

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) IN THE NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS, 1999 – 2015

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Abstract

The research has taken a cursory study on The Role of CSOs in the Democratization process in Nigeria. Three research questions; what is the role of CSOs in the democratization process in Nigeria, what are the contributions of CSOs to democratic sustenance in Nigeria and what are the challenges faced by CSOs in Nigeria were raised and discussed in the course of the study. The Resource Mobilization theory is used as a framework for analysis. Taking a historical perspective, relevant literatures on democracy, the evolution of the CSOs in Nigeria, their activities during and after the Military era were x-rayed. The research established that CSOs plays vital role and have contributed tremendously to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria by protesting against tenure elongation, participation in the electoral reform, advocacy for the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) bill into law, voter education and mobilization, election monitoring, from 1999 -2015, etc. Given the serious financial dependence of CSOs on donor agencies and government for its operation, the study concluded that, CSOs need to be financially independent, in order to carry out their activities without hindrance.

Keywords: Civil Society Organizations, Sustainable Democracy, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa's 'nascent' civil societies are usually portrayed as the prime movers in the democratisation process in the 1990s. However, with the establishment of democratic governments in Africa, especially in Nigeria, it seems the expectations about the role and capacity of these civil society organizations to promote governance reform and foster democratic deepening has been under estimated. Against the growing pessimism about the capacity of these organisations to fulfil their democratic potentials, this paper explores the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Nigerian democratization process.

Civil society has been defined not only as the engine of the transition to democracy in Nigeria and elsewhere, but also as equally crucial to the vitality of democracy. According to Chazan (1996:282) the nurturing of civil society is widely perceived as the most effective means of controlling repeated abuses of state power, holding rulers accountable to their citizens and establishing the foundations for durable democratic government. Proposing that "a vibrant civil society is probably more essential for consolidating and maintaining democracy than for initiating it", Diamond (1994) defines the role of civil society as that of "containing the power of

democratic governments, checking their potential for abuse and violation of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny". He believes that civil society organizations supplement political parties as schools for leadership training and fostering the development of democratic culture. Citizens learn political advocacy and contestation from participating in such organizations. As avenues for interest aggregation and representation, Diamond posits that they serve to mitigate political conflicts. The theory of social capital also underscores the importance of civil society to the democratisation process.

Coming from a plethora of Military interregnum, democratization process in Nigeria have been challenging, especially for CSOs to make vital contributions. According to Gbodi (2001:3) the role and contributions of civil society to democratization process in Nigeria is in different phases and so could not be generalized. He said their role from 1985 to 1999 centred on the campaign for immediate disengagement of the military from the political space and the restoration of democracy in the country. Civil society (under the military) was successful in accomplishing the above objective, however, the role changed to that of deepening democratic practices from 1999 and because the Nigerian civil society is yet to change its campaign strategy from militant to a pro-active method, it is presently experiencing difficulties in its interaction with 'democratic governments'. He further argued that the above challenge has impacted negatively on the role and contributions of the sector to the 'second phase' of democratization process in the country.

Research questions

From the foregoing, this research poses the following questions:

- i. What is the role of CSOs in the democratization process in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the contributions of CSOs to the democratization process in Nigeria?
- iii. What are the challenges encountered by CSOs in their contribution to the democratization process in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The research objective is broadly divided into two; general and specific objectives. The general aim of this research is to examine the role of CSOs in the democratization process in Nigeria from 1999-2015. Specifically, the research seeks to:

- i. Analyze the role of CSOs in the Nigerian democratization process
- ii. Discuss the contribution of CSOs in the democratization process in Nigeria.
- iii. Identify the challenges CSOs faced in trying to make their contributions to democracy.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2:1 Literature Review

2:1.1 Civil Society Organizations:

