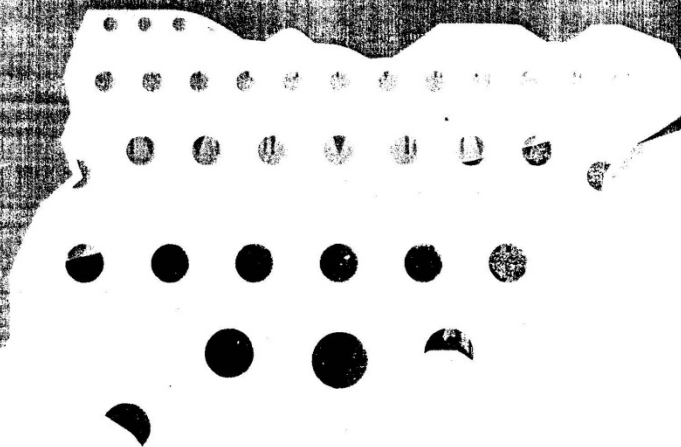


Contemporary Issues in the Nigerian Society



Edited by

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Table of Contents

Section A: Introduction

Chapter One: Introduction

Jimoh, A.

3

Section B: Economic Development

Chapter Two: Economic Development and the Nigerian State

Jimoh, A.

9

Chapter Three: Looking Backward and Thinking Forward: A Discussion of Fifty Years Economic Performance of Nigeria

Kilishi, A.A.

25

Chapter Four: Economic Planning, Reforms and Inclusive Growth in Nigeria

Yaru, A.A.

43

Chapter Five: Empowerment and Its Outcomes in Nigeria: The Missing Link

Ijaiya, G.T. and Ojuolape, M.A.

59

Section C: Transport and Development

Chapter Six: Weather and Safety Issues in Aviation: The Need for Action in Nigeria

Usman, B.A; Ifabiyi, I.P. and Kekere, A.A.

81

Chapter Seven: Planning for Non-motorised Transport in Nigerian Cities: Rights, Challenges and Prospects

Arosanyin, Godwin Tunde

97

Section D: Health, Agriculture, Climate Change and the Environment

Chapter Eight: Tobacco Use, Cigarette Smoking and Sustainable Development in Nigeria
Bello, R.A. 119

Chapter Nine: Dams and the "Damned": Impact of Dams on Indigenous Communities in Nigeria
Abdullahi, Ali Arazeem 137

Chapter Ten: Precipitation Features as an Index of Climate Change and Its Implications on Agriculture in Kwara State, Nigeria.
Olanrewaju, R.M. 159

Chapter Eleven: Dynamics of Nutrient Cycling in Cocoa Ecosystem in Nigeria
Ajibade, L.T. and Afolayan, O.S. 173

Chapter Twelve: Emerging Challenges in Agricultural Extension Service Delivery: A Perspective of Pastoral Livelihoods in Kwara State, Nigeria
Aderinoye-Abdulwahab, S.A., Adefalu, L.L., Dolapo, A.T. and Ladipo, F.O. 193

Section E: Politics and Development

Chapter Thirteen: Democracy, Local Government and Service Delivery in Nigeria since 1999
Aliu, Fatima O. and Ifejika, Solomon I. 215

Chapter Fourteen: Roles of Civil Society Organisations in Governance Process in Nigeria
Lawal, E. Ejalonibu and Bakare, Adebola Rafiu 235

Chapter Fifteen Enhancing the Performance of Nigeria's Foreign Service
Saliu, Hassan 261

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Roles of Civil Society Organisations in Governance Process in Nigeria

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1.0 Introduction

The ability of civil society to play its role and the level of opportunity given by the government in order that the former could thrive unhindered is an essential measure of a country's development process. Such situation is a hallmark of good governance. In essence, the primary yardstick for measuring a country's developmental status is good "governance". The question that has been lingering over the years on this subject matter is "what are the factors that can make a governance to be regarded as good?" Many scholars, civil society groups, research institutes as well as individual opinion makers had identified criteria or notions that if seen can ascribe the epithet of "good" to a particular governance. With regard to civil society groups, there was a consensus statement adopted at the NGO/CSO Regional Consultation for Governance in Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that good governance is in present in a polity if the government and people together identify shared values, needs and challenges, set priorities and develop programmes to address those needs and challenges and jointly manage the implementation of those programmes and the available resources, through a transparent and accountable process with shared responsibility for outcomes that are responsive, gender-sensitive and broad-based. It is further argued that such government must respect the rule of law, ensure the existence of institutional checks and balances and full respect for human rights, with the expressed

objectives of maximizing benefits to men and women for the common good (see Negatu, 1997: 97).

This infers that opportunities must be provided for the fullest participation and genuine inclusion of all members of relevant communities in the political process. Civil society is made up of interest groups and has a substantial coverage of the relevant communities in question. To this end, the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) cannot be over-emphasized in governance. However, it should be categorically stated that notwithstanding the great prominence given to the activities of civil society, it is not an oppositional competitor to the government.

Civil society is typically closer to the grassroots than most government actors which make it an important factor in the development process. It is on this standpoint that ADF (2004) posited that CSOs should be seen as the critical agents for enhancing popular empowerment, enforcing political accountability and in general, improving the quality and inclusiveness of governance.

