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## **Civil Society, Ideology and Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*In recent years in Nigeria, civil society of different ideological orientation have become integral purveyors in specific development issues in the country. Their activities cover various areas of human endeavours that the government and institutions see them as partners in progress. With international linkages that offer both financial and moral leverages. Civil societies are local advocacy others religion quite penetration to achieve their objectives. This paper is therefore an attempt to find out the role of civil society in the Nigerian polity and whether ideology plays a part in their contributions to development. We relied on qualitative-descriptive technique by availing of secondary literature and embellished with personal experiences. Our findings indicated that whereas civil society has become very ubiquitous and relevant driving specific issues, ideology is not really a manifest preoccupation despite their advertised orientation rather the love for the common good and welfare of the generality of Nigerians are their modus operandi. Accordingly, this paper recommends that civil society should be encouraged constitutionally in funding, regulation accountability, transparency etc. to enhance their credibility and development of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Civil Society, Ideology, Development.

### **Introduction**

Civil society thrives better under liberal democracies than authoritarian climate. Thus, Nigeria in recent years especially since the advent of fourth republic tolerate the flourishing of civil society thereby providing opportunities for people to participate in collective activities that are neither pro-state nor anti-state but simply non-state (Hague & Harrop, 2010).

In the areas of civil liberties, electoral advocacy and reforms, human rights, environmental issue, prison congestion, migration, child marriage etc. Civil society has demonstrated an abiding fate in crusading for the betterment of the Nigerian society.

This paper therefore tries to evaluate the role of civil society in the development of Nigeria and whether ideological purity has a hand in it. To achieve this, the paper will be approached thus: part one offers the abstract, introduction and conceptual clarification. Part two examines the theoretical framework of the Rentier State Theory. Part three focuses on evaluating findings while part four concludes and offers some recommendations.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Civil Society**

Civil society encompasses an active segment of society's life because they straddle the government, business and nongovernmental sectors by providing a link between them and influencing activities. Like other concepts in the social science, civil society is difficult to define and grasp within a shot. Scholars as well as institutions and governments offer various views on what civil society entails. According to the World Bank (2010), Civil Society "refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations". Similarly, the Centre for Social Impact views Civil Society as "a broad range of formal and informal non-government sectors and actors, to pursue or promote specific, sometimes competing values, policies and political agendas."

Scholars have equally contributed to the understanding of civil society; Keane (2009), views Civil Society as being contrasted from the government, for him, civil society means "a realm of social life – market exchanges, charitable groups, clubs and voluntary associations, independent churches and publishing houses – institutionally separated from territorial state institutions". In the same vein, Orji in Gberevbie (2013) views civil society as "organized activities by groups or group of individuals essentially out to perform certain services with a view to influencing the government in its policies and programmes for the improvement of society". Ghaus-Pasha in Gberevbie (2013) conceives civil society as "a sphere that is separate from the state and the market, and formed by people who have common needs, interest and values". In addition, Ikelegbe in Gberevbie (2013) refers to civil societies as "an—essentially participatory, broad-based and self-governing formation engaged in shaping public affairs, public policy and governance".

Regardless of the varying views about what constitutes civil society, there seems to be major points of convergence that characterise civil society. Civil society is therefore seen as an aggregate of the nongovernmental and non business actors that are actively engaged in the day to day activities of society with a view to advocating or promoting certain ideals. Ideals pursued by Actors in the civil society can either be conformist, reformist, or transformist in aspirations (Jan Aart Scholte). Civil societies also operate at multiple levels or scale in contemporary society. The diversity of civil society actions also target different types of development question. The operation and structure of civil society has evolved over the years from Civil Society Organisations to various types of organisations engaged in the daily affairs of society. Modern typologies of civil society have evolved to include the but not limited to the following:

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) comprising community-based organisations that have an organised structure and mission and are typically registered entities, faith -based organisations as well as groups and NGOs.

- Civil Society also encompass online groups and activities, comprising social media communities that can be “organised” but do not necessarily have physical, legal, or financial structures.
- Social movements of collective action and/or identity, which can be online or physical.
- Labour unions (VanDyck, 2017).

### **Ideology**

The concept of ideology is difficult to define in one sitting. In the view of Bello (2008) “an ideology is a coherent set of ideas that provides a basis for organised political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power relations”. He went further to add that ideologies offer accounts of existing social order and provide model for desired future. They also outline how political change can and should be brought about. In a different perspective, Mannheim in (Bamikole, 2009) described ideology as possessing two elements: ideology and utopia. For him, ideology represents a system of thought that serve to defend a particular social order and broadly express the interests of its dominant or ruling group. He went further to present utopia as an idealised representation of the future that imply the need for radical social change, invariably serving the interests of the oppressed or subordinate groups.

Other scholars have equally offered their view on the subject by defining ideology in their unique ways, Gould and Kolb in (Bello, 2008) saw the concept as “a pattern of beliefs and concepts both factual and normative which purport to explain complex social phenomena with a view to directing and simplifying socio-political choice facing individuals and groups”. Similarly, Dolbeare and Dolbeare in (Bello, 2008) added that

ideology means belief about the present nature of the world and the hopes one has for its future. Such beliefs and hopes, when integrated into a more or less coherent picture of how the present social, economic and political order operate, why this is so and whether it is good or bad and what should be done about it.

