ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN STRENGTHENING LEGISLATIVE PRACTICES: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract:
This research has come to spotlight on the role of Civil Society in strengthening legislative practices in Nigeria. The role of the Civil Society can be said to be important and needful in the legislative practices in Nigeria. Civil Society has been widely recognised as an essential 'third' sector. Its strength has a positive influence on the legislative practices of the legislatures. The paper concluded and recommended that there should be an increase and focus networking among Civil Society groups to aid training of cadres in grassroots mobilisation and advocacy; more efforts should be directed at service delivery and the reduction of corruption in the Civil Society in order to properly strengthen the legislative practices in Nigeria; finally, Civil Society groups should improve their effectiveness by clearly defining their objectives, strengthening their technical competencies, increase in knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy

Keywords: Civil Society, Legislature, Advocacy, Governance

1. Introduction

The activities of Civil Society leading to democratisation in 1999 in Nigeria was very much a response to the declining economic and political capacity of the Nigerian state. It was in a sense a protest against political decay, on the one hand, and lack of competitive party politics (or competitive politics), and also, a denunciation of the establishment of a patrimonial regime centred on personalisation of power, suppression of civil liberties, and political malpractices (Agbese 1992; Chazan *et al*, 1988; Kukah 2002; Toye 1994). Civil Society, therefore, becomes a challenger to the authoritarian African state (Toye 1994). Kukah (2002) presents the circumstances and background and activities of Civil Society in Nigeria, particularly as part of the opposition to military rule and the non-existent of competitive politics and free press. Accordingly, during these periods, the Civil Society like Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Campaign for Democracy (CD) and others were at the forefront in the fight against the perpetuation of military rule and dictatorship, and the need to

restoration of democracy and democratic governance in Nigeria (Orji 2004a). Civil Society can therefore be either a progressive or reactionary force.

The phenomenon of Civil Society was followed by international donor support and funds (Bebbington & Riddell. 1997). This created a new field of endeavour in the Nigerian larger socio-economic space. The donor-countries, international multilateral agencies, international foundations, became aggressive in promoting Civil Society organisations, also tacitly demanded equal *aggression* on the part of Civil Society in the pursuit of their agenda. Thus, advocacy became the new buzz word, and the panacea to long standing political and economic problems.
The concept of Civil Society relationship with the parliament is not novel in academic discourse. However, in Nigeria, it is becoming a current theme and strong at that, largely because when academics reflect on the role of Civil Society in the "struggle" for democracy in the 1990s leading to a democratic dispensation in 1999, it makes the debate more apt. Thus, it is understandable when we see the strong resurgence in research studies on Civil Society, but more importantly the critical questions of its role in strengthening aspects of the political and governance space.

In Nigeria, Civil Society Organizations have largely been associated with hardliner, free spirited and confrontational relations with the State. The thinking was that only those organisations and movements that confront and challenge state power constitute Civil Society (John Keane 1988; Naomi Chazan *et al* 1988; Chazan *et al* 1994; Bayart 1986). For several years, this thinking defined the perspective of the Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria, particularly in the 1980s.

It is therefore right to argue that a vibrant Civil Society is sine qua non to the sustenance of any nations' development. Studies have shown that the role of Civil Society is vital in the legislative practices (Kaul & Shakdher 2000; Yohanness 1997; Gyimah-Boadi 2004). According to Yohanness (1997) this role can be viewed from three dimensions: improving the quality of governance; second, strengthening legislative practices; and third, working towards gaining the commitment of all elected officials, and public servants to good governance. This is because they are the agents of development in any nation. They serve as the internal correctional mechanism to check and balance the activities of legislature and governments to avoid wasteful spending, misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds (Bebbington & Riddell. 1997) and help determine or prioritise the needs of the people.

Beyond examining the Nigerian experience, this research goes further to examine the expected role of Civil Society Organisations. The reasoning is that if the role of the Civil Society organisations is established, then, are the roles enough? And, are the organisations playing these roles sufficient enough to contribute to the larger objectives of strengthening legislative practices? The second aspect of our reasoning is, what is the situation at the subnational level of Nigeria's federalism. Are Civil Society organisations fairing at all, well, or are non-existent in strengthening legislative practices at the State Houses of Assembly's.