In reality, since national situations differ enormously, state-civil relations vary correspondingly. It is arguable that some countries (though very few) most especially those under military rule and theocratic monarchy have no tradition of partnership between the state and civil society, and even the concepts of civil society may seem alien and inapplicable. On the other hand, some countries have benefited immensely from a widening participation of civil society in governance and more importantly social development (Matsuura, 2001). It is on this note that this paper intends to fix the Nigeria-state into one of these two categories. For this to be done, the paper shall trace the historical development of CSOs in Nigeria and expatiate on the roles of civil society as enunciated by conferences, workshops and civil society scholars. These will be followed by critical assessment of whether the Nigerian civil society has been able to live up to expectation. Whether they are adopting the right strategies in promoting and/or encouraging civil engagement? Will they? CSOs are succeeding in making the government institutions and corporations provide quality public services? And to what extent does the Civil Society able to deal with political obstacles in its efforts to resist injustice, or the socio-environment that likewise tend to impede such efforts? If not, why?

In view of the above, this paper is divided into several sections. The first is the introduction and will be followed by the conceptualisation of civil society, its roles and strategies. The third section will trace the historical development of civil society in Nigeria while the subsequent section will cover the main thrust of this paper where the assessment will be made; the challenges facing CSOs in Nigeria will also be analysed. The paper concludes and recommends how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of civil society in governance; all on the part of civil society itself, government and donor agencies.

2.0 Civil Society Organisations: Conceptual Clarification

Conceptualizing civil society is a contested task as it is usually the case with most social sciences concepts. There is little agreement on its precise meaning, though much overlap exists among core conceptual components. Aside this, the types of organizations that make up the list of CSOs have also been generating controversies among scholars. This prompted Matsuura (2001) to raise a pertinent and technical questions that "should it (civil society) include political parties? In addition, should it include the private or corporate sector? The veracity of these questions undoubtedly made scholars to work assiduously to proffer answers. It should be noted that it is now a settled matter in the annals of literature that civil society exclude political parties and business organizations (see Cohen and Arato, 1992; Diamond 1992 and 1999; Hirata, 2002; Simai, 2006 and Scholte, 2001). Though, the latter is still shrouded in controversy. Civil society is distinguished from political society (i.e., the party system) on the ground that political parties seek to capture political power and form government while civil society only influence government policies and activities without the intention of forming the government. On a broader note, while civil society organizations may form alliances with political parties, their primary activity is not party politics. As Diamond (1997:221) asserts, "If they [civil society organizations] become captured by parties, or hegemonic within them, they move their primary focus of activity to political society and lose much of their ability to perform certain unique mediating and democracy-building functions".

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

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

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

Another contentious area in the conceptualisation of civil society is whether militant groups should be included in the comity of civil society organizations since it is neither political nor profit-making. It should be noted that certain characteristics have been identified as prerequisite for an organization to be seen as civil. These include: being voluntary, self-generating, rule-abiding, and distinct from parochial, economic, and political societies. Diamond (1999) argued that since civil society also entails important characteristic like the promotion of pluralism and diversity; thus, civil society excludes narrowly focused, intolerant, ethnic chauvinist groups, hate groups, religious fundamentalist groups, and militia groups that claim, often through violence, that they are the only legitimate representation in society. Although it is commonly assumed that civil society is equivalent to everything that entails non-state activities, civil society does not consist of groups that deny pluralism and diversity even though they are non-state actors. In the context of Japan, Hirata (2002:17) argued that groups such as the *Aum Shinrikyo* (renamed "Aleph"), the Japanese Red Army, or various extreme right-wing groups (*Uyoku*) are not part of civil society, primarily because they

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

This analysis will be incomplete if we did not contribute to the current contested and debated segment of the conceptualisation. Scholars are yet to agree on whether there is difference between civil society and civil society organizations. The concepts of 'civil society' and 'civil society organisation' are used interchangeably by most scholars without giving consideration to any likely difference between the two distinct but inter-related concepts. This also made scholars to use other common terms such as: non-profit organisation, charity, NGO, third sector, voluntary sector and so on to mean civil society organisations as they are most widely understood internationally. It is arguable that civil society is broader than civil society organizations. The former entails the entire territorial polity which include all citizens who either officially belong to any civil group or not; while the latter entails those individuals that consciously and actively participate in civil group activities. Since civil society organisation is an intermediary realm between the private sphere and the state, our argument found solace in the position of Hirata (2002:19) when he argued that civil society organisations exclude parochial society (i.e., individual and family life and inward-looking activities such as entertainment, recreation, and religious worship) and economic society (i.e., profit-making individual business firms). Both parochial society and economic society are primarily concerned with private ends, not civic life or public ends. He (Hirata, 2002) opined that it is when religious groups are engaged in public ends, such as efforts to fight poverty or crime or to improve educational institutions in the community, they are participating in civil society

organisations. Thus, this type of organisations is simultaneously involved in both parochial and civil society. This analysis depicts that the collective people in its entirety living in a defined territory made up of families is seen as a civil society of such nation while those that consciously come together to form a formal organization to promote specific public interest and meet up with the characteristics earlier enunciated are seen as civil society organisations.