The issue of defining what constitutes Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is a problematic one. Hallaway(2001) sees the term CSO as a positive descriptive term and defines it as "citizens, associating neither for power nor for profit, are the third sector of society, complementing government and business, and they are the people who constitute civil society organizations". CSOs can encompass grass-roots organizations, citizen's movements, trade unions, cooperatives, and NGOs, and other ways in which citizens associate for non-politically partisan and non-profit motives. They are not necessarily formal or registered. Hallaway looks at the political economy of the modern society in three basic sectors-state, business and a third sector defined by citizen

self-organization. The state's distinctive competence is legitimate use of coercion. The business sector's competence is market exchange and the third sector's competence is private choice for the public good. Citizens mobilize through values they share with other citizens and through shared commitment to action with other citizens. Holloway further states that it is taken as given that CSOs can do things which neither of the other national development actors-the government and the corporate sector-can do on their own.

Van Rooy (1998) defines CSOs as "the population of groups formed for collective purposes primarily outside of the state and market place". It is also defined as "the sum total of those organizations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus" (Source Book, 2000). Something very common with the above definitions is the emphasis on the fact that civil society operates outside the state, and this means that civil society must be independent. For McNicoll (1995), Civil society is "the totality of self-initiating and self-regulating organizations, peacefully pursuing a common interest, advocating a common cause, or expressing a common passion; respecting the right of others to do the same; and maintaining their relative autonomy vis-a-vis the state, the family, the temple, and the market." According to Diamond (1994:5), Civil society is the:

The realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by the legal order or set of shared rules ... It involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable.

It is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state.

Diamond like the scholars earlier mentioned also focus on the autonomous and voluntary nature of CSOs. Deducing from this, a civil society can simply be defined as stake holding, non-governmental agencies, institutions and groups within a state, having the ability to influence certain decision, policies and activities of either government or other groups within the state. Civil society is also defined by White (1994) as an intermediate associational realm between state and a family, populated by organizations separate from the state, enjoys autonomy in relation to the state and is formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or extend their interests or values. For Layton (2004), civil society is "social organizations occupying the space between the household and the state that enable the people to coordinate their management of resources and activities." In similar vein, Bayart (1986) sees the civil society as a political space between the household and the state. He went further to state that, "it encompasses NGOs, advocacy organizations, business associations, chamber of commerce, informal community groups, cultural societies, religions, sports clubs, labour unions, students organizations, youth organizations, community based organizations, social movements, traditional leadership, women organizations, professional associations e.g physicians and lawyers associations, and the media. This definition is all encompassing and it agrees with that of Diamond above, as they both concluded that the civil society is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state. This means that the CSOs have the ability to influence certain decision, policies and activities of either government or other groups within the state.

2.1.2 Democracy and Democratization

The term democracy literally signifies “the rule of the people”. Abraham Lincoln’s definition of Democracy is close to its literal meaning. It reads, “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people” Guaba, (2005). The simplicity of this definition does not do justice to the extremely controversial notion of the concept. Guaba provides an array of interpretation of democracy beginning with the elitist version typified by Mannheim (1998), who argued that the people cannot directly participate in government, but they can make their aspirations felt at certain intervals; and this is sufficient for democracy. The pluralist version finds expression in Dahl’s interpretation who insists that the policy making process, however centralized it may appear in form, is in reality, a highly decentralized process of bargaining among relatively autonomous groups.

Democracy therefore, can at best be said to be relative. For Agi (2000) writing on the concept of Democracy, firstly made a distinction between direct and representative democracy. In a direct democracy, all citizens participate directly in the laws and take turns in carrying them out. This form of Democracy was practiced in ancient Greece and in decentralized pre-colonial Africa societies. It gave way to representative democracy due to size in population and territory. In Representative democracy, the people do not generally make the laws or administer them but choose those who will do it. This latter type characterizes the modern type of Democracy.

