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Limited Policy Engagement of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs): A Guilt Trip on the Nigerian State

By

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Abstract

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have in recent years become a veritable mechanism for the realisation of policy objectives. In active partnership with the state, they can be effective in addressing public policy. In line with this thinking and given the huge development demands of the Nigerian citizenry, the policy engagement of NGOs has become desirable. However, with the present state of affairs in the country, NGOs seem not to be active participants in public policy design and governance; an iniquitous practice which negates the ideal of participatory development. The paper gives a revelatory insight into the contextual issues involved in the policy engagement of NGOs in Nigeria. If the policy performance of NGOs must be enhanced, the paper contends that NGOs require legal protection, the reciprocal relations between the state and civil society organizations must be strategically defined, while the NGOs on their part need to be economically viable and must comply with ethical operating procedures.

Introduction

A key assumption of Pareto Optimality is the achievement of maximum social welfare (Ahuja, 1970:1073). Also, the philosophical postulation of Bentham Utilitarianism explains that the only right action, which can be vigorously pursued through effective legislation and policies, is that which produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:266). As generally observed, the Nigerian state, which is vested with the power to allocate values and formulate welfarist policies (Oke, 2008:105), has not performed impressively in this regard. This, therefore, necessitates the involvement of NGOs in the public policy process through effective partnership with the state. In Nigeria and elsewhere, studies have revealed that the problem of non-performance by the state largely constitutes a catalyst for the engagement of NGOs in poverty reduction,

service provision and public policy (Stewart, 1997:16; Kukah, 1999:49; Kajimbwa, 2006:60; Todaro and Smith, 2007:565). The foregoing articulation succinctly provides a justification for the complementary roles of NGOs in policy formulation and implementation.

The continued relevance of NGOs in policy cycles has received ample empirical and theoretical attention (Allard and Martinez, 2008:2). Thampi and Balakrishnan (2002:4) hold the view that the success of public policy is largely dependent on the effective response of civil society, which Ward (2007) describes as the womb of NGOs. Contrarily and worrisomely, Peels and Develtere (2008) assert that civil society organizations are limitedly involved in policy decision making. This development, regrettably, is capable of effacing the utility and policy impacts of NGOs. The Nigerian experience is not different from the pale picture painted above as the ruling elites dominate the process of policy -making (Okereke, 1998:38). This, however, negates the principle of participatory decision-making, which seems to be a new paradigmatic working approach in development studies (Jennings, 2000).

A major problematic issue, which forms the bedrock of this research effort, is the pervasiveness of the Nigerian state and the weakness of NGOs in the area of public policy. This scenario has impacted negatively on the social welfare of the citizenry. In spite of obvious government failures, non-state actors such as NGOs are still not actively involved in policy making; thereby leaving the masses disenfranchised and alienated from the process, which determines their fortune or misfortune. The recognition of this problem has inspired the writing of this paper which is aimed at identifying the policy attributes of NGOs, analyzing the barriers to NGOs involvement in public policy design and governance in Nigeria, as well as suggesting measures for enhancing the policy performance of NGOs in Nigeria.

On the Concept of NGO

The concept of NGO conveys a vaguely worded impression. The notion appears rather inclusive, thereby making it difficult to distinguish NGOs from other forms of association - civil or non-civil. This difficulty notwithstanding, efforts have been made to situate NGOs where they belong.

From a broader perspective, the prominent elements of a society are the state, market and civil society - the "third sector" or "citizen sector" (Kajimbwa, 2006:60; Todaro and Smith, 2007:560). According to Todaro and Smith (2007:560), organisations of the citizen sector are usually termed non-governmental organisations in the development context and in certain instances also referred to as non-profit, voluntary, independent, civil society or citizen organizations. Apropos of the

foregoing. NGOs belong to the 'third' or 'citizen' sector because they differ from government authorities and private businesses

This differentiation of roles is well highlighted by Kajimbwa (2006:60) who defines the role of each sector. The State maintains public order and serves its citizens' needs; companies in the market place pursue profit; NGOs, like the state seek to serve community needs, such as health, education, water, and sanitation. He further identifies two broad reasons why NGOs exist. In his argument, they exist internally because the government cannot deliver high quality public services to the citizens, leaving a vacuum for NGOs to fill. Externally, NGOs exist because donors channel funds to them (Kajimbwa, 2006:65).