The need for greater clarity regarding who constitutes civil society organisations and why, led to the myriad of definitions as espoused by scholars and research institutions. Analysing scholarship definitions of the subject matter, it is arguable that the myriad definitions are relationship-based, as each definition tends to view it from the relationship, which the civil society has with the government and people. However, the fact that civil society includes 'formal and informal organizations, groups, associations and individual that operate independently of the state' is a notion to which all civil society scholars subscribed. Nevertheless, the area of contention is the nature of the relationship between CSOs and government. Premised on this, one can highlight its conceptualisation based on three standpoints derived from the contentious relationship viz.

- i. Substitute-to-State
- ii. Absolute-Independent-from-State
- iii. State-Citizen-Intertwined.

In its *Substitute-to-State dimension*, civil society is seen as the space between the people and the state where the citizens organise to provide or advocate for services and institution that the state fails to provide or does not have a responsibility to provide, but which are considered important or necessary by the citizens (Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland, 2006:6). This means that civil society is a broad term encompassing organizations outside the government sector in which their activities are very vital to governance in both developed and developing countries.

On a contrary note, civil society in its *absolute-independence-from-state dimension* is defined as comprising the totality of voluntary civil and social organisations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the force-backed structures of state (regardless of that state's political system) and commercial institutions of the market (Simai, 2006). Shashi (2007:676) buttressed

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this view by arguing that civil society is the non-state part of the society or the sum total of social interests and institutions existing autonomously of the political systems. By this definition, an exemption is made of government institutions both in term of political governance and economic functions from what constitute civil society. In essence, public institutions like public enterprise (PHCN, Water Corporation, etc.) or government agencies (INEC, NAFDAC, etc.) are said to belong to the government and not the civil society.

However, the idea that exonerate government institutions from civil society has been criticised on the ground that all civil activities take place or are directed toward one or more government institutions at one point in time. Willetts (2005:426) shared this standpoint and see civil society as the totality of all individual and groups in the society who are acting as participants in any government institutions. This contested notion brought afore the third dimension of the conceptualization of civil society.

In the *state-citizen-intertwined dimension*, scholars attempt to marry private activities with governmental activities to come up with a more comprehensive and all-encompassing definitions that suit reality of happenings. Bayart (1986:111) had earlier argued on this notion that Civil Society is a society in relation with the state, in so far, as it is in confrontation with the state, or more precisely, as the process by which society seeks to breach and counteract the simultaneous tantalizations unleashed by the state. Bratton (1994:2) in his own wisdom agreed with Bayart but differ on the ground that the relationship between private citizens and government is not confrontational rather, it is a sphere of social interaction, which manifest in norms of community co-operation, structure of voluntary associations and networks of public communication. He (Bratton, 1994) consequently distinguished the institution of Civil Society on three grounds: the norm of civic community, the structures of associational life, and networks of public communication. Nevertheless, the most illustrative definition of civil society in this context is the one advanced by the Centre for Civil Society the London School of Economics (2004) as espoused earlier.

3.0 Roles of Civil Society Groups

Any attempt to itemize the role of civil society may result in generating a voluminous document. As long as there are social problems, such will definitely enter the list of civil society roles. Put simply, CSOs' roles cannot be pinned to specificity; rather it is determined by the social problems emanating from a social setting at a particular point in time. Be it as it may, effort will be made to identify some of the roles that have been scholarly espoused.

Atword (n.d.) identified seven (7) roles of civil society to include:

- i. Checking corruption and abuse of power (whistle blowing).
- ii. Stimulating and leading debates on prevailing issues.
- iii. Free flow of information through mass media.
- iv. Collaboration in diagnosis of social problem and feedback.
- v. Design and implementation of programmes, distinctive in style, symbiotic in intent and complementary in objective.
- vi. Monitoring of government project and programme.
- vii. Strategic alliance with the legislature to ensure constituency feedback and information sharing.

On a broader categorisation, Civil Society and Governance Focus Group (2004) pin-pointed four core roles of civil society.

- i. **The formation of public policy:** Since the chances of individual influencing public policy are low, the onus is on CSOs to foster the interests of the people in influencing public policy formation through the articulation of citizens' views.
- ii. **Transparent governance and access to information:** CSOs are expected to ensure transparent governance by providing information about the making and implementation of government policies through the mass media. In addition, censor the mass media to avoid perverting its essence.
- iii. **Enhancing state performance:** As earlier stated, CSOs are expected to contribute in enhancing state's performance through public private partnerships in which CSOs work closely with state institutions in the design and delivery of services; monitoring of government programmes; mobilization of funds among client groups and other sources for direct delivering of services.

- iv. **Social justice, rights and the rule of law:** it is the role of the CSOs to combat injustice, violations of human rights and disrespect for the rule of law; thereby serving as whistle blower.

Furthermore, in the context of social injustice, development process often marginalizes different sections of the society, such as poor men and women, minorities and the disabled. It is the role of the CSOs to aid the marginalized section of the society in order to enable them to participate and contribute to the overall development of their community, region and country (Republic of Ireland, 2006:5). This role is considered more important because it deals with life and conditions which determine the living level of the citizenry. In view of this, CSOs are expected to be a complement and a counterbalance to government especially where they (CSOs) influence political and economic decisions in favour of poorer and marginalized citizens.

