AN ANALYSIS OF POLICE PENSION FRAUD AND THE FUTURE OF PENSION ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Eme, Okechukwu Innocent
Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Uche, Okala A.
Uche, Ijeoma B.
Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract
Corruption in Nigeria has festered and irredeemably so due in part to the virtual non-existence of institutional mechanisms for ensuring that the machinery of governance and public administration are not unduly distorted or diverted to the satisfaction of egotistical and parochial interests. Nigeria’s public service is saddled with a bureaucratic arrangement that is notoriously over-bloated, yet it is always easy for particular officials or civil servants to hijack the paraphernalia of public service and deploy same in the service of amoral designs. The just concluded probe by the Nigerian Senate on the mismanagement of the police pension funds is one incident out of numerous cases which exemplifies this odious phenomenon. The leadership newspaper captures it as follows: “At last count the amount said to have been stolen amounts to about N156 billion. Perhaps most disturbing was the brazen falsification of documents to withdraw the pension funds that will not get to the beneficiaries.” Illustratively, there was a situation where the Senate probe committee heard how officials of the Police Pension Board falsified documents to withdraw N24 billion from the budget office for the payment of pension that required only N3.5 billion. One does not require any further elaboration to prove that Nigeria, as a social entity, has lost its soul. For when a society degenerates to the level where public officials cultivate sadistic delight in stealing death benefits of retirees, such officials will also harbour no reservations about stealing the buried coffins of dead bodies. This paper examines the police pension scam that was investigated by the Nigerian Senate. It explores the background information to the scam, the investigations and findings. The paper concludes by positing that the scam is a blatant indication of the porosity of the county’s institutions and the weakness of its statutory processes for the public officers indicted in the pension probe to have found the latitude to flirt with such stupendous sums of money without any institutional inhibition. Even with the hullabaloo being made by Sanusi’s CBN about the all-important requirement of lodgement disclosures in the new banking reform, it is curious that debauched public officers could launder and divert public funds into private accounts without being dictated and halted.

Keywords: Pension Fraud, Corruption, Retirements, Investigation, Anti-corruption Agencies and Pension Reform.
Introduction

His death before 2011 Christmas was not an unusual one. It was not so different from the unending plight of thousands of his fellow pensioners across the country. Festus Chigahia retired from the Nigerian army as a Warrant Officer. He was one of the pensioners who collapsed at the military pension’s office, Port Harcourt few years ago. He, along with scores of others, had queued up in the scorching sun for hours that blustery day. Chigahia’s health took a blow during the Liberian civil war where he was part of the Nigerian Military contingent that helped to rescue the country during that troubled period. He was forced to retire in 2001. But since then, he depended on his pensions which had not been regular. His children have, most times been out of school. His death has added insult to injury. The family members are now heart-broken.

In November 2011, Chigahia’s plight was an agonizing reference point during the meeting of the Nigerian Military Pensioners Welfare Association, in Port Harcourt. At that meeting, the leader of the association, Maj. Danjuma Kibo (retd) lamented the plight of the pensioners, accusing the Federal Government of taking the pensioners for a “ride”. He issued a threat that the pensioners may be forced to blow up oil pipelines. He said, “our children are out of school, and families have been broken because of lack of money. We cannot wait forever as we shall soon strike and wait for the consequences” (Onwukwe, 2012:27). There are unconfirmed reports that some of the aggrieved military pensioners in the South- South have joined militant groups in the zone. This is only one part of the larger issues emanating from the latest frauds at the Pension office.

In the last few months, the stream of shocking revelations, detailing the monumental frauds in the scheme makes it easy to believe that Nigeria is a nation like no other, a-country of blood money – where some people profit ruthlessly at the cost of suffering of others. If not, how else can one explain the eye-popping testimonies from the National Assembly joint committee probing the pension scheme? It is all about the sordid, revolving doors of corruption and how some individuals entrusted with the management of retirees’ fund have helped themselves at the detriment of those who worked tirelessly for the country but can’t enjoy the labour of their work, because of fraud.

Immediate past Head of Service (HOS) Mr. Steven Oransaye during his testimony before the joint senate Committee on Establishment and public service investigating the scam, confirmed how huge and heinous the fraud was. He said that top government officials were known to have falsified documents in order to siphon money from the Pension Fund. He also disclosed that during his tenure, it was discovered that the fraud was perpetrated right from the office of the Account-General of the Federation. But why did he keep quiet until now? A recent nationwide biometric verification of pensioners by the Presidential Task Force detected over 258,000 fake pensioners on the list while a total of 141,764 were genuine pensioners. The Federal Government says spends N5 billion monthly as pension. But a monthly expenditure to pensioners ought not to be more than N1 billion (Onwukwe, 2012:27).

The joy of every worker, whether in the public or private sector, is to have something to fall back on after retirement. Sadly, this dream has been denied many retirees as a result of the mismanagement and outright embezzlement of the pension fund by those entrusted to manage the scheme. Tracking the fraud, as the Presidential Task Team claims it has done, will be meaningful if those found to have looted the fund are severely punished. Long imprisonment would not be a bad starting point for such people.

Three years ago, it was discovered that over N24 billion was embezzled by a syndicate. That was money set aside for the construction of boreholes nationwide, between 2004 and 2006. Despite the huge amount appropriated as Pension Fund, few individuals had, for years, helped themselves with the fund at the detriment of those it was meant for. Considering the huge amount involved in the latest racket, which might be a tip of the iceberg, a judicial panel is necessary with a
view to putting on trial those behind the sleaze. Those involved should be treated as economic saboteurs and tried accordingly by the EFCC.

