CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Pressure groups exist in every society for similar reasons. Their main function is to put pressure on the government to meet the needs of the people. Before going into the pressure groups that exist in Nigeria, it is important to know what a pressure group is. But firstly what does it mean to mount pressure? To mount pressure is to persuade someone or coerce a person into doing something. A pressure group is therefore a formal or organized body with a common interest whose fundamental aim is to put pressure on any governmental institution with the goal of influencing government policies and laws to its own advantage. The pressure group is referred to as “The Functional Representative”, it seeks to influence government decisions and promotes its own interest.

There are several types of pressure groups. In Nigeria there is religious pressure groups, social, educational, business, and professional pressure group among others. Some examples include: Academic Staff Union for University (ASUU), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and many more. It is believed that pressure groups and political parties are the same, especially in Nigeria where people have superficial opinions rather than factual opinions. However, they are different in many ways: political parties seek to gain power while pressure groups try to influence those in power and have no business with power itself. Also, political parties have a wide range of goals and interests while pressure groups narrow down their goals.

Furthermore, pressure groups exist to checkmate and make democracy better. They therefore prevent tyranny and protect the interest of the society. However, problems can arise when the democratic process becomes dominated by a few specific groups. In this situation the voice of a small group of people with narrow interest can become overly influential. In other words when pressure groups become overly ambitious and selfish, the interest of the society suffers and becomes second. An example is when ASUU goes on strike. Though they may be trying to promote their interest, the interest of the society suffers because of their pursuit.

Pressure groups that have access to ministers or legislators they are known as insiders groups on the other hand pressure groups that do not have access to the government or its machineries are outsider group. Also groups that seek to promote causes are known as cause groups and groups representing the interest of the people are known as interest groups. The functions of pressure group can be sifted from its explanation above however, while highlighting some of its most important functions it was noted that they link the people to the government. As they mount pressure on government to act in the interest of the people some of these interest are communicated and feedback is given to the people; they therefore help to link the people to the government.

In criticizing government policies, they help to curtail any dictatorial tendency that the government may have. It was also noted that pressure groups champion the rights of the under-privileged. As they go about their activities, they ensure that the interests of minority groups are not trampled upon by the government. Thus, they act as watchdogs on the government. Some other functions highlighted include: influencing legislation, promoting participation in government, serving as sources of information to government (explained in the point, **links the government to the people**).

Due to the structural set of government it is not unusual to wonder how pressure groups get the government to listen to them. They adopt a variety of ways to achieve their goals, including lobbying elected officials, media advocacy and direct political action. Thus they serve as one of the most important institutes of society; they help protect the interest of the people, pass information to the government, links the people to the government and help fuel public opinion among other things.