

CIVIL SOCIETY, DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA, 1999-2012

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ABSTRACT

It has been argued by scholars that no nation can fully achieve its development potentials without democratic governance as engendered and supported by vibrant civil society. In this regard, civil society (CS) is seen as the engine of democratic governance (DG) and development of nations. Utilizing secondary data, the paper examines CS, DG and development in Nigeria. It finds that the nation's inability to enjoy DG for development in the past is the absence of continuous vibrant CS arising from weak support and lack of tolerance for the activities of CS organizations by the government and also, the non-adherence to democratic norms by public officials both in words and action. The paper concludes that for the citizens to enjoy DG there is the need for the CS organizations in the country to unite in their activities against repression, and resist every attempt by the government to cause division within their ranks as strategy for the successful entrenchment of democratic norms and its resultant dividends.

Keywords: Civil society organizations, democratic norms, democratic governance, development, Nigeria

Résumé

Des chercheurs ont fait valoir qu'il n'existe aucune nation pouvant réaliser pleinement son potentiel de développement sans la gouvernance

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D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

démocratique engendrée et soutenue par une société civile résolue et dynamique. À cet égard, la société civile est considérée comme le moteur de la gouvernance démocratique et du développement des nations. Sur la base de données secondaires, cet article examine la société civile, la gouvernance démocratique et le développement au Nigeria. Il constate que dans le passé, le pays était incapable de jouir des bienfaits de la gouvernance démocratique dû à l'absence d'une société civile résolue et dynamique. Cette absence découle d'un faible soutien gouvernemental et du manque de tolérance à l'égard des activités menées par des organisations des sociétés civiles, et du non-respect systématique aux normes démocratiques par les agents de la fonction publique. L'article conclut qu'il est nécessaire que les sociétés civiles unissent leurs activités contre la répression pour que les citoyens jouissent d'une gouvernance démocratique, et qu'elles optent pour une stratégie de résistance à toute tentatives du gouvernement de provoquer des divisions dans leurs rangs pour que les normes démocratiques et ses dividendes s'enracinent.

Introduction

Studies by different scholars have shown that the rate of development of nations, particularly in the area of political, social, economic and technological spheres, is a function of the way they are organized in terms of governmental systems, the existence of vibrant non-governmental organizations – civil society (CS), and the overall political culture that is prevalent in such a country, and Nigeria is no exception (Ake, 2003; Werlin, 2003:329-342; Orji, 2004a:41-51; Gberevbie, 2009:165-191; Osumah and Ikelegbe, 2009:185-199).

Nigeria attained political independence on 1st October, 1960 and adopted the British type parliamentary democratic system of government. As a result, the country experienced democratic governance between 1960 and 1966; thereafter the military took over political power from the democratically elected government of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (from the eastern part of Nigeria) – then constitutional president without executive powers, and Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (from the northern part of Nigeria) – the then prime-minister with full executive powers, (Oronsaye, 1993:18-39; Ikelegbe, 2004:77-82).

During the period between 1960 and 1966 (now referred to in Nigeria as the First Republic), the country was under a democratic rule organized under a federal system of three regions – North, East and West. The period also witnessed the interplay of democratic norms when people had the opportunity to elect their political representatives in government. However, the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) were viewed by government as anti-democratic, even though it is on record that the roles played by these CSOs contributed immensely in Nigeria's struggle for independence in 1960 (Okhaide, 1995:188-196; Orji, 2004a:41-51). The culture of intolerance of the opposition and CSOs was the hallmark of the government then to the extent that any contrary views or suggestions were seen as treasonable offence against the government, which actually earned for a number of prominent CS activists prison terms. It was the resultant effects of intolerance of opposition and the CSOs that led to a political stalemate and a near state of anarchy in the then western region of Nigeria, and which eventually contributed largely to the first military coup of 15th January, 1966 that terminated the democratic government of the First Republic. The coup claimed the lives of prominent politicians including those of the nation's Prime Minister – Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and Premiers of the Northern Region – Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, and of the Western Region – Chief S. L. Akintola (King, 1988; Asia, 2000:19-25; Ikelegbe, 2004:80-88).