Marx as quoted by, Dolbeare and Dolbeare in (Bello, 2008) paraphrased ideology as ideas which the capitalist ruling class uses to rationalise and justify the capitalist system and its privileged position in it. They are distorted or selected ideas in defence of the status quo. The differing views in the understanding of the concept of ideology points to certain salient features about the concept: first, ideology represents an understanding of a people’s social, political and economic state. Secondly, ideology presents a picture of what is to be done about the people’s condition. Ideology might recommend a radical change or maintenance of status quo depending on the view or interest of the persons wielding the ideology. Some popular ideas that have dominated the world include fascism, capitalism, Nazism, Communism etc etc.

- Development

Development means different things to different scholars. While some equate development with industrialisation, modernity or westernisation and its artefacts such as cars, refrigerators, air conditioners, etc, others see it as the mere achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In some cases, development is viewed from an economic angle, in other cases, political or social. The diversity of views on what development is has given rise to the divergence in definitions by different scholars (Agwadu, 2015) .

Rostow in (Okeke, 2012) views Development as the progressive movement from traditional society to the stage of high mass consumption of goods and services. For any human society that wishes to develop, it must go through five stages of development as epitomized by the West, particularly the USA, and these include: (a) Traditional Stage (b) the Transitional Stage (c) the Take-off Stage (d) the Drive to Maturity (e) the Stage of High Mass Consumption. This rather simplistic definition does not discuss the forces involved in development. Also, the definition is too rigid as it views development as a linear road in which all societies follow to develop. Furthermore, the definition makes the costly assumption that development carries every member of society along. It is evident that most societies suffer from wealth distribution problems.

According to Seers (1979 in Nafziger 2010), the purpose of development is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This view is too humancentric in the sense that it places emphasis on humans and humans alone. It does not take into cognisance, the fact that other factors like the environment are equally important in measuring development. Certain human activities geared towards poverty reduction, employment generation and equity are harmful to the environment in which humans share with other life forms. In the end, if poverty is reduced as well as inequality and unemployment but the environment is destroyed, development cannot be said to have taken place. Also, the view is only centred on economic factors; development also involves the social and political aspects of life. Gboyega's view in (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011) suffers a similar humancentric disposition as it talks about development as attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. For Sen in (Nafziger, 2010), development involves reducing deprivation or broadening choice. Deprivation represents a multidimensional view of poverty that includes hunger, illiteracy, illness and poor health, powerlessness, voicelessness, insecurity, humiliation, and a lack of access to basic infrastructure. This definition covers a lot of areas but it still suffers the humancentric position of the previous view.

Rodney (1972) offers a far more promising definition as he views development as being multifaceted and having many sides involving individual, social group and society at large. For Rodney, development at the level of individual implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships while for the society at large, development has exhibited strength to single-handedly improve their ability to live better lives through harnessing the earth's resources

available to them. Rodney therefore, defined Development as an overall social process which is dependent upon increased capacity of members of a society to master the laws of nature (that is science) and apply such laws in the production of tools (that is technology) with which they can control their environment to meet their immediate and future needs. It cannot be seen purely as an economic affair because other segments of the society are also involved.

This work aligns more with the position of Rodney as it is wider in scope. The position views development as not being strictly economic but involving other aspects of society. It also sees development from different levels: individual, social group and society at large. It also took environmental concerns into cognisance. These are factors either lacking or not pronounced in other perspectives. Today, discusses in development have expanded to include factors beyond humans living conditions like the environment and safety of other life forms.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Rentier State Theory**

The rentier state theory is a theory in political science that was propounded by Hossein Mahdavy in 1970. The rentier state theory describes certain states based on their economic system. A rentier state is one that relies on rents to sustain itself. Rent in this regard is not the type of rent between a tenant and landlord but something different. Rent here means the money received from the exploitation of natural resources (Kamal, 2017). The term “rent” in classical economic theory means the surplus left after cost of production is deducted. Rent was usually paid to the owners of the land for the use of its natural resources. Rent has been described as nature’s reward for the ownership of resources and it exists in all economies in varying degrees (Levins, 2013). In the case of rentier states, rents are given to states for the usage or exploitation of resources gotten from the land within such states. Rents are largely sourced from external sources. States or economies are qualified to be called rentier when their incomes are predominantly derived from external sources. While rents may be derived from internal sources, such rents represent mere cash transfers and don’t form significant portions of the monies involved in running state.

In a typical rentier state, only a small fraction of the society is engaged in the creation of wealth while the rest of the population is merely engaged in distributing and utilising such wealth. Government is the main recipient of rent externally sourced rent. One of the major issues with a rentier state is that production efficiency is relegated to the background due to the fact that a weak link exists between individual work and income. Preoccupation for gaining access to rent circle is greater than production efficiency (Kamal, 2017). This leads to the formation of a rentier mentality which is embedded with breakage in the work-reward relationship as contained in John Locke’s ideal of property where private property is acquired by individuals through the application of labour. Wealth from natural resources in rentier states deceives individuals into the expectations that revenues will always increase. Also, the elites in rentier states themselves get deceived by the satisfaction of their living condition (Levins, 2013).