Strong Civil Society capacity and influence must be recognised and seen by the legislature as critical to building constituencies and consensus on legislative practice in the areas of advocacy, information sharing and local by-ins. Thus, their involvement can help parliamentary practice use resources to generate sustainable inputs.

But is there a role for Civil Society in legislative practices in Nigeria? What is the relationship between the roles and activities of Civil Society, legislative practices and governance in Nigeria? How can Civil Society contribute to deepening legislative practices, and entrenchment further democratic norms for political development in Nigeria? What roles can the Civil Society play to enhance legislative practices?

To address these questions in depth this research study adopts a qualitative methodology, using the simple narrative approach. As part of its methodology the researchers consulted both primary and secondary materials—books, journal articles, seminar papers, magazines, and websites of revenant entities which deal with the subject matter.

The paper is structured into three sections. Section one serves as the introduction; section two examines the concept and roles of CSOs in legislative practices and historical overview of roles and activities of civil society in Nigeria; and section three concludes the paper and also give recommendations.

2. Concept and Roles of Civil Society in Legislative Practices

2.1 Concept of Civil Society

There are several meanings of Civil Society. These meanings have mottled extremely through time, place, theoretical perspective, and political persuasions. Different political thinking identifies Civil Society nearly with everything from multi-party systems and the rights of citizenship to individual voluntarism and the spirit of community (Seligman, 2001: 203).

The concept of the Civil Society is diverse and numerous (Adjibolosoo 2006: 59), and also contested historically and in contemporary debates (Muukkonen 2007). What this means is that the concept of Civil Society, like other concepts in the social science, lacks a single, precise and universally acceptable definition. This situation may not be unconnected with the fact that most definitions actually reflect the political background and experience of those defining the concept. However, scholars like Orji (2004b) see Civil Society as organised activities by groups or group of individuals essentially with the objective to perform certain services, push a particular interest, with a view to influencing public authority in its policies and programmes. The various role and actions of Civil Society are meant to improve society.

The World Bank has adopted a definition of Civil Society developed by a number of leading research centres:

> The term Civil Society refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organisations: community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations.

The World Bank further adds that Civil Society is not only emerging as a clear societal actor in many parts of the world, it is also quite varied in its nature and composition.

Linz and Stepan (1996: 17) define Civil Society as the "arena of polity where self-organising and relatively autonomous groups, movements and individuals attempt to articulate values to create associations and solidarities and to advance their interests". While according to Scholte (1999), Civil Society can be understood to be a political space where voluntary associations deliberately seek to shape the rules that govern aspects of social life. In these definition, it is clear that Civil Society operates within the political space, it is organised voluntarily and seeks to advance interests within the public space. Important in this construct is the fact that Civil Society also encompass many sorts of actors and operatives, which operate in a much wider than the formal world of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

"Civil Society is a sphere of social interaction between the household (family) and the state which is manifested in the norms of community cooperative, structures of voluntary association and networks of public communication ... norms are values of trust, reciprocity, tolerance and inclusion, which are critical to cooperation and community problem solving. Structure of association refers to the full range of informal and formal organisations through which citizens pursue common interests" (Centre for Civil Society 2004). Civil Society is composed of autonomous associations which develop a dense, diverse and pluralistic network. As it develops, Civil Society will consist of a range of local groups, specialised organisations and linkages between them to amplify the corrective voices of Civil Society as a partner in governance and the market" (Connor 1999).

Civil Society are 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.

Civil Society has been widely recognised as an essential 'third' sector. Its strength can have a positive influence on the legislature. Civil Society is therefore seen as an increasingly important agent for promoting good governance like transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability. Civil Society can further improve good governance, first, by policy analysis and advocacy; second, by regulation and monitoring of state performance and the action and behaviour of public officials; third, by building social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs, civic norms and democratic practices; fourth, by mobilising particular constituencies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised sections of masses, to participate more fully in politics and public affairs; and fifth, by development work to improve the wellbeing of their own and other communities.

