

Civil Society Organizations and Democratic Governance in Rivers State

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Abstract

Good governance has a pivotal role of engendering development and eradicating poverty. And this is brought about by sustained participation of the people in their governmental affairs. This paper examines civil society organizations and democratic governance in Rivers State. The paper is anchored on the liberal theory of civil society as its theoretical framework. Information for the paper was wholly qualitative as such the paper relied on information from secondary sources such as books, journal articles, seminars, newspapers, magazines, internet materials and other textual documents. Impliedly the design of the paper was historical/descriptive. The paper concludes that; the arduous task of development through good governance requires the joint efforts of the government and non-state actors such as civil society organizations. Accordingly, the paper recommends amongst others, the linkages and communication between the government and the civil society organizations and indeed the citizenry should be strengthened by the government allowing or encouraging CSO activities and provides more space and autonomy for their actions.

Keywords: *Good Governance, CSO, Liberty development.*

Introduction

The need for good governance has dominated the front burner of development discourse in the last four (4) decades; this is because of its pivotal role in engendering development and eradicating poverty. Furthermore, it has been observed overtime that sustained development is hinged on the effective application of the ethos and principles of good governance. Porter and Sabine (2000), cited in (Azeez 2009) averred that;

good governance is the competence of government to formulate appropriate policies, make timely decisions, implement effectively and deliver services: the extent which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, committed to improving the public welfare and responsiveness to the needs of the citizens; competent to assure law and order and deliver public services, able to create an enabling environment for productive activities equitable in its conduct.

Associated with good governance are citizen participation in decision making, consensus

building where decisions are based on widespread agreement, transparency in decision making process, responsiveness to the needs of the citizenry, effective and efficient provision of basic services and ensuring equitability and inclusiveness in the distribution of resources benefits without marginalizing any group (Piece, 2012). Also, most foreign direct investment inflow is predicated on the practice of good governance and International donor agencies are more likely to direct their resources to countries with proven track of good governance.

The necessity for good governance is of more paramount concern to developing countries in Africa due to their low level of attainment of the SDGs, underdevelopment and alarming rate of poverty. It is pertinent to note that the need for the good governance is more compelling in the Rivers State of Nigeria due to its high level of underdevelopment and high proportion of people living in poverty despite the fact that the region is the cash cow of the nation.

In spite of the evident and abundant resources (including crude oil and gas, which is the source of the wealth of the country, generating over 90 % of foreign exchange and government revenues) the Rivers State paradoxically represents one of the extreme situation of underdevelopment and poverty, lacking virtually all the indices of development (Ibaba, 2005).

Good governance is of essence in the Rivers State, because it would provide platform for governments at all levels to enact appropriate laws, formulate and implement policies that can deliver services to the majority of the people, (Piece, 2012). In order for development to thrive in the area and attain the goals of SDGs, good governance is also required which is essentially about fostering trust, bond and ensuring the accountability of decision makers, (Piece, 2012).

For the people of Rivers State to enjoy the dividends of democracy, they need good governance and leadership that should also offer reasonable strategic direction, which is capable of preparing effective plans and formulating sound policies that can serve the interest of the majority.

Imobighe (2003) points out that the civil society in Nigeria includes professional organizations, labour movements, youth associations, peasants, socio-cultural groups, civil rights and communal groups, around which the civil populace build various identities for the promotion of their various interests for development. It has been observed that the democratic government of the second republic (1979-83) actually fell into the hands of the military mainly due to the absence of the culture of tolerance of and support for the CSOs, lack of trust in the government by the people, and lack of accountability and transparency on the part of those in government (Gberevbie and Lafenwa, 2007). Buhari (2008) argues that the most prominent aspect of democratic governance is the development and sustenance of the democratic norms – tolerance of opposing views in a country.

Civil society is a “space” where function is to mediate between the individual and the state while there may not be a clear cut definition of civil society; they more or less agree that it comprises institutions such as religious organizations, labour unions, charity organizations, community groups, non-profits and the media. In advanced and virile democratic systems, these institutions supplement formal processes such as voting and help citizens shape the culture, politics and economies of their nation. Civil society organization tends to strengthen and raise the capacity of

citizens to address social, economic and political developmental challenges.

This paper is arranged in four (4) parts. The first part is the introduction which is just concluded. The second part covers the theoretical framework and brief review of relevant concepts to the paper. The third part is the gist of the paper while the fourth part is the conclusion/recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Theory of Civil Society

Liberal theory of civil society holds that the existence of civil society is highly imperative in a democratic society because it promotes freedom, equality, tolerance, accountability and progress. Liberalism is a negation to autocratic ideology and is sine qua non to democracy. As a political ideology, liberalism espouses citizen's freedom of association, expression, thought among others (Fadakinte 2013).

To the liberals, civil society is crucial in any democratic nation, especially in a multi-ethnic society because it promotes unrestricted freedom, tolerance, and equity, freedom of expression and association which is germane for building a violent free democratic society. By providing guidelines and legal provisions for openness and freedom, citizens are better informed and empowered to participate in governance. The survival of these liberal tenets inhibits the emergence of dictators and attenuates democratic culture.

