

## **Civil Society Organizations and the Entrenchment of Democracy in the Fourth Republic: An Appraisal**

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### **Abstract**

*Democracy has inherent mechanism for resolving conflict, the provision of court and tribunals provide an alternative means for resolving conflict in a democracy. This, in other words can be understood as democratic peace where processes and procedures for seeking redress are imbued in a democracy. With this in mind, democracy cannot work well where democratic principles are not well established. To achieve this objective, several stakeholders of which civil society is a critical part has a role to play. This paper focuses on the need to entrench democratic ethos in Nigeria. The study examines the roles played by civil Society in the entrenchment of democracy in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Using a qualitative method through the extensive use of secondary data, the paper attempts to provide answers to the questions such as: How effective is the civil society organizations in the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria? What are the militating factors that can hinder the achievement of this objective? To what extent has the body itself imbibed the culture of peace in its approach to fostering democratic ideals? The paper concludes that the availability of the civil society organizations has helped to foster democratic ethos in the country. It however recommends the need to make the group more visible in the rural areas where lessons in democratic ethics are more required, it recommends that the group should seek more independent source of revenue to enhance objectivity*

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*and credibility in its advocacy and advocated that the group should be more proactive and not reactive in its dealings.*

*Keywords: civil society, democracy, democratic peace, democratic ethos*

## **Introduction**

Civil Society historically has its expression in every society and has always played a role in the social, political and economic process in the society. The notion of civil society has become, at least since the “second wave” of democratization at the end of the 1980s, an analytical instrument to measure and explain political changes in formerly non-democratic political societies. This notion, despite its European or Western origin, has found its place of acceptance also within African academics and political leaders. In Nigeria, the instrumentality of mass resistance and sustained opposition from the civil society forced the military out of power in 1999. On May 29 of the same year, a new civilian administration was sworn into office heralding the beginning of the Fourth Republic. This democratic experiment has come with great hope and expectations not minding the fact that the process was mooted and birthed by the military that had tenaciously held on to political power and so lacked the moral latitude to convince the generality of the citizenry of its success. This at the earlier stage make people not to have trust on the sincerity of the military to abdicate power.

From inception in 1999, democratic system in Nigeria is riddled with corrupt practices, human right abuses, electoral frauds, political godfatherism, violence, economic injustice and the rise in ethnic militia movements that tend to weigh heavily on governance structure in Nigeria. The civil rule the people yawned for has been replaced with frustration and hopelessness as those elected by the majority to represent the people continue to live in affluence, and those they lead continue to live in penury. Consequently, the state exhibits very little concern for the vulnerable segments of the population. Hence, when the people are further estrange from the state, the people begin to relate to the state

as an alien institution which has proved itself largely irrelevant to their daily needs. This is understandable because Nigerian state has virtually abandoned its responsibilities to the citizenry. This attitude has in recent times led to playing with concept referring to the state as a crippled giant, and has also warranted a notion contemplating if the country is falling or displaying the qualities of a failed state (Osaghae 2002).

Despite successful transitions in many African societies, Nigeria inclusive, consolidation of democracy has been a huge problem confronting political elites (Van de Walle & Butler, 1999, Barkan, 2000; Sand Brook 1998). Donor countries have encouraged African political elites through aid to entrench democracy and to ensure that these emerging democracies do not relapse into authoritarian regimes which governed those countries before the early 1990s. Consequently, Civil Society Organizations role becomes very useful in these countries in the entrenchment of democracy. According to Ikelegbe, civil society provides the oil that lubricates the relationship between the government, business outfits and the people. He observed that emerging democracies especially in Africa and Nigeria cannot be entrenched without a virile and vibrant civil society group (Ikelegbe, 2007). Muadasiru and Moshood (2017) equally affirm the usefulness of the CSOs in conflict, they argue that democracy and development will be elusive where there is no peace. The question then arise that how best has civil society contributed to the development of democracy in Nigeria? In what ways can the civil society further help to strengthen the contribution to democracy in Nigeria? The paper is divided into six sections including the introduction, conceptual clarification, history of civil society, roles of civil society in fostering democratic principles, factors militating against the effectiveness of civil society in Nigeria, and conclusion. The next segment deals with explanation of concept as they are used in this paper.

