
EFFECT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

UKAH FINIAN O (PhD)

Finejoe86@yahoo.com

08038814765

IKECHUKWU DIALOKE (PhD)

driechukwudialoke@yahoo.com

Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike

EGBE EMMANUEL Onyekachi

Dept of Political Science

Alvan Ikoku University of Education Owerri

Abstract

Civil society groups are agents of development in any nation. Civil society organizations play vital role in social, political and economic development activities. The transformation of any society or system, particularly the developing societies like Nigeria depend on the effectiveness and efficiency of its civil societies. This paper critically assessed the impact of civil society groups, and its contribution to sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper also examined factors that hinder the performance of civil society groups in relation to national development. Secondary method of data collection was used to source information. The paper concludes that civil society groups in Nigeria are bedeviled with series of problems ranging from political instability, inadequate funding, disconnection from rural organizations, government patronage, lack of internal democracy, lack of unity, corruption and lack of state support and partnership. The paper recommends that civil society groups need to be sanitized and strengthened so as to ensure effective service delivery through the creation of an enabling environment for their operation and that they should maintain a high degree of independence from the government.

Key words: civil society, democratic sustenance, sustainable development, policy evaluation.

Introduction

A vibrant civil society is sine qua non to the sustenance of any nation's development. Studies have shown that the role of civil society groups is vital in the political, social and economic development of African countries (see Diamond, 1999; Ndegwa, 1996; Yohanness, 1997; and Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). According to Yohanness (1997), this role can be view from three dimensions. First, improving the quality of governance;

second, developing the capacity of governments to apply the principles of accountability, transparency and openness; third, working towards gaining the commitment of all elected officials, public servants, and NGOs to good governance. In view of this, one can infer that, CSO's have, contributed immensely to democratic consolidation and sustainable development in Nigeria. In fact, the responsibility of ensuring sustainable development rest on the shoulder of CSOs. This is because; they are the agents of development in any nation.

Civil society has become across the world, the non state emergent agent for providing critical social welfare, social services, humanitarian services, socio-economic empowerment, political participation, human capital development and productive economic activities. But more importantly, it has become the popular agent for instituting accountability, transparency and good governance, restraining state abuses, resisting the untamed effects of market forces and strengthening public scrutiny.

Conceptual Clarifications

Civil society: Civil Society is the associational life of citizens characterized by common interests, civil and public purposes, and voluntary collective and autonomous actions (Grindle, 1996, Ikelegbe 2001a). It is made up of voluntary assemblies and organizations that form part of the modern democratic system as a pressure group that promotes justice and social order (Ikelegbe, 2013). The status of civil society organization as societal actors in many parts of the world, coupled with its varied nature and composition, makes its definition vary according to conceptual paradigms, historical origin and country context. Civil society is a trend of societal interaction between individuals and the government which is displayed in the values of the societal cooperation, self-help organizations, and networks of public activities (Adibe, 2015). According to Chambers and Kopstein (2008) civil society is an association and an activity that is apart from the state, against the state, in support of the state, in dialogue with the state, in partnership with the state, and beyond the state. This definition simply denotes that civil society is an association that is in coordination with the state, in contradiction and in-between depending on the interests and the issues at hand. The term civil society refers to the wide array of non-governmental and non-profit oriented organizations that have a presence in public life expressing the interest and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religions or philanthropic considerations. civil society organizations (CSOs) therefore include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), trade unions, farmers associations, academic staff unions, professional organizations, students movements and other activities which are not related to political organizations (Edwards, 2011).

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) defines sustainable development as a: process of change in which exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations (Mabogunje, 1996).

In more specific and action terms, SD according to Tolba (1987) encompasses the following;

- i) Help for the very poor because they are left with no option other than to destroy their environment
- ii) Self reliant development within natural resource constraints
- iii) Development that does not degrade environmental quality nor reduce productivity in the long run
- iv) The great issues of health control, appropriate technologies, food self reliance, clean water and shelter for all
- v) People centred initiatives as people are the resources in sustainable development.

Sustainable development has three dimensions; economic, environment and social. In a sense, these dimensions refer to sustainable qualitative improvements and integrated sustainable growth in the quality of life, the economy, society and environment. Thus economic growth for example is not at the expense of society or the environment. According to Natufe (2001), the scale should significantly tilt in favour of the environment.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Civil Society as a Third Sector

This work adopted the theory of a civil society as the “Third Sector.” The theory has its root from the support by Kettering Foundation in 1987 in the United States. The Kettering Foundation financed programmes to study civil societies and their role in the society. One of the major assumptions of the Third Sector theory is that civil society is a third sector in governance or an independent sector different from the government and private/business sectors. The assumption believed that civil society is a voluntary and non-governmental organization which played a critical role in democratic process around the world. Thus, the state is perceived as the first sector, the second sector comprises businesses, families, schools, universities, mosques and churches, and all

forms of voluntary organizations and professionals. Civil society is thus seen as the third sector which plays an important role different from the first and second sectors ([Salamon et al., 1997](#)).

