

# Corruption and Accountability Gaps Among Women in Political Leadership in Africa: Alternative Strategies for Women's Political Empowerment

<sup>1</sup>Chioma Scholastica Ugwu & <sup>2</sup>Kariba-Botoye Queen Idanyingi

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Political and Administrative Studies  
University of Port Harcourt,  
Rivers State, Nigeria

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*Corresponding Author:*  
Chioma Scholastica Ugwu

## Abstract

This study delved into the nuanced dynamics of corrupt practices and accountability gaps among women in political leadership in Africa with a specific focus on Nigeria. Over the years, African countries especially Nigeria have grappled with systemic corruption, exacerbated by societal norms, a lack of integrity, and institutional shortcomings. This research determines to find out if women political leaders have a high propensity to corruption as male leaders, and are less corrupt than their male folks in Nigeria, through the investigation of high-profile past women politicians. Data were sourced through the secondary method via journal articles, books, newspaper publications, and other academic materials, and analyzed using descriptive analyses. Ethical leadership theory served as the study's theoretical framework and highlights the importance of integrity principles and values in leadership roles. The study discovered that women in Political leadership in Nigeria engage in corrupt practices as men do, and rather not be less corrupt as long as the opportunity to access resources is available. Factors such as societal norms, a lack of integrity, and poor institutional capacity combine to promote political corruption. This unethical behavior has implications for good governance, gender equality advancement, public trust, and the appointment/election of more women in future posts. In addition, effective strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability, and gender inclusivity in governance processes to mitigate corruption risks and promote ethical leadership are imperative.

### **Background to the Study**

The world over, corruption and a lack of accountability in political leadership pose significant threats to democratic governance and hamper socio-economic development. Governments that misuse their position of authority for private benefit, misappropriate funds, or participate in illegal activity erode public confidence in democratic institutions and threaten democracy itself. Moreover, when funds meant for the public good are diverted for private gain, poverty exacerbates, economic growth declines and inequality persists (Keneck-Massil, Nomo-Beyala & Owoundi, 2021; Aktaş, 2022; Wei, Dang, Liu, Li, Tan & Gu, 2022).

Corruption, a sneaky force that impedes social advancement and erodes public confidence in the government, knows no gender boundaries (Transparency International, 2014; Rashid, Ahmad, Din & Zaman, 2021; Zaloznaya, Glanville & Reisinger, 2022). According to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, 27 percent of men and 22 percent of women account for paying bribes to at least one institution (Transparency International, 2013). In line with this discovery, numerous studies have demonstrated that men are more likely than women to participate in corrupt activities as corruption tends to decrease with the number of women in positions of authority, and vice versa (Pereira, 2020; Tu & Guo, 2021; Handayani, 2022; Hagglund & Khan, 2023; Decarolis, Fisman, Pinotti, Vannutelli, & Wang, 2023; Zhao, 2023). Additional studies on the subject of corruption have also shown that women may have less opportunity to be exposed to corrupt activities, which could account for the gender gap in experiences. Therefore, the social roles that men and women play in different cultures are a significant determinant of how exposed they are to corruption; a higher level of exposure in daily life is probably associated with a higher tolerance for corruption (Anne-Marie, 2004).

Historically, women have been underrepresented in positions of leadership, hence, their rise to these positions is a step toward inclusive government (Dickson, 2021; European Union, 2021; Hamid, Chaudhary & Khadija, 2023). Since the nation's return to civilian governance in 1999, the number of women in both appointive and elective positions has remained significantly low, especially in comparison to the number of males. For appointive positions, women have only attained 19.1%, 15.1%, 17.9%, 31.7%, 16.6%, 15.9%, and 25% in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 respectively (Abatta, 2023). At the national parliament, women achieved 3%, 4%, 7%, and 4.1% representation in the 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011 elections respectively. While in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections, no significant improvement was made in terms of their number increase rather a decline in the numeric figure was observed especially in the 2023 election. Data shows that women won 6%, 4.5%, and 3.6% of seats in the national legislature (Agunbiade, 2023). The total average proportion of seats held by women in Nigeria both in elective and appointive positions stands at 6.7%. This percentage is lower than the global average of 22.5% and the West African average of 15% (Abatta, 2023).