### Conceptual Clarification

The realm of politics is today flooded with terms such as ‘civil society’, social movement, nongovernmental organizations [NGOS], non-profit

association [NPA], private voluntary organizations [PVOs], independent advocacy groups [IAGs], segmental polycentric ideologically integrated networks [SPINs] and more. Civil society is the oldest of these concepts dating back to English political thought of the sixteenth century. The contemporary proliferation of broadly related terms perhaps in part reflects in certainty confusion and disagreement about the meaning of the older notion. 'Civil society' has been enmeshed with considerable debates as to what constitute "civil society" and how it should relate to government. The need for clarity is underlined by the fact that the term has been bandied about by agencies that have vested interest in dictating the parameters of participation. The diversities of views on CSOs led Young (1994) to aver that:

The concept is vague and shrouded with a lot of ambiguities. He noted that; civil society [organizations] is indeed an elusive concept and a more fugitive reality. But the remarkable energies devoted to its definition and pursuit strike me as the most powerful force on the scene The quest for a civil society organization that can reinvent the state in its own admittedly idealized image is a drama of redemption whose potential nobility commands our administration.

It should be noted that the definitional crisis in social science concepts is normal because, different scholars view different concepts from distinct precinct. Civil society in broad terms refers to those social groups outside the realm of the state, but operating within the civic and private spheres. Adebayo (2001) defines civil society in its specific as being "made up of associations–voluntary, autonomous, professional or non-professional which have arisen out of the self-organizational effort of various social forces. From this definition, civil society exists outside the state and ideally relies on the initiative and commitment of its members. This view is in tandem with Osaghae (1997) when he defines civil society as comprising of "the whole gamut of formal and informal associational life insofar as the associations are relatively autonomous of the state, are public

(that is, involve in setting the normative order for the state as well as in furtherance of the common goal), and civil “that is unlike the state, they are voluntary bodies which reconcile differences on the basis of mutual interests rather than coercive means”. He however, makes the point about the differentiation within which society and the fact that it is a contested terrain, which has implications for its effectiveness in promoting the democratic project.

What is significant to note is that civil society is a contested and sometimes ideological concept used in referring to social forces or groups that are independent of the state. Imade (2007 cited in Odeh 2012) further views civil society as a source of counter-hegemonic social movements, concerned with political and societal actors, playing by the rule of the political game and thus seeking to legitimize the state but not to win control over the state. In the same vein, Diamond (1999) sees civil society as that realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, largely self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by a legal order and a set of shared rules. He further stated that it is distinct from society in general and that it involves citizens acting together and collectively in the public sphere, to express their interest, passion and ideas, exchange information, achieve material goals, make demands on the state and hold local and state officials accountable. It is pertinent to note from the above that ‘interest’ remains a defining factor that spurs members of civil society to act collectively in a quest to actualizing their objectives. However, these interests in some cases run contrary to state interest and policies.

Diamond (1999), further ascribes certain functions to civil society in a democratic setting. These include: providing the basis for the limitation of state power. It is supposed to supplement the role of political parties by stimulating participation, promote the development of political attribute and creating channels other than political parties to articulate, aggregate and represent their interests. For Whitfield (2002), civil society organizations are specific kinds of non-state organizations in public sphere which engage in organizational activity according to particular criteria. He added that they are instrumentally positioned to make

states more democratic, more transparent and more accountable. These organizations tend to be independent from the state, sufficiently financed and expertly led, in order to overcome opposition to democracy and participation in its consolidation. On his part, Orji (2009, 9-80) sees civil society as organized activities by groups 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. In his own submission, Olateju (2012) 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”.

