africa; though infection was also found decades ago in Europe and South America, this infection has since vanished with improved livelihood and healthcare.

Preventable but deadly, all over the world, Noma has been given a cold shoulder (neglected) over the years. The absence of current epidemiological data has made the data of World Health Organisation (WHO) from 1998 the most frequently cited estimation of the disease, with a global estimation of 140,000 new cases recorded annually, with majority in Sub-Saharan Africa and a mortality rate of 90% if not treated within two weeks.

The infection has not spared the children in Nigeria, falling under the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, killing numbers and leaving survivors disfigured, coupled with reality of leaving the rest of their lives under stigmatisation.

This informed the decision of the Federal Ministry of Health to call on the WHO at the 75th World Health Assembly to include Noma on the list of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) where it belongs.

The call was aimed at rallying global sup-



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## EDITORIAL

# Unending fraud in MDAs

THE padding of budgets by civil servants across the Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) has shown that the war against graft is not as effective as it should be. The unending fraud in the MDAs obtains because those involved have not been caught and adequately punished. The fact that some people get away with corruption has emboldened others to follow the evil way.

A recent report by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Offences Commission (ICPC) has confirmed the endemic corruption in the MDAs. The chairman of the agency, Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye, recently disclosed that the N13.59 trillion 2021 Federal Budget was 'padded' by the various MDAs. Also, project duplication worth N100 billion was inserted into the N17trillion 2022 budget. This includes the N49.9billion that had been tracked as salaries for "ghost" or non-existent workers between January and June this year.

The ICPC boss revealed this during an interface with the Senate Committee on Finance headed by Senator Solomon Adeola. The names of the MDAs involved in the fraud have been forwarded to the Senate Committee on Finance for necessary sanctions, according to the ICPC chairman. He lamented that if the fraud was not uncovered, the amount would have been wasted by the Federal Government on duplicated projects for the same purpose in the 2023 budget.

In that connection, the relevant committees of the National Assembly have been advised to be on the look-out for such project duplication in the implementation of the 2023 budget. It is commendable that the agency has uncovered monumental corruption in the affected MDAs. Corruption in the MDAs is no longer new. Financial malfeasance has over time been rife in the MDAs. For instance, in its 2017 audited financial report of the MDAs, the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation (AuGF) revealed that 265 MDAs did not account for over N300billion. Similarly, the 2016 AuGF report uncovered N450billion unremitted funds between 2010 and 2015. This occurred despite the N40trillion disbursed to them.

The unbridled corruption in the MDAs requires deterring sanctions against the culprits. Civil servants must not be allowed to get away with stolen wealth. They should be punished adequately. Apart from the ICPC report being an indictment on the poor performances of the affected MDAs, it would have been apt if the names of the MDAs were made public at least to shame such agencies and their heads.

The recurring corruption in the MDAs indicates that accounting procedures are being breached. They do not even observe the guidelines for the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA).

By the provisions of the Financial Regulation 3210(v), Heads of government agencies and commissions, are required to submit details of both the audited accounts and management reports to the AuGF not later than May 31 of the following year. It is not certain that this provision is strictly observed.

Even though the relevant rules of the National Assembly stipulate that defaulting agencies should be sanctioned and stiff penalties imposed on the chief accounting officers for violating the rules for withholding the statement of account, it is yet to be seen if any of the chief accounting officers have been punished on account of breaching the regulations. This has made it possible for the agencies and their heads to run the affairs of their respective agencies with impunity.

It is despicable that while the government is in dire financial straits and in a borrowing binge to meet some of its pressing obligations, some MDAs and their accounting officers are siphoning public funds. Early this year, the current AuGF, Adolphus Aghughu, while submitting the 2019 Audit Report of the MDAs, noted that his office uncovered massive unverified balances in the consolidated financial statements totalling N4.97trillion.

The queries issued to the affected MDAs were not honoured by their heads. This smacks of extreme impunity that has become the bane of most MDAs. Unless the corruption in the MDAs is quickly tackled, it is likely to continue unabated. The National Assembly should decisively deal with MDAs that fail to meet all accountability requirements stipulated by the law, and also refuse to approve budgets for any MDA that defaults in its statutory compliance duties.