Despite each government's effort to enhance women's leadership positions, entrenched patriarchy and systems of corruption continue to impede this progress and sustain

gender differences in leadership effectiveness and decision-making. The prism through which corruption views female leaders around the world reveals particular difficulties and dynamics (Transparency International, 2014; Hagglund & Khan, 2023). Notwithstanding little advancements in the area of gender parity in leadership positions, women still face disproportionate obstacles when attempting to navigate political environments tainted by accountability discrepancies and corruption. Women executives experience a range of corruption expressions in both business and political settings, from covert bribery and coercion to subtle discrimination (Smith, Rueden, Vugt, Fichtel & Kappeler, 2021; Erlich & Beauvais, 2022; Gomathy, 2022; Shopola, Malapane & Nokele, 2023). The robustness of democratic institutions and their commitment to gender equality are measured by their capacity to face these obstacles and support accountability measures.

In African societies including Nigeria, corruption has remained a persistent challenge, undermining development efforts, eroding trust in governance, and perpetuating inequality. A study by Transparency International on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) in 2019 showed that Sub-Saharan Africa was the lowest performing region in the CPI with an average of 32 out of 100, while Nigeria, one of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, scored as low as 24 in the 2021 index (Transparency International, 2021). This evidence shows the persistence of corruption on the African continent, involving both men and women in leadership. Since female leaders have increasingly assumed positions of power across the continent, they have not been immune to allegations and cases of corruption.

Typical cases are evidenced. Grace Mugabe, the wife of former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, faced allegations of corruption and extravagant spending during her husband's regime (Freytas-Tamura, 2017; Allison, 2017). More so, Esther Lungu, the former First Lady of Zambia, was also detained for allegedly possessing properties that were thought to be the profits of criminal activity. Reports suggest that Ms. Lungu did not provide a plausible explanation for how she obtained a \$1.5 million (£1.2 million) estate in the capital (BBC, 2024). The former speaker of the South African parliament was also accused of money laundering and corruption in another case. According to the report, Ms. Mapisa-Nqakula is charged with 12 counts of corruption and one count of money laundering (Guardian News, 2024).

Just like in other African countries, cases of corruption persist in Nigeria despite governments' efforts to curtail the occurrences through the establishment of some anti-corrupt agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC). Notwithstanding the clamor for gender equality, especially in leadership, and the little progress made over the years with the emergence of women leaders, there is hardly any administration in recent times has been without corruption indictments against some women in leadership positions.

Despite societal expectations of women in leadership, their complicity in unethical behavior feeds negative stereotypes and impedes the advancement of good governance and gender equality. Works abound in women, leadership, and corruption such as Hagglund & Khan (2023) who evaluated the gendered impact of corruption in South Africa, and argued that corruption can affect women more adversely than it does men and that vulnerable women are likely to be more adversely affected by corruption than those that are less vulnerable. Another study by Gomathy (2022) assessed the role of women in leadership and argued about women's important contributions and qualities in leadership responsibilities. Decarolis et al. (2023) on the other hand, examined the correlation between gender and bureaucratic corruption using two distinct datasets, one from Italy and a second from China. The research revealed that women are far less likely to be investigated for corruption than men. More related studies such as Tu & Guo (2021) who examined gendered clientelism and corruption in China found that women's tolerance for corruption is significantly lower than that of men. The study further revealed that women are more likely to be excluded from clientelist networks that facilitate corruption. Handayani (2022) also assessed women and gender in corruption in Indonesia and found that corruption no longer recognizes gender as men and women engage in corruption. Aligning with the thoughts of these later studies, this study examines the dynamics of corruption among women who hold leadership positions in Nigeria with the view to determine if women are less corrupt than men in Nigeria or if they display similar character towards corrupt practices as men do. Hence, policy recommendations to foster transparent, ethical, and inclusive governance practices remain crucial to attaining good governance, gender inclusivity, and development in Nigeria, Africa, and the world over.

## **Conceptual Clarification and Review of Related Literature**

### **Corruption**

The term corruption is often used, yet because of its ambiguity and complexity, there is no universally agreed definition for it. Academic interpretations of the idea vary depending on the kinds of behaviors that are repeated. According to definitions, corruption is defined as criminal conduct that includes coercing or unduly influencing individuals in the public or private sphere to act against the established guidelines and norms that typically direct a given activity. It is a widespread and sneaky phenomenon that taints economic markets, erodes public confidence in the government, and upholds social inequalities (Abga & Aide, 2020; Oghuvbu, 2021; Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021; Ekumankama, 2022; Udude & Onwe, 2023). Although corruption can take many different forms and occur in many different settings, it usually entails the misuse of authority for one's benefit or illegal gain. This misuse of authority could manifest in the form of extortion, fraud, nepotism, embezzlement, bribery, appropriation, or privatization of public properties for private gain (Nanaghan, Perewari & Murray, 2023; Harahap & Isgiyarta, 2023). From municipal bureaucracy to the highest echelons of government, corruption affects every aspect of society and can have far-reaching effects on both people and societies at large.