The country was governed by the military between 1966 and 1979 and between 1983 and 1999. During these periods, the CS and professional organizations such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), and National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) were at the forefront in the fight against military rule and for the restoration of democracy and democratic governance in Nigeria (Orji, 2004a:41-51). Despite the different military governments that governed the nation, and the difficulties experienced by civilian governments, Nigerians believe that democratic governance based on election of political leaders is preferable to unelected military governments. This preference is based on the fact that a multiparty system, free press and CSOs are supported and better accommodated within the sphere of governance under a democratic civilian rule than in a military administration (McCormick, 2004; Ajayi, 2006:49-62).

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Imobighe (2003:3-12) points out that the civil society in Nigeria includes professional organizations, labour movements, youth associations, peasants, socio-cultural groups, civil rights and communal groups, around which the civil populace build various identities for the promotion of their various interests for development. It has been observed that the democratic government of the second republic (1979-83) actually fell into the hands of the military mainly due to the absence of the culture of tolerance of and support for the CSOs, lack of trust in the government by the people, and lack of accountability and transparency on the part of those in government (Gberevbie and Lafenwa, 2007:121-139). Buhari (2008:72-78) argues that the most prominent aspect of democratic governance is the development and sustenance of the democratic norms – tolerance of opposing views in a country.

Arising from the above, the following questions are raised: how can CSOs contribute to the entrenchment of democratic norms for political development in Nigeria? To what extent can the activities of the CSOs moderate the actions of government to imbibe democratic norms? What is the likely danger in government's undemocratic norms of intolerance of CSOs in the consolidation of democratic governance for political development? Is there any relationship between the activities of CSOs, democratic norms and governance in a country? The main arguments in this paper therefore are that democratic governance, rather than military or unelected government as engendered and supported by CSOs in a country, enhances political development, and that the lack of enhanced political development in Nigeria so far is actually a function of the limited acceptability of the activities and the lack of support for the views of CSOs by those in government.

In this paper, secondary data obtained from relevant books, journals, seminar papers, magazines and newspapers were researched. The paper is structured into five sections. Section one serves as the introduction; section two examines the concept and roles of CSOs in nation building; section three looks at the concept of democratic governance and political development; section four discusses the roles of CSOs and democratic governance as key to political development in Nigeria; and section five concludes the paper.

Concept and Roles of Civil Society Organizations in Nation Building

i. Concept of Civil Society

The concept of civil society, like other concepts in the social science, lacks a single, precise and universally acceptable definition. This situation may not be unconnected with the fact that most definitions actually reflect the political background and experience of those defining the concept. However, scholars like Orji (2004b:80-90) see civil society as organized activities by groups or group of individuals essentially out to perform certain services with a view to influencing the government in its policies and programmes for the improvement of society.

According to Ghaus-Pasha (2005), civil society is understood to mean a sphere that is separate from the state and the market, and formed by people who have common needs, interest and values. In the same vein, Ikelegbe (2005:241-270) refers to civil society as an “essentially participatory, broad-based and self-governing formation engaged in shaping public affairs, public policy and governance.” He points out that civil society is “an instrument, a means by which the citizens engage the state, in different struggles, challenges and contestations.” On his part, Uwais (2008:50-153) refers to civil society as the sum total of those organizations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus, which includes: social groups, professional groups and non-governmental organizations. Olateju (2012:310-319) argues that civil society is “often used to mean either society as opposed to the state or, more precisely as an intermediate sphere of social organization or association between the basic units of society – family and firms – and the state.”

The different concepts of civil society put forward by the various scholars above point to a common fact that civil society is non-governmental and hence outside the sphere of the state and the government; it has the capacity to influence public policies and programmes if given the opportunity to do so; it is an association of individuals or group of individuals; it has a set of agenda or interests to protect; it is out to put forward or project a particular idea for the interest of its members and the good of

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

society; and its activities involve struggles, challenges and contestations to achieve specified outcomes in the society or nation. Therefore, in this paper, civil society refers to a group of non-governmental organizations, professionals and associations in any shape and size in a society formed purposely to engage the state or government on issues that affect the people with a view to finding acceptable solutions to the developmental challenges of the state – political, social and technological for the enhancement of the living standard of the people.