Civil society groups are not formally part of the state apparatus, nor do they seek to gain control of state office. On these criteria, political parties are excluded from civil society. Also, civil society lies outside the ‘public sector’ of official governance. Civil society is not a market, that is, it is non-commercial realm, the initial intention is not to make money, but to render services. Civil society bodies are not companies or part of firms; nor do they seek to make profits. Thus, mass media, the leisure industry and cooperatives world as business enterprises, would not normally be considered part of civil society. In recent times, there have been some infiltration into the activities of the civil society groups as in some cases some of it are government sponsored especially during the time of election. Also, some of these groups have their initial intention to make money which often make such group susceptible to manipulation. For the purpose of this paper, the activities which are considered to be part of civil society include when they involve a deliberate attempt – from outside the state and the market, and in one or the other organized fashion to shape policies, norms/or deeper social structures. In a word, civil society exists when people make concerted efforts through voluntary associations to mould rules; both official, formal, legal arrangements and informal social construct with the view to engaging the state constructively and challenge it to follow the part of development. How has this group evolved over time? A brief history of the group is stated in the next segment.

### Nigeria's Civil Society Organizations in History

The evolution of Civil Society Organizations in Africa could be traced to the colonial era where most African nationalists resisted or attempted to challenge the stronghold of colonial domination and subjugation in the various colonial territories around the continent. Mudasiru et al (2017) Osaghae (2002), Hopkins (1973), Ikime (1977) Jordan (1978) and Thompson (1977) all agree that various Nigerian nationalists, namely Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Herbert Macaulay and the likes contributed tremendously towards the resistance against the shackles of colonialism in Nigeria. Thus, these distinguished nationalists demonstrated clearly Nigeria's love for freedom and sovereignty by the ways they reacted to British attempts to gain economic and political control of Nigeria. This burdensome attempt to obstruct colonial domination was further boosted by the formation of socio-cultural groups such as Egbe Omo Oduduwa, the Jamiyar Mutanem Arewa and the likes, as an inbuilt mechanism to checkmate the excesses of external misrule in Nigeria.

It is interesting to note that, most of these cultural groups and hegemonic configurations were later transformed into political institutions as a means of sectional agitations. For example, while the Pan-Yoruba cultural organization, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa metamorphosed into Action Group (AG) the Jamiyar Mutanem Arewa transformed into erstwhile Northern People's Congress (NPC) (Osaghae 2002; Hidgkins, 1971). From the foregoing, one can rightly ascertain that civil society formations in Nigeria have a very long history of existence in this part of the world. Consequently, the present status of Nigerian Civil Society Group could be said to be a product of historical development of vibrant social structures existing in order to guide against the subversion of the will of people. However, the pre-colonial civil society came into existence mainly to fight against what they perceived to be an unprecedented oppression of the Nigerian masses by the colonial masters.

After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the political leaders at the time attempted, as expected of any democratic state, to deepen the growth by providing a conducive space for the existence of civil society

organizations. However, the efforts of the post-independence leaders were thwarted by military intervention into Nigerian politics which began in 1966. Thus, Nigeria was under successive military regimes that were highly dictatorial and anti-civil society. Although very few civil society organizations existed during these periods, they were very vocal and confrontational despite military intimidations. With support from international civil society organizations, many Local Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria began to agitate for the return to civilian rule (Ikelegbe 2001).

During this period of Military rule (1966 to 1979 and 1983-1999) civil society and professional organizations such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), faith-based civil society group such as the National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO) and National Association of Nigerian Student (NANS) were at the forefront in the fight against military rule and restoration of democracy and democratic government in Nigeria (Moshood 2017; Orji, 2004). Despite the different military governments that ruled the country, and the difficulties experienced by civilian governments, Nigerian believe that democratic governance based on election of political leaders is preferable to unelected military regimes. This preference is based on the fact that a multiparty system, free press and CSOs are supported and better accommodated within the sphere of governance under democratic civilian administration than in a military rule (McCormic, 2004; Ajayi 2006). The struggle by the civil society organizations culminated in the birth of democratic rule in 1999 which is hereafter referred to as the fourth republic. How has this group fared since inception? The next section looks at some of the roles played by the CSOs in deepening democracy in Nigeria.

### **Civil Society and Democracy in the Fourth Republic**

The civil society group has played different roles in the entrenchment of democratic ideals in the extended fourth republic in Nigeria. Such roles



are subsumed under the following subheadings which include Tenure elongation, instilling democratic norms, defense of people's interest, and impact on conflict resolution. They are now discussed briefly.