Fundamentally, corruption is a betrayal of the public's confidence as well as a transgression of moral standards and values. The social contract that ties citizens to their government is weakened, as are the foundations of democracy and the rule of law when those in positions of authority put their interests ahead of the common good. Decision-making processes are also distorted by corruption, which distributes resources according to personal ties rather than needs or merit. This can result in incompetence, injustice, and a lack of accountability.

The reasons behind corruption are varied and complicated, frequently resulting from a confluence of institutional flaws, financial incentives, cultural influences, and personal incentives. A few more are insufficient oversight procedures, weak governance frameworks, a lack of openness, poverty, and an unequal allocation of resources (Manukyan, Stepanyan & Ilyushina, 2023; Dorasamy & Kikasu, 2023). All of these give rise to opportunities and may intensify the desire for people to act corruptly as they try to use illegal means to better their situations.

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### **Accountability**

Accountability is a fundamental concept in governance and organization that is necessary to guarantee the openness, honesty, and reliability of decision-making procedures and actions. Fundamentally, accountability is the duty of people, groups, and establishments to answer to pertinent stakeholders - such as constituents, shareholders, residents, and beneficiaries-their deeds, choices, and duties (Kessy, 2020; Isinkaye & Ajayi, 2021; Lee, 2022; Nweke & Tamusepiriala, 2022). It includes both answerabilities, or having to give a reason for actions taken, and enforceability, or having systems in place that allow penalties or consequences to be applied when obligations are not met.

On the other hand, accountability's absence or lack presents serious problems for democracy, governance, and organizational efficacy. Evading accountability for one's conduct can cause people or institutions to lose credibility, trust, and confidence in both public and private institutions. A lack of accountability can take many different forms, such as disobedience to the law, corruption, impunity, and lack of openness (Okafor, Adebisi, Opara & Okafor, 2020; Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021; Mlambo, Ngema, & Mpanza, 2023). Corruption, in particular, thrives in environments prone to poor accountability standards, and those in positions of authority can behave without consequence and take advantage of their position for personal benefit. Corruption impedes growth and erodes public confidence in government institutions by undermining the rule of law, warping

economic markets, and sustaining social injustice (Harahap & Isgiyarta, 2023; Mlambo et al., 2023).

In addition, a culture of impunity where people feel they may act without facing consequences can be fostered by a lack of accountability. This lack of consequences might encourage people to act immorally, abuse their position of authority, and commit other transgressions, which further erodes public confidence in institutions (Okoafor et al., 2020; Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021; Manukyan et al., 2023; Dorasamy & Kikasu, 2023).

Succinctly, accountability is necessary to advance honesty, trust, and confidence in leadership and governance. On the other hand, there are serious threats to democracy, governance, and socioeconomic growth when there is a lack of accountability. Societies can preserve the ideals of good governance and guarantee that power is exercised responsibly and in the best interests of all citizens by sustaining accountability procedures, encouraging transparency, and cultivating an integrity-driven culture.

Considering the aforementioned, any country's socioeconomic development, advancement, and good governance are all negatively impacted by corruption and a lack of accountability, including shadowy actions against the law. Since many people in Nigeria now view corruption as the ideal way of life, the moral standards that were once thought to be necessary for society's advancement have been undermined. Adopting ethical leadership principles becomes imperative to combat the threat of corruption among political leaders and advance the accountability and transparency required for effective governance and socioeconomic growth. It is common to tag those who uphold moral principles as "dull" or "not sharp." In other words, corruption has permeated Nigerian political systems and has become a common way of life. Strategies to curb it form part of the focus of this article.

