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The Impact of Civil Society Organizations on Sustainable Development in Developing Countries: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

Civil society groups are agents of development in any nation. Civil society organizations appear to play important 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 examines the factors impeding the performance of civil society groups in relation to national development. The paper adopts secondary method of data collection to source information. The paper concludes that the Civil Society Groups in Nigeria and other developing nations are bedevilled with series of problems ranging from political instability, disconnection from rural organizations, lack of unity, inadequate funding, government patronage, lack of internal democracy, lack of skills, corruption and lack of state support and partnership. It 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, economic 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; Yohannes, 1997; and Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). According to Yohannes (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.

They serve as the internal correctional mechanism to check and balance the activities of government to avoid wasteful spending, misappropriation and embezzlement of funds and help determine or prioritise the needs of the people. CSOs more often than not champion dissenting views with government officials on a particular issue at a point in time. Political executives premise this on the fact that they derived their policy option and direction largely, from the cooperation and collaboration among certain key stakeholders as against caucus decision-making and public - policy process.

Be that as it may, political and development analysts have rightly come to give great prominence to the activities of CSOs. One must note that the collaboration and participation of the civil society is frequently a crucial factor in the successful implementation of development initiatives. This point is premised on the view that CSOs are typically closer than most government actors are to the grassroots of the community, with consequent advantages both in the ability to mobilize at the levels governments may find difficult to reach and in the sensitivity to grassroots needs that may be vital to the achievement of development objectives (African Development Forum [ADF], 2004). This can be seen from the activities of CSOs on the input side of large-scale initiatives, in consultations and forums at all levels, and also in the effective pursuit of goals such as achieving targets for representation, promoting regional integration and international cooperation, and maintaining or restoring respect for human rights in Nigeria. It is on this ground, that this paper aims to analyse the impact of the roles of CSOs in promoting, maintaining and consolidating socio-economic and political development in Nigeria.

The paper is divided into several sections. The first and second sections deal with the introduction, conceptual clarification, roles and functions of CSOs. The third section traces the historical overview as well as the impact of CSOs on national development in the country. Suffice it is to mention the impact of the CSOs is analysed on several developmental issues in the governance and politics in Nigeria such as the third term agenda, fuel subsidy removal, Freedom of Information

Act, health sector reform, Anti-gay marriage bill, the doctrine of necessity clause and the electoral reform. The problems affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of CSOs in Nigeria are also examined and the paper ends with conclusion and recommendations.

Civil society and civil society organisations: a clarification

There is little agreement on the precise meaning of civil society organisations, though much overlap exists among core conceptual components. Aside this, the types of organizations that make up the list of CSOs have also been generating controversies among scholars. This prompted Matsuura (2001) to raise a pertinent questions that “should it include political parties and private or corporate sector? It should be noted that it is now a settled matter in the annals of literature that civil society exclude political parties and business organizations (see Cohen and Arato, 1992; Diamond 1992 and 1999; Hirata, 2002; Simai, 2006 and Scholte, 2001). Though, the latter is still shrouded in controversy. Civil society is distinguished from political society (i.e., the party system) on the ground that political parties seek to capture political power and form government while civil society only influence government policies and activities without the intention of forming the government. On a broader note, while civil society organizations may form alliances with political parties, their primary activity is not party politics. As Diamond (1999) asserts, “If they [civil society organizations] become captured by parties, or hegemonic within them, they move their primary focus of activity to political society and lose much of their ability to perform certain unique mediating and democracy-building functions” (p. 221).

On the other hand, the controversy trailing the inclusion of business organizations became evident in the widely acknowledged illustrative definition posited by the Centre for Civil Society of the London School of Economics [CCS of LSE] (2004) that:

Civil society refers to the area of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are

distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.

This definition contradicts the argument of scholars who define civil society as organizations that fall outside government and which are not primarily motivated by profit (see Diamond, 1992; Simai, 2006 and most importantly Scholte, 2001, p. 75).