Civil Society may be defined and characterised in various ways, including in terms of:

- not-for-profit, voluntary, inclusive, third element beyond state and business, emerging from everyday life, knowledge producers/ consumers, multi-stakeholder),
- intentional, value-guardian, counterbalance to non-Civil Society actors, democratic, action-oriented, reciprocity, political, normative, emancipatory-self-regulating-supremacist, transformative-reformist-conformist),

- freely organised, freedom of expression, participatory, dialectic, networks, relationships, collective action, cooperation, self-help, service, interaction, dynamics, flexible/adaptable, critical/reflexive, fragile/resilient, historical),
- grassroots, blurred boundaries, transboundary, local/global, realm of social interaction, social context),
- people enabled to fullest capacity, voices heard, social justice, better planet, enhancing everyday lives).
- Over all, in understanding the Civil Society, the following summations can be made:
- Civil Society targets formal rules and seek to change and/or impose and/or deconstruct social political and economic constructs or orders
- Civil Society exists wherever and whenever voluntary associations of any kind try deliberately to shape rules that govern society, broadly defined (School for Civil Society 2013).

Civil Society exist within the public realm but distinguished from the household arena and the State.

2.2 Legislative Practice-an Overview

In a civilised society, there is a requirement for laws to be observed. For this to be credibly fulfilled, these laws must be made by a group of individuals called the representatives of the People. The first responsibility of a parliament is thus, the making of laws as reflected in the term "legislature". The legislature is defined as a body that makes laws, appropriate funds for the nation, exercises oversight on the executive and represents the people generally. The legislature is known as both "congress" and "parliament" in nations around the world. In the parliamentary system, the legislature appoints the executive, while in presidential or congressional systems the legislature is a power that is considered equal to and independent from the executive.

Parliament makes laws for a variety of reasons. The government would have come to power on certain commitments or promises to make or change laws to meet the varying needs of society. As the government proceeds with its work, there will inevitably be other circumstances that necessitate handling through use of its law-making mechanism. Some situations that the government will face will stem from a combination of both of these factors. Legislation thus derives from various pressures and is the answer to society's needs for a well-ordered and just code of governance. While government, through its Ministers, will always be the chief initiator of laws, there are opportunities in democratic legislatures for non-Ministers, both from the government and the opposition, to present their own attempts to change the law or to influence draft legislation, though it would be optimistic to expect these to succeed without government support or cooperation.

The process of government by which bills are considered and laws enacted is commonly referred to as the 'legislative practice'. Pursuant to the Nigerian Constitution, the Senate and the House of Representatives shall each stand dissolved at the expiration at the expiration of four years commencing from the date of the first sitting of the House. Both Houses of National Assembly organise, elect officers and adopt rules for the period of four years. The Senate and the House of Representatives shall each sit for a period of not less than one hundred and eighty-one days in a year. The Senate consists of three Senators from each state and one for the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. While the House of Representatives shall consist of three hundred and sixty members

representing constituencies of nearly equal population as far as possible, provided that no constituency shall fall within more than one state. The Senate has 52 standing committees, while the House of Representatives has 65 standing committees. These committees consider legislation in a wide range of policy areas.

Under the United States Constitution, the power to legislate is vested in the United States' Congress. Like what obtains in Nigeria, the Congress is made up of two bodies: House of Representatives and the Senate. The concurrence of both is required to enact a law. However, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the Senate or the House of Representatives shall have power to regulate its own procedure. Each committee is staffed by members who work closely with each other in facilitating their legislative agenda.