The startling revelations should act as a rude awakening to clean up the Pension Commission and individuals implicated in the looting of the scheme. While the Presidential task team has revealed so much, the twist in the tail is that the Maina-led team is also swimming in its own controversy. It’s like the case of the hunter now been hunted. According to reports the team has been accused looting N130m of the pension fund it is assigned to clean up. It is alleged that Maina transferred N210m of police pension fund into three different bank accounts. The accounts were said to have been opened with the authority of the Accountant General of the Federation. Part of the N130m was allegedly spent on official trips made by the members outside the country. The report also questioned the cost of N240m spent on biometric exercise. It makes sense therefore to disband the presidential task force under Maina, as well as the top hierarchy of the Pension commission, to allow a thorough probe. Surprisingly, when asked by the senate what he makes of the high amount allegedly spent on the biometric exercise, Maina demurred, saying he saw nothing wrong with the expenditure.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has seized six properties belonging to a former Director of the Pension Administration Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Sani Teidi Shuaibu, who is standing trial over a N4.56 billion Pension fraud. The properties which were taken over by the Asset Forfeiture Unit of the EFCC during an operation recently included two buildings and four filling stations. The interim forfeiture is sequel to an order of Justice Adamu Bello of the Federal High Court, sitting in Abuja made on 11 July 2011. The Court granted the order “restraining all persons including persons hereinafter referred to as RECEIVERS in the Schedules hereto attached, by themselves directly or through another, (whether natural or otherwise )including , but not limited to all parties listed in all the schedules hereto attached, whether or not named in Charge No FHC/ABJ/CR28/2011, that is to say and such other persons yet to be identified, from removing, Alienating, Disposing of, Dealing with or Diminishing the value of, assets or properties being suspected proceeds of crimes or otherwise, held or owned by or in the names of persons suspected of the alleged Financial Crimes in Charge no: FHC/ABJ/CR/28/2011.

According this document:
That the Executive Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, is hereby permitted to seize and retain custody of all such properties or assets of persons listed in the schedules attached to this Motion, which assets are suspected proceeds of crime or the value thereof until the final determination of Charge no: FHC/ABJ/CR/28/2011

(Akogun, 2012:8).

The court also granted an order permitting the Executive Chairman of the EFCC to seize and retain custody of all the properties or assets of persons (as listed in the attached schedules) though not yet charged but found to be connected with the transaction or allegation contained in charge No: FHC/ABJ/CR/28/2011. Some of the properties belonging to Mr Shuaibu which the court asked the EFCC to seize included:
(a) No 24, Ahmadu Musa Crescent, Jabi, Abuja;
(b) Brefina Hotel at plot 1106, (Beside MTN) warehouse, adjacent to vines Hotel, Durumi, Abuja;
(c) A house at No 1, Shuaibu Close, opposite Governor’s House, Idah;
(d) Riba-il petroleum Ltd;
(e) M.R.S Ajaka (registered as Riba-Ile oil Ltd; (f) M.R.S Idah station, Idah, registered with Hammo oil, Nigeria;
(g) NNPC Mega station, Idah junction, Ayingba, registered with Hammo oil, Nig. Ltd.
(h) MRS Filling Station at Ganaja, Lokoja; (i) Registered with A.Y Ted oil Ltd; (j) A mansion at Idah, opposite Federal Polytechnic, Idah; (k) SunTrust Properties company Ltd; (l) Plot B59, Dawaki Extension layout, Bwari Area council, Abuja; (m) An Estate of about 10 bungalows, lying and being at Dantata Street, Nyanyan, FCT, Abuja (Akintola, 2012:1).

The properties which were taken over by the Asset Forfeiture Unit of the EFCC during an operation at the weekend included two buildings and four filling stations.

One of the buildings located at 1 Shuaibu Close, G.R.A. Idah, Kogi state is an imposing 8 bedroom twin duplex, a 5 units 2 bedrooms apartment, two-room security house and a mosque all scattered in the expansive compound. The property at the Polytechnic Road, directly opposite Federal Polytechnic, Okenya, Idah, Kogi state is an unpainted one story duplex with multiple sitting rooms and apartment built within. The third property that was seized was a non-functional filling station, located 100 meters away from Ajaka police station. It has a small office building with four rusted and non-functional fuel pumps and a leister generator in a small generator house.

At Agbeji in Ayingba, Kogi state, a thriving MRS filling station located at Agbeji along Ayingba Road, a few meters from Confluence Fertilizer Company limited was also seized from Mr Shuaibu. An NNPC Mega station along Lokoja-Enugu Highway, Ayingba and a Texaco filling station with a shopping mall along Ganaja Road, opposite Ibra Petroleum and Petrochemical Limited, Lokoja, Kogi state were among the properties seized from the former director.

Mr Shuaibu, Phina Ukamaka Chidi and 30 other suspects are facing trial on a 134 count of diversion of pension funds, abuse of office, using ghost pensioners to pay N2million and N3million into their accounts monthly and diversion of the same amount through award of fictitious contracts to companies which they manage. Ukamaka Chidi is a former Deputy Director (Finance and Accounts), in the pension office while Aliyu Bello was a Personal Assistant to Mr Shuaibu.


Count one of the 134 count reads “that you Dr. Shaiubu Sani Teidi, Phina Ukamaka Chidi Computer Plaza, Essential gadget Ventures, Mobis Point Investment Ltd, Obista Enterprises, Shallow Well Ventures at various times, between 2008 and 2010 within the jurisdiction of this honourable court, conspired among yourself to induce the pension department, office of the head of service of the federation of Nigeria, to deliver to you, various sums in the aggregate N176, 910, 650 (One Hundred and Seventy Six Million, Nine Hundred and Ten Thousand , Six Hundred and Fifty Naira) property vide the medium of a contract induced by false pretences, thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 8(a) of the Advance Fraud and other Fraud Related Offences Act, 2006 and punishable under Section 1 (3) of the Advance Fee Fraud and other Fraud Related Offences Act, 2006”.

Put differently, the country has been embarrassingly a-washed with the on-going revelations of the multi-billion Naira pension fund scandals pervading many strata of the Nigerian society. From the Pensions Unit of the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation to Pension Commission (PENCOM) and Nigeria Police Pensions Funds, the story has been the same, throwing many aged people into untold hardship in the evening of their lives.
Pensions

Pension has been defined as a periodic income or annuity payment made at or after retirement to employee who has become eligible for benefits through age, earnings and service. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defined pension as a sum of money paid regularly by a Government to people above a certain age and to widowed (Widow) or disabled people or by former employer or financial institution to retired people Micro Word Encarta Dictionary has two definitions of pension: “Retirement pay: a fixed amount of money paid regularly to somebody during retirement by the government, a former employer or insurance company. Regular sum of money paid regularly as compensation for an injury sustained on a job, or as a reward for service. For example, to an ex-worker. (Amujiri, 2009:139-140)”.