4.0 History and Development of CSOs in Nigeria

The history and development of CSOs in Nigeria can be categorized into five epochal periods: the pre-colonial era, colonial period, post colonial period of self rule (1960-1966), military era and the period of democratic rule (1999 till date). During these periods, CSOs were defined by the prevailing political condition of the country which consequently shaped its nature.

The history of CSOs dates back to the pre-colonial period when the local natives organised themselves into groups and associations: mostly youth to form community youth associations (for example, "Egbe Odo" in Yorubaland) to ensure and promote the welfare of the people by influencing the policy making process of the kings and sometimes protest against any decision or action of the Kings which is seen to be tyrannical, exploitative, and inimical to people's interest. During the colonial conquest, these youth associations were part of the struggle that resisted colonial invasion, though were unable to withstand the highly sophisticated weaponry of the British army. However, the formal CSOs can be said to emerge during the colonial era in the quest for self-rule. Prominent among them are: 'Egbe Omo Oduduwa' in the West and the 'Jam'iyar Mutanin Arewa' in northern Nigeria which later metamorphosed into a political party after independence.

Having achieved the primary objective for the establishment which is "political independence", the focus of CSOs in Nigeria shifted to what can be described as "welfarism- oriented". They engaged in 'community self help' activities by providing humanitarian assistance at grassroots level (CIVICUS Civil Society Index: 2007). Several CSOs sprang up in all nooks and crannies of the country to protest against anti-people policies of the first republic government.

For the third time in history, the CSOs' focus shifted again as a result of military intervention in the government and politics of the Nation. However, their activities were heavily suppressed as the military rules highly have disdain for all form of opposition or dissenting views. Most leaders of the CSOs were either killed, maimed or jailed. It is noteworthy that the CSOs (with its relentless character), succeeded in forcing out the military from power. NADECO, Civil Liberty Organization, Campaign for Democracy among others were in the forefront of the fight against the subversion of the will of Nigerians and the eventual enthronement of democracy (Wisdom et al, 2011:5).

The fourth epochal period started in 1999 till date. The focus in this era shifted to the consolidation of the Nigerian nascent democracy as well as ensuring and promoting good governance and rule of law in the society. On several occasions, CSOs are seen engaging the government on series of national issues in form of protest, debate and sometimes filing litigation in the court of law. It is premised on this that this research work intends to critically examine these roles and make case for either the sustainability or improvement of the CSOs in order to bring forth a better Nigeria.

5.0 Strategies and Assessment of the Performances of CSOs in Nigeria

5.1 Strategies

There are basically five methods through which CSOs can carry out their activities or perform the afore-discussed roles.

- i. Peaceful public demonstration (or civil disobedience)
- ii. Strikes (workers down tools)
- iii. Publication: in newspaper, journal, magazine etc. or through the use of Guerilla journalism i.e. printing of sensitive papers or publications without author and contact address.
- iv. Judicial means of redress (i.e. litigation in the court of law)
- v. Formation of alliance to form a formidable entity (as earlier explained).

5.2 CSOs and Public Policy Formulation

It is not out of context to argue that the socio-economic and political condition in Nigeria is substantially not suitable for grassroots mobilization in influencing public policy. This is as a result of four reasons. First, Nigerian governments over the years have developed the habit of seeing public opinions as mere advice which is not binding. The governments more often than not do away with public opinion whenever a public policy decision is to be taken. This is chiefly because Nigerians lack the enforcement capability of forcing government to abide by their opinions as it is the case in the Arab world and most developed countries. Second, government might have already taken a decision on public issue and subsequently attempt to mobilize support for the policy. A good example of this is the deregulation of the downstream sector (petroleum) in which the Jonathan's administration had done without public consultation and then try to make people buy the idea through series of advertisement jingles. Nigerians woke up on May 1, 2012 to see the pump price of petroleum rose to ₦140/litre. It took the relentless effort of CSOs for the President to reduce the pump price to ₦97/litre backed up with the use of military force to discard protesting CSOs. Afterwards, the President launched the SURE-P programme to cushion the effect of the rise in price. Whether the policy is able to do that is another topic of research.

Third, the idea that Nigerians can cope with any situation or condition, no matter how harsh, is another major problem confronting CSOs in grassroots mobilization. This has been the situation and been witnessed on several occasions when Nigeria Labour Congress called for strike (worker down tools). After two-three days, the citizens become tired and decide to go about their normal business with the prayer that God will be providing money for them to buy fuel at the hiked price. On minimum wage strike actions, it is also the masses that first become tired and call for its suspension on the ground that they have nothing to eat if they do not go out on daily basis. This love over the years made government to take decision without consulting the masses on the promise that after two-three days strike action, they (the masses) will go back to work and adjust to the new condition.

Fourth, if a political head is voted to power based on his promises and perceived quality of his manifesto; and afterward reneges by pursuing anti-people programmes, Nigerians will not hesitate from condemning such administration.