Ethical leadership is vastly relevant to women leaders in combating corrupt practices since it offers a moral basis for open and accountable administration, and is pertinent to women leaders to overcome unethical practices. Adopting ethical leadership principles makes women leaders role models by exhibiting honesty, equity, and dedication to the public interest qualities that are crucial in opposing corrupt regimes. By encouraging a culture of integrity and trust, ethical leadership enables women to handle the demands of organizational and political contexts where dishonesty may become accepted. Additionally, by emphasizing moral conduct, female leaders can debunk myths that link leadership to dishonesty, boosting self-esteem and supporting larger initiatives to lessen social corruption. In addition to increasing their reputation, this strategy fortifies institutional resistance against corruption.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy (1724–1804) inspired the ethical leadership theory, which serves as the study's theoretical framework. According to Kant's moral theory, the "Categorical Imperative" (CI), a practical rationality principle, is the ultimate moral

precept (Paton, 1947). According to Kant, the CI is an objective, logically required, and unwavering principle that we must uphold despite any innate urges to the contrary. This principle justifies all particular moral criteria, meaning that all immoral acts are irrational since they go against the CI (Paton, 1947). The ethical leadership framework highlights the importance of moral principles and values in leadership activities by drawing on these moral ideals.

As a result, leaders are supposed to preserve the highest moral standards, exhibit honesty and justice, and put everyone's welfare first. Strong moral character and integrity are characteristics of ethical leaders. They resist temptations and make morally challenging choices anyway. They gain the respect and trust of their followers by acting in an honest, open, and consistent manner. The ethical framework highlights the significance of ethical ideals and principles in decision-making and behavior, outlining the moral obligations and behaviors required of leaders. Integrity, equity, and transparency are qualities of ethical leaders, and they work to reflect these qualities in their behaviors.

The values of ethical leadership are called into doubt in Nigeria because so many political leaders engage in unethical behaviors that undermine the standards of ethical leadership. It is required of political leaders, regardless of gender, to set a good example by upholding the highest moral standards and acting with integrity when discharging their duties. Leadership positions, including those led by women, have long been plagued by corruption, which has led to a lack of transparency, mistrust, and poor governance in Nigeria.

### **Exploring corrupt practices among women political leaders in Nigeria**

Examining corrupt practices among women in leadership in Nigeria offers valuable insights into the dynamics of corruption within various sectors. While it's important to recognize that corruption is not exclusive to any gender, these few cases shed light on specific instances where women in positions of power have been implicated in corrupt activities. The selection of these women leaders was done based on their political portfolios which were found to be at the highest levels of leadership in Nigeria (both elected and appointed positions). The justification for the choice period of 2007-2023 was informed by the fact that it was in 2007 that a Nigerian woman made history in the political space by attaining the position of Speaker in the House of Representatives. The table below shows a few cases of women political leaders indicted for corruption in Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Women leaders indicted for corruption cases between (2007- 2023)

S/N	Name	Portfolio/Status	Period	Corruption case
1	Patricia Etteh	Speaker of the House of Representatives	2007	(a) Accused of spending over N628 million on renovations of her official residence and that of her deputy, Babangida Ngoroje. (b) Alleged to have purchased 12 official cars for the House without due approval. (c) Alleged to have received N130 million from Phil Jin Project Ltd.
2	Diezani Alison-Madueke	Minister of Petroleum Resources	2010-2015	(a) Accused of, among other charges, unlawfully taking into possession, the sums of \$39.7 million and N3.32 billion said to be proceeds of unlawful activities. (b) Charged with six bribery offenses in exchange for awarding multi-million-pound oil and gas contracts. Alleged to have benefitted from at least £100,000 in cash, chauffeur-driven cars, flights on private jets, luxury holidays for her family, and the use of multiple London properties.
3	Stella Oduah	Minister of Aviation	2011-2014	(a) Alleged to have purchased two armored BMW cars at an inflated cost of \$1.6 million for the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) (b) Accused of alleged fraud, money laundering, and bribery running into N7.9bn from China Construction giant.
4	Mrs. Sadiya Umar-Farouq	Minister of Humanitarian Affairs	2019-2023	(a) Alleged diversion of N2.67 billion meant for school feeding during the COVID-19-induced lockdown. (b) Allegations of corruption in the handling of N37.1 billion (N37, 170,855,753.44) social intervention funds
5	Betta Chimaobim Edu	Minister of Humanitarian Affairs	August, 2023 - January, 2024	(a) Alleged plan of diversion of ₦585 million (\$640,000; £500,000), which was meant for vulnerable groups in Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ogun, and Lagos states.