There is usually a low desire for industrialisation in rentier states due to the availability of revenue from rents. The government itself only serves as the engine of circulation or allocation of rent through various economic sectors and social groups. The role of state in rentier states is unique as well. Generally, citizens pay little to no tax hence their inability to make numerous demands. The existence of rents makes it possible for governments to build certain things without imposing heavy taxes on citizens. The availability of welfare services from the state makes and low taxation makes citizens less inclined to act on their behalf and promote self-interest (Levins, 2013). In the words of Levins (2013) “the diminished need of the state to tax its citizens hinders the development of a strong state that legitimately represents its citizens.”

Nigeria as state tends to exhibit elements of state rentierism which explains its major revenue source (oil), its state driven development pattern and the mentality of its citizens towards development hence their reactions to state actions. The rentier state theory is therefore adopted by this paper to explain its position.

### **Civil Society and Development**

As noted earlier, civil society is actively involved in daily activities of society. Their involvements are usually targeted at promoting certain ideals which could be reformist, conformist or transformist in nature. Also, civil society is flexible in terms of composition and goals. This makes them feature prominently in development processes at different levels. Civil society serve as pressure groups to government and also impact on development in several ways. According to Scholte (2012), civil society impact on society in the following areas: (i) language; (ii) institutional processes; (iii) policy content; and (iv) broader social structures.

In the area of language, they shape the way issues are thought about and discussed. This goes a long way in influencing understanding and mobilisation in dealing with issues. As noted earlier, civil society is diverse, while others pursue conformist goals, others pursue reformist or tranformist ones. This diversity produces in most cases, corresponding diversity in the language used to discuss issues.

Beside influencing the languages used in discussing issues, civil society also impacts on institutional processes. They influence the procedures through which global and national policies are made and implemented. Civil society actors also participate directly in the processes of policy formulation. Actors in the civil society have also influenced transparency in developmental institutions. Beyond policy formulation processes, civil society also impacts on policy content as well. Numerous interventions by civil society have aided in initiating, amending, propelling or blocking certain policy measures. Civil society is largely credited for focusing the attention of actors in development on the environment especially since the 1970s. Actions of civil society are also largely credited for championing the moves for poverty reduction and social safety nets. At the international level, civil society is also credited for helping to project the autonomy of supranational organisations from nation-states (Scholte, 2012).

The role of civil society in development goes beyond language, policy formulation processes and policy content; it goes to the areas of implementation of development programmes. In the 1960s and 1970s, nationalists and donors saw the state as a central mechanism for economic and social development. However, perceived inefficiency from the state sparked a need for a new paradigm in development with an inclination far from state-driven especially in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s marked the rise of neoliberalism as a leading ideology in the international arena in opposition to the previous nationalist thinking that dominated. Neoliberalism is largely propelled by the recent wave in globalisation. Neoliberalism is an economic ideology that prescribes mostly anti-statist ideas. Institutions like the World Bank and IMF have been promoting the idea that states are ineffective in service delivery. As a solution to state ineffectiveness, policies such as deregulation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and cutbacks in social welfare programs have been advanced by these institutions especially under the structural adjustment programme. These anti-statism drives have led to reductions in state participation in the areas of service and welfare provisions (Smith, 1999). States have traditionally carried out such services prior to the rise of neoliberalism especially in the nationalist era of the 1960s and 1970s. The withdrawal of state from these areas has created a vacuum which is filled by civil society actors in development (Gberevbie, 2013). The activities of donors of the global north have equally given a bust to the role civil society plays in development. This is particularly a product of the new policy agenda on good governance where donors explicitly promote political reforms which meant promoting policies that limited the state interference. Aid donors pressure recipient countries to improve their records on democratic elections, human rights and the rule of law etc. as prerequisites for receiving aid (Andrew & Taylor, 2000). Beyond setting these criteria as prerequisite for aid, civil society is equally engaged. Civil society organisations engage in promoting good governance, human right and other democratic ethos. In the opinion of Gberevbie (2013), no nation is capable of achieving its full development potentials without democratic governance as engendered and promoted by a vibrant civil society.

### **Ideology and Development**

Ideology has been noted to represent understanding of the social, political or economic state of society as well as a normative prescription of what is to be done about that state of society. Ideologies serve as mentally generated pictures or architectural designs for society. As blue prints, ideologies have served as roadmaps for several societies to pattern their developments. History is full of examples of societies that developed by prescriptions of ideological positions laid down by theorists. Beyond the growth of science and technology that propel development of society, the question of wealth distribution, availability of health care facilities and other indicators of development are paramount in measuring development in general. All of these matters can be captured within the frameworks of ideologies as blue prints for development.