After spending three and a half years out of the 4-year term, the political head can roll out welfare programmes, reduce the working of Task-Force team on tax generation, mandates the PHCN not to disconnect the power-supply of bill-payment defaulters, engage in peripheral project that will not be completed among others. In a jiffy, Nigerians will change the tune of their song and start praise-singing the political head and will not hesitate to vote him into power massively again. The political gladiators aware of this usually ignore the threat of the CSOs on the mobilization of the grassroots to vote out such political head.

Premised on these, we can categorically argue that the socio-economic and political condition in Nigeria has been militating against the CSOs in the ploy to make the government responsive, responsible and accountable to the people through pro-people public policy formulation.

CSOs are not helping matters as the strategies being adopted are not compatible with the reality on ground. Premised on the political culture and the social economic-political condition, the CSOs are supposed to adopt strategies that suit the prevailing condition; such as putting more pressure on the government, seeking judicial redress, using guerrilla journalism or strike. Rather, the CSOs are forming alliance which operates like a toothless bulldog. To make it worse, most of the CSOs are disconnected from the rural areas. Their activities are mostly restricted to the city centres and mostly capital cities. This makes it difficult for the rural dwellers to develop political consciousness and confidence to resist political and electoral inducement. In addition, the problems of proliferation of CSOs, government patronage, corruption and personal enrichment on the side of CSOs leadership among others are making them not to adopt unified strategies. These usually necessitated dissenting views among them. While some will go against a particular government policy, others will support it. In this situation, it will be difficult if not impossible for the CSOs, to adopt the right uniform strategy in promoting and / or encouraging civil engagement.

5.3 CSOs, Governance and Access to Information

One may not be out of order to argue that the CSOs are making appreciable effort to promote the implementation of existing legislations, though with less effort in the area of monitoring. The effort in promoting legislative implementation can be seen in the organization of series of workshops and

conferences in which the outcome is documented in form of communique and sent to the government for consideration. However one might not appreciate these efforts since we are yet to see them fully materialize. For example, despite series of conferences on the implementation of free and compulsory primary education policy in Africa, 113 million school age children who are out-of-school, high rates of repetition and dropout, and the 875 million adults who are illiterate (Matsuura, 2001) are evidence of the fact that the effort of the civil society is yet to materialized. The Freedom of Information Act is another case in time. Despite the successful efforts of CSOs at making government passed the bill, it is sadden to note that it is yet to be domesticated and there is no noise on it again. What about the Electoral Act that guide political parties' electioneering spending? Is there no infringement on the fundamental human rights of the people as enshrined in the constitution? Are inmates taken care of in the prison facilities? All these are backed by existing legislations that nobody cares to implement. On the other hand, thousands of development projects are lying uncompleted throughout the country with relenting effort of CSOs on prevailing on government to complete them. Programmes are not been monitored thereby making the realization of its objective not feasible. For example NEEDS, SEEDS, LEEDS, SURE-P, poverty eradication and alleviation to mention but a few.

CSOs are working assiduously to ensure transparency in government and avoiding corruption and abuse of office by political office holder. However, the 1962 Official Secret Act serves as a major stumbling block which limits the degree at which one can inquire into government dealings. To correct this, and make the performance of this role easy, three CIOs: Human Right Agenda (MHA), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) formed a coalition in 1992 to push for legislative provision for access to government information. The three groups produced a draft bill entitled "Draft Access to Public Records and Official Information Act" and which subsequently sent to the National Assembly. After harmonization, the bill was published in Federal Government Official Gazette No. 91 Volume 86 of 8th December 1991 as Government Notice No. 200 titled "An Act to make public records and information freely available, provide for access to public records and information to the extent consistent with public interest and the protection of personal privacy and related purposes thereof" (Diso, 2006:6-7). After series of allegation and counter allegations over the non passage of the bill, it was eventually passed and signed to

law. Its passage was expected to be a turning point in the history of governance and anti-corruption crusade. This is premised on the fact that the Act stipulates that all public institutions must be open about their operations and expenditure while citizens will have the right to access information about these operations. The sad outcome is the extent at which this law is eventually put into use. The public servants are not obeying the law in giving out information. From my personal experience, when seeking for information on local government spending in Lagos State, a civil servant (name and local government withheld) told me he is under the oaths of the Official Secrecy Act of 1962 not to divulge the income and expenditure details which is classified information to the public. It occurred to me that indeed the two laws are conflicting in which the government is doing nothing to repeal one for the other. Clinging on this loophole, the public servants will prefer to obey the Official Secrecy Act rather than the Freedom of Information Act.

Another issue of concern is the extent at which CSOs pursue corrupt cases to conclusion. The Maina Pension scam, Farouk-Lawan petroleum subsidy scam, Arunma Oteh stock exchange scam, the Justices indicted over electoral fraud in Ogun and Osun electoral litigations, Siemens scandal, Dimeji Bankole's House of Representatives scandal, Professor Adenike Grange's Federal Ministry of Education budget surplus scam, Obasanjo-Arku allegations. . The list is endless.