ii. Roles of Civil Society in Nation Building: In a bid to highlight the importance of civil society in nation building, Edwards and Foley (2001:1-14) outlines three roles played by civil society in governance including: providing services, holding the government and market accountable by representing or advocating for citizens, and building the capacity of citizens to participate in governance. In the same vein, Orji (2004b:80-90) identified the roles of the civil society in the promotion of democratic governance for political development to include: political education, political mobilization, promotion of popular participation in governance, legal aid, capacity building, micro-credit services, childcare and reproductive health services to the people in the society. Studies in Nigeria have also pointed to the fact that CSOs have important roles to play at bringing about democratic governance and political development in terms of citizens' participation in decision making either directly or through their elected representatives for the enhancement of their living standards (Imobighe, 2003:3-12; Orji, 2004b:80-90; Ajayi, 2006:49-62; Animasaun, 2008:123-141).

Imobighe (2003:3-12) sees the character of Nigerian CSOs as that of resistance, protest and advocacy for change, accountability, human rights observation and democratization of government. This is particularly so because of the unbearable conditions imposed on the people by the misrule and repression of successive governments in Nigeria as manifested in unpopular policies and programmes. In societies where undemocratic means are adopted in public policy formulation, lawlessness is more likely to be the outcome of such policies at implementation. In this regard, Ajayi (2006:56 & 61) posits that:

Where the rule of law becomes prostrate, executive lawlessness becomes the norm. In the process political apathy sets in as the politics of exclusiveness takes the center stage. Participatory democracy becomes anathema; the political space is contrived, just as cronies and palace jesters become the political oracle determining who gets what from the courts of the emperor... But given the failure of the political elites, it behooves the various segments of the civil society to rise to the challenge of ensuring that political actors adhere to basic democratic norms and values, as a means of stabilizing and consolidating the democratic process.

According to Animasaun (2008:123-141), the absence of, or at best low commitment, by the governing elites to the enthronement of basic values and precepts of democracy; the weakness of the basic institutions of democracy; the mass apathy and ignorance on the part of the people and their inability to demand accountable and transparent governance make it imperative for the intervention of CSOs in Nigeria. He argues further that the capacity of the civil society to deepen the democratic enterprise in Nigeria is a function of the ability of the state managers to change their hostile attitude towards CSOs and accept them as a critical stakeholder in the democratic project, if Nigeria must experience sustainable democratic governance and political development (Egwu, 2005; Animasaun, 2008).

In recognition of the roles of CSOs in the enthronement of democratic norms and governance in Nigeria, Uwais (2008:50-153) recommends that electoral legislations should guarantee the participation of CSOs at relevant stages of the electoral process such as: actively engaging in exercising their 'watchdog' function and working to hold politicians and political institutions accountable during the electoral process; monitoring unlawful use of public facilities for election campaigns and electioneering; monitoring of electoral violence and malpractices and those behind them and issuing reports on them; monitoring the enforcement of sanctions against persons who have violated the electoral law; and should be involved in broad civic and voter education about the importance of the elections, the voter registration process, and where, when and how to register and vote.

The roles of civil society in the electoral process for the enthronement of democratic governance in Nigeria is so crucial for the election of competent leaders capable of

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

formulating and implementing sound policies for societal development, and hence improvement in the living standard of the people. According to Bakare (2011:18), “elections in Nigeria is not people’s choice, it is selection. Most of these things are predetermined behind the scene and given to those who had no clue or any blueprint or idea.” A study by Isumonah (2004:7-18) shows that there is a strong relationship between the presence of vibrant CSOs in a country and the proper institutionalization of democratic governance. This is particularly so because further studies have also shown that civil society is a facilitator of democratic norms for good governance and political development in a nation (Ajayi, 2006:49-62; Howell, 2006:38-63). According to Babawale (2006), democratic reforms for political development would be meaningless without vibrant CSOs. Therefore, it is right to conclude that CS is the bedrock for the promotion of greater governmental accountability in a society.

