

A Reflection on Civil Society Groups in Nigeria

SUNDAY OWEN ABANG

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

Abstract. This study examines the presence of civil societies in Nigeria, under both the military and civilian dispensations. It takes note of the role of the civil societies in their actions and inactions to government policies. Efforts are made to examine their roles at restoring, restructuring and being part of consolidating democracy in the Fourth Republic after long periods of military rule in the country. This is arguably the highest point of civil society actions in Nigeria. But, down the line, the study observed that there is proliferation of these civil societies in the country as a result of the fact that Sections 34-42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) conferred certain fundamental rights on the Nigerian citizens, rights which were stretched to certain limits much to the chagrin of objectivity. This raises questions on the importance of civil societies as watchdogs of democracy. To carry out this research, data was sourced from literatures on civil society, journals, reputable textbooks through retrieval techniques, newspapers and other official documents. The data analyzed led to the recommendation that civil societies should be more proactive in playing their key roles in sustaining democracy and national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: civil societies, military rule, civil rule, liberal approach, radical approach, democracy,

1. Introduction

The historical antecedent of Nigeria shows that civil groups or associations organize themselves to agitate and resist any government policy that

is not suitable to the welfare of the local people. The civil society groups or associations have their root in the colonial era with a lot of confrontation as observed in the 1897 Lagos Labour Strike, the Aba Women Riot of 1929, and Nigeria Labour Strike of 1945. All these agitations were primarily geared towards seeking better welfare packages for the citizenry. A secondary motivation was to clamour for administrative positions in the civil service. In this case we cite the Abeokuta Women March of 1946, Enugu Coal Miners Strike of 1949, the Zik Movement, etcetera (IDEA 2000; Tijani, 2012). Added to these are the agitations for independence that paved way for democratic rule in the country. Democracy in Nigeria was an alien system of government introduced by the colonial masters through constitutional means. Prof Bayart (1986) explains that the concept of democracy and human rights are the products of Western history (as cited in Kukah, 2003:37).

Nigeria had her freedom and independence in October 1, 1960 with a democratic system in place. Democratic rule in the first republic in Nigeria created its own monster among members of different political parties pushing to capture each political space for their respective parties through rigging, killing, and/or destruction of property as was witnessed in the western part of Nigeria. The Northern and Eastern regions with the Midwestern regions manifested their own peculiar problems as there was lack of internal cohesiveness. The bickering and leadership tussles that came in the wake of Independence ushered in the first military coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu in 1966. It is worthwhile to claim that the inability of Nigeria

to enjoy the newly gotten independence was because of excessive ethnic bias.

The military hijacked power but failed to have popular acceptance in the four geo-political regions that made up the country as some eminent northern political bigwigs, it was alleged, were killed in the coup than their southern counterparts. In response, civil society groups were more drawn along ethnic lines, calling for protection from the regions where they are domiciled for fear of being caught in the crossfire ravaging the country.

Fast-forward to the 1970's and 1980's when the civil societies in Nigeria had expanded to include professional bodies like Nigerian Bar Association and Nigerian Medical associations, and non-professional groups like National association of Nigeria students led by Femi Okewo in "Ali Must Go protest". A new dimension was also added to the protests, to include agitations for improved welfare packages, reduction in school fees, and democratic rules. Coming in confrontation with the military outfit, these civil groups suffered a lot of casualties and yet persisted in their protests and rather established vibrant civil societies that were radical. One of the most radical civil societies groups was National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). The thrust of NADECO was to vehemently oppose the military and ensure a transition to the civilian regime.

Fact remains that the activities of civil societies in Nigeria undeniably contributed immensely to the return of democracy on May 29, 1999, after a long period of military rule, from 1966 to October 1, 1979, and from 1983 to May 29, 1999. But, in this age of democracy in Nigeria, a major question that calls for answer is whether the future of the country putting into cognizance the tensed atmosphere in every part of Nigeria, the hate speeches, and other challenges.

Conceptual Framework

Michael (2011), cited in London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society, holds the definition of civil society as:

"The arena of coerced collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory,

its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market is complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups".

