

# **Addressing the Problem of Corruption in Nigeria through Islamic Ethical Codes**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*Scholars have attempted to examine the nature and dynamics as well as the factors aiding corruption and corrupt practices in Nigerian society. But little attention has been given on how Islamic ethical codes can be used to address the issue of corrupt practices especially in formal organizations. This paper is an attempt to examine how ethical codes of conduct for Muslim employers can be used to address the issue of corruption in Nigeria with particular reference to Sokoto State. In doing this, a brief history of Muslim ethics towards employment will be highlighted in order to examine these factors through Islamic code of ethics. The paper will also examine how best to address the issue of corruption for a better Nigeria.*

**Keyword:** Islam, Ethical Codes, Corruption, Nigeria, Employers

## Introduction

Islam is a way of life, and morality is the cornerstone of Islamic faith as well as the fundamental sources of a nation's strength, just as immorality is the major cause of a nation's decline. Islam is a religion of justice that established some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed in all circumstances. Islam has provided not only legal safeguards, but also a very effective moral system. Whatever leads to the welfare of the people and does not oppose the religion is morally good and whatever is harmful is morally bad.

Islam does not only encourage mankind to be responsible for their fellow human being but also calls upon them to enjoin what is right and prohibit what is wrong.

Adaptation of these moral attitudes among the Muslim employers is not a new thing in the history of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) is an example to Muslims and non Muslims world. His speeches and practices demonstrated that he sought to see all humankind from the lens of kindness, modesty, moderation, justice, liberty, generosity, and love.<sup>1</sup> His exemplary behaviour have a significant meaning to our lives when he said that, every religion must have some kind of meaningful character, he laid emphasis on the fact that Islam was a modest religion.<sup>2</sup>

Corruption is the opposite of the Islamic ethical codes of employers and great agent which destroyed Muslims and non Muslims alike. There are many several unresolved problems among the Muslims employers in Nigeria and Sokoto in particular but the issues of the upsurge of corruption is the most troubling. The

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<sup>1</sup> A. Zohery, Muhammad Leadership, Communication and ethics, ([www.prophetMuhammadleadership.org](http://www.prophetMuhammadleadership.org), 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

menace leads to neglecting duty, slow movement of files in offices, ghost workers syndrome, among others. The danger of corruption is that it cuts across faiths, religious denominations, and political groups. It also affects both young and old, man and woman alike.<sup>3</sup> Both Christians and Muslims are equally affected by corruption. This paper covers the following areas- Work ethics in Islam, Muslim workers and corruption in Sokoto, implications of corruption among Muslim workers in Sokoto and few suggestions on how to curb or minimize corruption among Muslim worker in Sokoto.

### **Workers Ethics in the History of Islam**

The function of a moral code of ethics is to shape the conduct and character of the people. Islam has prescribed a code of conduct for Muslims which is in line with the principles and teachings encompassed in the Qur`an and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him).<sup>4</sup> The behaviour and morals of Muslims should be in concord with the Qur`an and as taught by the Prophet (SAW). That is to say Muslims` conducts ought to be nothing but reflection of all that is good and virtuous as exemplified by the Prophet (SAW). This is because Allah says:

You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the final day and who engages much in the praise of Allah.<sup>5</sup>

Allah the Most High has given us a role model and an example of sublime character in the person of Muhammad (SAW) which all true believers are commanded to emulate. Prophet Muhammad`s (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) character is the direct application of the divine code of ethics that

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<sup>3</sup> Corruption in Nigeria: A new Paradigm for effective control [www.nigeriavillagesquare.com](http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com)

<sup>4</sup> A. Aljibury, Islamic Ethics (characters) (. Islamicbooks.info-H)

<sup>5</sup> Qur`an chapter 33 verse 21

Allah, the Most High has bestowed humanity in general and Muslims in particular.

Nor does He speak of (his own) desire. It is Only an Inspiration that is inspired.<sup>6</sup>

Ethics is defined as actions and norms accepted and they do not contradict Islamic rules.<sup>7</sup> Islamic work ethics is known as performing tasks in meeting religious demands and is categorized as worship.<sup>8</sup> The implementation is based on Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him). Instilling of noble virtues which will definitely be reflected when one performs his tasks. Among the positive deeds stressed by Islam are trustworthiness and justice when performing job functions. From time to time Caliph Umar (R.A.) the second rightly guided caliph, during his tenure, used to lay down the principles of administration to his workers (judges). For instance, he said:

