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## **Development Partners, Civil Society Organisations and Democratic Consolidation In Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Donor support for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria has grown over the years with noticeable increase since the return of the country democratic rule on May 29, 1999. However, involvement and impact of CSOs in Nigeria's democratic processes have been treated with mixed feeling. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between development partners, civil society and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Moreover, data for this study were obtained from text books, Journal articles, DFID report, USAID report and other similar international agencies. However, we discovered that there is absence of capacity development of Civil Society*

*Organizations (CSOs) at the state and local government level rather there is capacity development at the national level. This has resulted to the marginalisation of state based civil society organisation that have contributed in demanding for accountability from political parties, elected officials, the media at the state level. We argued here that for CSOs to effectively participate in democratic consolidation process in Nigeria their resource base and capacity must be enhanced for them to pay greater attention to grassroots development especially in the area of infrastructure.*

**Keywords:** CSOs, Democratic consolidation, Capacity Development in , Nigeria, USAID

## Introduction

The notion of 'civil society' emerged in eighteenth-century as a social space different from the state and the extended family. This notion of 'civil society' was developed by Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith in a different way. G. W. F. Hegel was revived in the 1980s and early 1990s in response to the fall of communism, which, many Scholars have argued, had been limited because it systematically denied the possibility of the existence of such a space. Moreover, civil society' act as a substitute for the state, while global civil society itself is partly signified by the existence of informal, non-state, transnational pressure groups in the area of the environment, but also encompassing human rights, animal rights, the anti-global capitalist movement, pro-capitalist groupings such as Davos and Bilderberg, religious movements, transnational political parties among others, and reinforced as a global phenomenon by cross-cultural global trends in consumption, entertainment and 'infotainment'(Brown, & Ainley, 2005).

In Africa, more than in any other region of the world, donors' have played significant role to nurturing and influencing democracy in the continent (Diamond 1997: 35). Since civil society was first mooted as an important democratic actor in African politics in the early 1990s, its main role has been seen in terms of democratic consolidation. A well

articulated civil society organization can widen democratic space by promoting pluralism and greater citizens' participation in election. Also, CSOs can deepen democracy in any political setting in order to ensure that the embedding values and institutions of liberal democracy entrenched within society.

Besides, 1990s marked increased interests on the part of governments from Western societies in funding civil society in Africa in an attempt to promote the continent's democratization process (Barkan 1994; Diamond 1995a; Robinson 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Carothers 1997). More recently, however, civil society has come to be seen as playing a potentially pivotal role in supporting economic policy in Africa.

Over the years, donor support for democracy funding in African countries has been scaled up from a narrow focus on the more formal procedural elements of democracy such as elections and formal democratic institutions, towards a more gradual long-term bottom-up civil society-oriented approach. Today, donors' policies on democracy have been focusing on two levels of engagement. First, politicians have been mediating at the highest diplomatic levels (top-down approach). Second, Donors policies on democracy promotion have acquired a good reputation for grassroots capacity-building bottom-up projects which can be considered a distinctive emphasis of advanced democracies of the world.

Since the return of Nigeria to democratic rule on May 29, 1999. Donors have been at the forefront in promoting economic liberalisation through civil society programmes in the country. This has been particularly visible in liberalization programme of the country entitled "Nigeria – Vision 2020", by means which they hopes to transform middle-income countries annual growth rates of 7 per cent. Thus, to

achieve, such accelerated adjustment in the economies of developing countries requires broad societal consensus which Civil Society Organizations have been perceived as a tool for achieving the goal.

On the whole, this study seeks to examine the relationship between development partners, Civil Society Organizations and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic.

### **Conceptual Discourse and Literature Review**

#### **Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations And Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

The term "civil society" and "Non-governmental organization" are often used interchangeable, most notably within the writings of the international financial institution. Though, in the literature, there is considerable debate about the meaning of civil society, its relevance, and its conceptual usefulness in the African context (Hutchful 1996; Mark Robinson 1998; Makumbe 1998). Therefore, concept of civil society in social science literature does not have a straight-jacket definition. Over the years, scholars and philosophers have used the term civil society in different contexts to mean different thing. However, several attempts have been made to apprise some of the conceptualizations of the concept of CSOs and establish a working definition in this study. Riddell and Bebbington, (1995) rightly observe that:

*"Civil society' is a notoriously slippery concept. It has entered donor terminology without careful definition.... In many respects, the term is used as a code for a set of ideas related to participation, good governance, human rights, privatisation and public sector reform"* (Riddell and Bebbington 1995:23).

