

THE CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE IN NIGERIA

Victoria N. Azu, PhD

Faculty of Social Sciences, Dept of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *The increasing spate of violence in the conduct of democracy in Nigeria is a clear indication of lack of active participation by the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The inability of the SCOs to compel the democratic institutions and their managers to respect the core values of democracy has significant implications for the nation's nascent democracy and her citizens. This concern necessitated an enquiry into the challenges confronting CSOs as impediments to the effective performance of their pivotal role in ensuring a sustained democratic practice. The study adopted the Marxian Political Economy Approach which sees the economic condition of society as the primary determinant of its other structures, to explain the dilemma of the CSOs in influencing the electoral process. The investigation drew from secondary sources, and adopted the descriptive data analysis. Findings showed that most of the civil society organisations have either been politicized, intimidated by repressive government or distabilised by internal crises that deviate their attention from their roles as watchdogs on political events. Key among the recommendations is that the ruling class should as a matter of expediency uphold the tenets of democracy to bear on the electoral process, by strengthening the democratic institutions to exist exclusively as state institutions rather than personalised structures; while the CSOs should consciously understand their role, and assume their rightful place to lay foundation for sustainable democracy in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: civil society organisations, democracy, democratic sustenance

BACKGROUND TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Report from World Bank Group (2013) noted that civil society all over the globe has experienced a dramatic expansion in size, scope and capacity, aided by the process of globalization and democratic governance, telecommunications, economic integration, etc. The year book of International organization reported that the number of International NGOs increased from 6,000 in 1990 to over 50,000 in 2006. Civil Society organisations have also played a significant role in global development assistance, as well as shaping domestic and global policies through its campaigns for debt cancellation, environmental protection etc. Although the term civil society has been explained in different but related ideas. However, it can ordinarily be understood as an aggregate of non- governmental organisations that manifest interest and will of the citizens, or individuals and organisations in the society which do not depend on government.

From the perspectives of social contract theories especially Thomas Hobbes and John lock, civil society emanated from the desire of men to live in peace with one another. Before the formation of civil society, men existed in their natural state. According to Hobbes, in the light of bleak and pessimistic human nature, men existed in a gloomy and sordid state of nature in which human relationship was characterized by mutual suspicion and hostility. In Hobbes state of nature, the only rule acknowledged was that "one would take if one had the power, and retain as long as one could". The state of nature was devoid of law, justice, notion of right and wrong, with force and fraud as the two cardinal virtues. Man in this state was described as an 'atomistic and asocial individual'. There was a clear prohibition of possibility for a civilised pursuit that could make life worthwhile; there was a condition of "war of all against all". Thus, Hobbes described life of man in the state of nature as "solitary, poor, nasty brutish, and short" (cited in Mukherjee et al). As men realized the danger of anarchy, continuous fear of aggression, uncertainties, etc, they became conscious of the need for protection of life and property. According to Hobbes, human rationality and self-preservation compelled men to enter into agreement to surrender their natural rights to a common power which Hobbes calls the Leviathan- state.

John Locke, writing in the period of the glorious revolution in England, characterised by a struggle between the divine right of the crown and the political power of the parliament, in his Second Treatise, Locke adopted the strategy of social contract to explain that legitimate political authority is derived from the consent of the people which could be withdrawn if the freedom of the individual is threatened or violated. His First and Second Treaties defined three fundamental principles of legitimate political power as freedom, consent and property which he defined as:
... the right of making laws with penalties of death and consequently all less penalties, for regulating and preserving a property, and of employing the force of the community, in the execution of such laws and in the defence of the commonwealth from Foreign inquiry and all this only for Public Good (Locke 1960: 308) cited in (cited in Mukherjee et al)

For Locke, political power was a trust with the general community specifying its purpose and aims. Thus, the free individuals express their consent willingly and voluntarily through a contract freely agreed to. They therefore, agreed to come together in a civil society to form government.