The 1999 Constitution as amended, vests legislative power essentially, the responsibility to make laws of the land in the National Assembly. Under the government's system of separation of powers, legislative power cannot be delegated to any other branch of government, and although the people are ultimately sovereign in Nigeria, the National Assembly's legislative power cannot be delegated to the public. This is because Nigeria's constitution makes no provision for popular initiative and allows only the National Assembly to propose legislation at the Federal level. Further, in the absence of a constitutional provision allowing a public referendum, bills passed by the legislative cannot be conditioned upon subsequent voter approval or ratification in a state-wide election.

The legislative practice in Nigeria has some components. First, it is a legal process governed by a host of special rules and procedures that specify how legislation will be considered in each house. The rules of procedure are adopted by the respective chambers at the beginning of each session. In the United States, each chamber has a unique mission, distinct rules of procedure and different traditions. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, is the Supreme law of South Africa and provides among others how the three branches of government; namely the legislature (Parliament, Provincial Legislatures and Municipal Councils), the Executive Authority and Judicial Authority should conduct their business. Chapter four of the Constitution sets out the national legislative practice and determines that Parliament is the national legislative (law making body) of the Republic. Both Houses of Parliament, namely the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, (NCOP) play a role in this process. Therefore, the exercise of legislative powers and responsibilities at the Federal and States level is regulated by both the Constitution and the Standing Rules of the House. In Nigeria, failure to comply with the requisite provisions relating to procedure will render the outcome or the decision unconstitutional and illegal.

There has been a dramatic expansion in the size, scope, and capacity of Civil Society around the globe over the past decade, aided by the process of globalisation and the expansion of democratic governance, telecommunications, and economic integration. According to the Yearbook of International Organisations, the number of international NGOs was reported to have increased from 6,000 in 1990 to more than 50,000 in 2006. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have also become significant players in global development assistance, with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimating that, as of 2006, CSOs provided approximately US$15 billion in international assistance.

Civil Society have also become important actors for delivery of social services and implementation of other development programs, as a complement to government action, especially in regions where government presence is weak such as in post-conflict situations. Perhaps the most recent and visible case of Civil Society involvement in post-disaster relief occurred in Asia during the post-Tsunami reconstruction after 2006.

Civil Society influence on shaping global public policy has also emerged over the past two decades. This dynamism is exemplified by successful advocacy campaigns around such issues as banning of land mines, debt cancellation, and environmental protection which have mobilized thousands of supporters around the globe. A recent manifestation of the vibrancy of global Civil Society has been the World Social Forum (WSF) which has been held annually since 2001 on different continents, and which has brought together tens of thousands CSO activists to discuss global development issues. Another example of the vibrancy and importance of Civil Society is the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), an international Civil Society campaign advocating for debt relief and greater aid to poor countries. In 2008, GCAP is estimated to have mobilised more than 116 million citizens to participate in the Stand up against poverty events held in cities throughout the world.

According to Ghaus-Pasha (2004), Civil Society is understood to mean a sphere that is separate from the state and the market, and formed by people who have common needs, interest and values. In the same vein, Ikelegbe (2005: 241-270) refers to Civil Society as an "essentially participatory, broad-based and self-governing formation engaged in shaping public affairs, public policy and governance". He points out that Civil Society is "an instrument, a means by which the citizens engage the state, in different struggles, challenges and contestations." On his part, Uwais (2008: 50-153) refers to Civil Society as the sum total of those organisations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus, which includes: social groups, professional groups and non-governmental organisations. Olateju (2012: 310-319) 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 organisation or association between the basic units of society—family and firms—and the state" (cited in Gberevbie 2013).

2.3 The Diversity of Civil Society

It is important to stress that Civil Society are as diverse as they come.

