

Nigeria's Falling Accountant Generals: When Treasury House Becomes Looters' Palace

By Sonala Olumhense

A recent occupant of the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation has been [convicted](#). His offence: diverting N868.46 million in public funds. Anamekwe Nwabuoku received 72 years in jail. On paper, at least. Typically, top Nigerian officials accused of massive financial crimes do not receive negative verdicts. They are taken to court, and the years come and go as judges change, while the accused carries on with life, cushioned by a retinue of lawyers. Mr Nwabuoku, who served in an acting capacity for just a few weeks, defies this trend. The Treasury House, that quiet engine room where the nation's numbers are expected to behave themselves, is no longer merely under scrutiny. It is on trial. Not metaphorically. Not rhetorically. Not in the loose, forgiving way Nigerians have learned to speak about scandal, but literally. Remember: Nwabuoku's predecessor, Ahmed Idris, is still in court. He is facing [allegations of N109 billion](#), allegations so staggering that they suggest system capture. The Treasury House, that quiet engine room where the nation's numbers are

expected to behave themselves, is no longer merely under scrutiny. But while the system was being fortified, the custodians were not: Otunla, the supposed reformist, would later face prosecution over alleged [money laundering](#) and [diversion of funds](#). Four years ago, I [argued](#) that Nigeria had embraced a model of government in which authority was freely granted but accountability was never required. "Government without governing" is a craft in which officials are not required to explain themselves, not required to perform, and certainly not required to answer for failure. It is impossible to understand Treasury House today without returning to that moment. Idris arrived in June 2015 and, astonishingly, was reappointed in 2019 even as he was reportedly beyond the statutory age. And when he was eventually arrested in May 2022, the figure attached to the arrest was N80 billion.

Think about that: One official, N80 billion. But that



figure ballooned to N109 billion in the formal charges before the court. The warning signs were not hidden in classified vaults or encrypted ledgers. They were in the open: embedded in a culture that celebrated proximity to power over fidelity to duty. A culture in which the presidency itself, as I wrote then, “demands neither performance nor responsibility for non-performance of his appointees.” That is where Treasury House broke. Because a treasury is protected not really by firepower or technology, but by consequences. The Nigerian irony is that we build systems without consequences. We resent accountability. Systems do not defend themselves. People do. Institutions do. Culture does. And where these are compromised, the system does not prevent corruption; it enables it. It explains why those who allegedly build the systems return in the morning to vandalize and violate them. We celebrate “anti-corruption” agency leaders not for exemplary sacrifice or demonstrations of accountability, but for big speeches that cleverly protect names. The police do not police. If you are a Senate President or former Governor, or a Minister, anti-corruption agencies invest you with almost-total immunity. This is why Treasury House is embarrassing, and the Idris case matters beyond its astronomical figures. If the allegations are proven, what we are looking at is not theft around the system, but theft through the very architecture of control.

But consider that, in a twist that should shame any serious state, Nigeria had replaced Idris with Nwabuoku, supposedly a corrective appointment. Instead, he too fell, convicted of diverting defence-related funds: money that, in any functioning country, would be treated with the highest fiduciary discipline. Pause there. Two successive custodians of the national treasury: one on trial for N109 billion, the other convicted for N868 million. Were this a novel, it would be rejected for lack of credibility. In Nigeria, it passes for governance, and it is why, if Nigerians still have voices, the conversation must move beyond individuals. Because Idris and Nwabuoku are, sadly, only symptoms. The problem is a political culture that protects power and negotiates accountability, a system in which investigations can begin without urgency, prosecutions can proceed without momentum, and cases can stretch until public memory dissolves as judges retire or recuse themselves, prosecutors change, and witnesses age or die. Ours is a peculiarly choreographed elite impunity: arrest, arraignment, adjournment, courtroom maneuvers, fatigue, forgetfulness.

This is why Nwabuoku's conviction is so extraordinary

as to be revolutionary. It is so rare in execution that you almost feel sorry for him until you remember the millions of Nigerians he deprived. But, as is often our story, the larger matter, the one involving N109 billion that is not building infrastructure, saving lives, providing education, or uplifting people, remains unresolved. It is trapped, as is routine and may be for decades, in procedural arguments, real or contrived. So, what is Treasury House? Is it the fortress of fiscal discipline Nigeria claims it to be? Or is it, as the evidence increasingly suggests, a weakly defended citadel, one in which reform and impunity coexist, and where the numbers, however elegantly compiled, cannot tell the truth about themselves?

I have persistently written about a presidency that refuses to publish the names behind recovered funds or identify assets it is selling. Three years ago, I wrote again that this government would disobey court orders to disclose accountability records. We shamelessly protect and elevate those who should be behind bars, giving them chieftaincy titles, ministerial chairs, and turbans. Aesop, the Greek philosopher, must have had Nigeria in mind when he said, “We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to high office.” Nigeria's refusal to name, to disclose, to conclude, has consequences. It creates permissiveness. It signals to friends and enemies that accountability is negotiable. It tells the system that it can bend. But eventually, it breaks. This is what we are witnessing now: not a series of scandals, but the exposure of an institutional condition. A treasury that cannot guarantee its own integrity is not merely inefficient; it is dangerous. Because the damage radiates outward, into federal allocations, into state and local government finances, into public trust, into the credibility of every number the government publishes. Sadly, this is nationwide. When a country can no longer trust its numbers, it cannot plan, it cannot govern, and it cannot grow. The tragedy is not simply that money has been stolen; it is that the institution designed to protect it has lost the presumption of honesty and service. Until Nigeria restores consequence: swift, visible, and unavoidable, Treasury House will remain what it has now become: one of the places where its disappearance is most efficiently arranged. I invite Nigerians who agree that Treasury House is simply a metaphor to refuse to be spectators.



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