Civil societies act as an independent eye of the society in order to avoid tyrannical regime. This means that they serve as a check against arbitrary use of power by leaders and challenge leaders that violate fundamental human rights or abuse the rule of law. For civil societies to be the watchdog to check the excesses of government it means that the organization must organize itself to confront government policies or decisions that are inimical to the society. Towards this purpose, civil societies have been credited with the role of civilizing the people, creating democratic awareness, and enhancing development. Practically, the roles of civil societies show in the amount of services rendered to the society like welfare services, bringing socio-political and environmental matters to the knowledge of government, and many more

Surajit (2013) writes that civil societies as a concept draw its sustenance from the notion of equality of citizens, the integrity of the person and the freedom of belief. So in any society where there is injustice and imbalance there would be tension, and if there is a vibrant civil society that serves as a watchdog, it would advocate for justice to be done in the society.

The legal dimension of civil society is brought out in the work of Andre Beteille on the legal rational thinking of civil societies. Beteille writes that civil society is driven by legal-rational considerations. According to him, the wellbeing of institutions is dependent on the

autonomy of civil society. Open and secular institutions like universities, colleges, hospitals municipal corporations, political parties and chambers of commerce are important for the transformation of a closed and hierarchical society to a more open and egalitarian society (cited in Surajit, 2013: 155).

The United Nations Development Programme (2001) defines the civil society as a third sector existing alongside and interacting with the state and private industry (cited in Akinboye and Oluruntoba, 2007). The third sector means that civil societies are an independent sector distinct from government and business sectors. Given that government cannot solve all the problems that originate in the society, the civil societies as a sector are often better qualified for certain kinds of “public work”. The proponent of the third sector argues that for Government roles to be justly, she should wisely transfer some of its functions to non-governmental sectors (www.civilrepublic.com). In addition, Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheir of the Institute for Development Research in United States of America postulating on the Third Sector theory, says that the institutions of civil society are concerned with the expression and preservation of core community value and belief.

Another authority, the Keffering Foundation, admits that the civil society is the network of citizens and nongovernmental organizations that create a political community. The interest of this foundation is to create a “public space” to discuss the meaning and role of civil society at a global level to allow for greater local authority in managing civil affairs. Other third sector theorists like Lester, Helmut, Colough, Clarke say that civil society can be defined as a third sector in contrast to the private sector and government. They conclude that civil society includes nongovernmental organizations, people’s movements, citizens’ groups, consumer association, religions institutions, women organizations and indigenous associations to cover the gap of government. “Synonymous with the third sector, the structural idea of civil society denotes a sector of organized human action composed of collective actors beyond the family and distinct from the state...” (Viterna, Clough and Clarke, 2015: 173).

In Nigeria for instance, civil societies have been at the forefront of the movement and struggle for empowerment, and resistance against unpopular and anti-people state policies. The nongovernmental organizations have come in on many occasions to fill in the gap where the state fails to provide some essential amenities like boreholes, public sanitary system, water in rural communities and health service, and so on. Civil society is nothing more than the gathering of likeminded people coming together for the purpose of pursuing a particular goal that they think would be of benefit to the society. In achieving their goals, civil societies adopt different approaches to their decision making processes.

2. Approaches to the study of Civil Societies

Civil society has been viewed from different perspectives by scholars and commentators. Some of these views are radical while others are liberal. The work of John Locke of the classical liberal school of thought on civil society grants that it is civil society that resolves the inconveniences of the state of nature by providing equal and independent people with a legitimate political authority, which takes over to deliver impartial judgment (Dunn 2001). These civil groups can be voluntary associations or secondary institutions like families, religious organizations, trade unions, private clubs, or charitable organizations that exist outside of the formal structures of governmental power (Delue and Darle 2009). From the liberal approach, we acknowledge the work of Larry Diamond that defines civil society as:

“the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self generating, self supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by the legal order or set of shared rules...it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interest, passions and ideas, exchange ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold the state officials accountable. It is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state (cited in Kukah, 2003:44)