The American society has developed to become arguably the most successful economic success story the world has ever seen. The US economy churns out great economic figures spanning from its manufacturing sector as well as agriculture and services. The US has come to not only be synonymous with its huge economic figures but development in general where most indicators of development show the country as being highly developed. The important question about the US is the history of its development especially the blue print it followed to get there. Following the theoretical positions of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and other liberal scholars, the US followed a liberal ideology rooted in capitalism to develop. Liberal ideas emerged as criticisms of mercantilism which involved the state greatly in the economy. The liberal position prescribed a reduction of the state's involvement in the economy. The state should rather encourage individuals to pursue various economic ventures. According to the liberals, the promotion of individual goals results in promoting those of society at large. The United States followed this ideology by encouraging capitalism. It was under capitalism that the United States rose to become a global economic power house. Individuals such as John D. Rockefeller, J.P Morgan, Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie developed the country by developing their businesses. They built roads, rails and other critical infrastructures that grew the US economy and developed the country.

Similarly, the USSR developed by adopting the Marxist ideology. The Marxist ideology stems from the works of German Scholars Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The Marxist ideology criticised the capitalist system by acknowledging its contributions to manufacturing but doing so through the exploitation of the working class which results in uneven distribution of wealth. The Marxists predicted that the working class were going to gain consciousness of their condition, unionise and overthrow the capitalist system. As a replacement, they will create a socialist state where the means of production and distribution will be controlled by the state thereby ending the exploitation that characterised capitalism and preparing society for communism which is to be totally stateless and without the private ownership of property (Stalin, 1938). The Russian revolution of 1917 was led by V.I Lenin and his fellow Bolshevik party members who subscribe to the Marxist ideology (Ezurike, 2013). Lenin himself made some adjustment to the original position of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels thereby creating a variant of Marxism known as Marxism-Leninism. He and the Bolshevik party followed the Marxist-Leninist ideology in running the government of the USSR. After Lenin's death in 1924, his successor, Joseph Stalin made Marxism-Leninism the official state ideology. Following the ideology, USSR, particularly Russia moved from a nearly feudal state to an industrialised state within 10 years rivalling older European powers. The Marxist-Leninist ideology helped the USSR to achieve a level of development so fast it seemed more like a miracle (Ezurike, 2013). This development was led by the state as opposed to individuals obtainable in capitalist states.

In the same vein, ideology has also led to the development of the Asian tigers especially South Korea and Taiwan. South Korea and Taiwan emerged as states as a result of ideological wars fought in their ancient states. A war in the old Chinese state

led to the victory of communist forces in the Chinese mainland. As a response, the capitalist forces retreated to the island and formed Taiwan. Similar is the case with South Korea where the communists and capitalists fought and formed a defence border which became the border that created two states, Communist North Korea and Capitalist South Korea. The capitalists who formed South Korea adopted the capitalist ideology which they used with collaborations with the US and her Western allies to develop into the economic powerhouse it has become today. Taiwan equally aligned with the West and used capitalist ideology to develop into a viable economy.

There are numerous examples of countries that have developed as a result of the ideologies they adopted as well as some that have retarded their development by the choice of ideology. The Chinese state as an example, took a Marxist-Leninist variant of the Marxist ideology known as Maoism as its blueprint for development. Maoism as an ideology prescribed collective ownership but limited it to agriculture as opposed to the Soviet Union which used it for industrialisation. Although there was increase in agricultural production, insufficiency in storage facilities as well as poor agro industry led to most of the agricultural produce decaying and leading to famine and mass deaths from starvation.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, various Latin American countries also adopted several ideologies especially Marxism as their blueprint for development. Cuba for example took Marxism and patterned its development on some Marxist postulations and ended up recording tremendous success in various sectors of their development.

### **The Civil Society in Nigeria**

The history of civil society in Nigeria is complex. Tribal associations and groups that are recognised as civil society groups today have been in existence in Nigeria before colonialism. The pluralistic nature of the country has birthed in its womb a long tradition of civil society. Civil society groups are credited for leading resistance against colonialism. Such groups as *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, the *Jamiyar Mutanin Arewa* were known to have transcended clan and tribal boundaries to form the nationalist forces against the repressive colonial regime (Omede & Bakare, 2014). Beyond resistance to colonialism, activities of major existing civil society groups in other areas of development today can be traced to the colonial era. Civil society groups have played significant roles in service provision around Africa. Christian missionaries for instance provided health care and educational programmes. In post-colonial Nigeria, the state set up health care schemes, educational programmes and agricultural development programmes which coincided with the rise in nationalism. Civil society actors were relegated to peripheral actors in the area of development where a number of missionary schools and hospitals were nationalised leading to restrictions in the activities of civil society groups in that regard (Andrew & Taylor, 2000).

The 1980s marked a period of dramatic decline in the ability of states to deliver development to their various countries in Africa. As a response to state decline, a “good governance” agenda emerged with the wave of globalisation that hit Eastern Europe, Former Soviet Union and many developing countries in the late

1980s. The dominant ideology of nationalism was challenged by the rising neoliberalism in the international arena. Within neoliberalism arose a dominant paradigm for public sector reforms known as “New Public Management” (NPM) (Andrew & Taylor, 2000). The period is also remarked as the period of the rise of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). SAP came as a solution to declining state capacity in third world countries especially in Africa. According to its proponents, third world countries were not developing because they had structural anomalies that needed adjustments. SAP came with certain recommendations which had to do with reducing the general role of the state. It came with policies such as deregulation and privatisation that were aimed at removing the state from various sectors. SAP is a product of NPM whose major tenet it was to contract out public service provision to the private sector. This gave rise to the reintroduction of civil society groups as key players in development by playing some of the roles hitherto played by states.

