Civil Society, Mass Media and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract
Civil society organisations (CSO's) and the mass media are critical institutions in entrenching democratic governance in the society. They serve as the conscience of the nation as well as monitor the temperature of democracy in any given society. The study explores the activities of civil society organisations and the mass media in promoting democracy in Nigeria. Using library research method, the study found that civil society organisations and the mass media were instrumental in entrenching democracy in Nigeria. The study equally shows that these institutions are vital in influencing and providing policy directives to government on important national issues. The study reveals that CSO's and the mass media are key players in exposing corruption among government officials and politicians. They were able to demand public accountability from those at the corridors of power; they as well fought obnoxious policies and programmes of government thereby consolidating Nigerian democracy. Despite these monumental efforts, the activities of CSO's and the mass media are threatened by the government through the use of harassment, intimidation, and promulgation of anti-democratic bills to gag their activities. The study concludes by reiterating that the government should reconsider its posture in the way and manner it is treating these vital institutions that make democracy to thrive in any nation. To this end government should see CSO's and the mass media as institutions that check their excesses and also provide them with the platform to communicate the yearnings, feelings and grievances of the citizens to the government.

Keywords: *Democracy, mass media, governance, civil society and Nigeria*

Introduction

Civil society organisations and the mass media have globally become active non-state agents of democratic governance saddled with the multifaceted responsibilities of providing social welfare, economic empowerment, humanitarian services, political participation, human capital development and economic activities (Ikelegbe, 2013, p. 2). Besides, civil society has become important agents for engendering good democratic governance through the

promotion of accountability, transparency, rule of law, curtailment of human rights abuses, and capitalist exploitation.
Prior to the return to civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian state was governed by several military dictatorships. During the years the military piloted the affairs of the country, so many human rights violations were committed by the military. For example, human rights activistslike KenSaro-wiwa werekilled; journalistslike Dele Giwa and several others were murdered because of their uncompromising stand on the activities of the military government. It was during this epoch in the history of Nigeria that corruption, ethnicity and nepotism were openly institutionalised. The height of this inhuman treatment of Nigerian citizens by the military led to the expulsion of Nigeria from the international community.

It was based on this background that civil society organisations and mass media sprang up to fight these authoritarian tendencies, promote, and consolidate democratic governance in Nigeria.This was evidently seen in the activities of civil society organisations in the 1980s when the country was overwhelmed with economic depression and serious decline in human rights protection.

The activities of the various civil society organisations like the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC); Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU); National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS); Campaign for Democracy (CD); Nigerian Bar Association (NBA); Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO); Transition Monitoring Group (TMG); Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR) and a plethora of many more havegone a long way in resisting authoritarian regimes in Nigeria, promotingdemocracy and acingas people overseer in ensuring that good governance is entrenched in Nigeria between 1999 to this present day. For instance, the processes that led to the institutionalisation of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999 was as a result of the combinedefforts of civil society organisations and the mass media. Their continual efforts also witnessed the country's political transitions from one civilian government to another in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 (Auwal, 2016).

The mass media on the other hand are key drivers in instituting democratic governments the world over. They are the forces that bring to the fore the activities and inhuman treatment of citizens by dictatorial regimes and other state actors bent on gaging the voices of the people to seek for freedom and self-determination. The Nigerian media has been credited with the achievement of playing an important role in entrenching democracy in the country (Santas, 2014).

Sowunmi, Ruafu, Aketokun, SalakoandUsifoh(2010) cited inSuntaiandTargema (2018) emphasise that the mass media are good institutions in the fight against corruption, as they help to provide information about government projects and the misdemeanours that go on in the course of executing them, hence exposing the acts of fund mismanagement. Lodha (2007) suggests that corruption can be prevented, checked, and minimised if not eradicated, by making people 'conscious' of its pernicious impact on their life. Here, she stresses that mobilisation of the people on a common political platform focusing on the issues of transparency and accountability is crucial to winning the war against corruption. This study explores how the mass media and civil society organisations have fared in consolidating democratic governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

The mass media are the channels through which information are communicated to people in the society. They include radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Information dissemination is a critical element in a democracy. For citizens to be adequately informedof government policies and programmes, they need an effective communication apparatus that would provide them the latitude to participate in government activities.

