

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISAZTIONS IN DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: THE BIRTH OF A NEW ORDER

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ABSTRACT

Since Nigeria returned to Democratic Governance in May 29, 1999, Civil Society Organizations and Trade Unions , the original Vanguard of the Democratization process and an alternative platform for enthroning a democratic social order have become quintessential platforms, arenas and fora for emancipating, transforming and enthroning the birth of a new order and revolutionary spaces for sustainable nation building and development. To this end, Nigeria has a very strong civil society organizations and trade unions which have played constructive roles in the country's transitions toward democracy and democratization process as battle grounds for recovering citizen control of public life. As important forces and platforms for creating and recreating stability towards the consolidation of its nascent democracy and democratization process animated through popular participation, they have nonetheless become the basis for a durable new political authority, regardless of the plethora of problems besetting them generally. Hence, civil society remains the transformative, emancipatory and revolutionary designate through which social forces could recover citizen involvement, participation and control of public life. The sentiment, contention and temper of this is that: by empowering civil society to perform the supreme and quintessential role and functions, and especially involving civil society in the political and electoral processes, structures and institutions, animated through popular participations, would generate, construct and re-construct an indispensable basis for a durable new and stable political authority and order in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Civil Society Organisations, Citizen, Public, Democratic Consolidation*

INTRODUCTION

The meaning and ontology of civil society evolved considerably since its uses in the context of the 18th century European Enlightenment. Civil society today is a surrogate for revolution that seems a remote possibility towards the attainment of an alternative social world order. In these circumstances, many activists and theorists have looked at civil society as the source from which alternative, more equitable forms of society might arise.... Civil society in the 20th century and most especially in the 21st century is the surrogate for a revolution that seems likely to happen. This is the question behind the revival of interest in civil society (Cox, 1990).

The rise, growth and development of civil society accentuated by a combination of factors which include the restructuring of the society by economic globalization, issues in global governance with consequences for the relationship of

political society to civil society (Cox, 1999). According to Konneth (n.d), the stability of democratic regimes is enhanced by strong civil society organizations and trade unions whose components struggled for democracy.

In Africa, (the) even more extreme cases of state breakdown and of alienation of people from the state structures as inherited from colonial regimes had no close relationship to local population to begin with. The state controls access to economic activities more than substantial peasant agriculture and petty trading. Hence, the political struggle for the control of the state was thus a struggle for a share of the economic product of the country, a product divided between foreign investors and the power holders in the state. There has been a history of resistance to this pattern. Thus, some social revolutionary movements and attempts at social democratic experiments have endeavoured to create political authorities that were based on African community life. However, obstacle, mainly external in origin, impeded the success of this struggle for a more participant polity.

In this circumstance, it is obvious that many African communities did not readily identified with their rulers. Furthermore, foreign capital proved to be equally hostile to people's welfare. Foreign investors with the connivance of African State have caused a lot of damage to the environment, which local people depend on for their livelihood. The International agencies such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) impose structural adjustment policies that have placed heavy burden on the population of this countries. In consequence, many Africans have come to see the state and the International Institutions as their enemies and have organize in a variety of self-help community groups to confront the daily problems of life. This is the form of civil society that has turned his back on the state, and have become the foundation for a new participant's form of democracy (Cox, 1999).

In Nigeria, because the upsurge of civil society groups coincided with the wind of democratization that swept across the African Continent in the early 1990's, most of these have centered on the potentials and limitations of civil society in promoting and sustaining the democratization projects. Nevertheless, most active civil society groups have become ethnic based. They have shifted from their initial focus as platforms for democratic advocacy and popular protest and resistance against excesses and abuse of state power to platforms for ethnic militancy against marginalization and agitation for resource control (to even the most extreme of criminality such as hostage taking, piracy, oil theft and bunkering). According to Imobighe (2003), they have become veritable platforms for violent confrontation with other groups and the state.