From the beginning of the 1980s, Nigeria’s economic indices revealed a downward spiral, an indication of a serious crisis. The central figures of this economic decline included: falling industrial production, and the consequent contraction of the manufacturing sector as well as a declining export revenue (Obadare, 2005). The country’s continued reliance on oil revenue made matters worse as the period marked a decline in global oil prices. The falling oil prices caught the country at the worst time because it had previously enjoyed a period of oil boom in the 1970s. In response to economic decline, the Babangida led administration in Nigeria introduced the World Bank and IMF programme of SAP. The major objectives of SAP were the restructuring and diversification of the Nigerian economy away from oil dependence. Declining industrial production as well as commercialisation and privatisation led to unemployment and increase in poverty. The weakening of the country’s currency, the Naira also led to a declining purchasing power for the people thereby deepening the rising poverty. The resultant effect of this was dissatisfaction and resentment. Dissatisfaction and resentment led to resistance which culminated in the anti-SAP riots of May 1989. The riot brought about a coalition of worker’s unions, professionals and students who were out to protest deteriorating economic conditions. The Babangida regime had also inaugurated a transition programme that was aimed at transferring power to civilians in 1990 but that never came to pass. Babangida himself was perceived to be interested in the government himself. The regime kept shifting the date for the transition culminating in the cancellation of the June 12 1993 presidential election. 11 days after the cancellation of the election, a coalition of human rights bodies, professional groups, trade unions and student groups arose in resistance of the government. The media designated them “civil society” (Obadare, 2005). According to Obadare (2005) although the 1950s and 1960s which marks the height of nationalism in Nigeria and other African countries, the term “civil Society” was never used as a common denominator to refer to nationalist actors or their action. The concept came into the Nigerian scholarly landscape in the middle of the 1990s. Civil society did not feature as a consistent subject of social research until that period.

The role of civil society in the country has evolved over the years to reflect the evolution of the country itself. In the colonial era, nationalists were concerned with resisting repressive colonial rule. The period after independence marked a shift to economic and social development. The military took over power in 1966 and suspended the constitution; this forced the civil society to wear an ethnic garment where citizens started to rely on ethnic associations to fight for them especially in resistance to military rule. After the civil war of 1967-1970, efforts of the civil society in Nigeria went into reconciliation, reconstruction of the country and preservation of national unity. From the late 1970s to date, the activities of civil society have been concentrated on managing the ailing economy of the country. These evolutionary stages only serve to espouse the evolution of the Nigerian state itself as well as the efforts put in shaping it (Omede & Bakare, 2014). One striking thing about the civil society in Nigeria is that it merely reacts to unfolding realities. The history of the evolution of civil society in the country shows a civil society that merely reacts.

The civil society in Nigeria was initially composed of tribal groups and associations, civil society organisations, the media and professional and educational circles, it has however evolved with recent trends to accommodate different segments of the Nigerian society that are actively involved in the day to day affairs of the Nigerian state especially as it relates to development. The rise of the internet has expanded the areas of civil society activities beyond the traditional arena such as media, protest and strikes. The civil society today has grown to include new areas like the social media and blogging sites where information is shared easily. The ease of sharing information on the internet has created a vibrant civil society arena where information about daily happenings in the country are shared and reacted to. Previously, information only got through to Nigerians through the traditional media: TV, radio, newspaper and magazine however, the rise of the Internet has opened a new platform for information sharing in the country. Traditional media platforms have themselves keyed into internet information sharing; they now post news on their websites and social media pages where comment sections exist for people to react. Even in programmes that are hosted on traditional media platforms such as the TV, interactive links are sometimes provided for individuals to react on social media. This has expanded the reach of information because traditional media platforms like TV and newspaper were viewed as platforms that had reach to a fewer people compared to the internet that is easily accessible to people through their mobile phones and other means. This has created a vibrant civil society where government officials, highly placed personalities and opinion moulders are engaged on national issues. Internet platforms especially social networks have been acknowledged to have influence on national issues as they reveal people's reactions to issues. Some individuals believe social media activism partly determined the outcome of the 2015 general elections held in Nigeria.

### **Evaluation**

The civil society in Nigeria is acknowledged to have evolved over the years and engaged itself on national issues with the country. It has engaged the country

through its evolution from colonialism to date. In spite of civil society involvement, Nigeria is still an underdeveloped country. The responsibility of developing the country does not lie in the hands of the civil society but the state itself. However, as discussed earlier, the Nigerian state is a rentier state relying on its oil rent. The activities of state are largely centred on allocating oil rents. The country is largely run by the resources from oil which is under state control. The development of the state itself is largely tied to the oil wealth and its allocation. The civil society comes into the development picture because it serves as the nongovernmental and non-business third force in the country. The civil society acts as the pressure group out to checkmate the government and also represents the majority of beneficiaries of development. As window into public reaction to government activities, the civil society is an important element in development hence possessing the capacity to influence government. Since the government might be seen as one that has not lived up to expectation in terms of developing the state, it is pertinent to study and understand what the civil society has done about it. Gberevbie (2013) described the civil society especially CSOs as the defenders of the people's interest. This makes the study of civil society in Nigerian pertinent, it is therefore important to review some of the impacts of civil society on the development of Nigeria.