Another contentious area in the conceptualization of civil society is whether militant groups should be included in the comity of civil society organizations since it is neither political nor profit-making. It should be noted that certain characteristics have been identified as prerequisite for an organization to be seen as civil. These include: being voluntary, self-generating, rule-abiding, and distinct from parochial, economic, and political societies. Diamond (1999) argued that since civil society also entails important characteristic like the promotion of pluralism and diversity; thus, civil society excludes narrowly focused, intolerant, ethnic chauvinist groups, hate groups, religious fundamentalist groups, and militia groups that claim, often through violence, that they are the only legitimate representation in society. Although it is commonly assumed that civil society is equivalent to everything that entails non-state activities, civil society does not consist of groups that deny pluralism and diversity even though they are non-state actors. In the context of Japan, Hirata (2002) argued that groups such as the *Aum Shinrikyo* (renamed "Aleph"), the

Japanese Red Army, or various extreme right-wing groups (*Uyoku*) are not part of civil society, primarily because they either propagate the use of violence to achieve their goals or glorify Japan's violent military past (p. 17). He (Hirata, 2002) premised his argument on the incidence of 1995, when it was found that the *Aum Shinrikyo*, for example, tried to destabilize Japanese society through chemical weapons attacks as part of the group's strategy to eventually overthrow the government. The Red Army's main goal was to bring about radical revolution throughout the world, including the destruction of the state of Israel through terrorist attack. Japanese extreme right-wing organizations promote wartime militarism and racism through propagated public campaigns. Hirata (2002) concluded that these groups are by no means part of Japanese civil society (p. 19). On this premise, groups such as *Odua Peoples' Congress*, *Boko Haram* (though now classified as international terrorist group), *Arewa Youth Forum* (militia wing), *Egbesu* amongst other militant groups in Nigeria cannot be admitted as civil society organizations.

This analysis will be incomplete if we do not contribute to the current contested and debated segment of the conceptualization. Scholars are yet to agree on whether there is difference between civil society and civil society organizations. The concepts of 'civil society' and 'civil society organisation' are used interchangeably by most scholars without giving consideration to the differences between the two distinct but inter-related concepts. This also made scholars to use other common terms such as: non-profit organisation, charity, NGO, third sector, voluntary sector and so on to mean civil society organizations as they are most widely understood internationally. It is arguable that civil society is broader than civil society organizations. The former entails the entire territorial polity which include all citizens who either officially belong to any civil group or not; while the latter entails those individuals that consciously and actively participate in civil group activities. Since civil society organization is an intermediary realm between the private sphere and the state, our argument found solace in the position of Hirata (2002) that civil

society organizations exclude parochial society (i.e., individual and family life and inward-looking activities such as entertainment, recreation, and religious worship) and economic society (i.e. profit-making individual business firms). Both parochial society and economic society are primarily concerned with private ends, not civic life or public ends. He (Hirata, 2002) opined that it is when religious groups are engaged in public ends, such as efforts to fight poverty or crime or to improve educational institutions in the community, they are participating in civil society organizations. Thus, this type of organizations is simultaneously involved in both parochial and civil society (p. 18). This analysis depict that the collective people in its entirety living in a defined territory made up of families is seen a civil society of such nation while those that consciously come together to form a formal organization to promote specific public interest and meet up with the characteristics earlier enunciated are seen as civil society organizations.

Be it as it may, the relevance of the CSOs stem out of the inevitable roles it is playing which cuts across all aspect of human life - from economic to political, health, social, and environmental developments. A logical inference from the foregoing is that, without the active involvement of CSOs we would live in a world ridden with an overwhelming resort to violence and human rights abuses. The concomitant effect of which is social injustice and less sensitivity to the ecological problems confronting nation states today. To buttress this point, Samuel (2005), recognise the basic role of Civil Society Groups as Development and Operation of Infrastructure; Supporting Innovation, Demonstration and Pilot Projects; Facilitating Communication; Technical Assistance and Training; Research, Monitoring and Evaluation; and Advocacy for and with the Poor. Other scholars like Almond & Verba (1963) pointed that it serves as watchdog to check the excesses of government, expose and curtail violations of human rights, abuse of the constitution and thereby exercising control over democratic political institutions (p. 347).

Historical overview of CSOs in Nigeria

Nigeria has a long and strong tradition of civil society, which represents the diverse and pluralistic nature of Nigerian society. Civil society groups primarily led Nigeria's history of struggle and resistance. In fact, their formation and activities date back to the colonial period when different groups, sometimes locally and territorially based, and at other times transcending clan and "tribal" boundaries, became part of the nationalist protest against the repressive colonial state. Examples are the likes of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, the *Jamiyar Mutanin Arewa* that later metamorphosed into political parties to contest power after Independence. In the immediate post-independence period, CSOs engaged in community 'self-help' activities, provided humanitarian assistance at the grassroots level (CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2007).