Verily Justice is an important obligation to God and Man. You have been charged with this responsibility. Discharge the responsibility so that you may win the approbation of God and the good will of the people. Treat the people equal Ally in your presence, in your company, and in your decisions, so that the weak despair not of justice, and the high-placed have no hope of your favour.<sup>9</sup> Compromise is permissible, provided it does not turn the unlawful into lawful, and the lawful into unlawful.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Qur'an chapter 53 verse 3-4

<sup>7</sup> W. N. Wan Husin, Work Ethics from the Islamic perspective in Malaysia, in European Journal of Social Science, Vol. 29 No. 1., 2012, P. 53

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., P. 53

<sup>9</sup> [www.alim.org/library/biography/khalifa/content/kum/15/5](http://www.alim.org/library/biography/khalifa/content/kum/15/5)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Caliph Umar bin Abdulaziz during his time practiced and taught good example to leaders and workers. He made sweeping changes in his government by appointing competent Jurists, scholars and dismissed the corrupt ones. As a just leader, Umar in his office had two candles. Whenever he wanted to write the state affairs, he would use the candle that belonged to the state and if he wanted to write his own personal letters, he would use the candle, which he bought with his own money. He also adopted some strategies to strengthen up the administration and workers, in doing that he took the following steps:

- a. State officials were excluded from entering into any business.
- b. Unpaid labour was made illegal.
- c. He urged all of the officials to concentrate on the complaints of the people and during any occasion, he used to announce that, if any subject had seen any officer maltreating others he should report him to the leader for some reward ranging from 100 to 300 dirham<sup>11</sup> (I.e. N368, 040 to N1, 104,120).

He is also a person who confiscated the estates seized by his relation officials and distributed them to the people.<sup>12</sup>

Islam urged Muslims to do good deeds which include trust worthiness and justice when performing job. For example in business dealings Muslims are expected to be honest in judgment and prevent one from taking advantage over others.

### **Muslim Workers in Sokoto and Corruption**

Sokoto is well known as Muslims dominated state and seat of the defunct caliphate. It is very important for the people of the area to show example to other states in the country. This is because the area was once the headquarters of the defunct caliphate where adherence to values and Islam were practiced and

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<sup>11</sup> Marohomsalicsite.weely.com/umar-bin-abdul-aziz-the-revival-leader.html

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

cherished in one hand and commanding the entire members of the caliphate to imbibe these values was preached and enforced. Thus, Sokoto is therefore expected to serve as a model in practicing the teachings of Islam by following its commandments and avoiding anything that contradicts it. Though, in Sokoto there are some workers who are God-fearing but the majority are not. In fact, what is very disturbing is that, one finds a wise and intelligent employee behaving corruptly and unjustly in the society.

Corruption and bribery are the major ethical problems among the civil servants particularly in Sokoto and Nigeria in general. According to Abubakar, corruption is the pervasion of public office for private advantage.<sup>13</sup> He also argued that the public sector is unfortunately being made to become conduit pipe for siphoning public funds.<sup>14</sup> It is unethical for a civil servant to make public funds and other facilities under his care as his own personal property. In Sokoto, it has been observed that majority of the workers (officers) use to go late and left before the time in the office. For example, we have four weeks in a month (24 days) and we use only sixteen days in office and remaining eight days for weekend. Therefore, by converting these days (16 days) into hours we have one hundred and twelve (112) working hours in a month and if one (worker) misuses 3 hours every day up to one month it means he misused 48 hours out of 112 working hours in a month due to lateness to work or early closure. These workers still receive full salary every month and they may suggest that this salary is lawful to them but, the salaries of such workers have problem of lawfulness. It is immoral for one to receive payment for a job not done.

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<sup>13</sup> K. Abubakar, "Islamic Solutions to Corruption Among Public servants in Nigeria" in Y. O. Imam (ed). Public Administration and Information and Communication and Technology (ICT) through the lenses of Arabic and Islamic Studies, shebotimo Publications, Ijebu-ode, 2009, P. 46

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, P.46

Problem and absence of promotion even when due become a channel of receiving bribe. According to Abubakar bribe is given in order to be employed, or correct an error in ones salary, e.t.c.<sup>15</sup> He opined that, Bribery is rampant not only in Sokoto state but all over the country particularly among top government functionaries. For example in Sokoto the corrupt charges which the then governor and some of his aides were facing include breach of trust, financial mismanagement, money laundering, abuse of office, and stealing funds meant for the people of Sokoto State.<sup>16</sup>

There is lack of qualified personnel which is directly affecting appointments based on merit. These unqualified candidates in most cases become stooges who connive with the chief executive to squander public funds.

