

Roles of Civil Society Organizations in Tackling Corruption in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at highlighting the roles of civil society organizations in tackling corruption in Nigeria. Nigeria has been bedevilled with lots of cases of corruptions which has had an adverse effect on the growth and development of the nation. There are numerous civil society organizations in Nigeria such as the Oodua Peoples Congress, Arewa Peoples Congress, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Pan Niger Delta Forum, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, Nigeria Labour Congress that have been at the forefront of canvassing for change in the nation by Intervening and alerting the public by raising burning issues in the polity, "Naming and shaming" corrupt public office holders, holding trainings and seminars; establishing monitoring and civil oversight of public administration, putting pressure on authorities by raising public awareness and campaigning. The study also highlighted the challenges bedevilling civil society groups such as harassment from government, greed amongst the management and recommended that government should make a definite resolution to create an enabling environment for the civil society organizations to operate and deliver their mandate to the people. Civil society organizations in the nation must also be effectively honest, transparent and accountable.

Keywords: Civil, Society, Nigeria, Corruption, Politics, Organizations

INTRODUCTION

Corruption

Corruption is defined as "an arrangement that involves an exchange between two parties (the demander and the supplier) which (i) has an influence on the allocation of resources either immediately or in the future; and (ii) involves the use or abuse of public or collective responsibility for private ends" (Macrae 1982, 678; cf Salisu 2006, 3).

Corruption is a behavior, which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private relationship. This includes such behaviour as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of inscriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private-regarding uses (Rose-Ackerman, 1998, p.12). A patter of corruption can be said to exist whenever a power-holder who is charged with doing certain things, i.e., who is a responsible functionary or officeholder is, by monetary or other rewards not legally provided for, induced to take actions which favour whoever provides the reward and thereby does damage to the public and its interests (Salisu, 2006). Corrupt transactions usually include bribery; fraud such as inflation of contract sums by public officials; unauthorized variation of contracts; payment for jobs not executed; payment of ghost workers; overpayment of salaries and allowances to staff; diversion of government revenue by public officials; deliberate irregularities in the management of accounting procedures (Ubeku, 1991:41-43).

The International Monetary Fund defined corruption as "abuse of authority or trust for private benefit: and is a temptation indulged in not only by public officials but also by those in positions of trust or authority in private enterprises or non-profit organizations" (Salisu, 2006). The Transparency International defines corruption as involving "behaviour on the part of officials in the public sector,

whether politicians or civil servants, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves or those close to them, by the misuse of the public power entrusted to them” The ICPC Act (2000) states that corruption includes bribery, fraud and other related offences.

Corruption is therefore multi-faceted affecting all spheres of our socio-economic life and politics.

Both the legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary, the private sector, the civil society organizations are all involved. Thus an all embracing and universally acceptable definition is not possible.

It has been documented by analysts that corruption in Nigeria has been a hindrance to its economic development (Iroghama 2011).

Nigeria has been ranked very low on the Berlin-based Transparency International of corrupt countries in the world. The rankings were based on weighted average of corruption perception indices. The overall index measures the degree to which public officials and politicians in particular countries are involved in corrupt practices such as accepting bribes, taking illicit payments in public procurement and embezzling public funds (Salisu 2006).

The Corruption Perception Index evaluates government corruption on a global scale and the Transparency International (TI) has been evaluating government corruption perception since 1995 and has been monitoring Nigeria’s CPI since 1996. The organization has a mission of stopping corruption and promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity around the world. The organization produces a specific report annually on Nigeria that evaluates the perception of government corruption in the society based on several surveys taken among the public (Stewart 2012).

The 2014 report by the global graft watchdog, Transparency International (TI), has again confirmed this status as it placed Nigeria 39th on the corruption ranking of 175 countries. The country, however, recorded a marginal improvement on the global Corruption Perception Index, moving four points from the previous 35th position in 2012. The latest ranking is a giant leap from that of 2000, when Nigeria was rated the world’s most corrupt country by Transparency International. Nonetheless, there is little to cheer in the latest report. Rather, it shows that we still need to do a lot to address corruption in a way that can boost confidence in the citizenry and the international community. According to the report released on December 3, 2014, Nigeria scored 27 out of out of a maximum 100 marks to clinch 136th position out of the 175 countries surveyed. This means that Nigeria has ‘improved’ by eight points against its 2013 rating as 144th out of 175 countries. A statement issued from the Berlin office of Transparency International shows that more than two- thirds or over 75 percent of the 175 countries surveyed this year scored below 50, on a scale from 0. Countries within the 0-50 range are perceived to be strikingly corrupt (New Telegraph Editorial, 2014).