Civil society would want to know how judiciously the government uses the resources of the state for the satisfaction of the people of the state by raising question and demanding for answers for the purpose of consolidating democracy. In the words of Guillermo O. Donnell, a “consolidated democracy has both horizontal and vertical accountabilities because it has gone through institutional reforms that improve the representative functions of democratic governance by strengthening political parties and their linkage to social groups ... and enhancing the autonomous capacity and public accountability of legislatures and local government, and invigorating civil society” (in Songonuga, cited in www.hsdl.org). This is done to create common standards deemed necessary to maintain smooth civic life that would arrange for the development of the state in providing some essential services for the benefit of the people.

Other commentators on the liberal perspective accept the role of nongovernmental organizations as a new sector to aid the provision of essential needs in the society for the purpose of development.

Another approach to the study of civil society is the radical view- the radicals see civil societies differently from the liberal arguments. They view civil society as manifest in such contentious issues as nationalism during the colonial period. Nationalistic struggle is much like separatism in that there is a desire for political autonomy; however, this is generally based on a certain widespread cultural idealism such as the case with nationalist struggle for independence in Nigeria and other countries (Abang, 2006). Political nationalist struggle is simply a broad category which encompasses all types of politically motivated civil groups. In the 19th century, the desire of colonized nations for such statutory rights as suffrage and popular empowerment encouraged the upsurge of nationalist movements through struggle against colonial territories throughout the world (Abang, 2006); eventually resulting in the kind of modern civil society we have today. This explains the wave of modern civil societies as associated with the international movement toward decolonization that spawned national

movements in territories like Algeria, Nigeria, and South Africa. Struggles for self rule became another catalyst for civil groups in a radical approach.

Civil society in the radical sense reflects the struggles within wider society especially between the state and exploited classes (Mercer, 2002) which is in line with the Marxist view that civil society is a domain force serving as intellectual tool for formatting a change. Cox (1999) sees civil society as a counter-hegemonic force contending with oppression and exploitative structure of the state. Civil society acts as a guard against any negative actions of government or call for revolution for the purpose of moving the society forward like in Egypt during the Arab Spring of 2011.

The radical exercise of civil societies is one of the conditions for freedom, accountability and provision of welfare packages for the people in the society. It is a condition of change as applied by Marxist philosophers. Karl Marx says that violence would be necessary in the revolutionary struggle because the bourgeoisie will not relinquish power without a fight. This view was cherished greatly by many state actors, encouraging some developed countries to secretly support the activities of civil societies like

NADECO in Nigeria in the 1990s.

3. The Trends of Civil Societies during the Military rule in Nigeria

The civil groups association in the colonial period organized themselves for the purpose of agitation for freedom and welfare packages for the civil servants. By 1960, the organized civil groups mostly had the interests of the elites at heart, at the expense of the general populace. This is accentuated by the ease with which tribal groupings metamorphosed into political parties, coalescing into the eventual civil war. It is also worthy of note that rivalry among the First Republic politicians never moved the country forward as expected, which resulted in military coup d'état in 1966 and a counter coup that brought in Gowon as the head of state. In the predominantly military period of the mid 1960's

to 1980's, and in the 1980's and 1990's, it was strictly forbidden to have radical associations, civil groups or civil societies in Nigeria. But, in spite of brutal repression, people still formed strong associations, civil groups or civil societies to serve as opposition group to the military.

Odinkalu (2001) writes that during Gowon's regime, especially between 1974 and 1975, there were 655 trade disputes in Nigeria of which 354 resulted to strikes. These mainly arose given Gowon's unwillingness to restore power to the civilians after announcing on October 1, 1970 a transition programme. When Muritala Mohammed took over power through coup in 1975, the civil groups did not relent, organizing to fight for their entitlements and benefits through strikes and other protest tools. Two things happened simultaneously: the setting up of the National Industrial Court to settle trade disputes, and the banning of twelve leaders of trade union from unionism in Nigeria (Odinkalu, 2001). Nigerian Union of Students protest for the sacking of Federal Commissioner of Education led to the proscription of the union and expulsion of the leaders of the union out of the university. Amidst all these, the Muritala/Obasanjo regime kept to their promise of handing over to the civilians on October 1, 1979.