Associational formation or civil society is an important theatre of agitation, debates, education, mobilization, sensitization and action as well as a major actor and juncture for the interaction of diverse interests, value and preferences. Thus, civil society by its inherent situation, activities and roles is a key player in the

construction of the practice, promotion and management of peaceful pluralism. It must be oriented towards the problems of society if its social relevance is not to be dissipated. Having achieved the democratic projects in an intense, protracted and tortuous struggle of which it was the vanguard, civil society must now direct its efforts to the issues of needs and concerns of liberal constitutional democratic consolidation, and conflicts that undermine the very foundation of democratic stability (Ikelegbe, 2003), development, peace and social justice. Be that as it is, the contentious sentiment and temper of this study is that for civil society organizations and trade unions to perform the supreme task and quintessential role of being the battle ground for recovering citizen control of public life, it must through popular participation in the democratic space identify issues, needs and concerns for strengthening and consolidating liberal constitutional democracy and democratic practices in Nigeria. These could be done through constructing and reconstructing the basis for a new durable and stable platform for political authority and order. It must serve as an arena, forum and platform for non-partisan involvement in both the political and electoral institutions, structures and processes. It must promote civil liberties as well as prudently manage political pluralism and encourage integrity in government. It must enhance public dialogue, public policies, communication and constitutionalism. It must be tolerant of opposition and differences, promote democratic and cultural behaviours and values, community development and empowerment, citizen-popular participation, civic responsibilities and rights. In addition, civil society must support the manifestation and practices of sharing public domain, conflict management and resolution roles, development, inter-group and inter-ethnic harmony, form synergy between the organized private sector, government and civil society organizations through partnership. Also, it must have put in place the code of practice, promote collaborative and joint programmes, regardless of the myriad of problems.

The aim of this study is to examine civil society as quintessential agents for change, stability, nation building, popular participation, democratic stability and consolidation, and for the birth of a new order the latent energies of civil societies and trade unions in Nigeria. Civil society could be harnessed for the overall objective of genuinely creating a stable polity, whilst at the same time consolidating on liberal constitutional democratic values, institutions and practices.

Pushing beyond the rough picture, this study would build a richer picture on how the sector had and is expected to help consolidate, stabilize and further strengthen Nigeria's liberal constitutional and democratic project and enterprise. It is hoped that through this study, a greater understanding on how civil society organizations and trade unions could be appreciated and further strengthened as an alternative for the state in their attainment of a stable and democratic social order that is peaceful and popularly-participatory and that would ensure the birth of a new order and sustainable nation building in Nigeria.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN NIGERIA: CONTEXTUALIZATION

The concept of civil society is today not just a major analytical paradigm but a major force and factor in the politics of Africa. Its current development is regarded as a significant milestone in the structuring of the political life of Africa. It has been associated with the wave of democratization in many countries south of the Sahara. It has played a major role in the state reform project. It is being expected to play more major role in democratic consolidation. Civil society has become so central in the Africa project of the west and international donor agencies that it has become a major beneficiary of their activities and funds. It has been linked romantically and euphorically to much of the positive changes and reforms in Africa since the 1990s. Civil society has been associated with the benign, progressive, developmental and democratic project that the state has not.

Civil society comprises certain kinds of associations or groups. It is the organization of the citizenry outside of the state. It is the realm of organized social life. It encompasses the network of institutions through which groups represent themselves both to one another and to the state. Civil society typifies citizenry social activism through associational solidarity and engagement. Civil society groups are intermediate or middle level organizations situated between the family and the society on the one hand and the state on the other. It is the private realm of the citizenry as opposed to the public realm of the state. It is also a civil realm that of living, working and associating on the basis of decency and civility, mutual respect, fair play, civil rights, peaceful competition and tolerance of differences that is conducted on the basis of laws and conventions. It is the composite of non-partisan institutions engage in non-state activities and involving non-state actors.

Civil society is a theatre, a context and a means. It is a theatre of discourse, a space for the deliberation of common affairs, the arena of social relations and communication between citizens informed by law and public policy but potential critical to them. Civil society is the means by which the citizenry influence the state, engage in activities to change or reform the state and its policies and seek or demand greater responsibility and accountability. Civil society is thus concerned with the generation of influence as opposed to the control of power, which is the realm of political society that is directly involved in state power.