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used to mean a regime that was committed to secure the rule of law for the common good on behalf of people, common good meant the provision of basic rights, public safety, education for all, and basic infrastructure like roads, electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals among others. Within this view, civil society was seen as a good society where democratic dividends are delivered to the citizens.

According to Jan Aart Scholte, civil society is understood to be a political space where voluntary associations deliberately seek to shape the rules that govern aspects of social life. Civil society organizations target formal rules; they seek to change and/or impose social constructs or social orders. Civil society can also encompass many sorts of actors, and it is much wider than the formal world of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Civil society exists wherever and whenever voluntary associations of any kind try deliberately to shape rules that govern society, broadly defined ([www.schoolforcivilsociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/What-is-Civil-Society.pdf](http://www.schoolforcivilsociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/What-is-Civil-Society.pdf)).

Potter, Binns, Elloit, and Smith, (2004:309) sees civil society to mean the society over which government governs, it needs to be recognized that some parts of society may be highly organized, while other parts of society may have little access to government or indeed international organizations, "even though they may be equally, if not more affected, by government policy and World Bank or IMF decisions.

Ikelegbe (2013) defined civil society as the associational life of citizens characterized by common interests, civil and public purposes, and voluntary collective autonomous actions. It also stretches to include all those associations that enables citizens to participate voluntarily, freely and openly within the public realm, and operate and function independent of and outside state and corporate powers though, relating with them.

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Civil society act as a buffer against the power of the central government and in that capacity encourages individuals to follow their own courses without fear of intimidation from the central government. Besides, civil society is also defined as the arena outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interest.

Uwan and Yearoo (2009) civil society is defined as the set of institutions and organizations that interface between the state, business world and the family. They further argued that civil society is the arena of un-coerced collective actions around shared interest, values. In theory the institutions are different from the state, business and family world though in practice, the boundary between the state, family, market and civil society are often complex, blurred and negotiated. They identified civil society to include Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), people's organizations, community based organizations (CBOs), civic clubs, and trade unions.

Schmitters, (1997) defined civil society as... a set of self-organized intermediary groups that: are relatively independent of both authorities and private units of production, that is, of firms and families; are capable of deliberating about and taking collective actions in defense or promotion of their interests or passions; do not seek to replace either the state agents or private producers or to accept responsibility for governing the polity as a whole; and agree to act within pre-established rules of a civil nature, that is conveying mutual respect. This position was supported by Jega, (2007:246) on the elaborate context in which Civil Society organizations can be contextualized.

According to Aristotle, he defined civil society as a "public ethical community of free and equal citizens, under a legally defined system of rule" (Imade (2007). Alternatively, civil society can be defined

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manifestations of civil society. This concept consequently includes not only the humanitarian organizations and associations active in objectives without reward of profit or political power. These organizations range from associations, unions, and mass organizations, networks, social organizations, to social movements.

Orji (2004b) see civil society as organized activities by groups or group of individuals essentially out to perform certain services with a view of influencing the government in its policies and programs for the improvement of society. According to Ghaus-Pasha (2005), civil society is understood to mean a sphere that is separate from the state and the market, and formed by people who have common needs, interest and values.

In a related development, Uwais (2008) refers to civil society as the sum total of those organizations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus, which includes: social groups, professional groups and non-governmental organizations. Olateju (2012) in a separate remark argues that civil society is often used to mean either society as opposed to the state or, more precisely as an intermediate sphere of social organization or association between the basic units of society – family and firms and the state. Marx referred to civil society as “the true source of theatre of all history” (Bobbio, 1979:29 cited in Jega, 2007:254).

Civicus defined civil society as the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests. The CSOs has two interesting features that contrast with other civil society concepts. First, its goal is to avoid the conventional focus on formal and institutionalized civil society organizations by also considering informal coalitions and groups. Second, whereas civil society is sometimes perceived as an area with positive actions and values, the CSOs seeks to assess both the positive and the negative

manifestations of civil society. This concept consequently includes not only the humanitarian organizations and associations active in environmental protection, for example, but also groups such as skinheads and aggressive football supporters the CSOs not only assess the extent to which CSOs support democracy and tolerance, but also the extent of their intolerance or even violence (Action Aid, 2007:19).

Diamond, (1999) defines civil society as the “realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least, at partially self-supporting, and autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.” The problems with this definition, however, is that it is difficult to distinguish civil society from society in general, as it involves citizens acting collectively in the public sphere that is “made up of associations—voluntary, autonomous, professional or non-professional which have risen out of self-organizational efforts of various social forces”.