A potent definition of NGOs and highly relevant to our analysis is the one given by Allard and Martinez. They expound that NGOs are non-profit, voluntary citizens' groups that are organized on a local, national and international level. According to them, NGOs may be of three types: advocacy NGOs, that promote the interest of groups who do not have either voice or access to do so themselves; operational NGOs that provide goods and services to needy clients; and hybrid NGOs, which perform both functions of advocacy and operational NGOs (see Allard and Martinez, 2008:3). A similar, albeit, encompassing definition is put forward by the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI). The UNDPI defines NGOs as:

> *Any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level...(UN DPI, 2009).*

The forgoing definition shows that NGOs are organizations that are independent of governments, and which have humanitarian or co-operative rather than commercial objectives. This is why Asamoah (2003) identifies NGOs target populations to include specific categories of the poor and disenfranchised; age and gender groups; selected occupational groups; and persons adversely affected by diseases, natural and man-made disasters, ethnic strife and forced migration. NGOs, therefore, promote policy programmes on poverty alleviation, sustainable development and disaster relief.

On the Concept of Public Policy

Sambo (1999:286) observes that all policies originate from demands or claims made upon public officials by other actors, private or official, in the political system for action or inaction on some perceived problem. Politics and public policy are intricately linked. The Eastonian definition of politics as the authoritative allocation of values for a society (Anifowose, 1999:3) and the conception of politics as an activity which determines who gets what, when and why (Natufe, 2001), all buttress the critical elements in the linkage between politics and public policy. Allocating values directly translates into policy output, but Jenkins (1978:16) avers that public policy must be considered to be much more than simply governmental outputs. This position makes allowance for further examination of the political and economic forces which impact on the vortex of policy input. Essentially, Olaniyi (2001:17) defines public policy as "the management of human and material resources by policy actors to address a policy problem identified in a polity at any point in time." Okereke (1998:3) submits that public policy refers to "the definite acts or actions of government, geared toward the fulfillment of the obligations of government on the citizens." This relates to "the maintenance of law and order and the provision of necessary social and economic facilities needed for an enhanced standard of living of the people." As a derivative of Okereke's submission, public policy is geared towards achieving a better and dignified living condition for the citizenry. Therefore, if the citizens are truly at the core of public policy making, then the argument for their involvement in the process becomes irrefutable. It is thus logical for us to conclude just as Ward (2007) reiterates that NGOs represent one of the most evident examples of such participatory decision-making and therefore can facilitate changes in public policy.

Theoretical Issues

Of direct relevance to this work is the methodological utility of political economy to the study of NGOs. Momoh and Hundeyin (1999:38) perceive political economy as a useful tool of scientific analysis, which provides a holistic study of issues, phenomenon and policies in any society. From this premise, the term provides a broad context for studying the growth of NGOs and the extent to which they can be effective in promoting public policy. This coincides with the argument of Ward (2007) which reveals that political economy attempts to identify and research the social, economic and political conditions needed for NGOs to grow, sustain and influence public policy.

As argued by Ward (2007), when one begins to differentiate among existing models of political economy, it is evident that NGOs function optimally in the context of both a modern liberal democracy and a market economy. It is believed that these

social models allow governmental controls to compromise needed autonomy. The argument is that political and economic freedom is a factor that contributes to the growth of NGOs. Aja (1998:7) further corroborates this assertion by emphasizing the pluralist nature of the liberal view of political economy. The liberalization of the social space promotes group pluralism. Civil society groups are therefore fruits of this pluralism. This represents a theoretical articulation on the operational context of NGOs. However, the fact that NGOs are functionally weak in Nigeria explains the dislocation of the country's political economy.

While attempting to justify NGOs from the viewpoint of political economy, Meyer (1999:1) notes that NGOs are active in both politics and economics. While economically, NGOs provide public goods, politically, they are building blocks of global civil society. The economic role of providing public goods regenerates in NGOs largely because of the unimpressive performance of the state in this regard (see Stewart, 1997:16; Kukah, 1999:49; Kajimbwa, 2006:60; Todaro and Smith, 2007:565).

Perceiving democratic experiment in economic parlance, Nigeria seems not to have performed optimally in providing public goods for the citizenry. The pervasiveness of poverty and prevalence of diseases are visible strains attenuating the Nigerian economy; calling for attention from both NGOs and governments at all levels. The summation of the symptoms presented above constitutes an anathema to democratic sustenance (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992; Ojo, 2008; Abiola and Olaopa, 2008). NGOs in particular can .play a crucial role in redressing these anomalies.