Although Locke had a contrary opinion on the nature of man. For him, against Hobbes notion of man as brutish and asocial, Locke saw man as naturally social, and pacific, for Locke, men were created with equal rights to share the earth and its fruits, each individual having right to enforce natural laws for which he was subject to; punish the offenders and express his opinion. However, because of the absence of common legislative, judicial and executive authorities, disputes arose in the interpretation of the natural laws, it ostensibly became a matter of "one person's word against another's".

Consequently, the frustration, insecurity and hard-earned happiness prevalent in the state of nature forced men to perpetually be at war with one another. There were pronounced hostilities between the rich and the poor, every individual under this gruesome state of nature developed thirst for peace and freedom. There was a dire need to change the ugly situation by allowing natural freedom give way for civil freedom. This scenario created the condition for social contract resulting in a multitude of individuals coming together in a collective unity to form a civil society. Hence, each individual was placed in complete dependence on another through mutual equality. The members of the civil society therefore submitted their individual will (rights), the totality of which became the general will; and 'individual will' became subjected to the direction of the general will, while the 'general will' became protected by the rulers of the civil society.

The analysis above shows that both Hobbes and Locke have accepted a system in which peaceful co-existence among human can be achieved through social agreements or contracts. They see civil society as a community through which civil life is maintained, a realm in which civic life were derived from natural laws. For them, civil society existed alongside the state where the civil society determined the direction of the state.

Clarification of terms: The terms relevant for this paper are: Civil Society organizations, Democratic Sustenance and Challenges.

Civil society: The status of civil society organisation as societal actors in many parts of the world, coupled with its varied nature and composition, makes its definition vary according to conceptual paradigms, historical origin and country context. However, this study provides the definition of civil society organization adopted by World Bank Group as developed by a number of leading research centers: "The term civil society refers to the wide array of nongovernmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life expressing the interest and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religions or philanthropic considerations. Civil society organisation (CSO) therefore include a wide range of organisations, community groups, (NGOs), Labour Unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organization, professional associations and foundations".

Challenge: This means a situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully, and therefore tests a person's ability.

Democratic sustenance: Democratic substance can be understood as a situation in which none of the major political actors, parties, organised interest, forces or institutions considers that there is any alternative to democratic process to gain access to power, and no political institution has a claim to the actions of democratically election decision makers.

Theoretical Perspective

This study adopted the Marxian Political Economy approach in explaining the obstacles encountered by civil society organisations in Nigeria. The political economy theory is derived from the work of Karl Marx. The central premise of this framework is that there is a relationship

between the economy and the other elements of the society, such that the economic condition of any society eventually determines the nature and character of the other elements of that society. Enemuo captured this when he noted that:

The mode of production of material life determines the general character of Social, political and spiritual process of life. The political economy framework therefore gives primacy to material condition of life. On this Ake (1981) observed:

Once we understand what material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed and what type of social relations arises from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system and even its mode of thought.

Thus, the relations of production in any society produce conflict and contradictions which give rise to social change. "Since all parts of the society are interconnected however, it is only through the process of interplay between these parts that changes occur". (Haralambus & Holborn: 2004:946).

It is clear from above that political power revolves around economic power, and that economic inequality cannot produce political democracy. Ake (1981) also noted that societies characterised by social inequality adopt repressive political processes in order to curb the inevitable demands of the less privileged for wealth re-distribution; also, the values and morality of such societies support the preservation of the status quo in which the ruling class is favoured. The idea derived from the above framework explains why the Nigerian ruling class is reluctant to open up the socio-political space for the civil society organisations to function.

Models of Civil Society

Barber (1999) has x-rayed what he describes as the three models of civil society. He noted the relevance of these models as crucial for revitalization of civil society, taming of markets, civilising society and democratisation of government.

He identified the three models as:

1. Civil society as a synonym for the private sector (two- celled model) i.e. Liberal market perspective
2. Civil society as a synonym for community in communitarian perspective (the two- celled model)
3. The strong democratic perspective civil society as a mediating third domain between government and market (the three-called model).