According to Ozor (2006), pension consists of lump sum payment paid to an employee upon his disengagement from active service. According to him payment are usually in monthly installments. He further stated that pension plans may be contributory or non contributory; fixed or variable benefits; group or individual; insured or trustee; private or public, and single or multi-employer. In many advanced countries of the world, income from pension to an individual may be supplemented by social security benefits, which apply to all citizens of a citizen in such country whether or not they belong to the working class. However, since most citizens in such countries might have at one time or another, been workers, it would appear that social security benefits are co-terminus with the working class. It is different from gratuity. According to Ugwu (2006), there are four main classifications of pensions in Nigeria. These are:

Retiring Pension: This type of pension is usually granted to a worker who is permitted to retire after completing a fixed period of qualifying service usually practiced in Nigeria between 30-35 years. Compensatory pension: This type of pension is granted to a worker whose permanent post is abolished and government is unable to provide him with suitable alternative employment. Super-annuating Pension: This type is given to worker who retires at the prescribed age limit of 60-65 respectively. Compassionate Allowance: This occur when pension is not admissible or allowed on account of a public servants removal from services for misconduct, insolvency or incompetence or inefficiency (Amujiri, 2009:140).

Gratuity is a once and for all lump of money paid to on employee on retirement, upon death or retirement or on total incapacitation while at work. According to Nwajiagu (2007), in some cases, workers are only entitled to gratuity upon withdrawal of service, in others; they may be entitled to both gratuity and pension. But in all cases, a worker who qualified to receive pension is usually also entitled to the payment of gratuity. Even if he is indebted to the organization at the time of retirement, he is still qualified unless he was specifically dismissed without benefits based on misconduct.

Pension and gratuity plan for public servants in Nigeria states that public officer on completion of 35 years of unbroken service or 60/65 years of age for public servants and professors respectively which ever comes first, shall receive the maximum pension and gratuity for their respective grades and ranks. The calculation of these terminal benefits is guided at any point in time by a legal framework or law.
Background to Police Pension Fraud: The Crime, the Public Hearing and the EFCC Prosecution

It all started with series of complaints reaching the Senate Committees on Public petitions, States and Local Government Administration as well as Establishment and Public Service from members of the Nigerian Union of Pensioners (NUP) and other members of the civil society. Such petitioners had been touched by the perennial mismanagement of pension funds, leading to the death of a number of elderly citizens, either on queues to collect their tokens or in transit. The trend had remained with Nigeria for a long while and government, over the years, has been shifting from one perceived panacea to the other.

With the introduction of the contributory pension scheme and the pension reforms of 2004, everyone hailed the end to the travails of the pensioners as it was believed that the introduction of Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) would mark the end of endless queues at pension verification centres and the ugly incidences that are recorded there. The government was shocked in 2010 that notwithstanding the introduction of the new pension scheme, Nigerian pensioners still go home hungry, while many still die without touching their dues. Thus, the administration of Mr Steve Oronsanye as Head of Service of the Federation got the presidential approval to set up a team called the Pension Reform Task Team (PRTT). The team, headed by Alhaji AbdulRasheed Maina, was mandated to clear all backlog of issues relating to the administration of pensions, sanitise the system and clean it of bogus and fictitious names which officials have been using to milk the government of huge sums.

At the start of work by Maina’s team, it was smooth and the government was hopeful it had taken the right step, what with the discovery of the huge fraud running to over N4.5 billion allegedly committed by some top officials of the pension offices and the commencement of their trial by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The reports coming from Maina’s team also appeared heartwarming with revelations that the Team had saved about N151 billion of pension money from going into wrong hands. Maina himself disclosed this during visits to the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC). Even at that, the government was uncomfortable, following reports that some criminal acts appear to be ongoing in the various pension departments.

The Senate took up the matter, late last year, when it mandated its Joint Establishment and Public Service and State and Local Government Administration Committee to undertake a probe into the N2 trillion pension fund. The frustration of the government and the Senate is that while the Federal Government commits N1.5 billion to pension payment every month, several pensioners still go without earning their dues (Akintola, 2012:4).

The Committee had gone round the geo-political zones and settled down for the last leg of its assignment in Abuja when the music changed. While none of the reports from the zone indicated that the PRTT was involved in any form of shady acts, the Senate and indeed the nation was shocked to see allegations flying against the chairman of the PRTT right in Abuja. An Assistant Chief Accountant in the Police Pension Office, Mr Toyin Ishola, who testified before the Senator Aloysius Etok-led committee said, early March, that Maina was guilty of mismanaging over N21 billion of the Pension funds.

According to Ishola, Maina allegedly distorted the existing Police Pension Account by transferring the sum of N21 billion into three different accounts domiciled in Fidelity Bank, (N8 billion), UBA, (N3 billion) and First Bank, (N10 billion). Unfortunately for Maina, he was nowhere to be found on that day. The committee was forced to issue a bench warrant for his arrest by the Inspector General of Police. The warrant, with reference number NASS/S/JCPI/WRT/IGP/W/01/04, which was dated March 8, 2012 was immediately issued,
pursuant to Section 89 of the 1999 Constitution. It was signed by the joint chairmen of the probe committee, Senators Senator Aloysius Etok and Senator Kabiru Gaya (Ayoride, and Utomen, 2012:41).

In his chilling testimony, Ishola further indicted Maina of using his brother to siphon funds of the pension scheme and earning interests running into millions monthly. He said: “The task team, within three months period, unilaterally opened three accounts in different banks without recourse to extant financial rules and approval from the Accountant General of the Federation and the Honourable Minister of Finance. According to Ishola:

The account in Fidelity Bank, Central Business District Branch was domiciled in the account of the younger brother of the Chairman Pension Reform Task Team, named Danjuma Zubairu and the said amount was fixed since then with a monthly interest of over N100million into the coffers of the perpetrators of the act. “N3billion was deposited in UBA up till date with no proper documentation has been effected (Soniyi, 2012:8).

It was like the case of the hunter becoming the haunted. Maina, who had on his own strolled into the offices of Nigeria’s anti-graft agencies to declare the exploits of his team, now stands accused before the very eyes of the agencies and the Nigerian public. The man promptly appeared before the Senate Committee on March 9 to declare his innocence of the charges. In a 50-page written submission and other documents already submitted to the joint committee probing the pension fund, Maina’s PRTT absolved itself of fraud in the management of the pension funds. Rather, the Team said it has saved the government the sum of N151 billion and another £6 million between 2010 and 2011.

The documents indicated that out of the savings, the sum of N74 billion has been appropriated as part of the N4.877 trillion in the 2012 budget. Minister of Finance, Dr (Mrs) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, in her testimony before the committee also confirmed that the government was in receipt of that sum. Details in the documents already before the Senate committee also indicated that the bank accounts in respect of the deposited funds in Fidelity Bank and United Bank for Africa (UBA) were opened with authorisation from the office of the Accountant General of the Federation. A letter to that effect, dated August 9, 2011 with reference number AGF/TRY/RB/508/VOL I/20, further confirmed the authorisation (Onwukwe, 2012:42).