Educational institutions are also not equally exonerated from corrupt practices. Teachers (lecturers) neglect constantly their duty for unnecessary commitment. In this case, Mango argued that tertiary institutions' lecturers leave their academic responsibility of teaching, which is their primary assignments and instead compete with others on material goods, money, buying cars, building houses and taking part in unnecessary committee meetings among the several others.<sup>17</sup>

The behaviour of lecturers in tertiary institution in Sokoto is worst, as teachers hardly listen to students and always shout at them and even abuse and send them away when they come for guidance. This is unethical behaviour as far as academic excellence is concern.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, P. 47

<sup>16</sup> K. Abubakar, Muslim Leaders and Corruption in Nigeria: The Implications. In *Danmarina International Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Umaru Musa 'Yar'adua University, Katsiana, 2009, P.94

<sup>17</sup> H. Mango, Rethinking University Education in Nigeria, University Central Coordinating Committee for University inaugural lectures and seminars, Usmanu Danfodiyo, University, Sokoto, Nigeria, June, 16, 2011, P. 7



The problem of ghost workers increased in the Nigerian government payroll. Example can be seen when recently the governors of Sokoto and Niger States detected many ghost workers in the payrolls of their States. Millions of naira are being misappropriated in this way.<sup>18</sup>

Muslim workers refused to put Islamic code of ethics in to practice because, of pursuance of worldly gains, wishes and caprices. This brought many problems in the society and severe implications/consequences on the Day of Judgement.

### **Implications of Corruption among the Muslim Workers**

In Islam, any office appointment is considered as a trust given to a choosing man among Allah`s servants. Man should keep that trust without betraying it. Allah says:

Verily: Allah commands you that ye return trust to its owner and when ye judge between people ye judge with justice...<sup>19</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon him) also said: return the trust to those who entrusted you, do not betray those who betrayed you.<sup>20</sup> This command includes the rights of servants on each other, such as what they entrust each other with, including the cases that are not recorded or documented in the office. Allah commands that, all types of trusts be fulfilled.

The above verse and Hadith testify that, no worker should misuse the properties of government which he has been entrusted with, whether recorded or not. The two sources also show that everybody has a responsibility which he is expected

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<sup>18</sup> K. Abubakar, *Muslim Leaders and Corruption in Nigeria*, Op. cit, P. 94

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an chapter 4 verse 58.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Ibin Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azeem*, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, in commentary to the verse, Part 1 and 2.

to discharge or a trust which one is entrusted in the Day of Judgement there will be an account on how the trust was handled. Therefore, the prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) warn people against the looting of people properties and cheating them even when one is sharing food with his brother, he should be very careful. For instant, Prophet decreed that one should not eat two dates together at a time unless he gets permission from his companion (sharing the meal with him).<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) appointed a man as a zakat collector when he returned (from assignment) he said this is for you and this is given to me as gift. The Prophet stood up and climbed a platform and said: Allah and glorified Him and then said After that: verily i have appointed a man amongst you (to oversee) one of the duties imposed upon me by Allah and he returned saying: this is for you and this was giving to me as a gift. Why didn't he stay in the house of his Father and Mother and wait for the gift to come if is truthful? By Allah none of you will wrongly take something (from public funds) save he meets Allah the exalted, carrying it on the day of judgement...<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is clear from the foregone discussion that corruption is the biggest problem among Muslim workers in Sokoto and Nigeria in general. Corruption is vehemently against the Islamic ethical conduct and needs to be addressed by all well meaning Nigerians as a whole and Muslims in Sokoto in particular. Islamic provides an effective moral code that anything that does not harm people and is not against Islam is morally acceptable while anything that harms people and goes contrary to the religion is condemnable and unacceptable. For a change in

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<sup>21</sup> Imam Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 3 Book 44, Mobile English Translation, No 669.

<sup>22</sup> K. Abubakar, Muslim Leader and Corruption in Nigeria, Op.Cit, P.96.

attitude among Muslim workers in Sokoto to take place, there is need for both government and the workers to fear Allah and obey Him at all times.

### **Suggestions/recommendations**

From what has been discussed above, the following suggestions are forwarded so as to help curb or minimize corruption in Sokoto and Nigeria as a whole.

- 1) Muslims and all workers should imbibe the fear of Allah in all their dealings.
- 2) Civil servants should bear in mind that their jobs are trust and they will be questioned about the trust on the Day of Judgement
- 3) Government of Sokoto State should pay their workers salaries that will take care of their families and some of their basic needs like housing, transportation and other social services.
- 4) There should be strict monitoring of workers so as to check lateness to office or early closure.
- 5) Government should avoid wasteful spending so that the resources can be used to better the conditions of the citizens.

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