Politically, studies have shown that NGOs promote good governance and democratization (see Stewart, 1997:26; Igwe, 2006:1). When NGOs are legally recognized and allowed to operate, they can promote an upward spiral of democratic good governance. NGOs in Nigeria, especially the Transition Monitoring Group, can actually be effective in promoting good governance if given the full concession needed by the state. Nonetheless, as things appear at present, administrative dispensation, quality of governance, management of elections, Nigeria's image abroad are major areas requiring immediate attention. Therefore, NGOs in partnership with the state can be primarily relevant in these areas.

Policy Governance Context and NGOs in Nigeria

After several years of iron-fisted military autocratic regime spanning about thirty years, Nigeria eventually returned to democracy in 1999. Democratic re-birth in Nigeria ushered in new hopes of participatory decision-making. This is because, through popular consultation, democracy offers the opportunities for the diverse

elements of society to be heard. In policy design and governance, the voices of the privileged few are not superimposed on the voices of the disadvantaged majority. This is particularly the case under the liberal democratic model. Contrary to this ideal, the elites in Nigeria have dominated the public policy process for a long time without adequate recourse to the sensitive demands of the populace. By virtue of their privileged positions, these elites constitute the few who authoritatively allocate values and determine who gets what, when and how. The effect is that the citizens, who in conventional sense form the core of public policy, are alienated from the process. In Nigeria, this process of 'deliberate' public alienation has negatively impacted on social welfare and increased economic vulnerabilities. However, with Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, this posture was expected to change to accommodate policy inputs from the citizen sector. Although changes are expected on the horizon but these have been painfully slow. The succeeding civilian leaders appear to be benefiting from the orientation inherited from the military. Little wonder, the public sphere where the citizens operate has not been fully liberalized to promote a strong public dialogue on issues that affect them. This limitation notwithstanding, various groups of citizens have emerged to make their voices count on policy issues that affect them. These groups are largely NGOs, working on key issues such as poverty reduction, delivery of social services and public policy. Although the establishment of NGOs in Nigeria dates back to the pre-independence period (Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti, 2006:74), however, their relevance in policy cycles only became noteworthy in the post-military era with the inability of the post-colonial state to cope with the huge policy demands of the Nigerian populace. In the current democratic dispensation, quite a number of NGOs operate at different levels and maintain different orientations. These are community-based organisations, city-wide organizations, national and international NGOs. Also, they have acquired different orientations focusing on service, charity, participation and empowerment (Igwe, 2006; PAMNET, 2008).

Although the situation above is heart-warming, but the point must still be made that the policy impacts of NGOs are still largely limited. In policy cycles, emphasis is on policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. In each of these levels, NGOs possess relevant expertise that can aid policy design and governance. At the first two levels, the impact of NGOs is still observed to be minimal. However, they have been more useful in the area of monitoring. Civil society groups are becoming relevant in monitoring the budget process. Networks and coalitions on budget law and fiscal responsibility were established to help monitor the budget process. Gradually, NGOs are engaging the budget office on medium term sector strategies; office of the senior special assistant to the President on the MDGs; the virtual poverty fund and monitoring capital projects (Action aid Nigeria, 2009). The budget oversight role of NGOs in Nigeria is just gradually emerging. For NGOs to be

considered as key policy actors in Nigeria, they must be actively involved in the three stages identified above. Expectedly, there are factors which impair the relevance of NGOs in the areas of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. These inhibiting factors, which shall be discussed in the text later, are largely induced by the state.

The Valuable Attributes of NGOs as Policy Actors

The role of NGOs in influencing public policy cannot be overemphasized. Although public policy falls within the purview of government, but the qualities that NGOs possess in this respect makes them adequately positioned to impact positively on the process. Typically, on any policy issue, there are two contending interest groups: those who favour the status quo and those who advocate change (Natufe, 2001; Ward, 2007). NGOs, by their traditional trademark, identify problems that threaten human welfare and champion humanitarian causes which require changes in public policy. The fundamental question that readily comes to mind at this point then is why are NGOs ideally effective in influencing public policy? In the literature, a number of mutually reinforcing advantages that NGOs possess in comparison with the state, have been identified. The critically important ones and how they apply to public policy are exemplified below.