**Financial malfeasance has over time been rife in the MDAs. For instance, in its 2017 audited financial report of the MDAs, the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation (AuGF) revealed that 265 MDAs did not account for over N300billion. Similarly, the 2016 AuGF report uncovered N450billion unremitted funds between 2010 and 2015.**



## EDITORIAL

### Management of Recovered Assets

Interestingly, the various anti-graft laws make provisions for the effective management and disposal of forfeited properties, suggesting that a workable and transparent mechanism is no rocket science. However, corruption will continue to be a stumbling block until severely dealt with.

Instructively, the recently enacted Proceeds of Crime Act 2022 raises hope. This Act provides for an effective institutional framework for the recovery and management of the proceeds of crime. It also establishes the Proceeds of Crime Management Directorate (“the

Directorate”) in relevant anti-graft organisations such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission; \*the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission;\* the Nigerian Police Force; and such other organisations as the Attorney General of the Federation may designate

from time to time. Once a property is under investigation, the directorate has the exclusive power to take over and assume responsibility for the same subject to specific orders of the court. This is to ensure that such assets remain viable pending the expiration of cases and appeals.



While this latest legislative intervention is a welcome development, it will be meaningless unless government musters the appropriate political will to use it for all practical purposes. It may be ideal to create an independent body for proper and effective management of all properties forfeited to the Federal Government. A uniform framework will allow for an efficient traceable, accountable and transparent asset recovery, management and disposal process.

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Conscience is an open witness; only truth can heal it. *Uwemehere Edo (1994-2000)*

# Editorial

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## Management of recovered assets

**R**EVELATION that over 2,000 assets confiscated from politically exposed persons, civil servants and other individuals are rotting away is not just alarming, it underscores the lack of political will and fluttering anti-corruption campaign of the Federal Government. Given also the huge loss the country is garnering as a result of the mismanagement of the assets, President Muhammadu Buhari has an onerous duty to address the gaping deficits, as the only course to redeem the waning reputation of his administration in this regard.

The assets, comprising residential and commercial buildings, sea vessels, fuel-laden tankers, exotic cars, valuable jewelry etc, were seized by anti-graft agencies from several persons including the former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke; and the late Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh. The properties, which are scattered across the federation, are reportedly either dilapidated, no longer serviceable, badly damaged, plundered, vandalised, or completely damaged for want of proper management.

Failure of the Federal Government to effectively manage the situation is a crass demonstration of a lack of political will to do the right thing, considering the avalanche of relevant laws and regulations. Surely, Nigeria with her harsh economic realities cannot afford the luxury of ignoring such a viable revenue stream. Equally worrisome is that the country is losing about N4tr on these assets. Sadly, this lose-lose situation will linger until the government is willing to do the needful.

The crux of the issue remains the non-chalance of the ruling class towards good governance. This explains why corruption has been identified as the major hindrance to an effective asset management framework. It does appear that officials charged with the duty of managing the recovered assets are responsible for the current defective structure. Some of them have been entangled in allegations bordering on corrupt practices such as diversion and illegal sale of recovered assets, and failure to render a proper account, among others. An unresolved case in point is the investigation of the former acting Chairman of the Economic Financial Crimes

Commission (EFCC), Ibrahim Magu, by the Justice Ayo Salami panel set up by the Federal Government over alleged failure to account for 332 out of the 836 properties recovered by the EFCC up to March 2018. Till date, the panel's report has not been made public.

The country's slow-paced justice administration is another impediment to seamless asset recovery and management process. The assets under discourse are mainly suspected proceeds of crime; hence can only be legitimately disposed of upon the orders of court. But judicial proceedings usually stretch over several years thereby putting the government in a fix on how to handle interim forfeited assets pending the final determination of such lawsuits.

Notably, the current administration has somewhat made attempts to strengthen the asset recovery and management drive. For instance, the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami (AGF), initiated the suspension of Mr. Magu in 2019 to pave way for his investigation by the Presidential Committee on Audit of Recovered Assets and the Judicial Commission of Inquiry chaired by Honorable Justice Ayo Salami (rt'd). Similarly, the AGF framed the Asset Tracing, Recovery and Management Regulations in 2019, and also inaugurated an inter-ministerial committee on forfeited assets in November 2020. Collaboratively, the House of Representatives constituted an Ad Hoc Committee on Assessment and Status of All Recovered Loots, Movable and Immovable Assets from 2002 to 2020 by Agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria for effective, efficient Management and utilisation.