Like the concept of Democracy, the definition of democratization has consistently been subject to analytical scrutiny by social scientists. In his definition, Conteh-Morgan (1998) posits that democratization is an increase in political equality and a decrease in coercive rule; although, he fail to say how. To him, democratization is above all a matter of power. He contends that it is power relations that most importantly determine whether democratization can emerge, be stabilized and then maintain itself in the face of adverse economic conditions. Instead of calling it power relations, Manor (2004) argued that, the success of any democratization process to a large extent depends on government commitment. Ifeanacho and Nwagwu (2009), argues that democratization does not simply connote change of government. It goes beyond the dethronement of authoritarian regime and organization of political parties and elections. To them, democratization is more appropriately viewed as the institutionalization of democratic principles as part of everyday culture in a society.

2.1.3 Civil Society Organizations and Democratization Process in Nigeria

i. Evolution of Civil Society and Democracy in Nigeria: Civil society in Nigeria as in other third world nations differs sharply in terms of its evolution from that of the Western world. This has tended to shape its actions, objectives or goals. While in the western society, civil society grew out of necessities, that is to say, they grew out of the expansion of state which was occasioned by the complexities of governmental role in everyday affairs; third world civil society came about as a result of dissatisfaction with state policies. In fact, most scholars and political commentators have tended to trace the evolution and subsequent proliferation of civil society groups to the high-handedness witnessed by the masses during military dictatorship in Nigeria as in other third world nations (Ikubaje, 2011).

Civil society actors in Nigeria have been in the vanguard of the democratic struggle, especially immediately after Independence in 1960. Prior to independence, civil society actors emanating from political change and ending colonial rule, were already in place; however tenuous in

Nigeria. Many of the early civil society groups in the pre-independence era re-emerged in the 1990s as democratic activists. In fact, some of the most strident pro-democracy activists against continued military rule prior to the election of President Obasanjo in 1999, including Anthony Enahoro of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), comprised the 1950s pro-independence nationalists (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002). Thus, the contemporary, pro-democracy movement in Nigeria has its root in the early pre-independence days. First among these various groups was a trans-national organization known as the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) led by some intellectuals under the leadership of a Ghanaian Lawyer, Caseley Hayford. Its main objective was uniting the four British West African Countries—Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast now Ghana and Nigeria in their demand for self-determination. Some scholars believed that despite the colonialist opposite reaction to the demands of this group, they were successful in their bid, because in 1922, the establishment of a new legislature with the elective principle was made by the Governor Sir Hugh Clifford in Nigeria; a major request of the group. In short, it may not be wrong for one to conclude that the pre-colonial civil society came into existence mainly to fight off what they perceived to be an unprecedented oppression of the black race and more specifically against the Nigerian masses by the colonial masters.

As independence loomed in the horizon of the Nigeria state, a barrage of religious, peasant, communal, student, women and labour groups permeated the Nigerian civil space. The explosion of civil society activity was further galvanized because of the repressive post-independence military rulers, as well as the feeling of non-reprisal from the colonial regime and other regional events that stirred citizens into democratic action. Some of Nigeria's most prominent civil society organizations like the Nigerian Union of Teachers, the Nigerian Bar Association, the Nigerian Society of Engineers, the Nigerian Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria were all founded before independence, and were patterned after similar European civil society actors (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002). After independence, new professional associations became deeply entrenched in the country, with CSOs such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002). However, trade union CSOs like the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Nigerian Bar Association became the most active of pro-democracy CSOs. Membership in a professional association was largely a status symbol and admission into a class oriented brotherhood (Lucas, 1994).

ii. Civil Society Organizations under the Military in Nigeria: By the early 1990s in Nigeria, many new civil society organizations were established for the specific purpose of defending the rights of citizens and extending the frontiers of political rights and freedoms throughout the country (Bangura and Beckman, 1992). During this period also, Nigeria experienced not only an exponential growth in the area of human rights and social activism, but also a growth in the area of personal freedoms. These emerged to coordinate the struggle for civil liberties (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002).