Following this, labour organizations, student associations, and the media provided a strong leadership and organized protests against unpopular policies during the first civilian administration in 1960 to 1966. Subsequent military regimes which came to power through coup d'états resorted to mounting political transition programmes without a push from CSOs (Young, 1997, p. 23). Under the military regimes in Nigeria, there were attempts to stop, reduce or manipulate the activities of the CSOs. This is probably understandable, as civil society organizations thrive better in free democratic and liberal society. In spite on the limitations placed on their activities, the civil society under the military played a significant part (particularly in the late 1990's) in the final ouster of military rule in Nigeria. Organisations like National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Civil Liberty Organization (CLO), and Campaign for Democracy (CD) etc. were part of the civil society that fought against the subversion of the will of Nigerians and enthronement of democracy in the country (Wisdom, Harrison, & Ebueku, 2011, p. 5).

The civil society groups had largely been affected by the nature and politics of Nigeria since independence. During the colonial era, the

civil society groups were mainly concerned with the nationalist protest against the repressive colonial state. After independence, the emphasis was on social and economic development. The civil society groups had to adapt its basic role to the new challenges. With the advent of the military government in January 1966 and the suspension of the constitution, the civil society groups became exposed to functions essentially incompatible with its traditional roles. This is why Mohammed Salih (2001) asserts that: “in Africa, elite and ethno-nationalists have... [developed] ethnicity into a liberating force against colonialism and, after independence, against authoritarian states” (p. 24).

After the civil war of 1967-1970, the role of the civil society groups majorly shifted to preserving national unity, nation reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. With increase in oil revenue, emphasis shifted to the development of infrastructures and provision of social services. From early 1979 till date, the role of the civil society groups has had to adopt to modern challenges of managing an ailing economy through Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Rationalization, Nationalization and of recent, Privatization, Poverty alleviation, empowerment etc. (CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2007)

Civil society groups and national development in Nigeria

CSOs have played vital roles in the enthronement of democracy as well as, the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Many of these groups like Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and Civil Liberties Organisations (CLO) were instrumental in the restoration of civil rule. It would, be recalled, that between 1993 and 1999, in collaboration with the Nigeria Labour Congress, which is another civil society organisation, these groups fought the Nigerian military to a standstill. They mobilised students and workers for civil disobedience, strikes and protest marches across the country. Many in their ranks were killed and maimed while some lucky few were able to make good their escape into exile (CIVICUS

Civil Society Index, 2007); only to come back after the 1999 democratic enthronement to continue their struggle for good governance and national development. In light of this, they immensely contributed to the present day national development on the following ground:

Third term agenda

Ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) attempted to insert an elongation clause in the constitution to ensure his continuous stay in office. This issue is however controversial due to the fact that the President did not make any categorical statement on his willingness or otherwise to go for another term, but actions and utterances of his aides without rebuff from him indicated his willingness to have an extension (Saliu and Muhammad, 2007, p. 535). These included the purported circulation of a strange document by Prof. Jerry Gana, the then Special Adviser on Political Affairs to the President, at the NPRC (National Political Reform Conference); Open support for third term by the PDP national chairman, Dr. Ahmadu Ali and other party stalwarts; sharp reactions to opponents of third term by the government; purported attempt to bribe the National Assembly over the issue among others (see Anifowoshe, 2006, p. 56-88; Idowu, 2006, p. 15; Archibong, 2005, p. 65). The disclosure by the Vice President Atiku Abubakar at an anti-third term forum in Abuja eloquently gave insight into what the President's mindset was (Saturday Sun, April 8, 2006, p. 11).

Largely, antagonists of the third term bid cuts across different facets of the Nigerian society. This included prominent political actors including the Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, some members of the PDP, other political parties and civil society organizations (Saliu & Muhammad, 2007, p. 538). Of such protest against the tenure elongation bid by the civil society is the one championed by the National Civil Society Coalition against Third Term (NACATT). Bamidele Aturu, the Steering Committee Chairman of NACATT, challenged President Obasanjo that the "third term agenda is immoral,

corrupt, divisive, insulting, an evidence of failure, capable of creating a political uncertainty and, of course, it is unconstitutional..." (Vanguard, January 05, 2006). Other civil society organizations that participated in this protest are; Peoples Problems and Solutions (PPS) organization, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria and individuals like Prof. Wole Soyinka, former governor and factional chairman of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), Chief Bisi Akande, Prof. Ropo Sekoni, Dr Joseph Oladokun, Solomon Olufelo and Adeola Odusanya among other (The PUNCH, March 12, 2006).