Civil society groups have participated in several activities that impacted in the country's development especially in politics. It is therefore pertinent to look at some of the achievements of civil society in the country.

### **Fight for Independence**

The civil society in Nigeria is credited for forming several groups like the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and Jamiyar Mutanin Arewa which transcended ethnic lines to fight colonial repressive government leading to independence in 1960. The first nationalists in Nigeria came from the civil society (Omede & Bakare, 2014).

### **Fight for the Return of Democracy**

Nigeria went through series of military incursion between 1966 and 1999. All through periods of military incursion, the civil society has been fighting for the return of democracy. The most notable of all, in the SAP era of Babangida, the government designed programmes of transition to democracy but kept shifting the date and climaxing in the June 12, 1993 annulment of presidential election. 11 days after the cancelation, professionals, worker's unions and students teamed up to form a civil society group like National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO) and Campaign for Democracy (CD) to fight for return to democracy. Their efforts culminated in the return of democracy to the country in 1999 (Gberevbie, 2013), (Obadare, 2005) and (Omede & Bakare, 2014).

### **Fight Against Third Term Agenda**

The civil society in Nigeria has been acknowledged for the role it played in returning the country to democracy in 1999, however, the seat tight syndrome associated with the military seemed to have returned with democracy in the form of

the government of Obasanjo wanting to extend its stay beyond the constitutional two tenures of four years. Although the president, General Olusegun Obasanjo never mentioned that he wanted to extend his tenure but actions and utterances from his aides suggested otherwise. The open support by the then PDP national chairman Dr Ahmadu Ali also indicated the president was interested in tenure elongation such utterances and actions went unrebuffed by the president. The bill for tenure elongation was sponsored in the National Assembly by Senator Ibrahim Mantu the then Deputy Senate President. It took the efforts of civil society groups and imminent personalities within the Nigerian civil society space to fight the agenda to a standstill. Such civil society groups as Peoples Problems and Solutions (PPS) organization, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria while being championed by National Civil Society Coalition against Third Term (NACATT) participated in anti-3<sup>rd</sup> term protests and publications in the media and other available platforms. Imminent personalities like the then vice president Atiku Abubakar, Prof. Wole Soyinka and Chief Bisi Akande contributed their efforts in fighting against the third term agenda leading to success and a conduction of elections in 2007 and the subsequent handover to a newly elected government (Omede & Bakare, 2014).

#### **Doctrine of Necessity Clause**

In September 2009, ailing president Umar Musa Yar'Adua was flown to Saudi Arabia for treatment. Certain prominent members of the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) who were largely from the north and allied to the president did not support the idea of the then vice president Goodluck Jonathan assuming the leadership of the country. Their argument was premised on the fact that Late President Yar'Adua did not give a written permission to the vice president to act in that capacity before leaving for Saudi Arabia as stipulated in the constitution. The situation led to a confusion that almost polarised the National Assembly along an ethnoreligious line. In the midst of the confusion, it was the civil society that rose to the occasion in addressing the matter. Such civil society groups as the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) and Enough is Enough Group mobilised the Nigerian civil society, protested in major Nigerian cities and marched to the National Assembly to demand a resolution that will give the vice president the mandate to act. This forced the National Assembly to invoke the "doctrine of necessity" to declare Vice President Goodluck Jonathan acting president.

#### **Electoral Reforms**

Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, the country faced series of challenges and electoral malpractices in the conduct of her elections. This led to series of outrage around the country, the civil society in the country rose to challenge the unfortunate development and demand electoral reforms that will guarantee free fair and credible elections in the country. The government of Late President Yar'Adua inaugurated and Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) on August 2008 to be headed by Justice Uwais. Civil society groups submitted series of memoranda to the ERC containing suggestions on how Nigeria can conduct free, fair and credible elections. The

committee itself had civil society members in its composition. CSOs also participated in public hearings on the matter. This led to the current legal framework Nigeria has for conducting elections and it produced the 2011 elections which was largely praised to be credible. Beyond participation in the processes of legal electoral reforms, CSOs contributed mobilising citizens through voter education on media as well as social media. They also deployed 50,000 trained election observers to monitor the election under the umbrella of Domestic Observation Groups containing such CSOs as Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Labour Monitoring Team (LMT) etc.

### **Freedom of Information Act**

Nigeria has been a country bedevilled with corruption especially with the government circle. There had been a need to make a law stipulating the all institutions spending public funds should open their operations and expenditures to make them accessible to citizens. The Freedom of Information bill was first sent to the National Assembly in 1999 but didn't make it through. The bill returned to the National Assembly again in 2003, although it was passed by the two houses, President Olusegun Obasanjo vetoed against it. It returned to the National Assembly for the third time in 2007 and was passed in May 2011. The success is largely attributed to civil society through their relentless efforts in the advocacy for the passage of the law. A coalition of civil society groups under the leadership of Right to Know Movement, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and the Open Society Justice Initiative are known to have championed this course (Omede & Bakare, 2014).