Civil Society as synonym for the private sector liberal perspective (two- celled model): The liberal perspective sees the civil society as the same as the private/ market sector. This notion

posits that for an effective free and fair market place to be achieved by the individuals, there has to be a radical choice between government and market. From this perspective the social space or civil world is divided into two-cells the rival and incompatible public and private sector. The public representing the state and its institutions, while the second domain i.e. private sector represent every other thing ranging from individuals to social organizations, economic corporations, to civil associations- the civil society organisations. According to this perspective, while the public is defined by power ie coercive instrument of government, the private sector is defined by liberty, freedom (market) as the condition of privacy and individuality. The contentious relationship existing between the two sectors thus, suggest that a growth in one sector would mean a corresponding cost of attrition on the other, more government, less liberty, and vice-versa:

As the liberal model dichotomises the people and government, liberty and power, individuals and the state, there is no option left for a civil society than to cleave itself under the private sector domain. Thus, no clear distinction can be made between the individuals and the private civil association, between economic corporations, and civil organizations which the individuals constitute. Those who are frustrated with government actions perceive privatisation as their only option.

This perspective frees individuals and associations to enter into several deals to safeguard their interest and defend their liberties. Government is seen under this perspective as being so powerful to give the citizens all they need just as it can also take away from the citizens all that they have.

The liberal school therefore maintain that liberties must be surrounded by a thick wall of rights. Thus, philosophers viewing citizens in pursuit of their economic interest and install a defensive parapet of rights to protect themselves against an encroaching state, sees in the citizens what Barbar (Ibid) has described as " homo economics" which is something more than an economic animal, a rational person who pursues wealth for his own interest. Citizens are here seen as sovereign but passive beings to which limited government is accountable.

The communitarian perspective of civil society as a synonym for community (Two Celled Mode)

This perspective also agrees that society is divided into two – the government and the private sector. However, communitarian perspective does not understand or see private space as a domain for solitary, right bearing individuals or grasping entrepreneurs. They believe that individuals are tied to one another by bond existing or precede their individuality. This perspective sees civil society as unavoidable circle of emotional relationship that tie people together into families, clans, clubs, neighborhood, communities, etc. While liberal view sees civil society as individuals who volunteer and come into contracts to form economic associates, the communitarians discover a zone of interactions, embeddedness and bonding.

Communitarians therefore argue that most human associates are ascriptive, that is natural or given, and not voluntary like in the liberal perspective. Human beings are born as members of particular communities, clan, male or female as nationals of a country, and play little or no part in determining the communities into which they are born or belong. In other words, a particular society where individuals are born and interact in their social relationships becomes a civil society; and anybody born into that society automatically or naturally becomes a member of that society, not by voluntary but by natural inclination. Therefore, while the defining character of civil society on the libertarian model is the right bearing consumer, the defining character of civil society on the communitarian model is the clansman, tied to community by blood and birth. This perspective thus, decries the extinction of traditional ancient communities sustained on face to face communal social relations, and replacement with an elephant urban civilisation that define modern life; and raised up the new communitarians as champions of a vanished life style. Communitarians therefore call for the restoration of the ancient communities which have gone into extinction as a result of the modernising trends which they condemn, and on the basis of which they prescribe community as the only remedy. They however argued that since the ancient world on which civil society can be reformed is lost, and that if civil society depends on its restoration, there may not be civil society any more.

The strong democratic perspective: civil society as a mediating third domain between government and market (the three- celled model)

It was noted above that irrespective of their different perspectives of private sector, both libertarian and communitarian share the believe that the social space is divided into two opposing blocks. Public and private sphere. However, this perspective argues that a two-celled model is inadequate to describe the actual world and insufficient as a normative ideal for citizens who seek a very active environment for civic activity that is neither as thin as the private sector/market (libertarian) nor as thick and a sticky as clannish community.

By this perspective, the three-celled model world distinguishes the public from private or government and its institution from the private sector occupied by individuals and their contract associations, and as well as separate these two from the third sector which Barbar (1999) calls the **civic sector**. Civic sector is defined by civil communities qualified as member communities, as well as sufficiently open to accommodate voluntary members. Civil society by this perspective should possess some qualities of public, and open like the public sector, at the same time allows volunteers to join; its communities must have aspects of openness as well as inclusiveness. For instance, a church membership includes both those born into the church and those who are baptised in it or are members by choice. Thus, this model of civil society accommodates in it the egalitarianism and non-exclusiveness of the democratic public sector, while possessing the liberty character and voluntariness of the private sector. By sharing some attributes and virtues of both public and private domains, it constitutes the third and independent sector; Barbar therefore identities this sector with strong democratic value.