**Source:** Authors compilation from **Ozibo (2019)**; Ekenna (2007); Sahara Reporters (2022); Sanusi (2023); Premium Times (2023); Agbo (2023); Ogala (2014); Suleiman (2023); Tolu-Kolawole (2024); Agbo (2024)

### Analysis and Discussion

Patricia Etteh was Nigeria's Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2007. She presided as the 10th speaker of the House of Representatives from June to October 2007. As the first and only woman to be elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in the nation, Etteh made history for this milestone in women's political engagement in Nigeria. However, in September 2007, she was charged with spending more than N628 million on improvements to both her official residence and Babangida Ngoroje, her deputy. She was also accused of buying 12 official House vehicles without the proper authorization. Sahara Reporters further alleged that the former Speaker's questionable financial relationship with Phil Jin Projects Limited led to her detention on May 17. The Niger Delta Development Commission awarded a contract to Phil Jin Projects Limited for the installation of solar-powered street lights in a few Akwa Ibom State localities. At the end



of the business transactions, Patricia Etteh was purportedly paid N130 million by Phil Jin Project Ltd. The former Speaker was detained by the EFCC, but she was later released after meeting her bail requirements while the inquiry proceeded (Sahara Reporters, 2022). As a result of public criticism and pressure from notable individuals and activists, especially Wole Soyinka (Ozibo, 2019; Ekenna, 2007), Etteh and her deputy, Ngoroje, resigned their positions from office on October 30, 2007.

Etteh's short stay in office was quite an ugly incident, especially for women in their quest to achieve gender equity. As the first woman in the history of Nigeria's political landscape to attain such a position in office signaled great hope for women's leadership empowerment. However, the impromptu loss of office after four months presented a bad image for women and a blow towards women's equality gender. Etteh's action in office betrayed women's accountability, trust, and integrity principles perceived as qualities of ethical leadership. Thus, accountability among women in leadership can improve equal opportunities for women's career progression in all aspects and vice versa.

Diezani Alison-Madueke served as the Minister of Petroleum Resources from 2010-2015. She became Nigeria's minister of transportation on July 26, 2007, and Nigeria's first female minister of petroleum resources in April 2010 after being designated minister of mines and steel development in 2008 (Vanguard, 2014). She was appointed as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC's) first female president in November 2014. Not long after she resigned as a minister in 2015, Alison-Madueke was taken into custody in London for alleged corrupt activities. Six bribery offenses were brought against her in August, all of which involved payments made in exchange for multimillion-pound oil and gas contracts while she served as the Minister for Petroleum Resources. She was alleged to have benefited from at least £100,000 in cash, private jet travel, chauffeured automobiles, opulent family vacations, and the use of multiple London properties. Her charges also detail financial benefits such as furnishings, staffing for the buildings during renovations, funding for private schooling, and presents from upscale stores like Louis Vuitton and Cartier jewelry (Sanusi, 2023; Premium Times, 2023; Agbo, 2023).

According to the EFCC, the Federal High Court in Abuja received 13 money laundering charges against Mrs Alison-Madueke on November 11, 2018. Diezani was charged with several offenses, including allegedly obtaining \$39.7 million and N3.32 billion – amounts purportedly obtained from illicit activities – illegally. It was alleged that she used the funds to buy desirable land properties under false pretenses as the owners. Allegedly, in September 2013, she purchased a property called Block B3 using the name Rusimpex Limited, priced at \$37.5 million, and consisting of six penthouses and eighteen apartments at Zone N Federal Government Layout, popularly called Bella Vista Estate, Banana Island, Ikoyi, Lagos (Agbo, 2023; PremiumTimes, 2023). According to a report from Premium News, she allegedly paid N650 million on June 4, 2012, to purchase 13 terrace homes with three bedrooms and one room for maids in Mabushi Gardens Estate in Abuja, under the name Azinga Meados Limited. She purportedly purchased eight four-bedroom terrace homes, two three-bedroom penthouses, six three-bedroom flats, two

three-bedroom maisonettes, two two-bedroom apartments, and one four-bedroom apartment at Chapel Properties in May 2012. These properties are valued at N928 million in Port Harcourt, and another property is located at 135 Awolowo Road/Bourdillon Road, Ikoyi, Lagos State. Additionally, it was reported that the former minister paid \$2.2 million in December 2011 for a 4,890 square meter property at 12, Forces Avenue, Old GRA, Port Harcourt, under the name Sequoyah Properties Limited (Premium Times, 2023; Agbo, 2023).

This evidence against the former Minister of Petroleum showcases clear unethical behavior and can be detrimental to women's political empowerment and achieving gender parity agenda. The female gender is perceived to be more moral in action than their male counterpart, however, this belief is being shredded by evidence of corrupt activities by some women found in the corridors of power in Nigeria. These unethical characters are inimical to achieving gender equality and inclusive governance in Nigeria. This is because a lack of trust in women's agency is capable of limiting the number of women's recommendations, appointments, or those elected into leadership posts.