The CSOs have recorded a greater success in taming the media as far as information carriage is concerned. Though there are still some elements of gross misconduct in the media. For instance, some television stations, radio stations and newspapers are known to be pro-government, while some are anti-government. Hardly will you hear or see anti-federal government broadcast on NTA stations as well as state-owned media organizations going against government policies especially those evidently seen to be anti-people. Some influential personalities also float media organisations not solely to make profit but to foster their socio-political interest. For example, Compass Newspaper is linked to Otunba Gbenga Daniel (former Ogun State governor), the Sun Newspaper to Orji Uzor Kalu (former Abia State governor), the Nations newspaper and TVC television house to Bola Tinubu (former Lagos State governor), among others. In other cases, some aggrieved individuals influence media houses against a government in order to pull such government down. A good example of this is the case of political

turmoil in Ogun State during the early 2008 to 2011. The crisis was falsely accounted for in the media with conflicting reports from different media houses. In a swift response, the coalition of civil society groups met in Abeokuta to figure out the truth about the issue. The conference was titled "Politics and Good Governance in Ogun State: Need to Separate Fact from Fiction". A cursory observation of events in the state showed that, as the 2011 general election approach, certain individuals and groups, in a bid to advance a selfish political agenda, have embarked on a campaign of spreading half-truths and outright falsehoods about the general state of affairs in the state in order to give the impression of a polity tottering on the verge of anarchy (Usani, 2008). Consequently, the coalition of civil groups resolved to henceforth keep a sharper eye on the media, especially Ogun State-based media to avoid chaos. It should be stated categorically that the effort of the CSOs have materialized as the media have taken caution in the type of information been disseminated.

5.4 CSOs and State Performance

The relationship between government and CSOs in Nigeria is somewhat undeterminable. In some cases, the relationship is cordial at a point in time while in other cases, it is suspicious. The blame of this can be rested on both. Some organizations and movements within CSOs are source of conflict where they represent narrow sectional interests. In view of this, they more often than not display intolerance, sectarian and anti- democratic tendencies. On the other hand, the government sometime sees the CSOs as threat thereby frustrating their (CSOs) activities. In some cases, government does float CSOs to promote its interest and rally support for its programmes. A very good example is the Neighbor-to-Neighbor Organisation floated by President Jonathan to ensure his election success. Afterward, the organisation has been promoting and seeking people's support for the Jonathan administration and programmes especially the subsidy removal policy. Till today, the organization has a number of advert jingles on television stations and newspapers calling people to embrace the subsidy removal policy. Despite this, the coalition of CSOs has never deemed it fit to denounce this organization. Generally speaking, the CSOs-government patronage is not helping matter. There have been series of allegations that the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) compromised with government to end the 2012 strike/mass protest against subsidy removal. Also, some CSOs' leadership

are transforming to political gladiators in sharp contrast to the tenets of CSOs. A good example is the governor Adams Oshiomole of Edo State who resigned as NLC president to contest. Ever since, he has been the middleman between labour unions and federal government on issues of contention.

Quality public services begin from drawing and adopting good budgeting framework. It is factual that the type of public service to be provided depends heavily on the content of the budget. In view of this, the CSOs in an attempt to ensure the provision of quality public service must participate in budgeting process. Good enough, the Civil Society Legislature Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) recognized this position and organized series of workshop for CSOs, National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly to fashion out a co-operative and collaborative means of budget process. The 2005 workshop featured paper presentation on the theme and the following papers were presented: Capacity Building in Analysis: the Civil Society, Budget and Democratic Governance by Prof. Sam Egwu; A Comparative Experience of Civil Society Participation in the Budget Process by Prof. Okello Oculi; The Civil Society and Participatory Budgeting: a Framework by Emma Ezeazu amongst others. At the end of the two day intensive discussions, it was resolved that the CSOs and the legislature need to pull efforts together in making the budget a popular process instead of the current practice, which makes the budget a secretive and technical affair exclusive to bureaucrats and specialists (CISLAC, 2006). It should be noted that the new arrangement of collaborative budget process is still new and strange to the budgeting process. This is perhaps why it is yet to materialize. With time, the effort of the CSOs in ensuring greater provision of quality public services will become evident (if the tempo is sustained and all things been equal).

It is arguable that CSOs have been contributing immensely to national issues and development in Nigeria since its emergence. Going through its historical development (as earlier discussed), one will see that they have been riding the front seat in ensuring good governance despite all odds. They contributed immensely to the peaceful independence of the country from colonial rule. They also fought the military despite their might to return the country to democratic rule. Since 1999 to date, CSOs has been watching on the back of political executives to make things right and avoid such sinister tendencies. For instance, the role played by CSOs in frustrating the anti-rain agenda of former President

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Olusegun Obasanjo cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, a coalition was formed to avoid the sit-tightism syndrome known as National Civil Society Coalition against Third Term (NACATT) under the chairmanship of Barr. Bamidele Aturu. NACATT challenged the president's bid on the ground 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 (see Vanguard January 5, 2006). In a similar vein, the Centre for Legislative Studies (CLS) organized a conference on March 26, 2006 at the International Press Centre, Ogba, Lagos attended by media workers, human right activists, politicians, students and the public where the agenda was condemned in its entirety (The Punch, April 7, 2006). Eventually, these resulted in the 'death' of the 3rd term agenda.