The Centre for Legislative Studies (CLS), a non-governmental organisation, invited stakeholders on March 26, 2006 at the International Press Centre in Ogba, Lagos to analyse the propriety of the agenda in line with the public hearing of the National Assembly Joint Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution, this afforded Nigerians another opportunity to X-ray the issue once more. The stakeholders, who came from the media, human rights community and politics, concluded that the third term agenda is an ill wind that will blow nobody any good and that the public hearing on the constitution amendment was a sham (The Punch, April 7, 2006). All these and many more protests from the civil society groups paved way for the senate arm of the National Assembly on Wednesday May 16, 2006 to throw out, in its entirety, a bill seeking 116 amendments/alterations of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria which sought a three-term maximum of 4 years each for the President and the Governors as opposed to a two-term of 4 years each prescribed by the Constitution (see <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/2335>).

Fuel subsidy removal

A decision by the Nigerian government to halt a hefty fuel subsidy on January 1, 2012 prompted one of the largest and most coordinated protests in Nigeria's history. The removal of the fuel subsidy with the claim that Government was spending more than 25 percent of her annual budget on the fuel subsidy and disregarded of the negotiations with the labour unions and civil society erupted National commotion witnessed by immediate increase in the price of fuel, transportation

and food. The abrupt nature of the removal of the subsidy which was seen by some as act of insensitivity by a government that is out of touch with the economic struggles of the majority of the Nigerian people was welcomed by tens of thousands of Nigerians with protest against the removal of the subsidy. Even before the removal of the subsidy, activists like Femi Falana, Olisa Agbakoba, Festus Okoye and several other activists, held a meeting with President Jonathan and his aides, which resoundingly rejected the planned removal of fuel subsidy on Saturday 10th December 2011 (Sahara Reporters, 2011).

In Lagos, protesters massed at Ojota for a rally that was convened by the Save Nigeria Group. Musicians, movie stars and leaders of civil society groups all addressed the huge crowd as they denounced the government's attempt at creating hardship for the people. Part of the plan, as explained by Femi Falana, a lawyer, is to occupy the Gani Fawehinmi Park, venue of the protest, until the government backs down on the policy. In Abuja, the federal capital, Abdulwaheed Omar, president of the Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC led a rainbow coalition of civil society groups and trade unions to defy official ban on the protest (Adewuyi, 2012). This action on the part of the civil society in the removal of the fuel subsidy was not limited to the shore of the country, the protests by Nigerian in Diaspora were held in major cities around the world such as UK, Canada, USA, Ghana, South Africa and other countries (Social Development Integrated Centre [SDIC], 2012, p. 6).

After one week of protests over the removal of fuel subsidy by the federal government, which crippled economic and social activities in Nigeria, the Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC, and Trade Union Congress, TUC, suspended the nationwide strike on Monday 23rd January 2012. The decision of the two main trade unions to suspend the strike came just a few hours after President Goodluck Jonathan announced an immediate reduction in the price of fuel from N141 to N97 per litre. The labour leaders, however, explained that one of the major gains of the protest was that "through the strikes, mass rallies, shutdown, debates and street protests, Nigerians demonstrated clearly

that they cannot be taken for granted and that sovereignty belongs to them” (Ajaero, 2012).