The Second Republic, from 1979 to 1983, was characterized by politicians being accused of corruption. Some social critics, civil groups, trade and students unions criticized the style of running the country. The austerity measure in the Second Republic caused widespread deprivation among the populace, leading to the ousting of the Shehu Shagari civilian regime by Buhari/Idiagbon in 1983. Some of the policies like extra-judicial killing and death penalty flagged off in the infamous War Against Indiscipline introduced during the Buhari/Idiagbon government forced the civil groups to take up 'arms' once more.. Buhari/Idiagbon proscribed twice student activist, at the same time disaffiliating Academic Staff Union of Universities from Labour Union and declaring teaching "essential service" (Odinkalu, 2001). The social unrest that resulted eased in a counter-coup by Babangida in 1985.

Under Babangida regime, the civil groups became more active, aligning themselves with such vocal social groups as the press, the teachers associations, and other trade unions to protest the continued military presence in the country, and their continued highhandedness in treating social matters. Instances abound also where these civil societies resorted to riots like the anti-SAP riot of 1988, 1989, and 1991, which drew support from a cross-section of other non-state associations nationwide, the Ahmadu Bello University riots of 1986 that led to the killing of four students (Kunle Amuwo, 1995). Another civil society that thrived during the Babangida government, and spilled into the subsequent Abacha regime, was the Civil Liberties Organisation "which campaigned against the denial and erosion of personal liberties and against oppressive military legislation" The CLO also rose against continued military rulership in Nigeria (A. R. Mustapha, 2001).

A major thorn in the flesh of the Abacha government, the military group that ousted the Shonekan Transition Government, was the Committee for Defence of Human Rights (CDHR). This group, predating Abacha and originally ethnic in scope (their tentative steps were taken in clamors for the freedom of Beko Ransome-Kuti and Aborishade), later metamorphosed into a national tool on seeing how effective such an apparatus can serve in calling the leadership to order.

At a point when the observant populace noticed that General Abacha was going to renege on his promise to constitute a constitutional conference to address the grievances of the country, another civil society was birthed, by name National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). This group was made up of Peoples Consultative Forum, Afenifere, and the Committee for Unity and Understanding, among others. According to Mustapha (2001), NADECO "declared that it stood for restoration of democracy and true federalism". It later constituted a real dissent voice against Abacha's transition programme. Another event that stoked the activities of the civil societies was the death of Abiola during Abacha reign. The civil society increased its

aggressiveness, vibrancy, confidence and fights for the return of civil rule, with naked accusation and claim of the military looking for way to kill NADECO members, a move that made many to run to other countries, while many others were detained. This had an impact on the next transition to democracy pioneered by General Abubakar in 1999.

From the foregoing, it is deductible that the civil societies have had their fair share of contributions in shaping democracy in Nigeria. But this has not always been so as some upcoming paragraphs will illustrate. In some cases the societies have had their shortcomings, failing in the primary job of protecting the common man due to internal wrangling, or ethnic biases. Some observers are also of the view that some civil societies merely seek sponsorship from government and refuse to criticize the latter's excesses or incompetence in handling issues during military rule.

4. Civil Societies in Democratic Nigeria

The activities of the civil groups' organizations in the colonial period culminated in the struggle for Nigeria Independence. Democracy requires a condition where various groups and civil societies can express their ideas about how society and politics should be organized. Democracy is a form of government that gets consolidated once it is not obstructed by anyone that wants to take over power by any means. Also when it is constantly practiced as observed in advanced countries, it creates room for adaptation. To achieve this, civil society has to be distinct in its involvement in tackling some critical societal issues or problems, to serve as a watchdog on leaders who twist democracy to mean their personal interpretation of universally accepted rule of law. An instance includes the skewed interpretations given to democracy in countries such as the Gambia and Cote d'Ivoire. Olusegun Obasanjo, while answering questions in the United States of America, noted that "we believe that democracy is a process and not an event" (Agi 2000:127). No matter the way we view democratic process, it is all about maturity of the leader in putting up a well-built electoral

institution and other institutions that allow for an active civil society. To Kukah, M.H. (1999), *Our democratic experimentation in Nigeria has consistently failed because our nation lacked a responsive civil society to sustain the gains of democracy. It is the various organs of civil society along with other democratic institutions that will hold those who govern in check. The lack of a civil society has made democracy vulnerable in the hand of manipulative power elite (cited in Oyovbaire, S. 2000:21).*