Within the above perspectives, civil society stands as an alternative way to aggregating social, political and economic forces outside the state which help to monitor, observe and gauge government policies and programs on the citizens and to articulate the views and interests of people outside the arena of political corridor to the government. Liberalism which emerged with the fall of feudalism and the triumph of capitalism is contemporarily being vanguarded by liberal institutions like the United Nations Organizations, (UNO), International Monetary Fund, (IMF), World Bank (WB) African Union, (AU) among others. These agencies believe that the existence of civil society helps to deepen democracy by promoting accountability, transparency and prudence in governance. In fact, western donor organizations like IMF and WB have made the establishment and promotion of virile civil society as a prerequisite for granting foreign development assistance to developing countries of Africa and Asia.

Therefore, from an historical perspective, the liberal understanding of civil society is expounded clearly in the work of Locke, who is a classic liberal. His vision of civil society revolves around a main flaw of the state of nature, which is lack of impartial judges. According to Locke, only civil society can resolve this inconvenience of the state of nature by providing equal and independent people with a legitimate political authority, which takes over a function of making impartial judgement on their conflicts (Dunn, 2001). Put differently, Locke considered civil society as a legitimate political order, where people, who have learned to discipline their conducts – the civilised, could co-exist as a community. In other words, it was a contrast to the state of nature (Khilnani 2001). Christianity is a central element in Locke's vision of civil society. It holds a community together as shared culture. Civil society is built upon it to maintain

the community life (Khilnani 2001). A Christian creed that all people are equal before God is locus of Locke's work. Locke asserted that people were 'equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...; all servants of one sovereign master' (Dunn 2001). According to Locke, the government derives from people and represents different groups of the society. It has a 'fiduciary relation to society' since the society comes before the government. In case of violation of trust by the government, the society can 'recover its freedom of action' (Taylor, 2006). In addition to the representative political power, to secure civil society, it is necessary to have private property rights and toleration of worship. When Christianity was no longer a sufficient response to the problem of the community, theorists of a commercial society, such as Adam Smith, offered a new approach, the secular one. A crucial point in their civil society was that relationships between people were based on trade need and more importantly on private sentiments. The latter ones not only made a distinction between market exchange and private relationships but they also introduced voluntariness and choice in relationship. People were freed from pre-commercial kin-bond and patron-client relations. They could enter into relationships with anyone they sympathized with (Khilnani 2001). As a result, strangers were not enemies any more. A community of indifferent citizens emerged. Such a transformation of people took a society a level up from barbarity and rudeness to politeness and polish. This led to a social, economic and moral order in the community – 'being the products of the unintended collective outcome of private action'.

On the whole, the position of the contemporary liberals can be summarised as follows. The liberal understanding of civil society is based on freedoms and rights of individuals (Cohen and Arato, 1995), particularly 'in the private dimensions', which 'include the realm of individual choice as well as social relationships in the market and the home'. Liberals claim that individuals have moral rights, which 'serve as constraints on government and on others but are under the control of the rights holder' (Cohen and Arato 1995:8-9). People have these rights because they have moral autonomy and human dignity. The idea of moral rights is premised on 'individual autonomy, moral egalitarianism and universalism' (Cohen and Arato 1995). The role of the state is to frame civil society. It is supposed to conduct non-intervention policy towards a private aspect of people's lives. The role of civil society therefore is to check on the state to prevent its monopoly.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Civil society

The concept of civil society, like other concepts in the social science, lacks a single, precise and universally acceptable definition. This situation may not be unconnected with the fact that most definitions actually reflect the political background and experience of those defining the concept. However, scholars like Orji (2004) see civil society as organized activities by groups or group of individuals essentially out to perform certain services with a view to influencing the government in its policies and programmes 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 the same vein, Ikelegbe (2005) refers to civil society as an essentially participatory, broad-based and self-governing formation engaged in shaping public affairs, public policy and governance. He points out that civil society is an instrument, a means by which the citizens engage the state, in different struggles, challenges and contestations. On his part, 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) on the other hand 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.

The different concepts of Civil society put forward by the various scholars above point to a common fact that Civil society is non-governmental and hence outside the sphere of the state and the government; it has the capacity to influence public policies and programmes if given the opportunity to do so; it is an association of individuals or group of individuals; it has a set of agenda or interests to protect; it is out to put forward or project a particular idea for the interest of its members and the good of society; and its activities involve struggles, challenges and contestations to achieve specified outcomes in the society or nation.

Some authors also view the civil society as an elongation of the State. Civil society refers to the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group. It is safe to assert that Civil society organizations are organizations that work in an arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern.

To Tocqueville, civil society refers to associational activity that that occurs in political space outside the state, an ideology that gained renewed momentum in the 1980 and 1990s as organizations and activists struggled to challenge dictatorships and illiberal regimes. According to 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. 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.