Another document also confirmed that Maina did not open any account in the name of his brother, contrary to Ishola’s submission before the Senate committee. The document showed that while Maina is from Biu, in Borno State, Danjuma Zubairu, said to be his brother, hails from Kabba in Kogi State. The said Zubairu is said to be the Group Head, Private Banking, Abuja region of Fidelity Bank.

The PRTT noted that it discovered that there were illegal ’withdrawals by staff of the Police Pension Office, using multiple cheques in fictitious names in excess of 30 cheques per day to withdraw cash from their bankers and that it had moved to stop the fraud. Such illegal withdrawals amounted to N14 billion. The PRTT, assisted by the law enforcement agencies, have made substantial recovery of the said stolen monies. A staff of the Police Pension Office (names withheld) turned in N1billion cash. Another surrendered three luxury estates with about 27 blocks of deluxe flats he built in Abuja, one of the documents stated Maina’s submissions were helped by further developments that took place shortly after he appeared before the Senate (Abubakar, 2012:2).

The five days public hearing held by the Senate joint Committee on Establishment, State and Local Government probing pension administration in country under chairmanship of Senator Aloysius Etok in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, did not only expose the rot in the administration of the defunct deferred Pension scheme, otherwise known as Pay-As-You-Go, it also opened a can of worms.
Before the Abuja hearing, the committee visited Lagos, Enugu, Uyo, Makurdi and Kaduna, and received several presentations from stakeholders including state governments. It will be recalled that the joint committee was set up to among others, probe the pension administration in the country and find lasting solutions to the problem of inefficient and corrupt pension administration in Nigeria. This came up in the wake of about N700billion fraud uncovered in the Pension unit of the Head of Service, HOS, of the Federation by Pension Reform Taskforce Team, headed by Alhaji Abularasheed Maina. The Senate had to move in when several petitions against the activities of the Task Force set up by the former Head of Service, HOS, Mr. Steve Oronsaye, kept flooding the National Assembly. The taskforce team was asked to clean up the roth the Federal civil service pension. The clean up mandate given to Maina was also extended to the Police Pension Board by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. The key players at the HoS pension Office and the Police Pension Office were invited to the committee’s sitting to make presentations and answer questions on pension administration and their level of involvement in the sharp practices. At the hearing, new twist was added to the rot as Alhaji Maina Task Force was accused of not only hindering smooth pension administration but indeed alleged that its members helped themselves with the funds meant for pensioners.

The Taskforce Team was accused of mismanagement N21billion of Police Pension and that Maina opened an account for his brother, Mr. Danjuma Zubairu. Deputy Commissioner of Police, DCP, Toyin Ishola, an Assistant Chief Accountant in the Police Pension office, accused Alhaji Maina of several fraudulent activities within the three months period he spent at the police pension fund. He said,

Within the three months that the taskforce team came to the police pension, a lot of fraudulent activities went on, the Chairman used N240 million to capture only 20 retirees with the biometric data. He also awarded contracts in the tune of N12 million for the machines and to cover for his frauds, the contract was divided into small units. The Chairman opened three accounts within three months. There was N8 billion in Fidelity Bank, N3 billion in UBA, and N10 billion First Bank, Maitama branch. The account in the Fidelity Bank was domiciled in the name of the younger brother of the chairman, Danjuma Zubairu. We went to him to change the signatory to the account four times; he refused and said unless the chairman approved the change of signatory first. The said amount was fixed since then with monthly interest of N100 million. He has expended over N3 billion within this period with no proper records at the police pension office (Soniyi, 2012:42).

But documents in Pension office and in Senate’s possession indicate that the bank accounts allegedly opened by the Task Force members were indeed opened in the name of Police Pension Office. One is with UBA, 101-5556-733. The Fidelity Bank account was equally opened in the name of Police Pension Office with DCP, Toyin Ishola, being signatory, among others. The allegations of fraud against Maina also include paying 10 British pensioners on monthly pension of £64 each N1.5 billion. N1.5 billion paid to 10 Britons. Permanent Secretary, Establishment, in the Office of the Head of Service of the Federation, Mr. Charles Bonat, told Senate panel that the money was for retired British officers who served during the colonial period. Senator Etok had demanded explanations on why N1.5 billion was transferred to a foreign account in the United Kingdom by the task force team. Etok asked, “I am sure £6 million must have accrued more than £3 million interest by now and only 10 of these people are alive and the record from the High Commissioner said these people are on monthly pension of £64 pounds, so why this big amount?” (Abubaka 2012:2)
The Committee also demanded for the whereabouts of N4.5 billion five percent federal government share of pension paid to states between 2010 and 2011, which the permanent secretary initially said had not been paid. He explained to the committee that N4.5 billion was being managed by the Taskforce Team, saying,

Five percent was done up to the first quarter of 2010 and then HOS suspended it when the Taskforce Team came in. I can confirm that funds are budgeted for all these annually. 2010 warrant indicates for local government pension and gratuities including state of N4.2 billion. 2011 is reimbursement to state in the sum of N250 million. To the best of my knowledge, for first quarter, N500 million was paid to local government pension board (Ujah & Shaibu, 2012:2).

The committee was told that the names of Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, Mr. Ibrahim Lamorde and former Inspector General of Police, Hafis Ringim, were used to collect travel claims of N4.8 million each, while the name of the Chairman, Abdurasheed Maina appeared in three places for travel claims on the same trip. Lamorde who appeared before the committee, denied collecting such claims saying he never travelled to the United States as claimed by the Taskforce Team. Lamorde said, “I never traveled out of Nigeria within this period. I do not know anything about this. I do not have account in First bank where the money is said to be paid into.”

Maina however told the committee that the money had been returned to the treasury when it was discovered that Lamorde did not travel.

Also, Maina’s was accused of using N240 million in biometric data verification exercise for capturing only 20 retired pensioners. He however denied the allegations insisting that the Taskforce team saved over N28 billion that would have otherwise gone to private pockets. On the allegation of opening an account for his brothers, he said that Danjuma Zubairu is from Kogi state and the Group Head, Private Banking Abuja Region of Fidelity Bank Plc. Alh. Maina is from Biu in Borno State. He told the Senate panel how staff of the pension office of HOS defrauded the Police Pension funds of N24 billion. He said that 32 civil servants in the HOS office falsified documents to withdraw N24 billion from the Budget office for the payment of pension that required only N3.5 billion.