In the First and Second Republics, civil societies were not forceful but existed as associations or groups agitating for recognition in the midst of distrust among the various ethnic groups. In the Third and Fourth Republics, civil societies have played key role by educating the people to be aware of the dividends of democracy in a liberal democratic setting. At the beginning of 1999, the civil society concentrated more on seeing the military junta out of power and never wanted a repeat of the annulment of the June 12 election. On achieving democratic rule in May 19, 1999, there was an increase in civil society's organization and a rebirth of civil groups or organizations along ethnic lines, for example the *Arewa*, *Odua People's Congress*, *Oha-na-Eze Ndigbo* and others, having relevance in their language communities.

In the Fourth Republic, it is glaring that the voice of the civil society groups has not been as loud and aggressive, and unkindly confrontational as it used to be during the military as championed by NADECO and other groups. The fact might be that the concern of civil society went above agitation to education of the citizen to understand their right to vote, to choose their choice candidate to lead them as their leader, and cry out if the leaders are not fulfilling their promises in a non violent manner, thereby complimenting the work of political parties. Salihu (2017) writes that:

"Civil society organizations include trade unions, professional associations, faith-based groups, media organizations, community-based groups and other forms of non-governmental organizations. In the Nigerian context, it is a far cry to claim any known shared standard or value with respect to activities of these

organizations. At best, regressive trend in our societal life, which accounts for crashed standards and value system, tend to strengthen the rise of these organizations based on the need to raise the capacity of citizens to address social, economic and political developmental challenges. A second factor is a combination of declining public and private sector services coupled with inflexible and shrinking employment environment. This made the work of civil society organizations to serve as alternative source for income earning opportunity besides providing services. Thirdly, the existence of repressive and unpopular governments for more than twenty years in the country also serve as impetus for the proliferation of organizations that seek to challenge the legitimacy of policy, programmes and ultimately the existence of these governments”(cited in www.gamji.com)

Civil society during Obasanjo tenure (from 1999 to 2007) was not in agreement with policy somersault. The period recorded ceaseless confrontations and long strikes that paralyzed the nation’s economy, and brought created a heavy tension between the government and the Nigerian Labour Congress led by Adams Oshiomole. Some of these policies included the skyrocketing price of petroleum when the crude oil price at the international market was favourable. There was also the quest for tenure elongation by the Obasanjo government, prompting concerned Nigerians to kick against it under the umbrella of constituted civil society groups.

Yar’Adua/ Goodluck Jonathan government (2003-2007) faced the agitation of ethnic agitations, including the Niger Delta militants, a spillover from the outgoing Obasanjo regime. Another angle was added to the protests when President Yar’Adua was incapacitated following his illness. This caused some civil groups and concerned Nigerians to support the doctrine of necessity, the Resume or Resign protests so much similar to what has characterized the political atmosphere following Buhari’s over three months medical vacation in London. Accepted that these protestations have a national perspective, reading in-between the lines will often reveal oppositions leaning towards where

the subject of the protests, like the president in question, is coming from. Tagged alongside these are such realities as the integration of members of these groups into the political caucuses, thereby dousing their protesting voices. Some of the civil society leaders cannot help becoming victims of the failures that they raise initially raised their voices against, especially when they are integrated into the political process.