Concept of Governance

Governance is defined as the process of exercising state power especially in the management and administration of state affairs by people entrusted with state authority (Fadakinte 2013). Governance represents an articulate *modus operandi* of how political leadership is engaged in policy making in determining how power is exercised to embody transparency, accountability and rational and prudent resources management. Governance is also a process of exercising power, a process of utilizing authority and appropriating state resources for the benefits and welfare of the masses. It is a cumulus of interrelated processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulates their rights, exercise their rights, and meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In this perspective, governance could either be adjudged good or bad. Good governance is *sine qua non* with democratic governance; bad governance had been linked with autocratic regimes.

Politically, people may disagree about the best means of achieving good governance, but they quite agreed that good governance is absolutely imperative for social and economic progress (Oburota, 2003). Then what is governance and what makes governance a good or a bad one? This is perhaps a philosophical question which may attract endless and multifarious answers. Fundamentally, the question of good and bad is ethical/moral.

According to Madhav (2007) good governance has much to do with the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. It looks at the functioning of the given segment of the society from the point of view of its acknowledged stakeholders, beneficiaries and customers. It must have firm moorings to certain moral values and principles. The question dealing with governance, though significantly related to democracy, is culture specific and system bound. It depends to a large extent on the historical experiences of a nation, its cultural mores, aspiration of the people and the stated political and economic objectives of the state, including individual and group preferences, current issues, the expectations of the governed, the nature and type of the political system, the ideological and religious predisposition of the state and a host of others. For instance, the fundamental objective principle entrenched in the Nigerian constitution provides the yardstick for measuring good governance. Section 14(1) states that, “the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice”.

The common good stands in opposition to the good of rulers or of a ruling group. It implies that every individual, no matter how high or low, has a duty to share in promoting the welfare of the community as well as a right to benefit from that welfare (Eboh, 2003). Common implies that the “good” is all inclusive. In essence, the common good cannot exclude or exempt any section of the population. If any section of the population is in fact excluded from participating in the life of the community, even at a minimal level, then that is a contradiction to the concept of the common good (Eboh, 2003).

The Rise of CSOs in Nigeria

The fast expanding role CSOs have assumed in modern development has become so important that no government desirous of exploiting and harnessing the potentials of its citizens for national development can afford to ignore. Since the demise of the former Soviet Union and the

retreat of socialism in Eastern Europe in the middle and late eighties, the civil society sector or what social entrepreneurial literature now call 'citizens sector' has grown in lips and bounds the world over.

Since 1999 however, government (at all levels) has cultivated partnership with CSOs in the implementation of their development programmes. This has deepened the democratization processes and reduced public resentments. Earlier governments tended to treat CSOs as enemies and so could readily clamp down on them through various emasculating regulatory frameworks and registration processes that are designed to discourage rather than encourage their establishments. The present government in Nigeria desires to be counted among countries that are cultivating collaborative relationships with their citizens sectors. Civil society movement in Nigeria was motivated by human rights abuses and perceived economic mismanagement of successive military governments, particularly since 1986 when the then President Babangida implemented the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

The movement aimed principally at redressing various human rights abuses. Military dictatorship in Nigeria was characterized by wide arbitrary powers that circumscribed virtually every human right and aborted dissent at a frightening scale. The resulting absence of legal restraints on agents of the regime gave a free rein to human rights violations. There were also concerns that SAP placed enormous hardship and poverty on the people. Responding to the gulf that existed between public rhetoric of the regime on human rights and the gross violations of rights by its officials, a group of lawyers and journalists led by Olisa Agbakoba and Clement Nwankwo founded the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) in October 1987, to challenge the regime's human rights record. Beginning with litigating and documenting cases of human rights abuse by police and military officials and exposing the conditions in prisons and police jails, the group's successes and challenges laid the foundation for the growth of Nigeria's human rights movement. Following the footsteps and successes of the CLO, by 1993 when the military government of Babangida was forced to step aside, over 100 other groups had emerged in different parts of Nigeria. The prominent ones among these groups are Constitutional Rights Project, Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and Campaign for Democracy, Human Rights Africa and Human Rights Monitor amongst others.

At the initial stage the focus of most of the groups was on traditional human rights concerns such police abuse, prison condition, campaign against torture, long detention without trial, extra judicial killings and general litigation on specific cases of human rights violation. However, as the military government of General Babangida became more vicious in response to exposures of its atrocities and growing public disenchantment with the inability of the government to adhere to its transition timetable for a hand-over to an elected civilian government, human right groups began to make forays into agitation for an end to military rule in Nigeria. It is worthy to note however that until recently very few groups were actually concerned with independent budget work. The relationship between government and citizens-based groups simply worsened in the succeeding regime of General Sani Abacha.

The Abacha-led government was very hostile to dissent and political opposition. The regime

dismantled all the structures of transition to civil rule put in place by the preceding government. Abacha's regime is regarded by many as one of the most repressive in the history of independent Nigeria; many human rights activists and the political opposition were detained, driven underground or forced into involuntary exile abroad. Under such inhuman conditions, end to military rule campaign was identified as the major plank of the work of CSOs.