The fraudulent activities also include discovery of how the 32 staff of the office including a director of pension siphoned over N18 billion by inserting names of primary school teachers in the pension pay rolls. He said the team also discovered that about N200 million to N300 million were being withdrawn from the accounts daily by the civil servants. He said,

So many primary school teachers were used as conduit pipes to siphon pension funds. For instance a primary school teacher in Kebbi was paid N3 million each month and he takes 10 per cent and refunds the rest to the pension staff. It was through this process that the total number of pensioners were inflated to 141,790, which cost the federal government N1.3 billion monthly (Ujah & Shaibu, 2012:2).

On the biometric verification, he noted that the Team reduced the over-bloated figures of genuine pensioners to 70,658, with a corresponding reduction of the monthly budget paid to them to N825 million. According him, the Nigeria Union of Pensioners, NUP collaborated with the civil servants to siphon part of the pension funds. He gave an instance where the taskforce found out how the bank account of the NUP, where the monthly check off dues of the association kept growing from N15 million to over N2 billion due to proceeds from the alleged fraud in the scheme.

He said this extra amount was later transferred to the bank accounts of the fraudulent 32 staffs at the office of the HOS. The committee expressed shock with the revelation, lamenting that the fraud in the system had denied retired pensioners their entitlements.
As the public hearing came to close Friday, Nigerians who have been inundated with many probes by the National Assembly in recent times are wondering if the pension probe will bring the much needed succour to pensioners in Nigeria or end up inconclusive just like others. The chairman of the Presidential Pension Reform Task Team (PPRTT), Abdulrashid Maina, caused a stir at the continued public hearing on pension scheme, when he told the Senate Joint Committee on Establishments, Public Service, States and Local Governments that he brought 44,320 pensioners who were retired in 1968 into the pension’s pay roll. He further surprised the committee when he could not say how many of the retirees could have been alive since 1968, though it was later clarified that only about eight of such pensioners were actually involved. Maina also informed the joint committee that government had spent N250 million between 2005 and 2010 for verification exercise in its 42 pension offices scattered round the country, adding that the task force found out that there were many ghost pensioners, with Kaduna harbouring the largest number in the country.

The PPRTT boss statement confirms BusinessDay’s stories that huge fraud was going in the pension system and that a group of highly placed persons were feeding fat on the scheme. This disclosure was also confirmed by Steve Oronsaye, former head of service of the federation, who told the joint committee that the scam was perpetuated in the office of the accountant-general of the federation. Oronsaye also told the committee that the fraudsters “disbanded but they are now back to the office” (Business Day Editorial, 2012:10).

On assumption of office, Maina had told the committee that there were 341,790 pensioners, pointing out that after the verification carried out by his team, it was discovered that there were 71,193 ghost pensioners in the country to whom N1.7 billion had been paid. He told the committee that officials of the pension office used primary school teachers to siphon pension funds, disclosing that during its operations, people of less than 30 years claimed pensions. He stated that there was a cabal behind the fraud in the management of pension fund. “Maina’s submission clearly shows that corruption has eaten deep into every section of the Nigerian society. The use of primary school teachers who are supposed to be role models in perpetrating this fraud means that even the future of our social and economic future is already blighted.

The existence of a cabal in the nation’s pension scheme also means that ours is a ‘cabalised’ society where the privileged few are feeding fat at the expense of the handicapped majority, a senior citizen familiar with the pension fund scam told BusinessDay. According to the PPRTT boss, the cabals included names of 32 persons who are standing trial and whose list he had submitted to the committee, adding that their properties had been seized and under investigation by the EFCC.

To stress how pervasive corruption and fraud in this scheme are, Maina listed those involved in double and triple payment of pensions as university lecturers and NITEL officials “who were not pensioners but were collecting pensions from the office of the Head of Service” (Business Day Editorial, 2012:10).

He submitted an IPAD containing information of pensioners captured by the task force, along with bags of documentation of pensioners who he claimed the task force had paid pensions. A source who is very well informed about the pension scheme and the “works” done by Maina and his team, stated that the so-called achievement of the committee reeled out by Maina was typical of him, as reported earlier by BusinessDay. Former Head of Service, Steve Oronsaye who set up the task force in 2010, told the committee that there was no time frame for its operations, explaining that “on daily basis, what I saw was disturbing; I was aware that the monthly allocation released and paid, in my view, was sufficient to pay pensioners. Before the setting up of the task force, I called a meeting where members of the National Union of Pensioners were present. It was wrong for me, by my training, to give a time frame because it is only when you know what you are dealing with that you
can give time frame. The main function of the task force was to capture, verify and carry out on the spot payment.

He explained that the task force was set up because before then, there were representatives mainly of administration officers, adding that there was collusion between pension officers, files were cloned and there were still cases of complaints that many pensioners were not captured. The EFCC told Daily Trust recently that investigations into the pension fraud were on and that some government officials may soon be charged to court.

Among officials being investigated are Federal permanent secretary Abubakar Kigo; Esias Dangabar; a former director of the Police Pension Office (PPO), deputy commissioner of Police Okafor; Ahmed Wada, a former deputy director of the PPO now a director in the Federal Ministry of Sports; and Abdullahi Umar, now deputy director in the Ministry of Works are currently under investigation over the pension fraud. Others are accountant John Yusuf and cashier Vicky, both of the pension office. The eight suspects were recently arrested and interrogated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in Abuja, and were granted administrative bails pending prosecution. According to investigations by *The Nation*, the police pension office had in their various bank accounts within June and September 2011 squandered N24billion on top government functionaries, officials of anti-graft agencies and workers at the office, under the guise of biometric restructuring in police force. More worrisome is an attempt by the chief protagonist of biometric fraud, Abdulrasheed Menai, Head Task Force Team on Police Customs, Immigration and Prisons Pension Office (CIPPO), and Assistant director at the Office of Head of Service, who is fighting very hard to return to the office, in anticipation of further reimbursement from the Federal Government of Nigeria.

In an investigation conducted by *The Nation* revealed that the former director was mandated to restructure the Police Pension Office, which according to the Head of Service was over crowded and not effective in payment of pension to beneficiaries. Maina on assumption of office met over N24billion in the officially pension account but left in the pension coffers about N1million while leaving office, four months after overseeing the activities at the office saddled with the responsibility of paying the pensions and gratuities of retired police officers. Abdulahi on free spending mood has invited everybody to join him in causing permanent pains in ex police officer life.