According to Chukwuma (2005), civil society is seen as a set of institutions, organisation and behavior situated between the state, business world and family. These include non-governmental organisations, private voluntary organisations, people's organisations, civic organisations, community-based organisations,

and cultural, gender, religious, and social organisations. In the same vein, Geller (1996)opinesthat civil society is "that set of diverse, non-governmental institutions which is strong to counterbalance the state and while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomising the rest of society.Civil society groups therefore mainly operate outside the ambit of a formal structure of existing government. Civil society organizations perform the vital functions of acting as a buffer against the despotic and authoritarian tendencies of wielders of political authority in a society.

Democratic governance entails the process of exercising state power especially in the management andadministration of state affairs by people entrusted with state authority (Fadakinte, 2013). Democratic 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, rational and prudent resources management. Governance is also a process of exercising power, a process of utilising 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 articulatetheir 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 forconsolidatingdemocratic governance.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The agenda setting theory and the social responsibility theory of the press provided the framework upon which our discourse is hinged. According to Oboh (2014), the agenda setting theory evolved from the research work of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The authors specifically examined the correlation between the media reports of the 1968 election campaign in Chapel Hill and the issues the members of the public discussed about the elections. In 1992, Lippmann conducted a study to find out how

the media determine public opinion on topical issues. He found from his study that the members of the public do not necessarily respond to the actual event that occur in society but to the pictures of those events reported by the media in their daily coverage of issues in society (McCombs, 2000 cited in Oboh, 2014).
McQuail (2005) submitsthat the core idea in agenda setting is that news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. Therefore, the news media indirectly determine what issues are important in society through the prominence they accord to the different issues that make up the editorial content of the newspaper. The agenda setting function of the media implies that people constantly look up to the mass media for cues to issues of significance. Citizens want the media to assist them to determine that which is real and also help in setting standards (Owubere, 2016). The media in doing this must thus facilitate organised representation by giving due publicity to the activities, progammes and thinking of organised groups in addition to the formal processes of government and party opposition. It is basedon this constitutional responsibility of the mass media that they provide a platform through which the voice of CSO's can be heard in drawing the attention of both citizens and government to important issues of national importance in society. For instance, through the agenda role of the mass media they were able to draw attention to important societal issues like corruption, disease outbreaks, insecurity, and issues of civic responsibilities of citizens to the country.

On the other hand, the social responsibility theory which owes its origin to the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the Libertarian or Free Press theory is the second theoretical construct that finds relevance to this study. According toAnaeto, OnabajoandOsifeso (2008), the major premise of the social responsibility theory is that freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged with the responsibility for carrying out certain essential functions of mass

communication. Citing McQuail (2015),Ojobor (2002) gives the main principles of the social responsibility theory as follows:

- That media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society.
- That, through professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met.
- That whatever might lead to crime, violence, civil disorder or offence to minority groups, should be avoided by the media.
- That the media should reflect its society's plurality, giving access to various points of view and granting all the right to reply.
- Based on the principles in (1), the society has the right to expect high standards of performance from the media. Intervention can only be justified to secure public good.
- Accountability of media professionals should be to the society, employers and the market.

The social responsibility theory applies to the mass media and CSO's in any democratic society. Both institutions are expected to be socially responsible to the society. They are required to fulfil the above essential functions in order to contribute their quota in building a virile and strong democracy in Nigeria.

The Nexus Between Civil Society and Democracy

Civil society is *sine qua non* forliberal democracy. As a social force, civil society organisations have multiplicity of role to play within any democratic society. Gaus-Pash(2004) arguesthat civil society helpsto deepen good governance by providing certain basic services which the state and private sector may be unable to provide. These she identifiesas advocacy, mass mobilisation, monitoring of state performance and accountability.

Civil society organisations in a democratic society are expected to engage in the design, monitoring and implementation of public projects and budgeting(Osaghae, 1997;Diamond, 1999). As a third sector, they are critical lubricants and observers in state articulation of state budgets by ensuring that such budgets either at the federal, state and local levels are people-oriented. The essence of this is to

also ensure that the implementation of national budgets is transparent while advocacy to agencies and ministries in which capital and recurrent expendituresare budgeted for is judiciously done. Within the ambit of the rule of law, civil society organisations are to discover and make public, cases of corruption by people entrusted with government authority in budget implementation and to also advise government appropriately in budget designs at the initial stage(Gaus-Pash, 2004).