Thus, Barbar (1999) views civil society as occupying a middle position; not purely as consumers of government services and right-bearers against government institutions; or mere voters and passive watchdogs to whom the representative governing elites are marginally accountable to; rather, citizen appear as members of civil society because they are active, responsible, engaged members of groups seen about exploring common grounds and pursuing common relations. He submits that civil society relations enjoy stronger tiers or relations than those offered by market and economic interactions.

Barba, at the end of his analysis, concluded that the three-celled model of civil society rooted in strong democratic version is the ideal type. The civil society third domain, while sharing the virtues of public and private sectors, provides space for work, business and other activities not focused on profit nor services. It shares with government a sense of publicity and regard for general good and common interest. However, unlike government, civil society do not have any claim to monopoly of legitimate coercive force. It shares like the private sector liberty without being anarchic. It is rather a voluntary or private realm committed to public good. Civil society therefore stands between the big bureaucratic government that citizen no longer trust, and the private domain which the citizens cannot also depend on for moral and civic values that provide a say for the citizens. Without civil society therefore, the citizens would be homeless.

Similarly, Cohen and Arto refer to civil society as a third realm and the other two being the state and the market. For them, civil society consist of:

Plurality: Families, informal groups and voluntary associates whose plurality and autonomy accommodate different forms of life

Publicity: represents institution of culture and communication.

Privacy: represents a place for individual self-development and moral choice

Legality: here civil society constitutes a structure of general laws and basic rights needed to demarcate plurality, privacy and publicity from state and the economy. (cited in Sharma et al 2008)

Sharma et al (2008) have viewed civil society as consisting of ordinary citizen who organise themselves outside of government and the public service to deal with specific issues and concerns that normal government cannot address by itself. They submit that civil society can operate effectively if state and its citizens engage openly on how policies are formulated and implemented. Accordingly, the state in collaboration with the civil society pursue the welfare of the citizens. They re-echoed that civil society include non-governmental organizations, faith-based organization. women groups, famers union, other special interests, associates, business enterprises, labour unions, private foundations, religious organizations, caste associations etc. Civil society acts as a space where individuals can pursue self-defined ends in an arena of association of common concern. It is also an avenue through which the values embedded in democratic life can be achieved.

The Role of civil society organisations in Democracy

Protect the rights of citizens: In his analysis of the inter-sectoral governance in the USA, Nicholas (2007) pointed out the place of the independent, non-profit third sector level in governance. He noted that no sector has become quickly prominence in governance than the independent non-profit third sector—the civil society. He also explained the independent sector as those organizations, associations and institutions that do not seek profit, not created by government and are privately owned. He identified two types of independent non-profit organisation as public serving or public benefit organization which include universities, foundations, churches, among others. He made a striking revelation that nine out of every ten American adults belong to at least one of America's 1.6 million non-profit associations. He identified two types of independent non-profit organisations. The first is public serving or public benefit organisations which include universities, foundations, churches, etc. There are about 1.2 million of them existing to provide benefits for the public. The second group is the member serving organizations, which include labour unions, political parties, private clubs, etc., and they exist to provide benefit to the members. According to Nicholas, they are about 400,000.

Both public sector and members serving organization are exempted from federal, state and local taxes. He noted that these organizations employ 9% of American workforce, and employment in the non-profit sector is well above what obtain in the private or public sector.

The public serving non-profit organizations employ 9 out of every 10 non-profit employees. But if this number is added with the 6.3 million volunteers, who spend their energies in the third sector, non-profit organisations account for 11% of all paid and voluntary employment in the United States of America. This underscores the role of civil society organisations as employment providers as well as protecting the interest of their members.

Partners in policy Implementation

Public policies are action statements of government with respect to health services and hospital cultural and recreational services, higher and vocational education, social services referring to job training, residential, child day care, individual and family services: welfare, food, stamps; public housing etc. Nicholas pointed out that the United States government is quite unique in its use of powerful non-profit organisations to provide these range of services.