The implication of the above position is that where a country lacks the presence of vibrant CSOs arising from weak support and intolerance of their activities by the government, the norms of democratic governance are more likely to be affected negatively and the outcome is more likely to be that of undemocratic formulation and implementation of public policies and programmes that lack the people’s input, and hence lack their support at implementation. The resultant effect is likely to bring about underdevelopment in such a society. The foregoing shows that CSOs play crucial roles in nation building in the area of enthronement of democratic norms and governance for development in the different spheres of the society.

Concept of Democratic Governance and Political Development

i. Democratic Governance: The concept of democratic governance originates from democracy. Mimiko (2007:303–316) argues that democracy is desirable because it promotes development; it facilitates governance, especially of plural societies; and it is consistent with human rights and the fundamental freedom of citizens. According to Schattschneider (1975: xiv-xvii):

Democracy was defined as *government by the people*; but the classical model of the small city-state has little relevance to modern nations. In Greek

democracies, there were few citizens; supported by a large slaves' class, they had leisure time for politics; the issues were relatively simple; the organization of government was straight forward; direct participation by all was possible. In modern nations, however, there are millions of citizens...community meeting of the whole citizens are impossible...hence there is a need to redefine democracy, making it consistent with what the people are able and willing to do...in the modern complex world.

In the contemporary society however, nations including Nigeria opt instead for representative democracy – “a system in which citizens elect others to represent their views and interest when decisions are made on law and public policy” (McCormick, 2004:22). As society developed politically, there was the need to affirm the authority of the people as supreme over that of the government. In this regard, the concept of ‘liberal’ as an appendage to ‘democracy’ emerged. The concept of liberal democracy refers to “a society that believes in limits on the powers of government, majority rule, minority rights, and free-market economy” (McCormick, 2004:22). The argument is that a liberal democratic society affords the majority of the people the right to freely elect the leaders of their choice, gives them the opportunity to be part of governmental affairs in the area of decision making for societal development in terms of political, social, economic and technological advancement for the enhancement of the living standard of the people.

However, Schumpeter (1942:272) argues that “the will of the majority is not the will of the people.” This position is very important particularly when one considers the way political leaders are enthroned in Nigeria. In most cases, the will of the people is not respected at elections in choosing political leaders. The political class manipulates the electoral process to the detriment of the people to enthrone unpopular candidates or retain those in public offices due to the gains of self-enrichment (Joseph, 1991). Also, further studies in Nigeria show that democratic development has suffered setback because of the prevalence of the culture of a “winner-takes-all syndrome” (Joseph, 1991; Ajayi, 2006:49-62). Going by the enormous power entrusted to political leadership by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the area of authoritative allocation of values for the nation, no politician wants to be declared a loser at elections. The implication of this situation is that politics in Nigeria

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

is seen as a 'do-or-die affair' and a 'must-win-at-all-cost syndrome' (Joseph, 1991; Ajayi, 2006:49-62; Animasaun, 2008:123-141).

According to Ake (2003:16), democracy has failed to lay proper foundation for political development in Nigeria because like most other African nations, the "premium on power is exceptionally high, and the institutional mechanisms for moderating political competition are lacking. As a result, political competition tends to assume the character of warfare. In this regard, Eguavvon (2009:26-40) argues that the presence of undemocratic norms, such as election rigging, electoral violence and other vices in a nation's political system, do contribute to the inability of the people to elect credible leaders capable of articulating and maximizing the benefits of democracy in a society. Furthermore, Obayori (2009:17-25) identifies some strategies commonly adopted by political leaders in Nigeria to prevent the people from participating in government by denying them the opportunity to elect the leaders of their choice; these include: intolerance of the activities of CSOs and lack of access to political education. He argues that democracy cannot be expected to promote the interests of the people adequately if they are not fully involved in decision making as a result of their ignorance and disenfranchisement.

It has been argued that democratic culture entails that citizens are not only involved in the election of their leaders, but are also involved in the decisions of government as these affect them. Going by this position therefore, a democratic society could be termed a predictable society in terms of what to expect from its leaders on the one hand, and from the citizens on the other. And also, it is a system of government that gives the populace the opportunity to question government decisions through public opinion expressed in the media or through their elected representatives (Babawale, 2006; Gberevbie, 2009:165-191).