Freedom of information act

The passage of a Freedom of Information law is a victory for Nigerian democracy. A law that stipulated that all institutions spending public funds will have to be open about their operations and expenditure while citizens will have the right to access information about such activities. The F.O.I bill was first submitted to Nigeria’s 4th National Assembly in 1999 when the country returned to democracy but did not make much progress. It returned to the legislative chambers in the 5th National Assembly in 2003 and was passed in the first quarter of 2007 by both chambers. However, President Olusegun Obasanjo vetoed it. It returned to both chambers of the 6th National Assembly in 2007 and was finally passed on 24 May 2011. (Sunday Trust, 5th June 2011)

This success is chiefly attributed to the relentless efforts of the coalition of Nigerian civil society groups who have long worked and advocated for the passage of the F.O.I Bill under the leadership of the Right to Know Movement, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and the Open Society Justice Initiative. The significance of the inclusive joint workings of the CSOs is captured in the words of Edetaen (2011) that “the signing of the F.O.I Bill into law is the clearest demonstration ever of the power of civil society working together to influence public policy and initiate reform in making government work for the people”. In the same vein, the Associate Legal Officer, Open Society Justice Initiative, Maxwell (2011) submitted that: "The new law will profoundly change how government works in Nigeria. Now we can use the oxygen of information and knowledge to breathe life into governance. It will no longer be business as usual." (*Sunday Trust*, 5th June 2011).

Doctrine of necessity clause

CSOs also rose to the occasion to demand for the recognition of the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as the Acting President when

late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua was indisposed and was away to Saudi Arabia on medical treatment between November 2009 and March 2010. Civil rights organizations such as the Save Nigeria Group and Enough is Enough Group actually seized the initiative, mobilised and marched on the National Assembly to demand for a resolution that will give due recognition to vice president as acting president. This led to the adoption of the now popular 'Doctrine of Necessity' by the National Assembly on February 9, 2010 (Ojo, 2011).

The Senate based its resolution to declare Jonathan as the Acting President on the "Doctrine of Necessity". According to the Senate President, David Mark,

A rigid and inflexible interpretation will not only stifle the spirit and intendment of the Constitution, but will also affront the doctrine of necessity. The doctrine of necessity requires that we do what is necessary when faced with a situation that was not contemplated by the Constitution. And that is precisely what we have done today. In doing so, we have as well maintained the sanctity of our Constitution as the ultimate law of the land" (Oyesina, 2010).

It is uncontested that the history of Nigerian democracy with regard to the doctrine cannot be completed without recourse to the input of the CSOs.

Electoral reform

One of the unforgettable efforts of the CSOs in the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy was the unflinching support they gave to the Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) inaugurated on August 28, 2007 by late President Yar'adua. CSOs submitted tones of memoranda to the ERC offering suggestions on how Nigeria can break the chain of her electoral debacle. Indeed, significant number of the 22 member ERC was drawn from the civil society groups. They

helped in analyzing the challenges of Nigeria's previous elections as well as charted the way forward. During the constitutional and electoral reform public hearings, CSOs were there in good numbers to present memoranda. This led to a better legal framework for elections that Nigeria currently has (Ojo, 2011).

The contributions of CSOs in electioneering activities cannot be overemphasized. They embarked on series of advocacy to mobilize the citizens and encourage them, to actively participate in the voter registration exercises that preceded the elections. Coming together under the umbrella- Domestic Election Observation Groups (the group which included the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Labour Monitoring Team (LMT), Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD); Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Alliance for Credible Elections, Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) and the Electoral Reform Network (ERN); deployed approximately 50,000 trained election monitors throughout the country (Akinboye & Olorunfoba, 2007, p. 14-15) during the 2007 general election.

In addition, CSOs played a prominent role in ensuring the credibility of the widely acclaimed 2011 elections. First, they embarked on vigorous voter education using both the traditional and social media for their campaigns. Some other CSOs deployed thousands of observers to follow through and report on the electoral process.

Problems affecting the effectiveness of civil society in Nigeria

Civil Society Groups in Nigeria had over the years, been confronted with myriads of problems that have made it difficult for them to function effectively as agent of development. One of such a challenge is the issue of political instability that is characteristic of the Nigerian polity. Political instability and the frequent changes of government with its accompanied policy inconsistencies is a major hindrance to the development and growth of the civil society groups. To shed more

light on this, Odeh (2012, p. 65) identified eight problems and challenges of Civil Society Organisations viz:

1. *Disconnection from Rural Organizations:*

CSOs activities are mostly restricted to the federal government level. They lack national spread. Most of these organizations are concentrated in Lagos and a few other state capitals in the country. This makes it difficult for majority of the Nigerian population, which live in rural areas to appreciate the role they play, imbibe their doctrines and through the process, develop political consciousness and confidence to resist inducement from politician.

