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AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP

A pressure group is an organised body with a common interest who try to achieve their aim by influencing the government decisions and policies. It is referred to as "The Functional Representative" i.e. pressure groups represent different sectors of the society based on the function they perform. Anifowose describes them as interest groups, lobby groups or protest groups. Their main aim is to ensure the government does what they want. They protect the interests of their members. They could be religious, educational, business-like, ethnic oriented, economic, gender sensitive or social etc. depending on their professions. Examples in Nigeria are: Academic Staff Union for University, Nigeria Bar Association of Nigeria, Nigeria Labour Congress among others.

The activities of political parties may seem similar to those activities of pressure groups whereas they are not. The aim of political parties is to gain government powers while the aim of pressure groups is to influence government decisions. Pressure groups are not accountable for their actions while political parties are accountable. Political parties have many goals while pressure groups have few goals. Although, pressure groups and political parties are similar in such a way that they want to achieve social change. Some may work together if they have the same goals. Pressure groups have many functions. They check the affairs of government and make democracy better. They fill the gaps in democratic process. Although pressure groups are beneficial to the people they sometimes can have damaging effects on the society. This can occur when their aim cannot be easily attended to by the government and they put too much pressure on the government. They eventually resort into strikes which is detrimental to the people of the society.

There are 5 types of pressure groups. The first is interest groups. This is a group that represents the people in a society. An example is the trade units. The second is cause groups. These are groups that promote particular causes. They always aim at achieving a single goal. The third is Insider and Outsider groups. Insider groups are those that have access to the government. They are regularly consulted by the government. Example is the Nigerian Bar Association. While, the outsider groups have no access to the government. They use other means to ensure they achieve their aim. An example is the Animal Liberation Front. The fourth is anomic Groups. These groups have unpredictable actions and behaviour as they work based on the moment and situation in the society. They are not guided by an appropriate behavioural style. They act violently sometimes. They use protest, riots, strikes among other means to apply pressure. The last type is associational and non-associational groups. Associational groups are those that are registered with appropriate authorities in a society while non associational groups are those without a formal organisation.

There are many functions of pressure groups. One of the functions of pressure groups is that it serves as a link between the government of the day and the people he governs which means that pressure groups stay up to date on relevant information and are able to sensitise the people on such matter and at the same time relate the government what the opinion of people is. Another function of pressure groups is that it promotes public participation in the activities of the government of the day, the activities of pressure groups therefore promote political participation and carries the citizenry along. Thirdly pressure groups our sources of information to the government. As the pressure groups lobby government on various fronts, the interaction offers the government valuable information on aspects of issues that they may not even be aware of. Pressure groups serve the function of criticism of governmental policies curtail any dictatorial tendency government may have. Again, pressure groups champion the rights of the underprivileged, especially promotional pressure groups. As They go about their activities, they ensure that the interests of minority groups are not trampled upon by the government. Thus, pressure groups act as common watchdogs on the government. Another function of pressure groups is that they are instrumental in the mounting of pressure on governments so that it can implement policies that are to the benefit of citizens. pressure groups put pressure on government to influence its policy, change a policy direction, withdraw entirely a particular quality that does not favour their members or citizenry.

Pressure groups may adopt a variety of strategies to achieve their goals, including lobbying elected officials, media advocacy, and direct political action example organised protests. Obviously, some pressure groups exact more influence than others. The degree to which such groups are able to achieve their goals may depend on their ability to be recognised as legitimate by the population, media, and by those in power. Pressure groups lobby in many ways. The lobby with governmental officials directly, they might sometimes lobby these government officials through friends, children and other relatives and also, pressure groups may sponsor bills in legislative houses and contact legislators to ensure the passage of the unapproved laws.