Innovation

One of the virtues that NGOs possess is innovation. Todaro and Smith (2007:562) submit that NGOs possess the capacity to design new and more effective programmes that reach the poor by virtue of their close working relationship. It is, however, the duty of the government to scale up these programmes and transpose them into public policies. Important innovative programmes of NGOs may include community literacy campaigns, monitoring human rights violations, creating awareness on HIV/AIDS pandemic and other diseases among numerous others.

Flexibility

Ideally, NGOs are not constrained by the selfish preferences of the elites who dominate the public sphere. They are not perceived to be rigid or conservative because important development issues are addressed proactively. Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti (2006:74) claim that NGOs are able to respond flexibly to needs as they arise. However, the fact that NGOs can alter their programmes easily to suit new conditions or emerging trends does not denote there is no limit to their flexibility. To buttress this point, Kajimbwa (2006:64) notes that NGOs in the global South are constrained by funds. To adjust their programmes to suit emerging development needs of the citizenry, availability of funds plays a vital role. Unfortunately, NGOs in the

poor regions of the world where Nigeria belongs to are faced with huge financial constraints.

Technical expertise

Todaro and Smith (2007:563) assert that NGOs may have greater repositories of technical expertise and specialized knowledge than local governments. NGOs use their technical skills and specialized knowledge to respond effectively to policy problems identified at any point in time (Allard and Martinez, 2008:3). They supply policy actors with technical information about the nature and likely consequences of policy proposals.

Representation and advocacy

A visible role of NGOs in public policy is that of advocacy. NGOs give public support to programmes that are likely to have positive accumulated effects on their constituencies. Because NGOs have the exceptional advantage of being close to the target populations (Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti, 2006:74), they understand the needs of the constituencies they represent - the poor, physically challenged, victims of human rights abuse, and children among others - who are often alienated from the political process (Allard and Martinez, 2008:3). Therefore, Todaro and Smith (2007:564) note that NGOs play a role in the aggregation of preferences and hence of representation of community needs.

Confidence and legitimacy

The dictum that NGOs are more humane than national governments endears them to the people. As a result, they are able to gain the trust and confidence of their constituencies. In Africa, 'unelected' NGOs appear to be more trusted than elected governments. This is largely because governments in this region are perceived to be corrupt, irresponsive and insensitive to the plight of the masses. On the other hand, NGOs may enjoy greater trust because of their perceived competence, benevolence and responsiveness. All these, however, constitute the bases for their legitimacy (Allard & Martinez, 2008:3).

Participatory development

NGOs are believed to possess the capacity to open the space for participatory development. Jennings (2000:1) describes this as 'people first' paradigm. The thinking now is that, achieving and sustaining development require the involvement of the people who are the primary beneficiaries of development policies. As reported by PAMNET (2008:2), it is such participation, guaranteed by civil society organisations, that promotes responsive and accountable interaction between citizens and government. The interaction between these two entities will invariably promote public sector effectiveness, efficient use of public resources and good governance.

One should reiterate that the involvement of NGOs in the public policy process will not only produce direct positive effects on the citizens, but will also impact positively on the system of governance. The operational record of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) in Nigeria has shown that NGOs can actually be effective in promoting good governance. As cited in Peels and Develtere (2008), the involvement of NGOs in the public policy process will lead to good governance, with government officials who are well-informed about the potential benefits and costs for various stakeholders of policy decisions. In all, policy decisions that result from a broad consultative process will improve policy decisions' legitimacy. These values have made NGOs policy actors in their own right. If the Nigerian state is to improve on the current haphazard welfare principle, then the policy attributes of NGOs must be fully exploited.

In order to understand the significance and effectiveness of NGOs, the issue of their actual engagement within the polity needs to be explored. There are certain formal and informal ways in which NGOs get involved. However, persuasion, advocacy and negotiation with the government are tools of engagement that have received enormous attention in the literature. By organizing campaigns and protests to mobilize the public towards addressing a specific issue, NGOs can better lobby policy makers. Through participation in advocacy and multi-stakeholder dialogues, NGOs can give public support to an idea or course of action that affect their constituencies. Equally, NGOs work through governments and bodies that have an important role in designing public policy. When NGOs are offered a place at the negotiation table, they can significantly influence policy outcome. This is because whoever has a seat at the table has an effect on the outcome.