Nigeria has witnessed the removal of some high profile public personnel such as the former Inspector General of Police Tafa Balogun, former first female Speaker of the House of Representatives Patricia Etteh, former Senate Presidents, former Minister of Education Fabian Osuji and his Health counterpart, Grange and former Governor of Bayelsa State, Dimipreye Alameiyeghsea.

Today, the country is faced with so many security challenges ranging from militant groups in the Niger-Delta, while kidnapping rages in the East and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North. All of these have been attributed to the poverty level in the country, which is as a result of corruption.

The judiciary has its own share of the blame for contributing to the corruption challenges being faced in Nigeria today. While the judiciary remains the last hope of the common man and path to a corruption- free society, some judges have employed all kinds of means and terminologies to deny the ordinary man of justice. The judiciary is seen to be highly compromised. Former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Dahiru Musdapher, on assumption of office stated his resolve to extricate the judiciary from what he termed: “prevailing iniquities”, and stressed that “henceforth, there shall be zero tolerance to judicial corruption or misconduct. As opined by Iroghama (2011), it appears there are judges who have sworn to frustrate the anti- corruption crusade and they do this by granting orders of perpetual injunction to prevent the investigation and trial of even those whose immunity has expired. This is not in any way an attempt to undermine the progressive role some judges have played in bringing corrupt individuals to book. For instance, former Delta State Governor James Ibori, in spite of all the corruption court charges that were levelled against him came out victorious under the Nigeria judicial system only to be arrested in Dubai and extradited to the United Kingdom where he faced fresh charges of money laundering and was subsequently jailed.

In the face of the inability of the state to fight corruption, the people who are the greatest victims of official corruption, must mobilize as victims to ensure transparency and accountability in government. And this is where the civil society organizations have continued to be incapacitated (Godday, 2012).

Civil Society Organizations

Taylor (1990), defines civil society as:

‘the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self supporting, autonomous from the State, and bound by the legal order or set of shared rules... It involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions and ideas, exchange ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the State, and hold State officials accountable. It is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the State’

Taylor (1990), further lists the characteristics of civil societies as follows:

1. An organized civil society organization serves as a check against the excesses of government, human-rights violations, and abuse of the rule of law and monitors the application of constitutional provisions.
2. It increases the participation and the skills of all the various segments of a society and instils a sense of tolerance, thrift, hard work, moderation, and compromise among the various competing parties in the society.
3. It serves as an alternative to political parties and can offer a refuge for those who are shut out from their rights due to non-membership in given political parties.
4. It serves to enhance the bargaining power of interest groups and provides inclusive mechanisms for them.
5. It has a role in mitigating the excesses of fundamentalist extremists and maximalists who tend to have a very narrow view of life, in the context of either/or. It thus also provides other alternatives for negotiation within a multifaceted society.

Also Suberu (1997), defines civil society organizations in terms of different spheres of association. They make a point of delineating the need to keep political society and economic society as separate but correlated components with which civil society organizations is juxtaposed.

For Eghosa (2011), three key elements are important in the definition or conceptualization of civil society: autonomy from the state, public character (setting a normative order for the state), and furtherance of a common good. Grassroots social movements, which draw their strength from solidarity and the struggle against oppression, are parts and parcels of civil society organizations. It needs to be pointed out that civil society organizations encompass a vast array of organizations, which are formal and informal in character. These include: economic; cultural; informational and educational; interest based; developmental; civic-seeking in non-partisan fashion to improve political system; and make it more democratic through anti-corruption effort, by promoting transparency and accountability.

According to Melvin (2007), a civil society organization is considered as a "space" whose function is to mediate between the individual and the State. While there may not be a clear cut definition of civil society organizations, it is widely agreed that it comprises institutions such as religious organizations, labour unions, charities, community groups, non-profits, and the media. In advanced and matured democratic systems these institutions supplement formal processes such as voting and help citizens shape the culture, politics, and economies of their nation.