Civil society is a context within which autonomous groups emerge and interact and relate to the state. It is an arena where groups organize to contest state power and a site for hegemonic struggle between dominant and counter hegemonic forces. It is an arena of political and social class and ideological contestations and struggles. Civil society actually constitutes the organizational framework for social forces as they engage the state in struggles for domination, accommodation and opposition. The boundary between the state and civil society and the balance between them is reflective of the outcomes of and negotiated by these struggles. Because of these roles and situation, particularly in relation to the state, civil society is regarded as the

buttresser of the embattled realm of citizenship, a fount and repository of dissent, a key brake on the state power from without. Civil society represents a counter-vailing sphere that is seen as essential to freedom and democracy as opposed to the realm of the state and public agencies. Civil society is a major analytic window on the nature of interactions between the state and society in social, economic and political processes as well as an indispensable lens for tracing changing political relations. There is a major analytic advantage of the state and society interactive analysis which civil society enables. It indicates that though the central role of the state is accepted, the counter balances of social forces is also recognized, leaving a terrain not of state unitarism but exchanges, contestation, coalitions and conflicts. These constant interactions constitute the mutually transforming dynamics that mold and redefine the specific features, nature and dynamics of state structures, social forces, social structures and public political life (Ikelegbe, 2003). Among the civil societies in Nigeria include The National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), The Constitution Rights Project (CRP) Joint Action Committee for Democracy (JACOD), Organization for the Restoration of Actual Rights of Citizens (ORAROC); Concerned Youth of Oil Producing States (CYOPS); and Delta People Movement for Determination and Environmental Protection (DPMDEP).

At present, especially since the commencement of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, there has been an explosion of ethnic-based civil society movements and virtually all the very active civil society groups are ethnically based. Among these are the Ijaw National Congress (INC), Isoko Development Union (IDU), Urhobo Progress Union (UPU), Egbema National Congress (ENC), Movement for the Survival of Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality (MOSIN), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM), Urhobo Youth Movement (UYOMO), Egi Youth Federation (EYF), Ikwere Youth Movement (IYM), and Bayelsa Youth Federation of Nigeria (BYFN). Others include Esan Youth Movement, Egbe Afenifere, Odua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Ohaneze Ndigbo, Igbo Youth Movement, Igbo Salvation Front, Igbo Redemption Council, Federated Council of Igbo Youth, Igbo People Council and Ndigbo Liberation Movement.

Among the active groups include the Afenifere, Ohaneze Ndigbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Middle Belt Forum, Union of Niger-Delta, Ijaw National Congress, Catholic Bishop Conference, Christian Association of Nigeria, the Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Constitutional Right Projects (CRP), Campaign for Democracy (CD), United Action for Democracy (UAD), National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON) and the like (Ikelegbe, 2003). The active unions include the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and its affiliate unions, Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), Women in Nigeria (WIN) etc.

WEAKNESSES AND FAILURES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

Civil society in Nigeria has been engulfed in numerous problems. The Civil rights groups were characterized by proliferation, duplication, crass opportunism, splits, factionalism, conflict, personal differences, arrogance and ambition, ethnic, cultural and regional sentiments and identities, manipulation, treachery, regionalism and frequent squabbles, lack of internal democracy, transparency, accountability, and poor organization and management (Ikelegbe, 2003). Though the civil society was vibrant in Nigeria, it was strategically speaking yet weak. Its weaknesses could be explained partly by the cloud of cynicism covering the political landscape and the magnitude of state apparatus ranged against the civil society.

This is not to say that some segments of the civil society were not pro-government. Others weaknesses include lack of moral authority, identity, legitimacy, mandate, accountability, limited national outlook, authentic legal authority, undemocratic nature, transparency, unhealthy competition for access to resources, promoting narrow agendas, fragmentation, collective actions, confidence, questionable leadership, suspicion, politicization of leadership, government tyranny, rivalries for space and funds, competition, tension, conflict, tumult, confrontation of differences, identities and intents. In addition, cleavages, disloyalties, lack of solidarity, contention between and within interest groups.

According to Uadiale (2008), wild passion, violence, divisiveness, exclusiveness, disorder, embryonic, ethnic division, manipulation of foreign donors, suppression by authoritarian states, lack of influence, creativity, unity, elitism, urban based, lopsidedness, restrictive to the privileged few, ineffective organization, limited effectiveness, patrimonial, personal repressive, corrupt, co-optation, clientelism, opportunism, parochialism, manipulative, crippling poverty, nepotism, illiberalism, participation, consensus, egalitarianism also cause the failure of civil society in Nigeria. We must add that the lack of global vision of development, poor institutional and organizational capacity, inadequate professionalism and chronic dependence on external funding. (Uadiale, 2008)

STRENGTH AND SUCCESSES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

...the concept of civil society, a rich social fabric formed by a multiplicity of territorially and functionally-based units, has been increasingly linked to the dissolution of authoritarianism and the establishment of political democracy Civil society are self created, they provide the basis of political democracy (Konteh, n.d).