Furthermore, Osághae, (1997) identifies three key elements as important in the definition or conceptualization of civil society: autonomy from the state, public character (setting a normative order for the state) and furtherance of a common good on the basis of this definition. Grassroots social movements which draw their strength from solidarity and the struggle against oppression are part of civil society. Roniger provide further elaboration arguing that the primary function of civil society is to provide a platform for citizens to express their interests, preferences and ideas, to exchange information, achieve collective goals and make demands to improve the structure and functioning of the state (cited in Action Aid, 2007).

The World Economic Forum (2013) argues that the definition of civil society is broadening and roles of traditional sectors changing:

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Definitions are changing as civil society is recognized as encompassing far more than a mere "sector" dominated by the NGO community: civil society today includes an ever wider and more vibrant range of organized and unorganized groups, as new civil society actors blur the boundaries between sectors and experiment with new organizational forms, both online and off.

On the whole, we shall situate the context of our definition of Civil Society Organizations within the framework of Jega, (2007) who sees CSOs as highly contested public sphere, characterized, by struggles, crosscutting, and contradictory alliances, in relation to both the economy and the state. He added that Civil Society Organizations are neither independently or autonomously juxtaposed against the neither state nor inherently democratic, with the overall interest of the larger society at heart.

On the other hand, the term "Democratic Consolidation" was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression. This normalization requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, the functioning of a mature civil society and political institutionalization. Therefore, consolidation requires that habituation to the norms and procedures of democratic conflicts regulation will be developed. A high degree of institutional routinization is the key to such a process (Valenzuela, 1990).

In academic literature on democratic studies several authors have argued that the key indicators of democratic consolidation on the percentage of voters in a particular country who consider democracy as

Definitions are changing as civil society is recognized as encompassing an indispensable way of life and are willing to go all lengths to defend it. For the performance of democracy globally, the quality of its practice has been measured in terms of protection of human rights, defense of justice and equality, responsiveness and effectiveness of governance and nonviolent political expression. A critical assessment of democracy in Nigeria especially in contemporary fourth republic one would definitely not rank the country high in this regard because of the blatant violations of democratic rules and processes. Thus, many Nigerians would not subscribe to the notion Nigeria has attained high level of democratic consolidation since there are violations of democratic principles at almost all sphere of governance in the country.

Valenzuela, (1990) juxtaposes "consolidated" and "democracy". He argues that the use of both term are misleading for the study of any transition society. He further argued that since something that is "consolidated" has the quality of being seemingly immune to disintegration, there is a tendency to associate "consolidated democracies" with their stability and, by extension, to convert the passage of time with no regime reversals and the absence of potentially destabilizing factors into the basic criteria of democratic consolidation. While the durability of a democratic regime is an attribute of consolidation, this characteristic does not provide in itself an adequate basis to ground the notion of consolidation.

Finally, democratic consolidation implies the deliberate political process in a polity by which democracy is "so broadly and profoundly legitimatised among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down" ([www.oycf.org/perspective/6-063000](http://www.oycf.org/perspective/6-063000)). It means a democratic state that cannot come to an end suddenly or abruptly through unconstitutional acts such as military coups or dictatorships. It implies established stability in

governance. Besides, consolidation of democracy in any country involves behavioural and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty that is capable of truncating the democratic process.

In the literature a lot of factors of stimulated the interest of donor agencies in African civil society (Robinson 1995; William Robinson 1996; Carothers 1997). Omodia and Eruka, (2007) in their study of the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria suggested that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must remain autonomous social entity if they must survive in Nigeria. Omodia and Erunka in their studies suggested ways of encouraging CSOs in expanding their development activities at the community levels in Nigeria. Bradley, (2005) in his studies asserts that considering the increasing pressure of globalization on states globally, civil society organizations operating in form of Non-Governmental Organizations are helping the states to fill in such vacuum. He further argues that in Nigeria Non-Governmental Organizations are playing significant role in addressing democratic limitations.

Cooper, and Farooq, (2014) examines the evolving pattern of democracy promotion by three emerging donors: India, Brazil and South Africa. They argued that despite the risk of compromising security and trade interests, the emerging donors have adapted to a 2x2 (two by two) model of democracy promotion, by which they circumvent risk by promoting procedural democracy through bilateral means and non-procedural democracy through multilateral frameworks. The model safeguards the emerging donors from criticism of being undue interveners in other countries' domestic affairs, it also privileges them with international recognition for being responsible partners in

democracy promotion. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the relationships between development partners, Civil Society Organizations and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic.