He noted that America government created a welfare state through non-profit organisation mostly since 1950. Nicholas found out from his studies that non-profit organisation or civil societies organisation acquire an average of 1/5 of their budget from government. They deal directly with human services and government contribution to their budget ranges from a tenth for cultural program to more than all revenue collected by social services. Nicholas noted from a study that 42% all government spending from delivery health care including hospital, housing, and community development, employment and training, art and culture and other social services

went to non- profit organisations. This tells that more than six out of every 10 public sector funded project were contracted out either through states and local governments to non-profit organisations or directly to non-profit organisation, while about 10% went to profit companies. This strategy can also improve public accountability he said.

Instrument of government reforms

In the same vein, Sharma et al (2007) noted that civil society organisations contribute to governance by voicing out issues in relation to priorities and virtues of good governance. As a movement, civil society organisations create collection pressure for government reforms and contribution to the practical task associated with self- governance.

Promote good governance and human development

A successful interaction between the effective states, mobilised civil society and a productive private sector would invariably promote good governance and sustainable human development. Sharma et al noted that a democratic process striving on a joint effort of the 3 variance of civil society organisations makes way for democracy and the institution associated with it.

4. Contributes to conflict resolution”

A functional civil society involved in policy making and implementation can mediate for peace in case of conflict among the citizens and between citizens and government. Such informed active civil society organisations would extol the virtues of trust, openness, tolerance, bargain and negotiations which are relevant ingredients for peace and sustained democracy.

Encourage viable institutions:

Though the basic institutions of law and framework of administration are created to promote good governance, but most of them are ostensibly weak especially in developing countries, and have performed abysmally such that inefficiency in policy implementation has become the order of the day in the Nigerian public sector administration. The general factors resulting to low performance could be poor accountability, lack of motivation, corruption, delay in delivery of goods and services, etc. However, civil society organisations enhance administrative institutions by making them participatory, effectively counter corrupt elements and improve the scope and quality of services delivery for improved governance.

Promote Representativeness:

Robert Dahl pointed out that civil society organisations (interest groups) strengthen representativeness by articulating interest and advancing views that are ignored by political parties; and provide a means to influence government (cited in Sharma et al 2008)

Stimulate debate and discussions:

Civil societies organisations promote debate and discussions, and by so doing create a better, well informed and more educated electorates, at the same time improve the quality of public policy.

Broaden the scope of political participation: Civil society organisations create wider space for political activities. They do this by providing an alternative to conventional party politics and as well as provide platform for grass-root activism.

Checkmate government powers:

Civil society organisations act as check on the powers and excesses of government, and thereby defend liberty of citizen by ensuring that the state is balanced against a vigorous and healthy civil society.

Provide political stability:

Civil society organisations help to maintain stability in the political system by providing a channel of communication between government and the people and matching outputs with inputs.

Ensure free and fair election:

Above all, civil society organizations extend effort to ensure free and fair elections. In a liberal democracy, election is the most important platform that determines the degree of citizen's participation in a democratic process. For the electoral process to represent the sovereignty of the people, it must be conducted in a free and fair manner. It is considered that such process should not be entirely left in the hands and management of government and its agencies alone. It is therefore imperative that civil society organisations engage in vigilant and close monitoring of the process to ensure that government do not adopt the antics of the incumbency to manipulate the process against the will of the masses.

The points listed above highlight the relevance of civil society organisations in a democracy. It is however regrettable that Nigerian democracy has not drawn from this well of virtues provided by civil society organisations as the western countries of Europe and North America have done. This is not to say that civil society organisations do not exist in Nigeria. A good number of them exist. Prominent amongst them include Oduduwa People's Congress, Arewa people's Congress, Ohaneze Ndigbo, PANDEF-Pan Niger Delta Forum, Nigeria Labour Congress etc. The numerous difficulties experienced in the Nigeria democratic arena provides a clear evidence that those groups are perpetually more dormant than they are active in creating the enabling environment for a sustained democracy, with regard to both the electoral process and governance proper. It is against this background that this work examines the factors that constitute challenges to the ability of the civil societies to sustain democracy in Nigeria as they do in western countries.