Workers at the Police Pensions Office, who were beneficiaries of Maina's sense of magnanimous wastefulness however wondered, why the director would embark on a single payment of pension and gratuity for retired police officers and next of kin to dead officers. The workers felt that the former director would have paid the backlog of pensions and gratuities that were due to retired police officers and next of kin to dead officers, with the N24 billion that he met in the coffers of the office. The director was said to be owing contractors who supplied various equipment for the biometric exercise to the tune of N13million.

According to *The Nation* investigation, the former director had immediately on resumption of office embarked on a spending spree, doling money out to government functionaries and their aides, under the guise of using them as supervisors for Biometric Data Capturing as ordered by the Head of Service of the Federation, then Professor Afolabi. Findings by The Nation showed that IGP Ringim was one of the beneficiaries of the fraud that is currently threatening the lives of retired police officers and dependants of dead policemen and women, who laid their lives for the country. In one of the lodgments into the IGP’s account; First Bank account no 438010064503, the sum of N2, 386,000 (two million three hundred and eighty six thousand naira) was paid as his allowances for the supervision of Biometric Data Capture for retirees of the Nigeria Police Force in the United Kingdom.
A breakdown of the cash from the Police Pensions Office shows that N800,000 (eight hundred thousand naira) was paid as fare for his air ticket, N50,000 (fifty thousand naira) as taxi fare and N1,596,000 (one million, five hundred and ninety six thousand naira) as estacode. There are also reports among many workers of the Police Pension Office that the director also gave cash, running into about N40million (forty million naira) to the police boss without the necessary documentations to back the payment. The force Public Relations Officer Mr. Olusola Amore, a deputy commissioner of police, while speaking with The Premier on the incident, maintained that his boss did not have any account with First Bank, had never signed any First Bank cheque and had nothing to do with the Police Pension Office.

The police image-maker also insisted that the Inspector General of Police had not at any time traveled to the United Kingdom or any other country on the bill of Police Pension Office. However, documented facts reaching The Premier detailing officers constituted by the Pension Task Force Team and assigned to London for the biometric data capturing of all retirees residing in the UK negate that stance, revealing that the IGP was among the 14-man team, with an expense sheet of N23,046,680.00 (twenty-three million, forty-six thousand naira) for air tickets, estacodes and other related expenses, even though the IGP never made the trip. Other details of free spending by the Task Force show that the sum of N36,061,680.00 (thirty-six million, sixty-one thousand, six hundred and eighty-six naira) paid to a team of 15 to New York for the same purpose; N43,333,200.00 (forty-three million, three hundred and thirty-three thousand, two hundred naira) for a team to Atlanta in the US; N18,434,920.00 (eighteen million, four hundred and thirty-four thousand, nine hundred and twenty naira) for a team to Johannesburg in South Africa; N9,152,800.00 (nine million, one hundred and fifty-two thousand, eight hundred naira) for a team of 7 to neighbouring Ghana with supplementary estacodes to the tune of N10,208,801.00 (ten million, two hundred and eight thousand, eight hundred and one naira) for 11 others.

The Nation is in possession of a request letter from one Mr. Polycarp an official of the watchdog; to the Pension Reform Task Team asking for the account of the Pension Reform Task Team to be sent to him in order for him to refund the sum of N2,638,000 (two million, six hundred and thirty-eight thousand naira) accredited to him as one of the nominees for the trip to Atlanta, since according to him, his office did not approve of the trip with reason being that his name did not come with the first list of officers requested by the reform team. Another N4,854,000 (four million, eight hundred and fifty-four thousand naira) was also refunded by the same person purportedly paid into his account by the reform team inadvertently.

It is not exactly clear how the reform team could mistakenly have paid such a huge amount of money into lbe’s account but it’s been alleged that the money was the share of the recently sacked EFCC Chairman, Faridah Waziri but due to a relationship strain between the two, lbe promptly made the move to refund the monies to exonerate himself from any trap that might have been in the offering. While the Maina –led Reform Task Force had spent the N24billion within five months to conduct biometric exercises, fraudulent erstwhile beneficiaries of the fund have issued series of death threats to the reform chairman. While many problems associated with the administration of pension have been discovered to be human-related and traceable to staff members of the pension desk among others, it is considered in many circles as corrupt for the reform team to claim to have judiciously expended N24 billion within five months to carry out the biometric exercise that could have cost a whole lot less, with many things on the expense sheets spurious or duplicated and questionable reimbursements of huge amounts made.

Maina, who perhaps in full knowledge of what would have followed if he attempted in any manner to rake in the gravy alone, had to involve the EFCC, whose members who participated in the exercise became instant millionaires as well as the Inspector General of Police. From all indications,
the pension reform task team dipped hands into the police pension funds, mismanaging hundreds of millions and illegally moving billions between banks, according to a forensic audit report prepared by KPMG. Daily Trust obtained a copy of the report, which showed that the Pension Reform Task Team, headed by Abdulrasheed Maina, used names of top government functionaries to siphon about N140 million under the guise of travel expenses to take biometric data of police pensioners outside the country. Names of some top government officials were used in payment vouchers and then replaced with other names in the e-payment schedules to loot public funds, the report said. Maina's team yesterday denied operating any bank account illegally, and recently the team told Daily Trust that documents purportedly proving that Maina engaged in fraud were cloned and forged.

But original payment schedules and e-payment vouchers were shown to Daily Trust in Abuja at the weekend by government officials, indicating irregularities in payments of hundreds of millions approved by Maina. The audit report also detailed sleaze by the pension task team, including use of names of high-profile officials to withdraw monies that never got to such officials. Among senior officials named in the payment schedules but who apparently did not receive any money are former Inspector General of Police Hafiz Ringim, EFCC chairman Ibrahim Lamorde, former Head of Service Professor Oladapo Afolabi, Director General of the Budget Office Mr. Bright Okogwu and Auditor General of the Federation Mr. Samuel Ukura.

The report also said there were multiple payments to police pension office staff in place of earlier listed senior government officials with same bank account numbers. A deputy director at the PPO, Abdullahi Umar, received three estacodes amounting to N6.9 million for the same trip. Umar received N2 million as estacode for spending a day in New York to monitor the biometric data verification exercise, and also collected N2.3 million in place of federal permanent secretary Goni Aji and another N2.3 million in the place of Hafiz Ringim. The assistant director accounts at the PPO, John Yusuf, approved two estacodes for himself amounting to N4.7 million. The first payment was N2.1 million for a New York trip while the second payment of N2.6 million was made to Yusuf in place of Mohammed Dauda who was listed in the voucher but not in the e-payment schedule. A level six officer at the PPO, Christian Madubuike, received a total sum of N5.4 million in his account in three installments for a single trip.

