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**Chapter Fifteen**

**An Overview of the Idea of Pressure Groups.**

A pressure group is s formal or organized body with a common interest and the aim of pressuring government institutions to influence government policies and laws to their advantage. They are often referred to as “The Functional Representative”, with examples such a Nigerian Bar Association, Nigerian Medical Association, etc. Anifowose (1999) qualifies pressure groups as “interest groups”, “lobby groups” and even “protest groups”. Pressure groups could be religious, educational, ethnic, economic or social and they serve to influence political structures and public policy.

Though the modus operandi of pressure groups and political parties may seem similar, as they can coalesce to make social changes, they are not at the same. First, while political parties seek to gain government power, pressure groups merely seek to influence political decisions. Also, while political parties are broad in their interests and objectives, pressure groups usually have aims which cover a narrow or specific scope.

Pressure groups exist to make democracy better by treating the gaps in the democratic process, encouraging political participation and promoting accountability. Negatively however, pressure groups can serve as a bad influence and monopolise the democratic process by remaining rigid and refusing to compromise on certain issues.

Pressure groups can come in various forms. They can be interest groups or sectional groups that have the objective of representing people in society, for example the Confederation of British Industry, known as the voice of business in Britain. They can also be cause groups or promotion groups that campaign for visibility of certain causes e.g. charities and environmental groups such as Amnesty International. There are also insider groups which are high profile groups that are regularly consulted by the government because of constant access to ministers and legislators and an example is the Nigeria Bar Association. On the other hand, outsider groups do not have access to the government and so must make use of other means to make impact. Examples include the Animal Liberation Front. Anomic groups are characterized by unpredictable actions and behavior as their objectives are guided by the situations prevalent in the environment, rather than by a laid down behavioral style. They could sometimes be violent as they mount pressure using riots, protests, etc. Associational groups are registered with the appropriate regulatory bodies in a state, sometimes even possessing their own offices and domain, but non-associational groups have no formal organization and are usually arranged by virtue of kinship or family attachment or with the influence of tribal and social norms.

Pressure groups serve as a link between the government and the governed by keeping up with the development of relevant information and making it available to the masses in order for them to be enlightened. They also promote political participation and provide valuable information to the government on certain issues the government may not have considered relevant. Pressure groups serve to curtail dictatorial tendencies by ensuing that governments do not misuse their power and they champion the rights of the underprivileged and ensure that those rights are not trampled upon.

Pressure groups employ various strategies in the furtherance of their aims. These strategies include lobbying, media advocacy and organized protests to achieve their goals, depending how legitimate they are considered to be by the population.