

Irregularities Mar Construction of Classrooms Block at Lapai, Niger State

Introduction

“Corruption has an adverse impact in frustrating or ruining the provision and maintenance of public infrastructure in Nigeria over the years. The corrupt practices were and still being carried out by individuals, but on most occasions, executed by an elaborate and sinister syndicate that included contractors, architects, quantity surveyors, engineers, consultants to government officials, corporate executives and other players”

- Former Acting Chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ibrahim Magu.

The economic growth and national development of any country are dependent on the availability of functional infrastructures such as energy, roads, railways, water supply, education and a host of other amenities that converge to provide the required environment for the free flow of goods and services across the length and breadth of the country. Poorly implemented infrastructure around the country can be traced to corruption and lack of accountability.

This can be attributed to the level of opacity witnessed at different stages of contract award and execution. Corruption as a phenomenon is a global problem and exists in varying degrees in different countries. Irrespective of the type of government, be it democratic or dictatorial, capitalist or socialist, corruption exists. Corrupt practices are as old as the world. In Nigeria, it is one of the many unresolved challenges that have made unattainable. Corruption is a long-term

major political, social, and economic challenge to Nigeria in the Implementation of public projects.

The quality of education in any nation is central to political, technological, and scientific development. Education is an effective tool used by the society to transform and equip its human resources to become contributing members of the society. Education infrastructure is an important factor in determining the quality of learning and graduates but most public schools in Nigeria lack basic infrastructure, such as laboratory, library, electricity, and quality learning environment. While existing infrastructures in some public schools are in deplorable condition, others are below acceptable standards and, in few cases, non-existent at all. In some of these schools, there is lack of functional public sanitary facilities; hence, the 'bush' serves that purpose in such schools. School facilities maintenance affects the physical, educational, and financial foundation of the school organization and should, therefore, be a focus of both its day-to-day operations and long-range maintenance management priorities.

Poor Project Implementation

The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) - a federal government agency that governs and operates Ports in Nigeria embarked on various Corporate Social Responsibility projects across the country between 2013 and 2015. Review of 2017 Audit Report of the Federation showed the primary goal of the corporate social responsibility of the agency may have been shortchanged as most of the projects highlighted in the 2017 Audit Report were marred with various abuses and acts of corruption. One of such projects is the contract for the construction of classrooms block, under the Nigerian Port Authority's Corporate Social Responsibility Department at Government Day Secondary School, Dangana, Lapai LGA, Niger State awarded vide award letter Ref. No. HQ/GM/PROC/CON/C.11/13/122 dated 18th November 2013 at the sum of ₦25.4 million with six (6) months completion period. The sum of ₦24.1 million was paid to the contractor, vide payment voucher number HQ/0036909 dated 20th January 2014 with the balance (Retention Fee) of ₦1.2 million paid vide invoice no HQ/CS/385 of 13th May 2015.

Value for Money team visited the project site to verify status of the project on 26th March 2020. The team discovered that although the classroom block was built to completion, the project itself was poorly implemented. The ceiling appeared to have been fixed with inferior asbestos, the flooring was not properly done, there were no sanitary appliances (water system) like toilet roll holders, water heater, water tank, etc. Rather, the regular pit toilet system was constructed. Overall, the project was done with substandard products and materials. The VfM team held a community engagement meeting on 9th September 2020 with stakeholders and citizens of the community who acknowledged that the construction of the classroom block will accommodate more wards thereby encouraging other out-of-school children to get educated. Community members also complained about cracks on the wall and leakages from the ceiling few months after construction.

Conclusion

It has been observed that despite the increasing trend in public expenditure on infrastructure in Nigeria, the reality on ground appears dismal. Most government agencies at federal level in Nigeria have adopted due process (in principle) in projects award and execution as a way of checking excessive corrupt projects, over-invoicing, and poor implementation. This is supposed to allow for transparency and accountability in governance especially with the reputation of contractors involved in handling public projects. The major bottleneck in the

adoption of due process in contract award is lack of competitive bidding for projects which consequently lead to poor implementation of projects. Another major issue is the lack of adequate monitoring mechanism to ensure realization of planned objectives. These factors are also responsible for the loss of ₦4.5 million on the poorly implemented project at Government Day Secondary School, Dangana, Lapai in Niger State.

Recommendations

- We recommend renovation of more classrooms at Government Day Secondary School, Dangana to ease learning for students, this will increase enrollment and lift the burden of construction or renovating classrooms off the community.
- There is the need for public schools' infrastructure renewal drive to address the infrastructure deficit in the public schools across the federation.
- The contractor should be prosecuted, and unaccounted funds recovered while the official of Nigerian Port Authority in charge of the project should be sanctioned.
- Adequate and proper monitoring mechanism should be adopted to ensure the realization of objectives of projects to prevent further occurrence.

Images of poorly constructed classroom blocks at Government Day Secondary School, Dangana, Lapai LGA.