The KPMG report said when asked, Madubuike said he was not aware of the payments, saying "he was informed about it by his boss, Yusuf, who directed him to withdraw the funds and deliver them to him. He further stated that he withdrew the funds on 20 July, 2011 and handed them over to Yusuf on the same day" (Abubakar, 2012:2). A staff of the federal budget office, Chukwuma Osuagwu, received three estacodes totalling N9.7 million. The payment of N4.8 million was for monitoring of the data capture exercise in New York and was made in the name of the DG budget, Bright Okogwu.

The second payment of N2.8 million was made into Osuagwu's account approved by Maina as allowances in place of R.N. Odega who was listed on the voucher but replaced with Osuagwu on the e-payment schedule. Oludare Adedokun was chief security officer to Professor Afolabi. The PPO authorised payment of N6.3 million into his account for monitoring of the data capture exercise in Atlanta. Also, KPMG said it was found that the payment of N4.8 million was approved as estacode for Afolabi whose name was reflected on the voucher but not on the e-payment list, while the balance of N1.4 million was paid to Adedokun for travelling to Atlanta.

One Adamu Sale was paid N3 million as estacode for the biometric capture exercise in South Africa even when his name was not on the voucher list. He collected the money in place of a certain officer listed as D. General. At least N140,238,081 was approved by Maina on 9 August 2011 to be paid to 70 recipients for the purpose of monitoring the data capturing exercise in Accra, Atlanta, Johannesburg, London and New York, the report said.
It added that it was not established whether or not the officials actually attended the biometric data capture exercises which held in five select cities outside the country. One of the officials, Abdullahi Umar, was in Atlanta for just a day before travelling to Saudi Arabia and was paid N6.9 million, it added. The KPMG report said most of the travel payments were made to the beneficiaries about three weeks before the approvals were made. According to Daily Trust: With the exception of one, each tranche of payment was already debited to PPO account with Unity Bank on 14 or 15 July 2010 prior to the date of the approval of the payment by the chairman of the task team on August 9 2011 (Abubakar, 2012:2)

Investigation by the Senate since the beginning of the month has opened can of worms in pension scheme administration in the country, revealing how officials massively looted public funds. At one of the committee's sessions, Mr Toyin Ishola, an Assistant Chief Accountant in the police pension office, accused Maina of mismanaging N140 million of pension funds. The KPMG report revealed that Maina unilaterally approved movements of N24 billion released by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in July 2010 for settlement of police pension arrears.

The Pension Reform Task Team reacted to accusations that it moved funds between banks without approval, saying it never opened and operated any account without approval of the Accountant-General of the Federation. Spokesman for the team, Hassan Saluhu, told Daily Trust recently by telephone: "It is not true that we opened any account without the approval of the accountant general of the federation" (Abubakar, 2012:2). He said the pension task team transferred the sum of N8 billion to Fidelity Bank and the money was still intact. On the issue of First Bank account, he said, "We transferred the First Bank account from Lagos to Abuja" because it is not supposed to be in Lagos (Abubakar, 2012:2).

As a result of the above accusations and counter accusations the EFCC decided recently to drag a Federal Permanent Secretary, two directors and three other officials have been remanded in prison custody after they were charged recently with criminal breach of trust in respect of N32.8 billion pension funds between 2009 and 2011. Atiku Abubakar Kigo, who is permanent secretary in the office of the Head of Service; Ahmed Wada, a former deputy director of the Police Pension Office and now director in the Federal Ministry of Sports; and retired director at the Aviation ministry Esai Dangabar were arraigned at the Abuja High Court on Thursday, March 30 on a 16-count charge. The other accused are accountants John Yakubu Yusufu and Veronica Ulonma Onyegbula, as well as Sani Habila Zira. The six were arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and they all pleaded not guilty to the charges. Kigo was until recently at the Ministry of Niger Delta, and had served as director at the Police Pension Office, which has come under intense scrutiny in the past weeks.

It was during his stint at the PPO that he allegedly connived with the others to tamper with the police pension funds. Justice Mohammed Bello Talba of the Abuja High Court, Gudu District, ordered for the remand of the six officials at the Kuje Prisons in Abuja, pending hearing on their bail application on April 3. The judge also set May 28 as date for the commencement of trial. After the charges were read to the accused and they took their plea, defense counsel Solomon Adegboyega Awomolo made oral bail applications and pleaded with the judge to remand them in EFCC custody. Prosecution counsel Rotimi Jacobs told the court he had no objection to the bail bid but said the formal procedure should be adhered to before bail is granted. In his ruling, Justice Talba said the EFCC was not known to be a holding facility for accused persons, and therefore ordered that the six be remanded at Kuje Prisons until their bail bid is determined. The six officials are being accused of conspiracy, criminal breach of trust, conversion of public funds to personal use as well as receiving bribes at different times between January 2009 and December 2011. Ahmed Wada is individually
being accused of collecting N18 million in bribes from Unity Bank for maintaining a police pension account with the bank between February and June 2011.

According to count 1 on the charge sheet, Kigo and the others as public officers agreed to commit an illegal act in respect of the sum of N14.519 billion, punishable under section 97 of the Penal Code Act. This amount was part of the Police Pension Fund in an account in First Bank allegedly diverted by the accused while they were supervising the funds. In another count, Dangabar, Yusufu, Onyegbula and Zira allegedly tampered with N8.92 billion police pension funds kept in First Bank between January and December 2009. A year later, between January 2010 and February 2011, Kigo replaced Dangabar in the four-person conspiracy, and they jointly accessed another sum of N4.74 billion from the pension funds. Between February and June last year, Wada replaced Kigo and teamed up with Yusufu, Onyegbula and Zira to commit criminal breach of trust over pension funds amounting to N858 million. On or about January 31, 2011 the six persons allegedly helped themselves to another N657 million from the pension funds.

On yet another instance, the six officials on or about March 24, 2009 allegedly committed fraud in respect of N463 million. Also, the six are accused of fraud in respect of N407 million on December 14, 2010 and N400 million on December 30, 2010. According to count 12 and count 15 on the charge sheet, Dangabar, Wada, Yusufu, Kigo and Onyegbula are being accused of converting N14.519 billion and another N858 million pension funds to their personal use between January 2009 and June 2011. Again, Dangabar, Yusufu and Onyegbula were charged with fraudulently converting N8.9 billion pension funds to their personal use between January and December 2009. Count 14 said Kigo, Yusufu and Onyegbula converted N4.7 billion public funds to their personal use between January 2010 and February 2011.