The second assumption is society is not composed only of political order, but it also consists of social order of voluntary groups and their own orders. These social orders of the civil societies include diverse networks of organizations from alliances, unions, federations, and confederations of interest groups. Through this mode, a civil order is established ([Sriskandarajah, 2016](#)). Thus, succinctly, it can be understood from the two major assumptions of the Third Sector Theory that civil society is distinct from the government and a private enterprise sectors making it another independent body for social order and that, it is not only the government or the political aspect of the society that can provide regulations, order, needs, and social norms for individuals in the society since civil societies too can do the same.

The Theory of Third Sector is practically applicable to this study. This is because in Nigeria, prior to the emergence of civil societies and their activities in the 1990s, there were two sectors in the country. They are the government which controls the political order and the second sector is the private enterprise which consists of families, businesses, schools, universities, and professional groups. The civil societies which emanated in the 1990s to challenge the status quo of military dominance in Nigerian politics formed the third sector perfectly and it influenced the democratization process and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Civil Societies in Nigeria

The history and emergence of civil societies in Nigeria can be categorized into four basic stages: pre-colonial period, colonial period, military era, and post-military period ([Udogu, 1995](#)). Civil societies existed in pre-colonial period in forms of influence, communication, participation, and persuasion between the citizens and the state. There are various non-political associations in the pre-colonial kingdoms, chiefdoms, and societies that formed the present day Nigeria separate from government or rulers whose main activities were centered on civil activities such as community self-help and demand for civil right particularly in the decentralized states of Igbos and Niger-Delta societies ([World Economic Forum, 2013](#)).

During the colonial era, the Nigerian elite organized themselves and formed movements and associations which were different from political parties or government agencies and institutions to press home for their civil rights. These associations include West African Students Union (WASU) in 1920 and the National Congress for British West Africa (NCBWA) in 1925 (). The civil societies in Nigeria during colonial era were movements established to fight against colonial rule in the

country. Some of these groups included political parties like Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) established in 1922, Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) 1941, Action Group (AG) 1948, Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) 1951, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) 1952, United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) 1954, and several other parties established during colonial era ([Utsaha, 2014](#)).

The rise of active and modern civil society has been associated with the era of military regime. They received a considerable support from international civil societies and agencies as well as financial support to challenge military authoritarianism and to pursue democratic governance. There emerged many groups of civil societies such as human rights, women's associations, and other NGOs ([Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019](#)). As discussed in the previous section of this work, the civil societies are active organizations that succeeded in pressurizing the military to surrender power in the 1990s after prolonged decades of military rule

After Nigeria's 1999 election and the return to civilian democracy, it took a lot of civil society groups a long time to find their relevance and niche in working within a democracy. The language of attacking the military was not suited for engaging with a democracy. For some of them it cost them relevance because their approach was inappropriately aggressive. For others, being too close to government cost them their credibility because they lost their objectivity. Some other groups did find a way forward by focusing on how to improve the quality of governance. They identified gaps in the existing structures, built issue-specific partnerships and continued to push for those issues that affected Nigerians for which government lacked capacity or willingness to address.

Materials and Methods

Data were collected from secondary sources. The secondary data include books, journals, internet sources, and reports from civil societies and other international agencies that deal with civil societies directly. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analytical interpretations including tables and models for clarity of interpretation and perception. The data were backed up with theoretical postulations and existing literature in the field for a better analysis and discussions.

The Challenges of Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria

The role of civil society organizations in Nigeria's democratization project has been hampered by the following factors:

Inadequate Funding: Pratt (2003) has identified inadequate funding as a major challenge faced by NGOs in playing their role as democratic institutions. He noted

that most NGOs are funded by volunteered official donors. Some of these donors like the Dutch have reversed their 20 years of increased funding of NGOs. The withdrawal of these donor organizations has left huge financial gap between the function of the NGOs and their present financial position.