### Tenure elongation

Contrary to the provision of Section 137 sub-section (1b) of the 1999 Constitution which states *inter alia* that "A person shall not be qualified for election to the office of the President if he has been elected to such office at any two previous elections". The attempt by the ex-President Obasanjo whose administration spanned 1999 through 2007 to stay in power beyond constitutional limit was vehemently resisted by the Civil Society in Nigeria. Those who opposed the third term bid cuts across different segments of the Nigerian society. Prominent political gladiators including the then Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, some members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), other political parties and civil society organizations were antagonistic to this clandestine political move (Saliu & Muhammed, 2007). The press and professional organization like Nigeria Bar Association were opposed to tenure elongation. Civil Society Groups such as Global Rights, Open Society Institute of West Africa and Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) were against the third time agenda. For example, the Nigeria Bar Association organized one day court boycott to protest against third term bid (Odion 2006). Equally, a sustained protests against the tenure elongation bid by the Civil Society was championed by the National Civil Society Coalition Against Third Term (NACATT) under the Chairmanship of the late Bamidele Aturu who described third term agenda as immoral, corrupt, divisive, insulting, an evidence of failure, capable of creating a political uncertainty and of course it is unconstitutional (quoted in Omede 2014). Many more protests from civil society groups paved way for the Senate to throw away in its entirety a bill 116 seeking amendments/ alterations of 1999 Constitution of Nigeria which sought a three-term of 4 years for both President and Governors as against two-term of 4 years as contained in section 137 sub-section (1b). (Also, see <http://www.socialistworld.net/.doc/2335>).

### **Guarding against subversion of democratic norms**

There is no good politics without conflict, and there can be no functioning democracy without rooms for competition that may lead to conflicts. The essence of politics is not to avoid conflict. Rather, the system should be able to contain conflicts and there should be an in-built mechanism to mitigate the escalation of such conflict. This in some instances may be a conflict between parties, social groups and other social interest groups. The ability to find effective bargaining and mediate between forces in an impartial and objective means is part of ways democracy can be entrenched. In this case, civil society has a big role to play (Diamond 1999). The civil society group role was felt in this regard during the health saga of the former President on Nigeria, late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in September 2009. The late President was flown to Saudi-Arabia for treatment as a result of his ill health. Some prominent people in the ruling political party then People's Democratic Party (PDP) largely from the Northern part of the country and indeed those close to the late President did not support the idea that the then Vice-President of the country, Goodluck Jonathan should assume the leadership of the nation in acting capacity. Their argument was premised on the fact that late President Yar'Adua did not give a written permission to the Vice-President to act in that capacity when he was leaving for Saudi-Arabia for treatment as stipulated by the now amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Onwuamaeze, 2011:11).

This scenario created a state of confusion and stalemate to the extent that even the then members of the Nigerian National Assembly were almost polarized along religious and ethnic lines. It was the action of the CSOs headed by the 'Save Nigeria Group' (SNG) and Enough is Enough groups through street protests in major cities in Nigeria, including Abuja and Lagos, that forced the members of the National Assembly to invoke the "Doctrine of Necessity" for the first time in the nation's political history. This enabled the National Assembly to declare the then Vice President Jonathan as acting President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 9 February, 2010. This singular act of CSOs brought together all segments of the Nigerian society thereby bringing about peace and stability required

for development and prevented avoidable breakdown of laws and order (Onwuamaeze, 2011:11).

### **Civil society and defense of people's interest**

The CSOs in Nigeria by their activities are seen to be the real defender of the people's rights and interests against unpopular, unproductive policies and programmes of government. For instance, on the 1 of January, 2012, the Federal Government of Nigeria through one of its agencies in the petroleum sector, Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA), increased the ex-pump price of petrol from N65 to N141, on what it termed the implementation of the policy of deregulation of the petroleum sector and subsequent removal of 'fuel subsidy' hitherto enjoyed by the people in form of lower petroleum prices in the country. The justification for the policy of deregulation of the petroleum sector was that government subsidized petroleum to the tune of NGN 1.5 trillion equivalent to USD 9.68 billion in 2009, and NGN1.7 trillion or USD10.96 billion in 2011, which was more than the NGN 1.319 trillion or USD8.5 billion allocated to capital expenditure in the national budget of 2012 (Ameh & Josiah, 2011:1-21; Soyinka, 2012:46-57).