The EFCC, which has been on the trail of some other pension office officials who have been perpetrating fraud, confirmed that it had arrested a serving permanent secretary and six other officials of the Police Pension Office in connection with another N2 billion fraud. The permanent secretary was actually said to have been caught with the N2 billion cash. Those arrested according to the acting Head of Media at the EFCC, Mr Wilson Ewujaren, included three directors and three other officials of the Pensions office. The scam was said to have been blown open a month ago by PRTT, headed by Alhaji AbdulRasheed Maina.

This colossal loot which is made up of cash and landed properties were recovered from “fleece master” of the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the federation Pension Office before the PRTT was set up. The persons involved have admitted their wrong doings viz: Six million pound sterling laundered by former administration of Pension Office was recovered and is presently invested with Crown Agents, London. Another N28 billion was saved from the restructuring of the Police Pension Office. The team was directed stop the restructuring halfway. These funds are currently lodged in some banks (Akogun, 2012:19)

While the Senate handed in the report of its joint committee on the pension probe, emerging trends are pointing to the fact that Maina is already being haunted by the same corruption he is striving to fight. When you fight corruption, corruption fights back, that is one saying that cannot be strange to anyone who is determined to root out the scourge.

Recommendations

More startling revelations have been unearthed in the nation’s corrupt-ridden pension scheme with the recent disclosure that a Permanent Secretary in the Police Pension Office has been arrested and quizzed by the economic and financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) over a fresh N18 billion fraud. This shows that all is not well with the nation’s pension system. It is also a worrisome development that the federal government must do something drastically government must do something drastically to check its spread. According to reports, the suspect, who was caught with N2
billion cash in his residence and other incriminating documents, has been handed over to EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) for prosecution. To prevent more pension scams in the country, we suggest the reversion to the earlier position of keeping MDAs’ pension funds with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to minimise the recurrent abuse of such funds by pension officials through unauthorised lodgments with deposit money banks.

In addition, the entire Civil Service bureaucracy should be sanitized while measures should be institutionalised to build strong and effective government institutions that will toe the path of propriety concerning funds put in their care. Only the much-needed reforms of pension management and administration can ensure regular payment of entitlements to deserving pensioners as and when due without some undeserving hawks feeding fat on them.

While it is pertinent that cases of fraud be diligently investigated and prosecuted by courts of competent jurisdiction, we think that the two anti-graft agencies, the EFCC and ICPC, should not be handling one case, at the same time. A situation where the two agencies are probing the same matter at the same time is not tidy and may lead to confusion, clash of interest and undue waste of time, and resources. Perhaps, it was this type of situation that made some notable Nigerians to call for a merger of the two agencies since they apparently do the same job. That call is still relevant today. Regardless of the overlapping role which the agencies play, it is our expectation that whichever agency that is carrying out the investigation in the instant case should be diligent. It should seek to know how the permanent secretary withdrew such huge sums of money on a daily basis over a period of time without anybody raising an alarm despite the existing financial regulations against such huge withdrawals in our banks.

There is likelihood that it is not the Permanent Secretary only that was involved in this matter. In other words, it was likely that the permanent secretary did not work alone in this criminality. All the accomplices in the crime, which may include some staff of the banks involved, must be investigated to determine their role in the crime. Let all those found culpable in this matter be made to face the full weight of the laws of the land. Since the pension fund has become another goldmine for corruption, government should not hesitate to plug all loopholes that lead to these illegal withdrawals. It will be recalled that more sordid tales have emerged from the Senate Joint Committee on the Investigation into the Administration of the Pensions Scheme since it commenced sitting some weeks ago. The nation has been fed with gory details of how government officials falsified documents to siphon pensioners’ money. Already, the Pension Reform Task Team (PRTT) has intimated the public of how it recovered a whopping sum of N151.6 billion and others after conducting a biometric verification exercise on pensioners since 2010. Since this revelation, more frauds have been unearthed in other pension schemes, especially that of the police. The situation is really getting out of hand. Therefore, something urgent should be done to stem the tide of malfeasance in the various pension schemes before the sleaze becomes fully entrenched in the system.

**Conclusion**

Prior to the emergence of the present pension regime, Nigeria’s pension scheme was largely in a state of flux. Most schemes were under funded or unfunded; there was weak and inefficient pension administration; most workers in the private sector were not covered by any form of retirement benefits and cases of unsustainable outstanding pension liabilities were rife. Infact pension liabilities of the government at the inception of the Pension Reform Act (PRA) in 2004 was estimated to be about N2 trillion. Financial forecasts projected that in a few years to come, pension obligations would exceed the salary of active workers. This was an economic scourge waiting to happen and its prognosis was not encouraging. Hence, the need for Government intervention through the instrumentality of the PRA 2004.
It is a blatant indication of the porosity of the county’s institutions and the weakness of its statutory processes for the public officers indicted in the pension probe to have found the latitude to flirt with such stupendous sums of money without any institutional inhibition. Even with the hullabaloo being made by Sanusi’s CBN about the all-important requirement of lodgement disclosures in the new banking reform, it is curious that debauched public officers could launder and divert public funds into private accounts without being dictated and halted.

In the light of this debilitating systemic decadence which pervades the Nigerian space, one would have expected that the much-taunted “transformation agenda” of the incumbent political regime would have focused intensely and concretely on strengthening the various institutions of governance – including the Civil Service / Ministries. To all intents and purposes, it would seem that the government is more predisposed to seeking the line of least resistance than confronting and addressing the malaise of bureaucratic inefficiency and porosity immanent in the system. This temperament is easily reflected in the government’s indiscriminate procreation of multifarious “committees and task forces” for the purpose of conducting government business. The inescapable implication of such an ad-hoc approach to governance is that it leads to the unnecessary duplication of official functions, wastage of scarce and insufficient public funds / resources, escalation of the burdensome cost of governance, intensification of the chronic neglect and decadence of statutory public institutions, as well as the cultivation of a governance culture that is prone to nepotism and corruption, especially, as a means of creating “jobs for the boys.”

It is also a matter of serious contradiction that all incidence of corruption probes in recent times have always emanated and terminated within the chambers of the Federal Parliament, while the Presidency and its Executive arm (which is supposed to be in the driver’s seat of the anti-corruption crusade) now relegates itself to the nominal position of a disinterested spectator and, thus, maintains a certain aloofness and Olympian detachment regarding the vexed issue of anti-corruption, even while it continues to trumpet and pontificate about its zero tolerance for corruption.

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