### **Civil Society, Ideology and Development in Nigeria: The Nexus**

Ideology has been discussed in this paper to represent on the one hand; understanding of social issues and on the other hand serves as blueprint for what is to be done about social realities. As discussed earlier, different society of the world developed by following different ideological prescriptions especially the capitalist and socialist ideologies. More than half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century featured a cold war between the capitalist and communist ideologies. Nigeria as a country joined the nonaligned movement. The country however made its non-ideological leaning official in the 1979 constitution when it made no commitment to none of the known ideologies. The country therefore opted for a mixed economy (Ndoh, 1979). The non-ideological stand of the country means development is not patterned on any of the dominant ideological prescriptions. Within the frameworks of the two dominant ideologies of capitalism and socialism lies the question of industry and its ownership. The development of both socialist and capitalist countries was anchored largely on industrialisation. Nigeria on the other hand is not anchoring her development on industrialisation but distribution of oil rent.

The country has hatched several national development plans from the colonial era to the transformation agenda of Dr Goodluck Jonathan. In all of these plans, one thing that has been absent is an ideological position. It may be argued that the Structural Adjustment Programme of the Babangida administration was anchored

on neoliberalism, however, the outcome was devoid of economic diversity and the industrialisation claimed by the SAP. The country can therefore be described as one that is planning its development with no ideological leaning as well as a strong industrial base.

Over the years, practice of rentierism has developed in Nigeria a rentier mentality where thinking is targeted at distributing oil rent. The work-reward link in Nigeria has broken. Unlike typical industrial countries where the source of financing the state is sourced from taxation, taxes are used to provide social services such as roads, public schools, hospitals etc. They in turn determine the level of development in the country because such development indicators like health, education etc. Where they are provided for by tax payers' money, the tax payers tend to be compelled to pressure the government and demand answers on how their taxes are spent. In rentier states on the other hand, public services are rather provided for from rent and they come to citizens as a "favour" as such the citizens don't really have much to contribute in terms of determining how state rent is spent. In Nigeria, the state has the sole capacity of distributing rent and that has had impacts on the development of the country. As noted, social services come to citizens as a favour in the country and the state determines where they go. Government officials in the country have so far focused social services on their class interest. The Nigerian state is known to spend more on the political class than the rest of the country. In 2015, 2016 and 2017, the government appropriated the sums of ₦3.94 Billion, ₦3.87 billion and ₦3.2 billion respectively to the Aso Rock clinic for the provision of necessary drugs and equipment whereas the following sums were appropriated to the 16 teaching hospitals in the country collectively for capital projects, 2015, ₦1.424 billion, 2016, ₦3.333 billion and 2017, ₦1.943 billion (Ogundipe & Ovuakporie, 2017). Similarly, the 2017 budget appropriated ₦850 million to Aso Rock for food, cooking gas and kitchen utensils (Obasi, 2016) whereas the federal ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development was allocated the sum of ₦76 billion (Adebayo, 2017). With these allocations, there is no surprise that development indicators in the country show it is highly underdeveloped.

As the defenders of the people's interest, the civil society in Nigeria is embroiled in the rentier mentality where it is itself a "receiver of favours". The civil society only reacts based on the level of favours it receives from the state. From time to time, the volatile nature of the international oil market makes the function of state in Nigeria unstable and sometimes unpredictable. As a result, the country goes through several circles where the state sometimes carries out public services while they decline at other times. The Nigeria civil society only reacts to such disparities. In the SAP era, the country's economy shrunk and poverty increased, the civil society rose in protest of the development. There are other times when the economy seems to have been doing a little better that the civil society was largely silent and with less agitations towards government. The civil society does not in this case serve as a bearer of ideological alternative to the dominant thinking guiding development in the country. The civil society in Nigeria is neither capitalist nor socialist; it is not even anti-rentierism. The antagonistic reaction of the Nigerian civil society towards



neoliberal policies especially as contained in SAP in the 1980s and fuel subsidy removal of 2012 may suggest the civil society is somewhat socialist or plainly anti-neoliberalism, but a closer look may reveal the non-ideological nature of civil society in Nigeria. Reactions were merely against hardships experienced under such policies and not necessarily an opposition against neoliberalism itself.

Civil society encompasses the totality of the active populace that is present in national life. Over the years, the non-commitment of the Nigerian state to an ideology has built in the country a populace that is not largely tuned to an ideology. The state in Nigeria operates a mixed economy that is largely capitalist with some welfarist disposition. Just like the Marxian understanding of the structural arrangement of society, the economy of Nigeria has created in the country an educational system and a culture that orients people towards capitalism but lacking the industrial backup. The state rentier favour also accustoms citizens with “development by favours from the state”. This makes it difficult to fit the thinking into one comprehensive ideology and it is this thinking that fuels the activities of civil society actors in general.