The Challenges of Civil Society Organisations in Nigeria

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

Inadequate Funding: Pratt (2003) has identified inadequate funding as a major challenge faced by NGOs in playing their role as democratic institutions. He noted that most NGOs are funded by volunteered official donors. Some of these donors like the Dutch have reversed their 20years of increased funding of NGOs. The withdrawal of these donor organisations has left huge financial gap between the function of the NGOs and their present financial position.

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

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

Besides that, the period under the leadership of Chief Alao, Aka Bashurun (1987-89) during which the BAR was polarised into factions: the radical progressives and the conservatives, while the radicals sought to pursue their agenda by confronting government for injustice and human rights violation, the conservatives believed in cooperation, dialogue and or collaborations. This crisis was attributed to factors such as misappropriation of the N10m, use of money by

contestants and their representatives, allegation of manipulation of the accreditation process, the conferences venue etc., as reported by the committee set up by the military government to investigate the cause of the crisis and recommend measures to avoid future occurrence. These crises weakened the BAR as contestants for presidency no longer fight for justice and defense of human right, but fight to get their fit on the ladder of opportunity to get access to power.

Similarly, the student union body - National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) under military dictatorship student union in Nigeria suffered growth and identity problem. The proscription of NUNS and the withdrawal of NUNS president from a prestigious position he held in the Constituent Assembly following the demands of the students Union, which bothered on poor execution of Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPES), threat of increase in school fees; the danger of using soldiers to enforce discipline in schools, etc. This was followed by the arrest and detention of their then leader- Mr Okowo who was released after 43days. These series of harassment silenced the NUNS for a long time. However, the student union resuscitated again under a new name National Organisation of Nigerian Students (NONS). After this, a new president was elected in the person of Mr. Knife Tamia. The final blow that hit the Union and silenced in till date was the rustication of the president and the secretary following an accusation levelled against the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar for financial impropriety. The union was never the same again, and the remnant of it became politicised even under civilian rule.

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

Economic conditions of Nigeria society

The economic condition of Nigerian society is another obstacle suffered by civil society organisations in Nigeria. The conditions of hardship the citizens find themselves would invariably affect their strength of agitation. This has often times led to corruption and betrayal whereby the leaders of civil society organisations receive gratifications from government to douse the struggle. As leaders are gagged by the opium of contract award, appointments, cash incentives and gifts from the power that be, they can no longer forge any moral justification to criticise or play hard on government to secure the interest of members as stakeholders in democracy; besides, members who are already harassed by poverty are compelled by slight promise of gratifications to tilt towards government position. For instance, the issue of minimum wage has been discussed for more than six months without any sign of its implementation, and all members of labour unions go about their normal duties without any further move to compel government to comply with its promise either through a strike action or any serious protest. By the time government threatens with either loss of job or apply a "no work, no pay rule" most people would rash back to work for fear of losing the little source of livelihood; some persons will go by the maxim 'half bread is better than none' Nigerians are great managers of economic hardship. There have been some cases where workers spend the first one month at home on industrial action and most would be itching to go back to work with the hope that it is better to be owed by government than not having any hope anywhere. These are problems caused by economic hardship where citizens act like those without any knowledge of their rights.

Repressive Government: In most parts of the world especially in democratic societies, civil society organisations are known for protests as an avenue to resist unfavourable government policies. Civil society organisations in Nigeria have been deprived of this right of protest by the government using military and other armed security operatives to quell civil protests. This practice totally speaks against the civil rights of citizens; hence everyone is afraid to enter the street for any form of protest. In advanced democracies, police accompany civilians on protest to guild them from any mishap or assault by any group. The situation here is the use of shooting and tie-gas to dislodge protesters and scare anybody from engaging in such act.