The above considerations formed the background for civil society response to the transition program of the succeeding government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998. A civilian regime took over on May 29, 1999. Needless to say, human rights groups were skeptical about the sincerity and ability of the military to midwife democracy in Nigeria. Now 8 years into the current democratic era, the focus of CSOs is shifting gradually from politic and defences against repression to economic management and the need for transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

Role of Civil Society Organisations in Democratic Governance

The roles of CS are so diverse, complex and contentious that it is regarded very popularly as the solution to all social, economic and political problems (Paffenhonz & Spark 2006). The World Bank (2003:3) highlights three functions advocacy, monitoring and service delivery. The development role of CS gained international recognition from the 1980s, with the emergent dominance of neo-liberalism, which emphasized the market, private sector driven development and the contraction of the state, particularly in social service and welfare. As the state crisis, with inefficiency and failure raised doubts about the postcolonial state, the CSOs became a new alternative. Thus CSOs emerged as alternative providers of social services, "implementers of development assistance" (Paffenholz & Spark, 2006:9-10), partners of international development agencies and major recipients of development and aid funds.

The CSOs, particularly the NGO sector was seen as more politically independent and flexible, a more efficient alternative in service delivery, more effective in reaching beneficiaries, capable of setting the pace in good governance, democratization, respect for rule of law and human rights and in pushing for social, economic and political change (Paffenholz & Spark 2006: 9-10).

More specifically, the heightened interests, recognition and support for CSOs in sustainable development are rooted in certain advantages inherent in CSOs. These include:

- i) Greater flexibility in methods, approaches and strategies;
- ii) Greater participatory content of projects and project strategies
- iii) Greater responsiveness to the local people, community and the poor
- iv) Greater contacts or linkages with grass-root people and associations
- v) More bottom up strategies as dependence on local people and communities to identify needs, problems and projects.

In line with these advantages and strengths, the CSOs were pushed beyond the traditional areas of relief support and human rights activism into critical roles in social infrastructure provision

and contributions to economic growth (Ghans-Pasha, 2004). The roles of civil society in sustainable development can be categorized into political development and socioeconomic development.

Civil society's importance is increasing day by day especially in the developing and developed world. According to Bolme (2008:2)

Civil society is important safety nets. A "safety net" is assistance for extremely vulnerable individuals who are unable to meet the most basic needs for survival and human dignity. Individuals may be unable to meet these needs due to an external shock - such as natural disasters, conflicts or war - or due to socio-economic circumstances, such as age, illness, disabilities or discrimination. Such individuals are usually completely dependent upon CSOs that provide resources to meet their basic food and livelihood needs.

It allows people to express themselves directly and resist any form of economic and political oppression. Oppression is the excessive use of power by a particular regime over its marginalized populations who are victims of repressive, discriminatory and undemocratic laws. CSOs are important in this regard by effectively contributing to policies, programs and project formulation and implementation (IBON International, 2011:3). Civil society can advocate the rights of minorities which are too small to count politically. Due to civil society the public discussion is much enriched and the lapse of time from when a problem arises until solutions are asked and offered is greatly reduced. Civil society adds pluralism and flexibility to the society as a whole. By allowing pluralism to flourish through the participation of diverse groups, the government gets more flexible and more responsive to socio-economic change of its citizens.

The final aspect in favor of the importance of an autonomous civil society is that it works based on ideas, not on prestige, power or money.

CSOs have no power to make, change or abolish laws or to shape the state's policy neither does it have the financial resources of powerful political groups but; it is a valuable source of new policy ideas that encourages information sharing in all directions at all levels (Udsholt, 2010:2).

Roles of Civil Society Organization in Governance

The CS role is mainly seen by western scholars within the mould of governance, democracy and democratic consolidation. Thus Chazan (1996:288) identifies the roles of "controlling state abuses, holding rulers accountable to citizens and consolidating and maintaining democracy. Diamond (1994) identifies the roles of checking abuses and violations, instituting public scrutiny and fostering the development of democratic culture and political participation.

Citizen Efficacy and Empowerment

The CSOs seek a citizenry that is informed, knowledgeable, aware, conscious and participating in societal life and the public realm. Civil society provides avenues for initiatives and efforts that raise confidence, self-esteem, capacity and sense of efficacy of citizens to intervene and change

their circumstances or those of others. Such citizen mobilization and engagements raise their interests in public affairs and the public realm. Several NGOs have been engaged in enlightening, training and sensitizing citizens in different sectors and empowering citizens for actions and engagements in the public realm.

Citizen Initiatives for Collective Actions

CSOs have been at the vanguard of building citizen initiatives for collective actions on social and existential challenges. CSOs identify issues and initiatives related to special and basic needs and problems and construct advocacy and mobilization around them such that state attention is obtained.

Rights and Freedoms

The CS formation has been quite active in the protection of citizen and group rights and freedoms as provided in the constitution and laws. Some CSOs have mounted programmes of training and awareness on understanding and exercising rights and freedoms. The CSOs have also created or provided access to justice, or litigated and prosecuted cases on behalf of vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. The CSOs particularly seek to ensure government adherence to the constitution and guarantees of citizen rights, freedoms and welfare.