2. *Lack of Unity*

Divisions among the Nigerian civil society along the ethnic and regional lines have not helped its democratic advocacy. This has led to disunity and disagreement among the Nigerian CSO practitioners in term of decision-making and unity of purpose. The internal contradictions within the membership make it difficult to agree on common positions during the period of engagement with the state. Such inherent divisiveness weakens efficiency and makes the associations vulnerable to penetration by government agents.

3. *Inadequate Funding*

Most Nigerian prodemocracy CSOs are donor-dependent and the focus of foreign donors on democracy in Nigeria have expanded from supporting pro-democracy organizations to include the support for democratic institutions like the legislature, judiciary and other democratic institutions. This fiscal factor has also reduced the activities and impacts of some prodemocracy CSOs in contemporary Nigeria.

4. *Government Patronage*

Most often, the Nigerian private media, under the umbrella of the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), rely heavily on government patronage (advertisement) for survival and their independence has been seriously compromised for this reason. There have also been

claims that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) leadership compromised with government in the recent 2012 strike/mass protests against the withdrawal of subsidy on petroleum products.

5. *Lack of internal democracy*

The lack of internal democracy in most of the Nigerian CSOs makes it difficult for members of these organizations to learn democratic values/norms within their organization. Thus, they cannot adequately inculcate this principle to citizens.

6. *Lack of Skills for CSOs*

The civil society organizations are also faced with lack of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy. It is expected that any organizations that wish to engage the state must be well equipped with superior knowledge and articulation of stronger points. This is still absent in many of the civil society organizations in Nigeria (Ojo, 2011).

7. *Corruption and Personal Enrichment*

There have been accusations of corruption, ranging from lack of transparency in the utilization of donor-funds to outright embezzlement/conversion of foreign donations to personal use. This tends to weaken the CSOs' moral right to engage the state. It also hinders people of integrity and value from associating with them. The impact of their advocacy for a change is also limited, because it is stated that he who comes to equity must come with clean hands.

8. *Lack of State Support and Partnership*

The relationship between CSOs and the state is largely characterized by suspicion and tension. For the most part, state officials have viewed CSOs as competitors of power, influence, and legitimacy in the public sphere rather than as development partners.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to establish that the nature and direction of Civil Society Organisations in Nigeria is greatly inclined by the way politics and governance is being done. The role and behaviour of the

CSOs can be said to be flexible as it changes along with the political and economic development in the country since the period of colonialism to date. In fact, the present democracy right from its emergence in 1999, its consolidation and its present sustainability can be chiefly attributed to the efforts of the CSOs. One should also recognise the contribution of donor agencies which make it possible for the CSOs to work independently without recourse to the government for funding. However, this does not go without its own problems. Donors have utilised a number of different civil society strategies across Nigeria to influence and determine the political and economic roles of these groups. Kew (2004 & 2005) observed these problems to include ambivalence on capacity building and partnership, fears of politicisation, local or national focus, market forces and civil society opportunism; and a preference for Non Governmental Organisations. This notwithstanding, CSOs have been successfully assisted by the donor agencies to prosecute and execute diverse programmes ranging from voter education, election observation, campaign finance monitoring, election tribunal monitoring, electoral reform advocacy, conflict mitigation, access to justice, public interest litigation, budget tracking, constituency outreaches as well as research and documentation in thematic areas of democracy and governance.

As earlier argued, the need for a vibrant civil society cannot be overemphasised especially in a democratic setting like Nigeria. Despite the shortcomings of CSOs in Nigeria, its impact on social and political life has been enormous. It has also exposed the citizenry to varieties of issues, which hitherto were the preserve of the political activities. However, a lot needs to be done to strengthen the capacity of civil society groups for a positive intervention in the democratization process. Monty (1992) rightly pointed out that, the strength of a civil society depends on the democratization level of the government because it is the latter that provides the former with the necessary conditions and access to public decision-making without which the existence and the activities of the civil society become

questionable (p. 27). Premised on this, it is recommended that there should be an increase and focus networking among civil society groups to aid training of cadres in grassroots mobilization and advocacy; diversification of sources of funding through creative revenue generation activities; and the need to coordinate and control the NGO phenomena in order to reduce excessive reliance on foreign grants. In conclusion, more efforts should be directed at service delivery and the reduction of corruption to bring about a sustainable socio economic development in Nigeria. This will enable civil society groups to stand the test of time by organizing itself in a manner that will not make them apron or dependent on the government.

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