- Civil Society operates at multiple levels or scales in contemporary politics-diverse Civil Society actors engage with many different types of development questions
- The capacity and/or competencies that Civil Society actors can claim are also incredibly diverse
- In pursuing these ends, Civil Society organisations adopt diverse approaches to decision-making
- As regards objectives, it is possible to argue that Civil Society actors can pursue either conformist, reformist, or *transformist* aspirations

2.4 Historical Overview of Roles and Activities of Civil Societies in Nigeria

Nigeria has a long and strong tradition of Civil Society, which represents the diverse and pluralistic nature of Nigerian society. Civil Society groups primarily led Nigeria's history of struggle and

resistance. In fact, their formation and activities date back to the colonial period when different groups, sometimes locally and territorially based, and at other times transcending clan and "tribal" boundaries, became part of the nationalist protest against the repressive colonial state. Examples are the likes of Egbe Omo Oduduwa, the Jamiyar Mutanin Arewa that later metamorphosed into political parties to contest power after Independence. In the immediate post-independence period, CSOs engaged in community "self-help" activities, provided humanitarian assistance at the grassroots level (CIVICUS Civil Society Index 2007). Following this, labour organisations, student associations, and the media provided a strong leadership and organized protests against unpopular policies during the first civilian administration in 1960 to 1966. Subsequent military regimes which came to power through coup d'états resorted to mounting political transition programmes without a push from CSOs (Uganwa 2014). Under the military regimes in Nigeria, there were attempts to stop, reduce or manipulate the activities of the CSOs. This is probably understandable, as Civil Society organisations thrive better in free democratic and liberal society. In spite on the limitations placed on their activities, the Civil Society under the military played a significant part (particularly in the late 1990's) in the final ouster of military rule in Nigeria. Organisations like National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), and Campaign for Democracy (CD) etc. were part of the Civil Society that fought against the subversion of the will of Nigerians and enthronement of democracy in the country (Wisdom, Harrison, & Ebueku 2011: 5).

The Civil Society groups had largely been affected by the nature and politics of Nigeria since independence. During the colonial era, the Civil Society groups were mainly concerned with the nationalist protest against the repressive colonial state. After independence, the emphasis was on social and economic development. The Civil Society groups had to adapt its basic role to the new challenges. With the advent of the military government in January 1966 and the suspension of the constitution, the Civil Society groups became exposed to functions essentially incompatible with its traditional roles. This is why Mohammed-Salih (2001) asserts that: "in Africa, elite and ethno-nationalists have... [developed] ethnicity into a liberating force against colonialism and, after independence, against authoritarian states."

After the civil war of 1967-1970, the role of the Civil Society groups majorly shifted to preserving national unity, nation reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. With increase in oil revenue, emphasis shifted to the development of infrastructures and provision of social services. From early 1979 till date, the role of the Civil Society groups has had to adopt to modern challenges of managing an ailing economy through Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Rationalisation, Nationalisation and of recent, Privatisation, Poverty alleviation, empowerment etc. (CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2007).

2.5 Problems Affecting the Effectiveness of Civil Society in Nigeria

Civil Society in Nigeria had over the years, been confronted with myriads of problems that have made it difficult for them to function effectively as agent of strengthening legislative practices. Odeh (2012: 65) identified eight problems and challenges of Civil Society, thus:

1. **Disconnection from Rural Organisations:** CSOs activities are mostly restricted to the federal government level. They lack national spread. Most of these organisations are concentrated in Lagos and a few other state capitals in the country. This makes it difficult

for majority of the Nigerian population, which live 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 politician.