Civil society is as old as the oldest cultural, religious and/or civilization in the territorial space called Nigeria. It is neither western nor necessarily specified to Nigeria. It is part of human existence. Civil society is the most concrete evidence of grassroot politics, most of which were and remain guided by some aspect of democratic decision making that calls for the governing and the governed to collectively reinforce each other sphere of influence to advance the good of the

whole. In its more modern characterization, the nature of civil society or more contemporarily is democratic governance, protecting civil liberty within the context of political pluralism. A core characteristic of a democratic governance (Civil society) essentially help the government to be honest in disseminating government policies and ideas. Such decentralization engenders active political participation, invites competitive energies, policies and ideas between citizen and government officials. Because of the framework of constitutionalism that necessarily operates in such system, public dialogue are encouraged and enhanced by public policies that promote tolerance of opposition and difference.

Civil society is the bridge between government and the citizens, and to the extent that the citizens see and feel the positive impact of government policies, they are unlikely to yield their communities to destabilizing element. Civil society organizations are necessary components for sustaining and consolidating democracies. They serve as civil garden for cultivating democratic behaviours, community development and empowerment of individual and collective excellence. As gardens for cultivating civil dialogue, it has the responsibility of actively contributing to the building of Nigeria (and her nascent democratic values institutions and processes).

Civil society operates independently from the government and serves as a link between individuals for their mutual benefit through the establishment of civil organizations. It is also an extension of the public space where government draws ideas from private citizens to enrich public policy. Such civil engagements are assumed to create a web of inter-organizational, interpersonal, inter-ethnic, inter-religious and social networks that aid the state and society in their productive advancement of the public good. It allows for a more collaborative form of expression, which in turn leads to greater democratic participation. Civil society is founded on the principle of civil liberty, which itself is derived from a democratic and constitutional form of government that empowers people to be free in action, thought and belief as long as the rights and liberties of others are respected.

In this respect, civil society organizations and trade unions are essential to democracy because it creates the social infrastructure necessary to support the manifestation and practice of liberal democracy and enhance popular participation in the democratic space. Without such civil society support, transitional states like Nigeria are likely to suffer reversals to autocracy or, worse still, because illiberal democracies are characterized by illiberal politics. Civil society conditions citizens to imbibe democratic culture, develop leadership interests in public service and, provide a forum for innovative exchange of ideas that enable to consolidate democratic culture.

Civil society organizations and trade unions are expected to consolidate democracy and democratic culture in Nigeria by building, promoting and strengthening citizens' rights, rule of law, citizens' awareness and empowerment participation, pluralism and state responsiveness. Civil society is the master organizational network (and framework) with the magic wand for resolving numerous

problems pertaining to reforms, democracy and development. A robust, effective and autonomous civil society is a vehicle for a high degree of accountability, the setting of the normative parameters of public behaviour, inclusiveness, tolerance to pluralism and particularly the crystallization, accommodation and mediation of differences. The existence of civil society and effective sharing of the public domain is said to have tremendous implications for governance particularly in terms of human rights and freedom to individual, public welfare and public policy. The strength of civil society lays on the survival and development of democracy.

Civil society organizations in all democracies have been known to play very important role in the electoral process. This is because elections are considered very important aspects of the democratic process, the outcomes of which should be seen as strengthening democracy. To guarantee this, the transparency of the electoral process should be ensured by electoral governance institutions allowing non-partisan oversight and civil society involvement. And more importantly, the civil society with a traditional role of restricting the state can by its oversight activities prevent the incumbent government from manipulating the elections through the divesting of the electoral umpire's power to work independent. By so doing, civil society organizations can help to ensure the acceptability and credibility of outcomes of elections which depends greatly on the measure of independence of purpose, neutrality and impartiality.

Given the spate of communal, ethnic, ethno-religious and other conflicts and the violence that has attended such conflicts, civil society groups need to know that based on their intermediate position and the non-state roles, they constitute a viable alternative institutional platform that can be effective in the prevention, curtailment and management of conflicts. Rather than their present low activity and minimal involvement in conflict management, amid the weaknesses of the state, civil society groups should be made to realize that whether they are actors and neutral bodies, they possess and occupy some advantaged social position in relation to the management of conflicts situated in the diversity and the fostering of peaceful and accommodative pluralism.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, TRADE UNIONS AND THE DEMOCRATIC SPACE IN NIGERIA

Prior to the 2007 elections, the participation and involvement of civil society organizations and trade unions were as a result of the Annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election in Nigeria which led to the shrinking of the political arena. During this time, popular forces began to flow in order to re-validate the election earlier annulled by the Ibrahim Babangida administration. However, the struggle became intensified under the Sani Abacha's junta. To this end, civil society organizations and trade unions such as Campaign for Democracy (CD), Democratic Alternative (DA), the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Afenifere, the

Ndigbo and Eastern mandate (all three ethnic organizations) all began to spearhead a national campaign for a Constitutional Conference forum as well as demanded the installation of the winner of the 1993 presidential election.