Misdirected Contracting: It has been noted above that the western countries contract government services to non-for-profit organizations to facilitate service delivery and accountability, the case is different in Nigeria. Instead of government contracting welfare services to NGOs and other civil society organizations, contract for service provision are given to for-profit organizations, even in areas assumed to be exclusively reserved for NGOs. This invariably creates a distance between civil society organizations and management of public affairs; making it difficult for them to make their input that bear on the welfare of the public or its members. This manifests in the privatization of most basic essential services such as health, education, power, social welfare, recreation etc.

Military Rule: Kukah (2007) has recounted how the military applied its dictatorial regime to limit the operational scope of the institutions of civil society- the labour unions, the academic, women organization, Bar Association and Student Union. Kukah gave an account of how the military penetrated the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and the judiciary. According to him, in 1989, the NBA under the leadership of Uche, hosted the African BAR Association conference in Abuja, where the then military Vice President, Augustus Aikhomu declared the ceremony open with a donation of N10m to the BAR; the Cheque was handed over to the then president of NBA - Mr Idehen - a kinsman to the V.P. Aikhomu. In addition to that, two past presidents of the BAR (Messrs. Bola Ajibola and Clement Akpangbo) were appointed the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the federation by President Ibrahim Babangida respectively. These two incidents sent out a wrong signal that this attractive offer created the impression that the presidency of the BAR was a stepping stone to becoming the Attorney General and minister of Justice. Thus, this created a kind of collision between the judiciary and the BAR especially regarding defense for government. This led to a massive internal crisis within the BAR which manifested at the next election of the president of the BAR slated to hold in Port Harcourt.

Political Instability: Another issue challenging the ability of civil society organizations from playing their role in Nigerian democracy is instability of government. Nigeria has had a history of frequent change of government. Instability occurs both from military to civilian and from civilian to civilian administration. With each administration coming up with different policies in order to score performance goals

and take praises. This means that projects initiated by previous administrations are either abandoned or replaced with a new name with entirely different arrangement. For instance, the Better Life for Rural Women program launched by Mrs. Marian Babangida under the Babangida led military junta, with the huge amount invested in it was immediately replaced by Mrs. Marian Abacha as soon as Sani Abacha took over government. The economic arm of the Family Support Program (FSP) of Mariam Abacha was launched with an initial capital of N4.3b (Kukah: 2001) the Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP). Even the Mariam Abacha family support program ended with the exit of Sani Abacha, rendering the billions of naira invested in these programs a national waste. Those woman organisations beginning from the National Council of Woman Societies, to Better Life Program and Family Support were all intended to improve the course of women especially empowering them economically and giving them voice in the democratic space. However, the incessant change of government and lack of policy continuity have rendered the objectives of these programs unattainable. Those programs have all gone into extinction such that since 1999 neither has any reference made to them nor any effort made to revive them for democratic engineering.

Economic Conditions of Nigeria Society

The economic condition of Nigerian society is another obstacle suffered by civil society organizations in Nigeria. The conditions of hardship the citizens find themselves would invariably affect their strength of agitation. This has often times led to corruption and betrayal whereby the leaders of civil society organizations receive gratifications from government to douse the struggle. As leaders are gagged by the opium of contract award, appointments, cash incentives and gifts from the power that be, they can no longer forge any moral justification to criticize or play hard on government to secure the interest of members as stakeholders in democracy; besides, members who are already harassed by poverty are compelled by slight promise of gratifications to tilt towards government position. For instance, the issue of minimum wage has been discussed for more than six months without any sign of its implementation, and all members of labour unions go about their normal duties without any further move to compel government to comply with its promise either through a strike action or any serious protest. By the time government threatens with either loss of job or apply a "no work, no pay rule" most people would rush back to work for fear of losing the little source of livelihood; some persons will go by the maxim 'half bread is better than none' Nigerians are great managers of economic hardship. There have been some cases where workers spend the first one month at home on industrial action and most would be itching to go back to work with the hope that it is better to be owed by

government than not having any hope anywhere. These are problems caused by economic hardship where citizens act like those without any knowledge of their rights.