Another factor that tends to undermine the civil society existence in the country is the feature of ethnic cleavages. Nigeria as a nation has failed to surmount the ethnic hurdle and basically, citizens of the country identify more with their language communities and religious groups than with the Nigeria umbrella. In the South-eastern part of Nigeria there is unending agitation for the Biafra republic and counter hate speech of the Arewa youths that the Igbo people should vacate the northern part of the state; and the Niger delta militants giving a marching order that the Yoruba and the Hausa/Fulani must leave the region before October 1, 2017. Clever politicians play on these sentiments to distort the objectives of many civil society groups in Nigeria

5. Methodology

Secondary sources were used in order to study the presence of civil societies in Nigeria within the context of the relationship between government and the civil society groups. The sources are published works such as books, newspapers, periodicals journals and other materials relevant to the study which deal with the approaches and trends of civil societies or civil groups during the military and civilian regimes. The main thrust of this paper is to provide an analytic perspective on civil societies in Nigeria and reflect on the activities of these civil societies during the military era and that of civilian regime to promote sustainable development and consolidate democracy.

6. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the factors that contribute to the continuing presence of

civil society in Nigeria. The study also highlights the approaches of civil societies in order to observe the trends of its operation. The objectives are:

- i. To identify the trends of civil society in Nigeria
- ii. To determine the extent to which civil society groups have transformed from the military to civilian regimes.

Research Questions

- i. What are the roles of civil society?
- ii. Is the trend of civil society during the military rule the same with civilian rule?
- iii. Why is civil society more confrontational during military rule than civilian rule?

7. Data and Record of Some Civil Societies in Nigeria from 1912 - 2017

S/n	Establishment	Year Established	Purpose	Action
1	Nigeria Civil Service Union (NSCU)	August 19, 1912 by Mr. H. Libert	A body of wage earners to struggle and demand for proper welfare for workers	Agitating for good living conditions, while the colonial masters were afraid of the union dismantling colonial structures.
2	Nigerian Bar Association	1933	To promote legal professionalism and the rule of law	Uses the law as an instrument for social change.
3	Nigerian Labour Congress	1945	To demand for proper welfare for workers	Always in the forefront of agitation for good living standards for their members
4	Abeokuta women march	November 1947, led by Fumilayo Ransome Kuti	To promote women affairs	Nonviolent mass protest
5	National Association of Nigerian Students	1956	Bringing together Nigerian students both from within and in the Diaspora	Response to school fees increment through campus protests
6	Oha-na-Eze Ndigbo	1976	The group represents all the Igbo socio-cultural concerns within and outside Nigeria. They foster unity among the Igbo.	Agitation for the interests of the Igbo people.
7	Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Gas workers (NUPENG)	August 1978, (formerly registered as a Trade Union)	For furthering the interests of the Union	Always in the forefront agitating for good living standards for their members
8	Academic Staff Union of Universities	1978	Struggling for the welfare of workers and to save Nigerian university system	Being in the forefront to solve critical issues in Nigeria.
9	Women In Nigeria (WIN)	1982	It is an organization that promotes women interests, women liberation, equality, and justice.	To educate women to understand their rights.
10	Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO)	1987	The struggle against militarism and civil rights advocacy and police reform	Mobilized the people against the extension of military rule.
11	Committee for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR)	April 1989	To draw attention to human rights abuses	Uses the medium to seek redress under the constitution ,
12	Odua People’s Congress	1994	To promote and defend the interests of the Yoruba people	Always in the forefront of agitation for their members and confrontation with government
13	National Democratic Coalition (NADECO)	May 15, 1994	The struggle against continuation of military government	Mobilized the people against Sani Abacha to give power to the winner of June 12, 1993 election
14	Arewa People’s Congress	December 13, 1999	To promote and defend the interests of the Muslims, Hausa/Fulani, and all Northern people	Always in the forefront of agitation for their members and confrontation with government
15	Bakassi Boys	2002	Known for anti-crime. They act like a civilian joint task force, called by name Imo Vigilante Service, or Anambra Vigilante Service.	Involvement in extrajudicial killing of perceived criminals. It was disbanded by the federal government.
16	Patriot Foundation	2003	This group supports families of servicemen and women killed, wounded or injured in global war on terrorism.	To provide scholarships to victims’ children.
17	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger	2005	It is made up of members of the Ijaw ethnic group who agitate for the interests of their ethnic group in	They attack oil installations, kidnapping the staff and vandalizing oil pipelines to create awareness towards the plight of Niger