Through consistent advocacy and monitoring of actions and behavior of public officials, civil society organisations deepen the growth and consolidation of democratic culture by nipping in the bud bureaucratic red tapes which often culminate to waste of state resources and unscrupulous attitudes of public officers. Besides, through this means, efficiency in democratic governance is maintained. Democracy is about equality and elimination of discriminations irrespective of race, class or ethno-religious or cultural affiliations.

In this perspective, Ikelegbe (2007) notesthat civil society organisations ensure that there is adequate constitutional provisions that promote equity and fairness in the administration of government activities. It is expected that civil society should stimulate good democratic governance by promoting equity in all ramifications especially by reporting cases of discriminations to the public. Furthermore, they help to reform victims of racial, ethnic or cultural discriminations by rendering instant psychological and socio-economic stop-gap measures.

For instance, civil society organisations are critical in protecting victim of genocidal attacks in Rwanda in 1994 and in Nigeria during the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. In these cases, Civil Society Organisations provided victims with relief materials such as beds, food items, toiletries, water, and medical support among others. In fact, Lee (2007) notesthat the post-civil war policies of reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation in Nigeria were greatly carried out by civil society organisations.

Mercy (2012) in her study poignantly identified the interconnecting web between civil society and democratic governance which helpsto promote overall development in a civil state. Specifically, she aversthat civil society enhancesthe sustenance and consolidation of participatory governance through: voter education, election observation, campaign finance monitoring, election tribunal monitoring, electoral reform advocacy, conflict mitigation, access to justice, public interest litigation, budget tracking, constituency outreaches, as well as research and documentation in thematic areas of democracy and governance.

Media, Civil Society and Democracy

Wayande (1996) in a study entitled "mass media as civil society and its role in democratic transition in Kenya" discussed the contribution of the mass media to the transition from single to multi-party democracy in Kenya. Considering the media as part and parcel of civil society, the author argued that access to the mass media is critical to actors involved in the politics of transition from single to multiparty democracy. However, the study postulated that the role of the media in thisenterprise can be greatly enhanced by the support of other democratic social forces in society. The study found that both institutions need each other as they try to influence the direction, pattern and issues of democratic transition. The study also discussed the problems encountered by the media in theprocess of promoting democratic politics. These problemsinclude the legal and political environment in which the media operate in the absence of an effective media organisation to protect the interests of journalists and the tendency to disregard professionalism by the media practitioners themselves. The study concluded that a synergy between the mass media and civil society organisations would enhance better democratic transitions in Africa.

In the same vein, Aderonmu (2013) examined "the role of civil society and the 2011 elections in Nigeria". The study appraised the activities of civil society organisation before, during and after the election. The study found that civil society organisations embarked

on voter's education and public enlightenments campaigns in the build up to the election. They organised conferences and seminars to mobiliseand sensitiseNigerians on the need to register for the election. Findings from the study also indicated that civil society organisations like the Labour Election Monitoring Team (LEMT) and Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) monitored election proceedings during the election. The study further showedthat because of the involvement of civil society organisations in the monitoring of the election, so many irregularities were discovered by the CSO's.

Oppong,Oduro,AwalandDebrah (2013)in a study entitled "civil society organisations engagement with political parties during elections: lessons from Ghana and Serra Leon"examined the conditions that enable civil society organisations (CSOs) to influence political parties during election campaigns. Drawing on desk reviews and the experiences of CSO's during the 2012 election in Ghana and Sierra Leone, the study found that for CSO's to have their demands incorporated into party programmes, qualities such as political neutrality, evidence-based data gathering, and consistency in judgments are critical. The study also discovered that applying methods such as lobbying and strategic use of media were found to be very effective in engaging political actors. The study recommendedthat CSOs should be innovative in their strategies with political parties in order to inject fresh momentum in the way political parties respondto CSOs.

Fatia (2012) investigated "civil society and public support for the ant-corruption crusade in Nigeria's fourth republic". The study found that civil society organisations were instrumental in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. This is evident inthe impeachment saga of the senate presidents, the refusal to endorse former president OlusegunObasanjofor third tenure elongation and many other corruption cases. However, the study noted that a lot of obstacles constitutedimpediments for CSO's to effectively fight corruption in Nigeria. These obstaclesincludedlack of access to information, lack of political will to prosecute certain high government officials and the polarisation of CSO's along ethnic

and religious lines. The study concludedthat CSO's and the mass media needfunds and unhindered access to information to effectively monitor governance.

