

**AFE BABALOLA UNIVERSITY,
ADO-EKITI STATE, NIGERIA**

GROUP 3

**INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL
SCIENCE II (POL 102)**

**TOPIC: CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS**

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ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Although it now relates to societies of different civilizations, civil society roots lie mainly in the West. Romans spoke for the first time of “*societas civilis*”, a term introduced by Cicero. Socrates supported the idea that conflicts within society should be resolved through public debates, and Plato saw the ideal state as a society in which people dedicate themselves to the common good, while Aristotle saw the ‘polis’ as an ‘association’, that enabled citizens to share in the virtuous task of ruling and being ruled (O’Brien, 1999). Nevertheless, neither Greece nor Rome distinguished between state and society. After the Thirty Years' War ended, the Treaty of Westphalia endorsed states as political units having their territory and sovereignty. The monarchs were able to form national armies, which enabled them to control public life. Consequently, before the Enlightenment period absolutism was the hallmark of Europe and civil society was not discussed until the eighteenth-century by liberals attacking absolutism (Edwards, 2004).

The medieval idea of differentiating between state and society was lost in the work of Hobbes, who in religion found only potential for conflicts. He wrote that if a society is to be held together at all, it must be through the power of the sovereign. But Locke, in ‘Two Treatises of Government’ (1663) provided a distinctively modern form of differentiation by combining the concept with that of voluntary association. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke believed in a peaceful coexistence between human beings through social contracts and pacts (Warren, 1996). Locke and Hobbes did not hold that civil society was a separate realm from the state. It is society that created political institutions to protect it, and so can change them whenever it wishes to do so. In this context, Hobbes refused strict separation of state and society (Thomas Hobbes, 1660).

John Locke was the first one that distinguished between state and society. For him the state was a part of “civil society”, but he distinguished the political order from “the community” placing the moral basis of the political order on the consent of the “community”, that is, on society. Adam Ferguson developed the concept of civil society as a moral sphere in which human interactions can be protected from the state (O’Brien, 1999). On the other side, Tocqueville presented civil society as a network of non-political social organizations that strengthen democracy. Thus, he introduced the notion of subsidiary, which allows civil society to be involved in governance by limiting the power of the state whilst ensuring that the creative energy of society remains outside of the state and remains within civic activism of associations (Tocqueville 1969).. While Locke, Ferguson, and Tocqueville base their concepts of civil society on a distinction between state and society Adam Smith focused on the difference between society and markets.

In Hegel's analysis of society, the economy is a part of civil society, which is identified with market relations. He understood the distinction between market and state. Marx argued that civil society was strongly shaped by class antagonism and Rousseau thought that of the society where state should be absorbed into civil society. Civil society, as Rousseau describes it, serves two purposes: to provide peace for everyone and to ensure the right to property (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1950). On the other hand, Gramsci developed a concept of civil society that differentiated it both from the economy and the state, although he had a difficult time expressing the independent role of civil society without it being an instrument of state politics.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY

Citizen participation in processes of public decision-making is an essential part of the democracy. Through its social and political activism, civil society gives voice to groups of citizens that don't feel represented in democracy. Amongst other potentials, civil society organizations have expert knowledge in many areas of concern, and so are able to serve governments as counselors.

Participating in the system can be a good experience for citizens, allowing for a positive identification with their political system. This is how civil society can help strengthen some of the weaknesses in democracy and lower citizen dissatisfaction.

But not always civil society organizations have identical interests. Civil society is not always homogeneous. In essence there are many organizations within civil society that are undemocratic in their platform. Some of them imply violent and in some cases illegal strategies and activities which in essence are non-democratic. These aspects can directly threaten the maintenance of democratic regimes. It would therefore be misleading to conclude that all civil society organizations are interested in making democracy a reality.

Civil society in the context of communist regimes had a different meaning compared to the meaning of civil society in the context of contemporary democracies. Because of the limited freedom of expression in communist regimes, civil society existed in someone's living room, in churches or in cafes (Brinton, 1990). Under the communist regimes independent civil society usually took on the form of small groups of citizen activism. Both representatives of independent and of the broad civil society contributed with different means and forms to overthrow communist regimes and the following transition toward democracy (Skovajska, 2008).

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Non-state, non-profitable venture which is voluntary formed by groups of people or a single person in the social sphere that is separate from the state and the market. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) represent a wide range of interest and ties which could include; community-based organization as well as non-governmental organization (NGO). In the context of the United Nation (UN), guiding principles reporting framework, CSOs do not include business or for profit association. In other words, these organizations operates in a community, state or however the case maybe in a manner which is distinct from the government and business.

Civil society is regarded as the third sector of the society alongside business and government. It is a wide array of organizations which work independently in the citizen's interest. Independently in the sense that it does not rely on government for its needs. Yet has the power to influence the decisions of the government in the favor of the citizens. Civil societies comprises of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations.