Stella Oduah served as Nigeria's Minister of Aviation from 2011 to 2014. Precisely on July 2, 2011, she was officially appointed as a minister and took the oath of office. In 2015, she was elected to represent Anambra North Senatorial District at the senate in the year 2015, and in 2019, she was re-elected to a second term (Olowolagba, 2019). While in office, Stella Oduah was faced with allegations of corruption and misuse of funds. One of the most popular scandals was concerned with the inflation of the cost of two armored BMW cars at \$1.6 million for the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA). The action of the minister attracted public criticism, leading to the House of Representatives and a presidential committee indicting her for demanding the purchase of two armored at such an exorbitant rate, which is against Nigeria's public procurement laws (Ogala, 2014). She was also charged with fraud, money laundering, and bribery against China's Construction Giant, totaling N7.9 billion. On Friday, July 21, 2023, Mrs Oduah and eight other people entered a not-guilty plea to an N7.9 billion fraud accusation brought by the EFCC against them (Oyeyemi, 2023). Evidence from the case of Stella Oduah above does not speak less of corrupt activities engaged by women in leadership posts. Just like their male counterpart, women in leadership positions have failed to prove that they are more transparent in office than men. These actions by women leaders portray a negative image of women and may limit citizens' trust and belief in women's agency, especially during electoral contests.

Mrs. Sadiya Umar-Farouq was Nigeria's Minister of Humanitarian Affairs from 2019-2023. Mrs Sadiya Umar-Farouq served as the first minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development during President Muhammed Buhari's administration. She was purportedly implicated in corruption allegations while serving in the ministry. During her tenure in office, the ministry was allegedly engaged in certain money laundering and fraudulent operations. The school feeding component of the social intervention programs under the ministry was accused of diverting funds meant for

school feeding. According to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), its inquiry into the alleged corruption scandal revealed the diversion of N2.67 billion intended for schoolchildren's feeding within the period of COVID-19-induced lockdown (Agbo, 2024). Following this, the EFCC arrested Sadiya Umar-Farouq to question her on claims of corruption in the management of N37,170,855,753.44 in social intervention funds during her term. The contractor, who was identified with the name James Okwete, was denied by Mrs Sadiya Umar-Farouq of knowing his dealings, which was likewise connected to the aforementioned amount (Suleiman, 2023).

The corruption case involving Sadiya Umar-Farouq during the COVID-19 period comes with a lot of questions. This is so because the lockdown within this period required that all schools be closed down. Following the federal government's directive to shut down all schools, some of the unanswered questions that come to mind include: (i) which school was in section during the COVID-19 period? (ii) Whose/which children were fed? (iii) what method/methods were employed in the selection process? (iv) Which other agency/agencies assisted the ministry in carrying out the school feeding program? Or was the activity wholly done by the ministry? Answers to these questions are vital for re-evaluating the corruption allegations against the former Minister of Aviation Mrs. Sadiya Umar-Farouq.

Betta Chimaobim Edu served as Nigeria's Aviation Minister from August 2023 - January 2024. Betta Edu was in 2015 appointed Special Adviser to the Executive Governor of Cross River State on Community and Primary Healthcare and later Cross River State Commissioner for Health until her resignation. In 2020, she became chairman of the Cross-River State COVID-19 Taskforce and National Chairman of the Nigeria Health Commissioners Forum in 2021 (Oyeleke, 2023). In July 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu nominated Betta Edu for a ministerial appointment alongside other nominees, and in August 2023, she was sworn in as Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, making her the youngest minister at the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria in the Fourth Nigerian Republic (Enoghase, 2023).

Betta Edu was, however, suspended as the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation after an alleged ₦585 million (\$640,000; £500,000) scandal in her ministry on January 8, 2024 (Tolu-Kolawole, 2024; Agbo, 2024). The sum was meant for vulnerable groups in Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ogun, and Lagos states. Since the minister was suspended from office, no other political post has been offered to her as further investigation into the corruption case has been ongoing.