In his analysis Bello (2008) described Nigeria as a state operating with an ideological bankruptcy. To him, the rentier nature of the Nigerian economy and the electoral laws of the country have created political parties that are lacking ideological foundations. Within Nigerian political parties, a combination of liberals, conservatives and progressives can be found. Nigerian political parties contain so much differences within their ranks that internal crisis usually characterise them. Those individuals seeking offices don't look for parties with their kind of ideology but parties that might help them have an edge over opponents. This leaves a country where political parties look similar to each other with only differences in name and logo. In view of that, the civil society and indeed the general populace is left with no alternative to choose from or built its reaction on. To Bello (2008), the absence of difference in ideology within Nigeria leaves the space for other considerations to take the place of ideology in distinguishing individuals for electoral choices. This might partly explain a seeming contradiction by the Nigerian civil society on the issue of fuel subsidy removal. The government of Dr Goodluck Jonathan deregulated the petroleum downstream sector and removed subsidy on PMS on 01/01/2012. This led moved the price of PMS from N65 to N141. The policy did not go down well with the Nigerian civil society. The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Unions Congress (TUC) and several segments of the Nigerian society went on strikes and protests across the country leading to a negotiation with the government that reintroduced a partial subsidy which saw the price move down from N141 to N97. In 2016, the government of General Mohammadu Buhari took the path of its predecessors by removing the same subsidy thereby leading the price from N86.5 to N145. The 2012 reaction was expected from civil society but instead, the Nigerian Labour Congress factionalised, TUC refused to join the strike, protests were not as national in spread as they were in the former. Instead, there were demonstrations in some parts of northern Nigeria like Bauchi and Kano in support of the fuel subsidy removal. The factions in NLC were believed to have ethnoreligious colouration. And the demonstrations in support of the policy were believed to happen in President

Buhari's region of origin. In general, this makes it difficult to classify the Nigerian civil society in terms of ideological leaning. In the 1980s, 1990s and 2012, it felt like the civil society was against neoliberalism, in 2016 however, the same civil society challenged that perception by having parts of it support a neoliberal policy in spite of its bearing on national development.

### **Conclusion**

A study was conducted on the relationship between civil society, ideology and development in Nigeria with a view to understanding how an ideologically driven civil society could influence or shape the direction national development takes in the country. The concepts of civil society, ideology and development were analysed. Civil society was considered to comprise the segment of society that is active in national life but outside the circle of business and government. Ideology on the other hand was understood to mean an understanding of social, economic realities and a prescription of what to do about such realities. Development on the other hand is considered as a general improvement in the capacity of society to cater for itself and improves in its wellbeing.

In addition to the aforementioned concepts, the relationship of ideology with development was considered as well as that of civil society with development. It was found that ideology serves as a blueprint for development. Civil society on the other hand serves as voice of society hence speaks or acts on behalf of society in reacting to particular directions of development. Also, civil society equally serves as a tool for gauging development blueprints i.e. ideologies.

With specific reference to Nigeria, the relationship between civil society, ideology and development were analysed. It was found that the Nigerian society operates a rentier economy which bases national development on distribution of rents gotten from oil resources. As such, national development is subject to the will of the distributors of the rent i.e. the government. As a result, the question of ideology is relegated to the background due to the fact that ideology related questions like ownership and control of industries are absent or irrelevant in the rentier arrangement. The Nigerian civil society is therefore ill-equipped with its taxpaying credentials to make sound demands on how state revenue is spent. The Nigerian state from the days of nonalignment to the 1979 constitution has made no commitment to an ideology hence the ideological bankruptcy of the Nigerian society at large. The study concludes that the Nigerian state is not a fertile soil for ideologies to thrive in respect to national development. Its rentier nature, national orientation and legal framework make it difficult for differing ideologies to compete in respect to determining the direction of national development.

### **Recommendations**

Civil society as one of the champions of development must lead the amplification of an appropriate ideology and shielding of the people's interest in its engagement with all stakeholders in the state. In contributing to development of the country, civil society should: act as a bridge between or among estranged factions by

promoting spaces for open discussion and debate; strengthen the moderate middle position; present tangible, well-researched information and policy options; attach its potencies and use its conception, distinctive position and suppleness to bring the issues and concerns of development to the front in a productive manner.

In projecting issues for the development of Nigeria civil society should be relatively independent from the state. This means that they should improve the interplay of development with the state and accomplish better efficiency and receptiveness of its institutions.

Institutions, especially the executive, legislature and political parties should recognise Civil Society Organizations (CSO) as a legitimate interlocutor and acknowledge their roles as specialised non-elected entities, viewing them as a valuable source of information and policy options, thus providing them avenues to keenly contribute in the policymaking process. This would not only advance institutional capacity, but would also be a stride in regaining citizen's trust.

Donors should be valiant and disposed to support civil society's capacity in the course of increase funding for managerial infrastructure and programme development, letting them to intensify their expertise and make them more effective in achieving long term goals.

Government at all appropriate levels should create a legal, political and fiscal environment that eases CSO development, defending their right to information, free speech and freedom of action. Government should also institute channel for discourse between government institutions and CSOs, and recognize the importance of civil society's expertise and flexibility as complementary and positive in a variety of areas, from rapid action, policy making and service provision.

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