The foregoing shows that democratic governance is an offshoot of democracy as a political system. And it refers to a set of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its affairs (Strode and Grant, 2004:1; Boyte, 2005:536-546). Emphasizing the relationship between democratic governance, CSOs and political development in a nation, Kim et al. (2005:646-654) argue that the support for CSOs in their advocacy role for competitive politics is one of the hallmarks of a true

democratic society. In this regard, Werlin (2003:330) points out that the main gap between poor countries and rich countries is that of “inadequacy of governance rather than resources.” He argues further that:

Poorest countries of the world, particularly those with average annual per capital incomes of less than USD1, 000: most of these countries suffer from ‘political illness’ (similar to mental illness such as alcoholism or drug addiction) which manifests itself in improper policies, weak bureaucracies, and inadequate supervision, the illegitimacy of laws and regulations and lack of independent spheres of power...Governance is far weaker in poor countries of the world than in rich countries (Werlin, 2003:330).

Some scholars have identified ‘pillars’ of democratic governance to include: constitutionalism, the rule of law, the professional civil service, the role of the political institutions in engaging citizens, enhancing the legitimacy of fair elections, and promoting public accountability, transparency and participation of citizens in the governmental affairs of their nation (Im, 2005; Kim et al., 2005:646-654). Obianyo (2008:86-111) points out that democratic governance cannot be sustained for the enhancement of the living standard of citizens in a society where people remain completely excluded in the decisions that affect their lives. Therefore, in a society where citizens have little or no say in the formulation of government policies, the civil society becomes a ready platform that serves as the link between the governors and the governed.

ii. Development: The concept of development has varying meanings in the literature. Some scholars see it from the economic point of view as growth in per capital income; others see it from the political point of view as a process that enables people in a society to freely elect their political leaders and make them accountable for their actions. Looking at it from the economic sphere, Rogers and Schoemaker (1971:11) see development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital income levels of living through modern production methods and improved social organization. In the same vein, Ireogbu (1996) sees development as a progressive realization of the fullest possible and balanced flourishing of both human and natural resources, the latter in view of the former. On the other hand, viewing it from the political sphere, Roberts (1999:1-13)

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

sees development as “the growth of the political system such that it is able to institutionalize political goals and the means for achieving them.” Also, NISER (2001:154) sees political development to “involve[s] deliberate actions by inhabitants of a given society with the defined objective of achieving beneficial political goals in the polity.”

The conceptualizations of development above point to the fact that it has to do with the institutionalization of the ability of a people to freely participation in the electoral process to elect political leaders of their choice and be part of the decision making process of government as it affects them in the area of the formulation of policies in society for the improvement in the living conditions of the people. In this regard, it could be concluded that no nation is likely to experience development beyond its ability to manifest such characteristics as the support and encouragement of alternative views from outside the government through the activities of CSOs as it affects the management of governmental affairs, which are in line with the expectation of the people. Ake (1996:29) while emphasizing the relationship between democracy and development argued thus:

If people are the end of development, then their well-being is the supreme law of development. But the well-being of the people will only be the supreme law of development if they have some decision-making power...but the only one way to ensure that social transformation is not dissociated from the well-being of the people is to institute democracy.

The above implies that democracy is a catalyst for development in a society. According to NISER (2001:154), democratic politics, like all politics, has a ubiquitous character in that its dynamics often determine development in all other spheres of development.” While it has not been proven that all developed nations in the economic and technology spheres are democratically developed, it is however evidently clear that all democratically developed nations are as well socially, economically and technologically developed, which goes to support the argument that there is a relationship between governance systems and development performance in a society (Babawale, 2006:18; World Bank, 2006).

Obayori (2009:17-25) laments the effect of poor democratic norms on development in Nigeria and posits that “development is proceeding at a very shameful rate that queries the ‘IQ’ of the ruling elites.” He argues that Nigeria is a very wealthy country going by the quality of available human resource, mineral deposits including crude oil; and yet Nigerians are generally poor people. He points out that this contradiction could be attributed to poor governance brought about largely by military leaders and their corrupt civilian counterparts that have governed the nation since her independence in 1960.