Lack of press freedom

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

favour of public officers, referred to as 'public officer's protection against false accusation'. The degree was notorious for saddling media houses and journalist against publicly expressing opposing views to government. The decree also sanctioned and arrested those who criticised the administration. Babangida in his antics tactically exchange the hand of romance with some key journalists who were the major critiques of the previous administration. Notably among them were Duro Onabule and Nduka Irabo, who were editors at Concord and Guardian newspapers. He offered them position as chief press secretary and press secretary to the vice president respectively.

Addressing the issue of ownership of the press, military government under IBB came up with new decree in respect of press and media action. This new decree ostensibly made it difficult for journalists and newspapers to produce, distribute and publish news. Notable among this was the decree 59 of 1988 which created the Nigeria Media Council and authorised it to set entry qualifications for journalism and monitor their activities. The Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree 29 was also promulgated, and empowered by the administration to seize copies of publications considered against national interest. These actions were further legitimised by the Offensive Publication (proscription) Decree 35 of 1993. Under this decree any newspaper or magazine that reported or published any kind of information considered unfavourable by the government would face the consequence of proscription. Consequent upon that decree, by 1993, sixteen media houses were closed down: The Reporter, The News, Daily Sketch, Sunday Sketch, Newsday, The Observer, etc., were shoot down by Ibrahim Babangida administration (Oniye, 2008).

These series of seizures and harassments on the Nigeria media made it difficult for them to function and report unfolding political events in the country; even those not proscribed were gripped with fear, forcing them into doing selective publications, while those that couldn't meet up simply folding up.

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

Porous National Security Conditions: Security is paramount in every human involvement. An individual who is not sure of the safety of his life and property is already psychologically destabilised. Such a person cannot engage in any form of mental or physical activity that can lead him to attaining other goals. Citizens living in the Northeast, Middlebelt and other parts of Nigeria devastated by life threatening activities of Boko Haram and or farmers/herdsmen clashes have suffered unbearable horrifying experiences and emotional trauma. These victims have been rendered homeless, and come under the name Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Persons suffering such dehumanizing condition cannot gather together for group interest or to criticize the same government that has become their only hope of survival; no one bites the finger that feeds him. The sense of horror and uncertainties constantly experienced by persons affected by these ugly trends leave them hopeless and lean only on government for support. These victims are more pre-occupied on how to get back on their feet and resume normal life.

CONCLUSION

The role of civil society organisations in democracy has been sufficiently highlighted above. Western democracies appreciate the contributions made by these organisations, and have adequately incorporated them in the policy process to promote good governance. This most probably explains why these countries have experienced expansion, sustained democratic culture, and an overall national development. While those in advanced democracies may relax their efforts having attained an appreciable height in pursuit of democratic values, it is expected that civil society organizations in developing countries should double the effort of those in advanced democracies to raise the status of these emerging democracies. For that to happen, it is expedient that government creates an enabling environment for the impact of the activities of these organisations to be felt on the nation's democracy. The country needs innovative ideas, critical analysis of policies and programs of government. These virtues can come from well-informed members of the civil society groups.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To reinvigorate civil society organisations in Nigeria to act as democratic sustainers, the following recommendations are provided:

Improvement in the general economic conditions of Nigerian citizens. An improved economic condition of citizens would give them better focus towards their role as drivers in the democracy project. Poverty and hardship subject members of civil societies as cheap elements that can easily be lured by material gifts, financial gratifications, contract and other forms of fascinating promises that can re-direct their attention from pursuit of the general interest of members. This can be done by creating conditions that engage the citizens in meaning activities through manpower development, skills acquisition and employment generation.

Government should create room for civil society organisations to participate actively in governance. This can be achieved by understanding citizens' protests and agitations as part of the input into the system which should guide government policies decisions and outputs, and not to be seen as confrontational groups that should be dispersed with police teargas, shooting or other forms of force to intimidate and frustrate peaceful protesters. Demands of the citizens expressed either through protest or dialogue should be considered for policy implication.

In addition, civil society organisations should be brought into the mainstream of governance by involving them in policy implementation. From the analysis provided by Nicholas (2007) above, on the role of civil societies (the third sector) in governance in American democracy, it was pointed out that greater percentage of government services at all levels are contracted out and funded through organised civil society groups. This strategy extends government services to all and sundry, both rural and urban dwellers. As part of the survival strategy for Nigeria's democracy, leaders should borrow a leaf from such liberal democratic culture. By so doing, policies and programs of government are implemented in line with local contents of different communities.