The establishment of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) became the quintessential pro-democracy civil society organization. The CD is an 'umbrella' organization that advocates processes and procedures, human rights, and addresses social ill throughout Nigeria. Some of the "constituent bodies" under the umbrella include the National Association of Democratic

Lawyers (NADL), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ).

The authoritarian regime of General Mohammadu Buhari provided the grounds for the various groups and associations to forge a common front in confronting the excesses of that regime. In the particular case of Decree No.2 of 1984, which stipulated detention of people without trial, and the application of that decree to the arrest, trial and sentencing of Nduka Labor and Tunde Thompson (Journalists with the Guardian Newspaper), the refusal of the state to listen to plea for leniency by various groups, watered the seed of resistance by civil society groups in Nigeria. This accentuated the quest for self-preservation in an increasingly harsh political climate and crisis-ridden economy as well as the realization by this enlightened corps of Nigerian professionals to establish cross-associational alliance to retain social relevance.

When General Ibrahim Babangida came on stage as a successor to General Buhari, he appeared as if he had respect for human rights. He released political prisoners imprisoned by his predecessor and gave a commitment, to return the country to civilian rule. However, the notorious Decree 2 was not abrogated. Rather it was strengthened to permit the detention of persons for renewable periods of six months at a time.

The economic crisis of the 1980s continued unabated and General Babangida subjected the issue of IMF loan to a national debate as whether or not Nigeria should accept the loan from the International Monetary Fund. As Olukoshi (1998) observes, the IMF debate provided an occasion for associational life to blossom. Various groups, including professionals, students, market women, religious organizations, trade unions, roadside mechanics, associations and a host of others took advantage of the opportunity which it offered to air their views and canvass support for their opinions on the question of IMF participation in Nigeria's economic reconstruction efforts. The state made spirited effort to weaken the opposition made up largely of these civil associations through co-optations, threats and intimidation because of their resistance to the market reform, which had successfully decimated the middle class and caused massive misery in the land (Olukoshi, 1998).

Consequently, the structural adjustment programme of General Ibrahim Babangida served by default to hasten, reinforce and intensify the radicalization of professional associations, which began during the Buhari regime. The annulment of June 12 presidential elections of 1993 further ignited a fire of opposition against the military rule of General Babangida. Labour, students, and other professional associations mobilized against the criminal act, and despite the use of force by the state including killing of protesters on the streets of Lagos, General Babangida was forced to step aside in August 1993. The pressure from this group of people on his successor, Chief Ernest Shonekan made it impossible for the Interim National Government to last more than 83 days in office. General Sani Abacha took over government at the heat of the agitation for the revalidation of June 12 presidential election believed to have been won by the late businessman, late Chief M.K.O Abiola. However, as General Abacha reneged and clung tenaciously to power, the civil society organizations went to the trenches again. This time, with the formation of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), this incorporates different pro-democracy organizations, with operational bases in Europe and the United States of America. (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002).

Despite of the massive use of the state apparatus of coercion including state killings, false allegation of coup plots and compulsory exile for many of the leading figures, the civil society organizations maintained a sustained pressure on the discredited, suppressive, and blood thirsty regime until the sudden death of General Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998. It is no doubt in response to that pressure that his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar planned a transition programme to civil rule that produced Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the second Executive President of Nigeria on May 29, 1999.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this paper is the Resource mobilization theory as propounded by John D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald. The theory emphasizes the importance of resources in social movement development and success. Resources are understood here to include: knowledge, money, media, labour, solidarity, legitimacy, and internal and external support from power elite. The theory emphasizes the importance of resources in social movement development and argues that social movements develop when individuals with grievances are able to mobilize sufficient resources to take action. This is fundamental here because the study agrees that CSOs in Nigeria have over the period under review, organized themselves as interest groups to aggregate their views and those of the masses and channel it to the state; either as a demand or as a reaction to a public policy. This is done using the available resources; human and material at their disposal. The social protest by CSOs during the military dictatorship when the SAP policy was forced on Nigerians as a conditionality of the IMF loan is a case in point.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a secondary source of data collection through the review of Literature from journals, magazines, textbooks, government white papers, unpublished works and Internet materials. As a descriptive research, it employs a historical style in looking at the evolution and contribution of CSOs to the democratization process in Nigeria, especially from 1999 – 2015. The study adopted content analysis as a method in analyzing the data collected. The adoption of content analysis technique is to ascertain whether data from documentary sources support the questions raised by the research.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Here, the findings from the three questions raised by the research are presented and discussed separately, and then a conclusion is drawn.