The two trade unions in the crucial oil sector, NUPENG and PENGASSAN called out their members on a strike which brought the nation to a virtual stand still for two months. Although it was broken eight weeks later through a series of repression, intimidation and outright violence by the government, the strike was surprising but well received, rekindling the spirit of open struggles and defiance. The case was because the two unions has soldiered on without any help from the central labour union, the NLC. The attitude of whose leadership regarded the June 12, 1993 crisis from the beginning as manifestly dubious (Abubakar Momoh, 1997). During the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, it is evident that civil society organizations and trade unions have come to stay and whose potentials became manifest in both time and space.

During these periods, civil groups began to loom very large in Nigeria's democratic space. And as such, civil society became not only strong but played constructive role in the country's continued transition toward democracy but also in the democratization of the political space by these groups, through their involvement, albeit, peripherally in the country's political and electoral presses. However, in spite of the initial hesitations by the Nigerian government toward accommodating popular forces in the institutional and structural processes in both the electoral and political processes, civil society organizations and trade unions were particularly engaged on a non-partisan basis in the constitutional and electoral law amendments.

With these strengthening roles, civil society organizations were eager to engage Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance the conduct of the 2007 and 2011 general elections, collaboration with INEC for successful elections were fostered. In fact, the INEC/civil society desk was established in September, 2006. Also civil society organizations devoted considerable attention to electoral violence, involvement in civic and voters registrations education. Nevertheless, much more especially, at the grassroot level were campaigns in order for the social forces to understand voting procedures. Some civil society organisations such as Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Institution for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), National Campaign on Reduction of Electoral Violence (NACOREV), Election Reform Net Work (ERN), Labour Monitoring Team (LEMT), Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Civil Liberty Organization (CLO) and Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE) liaised under the umbrella of domestic election observers monitors for the purpose of observing the elections in Nigeria.

The Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Nigerian Supreme

Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), were all engaged in election monitoring, voters education and other civil activities. Not satisfied with the conduct of the 2007 general elections after the announcement of the results, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), and their affiliates in the civil society organizations across the country also called for the cancellation of the elections and threatened to begin a nation wide strike in protest of some of the sharp practices inherent in the electoral processes that were sometimes regarded as less than democratic (Nigeria: European Union Final Report, 2007).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at examining the role of civil society organisations as quintessential agents for change, stability, nation building, popular participation, democratic stability and consolidation, and for the birth of a new order the latent energies of civil societies and trade unions in Nigeria. In order to achieve an effective civil society participation, it is pertinent that pro-democracy group should continued to contest and engage the government sponsored and penetrated non-democracy incline civil society groups continued debate, dialogues, constructive engagement and struggle, with the aims of re-orientating and redirecting their focus towards the realization of the dignity of the human person. (Uadiale, 2009). Civil society and trade union organizations have continued to make their impact felt in the country's democratic space through their various activities in the democratic process in Nigeria. Regardless of the plethora of problems confronting them as vanguard and platform for enthroning democratic social order and quintessential arena for emancipating and transforming social forces, the birth of a new order that engenders genuine nation-building and development to perform their supreme transformative roles and functions in a non-partisan basis, especially in the political and electoral processes, institutions and structures generate, construct as well as re-construct a durable democratic political platform for popular participation in Nigeria's democracy and democratization process.

With the social forces in the middle of these processes, this paper opines that the recovery and control of public life - must be achieved through civil society and trade unions non-partisan involvement and participation in the political and electoral space, institutions, structure and processes. And as a framework to achieve common national democratic and developmental objective of stability, consolidation, change, nation building and the birth of a more popular participatory democratic Nigeria, Civil Society Organizations and Trade Unions must be empowered and strengthened to perform critical and quintessential national democratic and development roles and functions. Help create, re-create and consolidate on the gains of nascent democracy as well as current liberal constitutional democratic enterprise in Nigeria.

NOTES

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