2. **Lack of Unity:** Divisions among the Nigerian Civil Society along the ethnic and regional lines have not helped its democratic advocacy. This has led to disunity and disagreement among the Nigerian Civil Society practitioners in term of decision-making and unity of purpose.
3. **Inadequate Funding:** Most Nigerian prodemocracy Civil Societies are donor-dependent and the focus of foreign donors on democracy in Nigeria have expanded from supporting pro-democracy organisations to include the support for democratic institutions like the legislature, judiciary and other democratic institutions. This fiscal factor has also reduced the activities and impacts of some prodemocracy Civil Society in contemporary Nigeria.
4. **Government Patronage:** Most often, the Nigerian private media, under the umbrella of the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), rely heavily on government patronage (advertisement) for survival and their independence has been seriously compromised for this reason. There have also been claims that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) leadership compromised with government in the recent 2012 strike/mass protests against the withdrawal of subsidy on petroleum products.
5. **Lack of internal democracy:** The lack of internal democracy in most of the Nigerian Civil Society makes it difficult for members of these organisations to learn democratic values/norms within their organisation. Thus, they cannot adequately inculcate this principle to citizens.
6. **Lack of Skills for Civil Society:** The Civil Society organisations are also faced with lack of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy. It is expected that any organisations that wish to engage the state or the legislature must be well equipped with superior knowledge and articulation of stronger points. This is still absented in many of the Civil Society organisations in Nigeria (African Development Forum, 2004).
7. **Corruption and Personal Enrichment:** There have been accusations of corruption, ranging from lack of transparency in the utilisation of donor-funds to outright embezzlement/conversion of foreign donations to personal use. This tends to weaken the Civil Society moral right to engage the state. It also hinders people of integrity and value from associating with them. The impact of their advocacy for a change is also limited, because it is stated that he who comes to equity must come with clean hands.
8. **Lack of State Support and Partnership:** The relationship between Civil Society and the state is largely characterised by suspicion and tension. For the most part, state officials have viewed Civil Society as competitors of power, influence, and legitimacy in the public sphere rather than as development partners.

2.6 The 8th Assembly and the Civil Society

Senate President, Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki on Wednesday February 10, 2016 took his pledge to make the 8th National Assembly open, inclusive, transparent and accountable a notch higher, when he opened the gates of the legislature to Civil Society and the labour to ventilate their thoughts, make observations and voice their recommendations on how best to ensure that the 2016 budget truly reflects the will and aspiration of Nigerians.

Saraki had in his inaugural speech on his election as Senate President and Chairman of the National Assembly on June 9, 2015, said the present National Assembly would do things differently. "It will no longer be business as usual," he said. He promised to ensure that the change agenda of the present administration is reflected in every undertaking of the National Assembly.

Towards the realisation of this objective, the Senate and House of Representatives respectively prepared and adopted a people-centred legislative agenda as a guiding light to make the members stay true and focussed on their stated objectives. It was also meant to make the National Assembly a body that truly encapsulate the wishes and concerns of the ordinary Nigerian. As a way of making the process of law making, oversight and advocacy truly participatory, Saraki utilised every opportunity to engage Nigerians. One instance of such engagement is the use of Twitter and other new media platforms on a daily basis to inform, educate, explain the rationale for certain actions of the National Assembly and above all to respond in real time to the genuine concerns of the people. Besides, he had also ensured that the debates of the Senate at plenary are streamed live to Nigerians, who equally take advantage of the social media to make their contributions, ask questions and voice their concerns.

However, last Wednesday, January 10, 2015, On hand to receive the representatives of the over 100 Civil Society to the National Assembly were Saraki, Chairman, Senate Committee on Diaspora and Civil Society Organisations, Senator Rose Okoh, Deputy Senate Leader, Senator Ibn Na'Allah, Chairman, Senate Committee on National Planning and Economic Affairs, Senator Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso; Chairman Senate Committee on Health, Senator Lanre Tejuosho; Senator Olamilekan Adeola; Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance, Senator John Owan, Chairman, House Committee on Civil Society Organisations and Development Partners, Hon. Peter Akpatason, who represented the Speaker of the House of Representatives and other members of the House. Some of the CSOs that participated in the interactive session included: PLAC, CENCOJ, BudgIT, HOMEF, Action Aid, CODE, EiE Nigeria, FEPAR, BMGF, NNNGO, Oxfam, ONE Campaign, OSIWA, YIAGA, NDI, CSR in Action, among others.

The interactive session with CSOs which has been hailed both in Nigeria and in the international community as "historic and unprecedented", according to the Chairman, Senate Committee on Diaspora and Civil Society Organisations, Senator Okoh, was meant to ensure citizen's participation in the decision-making process in the legislature, especially on the 2016 Appropriation Bill which is then being considered by the federal legislature, Senator Okoh in her welcome address during the programme said:

> "Through your capacities of reach, advocacy and data collection, your contribution to this document (2016 budget) will not only enhance our mandate of appropriation for government, but also ensure that there is citizen participation in the decision-making process of government at this crucial level."