Civil societies organisations should understand their role in a democracy and pursue their goals as major stakeholders in sustaining the nation's democracy. This they can do by organising periodic conferences and workshop to educate members on what they should do, as well as sensitise them on how to relate with government to avoid using violence and confrontation in presenting their demands.

Civil society groups should partner with government to beef up security. Development does not thrive in an environment devoid of peace and security. It is only when people enjoy a sense of security that they can have a conducive environment to meet at a venue anywhere in the country to deliberate on how to support democracy.

Civil society organisations should work in synergy with each other to present a strong force capable of attracting government attention. They can do this by coming together to address basic social problems that affect the generality of the citizens, such as issues of political participation, protection of fundamental rights of citizens, security, etc, and shun all forms of intolerance that could breed internal crisis amongst them.

Considering the channels through which the relationship of the state with industrial functions may consistently make the civic interest of man explicit, Laski (2008) pointed out consultation with certain institutions as a major need of the modern state. He attributed the weakness of the present system to the government being compelled to consult only those whose protest is considered important for its action, instead of associations representing the interest affected by some statutes. It is necessary that authoritative bodies as civil society organisations (especially when they are given constitutional backing), are consulted before giving any policy a statutory

form. Laski pointed out some advantages expected from this strategy: it first and foremost secures effective access to government by the interests involved; they will receive authoritative exposition; they are positioned to learn in details and principles, the mind of government and determine whether to support or oppose the measures; they can seek, based on their knowledge of government intention to influence the supporters and opponents of government in the cabinet; supply to the minister information on the value in the construction of details of his measures, and also offer suggestions for the workability of such measures. In the words of Laski (2008), “they form in brief the deposit of expertise upon the different aspects of policy which if effectively used, create an atmosphere of responsibility about government acts”.

Religion is a personal thing. As a matter of right, everyone should be given the freedom of religious association. Religion should be separated from governance by not allowing religious fanaticism creep into institutions of national relevance, especially those that play major roles on the nation’s nascent democracy. Civil societies should not be infiltrated by religious sentiments so that members can feel free and safe to come together under common agenda, and deliberate on the way forward to the nation’s frail democracy. Religious bias is antidevelopment, a destroyer and should not be allowed to undermine the progress and efficacy of democratic institutions.

References

- Ake, C. (1981). *A political economy of Africa*. England: Longman
- Barber, B.R. (1999). “Clansmen, consumers, and citizens”: *Three takes on civil society*. In Fullinwider, R.K. (ed) *Civil society, democracy and civic renewal*. NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Day, P.J. (2006). *A new history of social welfare* (5th ed). Paris: Pearson education Inc.
- Enemuo, F. (2000). *Approaches and Methods to the study of politics*, In Anifowese, R. & Enemuo, F. (eds.) *Elements of Politics*, Lagos: Sam Ironsi Publications.
- Gladius, M. (2009). *Global civil society and human rights*. In Goodhart, M. (ed.) *Human rights politics and practice*, NY: Oxford University Press
- Haralambus, M. & Holborne M. (2004). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives*, (6th ed.) London: Harpercollins
- Kukah, M.H. (2007). *Democracy and civil society in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books
- Laski, H.J. (2008). *Grammar of Politics*. Delhi: Surject Publication
- Mukherjee, S. & Ramaswamy S. (2011). *A history of political thought: Plato – Marx*. New Delhi: PHI learning private ltd.
- Nicholas, H. (2007). *Public administration and public affairs*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India
- Oniye, O. (2018). *Free state, free press: The state & the media*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thebookbanque.com>
- Pratt, B. (2013). *Intrac for civil society*. Retrieved from: <http://www.intrac.org>
- Sharma, M.P., Sadana, B.L. & Kaur, H. (2011). *Public Administration in theory and practice*. New Delhi: Kitab Mahab
- Worldbank Group (2013). *Defining civil society*. Retrieved from: web.worldbank.org