In a meeting with the President Goodluck Jonathan with the Civil Society Organizations where representatives from the Centre for Constitutional Rights, CLEEN Foundation, NANS, National Human Rights Commission among others were in attendance. The argument of the CSOs was that while it is on record that huge sums of government revenue went into subsidy payment to oil marketers, they observed that substantial amount of these claims were based on fraud by the oil marketers in collaboration with government officials in NNPC and PPPRA. Furthermore, CSOs pointed out that because of the low minimum wage paid to workers in Nigeria NGN 7, 500 or USD 48.39 per month at the time the policy was introduced, any increase in pump price of petrol would be felt by the people and automatically translates into price increase in other areas of the economy such as, high cost of transportation, food, shelter and other basic household needs. The situation led to a one week general protest

strike throughout the nation called by CSOs and spearheaded by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC). The strike led to revenue loss in the nation's economy to the tune of NGN 300 billion or USD 1.94 billion (Ajaero, 2012:12-18; Soyinka, 2012:46-57; Sahara Reporter 2011).

The federal government in a bid to stop the strike, agreed to investigate the corruption charges against its officials. The investigation was first carried out by the Nigerian National Assembly. As will soon be established, the report actually confirmed the position of Nigerian CSOs about corruption in the payment by government of the petroleum subsidy claims to oil marketers. It was unveiled through the investigation that 24 oil marketers defrauded the nation in two ways: First, those marketers that did not obtain forex, but claimed to have imported petroleum products based on which they have collected subsidy; and second, those marketers who obtained forex based on the subsidy claim. The National Assembly recommended the prosecution of the oil marketers in court to serve as deterrent to others (Ajaero, 2012:12-18).

As soon as the National Assembly's report on the fraudulent subsidy claim was submitted to the presidency for implementation, ex-President Goodluck Jonathan directed the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice to set up a presidential panel to further review the report submitted by the National Assembly with a view to ascertain those to be charged to court. The presidential panel was chaired by Aigboje Aig-Imokhuede, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Access Bank Plc. The presidential panel indicted 21 oil firms out of the 24 initially submitted for scrutiny to have defrauded the nation to the tune of NGN 382 billion of USD 2.46 billion. The panel recommended that the 21 oil marketers should be made to refund the sum of NGN382 billion equivalent to USD2.46 billion to the coffers of the Federal Government, and in addition, they should be prosecuted in the law court to prevent similar occurrence. As a result, the 21 oil marketers have been charged to court for financial crime against the nation (Ajaero, 2012:12-18; Onuorah et al, 2012:1-4).

### Civil society groups and conflict resolution in nigeria

Conflict is an inevitable part of human existence. However, the ability and means through which conflicts are resolved in human society are essential to peace-building. This against the backdrop that, there can neither be bad peace nor good war anywhere in the world. The role of CSOs in conflict resolution in Nigeria especially in the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria help to further sustain peace in Nigeria as a whole. This role can be explicate from direct and indirect involvement in conflict management. According to Ibeanu (2006) cited in Mudasiru and Moshood (2017:72). He cited two case studies in the direct involvement of CSOs in the de-escalation of conflict in the Niger Delta. The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) obviously a pressure group and Community Rights Initiative (CORI) present rich experiences of the specific roles of Civil Society Organizations in conflict management. Firstly, he reports that the intervention of these groups centre on peace building and conflict prevention which started in 2005 in some parts of Ogoniland.

The project seeks to raise awareness about the negative impact of conflict, especially within and among Ogoni communities. It does this through the instrumentality of mediation and alternative dispute resolution methodologies. The anchor agency for this project is the Ogoni Peace Action Committee (OPAC), which consists of prominent and respected Ogoni people and some outsiders Ibeanu, (2006) cited in Mudasiru et al. (2017:80).