Building National Platforms for Popular Actions

CSOs are able to build vast networks, national platforms and concerts for action, where critical issues on which they are agreed arise. CSOs can periodically construct platforms for mobilization for concerted popular actions, among disparate elements of the CS formation as well as the ordinary youth, women, artisans, workers and traders. They also build alliances among diverse stakeholders for responding to issues of national interest or specific challenges of governance. CS has constructed concerts and platforms of national action in the areas of minimum wage and petroleum products subsidies.

Building Good Governance

The CS formation has been active in the struggle for good governance. The CSOs have been in the forefront of the struggle for accountability, transparency and the campaigns against funds mismanagement, corruption and financial recklessness. The CSOs agitate for openness and information on governmental affairs. The CSOs also seek dialogue on governance issues and agitate for governance systems to address citizen needs, aspirations and challenges. The CSOs have monitored governance issues and brought excesses to public scrutiny. CSOs are also a major platform for oversight and checks and balances. More specifically, some CSOs have monitored the conduct of public officials, and public agencies and exposed misconduct, abuses, excesses and improprieties. They have sought sanctions and even supported court litigation against exposed or implicated public officials.

CSOs impacts vital competence, experience and learning to members and society at large. These relate to the need for joint cooperative efforts, the primacy of group and national interests, the issue basis of activism, and the need for compromise and consensus on national issues. CS may set examples of conduct, governance, social service delivery, citizen participation and

participatory development which become the ideal, worthy of emulation by governments and other groups. Thus CS may demonstrate good and participatory governance, that citizens and governments may respect and copy.

Leadership Training

A recent phenomenon is the emergence of CSO leaders, who have either by appointments or electoral contests become part of political society and state officials. Some of these CSO leaders became popular or came into national limelight because of their CS activism and leadership of national platforms of CS engagements in the public realm. Thus in a sense, the CSO formation is producing a crop of leaders with opportunity to translate their ideals and goals and agenda into sociopolitical realities in the governance sphere. How effective these leaders are in the political and governance realm and the precise impact both on the state and the CSO formation remains to be seen. Thus CSO leaders are moving beyond ideals and goals into the realm of practice and deployment of politics to achieve their policy and governance agenda.

Building Governance Data and Knowledge

CSOs have through interactions with citizen challenges, development problems and social realities, built up a huge reservoir of knowledge and data on the state of development. CSOs/NGOs have through networks with international CSOs and organizations gained huge access to social realities and knowledge for development. As community based, grass root and people centred organizations, CSOs receive and generate information which could make valuable contributions to development and governance.

Special Representations and Voice: Supplementing Electoral and Partisan Representations

The CSO sector has positioned itself as the representatives, advocates, defenders and protectors of the weak, vulnerable, marginalized, voiceless, suppressed, and excluded. The CSOs have thus being the voice of these groups in terms of articulating their interests, creating awareness and raising concerns, seeking action and support for these groups. Particularly, the CSOs have agitated against the abuse of groups, protected those abused by agents of the state and provided legal support to the disadvantaged.

The CSOs provide a more broad representation of society well beyond political society and representatives in government. CSOs particularly represent the weak, disadvantaged, the minorities, and the poor, who have so little influence and representation in the state and governance systems even in issues that concerns them. The CS then is a space that citizens can easily key into such that their concerns, interests and aspirations are brought into the limelight in the socio-political process and the policy agenda.

Social Cohesion and Integration

CS enables virtues, values and roles that build bridges across class, social, cultural and identity divides. It facilitates the development of common sentiments, bonds and attachments and foster social cohesion and national integration. CSOs also build solidarity among citizens that weaken identity limitations.

Participatory Governance

CSOs strengthen participatory governance by empowering citizens to participate in the political sphere and public decision making. Through CSO activities, citizens learn the how and why of participation in public affairs and acquire confidence that they can influence public affairs. CSOs help to build social capital, by the cultivation of civic norms that build cooperation for community problem solving.

CSOs build a network of associations which foster cooperation for the common good. Further the norms of trust, tolerance, pluralism, neighbourliness, reciprocity and inclusion help to strengthen cohesion and nation-building (Ghaus-Pasha 2004:3, 5).

Public Communication

A core instrument of CS activities is the use of public communication in the public realm. CS articulates citizen interests, problems and concerns and place them in the public realm. It thus constructs or strengthens the culture of debate, public discourse, criticism and consultation. In doing this, it strengthens citizen input and participation and the platform of interaction, exchanges and transactions between the private and political and public spheres. Thus CSOs foster interactions in the public sphere around issues of common interest. CSOs identify unaddressed problems and bring them to public attention, just as they provide expression to sentiments that may be “artistic, spiritual, cultural, occupational, social and recreational” (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004:5).

Constructing Social Linkages

The CSOs have constituted the linkage between the grass-root and community and the national governments and between the communities and the international organizations. The CSOs thus mediate between the local, regional, national and the international in terms of bringing specific and local existential challenges to national and international attention and reach and bringing support from the national and international to the local.