Lack of Press Freedom

The role of the media in democracy is enormous. It is through the media that citizens air their views and make their opinions known about government policies, especially those considered inimical to the interest of the masses. One of the fundamental ideals of democracy is freedom of speech. Freedom of speech entails that citizens have the right to praise and criticise government through any media. Government in turn is expected to consider the criticisms of the citizens in policy formation and implementation. Unfortunately, the case in Nigeria has been different from the period of military rule, down the current civilian dispensation. The media institutions operate in fear such that they select programs and opinion to air to avoid being short down. During the military era, each region employed a number of repressive tactics to exert different levels of control on the media. General Muhammadu Buhari as a military head of state enacted degree 4 in

Religious Intolerance: Religion is both a unifying factor and at the same time a centrifugal force. Individuals with different religious ideologies tend to tilt towards particular believe system which they hold very tenaciously. Nigeria has a long history of intolerance between the two-dominant religious groups:- Christianity and Islam. Most civil society organizations that are of national relevance suffer the problem arising from religious differences. Instead of coming to fight a common cause, members divide themselves along religious lines and disintegrate their strength which weakens the association. The effect of this can be better explained with the maxim: ' a house divided against itself cannot stands'. Even in states inhabited by Christians and Muslims on equal proportion, the constant attacks and reprisal attacks by Muslims on Christians and vice-versa, in Kaduna state for example can't provide any forum to discuss their common good.

Conclusion

The role of civil society organizations has been sufficiently highlighted above. Western democracies appreciate the contributions made by these organizations, and have adequately incorporated them in the policy process to promote good governance. This most probably explains why these countries have experienced expansion, sustained democratic culture, and an overall national development. While those in advanced democracies may relax their efforts having attained an appreciable height in pursuit of democratic values, it is expected that civil society organizations in developing countries should double the effort of those in advanced democracies to raise the status of these emerging democracies. For that to happen, it

is expedient that government creates an enabling environment for the impact of the activities of these organizations to be felt on the nation's democracy. The country needs innovative ideas, critical analysis of policies and programs of government. These virtues can come from well-informed members of the civil society groups.

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen civil society organizations in Nigeria as agents of sustainable development, the following recommendations are provided:

- ❖ Improvement in the general economic conditions of Nigerian citizens. An improved economic condition of citizens would give them better focus towards their role as drivers in the democracy project. This can be done by creating conditions that engage the citizens in meaningful activities through manpower development, skills acquisition and employment generation.
- ❖ Government should create room for civil society organizations to participate actively in governance. This can be achieved by understanding citizens' protects and agitations as part of the input into the system which should guide government policies decisions and outputs, and not to be seen as confrontational groups that should be dispersed with police teargas, shooting or other forms of force to intimidated and frustrate peaceful protesters. Demands of the citizens expressed either through protest or dialogue should be considered for policy implication.
- ❖ Civil society organizations should work in synergy with each other to present a strong force capable of attracting government attention. They can do this by coming together to address basic social problems that affect the generality of the citizens, such as issues of political participation, protection of fundamental rights of citizens, security, etc, and shun all forms of intolerance that could breed internal crisis amongst them.

References

- Adibe, J. (2015). The 2015 presidential election in Nigeria: The issues and challenges. Brookings Institution.
- Chambers, S., & Kopstein, J. (2008). Civil society and the state. In Phillips, A., Honig, B., Dryzek, J. S. (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political theory* (pp. 364–381). Oxford University Press.
- Edwards, M. (2011). Introduction; Civil society and the geometry of human relations. In Edwards, M. (Ed). *The Oxford handbook of civil society*, 3-14, Oxford University Press.

- Ikelegbe, A., O. (2003). Civil Society and Alternative Approaches to Conflict Management, In T.A. Imobighe (ed) Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria. Ibadan: Spectrum.
- Ikelegbe, A. O. (2013). The state and civil society in Nigeria: Towards a partnership for sustainable development. Centre for Population and Environmental Development.
- Kukah, M.H. (2007). Democracy and civil society in Nigeria, Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- National Democratic Institute (2019). Preliminary report of Nigeria's 2019 election. <https://www.ndi.org/sub-saharan-africa/nigeria>
- Pratt, B. (2013). Intrac for civil society. Retrieved from: <http://www.intrac.org>
- Salamon, M. L., Anheier, H. K., List, R., Toepler, S., Sokolowski, S. W. (1997). Global civil society sector: Dimensions of the nonprofit sector. The John Hopkins Centre for Civil Society Studies.
- Udogu, E., I. (1995). The military, civil society and the issue of democratic governance: Towards Nigeria's republic. *Journal of Developing Studies*, 13(2), 206-220.
- Utasha, M. (2014). The rule of law: The role of civil society in Nigeria: Being a text of presentation at a round table organized by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Tues, June 10, 2014. Maitama Abuja, FCT.
- Wikipedia (2018). Civil societies. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society
- World Economic Forum . (2013). The future role of civil society. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FutureRoleCivilSociety_Report_2013.pdf
- Young, C.(1992), In Search of Civil Society, In In J. Harbeson, D. Rothchild & N.Chazan (eds) Civil Society and the State in Africa. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.