4.1 The Role of Civil Society Organizations in the democratization process in Nigeria

The civil society groups have largely been affected by the nature and politics of Nigeria since independence. According to (Civil Society Index, 2007), after the civil war of 1967-1970, the role of the civil society groups majorly shifted to preserving national unity, national reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. With increase in oil revenue, emphasis shifted to the development of infrastructures and provision of social services. From early 1979 up to the end of the military era, the role of the civil society groups adapt to modern challenges of managing an ailing economy through Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Rationalization, Nationalization and of with the return of democracy; Privatization, Poverty alleviation, empowerment etc.

Also, before the advent of the fourth republic, CSOs played vital role in the enthronement and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Many of the groups like Campaign for Democracy, NADECO, Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR) and Civil Liberty Organization were instrumental in the restoration of civil rule in Nigeria. It would be recalled that between 1993 and 1999, in collaboration with the Nigeria Labour Congress, which is another civil society organization, these groups fought the Nigerian military to a standstill. They mobilized students and workers for civil disobedience, strikes and protest marches across the country. (CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2007). From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the role of civil society in the democratization process in Nigeria include:

- i. Opposing authoritarian and undemocratic principles and values
- ii. Establishing human rights legal standards and advancing the application of human rights norms through high test cases.
- iii. Promoting legal and judicial reform through legislative advocacy
- iv. Providing legal assistance to disadvantaged persons, communities and groups
- v. Supporting the government through constitutional litigation.
- vi. Advancing the application of international legal instruments on human rights in Nigerian law.
- vii. Working with government and their institutions to promote laws, policies and practices that address the rights of poor and excluded communities.
- viii. Voters' education on electoral principles and guidelines.
- ix. Training of election observers and monitors, election tribunal monitoring and electoral reform advocacy.
- x. Peace building and Conflict mitigation, promoting access to justice, public interest litigation, budget tracking, constituency outreaches as well as research and documentation in thematic areas of democracy and governance
- xi. The promotion and the defense of the constitution and rule of law.

4.2 Contribution of Civil Society Organizations to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria

Based on the established role of CSOs in the democratization process in Nigeria mentioned above, the research came up with the following as the immense contribution of CSOs to the democratic sustenance in Nigeria.

i. Protest against the 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).

Largely, antagonists of the third term bid cuts across different facets of the Nigerian society but prominent were the CSOs. Their protest was 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 others (The PUNCH, March 12, 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>).

ii. 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 intent 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 of necessity cannot be completed without recourse to the input of the CSOs.

iii. 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).

iv. Election Monitoring: 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 during the 2007 general election. (Akinboye&Oloruntoba, 2007, p. 14-15).

In addition, CSOs played a prominent role in ensuring the credibility of the widely acclaimed 2011 elections through vigorous voter education using both the traditional and social media for their campaigns. They also established the Nigeria Civil Society Election Situation Room; a broad platform of civil society groups in Nigeria that collaborated to provide a more effective response to electoral fraud and violence, the key threats to the country's electoral process. The Nigeria Civil Society Election Situation Room was to later evolve and become the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (the Situation Room). The word "Election" was dropped from its name to reflect a wider focus extending to other governance issues and concerns. The Situation Room, which was made up of over 60 civil society groups, was hosted by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC)

During the 2015 general elections, a central command centre was established to coordinate the plans and activities of the Situation Room. Through its engagement with INEC, the Situation Room worked to maintain public confidence in the ability of the Commission to deliver on credible elections. The group engaged in back channel advocacy, and interacted with local and international leaders to flag potential flash points for conflict. It also held several discussions and press statements with various stakeholders both from within and outside Nigeria. (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2015)

v. Freedom of Information Act: The passage of a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 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". (Sunday Trust, 5th June 2011).