### **Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

Democracy consolidation is widely seen as the major reason for development partners support for civil society organizations all over the world. Development partners support for civil society organizations in Africa often place emphasis on improving 'governance', which in the 1990s came to be identified by many as the key factor affecting the continent's development and the prospects of democratic consolidation. For instance, the US foreign policy towards the developing countries, have recognise the significance of cultivating strategic alliances with civil society organizations in many developing countries. In addition, with the demise of nationalist and socialist ideologies, such foreign policy are no longer viewed with distrust in contemporary democratic system globally (Momoh, 2017).

Democracy depends on enlightened and organised civil society articulating itself, and bringing influence to bear on the decision-making process of the state, during and beyond elections (Westrescher, 2007:41). The 2002 United Nations Human Development Report stressed that the best way to achieve sustainable human development is to build strong and deep democratic governance at all levels of society. The report made it very clear that democratic participation is a goal in its own right and not merely a means to achieve human development (Spengler, 2007:51).

The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been struggling

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with developing new tactics and programs under current democratic rule in Nigeria, such as enhancing access to the legislature, serving in watchdog roles, and seeking to engage more effective citizen participation in local affairs (Lewis, 2005:39). Over the years in Nigeria, associations of civil society remain poorly developed. Civil society organisations and newspapers critical to the incumbent government often find themselves victims of government sanctions. The Nigerian political system arguably has not developed into institutionalised, consolidated democracies where democratic institutions and rules will become 'the only game in town' (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Momoh, 2017).

Also, there has been relative focus of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the state and local government levels when it comes to civil engagement in Nigeria. However, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the national level have dominated access to donors support and capacity building over the years, with limited evidence of benefit trickling down to state and local government areas where large percentage of Nigerians live. Besides, during election huge resources are expended on domestic observation through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the national level while Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the state and local government levels have limited access to resource (DGD Road Map, 2015).

Moreover, there is absence of capacity development of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the state and local government level rather capacity development has concentrated at the national level. This has resulted to the marginalisation of state based civil society organisation which plays a vital role to play in demanding for accountability from political parties, elected officials, the media at the state level (DGD Road Map, 2015). More worrisome is the fact that some

local Civil Society Organizations have been involved in certain grand corruption cases, staged public protests against the prosecution of high profile individuals in Nigeria. For instance, the former Governor of Bayelsa state, DSP Alamesigha who was the executive governor of Bayelsa state between 1999 and 2006 was never challenged by any CSO until he was arrested in the UK. Although he dubiously maneuvered the UK Metropolitan police and ran to Nigeria by disguising himself in female attire, he had never been tried since his return from the UK. Unfortunately, he was later granted a state pardon by past president, Goodluck Jonathan.

Similarly, the former governor of Delta State, Chief James Ibori, who was jailed in London, for money laundering and abuse of public trust. However, when the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) operatives attempted to arrest and prosecute him in the country, operatives of the EFCC were attacked by the Ijaw Youth Movement (IYM). The act arguably has not been in anyway condemned by numerous numbers of CSOs in Nigeria.

A number of factors have necessitated development partners' support for CSOs in Nigeria. This is because there is a plethora of human rights and women's Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), for instance, but they have been struggling for financial sustainability since the end of military rule in 1999 led to a shift in international focus to formal and informal institutions of government. This has also made donors to be complaining that democratic institutions in the Nigeria are still very weak and scarcely capable of resisting destabilizing forces. As there is weak civil society and a lack of transparency and accountability underscore the fragility of Nigerian democracy (Adetula, Kew & Kwaja, 2010).

Donors like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Union (EU), UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have attempted to fight the negative trends of increasing disapproval of the performance of the Nigeria's democratic institutions that has been fuelled by corruption and, increasingly, violence that ensured the continued dominance of a small, multi-ethnic oligarchy over the political, economic, and social systems (Momoh, 2017). Thus, democracy strive when there is educated, articulate and organised civil society organization in operation, which has the possibility of influencing public policy as well as voting behavior (choice) of the electorate (Spengler, 2007:52).

A critical assessment of USAID which have been described as a leading donor for supporting CSOs in Nigeria has taken two forms. First, it has strengthened the collective capacity of the private sector by sponsoring civil society organizations. Besides, USAID have also played significant role in supporting local research institutions and private as well as civic organisations, to strengthen their capacity to participate in the policy change process. The motivation behind this effort is to help institutionalize tools and fora for policy change that will improve policy management and improve sustainability of policy change in Nigeria's democratic system (Momoh, 2017).