Programme Formulation and Implementation

CSOs engage governments in the design of programmes, programme strategies, implementation methods and outcome. CSOs have also protested against proposed or existing policies by highlighting and educating citizens on potential policy externalities. Some engagements against policies have involved protests such as the recent fuel de-subsidization. CSO engagements have also pertained to who benefits and should benefit from public policy and advocacy for proper and comprehensive implementation of certain policies regarded as positive. CSOs may also pressure governments to release and implement the findings of commissions and inquiries. Public policies that deplete or undermine citizen interests and welfare, or that favour privileged groups at the expense of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, whose costs are too

high or those not seen to be in the national interests, have come under the criticisms of CSOs.

Particularly CSOs seek to influence public policy that relate to special groups and may mount pressures for the implementation or better implementation of neglected dimensions of existing policies. CSOs may monitor or assist concerned citizens in the monitoring of the formulation and implementation of public policy.

The CSO formation has been very active in suggesting and recommendation policy and programmatic change and rationalizing why such changes could better address societal programmes. CSOs have advocated policies, methods of conducting governance, implementation strategies and goal changes.

The Reform Agenda

CSOs have been a vital part of the political and economic reform agenda. CSOs were at the vanguard of the political liberalization and democratization struggles of the 1990s and the resistance to economic reforms engineered by the Bretton Woods Institutions, under which structural adjustment programmes were implemented. Since democratization, the reform agenda has continued to be at the centre of CS activities. CSOs have been strong advocates and supporters of reforms of governance institutions, existing laws and processes of governance. Electoral and governance reforms have been of critical interests in CS engagements.

Conflict Transformation, Peace Building and Security Management

The CSOs have been active in deescalating conflicts, reducing violence, facilitating peace building, facilitating changes that transform conflicts, and working with communities, CBOs, women, youth and local elites to prevent and contain violent conflicts and build peace initiatives.

The CSOs have particularly participated in training and education projects, facilitated service delivery, advocated peaceful strategies, monitored conflicts, rights violations and peace efforts and agreements, assisted in re-socialization and reorientation processes, and facilitated dialogue and inter group social cohesion (Daffenholz, 2009).

Importance of Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society has made contributions to Nigeria's development. Apart from being the vanguard of the struggle against military dictatorships and for democratization, CSOs have made some contributions to the protection of liberty, freedom and rights, socioeconomic progress, particularly at local and community levels, ethnic accommodation and mediation (Vickers, 2006), conflict management and peace building and humanitarian and relief services.

As a formation, the CS has been able to construct concerts, broad platforms and fora for the

coordination, cooperation, mobilization and action on public issues of interest. These platforms have tended to be led by few associations; trade unions particularly Nigeria Labour Congress, Trade Union Congress; professional associations as Nigeria Medical Association, student organizations, the Academic Staff Union of Universities and human rights advocacy groups (Lee 2007). The CSO formation has periodically successfully constructed national platforms for popular actions and mobilized citizen protests around such issues as fuel subsidy and minimum wage.

The CSOs have made much progress in the aspects of advocacy, assistance and support in the areas of social welfare, poverty alleviation, human capital development, diseases control, and humanitarian assistance. In these areas, with support from international organizations, the CSOs have contributed trainings and delivered support. The CSOs have also been fairly effective in initiating citizen based initiatives, strengthening citizen efficacy and participation, generating data and scrutiny of governance, environmental issues, elections and accountability.

Even in the pervasive and critically unsettling areas of religious and resource conflicts, CSOs have begun to emerge that focus on and attempt lack the experience, competence, contacts and confidence to liaise and work with the ministries, departments and agencies of government at the state and federal levels. The NGO sector by virtue of engagements in consulting, economic interests, direct provision of services and semi-commercial activities has become a lucrative commercial and dominant arm of CSO (Paffenholz & Spark 2006).

The NGOs act as subcontractors and agents to international NGOs and corporate organizations, and have been recipients of large funding support. NGO work is now lucrative, thriving and profitable. The emergent business, commercial and consultancy orientation is weakening the voluntary, selfless and sacrificial orientation and the focus on social assistance, welfare and support to the weak, vulnerable and less advantaged groups. There are now many self interested, profit making, exploitative and un-altruistic organizations that are operating and masquerading as NGOs.

The legitimacy of the CSO and particularly the NGO sector is weak. First the NGOs receive large funds but are not accountable or held accountable except to external supporters and management. Thus accountability to local constituencies and members and the public is weak.

The autonomy of the CSOs in the context of funds inflow and the competition and struggle for such funds is in doubt. The external funds are tied to certain agenda and goals, which are dictated by the interests and ideology of the patrons, sponsors and home governments of the international organizations and donor agencies.

Therefore beneficiary CSOs may actually be agents, surrogates and hand maidens of foreign interests, albeit surreptitiously. The CSO sector has suffered from leadership losses to politics and civilian administrations since the advent of democratic rule.