Other national issues which the activities of the CSOs helped put on track include the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, the legislation on Anti-Gay Marriage Act despite pressure from the United States, fuel subsidy removal, the health sector reform, electoral reform, and the doctrine of necessity clause to mention but a few

5.5 CSOs and justice

The degree at which the advocacies of the CSOs improve social justice is very low. However, one cannot deny the fact that civil society advocacy in Nigeria is very high, only that the resultant effect is less compare to the higher effort been put in. For example, sequel to the invitation of President Umar Yar'adua to the G8 meeting in Germany shortly after his election and before his inauguration, the civil society in a bid to ensure social justice under the umbrella of the Alliance for Credible Election (ACE-Nigeria) advocated and wrote an open letter to the Chancellor (President) of Germany Angel Merkel asking her to revoke the invitation as a result of the fraudulent election through which Yar'adua was elected. The ACE-Nigeria based it's argument on the fact that his election was marred by injustice where Nigerians in over fifteen states were denied the opportunity to vote; an election in which the electoral umpire deliberately ensure that the ruling party 'won' at all cost; an election in which security agencies connived with the ruling party to rob the people of their mandate through ballot box snatching and stuffing at gunpoint and; an election in which over 200 Nigerians lost their lives (ACE-Nigeria, 2007). The request was not a mere appeal

rather; an element of threat was encoded in the letter. Despite this effort, the request was ignored and Yar'adua eventually attended the G8 meeting. Sadly, the ACE-Nigeria has done nothing to bring to force its threat as stated in the letter. This, coupled with other instances of the CSOs' efforts is yet to improve social justice in Nigeria.

The failure of the CSOs' advocacy in resisting injustice can be attributed to three factors: political obstacle, social environmental obstacle and the culture of the CSOs itself. It is proven problematic for civil society to remove the political obstacle as a result of the political culture and the character of the Nigeria-state. Analytically, the purpose of initiating the freedom of information act is to outrun the secrecy character of governance and enable civil society and other stakeholders to have access to government's transactions. By this, it is expected that effective monitoring will be made possible leading to transparency, accountability, social justice, respect for human rights and rule of law. However in reality, the civil society having initiated the FOI bill and seen its passage into law has done nothing meaningful to actualize the potential of the law. One will expect to see a dramatic change after the signing of the Act considering the 'noise' and pressure mounted by the CSOs on the government in passing it. But, we are yet to see any meaningful changes. On the other hand, the social environment is not helping matters. The passive nature of the citizen made it impossible for the civil society to mobilize them against unscrupulous act of the government. Subsequently, the civil society is yet to device means of dealing with the social environmental obstacle that is impeding its efforts (the third factor will be discussed in the subsequent section, i.e., the challenges and obstacles impeding the effectiveness of CSOs).

6.0 Challenges Facing Civil Society Organisations in Nigeria

There are number of challenges facing CSOs in Nigeria. These challenges greatly undermined its effectiveness and efficiency. As earlier argued that the more social problems emerge, the more the role of civil society increases; correspondingly, the greater the challenges. These include:

Issues of Donors

This is one of the most fundamental challenge facing civil society organizations in Nigeria. This is because they are operating in an atmosphere where there is no

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subvention or aid from the government rather CSOs will have to fend for themselves in order to survive. The only direction toward fund generation is the donor agencies (local and international). However, over the past decade, there has been a significant shift in the way donors channel aid to CSOs. There is a greater focus on harmonizing and aligning donor programmes with national or other strategic planning and expenditure frameworks, in line with the commitments in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2006:5). The reason for this change is the wish to place development in the hands of host-partners' country, its government and citizens. The donor agencies are doing this as a corrective measure to some challenges been faced. Such include fear of politicization, local or national focus, preference for NGOs, market forces and civil society opportunism, which consequently become challenges to civil society as well.

- i. **Fear of Politicization:** The central roles played by civil society include balancing the power of the state, checking its abuses, hounding corruption, and organizing and supporting political opposition (Kew, 2005). Since these roles are anti-government in nature, Nigerian leaders see the donor agencies as encouraging anti-government activities and accused them of meddling with the CSOs in rocking the boat of political stability. Given that the donor agencies have strong interest in good relations with friendly African government, thus, there is some question as to how far they can support political activities of the civil society. An example of this was pointed out by Kew (2005) that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has since 2000 receive assistance for internal reform and skill development from a number of sources, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). However, when NLC has become perhaps the leading opposition movement in Nigeria, USAID and other donors retreated from funding the NLC and have been reluctant to involve the unions too centrally in their civil society programming; because the Nigerian government started accusing the donor agencies of deliberately rocking the boat of political stability in the country.

- ii. **Local or National Focus:** Another problem facing Nigeria CSOs as a result of the activities of the donors is the latter's struggle with the choice of focusing either on local, smaller and more rural CSOs or the large national ones that seek to impact national policy. The smaller and local CSOs can influence individuals' lives in a more direct way but is extremely labour intensive and financially draining while the national oriented CSOs can have impact on national policy which can be easily seen. This has been a problem to civil society in Nigeria and the donors as well.
- iii. **Preference for NGOs:** Most donors prefer dealing within NGOs rather than CSOs. This is because, it is believe that NGOs are more professionally conversant on issues of focus and are smaller in size as well as gives them an added adaptability and responsiveness to donor concerns. On the other hand, CSOs are been neglected because they are typically larger than NGOs, more bureaucratic, less amenable to donor policy direction, and more steeped in patterns of corruption (Ndegwa, 1996).
- iv. **Market Forces and Civil Society Opportunism:** Sequence to the above point, it has become custom for CSOs and NGOs to compete for the attention of the donor agencies. The NGOs have greater chances than the CSOs; most especially those that may be less fleet-footed in their marketing but may have greater expertise in specific issue areas, and/or greater local representation and impact on target communities (Kew, 2005). Most donors have shifted focus on NGOs thereby neglecting the CSOs. To a large extent, this pose a great challenge of inadequate funding to enable effective and efficient discharge of its roles.

