Chapter Eleven

Corruption In Public Libraries: Implication For Public Accountability

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Introduction

Corruption is pervasive in almost all facets of life in contemporary society. It also has a debilitating impact on economic, socio-cultural and moral aspects of the society. Corruption is therefore a cog in the wheel of progress and slows down the rate of development. The library which is part of the society is not exempt from corruption. Therefore, a study of corruption in public libraries is not only topical but very timely. This chapter therefore examines the phenomenon of corruption in public libraries. Examples shall be drawn mainly from the united states of America where data exists, although mention will be made about the situation in Nigeria

Definition of Corruption

It is germane at this junction to define corruption. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (1980: 411) defines corruption as "decay, rottenness, depravity, wickedness, pervasion, or deterioration of moral principles, loss of purity or integrity, bribery, a thing of influence that corrupts". Lesley (1980:518) defines corruption as 'pervasion of a person's integrity in the performance of especially official or public duty or work".

According to Wilkins (1970:111):

> Corruption is behaviour which is different from or conflicts with the standards which are accepted as normal within a group of social system.

Nye (1967:417 - 27) Opines that

> Corruption is behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains; or violates rules against the exercising of certain private regarding influence.

Although each of the above definitions attempts to capture to some extent; the meaning of corruption, none suits the purpose of this chapter. Therefore, in this chapter, we shall adopt the definition of corruption as used in the encyclopedia Americana (1980: 22). Thus, corruption is the misuse of public position of trust for private gain.

Forms of Corruption

There are some corrupt practices which are seen to be global in perspective, even though not all of them may be observed in all nations. Sometimes, the degree of intensity with which some of these practices are felt may vary from one place to another.

Lame and Odekunle (2000:33) listed the following manifestations of corrupt practices:

(a) Money laundering
(b) Gratification
(c) Abuse of office
(d) Nepotism
(e) Advance-fee-fraud
(f) Embezzlement.

We shall describe briefly each of these forms.

Embezzlement: This is a fraudulent appropriation of entrusted property. In this case, it is not only seen as a crime of financial misconduct, it could also be seen as property crime or a kind of theft where some property of an establishment are fraudulently appropriated. Cressey (1953 :20) defined embezzlement as "criminal violation of financial trust". He went further to explain that the culprit must have accepted position of trust in good faith and must have violated that trust by committing a crime".

Abuse of office: This is wrongly taking advantage of ones position of office for private gain. In Nigeria, some fraudulent executives will not sign any document for you or discharge any job within their normal schedule unless money changes hands. Sometimes, Secretaries are mounted outside to collect money before the "big boss" is seen. This scenario has also found its way in some libraries. Some chief executives can also go as far as using their office to punish an employee unjustly by denying him or her promotion or inflicting an undue punitive measure on the employee.

Gratification: This is usually something given to gain favour, a reward, recompense and in most cases a bribe. This, sometimes, could transcend monetary or material favour to physical favours (e.g. sexual relation) as a condition or reward for performing official duty. This also involves the all too familiar "10 percent" "kick-back on contracts, commission on contracts executed and other official deals, bribery of all kinds. Gratification involves receiving or giving these favours in order to influence official decisions.

Nepotism: This is the showing of special favour to a relation in conferring privileges or position. It is actually the unfair preference of relatives, tribesmen, ethnic, class, family and similar biological or primordial relationships. This is favouritism and abuse based on primordial considerations. It is one of the biggest problems facing Nigeria as a whole. Since the library is part of the society, this is the bane of most libraries. This affects both the selection of candidates for interviews, the result of the interviews and indeed, the whole gamut of work ethics. Librarians are assessed for promotion with this in mind and therefore, undue advantage is generally given to incompetent staff. This encourages mediocrity and gross indisciplin in the libraries.

Advance fee fraud (419): Sanusi (2000: 92) defines it as general phrase for all fraudulent activities. The name came abou from the Nigeria criminal code chapter 42, laws of the federation of Nigeria section 419, where criminal offences were codified. This often times, involves a kind of library racket and it is most prevalen in the public libraries managed by a board of directors. A huge sum of money could be stipulated for a particular project e.g. purchase of library equipment or otherwise and the money is shared among the members of the board. This hardly happens in the University system where there is usually a unitary budgetary system. This is because, a crime like this could be spotted by the bursary department or any other department involved in the payment of the quoted items.

Of all the forms of corruption mentioned , this chapter will focus mainly on embezzlement of funds in the public libraries.

Corruption In Public Libraries

As earlier stated, this paper deals mainly with embezzlement, a form of corruption in the public libraries. Indeed, it has become one of the most growing areas of concern in the public libraries. Overseas where a strict record of financial conduct is kept, library managers, directors and some libraries have been indicted in this regard.