AIMS OF CIVIL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

- ❖ Fulfillment of all economic, social and human rights
- ❖ Aid and financing for development effectiveness
- ❖ Global and national security
- ❖ Development issues
- ❖ Public accountability
- ❖ Debt cancellation
- ❖ Just governance

- ❖ Gender equality
- ❖ Trade justice

OBJECTIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- ❖ To serve as an engagement platform at the national, regional and international levels ensuring that government achieve and exceed the MDGs by 2015 and account to the people.
- ❖ To build an alliance with and facilitate the participation of other CSOs both in Africa and other regions so as to ensure that citizens lead the process of determining the post 2015 development agenda.
- ❖ To work with vulnerable groups including the marginalized, the less privileged, women, children and youth so as to bring to the front burner of discourse their development prioritization.

VALUES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- ❖ **Democratic governance:**

Civil society Coalition on Sustainable Development (CSCSD) believes in the principles and practices of democratic governance which necessarily promotes dividends for the people.

- ❖ **Transparency and accountability:**

CSCSD promotes transparency and accountability in its operations and therefore challenges government to be transparent and accountable to the people in all their dealings especially in response to poverty eradication and injustice.

- ❖ **Solidarity with the poor:**

CSCSD has passion for the poorest of the poor and the marginalized, identifies with them and campaigns with them challenging government to give their lives a meaning.

❖ **Inclusiveness:**

CSCSD believes that the society is comprised of various groups and stakeholders. There is the need to involve all groups in its operations including the poor, marginalized, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDs, women, youths, children, minority groups and other vulnerable group(s).

❖ **Partnership:**

CSCSD considers all the stakeholders, the vulnerable groups and development agencies as co-partners who have an important but collective role to play on the attainment of the MDGs and upholding of human rights, justice and peace.

ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Africa's „nascent“ civil societies are usually portrayed as the prime movers in the democratization process in the 1990s. However, with the establishment of democratic governments in Africa, especially in Nigeria, it seems the expectations about the role and capacity of these civil society organizations to promote governance reform and foster democratic deepening has been under estimated. Against the growing pessimism about the capacity of these organizations to fulfil their democratic potentials, below we will explore the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Nigerian democratization process:

- ❖ Civil Society Organizations act as watchdogs, holding government and institutions in account. E.g. some of these organizations monitor government compliance with human right treaties.
- ❖ They advocate for change, champion worthy causes and give a voice to the marginalized/minority in the society.
- ❖ They provide services such as social amenities and social welfare services to people, groups or areas that have little access to them especially rural areas.
- ❖ They build active citizenship by alluring citizens to participate politically other than voting during election, at federal state and local level, motivating civil engagement.
- ❖ They participate in global governance processes. Many international organizations such as the United Nation (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and world bank and so on. Have civil organization serving on their advisory boards concerning the organization's policies.
- ❖ They also organize seminars and programs for empowerment and self-reliability especially for women and youth.
- ❖ Peace building and Conflict mitigation, promoting access to justice, public interest litigation, budget tracking, constituency outreaches as well as research and documentation in thematic areas of democracy and governance

CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

❖ Inadequate funding:

It is no longer doubtful that civil society organizations in Nigeria have had considerable influence on democracy and electoral practices in Nigeria. However, certain issues militate against their effective operation in Nigeria. Boadi (1995) posited that one of the critical challenges of CSO in Nigeria is the issue of insufficient funds. Most civil society organizations rely on government funding for their various operations, which is not a healthy development as it breeds loyalty of civil society organizations to government.

❖ Lack of State Support and Partnership:

The relationship between civil society organizations and the state is largely characterized by suspicion and tension. For the most part, state officials have viewed civil society organization as competitors of power, influence, and legitimacy in the public sphere rather than as development partners.

❖ 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 CSO practitioners in term of decision-making and unity of purpose. The internal contradictions within the membership make it difficult to agree on common positions during the period of engagement with the state. Such inherent divisiveness weakens efficiency and makes the associations vulnerable to penetration by government agents.

❖ Patronage:

Osaghae (1998), also opines that "the poor economic conditions of the Nigerian state has also led to the emergence of civil society that are state inclined because members of such groups believe strongly that by showing loyalty to the incumbent government, material resources are assured". 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.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

ORGANIZATIONS

❖ CSOs Funding:

A major challenge among most CSOs is limited access to funding and restrictions with donor-driven agenda and projects. Over-coming this challenge will require the government and donors to recognize the roles of civil society organizations in Nigeria's democracy. For example, the government should establish a national CSOs trust fund, in order to provide local funding and support to CSOs. Setting up a CSOs national data bank will be very useful too in order to check proliferation when the trust fund is set up. This will improve the institutional memory and information on CSOs and consequently make the appropriate disbursements of funds.

OTHER DEFINITIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

ORGANIZATIONS

- ❖ Walzer has defined civil society as the space of (politically) un-coerced human association and also the set of relational networks-formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology.
- ❖ Halloway (2001) sees the term\ CSO as a positive descriptive term and defines it as 'citizens, associating neither for power nor profit, are the third sector of the society organizations'.

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