DFID supported an innovative mobile phone-based "Parallel Vote Tabulation" system to enable CSOs monitor and verify election results in 2011 general elections in Nigeria. DFID through its DDIN has also helped in promoting voters education, election management, media training, election monitoring and women's participation (DFID, 2014). According to Glentworth and Afari-Gyan, (2011) DFID through it DDIN

project used the Strategic Fund support to assisted two Civil society organizations to sponsor the “Enough is Enough” and “Wangonet” programmes aimed at mobilizing young middle class Nigerians to take part in politics. Furthermore, the DDiN project has improved the capacity of CSOs such that they are becoming more effective at voicing their concerns, and social media and other medium of communication are contributing to a greater level of engagement in the Nigerian democratic processes.

Also, the DFID via it DDiN project aided the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill in 2011. This has resulted increasing level of civic activity and media vibrancy. DDiN support for CSOs in Nigeria has improved the capacity of the Nigeria Election Situation Room (NESR) which consists of over 30 CSOs that served as observers, communication and monitoring hub that coordinate between CSOs and election activities in Nigeria. Today the NESR is serving as a clearinghouse for field observations for CSOs in Nigeria such that NESR make the 2011 general elections the “broadest...and most...monitored in the country's history” (DFID, 2014:9).

Donors' are also subject to conflicts of intent, for example between short-term economic interests and an informed interest in sustainable development. When assessing Nigerian democracy against the backdrop of a simple democracy index, like the Bertelsmann Foundation's index, it becomes apparent that Nigeria is not democratic as it democratic processes, democratic principles lack a profound link to society. The dislocation between civil society and democratic consolidation is one classic example as CSOs are weak at the state and local government level.

However, donors' engagement is rather weak at the mid-level of

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political-institutional level reforms such as political parties, parliament support and reform of civil-military relations. This is problematic because an overly strong focus on civil society grassroots support may not be enough. It is often argued that the democracy-generating potential of civil society depends largely on the existence of effective links between the civil society grassroots on one hand and political decision-makers on the other hand (Momoh, 2017).

On the whole, there is absence of capacity development of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria at the state and local government level rather there is capacity development at the national level. This has resulted to the marginalization of state based Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which have vital role to play in demanding for accountability from political parties, elected officials, the media at the state level (EUEOM, 2003, & 2007).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Donor support for civil society forms a relatively small proportion of aid programmes when compared to other areas of support. For instance, the kind of civil society organisations that donors fund in Nigeria are among the key actors in each society. Such groups are at the centre of shaping the most important questions facing the country: the type of economic policy to be pursued, the meaning and content of democracy, the form and power of local government, and the position of women in society. These CSOs are either funded by more than one donor or receive substantial funding from only one external source. In this study, we first provide conceptual clarity about Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Then, we review relevant literature on development partners, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and

democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Finally, we suggested ways of encouraging CSOs in expanding their development activities at the community levels in Nigeria.

From the following analysis we suggest that: Firstly, for CSOs to effectively participate in democratic consolidation process in Nigeria their resource base and capacity must be enhanced for them to pay greater attention to grassroots development especially in the area of infrastructure. Secondly, donors can only supplement, support, and motivate the democratic transformation process in Nigeria as bulk of the efforts at engaging the government lies with the CSOs themselves. Therefore, donors should ensure that promoting democratic consolidation in Nigeria will be possible through its harmonious working relationships with CSOs.

Development partners should continue to provide training for staff of CSOs on fundamental democratic values and principles that will help consolidating on the hitherto achievements recorded. In addition, development partners should also empower Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to be able to engage in massive voters' education programme at gross roots level. They should among other things adapt to local culture and environments and at the same time explain to illiterate Nigerians in their dialect what democracy and elections are all about in practice.

Also, donors should enter into contractual agreements with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for at least three to four years period with adequate funding to enable CSOs hold public office holders accountable. Furthermore, development partners should encourage democracy inclined CSOs to be involve in every elections in Nigeria. Besides, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should encourage Nigerian voters to reject choices of political candidates on the basis of tribe and religion or

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because payments are involve in any election. Lastly, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should among other things engage in the monitoring of elected officials after when they have been elected; monitor the behaviour of political parties and above all mobilize eligible Nigerians to vote.

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### ABSTRACT

Violence and criminality  
kidnapping, drug traffick  
all insurgency as perpet  
become the bane of soci  
curb this menace, the gov  
of the country was threa  
military, government, th  
important part of societa  
peace and security in the  
the civilian and the mili  
during the ongoing Boko