Similarly, SuntaiandTargema(2018) explore"media and the civil society in the fight against corruption: the case of Nigeria". The study exploredthe relevance of the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) to the fight against corruption in the country. It examinedthe awareness of the Act by both journalists and the civil society who need it to effectively expose corrupt practices and complement the efforts of anti-graft agencies in the fight against corruption in the country. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study with uniform questionnaire items issued to a sample of 260 respondents comprised ofjournalists and members of the civil society. Findings from the study revealed that residents of the surveyed population were aware of the existence and provisions of the FoIA. However, the Act has not been effectively utilised to fight corruption due to fear of harassment and intimidation, corruption among journalists who are after 'brown envelope' and personal interests among other reasons. This perhaps explains whyIkelegbe(2013)says there are now many self interested, profit making, exploitative and un-altruistic organisations that are operating and masquerading as civil society organisationstoday. According to him, CSO's receive large funds but are not accountable or held accountable except to external supporters and management. Thus accountability to local constituencies, members, and the public is weak.

Discussion

The role played by civil society organisations prior to the return to democracy in 1999 was glaringly showing evidence of their importance because they provided a genuine platform fordemocratising the Nigerian polity. For instance, between 1993 to 1999 groups like Campaign for Democracy (CD), Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Liberties Organisations (CLO), and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) were all instrumental in the restoration of civil rule. These groups fought the Nigerian

military to a standstill. They mobilised students and workers for civil disobedience, strikes and protest marches across the country. Many in their ranks were killed and maimed while some lucky few were able to make good their escape into exile only to come back after the 1999 democratic enthronement to continue their struggle for good governance and national development (Omede&Bakare, 2014, p 213 cited in Auwal, 2016).

During this time, the activities of the pro-democratic coalitions (NADECO) which became the unofficial opposition to the Abacha's administration were very visible. During the Abacha authoritarian reign, NADECO and other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) remained clearly an opposition organisation. They constituted themselves into political opposition simplicities and were engaged in critical questioning and an unceasing inquisitiveness (Arisi, 2015 cited in Auwal, 2016).

In 2010, a civil society organisation, Save Nigeria Group led by PastorTundeBakareorganised a rally during the period vacuum was created by the illness of the late President UmaruYar'Adua. This group mobilised Nigerians all over the country to stand against the abuse of power by cronies loyal to the late president and called for the elevation of Goodluck Jonathan as President. Even though the process was gradual, the mere aggressive campaign against such abuse, forced the National Assembly to swear-in Jonathan as the Acting-President. It must be acknowledgedhere that such campaigns are areas where CSO's power lies (Fasakin, 2012).

In the sphere of promoting and advocating for the fundamental human rights of Nigerians, civil society groups like the Bring Back Our Girls organisationwereable to pressurize thegovernment for the release of some abducted Chibok girls in 2014. The mass media and the social media were strategically utilised by the group to ensure that the international community responded to the abduction of the school girls. The campaign of the group received international attention such that major presidents around the world took to their social media platforms to condemn the barbaric act. The Goodluck Jonathan government was put under pressure to

secure the release of the girls. The inability of the government to secure the release of the girls cost the incumbent government to lose the 2015 presidential election.

In promoting accountability of public office holders, a civil society group, *OurMumuDonDo* Movement demanded the disclosure of President MuhammaduBuhari's health status during his three months' vacation to seek for medical attention abroad in 2018. The prolonged absence of the president became a subject for debate among Nigerians. The president's prolonged absence in the midst of daunting economic challenges that confrontedthe nation and especially on the demands of providing governance and directing the ship of government became imperative. The Publicity Secretary of the organisation, Mr. Adebayo Raphael assertsthat "ever since President MuhammaduBuhari left the country on medical leave for the second time 89 days ago, neither he nor his aides have disclosed to Nigerians the illness that has rendered the president completely infirm".

The group further noted thatit would also be recalled that when the late former presidentUmaru Musa Yar'Adua was sick and out of the country, pseudo activists, including the incumbent President and some members of his cabinet, went ballistic and demanded the resignation of the late president. Now that the table has turned, everyone has gone mute. As a result of this protest, several pockets of mass protest took place in the United Kingdom and Germany. Even though the law enforcement agencies clamped down on the protesters, they eventually pressurised the president to return to the country after spending several months outside the country.