Poor Capacity Building and Partnership

This is another major problem facing the civil society. Some of the CSOs do lack basic resources, institutional capacity and professional skills in performing their role. However, this problem has been tackled to a great deal. Today, most CSOs now have extensive local capacity, not just in terms of academic analysis or political knowledge but also technical expert in advocacy, management and

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strategy. Serving and retired professors are now going into the stream of civil society activities. Examples include Prof. Adigun Agbaje of the University of Ibadan, Prof. Hassan Saliu of the University of Ilorin, Prof. Elaigwu (rtd.) of the University of Jos, among others.

Proliferation of Civil Society Groups

There are some CSOs who are self-promoters but have little or no long-term commitment to the issues they target. Some groups of individuals may come together and register a civil society organization not for objective purpose rather for the sake of drawing fund and divert such for private use (profit-oriented). The donor agencies have been realizing this through their evaluation and have been taking cautious decisions in funding the civil society. This has a grave consequence on the civil society as the serious ones are also sharing in the punishment of fund starvation.

Behavior of Government Actors

The aggregate behaviour of government actors stemming from autocratic (no regard for dissenting views or opposition), to corruption among others do affect the activities of CSOs. The habitual aiding of corruption by making government transaction hidden is a force to reckon with. Nigerian government officials are fond of hiding under the 1962 Official Secrecy Act to perpetrate corrupt practices. The unwillingness to for-go this act resulted in the reluctant passage of the Freedom of Information bill into law. In addition, persistent abuse of office, disrespect for rule of law and human right serves as challenges for CSOs. These make it difficult for them to perform their functions, such as exposing corruption and abuse of office, monitoring of elections among many others.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

It is easy to take a stand that the effectiveness and efficiency of civil society in Nigeria is below average. This is as a result of the fact that the assessment of the civil society based on the roles (and assessment questions) reveals more deficiencies than achievements. This is not to say that the civil society groups are not performing at all (at least to some extent). However, the deficiencies can be attributed chiefly to the challenges espoused above. It is hoped that if these challenges are taken care of to a large extent, Nigeria civil society have the

potential to actively perform above average. It is premised on this note that the following recommendations are made for consideration:

On the part of the Government

- i. Nigeria CSOs should be given an opportunity to participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the country's national development and poverty alleviation strategies. By so doing, it will not only support the government to fruitfully implement those strategies but will among other things assist in building the capacity of civil society in the delivery of basic services where governments cannot or will not be providing for, supporting poor and marginalized people to access service, promoting and advocating for human rights and enable citizens to participate in democratic processes.
- ii. Encourage the creation of institutional mechanisms for dialogue between government and CSOs with transparent and accountable structures and processes.
- iii. Identify and support partners from CSOs whose co-operative advantage and expertise make them useful policy partners for government.
- iv. Should holistically hands-off from intervening or influencing the activities of CSOs and allow them to champion their cause according to their objectives and terms of reference.
- v. Provide level playing ground for CSOs to thrive without intimidation and hostility.

On the part of CSOs

- i. Since CSOs in Nigeria have already organized themselves based on the sector of interest and objectives (focus); and have also built inter-organizational alliances and networks for influencing the political agenda in favour of the citizens; thus, they should form a regulatory body that will ensure the sanctity of CSOs and weed-off those that are subjective to personal and selfish enrichment.
- ii. To solve the problem of dissenting and divergent views among various organizations (especially those with same interest on a subject matter), CSOs should support and coordinate networking to enhance

- their effective participation and to enable them to negotiate common position that is most beneficial to the generality based on objectivity.
- iii. Increase active discussion and facilitate opportunities for people to contribute information to policy issues and above all: ensure the timely release of information pertaining to such policy issues.
 - iv. The coalition of CSOs should as a matter of utmost priority constantly organize capacity building and training workshops for members on grassroots mobilization and advocacy.
 - v. They should diversify the sources of funding through creative revenue generation activities in order to reduce excessive reliance on government and donor agencies.

On the part of donor agencies

- i. Endeavour to make resources available to CSOs for research, consultations, policy analysis and advocacy; and networking activities not minding the threat or fear of the host government as long as they are acting within the ambit of the law.
- ii. The donor agencies should work together and partner governments to develop trust funds, pooled funds and other funding capacity building mechanisms that will reduce competition, enhance coordination and efficiency in the funding of CSOs.
- iii. They should step up their philanthropist act holistically without attaching any string or hidden agenda to it. They should allow CSOs that got their funding to act independently without pre-determining the outcome of their activities.
- iv. Finally, they should discourage unnecessary competition for fund between CSOs and NGOs.

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