However, a critical assessment of this administration's behavioural pattern in recent years cast serious doubt on its anti-corruption stance. Even the President has lamented that "corruption is fighting back." Therefore, to argue that the government has simply been playing to the gallery may not be out of place. The pardon granted two former state governors who were serving jail terms for financial crime speaks volume of government's suspicious commitment to fighting corruption. More embarrassing is the invalidation of the Asset Tracing, Recovery and Management Regulations by the Federal High Court. The Court held that the Regulations were, "ultra vires the office and powers," of the AGF and consequently, all sales and disposals made pursuant thereto were nullified. Is the Chief Law Officer ignorant of his constitutional limitations?

Or were the Regulations promulgated ab initio for window-dressing and not necessarily for repairing the damaged legal framework? Nigerians are also wondering whether Mr. Magu will be brought to account following the Justice Salami investigative panel report, or, as Magu said, is corruption fighting back, and government is still grandstanding? The silence of the government is not only deafening, Magu's subsequent elevation to the rank of Assistant Inspector General and subsequent retirement raise curiosity and challenge the credibility of the panel. Overall the handling of the matter makes mockery of the anti-corruption fight. Government, by this omission is the chief enabler and aider of corruption.

Sadly, while the country wallows in poverty, recovered assets worth trillions of naira are rotting away under government watch. In November 2021, the House of Representatives raised alarm when it discovered that some of the 90 ships seized by the EFCC had begun to sink in waters across the country. Similarly, the colossal edifice housing the former Federal Secretariat at Ikoyi is on the brink of collapse and there is no immediate solution in sight. Furthermore, the fact that this dereliction of duty of the officers-in-charge is never greeted with any punitive sanctions speaks to our culture of waste and zero maintenance.

Interestingly, the various anti-graft laws make provisions for the effective management and disposal of forfeited properties, suggesting that a workable and transparent mechanism is no rocket science. However, corruption will continue to be a stumbling block until severely dealt with.

Instructively, the recently enacted Proceeds of Crime Act 2022 raises hope. This Act provides for an effective institutional framework for the recovery and management of the proceeds of crime. It also establishes the Proceeds of Crime Management Directorate ("the Directorate") in relevant anti-graft organisations such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission; the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission; the Nigerian Police Force; and such other organisations as the Attorney General of the Federation may designate from time to time. Once a property is under investigation, the directorate has the exclusive power to take over and assume responsibility for the same subject to specific orders of the court. This is to ensure that such assets remain viable pending the expiration of cases and appeals.

While this latest legislative intervention is a welcome development, it will be meaningless unless government musters the appropriate political will to use it for all practical purposes. It may be ideal to create an independent body for proper and effective management of all properties forfeited to the Federal Government. A uniform framework will allow for an efficient traceable, accountable and transparent asset recovery, management and disposal process. Also, it would make the anti-graft organisations more focused on their core responsibilities of crime prevention, investigation, and prosecution rather than ancillary issues.

### LETTER

#### Caution, in implementing the Orosanye report

**S**IR: According to reports in the dailies, there is a step the Federal Government is about to take in the coming year which needs to be re-examined carefully. It has to do with the implementation of the Orosanye report which recommended the merging of many government's agencies and parastatals in order to cut the cost of running all the various agencies.

At the first look, the idea appears very good and reasonable but when subjected to a careful scrutiny, it's easy to see that such recommendation will only create more problems than it will ever solve. Since the workers are not going to be laid off, they will merely move from one office to another only to be rendered utterly redundant while still drawing salaries from the government.

In essence, there won't be any

reduction in government's spending since it will still have to increase allocations to the new formations in order to cope with their huge wage bills. Therefore, there is the need for the government to think through things properly before embarking on a policy that may later boomering and lead to a new set of problems.

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EDITORIAL ON NATIONAL SUMMIT ON DIMINISHING CORRUPTION

UNHELPFUL BUCKPASSING

Both the government and ASUU have roles to play in revitalising our varsities.

President Muhammadu Buhari is known to be taciturn. Rarely does he communicate his views on burning national issues to the public. \*However, the National Summit organised by the Independent Corrupt Practices And Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) on graft in the public sector\* provided the public a chance to peep into the inner recesses of his mind on the long-drawn strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The President, whose charge it is to take the final decision on ending the industrial action that has crippled the nation's Ivory Tower for

about eight months, challenged the teachers to stop blaming the rot in the sector on funding, delivery on their duties. He contending that the graft in the system must be curtailed if the universities are to deliver on their duties. He

called on the lecturers to purge the campuses of the graft that has led to diversion of funds in the universities.