It is a known fact that the passage of the Freedom of Information Act by the government was as a result of the persistent pressure of CSO's and the mass media in the country.The passage of the Freedom of Information law is a victory for Nigerian democracy. The F.O.I bill was first submitted to Nigeria's 4th National Assembly in 1999 when the country returned to democracy but did not make much progress. It returned to the legislative chambers in the 5th National Assembly in 2003 and was passed in the first

quarter of 2007 by both chambers. However, President Olusegun Obasanjo vetoed it. It returned to both chambers of the 6th National Assembly in 2007 and was finally passed on 24 May 2011 (*Sunday Trust*, 5th June 2011 cited inOlade&Rafiu, 2014). This success is chiefly attributed to the relentless efforts of the coalition of Nigerian civil society groups who have long worked and advocated the passage of the F.O.I Bill under the leadership of the Right to Know Movement, Media Rights Agenda (MRA), and the Open Society Justice Initiative.

On votereducation, civil society organisations and the mass media in Nigeria embarked on massive and aggressive voter education across the country through workshops, conferences, seminars and town hall meetings. Other means of voter education include: jingles on radio, television, newspapers, magazines, posters, stickers and the social media. Mock elections in rural areas on the need to vote, how to vote, election timetable, electoral law, violence free election, how to guard vote, the danger of selling votes and many other issues that were central to the success of the 2011, 2015, and 2019 general elections were carried out. This to a great extent gave the needed impetus for most Nigerians to be mobilised for the election (Aderomu, 2013).

On the fight against corruption and bribery many federal and state legislators, Ministers, andLocal Government chairmen had on several occasions been indicted for corruption (Ogbo 2011, Adeyemi 2012, cited in Danladi&Tanko, 2009). For instance, Nigeria had about seven Senate Presidents impeached between 1999 and 2007. Their impeachments were based on corruption cases. Also, the first female speaker of the House of Representatives in Nigeria was impeached on thegroundsof corruption. There were also cases of grand legislative corruption involving Hon. Herman Hembe bordering on mismanagement of pension and stock exchange funds. Others wereSenator Nicholas Yahaya, and Hon. Elumelu rural electrification scandal and that of the petroleum subsidy scandal involving Hon. Farouk Lawal and an oil magnet, Otedola(Shedrack,2015, Charles 2015, cited in Danladi&Tanko, 2009).

Civil society has been known to agitate for reforms in local, state and national governance to provide for an enlargement of the context of participation and in that way ensure that more people are involved in the making of decisions that affect the lives of citizens. If the popular participation by citizens is the hallmark of democratic system, it therefore means that the more people are co-opted into the decision making process via a pluralistic of the democratic space, the faster the pace of national development. It is on record that it is the clarion call by civil society organisations and the mass media that led the OlusegunObasango and the Goodluck Jonathan led government to agree to convoke a national political conference and dialogue is a product of agitations by civil society organisations like Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), Constitutional Rights Projects(CRP) and other spirited organisations (Idahosa&Otoghile, 2008).

Conclusion

Civil society organisations and the mass media are no doubt critical agents in the democratic process in Nigeria. They have pioneered the entrenchment of democracy in the country. The two institutions have wagedwar against the colonial government and the military juntas to pave way for the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria.

As the conscience of the nation, the mass media and civil society organisations have promoted good governance, transparency, good policies and influencedgovernment decisions in Nigerian fourth republic. They have supported the fight against corruption and spearheadedthe probing and prosecution of so many government officials. Despite these achievements,civil society organisations and the mass media are facedwith daunting challenges like inadequate funds, harassment by government agents and security operatives, lack of free access to information (classified documents), ethnicity, and corruption. It is the conviction of this study that if the civil society and the mass media are to continue to perform theirfunctions of monitoring the activities of government they must be properly funded to consolidate our democracy. The

mass media and civil society organisations must rise above corruption, ethnicity and parochial sentiments so as to ensure that Nigerian democracy is sustained and consolidated. The government must ensure that civil societygroups and the mass media must be free to organise protest and hold government to account on certain national issues that concern the citizens. Government attitude of refusing civil society organisations to carry mass protest should be revisited. The ongoing social media hate speech bill if passedinto law will further weaken the activities of civil society organisations and the mass media,preventing them from performing their fundamental and constitutional responsibilities. Nigerians must fight against this draconian law so as to secure a free democratic atmosphere in the country.

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