Corruption activities involving Betta Edu just like others above disclose the level of corruption rot within the Nigerian state. These cases complement the idea that corruption has no gender bound. It is on this note that Anne-Marie (2004) suggested that the level of corruption among genders depends on the level of exposure different genders have to corrupt practices. A higher level of exposure in daily life is probably associated with a

higher tolerance for corruption and vice versa. Thus, if these few selected women leaders out of a handful of women leaders in Nigeria could have such a level of corruption allegations; it follows then that corruption cut across all genders. A lack of accountability in public offices in Nigeria is evidenced by these selected cases. The shreds of evidence above disclose that women in leadership posts in Nigeria are not exempted from corruption acts. Although women are envisaged by many to display more integrity in the discharge of their duties, hence, the above evidence makes a mockery of such a view. These occurrences provide an opportunity to reflect on the wider implications for women's leadership in Nigeria. These women's actions highlight the relevance of ethical leadership and the necessity of supporting women who can function as positive role models in governance. Although it may not be appropriate to draw general conclusions about all female leaders from their actions, however, it provides clear evidence that women leaders just like their male counterparts engage in corruption once given the opportunity.

It is important to consider the broader social and political context in which these women operated. In a political system rife with entrenched corruption, many women in power may find it challenging to navigate corrupt acts, and may as well face additional scrutiny and harsher consequences than their male counterparts, who might engage in similar or more offensive behavior because of entrenched inequality and oppression that have existed between genders over centuries. These issues demonstrate the necessity of more robust institutional frameworks to guard against corruption and guarantee accountability, irrespective of the gender of the officeholder. The impact of poor accountability and corruption is enormous, thus, to improve governance in Nigeria, it is imperative to strengthen transparency, enforce legal repercussions, and cultivate a political culture that discourages impunity.

### **Impact of Corruption and Accountability gap on Governance**

Effective governance is negatively impacted by corruption and accountability deficits on a large scale, at the local, national, and international levels. Public institutions and procedures suffer from legitimacy issues as well as efficacy and efficiency issues due to corruption and a lack of accountability. These damage public trust, impair political stability, and widen the divide between the rich and the poor. Public trust and confidence in political leaders, government institutions, and the rule of law are all undermined by widespread corruption and accountability gaps (Zaloznaya et al., 2022). The public's perception of the government as dishonest, partisan, and unaccountable can cause disenchantment and a sense of estrangement from the democratic system. Public confidence in democratic government and the electoral system is weakened by corruption, which calls into question the legitimacy of democratic institutions and procedures. People may lose faith in democracy itself and experience political instability if they believe that their leaders are dishonest and unaccountable.

In terms of the economy, corruption has a profoundly negative economic influence on a country's population and development. Corruption impedes attempts to reduce poverty

and promote economic development by taking funds away from vital programs like infrastructure, healthcare, and education. Through theft, bribery, and kickbacks, funds designated for development projects may be diverted, resulting in inefficiencies and waste (Kulmie, Hilif & Hussein, 2023; Wei et al., 2022). Moreover, corruption impedes economic growth and development by warping investor trust and distorting market dynamics. Bribery, nepotism, and cronyism can put up obstacles to entry for companies, limiting innovation and competition. Corrupt and ineffective corporate settings discourage domestic and foreign investment, hampering economic progress.

Corruption also undermines the impartiality and integrity of legal and judicial institutions, which erodes the rule of law and threatens democratic governance. A culture of impunity is fostered by institutional checks and balances that are weakened by the lax enforcement of anti-corruption laws, the impunity of corrupt officials, and the absence of accountability procedures (Kulmie et al., 2023). Furthermore, the independence and integrity of important democratic institutions like the legislature, court system, and regulatory agencies may be compromised by vested interests and powerful individuals gaining control of them. The public's confidence in the democratic process may be eroded by institutional capture, and a small number of elites may come to hold all the power (Zaloznaya et al., 2022). These few people's unscrupulous actions exacerbate poverty and socioeconomic inequality in the community. By taking resources away from marginalized and vulnerable populations, corruption exacerbates social inequality and prolongs poverty (Aktaş, 2022; Keneck-Massil et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2021).

Similarly, social cohesiveness and stability are undermined by social gaps that are made worse by limited access to justice, public services, and opportunities for socioeconomic growth. Women, ethnic minorities, and rural areas are among the marginalized and underprivileged populations that corruption disproportionately impacts. Due to corruption, there is limited access to opportunities and resources, which feeds the cycles of poverty, inequality, and subpar service delivery, as well as social marginalization and exclusion. (Aktaş, 2022; Keneck-Massil et al., 2021). More so, in terms of the effectiveness of institutions in fulfilling their responsibilities, corruption erodes public sector organizations' efficacy, impeding the provision of services and compromising development goals. The quality of life for citizens is negatively impacted by embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds, which leads to inadequate infrastructure, healthcare, and education outcomes (Kulmie et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022; Aktaş, 2022; Keneck-Massil et al., 2021). Furthermore, neglect and deterioration of public infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, are caused by corruption. Infrastructure project funding is susceptible to embezzlement or diversion, which could result in construction delays, cost overruns, and poor-quality work that endangers public safety and welfare (Kulmie et al., 2023).