A few examples shall be drawn from some public libraries in America where cases of embezzlement have been reported. For example, June Shankin, Director of the public library in Adulubon, New Jersey, was sentenced in April 3, 1992, for guilty plea to charges of stealing $20,000 from the library. The 71 year old lady was given five years in jail and a fine of $100,000. (American Libraries 1992:433-34). Similarly, Daniel C. Macken III, public library administrator was arrested and charged with embezzling $20,000 in library funds. Although Macken initially denied the theft, he later gave full written and oral statements to the police admitting his involvement in the theft (American Libraries 1990: 1014 -15). Apart from these stated cases, a run down of the situation in America has been properly documented in Table I.

Table I: Analysis of National Survey Information on Embezzlement

State	Number of Incident	Embezzlement position	Means of embezzlement	Amount stolen	Means of Discovery
Arkansas	3	Library directors	Inflating salary cheques, redirecting library funds, failing to deposit cash from fines	1.$90,000 2. NA 3. NA	NA NA NA
Florida	1	Account clerk II	Failing to deposit cash from fines	$56,000	Regular Audit
Illinois	1	Library director	Using library funds to pay for personal expenditures	$160,000	Staff members noticed irregularities in payment procedure
Indiana	5*	. . .	. . . .	. . .	. . .
Lava	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Many kind	1	Library director	Failing to deposit cash from fines	$69,000	Regular audit
Michigan	1	Library administrative secretary	Failing to deposit cash from fine	$400,000	Regular audit
Montana	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
New Jersey	2	Library directors	1. Using library funds to pay for personal expenditures 2. directing library funds into personal accounts	1.$45,000 2.$86,000	New board member. Suspicious home made expense vouchers. Secretary noticed altered cheques
Texas	2	Library directors	1. Misusing foundation funds (exact-nature unknown) 2. NA	NA NA	NA NA

Note : Na means not available

Source: Snyder, H. and J. Hersberger (1997:5)

* - possibly higher because of more in depth investigation.

In Nigeria, such documentations are very rare and difficult to come by because of the sensitive nature of the case and the fact that Nigerians may not be honest enough to own up to such a crime. There are times in the past that an inquest was made in a few public libraries in Nigeria ,and because the claims of theft could not be substantiated the cases died a natural death.

Theft and embezzlement of funds are more prevalent in public libraries. This is because, the Directors of the public library work with a board of trustee and most times members of the board are not directly involved in the day to day running of the library. Therefore, the Directors often have a lee way to approve and account for cash. A fraudulent Director often misuses this position of trust. In the academic libraries especially, in the Universities, with one line budgetary system which involves that the chief executive of the University must approve every expenditure via the bursary department, such cases of embezzlement are very few. This is because of the number of people and departments involved in the payment of materials. This ensures internal control of cash flow.

Embezzlement permeates all facets of the library and is prevalent in sections dealing with money. In the public libraries, the circulation desk always poses a veritable area of fraud; fines could be collected without any proper accounting system. In America, a routine audit in Jacksonville public library revealed theft. The accounts clerk was arrested for failure to deposit funds collected from over due books and cost materials, (American libraries, 1993:806 - 808).

Conclusion and Recommendations

So far in this chapter, we have discussed the phenomenon of corruption in Public Libraries with particular emphasis on the United States of America. We noted that embezzlement is the main form of corruption in Public Libraries. For embezzlement of funds to be curbed in the public libraries, the writer recommends as follows:

(a) **Separation of duties:** Separation of duties reduces the risk of financial misconduct. When the functions of book selection payment authorization, book record keeping and taking custody of assets are separated, it becomes difficult for one person to falsify records and embezzle funds.

(b) **Proper documentation of records:** If records are properly documented and an occasional 'on-the-spot' check of such records are done, it becomes very difficult for funds to be misappropriated.

(c) **Proper authorization of expenditure:** The board of trustee involved in the management of public libraries should be keenly interested in what happens in the libraries. Library vote must be properly accounted for and before authorization is made for payment of books and library equipment, the voucher must be properly scrutinized. Therefore, board members should exercise adequate control over library financial matters.

(d) **Job rotation:** This is a very important way of checking fraud in the libraries. When staff are moved around and a new person comes to perform a job previously done by somebody else, the likelihood of fraud being detected is high. When employees are aware that they could be rotated it discourages them from getting involved in crime.

(e) **Inspection of records by external auditors:** Because the public libraries are usually under state government, the state can constitute a panel of auditors from time to time to check the activities of the public libraries. If this is occasionally done, it acts as a deterent to fraud and embezzlement of funds since the employees do not have any pre-knowledge of when such an audit panel will visit their library.

(f) **Furthermore, all the money yielding sections of the library:** The circulation desk, the photocopying unit, the acquisitions section, the binding unit (if any), etc. should be manned by the most trustworthy members of staff, and these staff members must ensure that record is kept and all monies collected are properly accounted for. If all these are done, embezzlement of funds in the public libraries will be greatly reduced.

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