The foregoing shows that there is a relationship between the activities of vibrant CSOs set out to propagate democratic norms for proper democratic governance in a nation and political development. According to James (2007:1-9), “civil society is recognized by many political scientists as a desirable structural element in the institutions underpinning democratic governance.” This implies that a nation that fails to support and encourage the activities of CSOs is not likely to experience the needed atmosphere for political stability that is required to engender sound policies and programmes of government for the improvement of the living standard of the people.

**Roles of Civil Society Organizations and Democratic Governance:
Key to Political Development in Nigeria?**

Studies in Nigeria have shown that the CSOs have helped immensely to champion the cause of democratic norms and governance in the country during and after military rule in 1999 (Orji, 2004:41-51; Babawale, 2007:7-16). Commenting on the importance of CSOs in the actualization of democratic governance in Nigeria, Orji (2004a:41-51) points out that the Nigerian CSOs were able to mobilize millions of both urban and rural dwellers, across ethnic, religious, class, gender and professional lines in several protest marches (between 1983, when the second republic was terminated by a military coup headed by General Muhamadu Buhari, and 1998, when the ban on political contest was lifted by the military government of General Abdusalami Abubakar who became the head of state of Nigeria’s military government after the sudden death of General Sani Abacha), to demand for democratic rule. The outcome is the democratic governance currently in place in Nigeria since 29th May, 1999.

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Military governments in Nigeria in the periods between 1966 and 1979 and 1983 and 1999 shared common characteristics – manifestations of undemocratic norms such as intolerance of oppositions and activities of CSOs, lack of dialogue, coercive way of policy formulation and implementation to the detriment of the people, corrupt practices, intimidation, and lack of accountability and transparency in governance. So, at the time the country transited from military to civil rule in 1999, Nigerians were expectant of the manifestations of democratic norms by the new political leaders. Rather than exhibit democratic norms such as creating enabling environment to allow popular participation of citizens to freely elect the leaders of their choice at regular elections; vote rigging, ‘ballot box snatching’ and electoral violence became the hallmark of the nation’s democratic experience, thereby denying the people the opportunity to effectively participate in government. In this regard, Babawale (2007:7-16) points out that for democratic governance to endure in Nigeria, “the governing elites must understand the languages of compromise, negotiation and dialogue. They must learn to persuade and not coerce.”

Since May 1999, when the nation resumed a new dispensation of democratic system of government, the CSOs have played major roles on issues that would have truncated democratic governance, create a state of anarchy and political breakdown in Nigeria as follow:

i. Role as Promoter of Democratic Norms and Good Governance:

In September 2009, the late President Umar Musa Yar’Adua was flown to Saudi-Arabia for treatment as a result of ill health. Some prominent people in the ruling political party – People’s Democratic Party (PDP) largely from the northern part of the country and indeed those close to the late President did not support the idea that the then Vice-President of the country, now President Goodluck Jonathan should assume the leadership of the nation on an acting capacity. Their argument was that late President Yar’Adua did not give a written permission to the Vice-President to act in that capacity when he was leaving for Saudi-Arabia for treatment as stipulated by the now amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Onwuamaeze, 2011:11).

This situation created a state of confusion and stalemate to the extent that even the then members of the Nigerian National Assembly (House of Senate and Federal House of Representatives) were almost polarized along religious and ethnic lines. It was the action of the CSOs headed by the 'Save Nigeria Group' (SNG) through street protests in major cities in Nigeria, including Abuja and Lagos, that forced the members of the Nigerian National Assembly to invoke the 'Doctrine of Necessity' for the first time in the nation's political history to declare then Vice-President Jonathan as acting President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 9th February, 2010. This singular act of CSOs brought together all segments of the Nigerian society thereby bringing about the peace and stability required for development to take place in any nation (Onwuamaeze, 2011:11).

ii Role as Advocate of Corrupt-Free Society:

The manifestation of corruption has robbed the nation of the development required to improve the living standard of the people. Werlin (2003:336) argues that:

Nigeria could be a wealthy country from the export of oil and natural gas alone...Despite a production of two million barrels of oil a day, motorists must wait in long lines at gasoline stations, eventually paying four times the official price...Corruption is seen as the primary cause of Nigeria's poverty...the impact of Nigerian corruption is economically and socially paralyzing.