Corruption and accountability gaps have significant and multifaceted impacts on governance in Nigeria, undermining the credibility, efficacy, and efficiency of governmental institutions and procedures. Comprehensive changes that boost anti-

corruption measures, advance accountability and transparency, and cultivate ethical governance and integrity culture are needed to address these issues.

### **Strategies for promoting transparency and accountability among women leaders**

Promoting transparency and accountability among women leaders in Africa and particularly Nigeria necessitates a multifaceted strategy that tackles structural issues and gives women the ability to preserve moral principles and advance good governance. To implement effective measures, these strategies should be employed:

1. **Strengthening legal framework:** Enhancing legal frameworks such as the adoption and implementation of anti-corruption legislation is a vital strategy that would promote transparency and accountability among women leaders. Improving anti-corruption laws and passing new ones will boost transparency and hinder corruption activities. More so, institutions of justice such as the judiciary must be made truly independent and reinforced to guarantee the efficient application of these laws.
2. **Strengthening institutional capacities:** To effectively monitor and assess individuals with charges of corruption and misbehavior, it is essential to strengthen the competency and independence of oversight institutions, such as anti-corruption agencies, audit committees, and parliamentary committees. Adequate staffing, resources, and technical expertise should be employed to efficiently and effectively achieve this goal.
3. **Capacity building:** Building capacity programs would help enhance transparency and reduce accountability gaps among female leaders. It is crucial to offer training and capacity-building initiatives on ethical leadership, anti-corruption measures, and good governance practices to female leaders and relevant stakeholders.
4. **Encouraging gender-responsive policies:** Policies that support women in leadership roles are crucial to advancing their effectiveness and accomplishment. Mainstreaming gender considerations into anti-corruption tactics and policies and encouraging women's participation are crucial in promoting women in leadership and transparency in governance.
5. **Fostering a culture of integrity and accountability:** Strategies that promote ethical leadership should be employed. Through awareness-raising campaigns, mentoring programs, and peer support networks, ethical leadership and integrity among women leaders can be attained. Raising public awareness about the detrimental effects of corruption and the importance of transparency and accountability in governance are effective measures to curtail corruption among women leaders.
6. **Strengthening international cooperation and collaboration:** Mechanisms that promote accountability and transparency in governance can be greatly achieved through international cooperation and collaboration. Anti-corruption initiatives and capacity-building efforts supported by regional and international partners, such as donor agencies, multilateral organizations, and civil society groups, and utilizing their technical assistance, expertise, and resources would help attain transparency and close the accountability gap among women leaders.

This article examined the dynamics of corrupt practices and accountability gaps among women in political leadership in Africa focusing on Nigeria using a few selected cases. The research determined to find out if women political leaders have a high propensity to corruption like male leaders, and are less corrupt than their male folks in Nigeria. Findings revealed that women like men alike engage in corrupt practices largely because of systemic corruption which may be difficult for women to navigate in a male-dominated political system.

### **Conclusion**

Although corruption is a global problem, it has no gender boundaries. The prevalence of corruption and accountability gaps among female political leaders in Nigeria poses a complex dilemma that has wide-ranging effects on good governance, development, and gender parity advancement. Women in leadership posts are faced with challenges of systemic corruption, exacerbated by societal norms and institutional deficiencies that make it difficult for them to carry out their responsibilities honestly and efficiently, even in the face of initiatives to combat corruption and encourage accountability. Women leaders' involvement in corruption activities could have robust negative implications on advancing gender equality goals, reduce public trust in women, and limit women's future opportunities for appointments and elections into political posts. Hence, to enhance accountability and transparency in leadership, a comprehensive and coordinated effort is needed to support the development of a culture of integrity and honesty in leadership positions. Furthermore, legal reforms, institutional reinforcement, the enactment and implementation of gender-responsive policies, and capacity-building assistance capable of fostering transparency and accountability among women leaders in Nigeria are crucial. Thus, employing these strategies would move Nigeria toward more transparent, efficient, and inclusive governance by encouraging women to take on leadership roles and cultivating an accountability culture both inside government agencies and in society at large.

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