Some of the influential leaders have joined political society, contested elections and hold appointive and elected positions. In some ways, the CSO leadership capacity particularly the potential network and concert leadership is being weakened (Lee 2007:6).

Civil Society Organizations and Democratic Governance in Rivers State

Now we come to the most difficult and most controversial question: What are the functions of civil society? Different people see different benefits and harms in the roles of civil society. As Rousseau simply put it, civil society engenders both the best and the worst - both our virtues and vices (Fine, 1997). One major function of civil society is economic. According to Gang (1998), there are both pessimistic and optimistic stories about the economic functions of civil society. One of the pessimist, Olsen, building on his own logic of collective action, argues that small interest groups have no incentive to work toward the common good of society and every incentive to engage in costly and efficient rent-seeking ...lobbying for tax breaks, colluding to restrain competition, and so on (Putman, 1993) Rousseau also pointed out that men are forces to care and destroy one another at the same time in civil society (cited in Fine, 1997: 17). Worse yet, as Olson holds, in the absence of invasion or revolutionary change, the ticket of special interest groups in any society grows over denser, chocking off innovation and dumping economic growth. More and stronger groups mean less growth (Putnam 1993).

Another pessimist is Callaghy, who fears that - wild passions of civil society may undercut sound economic management and economic reform (Harbason, 1994). Other scholars, however, hold that civil society has the function of provoking economic growth. Analyzing Italian regional level data from the nineteenth century to the 1980's Putnam found that levels of economic development even better than did economic variables. Ingleharts (1977:228) tries to reconcile these two diametrically opposed theories about the economic functions of civil society. Analyzing data from 43 societies, he concludes that relatively dense networks of associational membership seem to be conducive to economic growth in the earlier stages of development, just as Putnam has argued.

However in Olson's opinion, these associations can become hypertrophied and excessively powerful in advanced industrial societies, distorting policy to defend well-organized interests at the expense of overall economic growth. Another function of civil society organizations is the stabilizing function. The question is to what extent can civil society stabilize the state? Both Tocqueville and Putnam stress the importance of network of voluntary associations in support of a culture of trust and cooperation, which are essential to the successful functioning of democratic institutions. However, the answer to the question from other empirical test and theoretical analysis seems to be not necessary. Ingleharts (1997) notes that multiple regression tests, although membership in voluntary associations is strongly correlated with stable democracy, the variable did not show a statistically significance impact when the effects of other variables are controlled for.

Schmitter also argues that civil society... can affect the consolidation and subsequent functioning

of democracy in a number of negative ways. Among these he includes: five most dangerously, it may prove to be not one but several civil societies, all occupying the same territory and polity, but organizing interests and passions into communities that are ethnically, linguistically or culturally distinct even exclusive (Whitehead, 1997). In addition, the democratic functions of civil society seem long recognized. As Almond and Verba (1963) conclude from the examination of the survey data from five nations: the organizational member, political or not, compared with the nonmember, is likely to consider himself more competent as a citizen, to be more active participant in politics. The member, in contrast with the non-member, appears to approximate more closely what we have called the democratic citizen. He is pertinent, active, and open with his opinions. The most striking finding is that any membership passive membership or membership in a nonpolitical organization has an impact on political competence, and thus on pluralism, one of the most important foundations of political democracy (Almond and Verba, 1963).

Nie, Powell and Prewitt (1969) also investigated the democratic functions of civil society in terms of its effects on political participation. As shown in the figure above, as the density and complexity of economic and secondary organizations increases, greater proportions of the population find themselves in life situations that lead to increased political information, political awareness, sense of personal political efficacy, and other relevant attitudes. These attitude changes, in turn, lead to increases in political participation. Civil society has yet another democratic function; that is facilitating democratic transitions. Montesquieu quoted in Harbeson (1994) clearly believed from a theoretical perspective that civil society should function as a counterbalance to government in order to inhibit their tyrannical tendencies; he also suggested that civil society actually did perform in this capacity.

Establishing alternative media, war and peace reporting, Monitoring of elections and state institutions and activities related to democratization, Youth work (community-based social policy, income generation, education and empowerment), Support for education sector reforms and initiatives for peace education, Establishing peace cultures: incentives for overcoming cultures of war via arts, music, films and cultural events, Strengthening local peace constituencies, Initiatives for inter-religious dialogue, Empowerment of women, campaigns for women's rights and against human trafficking, Initiatives for demobilization, disarmament and demilitarization, Protection of endangered individuals, and providing security for minority groups or refugees and returnees, Re-integration of returnees and community building and Human rights monitoring (Ropers 2002). In the words of Olojede (cited in Olojede and Fajonyomi, 2000); the functions and activities of civil society organizations also vary. They include the representation of interest of specific groups in relation to government and other sectors of the society. It also includes the mobilization of the social actors to increase their consciousness and impact, the regulation and monitoring of state performance and the behaviour and actions of public officials. Finally, it includes the development or social action role to improve the wellbeing of their constituencies or groups.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The paper therefore concludes that the challenge of sustainable development-continuous and sustained growth in livelihoods, incomes, welfare, socio-economic development, society and environment, remains immense as poverty, low human development, inadequate and deteriorating infrastructure and social services, and economic and socio-political crises are extensive. Though the state emerged early as a dominant social force, intensely hegemonical, comprehensively intrusive and dominant in the development process, its weaknesses indicated quite early the need of a space for the non-state sector.