4.3 Challenges of Civil Society Organizations in the Democratic Process in Nigeria

i. **Inadequate funding:** It is no longer doubtful that civil society organisations in Nigeria have had considerable influence on democracy and electoral practises in Nigeria. However, certain issues militate against their effective operation in Nigeria. Boadi (1995) posited that one of the critical challenges of CSO in Nigeria is the issue of insufficient funds. Most civil society organisations rely on government funding for their various operations, which is not a healthy

development as it breeds loyalty of civil society organisations to government. There is also the challenge of dwindling donor fund especially in the area of democracy and governance.

ii. **Government Patronage:** Osaghae (1998), also opines that "the poor economic conditions of the Nigerian state has also led to the emergence of civil society that are state inclined because members of such groups believe strongly that by showing loyalty to the incumbent government, material resources are assured". 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.

iii. **Lack of State Support and Partnership:** The relationship between civil society organizations and the state is largely characterized by suspicion and tension. For the most part, state officials have viewed civil society organisation as competitors of power, influence, and legitimacy in the public sphere rather than as development partners.

iv. **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.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings in this research, CSOs have played important roles on issues related to democracy and development in Nigeria. However, the following recommendations are made in order to add more grease to the elbows of CSOs.

i. **CSOs Funding:** A major challenge among most CSOs is limited access to funding and restrictions with donor-driven agenda and projects. Overcoming this challenge will require the government and donors to recognize the important role of civil society in Nigeria's democracy. For example, the government should establish a National CSOs Trust Fund, in order to provide local funding and support to CSOs. Setting up a CSOs national data bank will be very useful too in order to check proliferation when the trust fund is set up. This will improve the institutional memory and information on CSOs and subsequently make the appropriate disbursements of funds.

ii. **Diversification of sources of funding through creative revenue generation activities:** Welcome though the idea for a CSO National trust fund, it is also good for CSO to look into other ways to generate revenue which will make them more self-reliant and Independent from external control, be it government or foreign donors.

iii. **Public Policy:** Despite the overwhelming evidence of public trust in CSOs, state actors hardly recognize CSOs as partners in addressing governance and development issues. CSOs need to create stronger advocacy campaigns and build strategic partnerships with government agencies and state actors. On the other hand, government also need to recognize CSOs as partners for development and not rivals.

iv. **Capacity Building:** A key priority for most Nigerian CSOs is to empower ordinary and marginalized citizens. One of the best ways to accomplish this is by building the capacity of

local level CSOs and building linkages and connections among community based organizations (CBOs) and grassroots organizations, so that they can begin to work more closely with the state and the private sector. Capacity-building can be advanced by holding training programmes and workshops at the local level, which would, in turn, enhance the capacity to engage the policy process at different levels, including budget tracking.

5.2 Conclusion

This research explored and discussed the role of CSOs in the democratization process in Nigeria. It gathered through the publications reviewed that NGOs have indeed played important role in the areas of democracy development in Nigeria. The research noted that Nigeria has several civil society groups that tend to put both the government and their policies in check. They assist in achieving some of those objectives that would have seemed impossible for the government alone to achieve. Although they vary in composition, mission, vision, and core values - CSOs all have in common an ideology of promoting equity and justice in the polity and bringing about development in Nigeria's nascent democracy. Considering the fact that these organizations contribute tremendously to the activities of government and can confidently influence government policies and programs positively to the benefit of the citizens, the promotion of their achievements cannot be over emphasized.

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