

The Challenges of Nigerian CSOs to work with Foreign Media and Journalists

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Concept of Civil Society Organisation

The concept of civil society organisation in this case, implies to such organizations that are essentially non - governmental and not - for - profit whose operations hinges on volunteerism, giving and charity by members or non - members, based on the principles; goal; vision; mission and objectives upon which such organizations are founded.

The broad typology of these organisations includes but not limited to - community / interest based organisations (manifesting in various forms),

Faith based organisations, non – governmental organisations and professional groups (including media), etc.

In many situation the CSOs interfaces extensively with the state and other stakeholders including the international community towards promoting such ideals which they consider critical in promotion of rule of law, social cohesion and ‘collective good’.

Concept of CSO (cont.)

Specifically, at the global level, the UN since its creation in 1945 has committed itself to ensure that NGOs have a role to play in her work. The UN Charter Article 71 states:

"The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned."

Over the years the role that CSOs (especially northern NGOs) play in development had continued to evolve considerably leading to its embrace across the world as the third sector in development.

UNDP in 1997 further explains the concept and its interface with the state and the market more succinctly as is presented below.

Civil Society Organizations – A working Definition.

Civil society constitutes a third sector, existing alongside and interacting with the state and market.

CSOs comprise the full range of formal and informal organizations within civil society: NGOs, CBOs, indigenous peoples' organizations, trade unions, social movements, etc.

Source: UNDP, 1997

Overview of CSOs in Nigeria

Nigerian civil society organizations have had a long history of working in time past as mutual help or service-delivery groups at the forefront of championing human, socio - cultural, economic and political advancement of the group or target of such groups in traditional societies looking back to the early 1930s to date. They existed and played different roles in response to the demands of their time. For instance:

Pre - colonial era: these organisations existed in many forms such as age groups, cooperative societies and community associations.

During colonialism: civil society organisations manifested in different forms such as nationalist & protest movements conducting advocacies and mobilising community members to rise against perceived injustice of the colonial administrations. Many of these organisations also transformed into political movements and parties that played key role in the achievement of independence in Nigeria.

Independence and Post: these organisations transformed into formal organisation with constitutions and regularly elected leadership. These groups include: trade unions, youth and student bodies, human rights and pro - democracy groups, women movement and professional associations. (Chom Bagu: 2006)

New CSOs in Nigeria

The history of the new CSOs in Nigeria could be traced to the mid 1980s following the introduction of the structural adjustment programme in 1986 “when the change with the country was given ‘shock treatment’ and forced into a paradigm system / shift that totally dislocated the middle and working classes, the most dynamic classes in any society and fatally weakened their organisations”.

The development brought about the entry of the northern NGOs that has changed the sector to date.

These manifest changes for the CSOs are in terms of: sources of funding, organisational structure, internal governance and direction of accountability.

New CSOs (cont.)

The activities of the CSOs and their Northern NGO collaborators irked government to begin to have some form of regulation on the sector

In response to the new development the military government promulgated Part C of the Companies and Allied Matters Decree (CAMD), Cap 59 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 to deal with the Incorporated Trustees and by extension exerting some form of legality before the law of the organisations within the sector through registration as a corporate body. This decree was later amended in 1999 as part of the Company and Allied Matters Act (CAMA).

Media in Nigeria’s Development Experience.

The history of Nigeria Mass Media is over 150 years dating back to 1843 when the Print Journalism began in Nigeria with the installation of the Printing Press

at Calabar by the Presbyterian Mission from which time the sector had continued to blossom to date.

Today, there are both public, private or independent as well as foreign media organisations (covering both the print and electronic) operating in Nigeria and cutting across the entire country.

Being the Fourth Estate of the realm, the sector is saddled with the task of informing and educating Nigerians on development processes and issues within and outside the country.

On their experiences, Journalists and indeed media outfits working in Nigeria over the years do have different experiences which are largely based on the mode of the nation and particularly the government in power.

CSO & the Media Since 1999.

Nigeria returned to democratic government in 1999 after over 15 years of successive military rule from 31st December, 1983 – May, 29th 1999. A period that witnessed an unprecedented decline in both media and NGO sector activities.

However, the tide began to rekindle following the General Elections of 1999 and subsequent inauguration of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo led government (29th May, 1999 – 28th May, 2007) up to the current government.

From the period May 29th 1999 to date, the unparalleled contribution and collaboration of the media and CSOs to promote social cohesion and peace through information and education has remained worthy of note.

Highlight of Achievements

Specifically, the media and CSOs have played active part in the gains made in Nigeria since her returned to democracy in 1999 in the following the areas:

Economic Development & Engagement: increasing citizens understanding of government economic plans and policy thrust NEEDS, NV20: 2020, 7 Point Agenda, Transformation Agenda as well as the MDGs and Post 2015 Development Agenda, (including mobilisation for mass protest when the need arises as witnessed during the Fuel Subsidy Match of January, 2012 and the ongoing BringBackOurGirls Campaign)

Legal and Constitutional Reforms: 1999 Constitution Amendments, enactment of critical laws - BPE Act, EFCC & ICPC Acts, Public Procurement Act 2007, FOI Act 2010, Constitutional Conference 2014, etc. as well as the promotion and observance of rule of law,

Highlight of Achievements (cont.)

Deepening Democracy: Elections - electoral processes, legal regimes for elections, party and candidates campaigns, voter registration,, imperative of violence - free pools, promotion of transparency and accountability in government through citizens participation;

General Wellbeing – Poverty mitigation and reduction initiatives, Education, Health – HIV/AIDS, Malaria, TB, Child Under 5 Health, Maternal Health, Sanitation and most recently Ebola Virus Disease

Security: the defense and promotion of national values and ethos, campaign against Inter-tribal and religious crisis, militancy, terrorism, etc. as well as educating and informing Nigerians of government commitment to international peace and rule of law.

Challenges in Working with the Foreign Journalist and Media in Reporting Electoral Process and Terrorism

Timeliness of information

Weak capacity of CSOs occasioned by

high NGO staff

High organization turnover

The concept of terrorism is nascent in the Nigeria domain and very few organizations had ventured into the sector

Elections are usually approached in Nigeria on an ad hoc basis which is also the situation that pervades for the CSOs sector

Lack of sufficient and in-depth knowledge and data on terrorism in Nigeria (including weak documentation by many CSOs)

The gradual politicization of the NGO sector (including NGOs Platforms being used as First Lady's Pet Project)

Emerging Practice in NGO and Journalists / Media relations:

Perceived cost of engaging the media

Brown envelope syndrome

Funder's conditionality's

Lack of internal institutional framework to foster partnership with the media:

Most CSOs do not have media department

Most CSOs do not have trained personnel in their employ to man media engagement

Lack of requisite information on the programme thrust of most media houses be with the local or foreign media outfits as well as the journalist covering specific programmes

Inadequate preparation for media events by CSO

For example Nigerian CSOs want the media to tell their story instead of them telling the media to story to share

Recommendations

Building of Strategic alliance with foreign journalist and media eg. through training CSOs on engaging and working with the media

Promote the de-politicization of terrorism and electoral process in Nigeria

Develop a database of foreign and local journalist and media outfits CSOs and contact persons working on terrorism and election sector and share same with CSOs

Advocate to donors to work more with credible and independent CSOs as against political inclined CSOs who would not be willing to grant interviews to the media when its contradict their political alliance

Promote effective operationalization of the FOI Act to enhance CSOs access to data and on a timely basis

Advocate to donors to ensure funding of CSOs media engagement components as part of overall project funding (including establishment of media unit and or focal persons)

I Thank You All for Listening.