Generally speaking and for this paper, civil society organizations refers to the sum total of those organizations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus. It includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- i. Social organizations including those representing the children, the women, the youth, the elderly or aged and people with disability and special needs.
- ii. Professional organisations for example, association of artists, engineers, health practitioners, social workers, media, teachers, sports associations, legal practitioners, academia, business organizations, national chamber of commerce, workers, employers, industry and agriculture, as well as other private sector groups;
- iii. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), religious or faith organizations and other faith based organizations;

iv. Others including cultural, student, sports and other informal organizations.

It should be noted that before the advent of NGOs, the traditional watchdog civil society organizations in Nigeria include trade unions, student unions, parents/teachers associations and professional associations. It has been pointed out that in spite of Western specificities that civil society organizations has attracted to itself, it is “identified with that section of society that engages the state for the purpose of constructing, defining and institutionalizing values, norms, rules and principles by which society is governed as well as the terms of such governance” (Agbaje, 1997: 363).

Civil society organizations are mostly formed by people who have common needs, interests and values like tolerance, inclusion, cooperation and equality; and development through a fundamentally endogenous and autonomous process which cannot easily be controlled from outside (Idumange, 2006). In most African countries, it is agreed that the State preceded and had influenced the constitution of contemporary civil society organizations (Agbaje, 1997: 365). Nonetheless, in Africa, there is a legacy of widespread, weak civil society organizations given the fact that throughout the 1960s and 1970s, most governments in the continent progressively narrowed the economic and political space for independent societal action outside the control of the state. However, since the early 1990s, the situation has been slowly changing. For instance, the role of civil society organizations was obvious and critical during and after apartheid system in South Africa.

In Nigeria, civil society organizations have been at the centre-stage in exposing corrupt practices since the return of democratic governance in 1999. For instance, the media had exposed the certificate forgery and perjury of the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Salisu Buhari. Also, there was the scandalous questionable past of the ousted Senate President Evans Enwerem. The press also exposed the N268m contract that necessitated the removal of former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh and many other members of the National Assembly. There was also the disappearance of the sum of \$12.4bn from the Dedicated Account and the scandals involving Halliburton, Siemens, Wilbros, Daimler, Pfizer, Kellong Brown and Root, Securrency International Pty Ltd which exposed Nigeria to ridicule before the international community. (Eme, 2010, p.41). Since the return to democracy in 1999, civil society organizations have provided a veritable platform for the Nigerians to query government policies, actions and inactions. Such policies include: privatization and commercialization of public institutions and services, incessant fuel hikes, retrenchments of workers and implementation of prescribed conditions and unfavourable policies of international finance capitalist institutions, etc.

As noted in Wikipedia (2018), notable civil societies in Nigeria include: Oodua Peoples Congress, Arewa People's Congress, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, PANDEF - Pan Niger Delta Forum, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, Nigeria Labour Congress. Futhermore, Bureau of Public Procurement (2012), lists some of the following civil society organizations in Nigeria:- Active Support for Rural People Initiative (ASURPI), African Centre for Corporate Responsibility(ACCR), African Network for Environment & Economic Justice, Association for Public Policy Analysis, Budget Transparency and Accountability Initiative Nigeria (BTAN), Budget and Procurement Watch (BUPWA), Centre for Organizational and Professional Ethics (COPE-AFRICA), Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Zero Corruption Coalition.

Although civil society organizations in Nigeria have been at the vanguard of the struggle of enthroning accountability and responsiveness in government since 1999, their work has not yielded the desired result due to certain challenges facing them. (Endre, 2002, p.14)

Significant Functions and Contributions of Civil Society Organizations in Tackling Corruption

The functions of civil society organizations are more pronounced in the literature. It is not surprising that in some quarters, it is referred to as an essential 'third' sector or the fourth organ of government. Aristotle equated civil society organizations to the polis (the State), John Keene cited in Mamdani referred civil society in general to “a type of political association which placed its members under the influence of laws and ensured peaceful order and good government” (Mamdani, 1992: 15).

- Promotion of Democratic values: In contemporary democratic societies, the process of democratisation is considered as synonymous with the coming to life of civil society organizations.
- Promotes Good governance, responsiveness and accountability of the state: The strength of civil

society can have a positive influence on the state and the market. Civil society organizations is therefore seen as an increasingly important mediator for promoting good governance like transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability.

- Objective policy analysis and advocacy: Civil society organizations can help further and improve good governance through its policy analysis and advocacy.