Barriers to the Policy Engagement of NGOs in Nigeria

Although NGOs demonstrate an apparent comparative advantage and possess a greater capacity to influence public policy, the experience in Nigeria attests to the fact that they are only limitedly involved in the process. The repressive nature of the ruling class and the consequent alienation of the people have prevented civil society organizations from effectively championing the causes of their constituencies. This approach, which perhaps, represents a legacy of the military, is seen as extremely reductionist (see Thampi and Balakrishnan, 2002:3). However, with the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, the role of non-governmental actors in development is increasingly being recognized, while their impacts on public policy design and governance is still at its lowest ebb. The factors responsible for this are discussed below.

Democratic authoritarianism is a critical factor. It is not uncommon to observe some traces of authoritarianism and dictatorship in a democracy. This may be an undesirable situation, but sadly the case, especially in emerging democracies like Nigeria where the functional capacity of civil society organizations is not optimally guaranteed. When this occurs, civil society organizations encounter civil limitations in performing their policy roles. The government possesses an overwhelming power which extends to the civil rights of the citizens. With this state of affairs, NGOs have become vulnerable to harassment by government and powerful interest groups especially when they try to question government policies. Kukah (1999:56) notes that, although Nigeria has entrenched various shades of freedoms in its constitution as enunciated by international charters but the country has been guilty of gross violations of rights of citizens. Since the re-birth of democracy in 1999, the public sphere - that area in society populated by citizens to deliberate and shape political and economic decisions - has increasingly been regulated in restrictive and controlled ways by the sphere of public authority - the state. Instead of the public sphere to serve as a watchdog on the activities of the state, it has become a victim of state surveillance and oppression. Civil society groups have been adversely affected by this development.

The view that the relationship between the state and civil society is largely adversarial also explains why NGOs are limitedly involved in the public policy process (Kabemba, 2005:4). The findings of a study on state-civil society relations in Africa, whereof Nigeria is one of the case studies, reveal that the state is inclined to creating a barrier to the operational activity of civil society organizations because of the adversarial nature of their relationship (PAMNET, 2008:7). A lot of regulatory instruments, political tools and other tactics have been put in place to curtail and in some cases obliterate the activities of NGOs. This orientation produces a zero sum game between the two entities in which a strong state invariably leads to a weak civil society and vice versa. This logic is, however, wrong because the relationship between the two should be mutual and reciprocative in nature (see Thampi and Balakrishnan, 2002:1). This idea is built on the axiom that strengthening civil society is about strengthening and not weakening the state.

Dearth of resources is another notable barrier to the policy engagement of NGOs. It is observed that NGOs largely depend on funds from donor agencies, governments and corporate bodies. Accessing these resources is observed to be difficult and this may be due to the decline in aid funds, untoward orientation of government, and low culture of corporate social responsibility. Aside from NGOs with international connections and huge support like the Action Aid Nigeria and the Society for Family Health, other community based and local NGOs are likely to be hampered by inadequate funds. When NGOs lack the economic wherewithal or needed resources, it becomes difficult to impact positively on public policy. One

cannot be wrong to infer then that the policy performance of NGOs in Nigeria is seriously hampered by the inadequacy of the strategic resources at their disposal, especially finance.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the issue of burgeoning corruption profile of NGOs in Nigeria. This development which relates to the internal structure and workings of NGOs is a mitigating factor against the effectiveness of NGOs in the country. Although NGOs appear to be accountable to standards of ethics, which supposedly constitute their guiding principles, it is not impossible for these principles to be circumvented. When this happens, the capacity of NGOs to influence public policy becomes hampered. In truth, NGOs in Nigeria are likely to become unscrupulous because of personal benefits. However, this position is informed by the prevalence of large-scale corruption in the country and NGOs as members of the larger society are equally enmeshed in this quagmire. When the operators of NGOs are too conscious of their personal gains, they become sycophants and allies of the state and therefore become incapacitated in addressing public policy. This symptomatic condition is noxious to the positive attributes that NGOs possess. Consequently, when the role of NGOs as ethical guideposts has been compromised, the political economy of NGOs becomes destabilized (see Ward, 2007).

Enhancing the Policy Performance of NGOs in Nigeria

A number of factors responsible for the disjointed role of NGOs in addressing public policy in Nigeria have been identified in the preceding paragraphs. The debilitating effects of these constraints are not only visible in the area public policy, but also contribute to their high mortality rate. Since studies have shown that NGOs possess the capacity to impact positively on public policy (see Musyoka and Mbeye, 2005:12; PAMNET, 2008:2), then the onus is on the state to create an ideal milieu for their functionality. Igwe (2006:1) opines that the expanding role which civil society organizations have assumed, in the development of modern society, has become so important that no government desirous of fully harnessing the potentials can ignore. However, creating an ideal social environment for NGOs to effectively operate and influence public policy requires that we situate such effort within the political and economic context of Nigeria.