In the same vein, the former governor of Kwara State in Nigeria (2003-11), now a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr Bukola Saraki, points out that "I am not sure whether corruption is the best word to describe some of the things I've seen in government. I think it's a combination of corruption, lack of patriotism, incompetence and even sabotage" (Agbo & Suleiman, 2012:50-51). The Nigerian CSOs are in the forefront in the fight against corruption in the country. They do this by exposing the secret wealth amassed by corrupt public officials either on the pages of newspapers or even testifying against them at the law court. Sometimes these corrupt politicians do get away with their loots due to the nature of the judicial system in the country. That notwithstanding, CSOs have also gone ahead to aid the speedy and successful prosecution of these corrupt public officeholders in foreign nations by publicly revealing incriminating documents to aid such trials. A good example is the

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

case of the former governor of Delta State of Nigeria, Chief Onanefe James Ibori, who is currently serving a jail term in the United Kingdom for corruption while he was in office as a governor (Adesina, 2012:1-2; Obiagwu, 2012:2).

Chief Ibori, former governor of Delta State (1999-2007), pleaded guilty to a 10 count-charge of money laundering and embezzlement of public funds belonging to Delta State to the tune of 250 million pounds on 27th February, 2012 in a London court. The prosecution established that as a governor, Chief Ibori was racking up credit card bills of USD200,000 per month on a luxury life style including running a fleet of armoured Range Rovers. Today, the efforts of the CSOs at raising alarm over corrupt practices of public officials in Nigeria has contributed to Ibori's sentence and his subsequent 13 year jail term in London (Obiagwu, 2012).

Also, the CSOs were able to expose the unethical practice that took place in the sale of Nigeria's oil refineries to private investors by the government in 2007. In a bid to transfer the burden of subvention and poor performance of Public Enterprises (PEs) from the shoulder of government to private sector management, the Obasanjo government, just before leaving office on 29th May, 2007, sold 51 percent of government shares in Port-Harcourt refineries (two of the four government refineries) managed by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the government-owned oil company, to Bluestar Oil Consortium. The sale was however truncated by the late President Musa Yar'Adua's government in June 2007 following a week long agitation in a general strike called by the Nigerian CSOs to protest the fraudulent sale of the refineries. The reason for the agitation was that the sale of the refineries did not follow proper procedure. It was discovered that the process of privatization of the 51 percent of government shares in the refineries by government was doubtful, lacked transparency and the amount paid by Bluestar Consortium was below the market value (Ezeobi and Onwue-Menyi, 2007: 1&13).

iii. Role as Defender of the People's Interest:

The CSOs in Nigeria by their activities are seen to be the real defender of the people's rights and interests against unpopular, unproductive policies and programmes of government. For instance, on the 1st of January, 2012, the Federal Government of Nigeria through one of its agencies in the petroleum sector, Petroleum Products

Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA), increased the ex-pump price of petrol from NGN65 to NGN141, on what it termed the implementation of the policy of deregulation of the petroleum sector and subsequent removal of 'fuel subsidy' hitherto enjoyed by the people in form of lower petroleum prices in the country. The justification for the policy of deregulation of the petroleum sector was that government subsidized petroleum to the tune of NGN1.5 trillion or USD9.68 billion in 2009, and NGN1.7 trillion or USD10.96 billion in 2011, which was more than the NGN1.319 trillion or USD8.5 billion allocated to capital expenditure in the national budget of 2012 (Ameh & Josiah, 2011:1-21, 8, 21; FGNTA, 2011-2015:6-25; Soyinka, 2012:46-57).

The argument of the CSOs was that while it is on record that huge sums of government revenue went into subsidy payment to oil marketers, they observed that substantial amount of these claims were based on fraud by the oil marketers in collaboration with government officials in NNPC and PPPRA, and called on the government to investigate corruption charges against them. Furthermore, CSOs pointed out that because of the low minimum wage paid to workers in Nigeria — NGN7,500 or USD48.39 per month at the time the policy was introduced, any increase in pump price of petrol is easily felt by the people and automatically translates into price increase in other areas of the economy such as high cost of transportation, food, shelter and other basic household needs; hence swift resistance from the people each time the price of petrol goes up. The USD48.39 per month as salary was below the poverty line, according to the UNO minimum living wage standard (Soyinka, 2012:46-57).