The second phase in which MOSOP is actively involved in the conflict project is seen in a meaningful dialogue with both state and non-state actors that include, political class, youths, government agencies and Civil Society Organizations. The project began across Ogoni land in 2005. Also, MOSOP engages in the “Mop up arms” project which entails engaging security agencies and militia to get the militants to voluntarily surrender their arms with assurance that they will be immune from prosecution. (Mudasiru et al 2017). Another role played by the CSOs is noticed in the activities of the Community Right Initiative (CORI), some of its previous and ongoing projects include; negotiation and conflict resolution project which it has

been implementing since 1996 in Ogba Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area. The aim of CORI is to bring to fore mutual understanding among the host communities, oil companies and government officials through the means of negotiation, and this has led to the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Egi community, Elf Oil and government (Ibeanu 2006 cited in Mudasiru et al., 2017:76)

Alluding to the above (Mudasiru et al., 2017) opined that the activities of CORI has, in no small measure, tamed the tension and pressure from the militants in this area of the Niger Delta. They equally noted that in spite of the monopolistic claim of the government as the instrument of prevention and de-escalation of conflict due to enormous resources enjoyed by the state, the CSOs have made significant impact. They aver that for the fact that CSOs provide a non-violent alternative for the people to air their grievances against the state is a great leverage they have over the state since in most cases, the government is always caught in the web of conflict. (Mudasiru & Moshood, 2017:77). This peace initiatives by the CSOs have helped to sustain peace in the Niger Delta region and country at large. It has provided platform for peaceful transition of government within the region. The next segment briefly consider some of the factors militating against the effectiveness of CSOs and attempts to offer some recommendations.

In this section, we have attempted a discussion of the role of CSOs in ensuring that third term agenda was scuttled, how they resisted the subversion of democratic norms, their role in fighting in defense of people's rights and the role they played in conflict resolution in the country. The next segment will dissect factors hampering the effectiveness of this group in Nigeria.

### **Factors Affecting Effectiveness of Civil Society Groups**

The civil society groups established in the aftermath of the May 1999 handover, and those that are critical to the process of democratic entrenchment including among others: the human right groups, conflict management groups, civic and political education groups, anti-corruption

groups, constitutional reform groups, organized labour groups, women's organizations, youth groups, student organizations, business, professional associations and faith based/ religious groups regardless of their proliferation, have a number of weaknesses. One of the main weaknesses of civil society lies in the urban-rural dichotomy to the extent that the vast majority of civil society groups are based in urban areas. Even the urban areas that are homes to civil society groups are situated largely in the Southern parts of the country and Federal Capital Territory.

According to Ikubaje (2011), this anomaly makes it difficult for majority of the Nigerian population that lives in rural areas to appreciate the role they play, imbibe their doctrines and through the process, develop political consciousness and confidence to resist inducement from politicians. The second weakness lies in the divisions that have occurred among the ranks of civil society groups immediately after the disengagement of the military from politics. The coalitions of human rights and pro-democracy NGOs, such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and the Joint Action Committee on Nigeria (JACON), have shown that they are not immune to ethnic, religious, social divisions and biases that affect the wider society. According to Odeh (2012) the divisions among the Nigerian Civil Society along ethnic and regional lines have not helped its democracy advocacy. This has led to disunity and disagreement among the Nigerian CSO practitioners in term of decision making and unity of purpose. Ikubaje (2011) corroborates that such inherent divisiveness weakens efficiency and makes the associations vulnerable to penetration by government agents.

In the same vein, Ojo (2011 cited in Odeh 2012) noted that civil society organizations in Nigeria are faced with lack of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy. It is expected that any organization that wishes to engage the state must be well equipped with superior knowledge and articulation of strong points. Corroborating this, Ibeanu (2006) argues that pro-democracy CSOs lack the necessary structure and formula to engage the state. This he pointed out constitutes

a major challenge to their quest to consolidate on the gains of democracy that was hardly fought to achieve.

Another important defect of Civil Society in Nigeria is inadequate representation. This is arguably the most difficult shortcoming to redress and warrants more extended discussion. If civil society is suitably to provide welfare, educate citizens, give voice, fuel debate, secure transparency and accountability establish legitimacy and promote social cohesion, then, all stakeholders must have access and preferably equal opportunities to participate. Indeed, biased access to civil society can reproduce or even enlarge structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges connected with class, nationality and race especially gender. This is like enlarging the problem they are established to solve.