	Delta		the Niger Delta. It initially started as a civil and community group before becoming a militant group.	Deltans.
18	The Charter of National Coalition of Nigerian Youths in Social Development.	February, 2010	To bring about social change and to promote growth and foster peace in the country.	To educate the Nigerian youths to understand their rights and be productive.
19	Save Nigeria Group	2010	Committed to creating a political environment that guarantees only best, brightest, fittest and most competent Nigerian are democratically elected in public office	To educate Nigerians on need to elect good and competent leaders.
20	Resume or Resign group	2017	Concerned Nigerians protesting the long medical vacation of the sitting president	To force the hands of the ailing president to come back to work

Source: *Vanguard* (August 25, 2012) www.Nigerianbar.org.ng, *Wikipedia*, www.cdhrnigeria.org, www.informationng.com

The table shows that civil society groups in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic are still growing to meet the desired standards. However, while the number appears endless, in form many of the groups are mere avenues to attract political portfolios and actually do not protest anything.

8. Discussions

In view of the research questions, we have shown that the civil society in Nigeria had its loudest voice when it was confronting the military regimes to pave way for the civilian variants, be it in 1979 or 1999, by complementing the roles of political parties in stimulating political participation and increasing political efficacy and skills.

The argument presented in Michael (2011) while acknowledging the work of Boadi (1995) and Osaghae (1998) include the challenges faced by civil society in Nigeria as: i) fund, ii) poor economic condition, and iii) appointment of civil society members into public offices, thereby compromising their standards. This weakened the strength of majority of the civil society groups to focus on a common goal for the realization of suitable development in a democratic setting. Boadi (1995) writes that “many of Nigeria’s new democracy civil associations turned out to be nothing more than political action committees and proto-parties that have more in common with political than civil society” (cited in Michael, 2011: 2). This is not to say however that it is a norm. Some other

groups, greatly in the minority though, define their goals and pursue it with singularity of purpose till a logical end. Instances include the Bring Back Our Girls group Championed by Oby Ezekwesili.

9. Conclusion

In the light of the liberal and radical dimensions to the study of the civil society in Nigeria, we have shown that especially when an issue of common concern arises, like hike in pump prices of petroleum products; civil societies lend their voices to a general clamour for total uprising against the development. Here we see the Nigeria labour congress. So, what is common goal in the understanding of the activities of civil society? Common goal refers to a variety of possible items that include basic rights, public safety, education, communication and many more. The people residing in a society under the control of a particular government must deliberate on policies that would favour the society in a democratic setting. Oyovbaire (2000) raises two germane questions on whether the problem of democracy in Nigeria is a product of the weakness of civil society or whether the weakness of civil society is itself is a product of the difficulties of democracy. He provides an answer by saying that civil society is weak because democracy has not been able to endure and to provide the enabling environment and conditions for ‘energisation’ of civil society. Uchendu (2000:34) writes that “Nigeria tends to be over-generous with its political promises and

verbal commitment, but lacks the capacity to deliver even where the resources are abundant in a liberal democratic state. This throws the civil society aback as to when would winning political parties and their leaders keep to the promises that push the voters to vote for them. Some authorities in political science have summed up the obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria to be i) Ethno-religious factor; ii) the absence of true federalism; iii) abject poverty; iv) political godfathers; and v) corruption.

10. Recommendations

Given the role of civil societies in Nigeria, there is need to rebrand from the style and approaches used in combating government over policy somersault that affect the people to an approach that would always press on government whenever they renege on their promises. The following recommendations are stated:

- i. Civil society in Nigeria should be allowed to operate on issue-based approach
- ii. The issues should be well defined and regulated by an agency that is independent from government control
- iii. Each civil society should be accountable of the funds collected for public accountability
- iv. The nongovernmental civil society serving as the third sector for development purpose should be monitored.

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