The situation led to a one week general protest strike throughout the nation called by CSOs and spearheaded by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC). The strike led to the death of some protesters who were shot by the Police. Also, some CSOs members were hurriedly tried and sent to jail by the government for supporting the general strike. The strike led to revenue loss in the nation's economy to the tune of NGN300 billion or USD1.94 billion, which would have gone into development of infrastructure for the enhancement of the living standard of the people (Ajaero, 2012:12-18; Soyinka. 2012:46-57).

D. E. Gberevbie: Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

The Federal Government in a bid to stop the strike, agreed to investigate the corruption charges against its officials. The investigation was first carried out by the Nigerian National Assembly. The report actually confirmed the position of Nigerian CSOs about corruption in the payment by government of the petroleum subsidy claims to oil marketers. It was discovered through the investigation that 24 oil marketers defrauded the nation in two ways: First, those marketers that did not obtain forex, but claimed to have imported petroleum products based on which they have collected subsidy; and second, those marketers who obtained forex based on the subsidy claim. The National Assembly recommended the prosecution of the oil marketers in court to serve as deterrent to others (Ajaero, 2012:12-18).

As soon as the National Assembly's report on the fraudulent subsidy claim was submitted to the presidency for implementation, President Goodluck Jonathan directed the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice to set up a presidential panel to further review the report submitted by the National Assembly with a view to ascertaining those to be charged to court. The presidential panel was chaired by Aigboje Aig-Imokhuede, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Access Bank Nig. Plc. The presidential panel indicted 21 oil firms out of the 24 initially submitted for scrutiny to have defrauded the nation to the tune of NGN382 billion or USD2.46 billion. The panel recommended that the 21 oil marketers should be made to refund the sum of NGN382 billion or USD2.46 billion to the coffers of the Federal Government, and in addition, they should be prosecuted in the law court to prevent similar occurrence. As a result, the 21 oil marketers have been charged in court for financial crime against the nation (Ajaero, 2012:12-18; Onuorah et al, 2012:1-4).

One disturbing issue about the whole saga of the fraudulent petroleum subsidy claim is the fact that some of the oil firms implicated are owned by the families of prominent members of the ruling political party – PDP. For instance, the oil companies of the sons of Dr Ahmadu Ali, one time National Chairman of the PDP, that of Alhaji Arisekola-Alao, a prominent PDP chieftain from the south-west zone of Nigeria and that of the current National Chairman of the PDP – Alhaji Bamanga Tukur are involved in the corruption scandal (Ajaero, 2012:12-18; Alli & Onanuga, 2012:1-2 & 58; Onanuga, 2012:8). The implication of the above is that corruption in the oil sector of the Nigerian economy is not likely to fizzle out easily considering the

calibre of people involved in it. One can however conclude that the roles of the CSOs are very crucial to the sustenance of democratic norms, democratic governance and development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper examined civil society, democratic governance and development in Nigeria, and found that CSOs are the engine room of democratic norms in societies. It observed that the nation's inability to enjoy democratic governance for development in the past is as a result of, among others, the absence of continuous vibrant civil society arising from weak support and lack of tolerance for their activities by those in government. In addition, the non-adherence to democratic norms by public officials — corruption in the management of government business, has contributed immensely to further underdevelopment of the different spheres of the Nigerian society.

Also, the paper established a relationship between democratic governance and development, and showed that development is more likely to manifest in a society where democratic norms hold sway, such as popular participation in the elections of political leaders and involvement of the people either directly or through their elected representatives in decision-making, fundamental human rights, freedom of the press and association, freedom of expression and curbing of all forms corruption in government as basis for a developed society. However, for the CSOs to achieve their goals of entrenching democratic norms for development in the different spheres of the Nigerian society there is the need for them to unite in their activities against any repression, and resist every attempt by the government to cause division amongst their ranks through the weapon of mass action or protest against undemocratic actions of the government.

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