Unless civil society becomes responsive to its important role, the experiences of Nigeria in the present circumstances seem to be moving in the direction of democratic erosion, denoting the slow and gradual decay of democracy, rather than democratic entrenchment. In the face of this scenario, civil society has an important role to play towards the pursuit of good governance and the consolidation of a hard-won democracy. Civil society can play a more pro-active role in propagating what Peter Ekeh refers to as “the republican principle” which simply means that the state belongs to its citizens. The arrogant perception, widely held by elected officials in the Fourth Republic that the powers and institutions of state are now theirs to use for purposes of primitive accumulation, rather than perceiving their official positions as being held in public trust, should be the focus of unrelenting but strategic attack by the CSOs. Civil Society should communicate and cultivate values and attitudes that can help to support and consolidate Nigeria’s democracy. A major plank in this endeavour should be a focus on upholding the rule of law. This will facilitates a movement towards a strong state and a strong civil society with a less parochial focus. The CSOs should be organizations which rank should be opened to all, including women. This will help bridge the gap of inequality that exist within the larger society. A civil society which



intent to preach inclusive government should open its ranks to important segment of the society such as youth, women, and people of ideas.

**Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are made to enhance the role of CSOs in the entrenchment of democracy Nigeria:

- Civil society in Nigeria should become more national in their spread and membership in the range of issues that they tackle and bridge the dichotomy between rural and urban concerns across the country. This will transform the CSOs to indomitable and popular political force that will be hard for the political class to ignore.
- Civil society should be more pro-active by mobilizing the citizens both in rural and urban areas to participate in party politics where political class perpetrates their self-serving interests instead of CSOs engaging in protests, mere monitoring of elections that usually turn to be a charade in Nigeria. If democracy is to be entrenched, CSOs must factor ways to ensure internal democracy among the existing political parties.
- For CSOs to play the role that will culminate to democratic entrenchment in Nigeria, they must eschew primordial sentiments and interests and become united and cohesive with the view to holding the representatives of the state accountable and transparent.
- Civil society as a matter of necessity should co-opt women and youth which are also critical stake holders in any progressive society into its fold.
- Civil society should always be present and active even if there is no political vacuum created or even if there is a vibrant practice of a democratic culture. There should be constant checking and questioning of the system as well as making influence on policy issues, especially those policies that affect democratic participation social and economic development of the citizens.

- It is also significant that the CSOs should ensure that their internal procedures and organization structures conform to the highest ethical standards of probity, accountability, transparency, a culture of binding commitment as well as improving internal governance mechanism.
- Towards democratic entrenchment in Nigeria, CSOs should endeavour to acquire more skills, knowledge, and techniques on how to pro-actively engage the political class constructively; this will portray CSOs as partner in progress and change the negative narrative of being antagonistic to the state.
- Civil society should equally champion the course of making political offices less attractive so as to discourage “Money bags” politicians who are bent on circumventing the electoral process with their inordinate appetite for power.
- Most importantly, civil society has a critical role at the national level, particularly in relation to national reconciliation. CSOs must be directly involved in advocating for conditions under which a national reconciliation and reconstruction can be undertaken and sustained.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has assessed the role of civil society in the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria. What seems to be uncontroverted is that, civil society has played indispensable role in the fight against military juntas and subsequent entronement of democracy in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. The study found out that despite the achievements recorded by civil society in post transition Nigeria, much is still needed to be done for it is evident that a civilian government does not necessarily equate to democratic government. Democracy is shallow and has failed to take deep roots because political parties in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic are bereft of articulated ideologies that could strengthen democratic foundation.

Thus, the need for civil society to become more actively involved in the democratic project has become a political demand. It is imperative that CSOs in Nigeria become virile, articulate, cohesive and focused to engage the state. They should be equipped with needed human and material resources to mobilize the people and provide a credible platform that will aid the quest for the establishment of a durable democratic order. However, while the civil society has a crucial role to play in entrenching Nigeria's democratic system, it is ultimately the Nigerian people that have to determine the political context in which democracy can be solidified.

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