Furthermore, the Senate President said the maiden interactive session between the National Assembly and Civil Society on the 2016 budget was convened to allow both members of parliament and the Civil Society to "explore new angles, consider fresh opinions and weigh new suggestions on the reasonable changes that need to be made, and on the best way to forge ahead with the 2016

appropriation process. This is not only an opportunity to air views, it is also a window that has presented itself that will allow all to work together to pass a budget that all can be proud of."

3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to analyse and assess the role of Civil Society in politics. It was anchored on the premise that Civil Society is not a homogenous movement rather it is a coalescing of organisations and movements that are characterised by competing interests in their relations with the state.

In concluding, we note that there are two sides to the discussion in this research study. We acknowledge the importance of Civil Society to strengthen legislative practices, however, the Civil Society must come to the 'party'—there must be credibility in the practices, effectiveness of partnership, and contribution of Civil Society.

This research paper has been able to examine the role of Civil Society in strengthening legislative practice in Nigeria. And clearly, the role of the Civil Society can be said to be important and needful in the legislative practice in Nigeria. In fact, since the emergence of the democracy in 1999, its consolidation and present sustainability can be chiefly attributed the efforts of Civil Society. It should also, be recognised that the contribution of donor agencies, which make it possible for Civil Society to work independently and without recourse to government for funding (Bebbington, & Riddell 1997). This source of support is also a source for concern.

Donors, largely foreign, have utilised a number of Civil Society groups in Nigeria to influence and determine political and economic questions. Thus, we see Civil Society been successfully vocal in raising issues around the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, which also criminalises homosexual clubs, associations and organisations.

We have clearly, also, established that there is need for a vibrant Civil Society in Nigeria particularly given Nigeria's vibrant democratic setting and sensibilities. This, itself presents and enormous expectations on the Civil Society, notwithstanding any shortcomings.

3.2 Recommendations

As earlier argued, the need for a vibrant Civil Society cannot be over-emphasised especially in a democratic setting like Nigeria. Despite the shortcomings of Civil Society in Nigeria, its impact on social, political life and legislative practices has been enormous. It has also exposed the citizenry to varieties of issues, which hitherto were the preserve of the legislative activities. However, a lot needs to be done to strengthen the capacity of Civil Society groups for a positive strengthening of the legislative practices. Adewuyi (2012) rightly pointed out that, the strength of a Civil Society depends on the democratisation level of the government because it is the latter that provides the former with the necessary conditions and access to public decision-making without which the existence and the activities of the Civil Society become questionable.

Following from our discussions above, it is recommended that:

1. There should be an increase and focus networking among Civil Society organisations to aid training of cadres in grassroots mobilisation and advocacy;
2. The legislature should hold more focused committee hearings as a means to enabling Civil Society to provide inputs on legislation. When focused and structured, public hearings allow parliaments to benefit from the expertise of civil societies;
3. The legislature should also consider providing opportunities for Civil Society to submit written comments on draft laws. In some instances, these comments become part of the official records;
4. More efforts should be directed at service delivery and the reduction of corruption in the Civil Society in order to properly strengthen the legislative practices in Nigeria. This will enable Civil Society groups to stand the test of time by organising itself in a manner that will not make them apron or dependent on the government; and
5. Civil Society organisations should improve their effectiveness by clearly defining their objectives, strengthening their technical competencies, increase in knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy.

The parliament in Nigeria—both at the federal and at the subnational level, must see Civil Society as "institutions' with capacity and influence, which are critical to building constituencies and consensus on national issues, and specific (thematic) policy. There is, following from these, a consensus which sees the involvement, participation and contribution of Civil Society as having the capacity of deepening participation, development, and effectiveness in legislative practices. The relationship, which may ensure, has the capacity to ensure voice for the marginalised and vulnerable in policy and project design; support bottom-up demand and broad-based social mobilisation, while enabling the Civil Society play a watchdog role in monitoring legislative progress.

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