To function effectively and impact positively on public policy, NGOs require legal protection. Giving them legal recognition is ideally the starting point, which, should be followed by legal protection against harassment. Experiences have shown that it is possible for government to create barriers to freedom of association; to speech and advocacy; and access to resources by civil society organizations (see PAMNET, 2008:7). To prevent such tendencies under whatever guise, the place of

binding laws becomes non-negotiable. Although the ongoing democratic experiment in Nigeria is a catalyst in this direction, the government must be seen to demonstrate a strict adherence to the rule of law. Within the existing legal framework, NGOs should be duly recognized and protected against possible intimidation by powerful interest groups. Ward (2007) believes that this will allow them to maintain their independence and function not only as service providers but as an institutional conscience to champion social causes that require both short term and long term solutions.

The relationship between the State and civil society organizations would have to be strategically defined. From an operational perspective, both entities must perceive their roles as complementary. Viewing the relationship as adversarial or to play out a zero sum game will only impede the positive results that may accrue from the possible partnership between the two entities. Studies have shown that the reciprocal relations between them will guarantee high quality public service delivery (see Clumpt and Balakrishnan, 2002; Musyoka and Mbeye, 2005). The citizen sector must be vibrant to be able to complement the capacity of the state to provide public goods and social services to effectively maximize the social welfare of the citizenry. In the area of public policy, the government should deem it fit to tap from the innovative and advocacy power, flexibility and technical expertise that NGOs possess. This will enable NGOs to assist the government to formulate re-distributive policies that should favour the most disadvantaged sections of the society. In view of the strategic nature of this relationship and the benefits that may arise from the synergy, the activities of NGOs are to be encouraged particularly to enhance their policy relevance in Nigeria.

In addition, NGOs need economic independence and financial sustainability to impact significantly on public policy. For NGOs not to compromise their positions on certain policy issues because of dire financial needs, they must be able to effectively mobilize the strategic resources needed for their operational activity. Excessive dependence on external funds will not only make them to lose ownership of their programmes, their policy impact also becomes one of triviality especially when the external funds are no more forthcoming. Therefore, for NGOs to achieve local ownership of their people-oriented programmes and effectively address public policy, financial autonomy becomes important. However, conscious efforts need to be made to ensure that NGOs do not become commercial ventures at the expense of what they traditionally represent.

There is also the need for NGOs to comply with ethical guidelines. This stream of thinking is in consonant with the view of Ward (2007) which holds that leaders of NGOs need to demonstrate self-control and voluntary compliance with ethical guidelines. He further claims that a code of ethics can prove to be of great use, particularly if representatives of civil society can maintain oversight functions as well

as monitor NGOs to determine the extent to which they comply with the code of ethics. Commitment to high moral standards and ethical behaviour will promote good management and accountability, which are veritable tools for achieving organizational and operational efficiency. The corrupt tendency of NGOs and its vicious impact on public policy in Nigeria, therefore, call for an incorporation of ethical principles in the country's legal code/constitution.

Conclusion

Public policy, arguably, represents a medium of allocating and re-allocating values by the government, in such a manner that the optimum welfare of the citizenry constitutes the crux of the effort. However, the capacity of African countries including Nigeria to achieve this momentous feat is in doubt. The reason for this bleak prospect may not be unconnected with the ebbing quality of governance across the continent of Africa (Kabemba, 2005:3). This situation is generally unacceptable given the huge development needs of the people particularly in Nigeria where about 70% of her population lives in abject poverty (see Oshewolo, 2011: 213).

The perceived failure of government, therefore, calls for an examination of the role of NGOs, which have been observed to be effective in addressing public policy. In spite of the general recognition of the policy relevance of NGOs, they still appear to be incapacitated. If the policy performance of NGOs in Nigeria is to be greatly enhanced, the paper concludes that NGOs require legal protection; the relationship between the state and civil society organizations would have to be strategically defined; while NGOs on their part need to be economically viable and also comply voluntarily with ethical guidelines. Above all, the Nigerian state must guarantee a more open society to promote a strong public dialogue between the state and civil society groups. This will not only add to the democratic credentials of Nigeria but will also ensure that the country outperforms other countries in West Africa on measures of civil liberty, political rights and participatory decision-making.

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