The growing crises of the state, governance and development since the 1980s clearly paved the way for significant roles and interventions of the non-state sector. More significantly, the failure of governments in the socioeconomic and social service sectors have led to pressures and efforts for integrating private business and CSOs into the provision and delivery of critical services. These pressures have manifested in the public private partnerships (PPP) and partnership arrangements with CSOs.

The Nigerian State especially Rivers State has not proven to significantly drive sustainable development alone. In fact, one of the major weaknesses of Nigerian governments and indeed African governments has been the inability to substantially mobilize citizens, groups and business for sustainable development. What has been lacking in our development lexicon, methods and agenda has been participative development.

Governance is well beyond governments and the non-state sector could play more critical roles, if its creativity, capacity, experience and energy are mobilized. Similarly, the arduous task of development requires the joint efforts of individuals, business, governments and CSO. Particularly critical to the development and socioeconomic progress of developing countries, is partnerships that can be forged between state and civil society, state and business, business and civil society, and state, business and civil society, international organizations, state and civil society, international organizations, business and civil society, and international organizations and civil society. Partnership then is perhaps the innovative way of rethinking governance and development against the backdrop of prevailing crises of the state, governance and development.

It is clear from the analysis that state and civil society partnerships are extremely few and strong working partnerships are fewer. What currently exists relate mainly to funding assistance, moral support and collaborative arrangements in the areas of social services, humanitarian assistance, human capital development, poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, micro-credit, health care, planning activities and conservation programmes. Some of the existing partnerships have been warranted by the conditions required by international organizations, and bilateral, donor and development agencies relating to government consultation with CSOs as stakeholders and collaborations between governments and CSOs in project implementation. CSOs that are funded by international organizations have tended to win better support from governments. The more extensive partnerships have been between international organizations and CSOs, and business and CSOs.

The CS formation in Nigeria, though weak in several respects, is fairly vibrant, active and engaging. It holds out great promise if properly mobilized, oriented, and strengthened to make contributions to Nigeria's socioeconomic progress and sustainable development. As the nation seeks participative governance, people oriented and sustainable development, the CS formation is strategically located by its work, experience, connections and orientation to make contributions.

It was identified that CSOs are associated with humanitarian philosophy and sacrifice, more commitment and attachment to the cause and vision of sustainable development, lower costs, more efficiency, less bureaucracy and less routine in operations, more adaptive and flexible management, neutral attitudes and grass-root location. Furthermore, CSO are more considerate to human rights and governance values, and tend to possess more participatory content, and contacts and linkages with the citizenry and beneficiaries. These place CSOs at advantage in working with the people, managing pro-people and pro-poor programmes and programmes for the vulnerable, weak and disadvantaged groups.

1. The paper recommends that to promote good governance sound anti-corruption policies devoid of rhetoric must be put in place. In addition, the legislature and the judicial arm must be functional and alive to their responsibilities, since a healthy and sound judiciary and legislature are sine qua non for good and democratic governance.
2. Both the State and civil society organizations need to recognize the others roles, obligations and responsibilities. Government has primary responsibility for governance and the formulation and implementation of public policy. The CSOs have responsibility to scrutinize the works of government, make inputs and advocate change, alternatives, remedies and progress. Governments need the local and peculiar expertise and knowledge of the CSOs just as the CSOs need the openness, accommodation, access, recognition and support of the state. Thus both governments and the CS formation have their mandates, constituencies, values, goals, roles, responsibilities and obligations.
3. It is the responsibility of government to mobilize citizens and resources for development. The mobilization of the non-state sector's energy, resources and efforts for development is crucial.

Partnership of government with the CSO sector is in fact, a crucial aspect of government mobilization for development. The linkages and communication between governments and CSOs and indeed the citizenry need to be strengthened. As such, government should encourage CSO activities and provide space and autonomy for their actions.

4. Government has to be open in the processes of policy making and implementation, programming, monitoring, impact assessments and expenditures. Governments need to strengthen openness and accountability to citizens and CSOs, so that the later can key in terms of input, debates and scrutiny. The rules, operating procedures and operations of public programmes have to be made known to the citizens.
5. The Public Information Act has to be effectively implemented so that information and data is available on government operations and activities. Governments have to accept constructive engagement, show understanding, build tolerance and accommodation and raise the level of

communication.

6. Governments should to create conducive conditions that encourages more participation of the CSOs in the governance and development process. Governments have reach out to CSOs for understanding or even agreements on the methods and platforms for partnership or joint actions between it and CSOs. CSOs have to be accommodated in public policy formulation, implementation and performance management. This is critical for bringing in, the sector's capacity and skills particularly in pro poor and pro-people policies.

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