Other Primary Functions Includes:

- Regulation and monitoring of state performance and the action and behaviour of public officials;
- Building social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs, civic norms and democratic practices;
- Mobilizing particular constituencies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized sections of masses, to participate more fully in politics and public affairs;
- Development work to improve the wellbeing of their own and other communities. (Idumange, 2006).

Furthermore, Kalikh (2010), highlighted the following functions of civil society organizations

a) Intervening and alerting – raising burning issues, e.g., responding to harm done to individuals or groups, as well as threats to the democratic system and civil rights;

b) “Naming and shaming” – pressuring and reminding, e.g., that specific laws should be adopted or actions taken.

c) Promoting the introduction of actual changes, e.g., court decisions, international treatments, or adopted law amendments.

d) Organizing trainings and seminars to enhance the professional capacities of local leaders and NGOs Kim (2009), also stated that civil society organizations play the following roles in terms of dealing with corruption:

1. control and observation: establishing monitoring and civil oversight of public administration preventing the misuse of power,
2. promoting transparency and accountability;
3. putting pressure on authorities by raising public awareness and campaigning.
4. Exposing corruption cases and criticizes corrupt officials and institutions, including judiciary.
5. Identifying corruption-prone areas within the legal and administrative system. C
6. Civil society organizations make efforts to raise public awareness regarding the existence, causes and gravity of and the threat posed by corruption. It publicizes some indices, reports, and study results for better awareness on the issue.
7. Civil society organizations do not only criticize the problems of corruption, but also gives alternatives for controlling it better.
8. It proposes new policies and legislations for better governance based on integrity and accountability.
9. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of anti-corruption agencies are also one of important roles of anticorruption CSOs.
10. Civil society organizations can initiate a strong coalition among different sectors of the society for fighting against corruption and safeguarding integrity

Gyimah (2010; p.10) using Larry Diamond’s checklist gave details on the various contributions of civil society organizations. These include:

- Helping to pry open authoritarian systems,
- Limiting the power of the state
- Challenging abuses of authority,
- Monitoring elections and enhancing the credibility of the democratic process,
- Educating citizens and building a culture of tolerance and civic engagement.
- Incorporating marginal groups and enhancing responsiveness,
- Providing alternative means for material development,
- Opening and pluralizing the flow of information,
- Building a constituency for economic and political reforms (Gyimah-Boadi, 2006: 100- 111).

In as much as the civil society organizations has not lived up to expectations, their efforts and contributions as non - state actors cannot be undermined, as they have initiated programmes and policies that are geared towards fighting corruption in Nigeria since May 29, 1999. In fact,

investigations of many allegations of corrupt practices by government officials were as a result of pressure mounted by civil society organizations groups that demanded the accountability in the face of scandal. Through investigative and incisive reportage, the media have provided an important counter point to the abuse of an entrusted power for private gains, shedding light on the wrong doings of the public office holders and even in the private sector. Aziken and Agande (2012), opined that the media, alongside other groups, have provided the basic knowledge with which citizens can hold public and private institutions accountable. They have also collaborated with anti-graft and other law enforcement agencies to expose corruption in low and high places.

We have witnessed the useful contributions of the civil society organizations, especially the Save Nigeria Group, Occupy Nigeria Group, NLC, Trade Union Congress (TUC), and others such groups to the inquiry into the oil subsidy removal and subsequent probe into the corruption in the oil sector by the National Assembly. Also, a legal rights advocacy group, Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP) took the National Assembly to court, citing the Freedom of Information Act, 2011, to compel the NASS to state their actual salaries.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the roles of the civil society organizations in fight against corruption prevalent in Nigeria which has had a big negative effect to the growth and development of the nation. The following recommendations are made:

First, the government should make a definite resolution to create an enabling environment for the civil society organizations to operate and deliver their mandate to the people. And one way of doing this is by legislature. By this, government should be compelled, by law, to domesticate most of the international treaties and conventions that the Nigeria government had signed years ago but are yet to be domesticated.

Secondly, the civil society organizations should also focus more on capacity building, technical assistance and information, to enable them empower themselves to serve their communities better. Thirdly, the various civil society organizations groups must be effectively honest, transparent and accountable. It is only by imbibing these very important values that their war against corruption will be effective. In addition, it is only when are transparent that they would have the moral right to carry on with their anti-corruption crusade.

Fourthly, civil society organizations should link the battle against corruption with the struggle for the consolidation of democracy, rule of law and human rights, and they should strive to network better along specific issues and themes to be more effective and visible in their interventions.

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