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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
since the attainment of independence in 1960, civil society groups have contributed decisively towards enabling and enhancing national independence, for instance in the mobilizations against the Anglo-Nigeria defense pact, judged to be against the national interest; as well as in the anti-structural adjustment program protests and movements under the military dictatorship of General Ibrahim Babangida. Civil society did what it could to hold the military governments accountable by organising citizens to demand the return to democracy in the 1990s. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, it has been in the forefront of constitutional reform processes to promote inclusion, participation, and improved quality of representation and governance.

As a result of the opening of the civic space brought about by the global wave of democratization and the increased international funding opportunities that came with it, developing countries in the past two decades, have witnessed the mushrooming of civil society organisations (CSOs). Most credible CSOs are primarily involved in advocacy or service delivery with some combining both. These represent diverse ideologies and while some are membership-based and exclusively concerned with issues of particular interest to their members, others adopt a broader approach, relative to their objectives, to either reform or transform the system.

More recently there has been a trend of CSOs either specifically established by the government to advance its interests or those that are co-opted to do so; what orthodox practitioners derogatorily refer to as government non-governmental organisations (GNGO). However, this abuse of the sector is not limited to governments as there have also been numerous cases of bad CSO actors not associated with governments.

However, on the whole community and state actors both acknowledge that civil society has made positive contributions towards ameliorating the sufferings of Nigerian. Evidence from existing literature, as well as findings from focus group discussions and key informant interviews existing literature, as well as findings from focus group discussions and key informant interviews undertaken for this project, show that CSOs have played and continue to play a pivotal role in Nigeria’s development in the past two decades.

It was noted that CSOs have increasingly stepped in to replace a receding, and in some cases, non-existent state with respect to the delivery of basic, often life-saving, services. Key contributions identified included in the role they have played in humanitarian assistance; influencing policy towards more pro-people legislation; reshaping the attitudes of traditional and cultural practices; improving the publics awareness of human rights, providing economic support to agriculture and trade sectors; supporting skills acquisition initiatives; and support for internally displaced persons and communities. Finally, CSOs are also an important provider of well-paid jobs and employment opportunities.

The study found there to be an overwhelming consensus that civil society plays a complimentary role to the state. At the same time, it was noted that tensions in state-CSO relations do exists. These are often generated in the context of advocacy, and demands for transparency, accountability and the defence of human rights of citizens rather than around initiatives of service delivery. Whilst the state and CSOs work together on a regular basis, the reports findings underscore the need to also include private sector actors in wider development processes to address Nigeria’s myriad of challenges.

Further recommendations include the need for improved and more participatory community and citizen engagement strategies from CSOs; sustained efforts to build an understand between the state and civil society about how they can better work together and not as adversaries; a recognition by states like Nigeria to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens on a daily basis; and the need for domestic civil society groups to set the priority agendas for their countries, rather than have these imposed by external funders. Finally, efforts should be put in place by CSOs to initiate a commonly endorsed Peer Review Mechanism - based on a voluntary code of conduct and of practice - for the purposes of mutual support, mutual learning, and strengthening transparency and accountability within the sector itself.
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

CSOs are a key feature of governance and development not just in Nigeria but across the world. Sometimes referred to as ‘the third force’, after the state and the organised private sector, CSOs embody the altruistic notion of shared values and associational life in contrast to, for example, the exploitative tendencies of capital and the state’s monopoly of constitutional threat and coercion. The ideals of CSOs are broadly framed in terms of social capital - the capacity and potential of individuals to secure benefits and devise solutions to problems through membership or engagement in social networks and relationships that are built on trust, along with the benefits and resources that emerge from such social ties and social participation.  

Historically, civil action has played key roles in Nigeria’s development. However, as in other parts of the world, CSO presence and influence became much more pronounced since the late 1980s, following Nigeria’s transition from military to civil rule in 1999. Scores have come into existence in the last two decades, working on a diverse range of development related issues through advocacy, service delivery or combination of both.

Globally, the relationship between CSOs and states is fraught. This is even more pronounced in fledgling democracies like Nigeria where political power is personalized, with inadequate institutional checks and balances to prevent abuse. In such situations, where the regime is conflated with the state, regime interest becomes synonymous with the national interest. Yet the conception of CSOs as a counterweight to the state and the belief by some actors that it amounts to something akin to an alternative government is central to the antagonism: state actors see their power and influence being challenged by these actors.

In response states like Nigeria, are increasingly striving to constrain CSOs activities and influence. This includes directing subtle threats and hostility from elected public officers and civil servants, harassment and intimidation, as well as the promulgation of laws and regulations to curtail their ability to operate. Between 2014 and 2017, the National Assembly (NASS) introduced draft bills, that would have imposed major restrictions on the ability of CSOs to operate independently and receive contributions from foreign sources. Although in both cases, the draft bills did not go through - in part because of intense and very public opposition to them by CSOs, the media and concerned Nigerians - in 2020 NASS again targeted the sector. This time successfully amending the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) with new provisions that tightened the registration and reporting requirements for CSOs. While government officials justified the amendment on the need to foster transparency in the CSO sector, civil society activists differ, arguing it is yet another effort by the state to constrain them.

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METHODOLOGY
METHODOLOGY

Despite their undoubted influence, there has been little effort to assess CSOs contributions empirically and comprehensively to national development in Nigeria. This gap is what this pioneering, and largely exploratory research, project strives to do. The research aims to contribute to a more inclusive CSOs regulatory framework in Nigeria by providing evidence about the role and contributions of civil society to development. It aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on CSOs impacts, while providing the evidence necessary to overcome the negative narrative against CSOs work. To achieve the overall objective the research focused in on three key areas:

1. Examining the impact of Nigeria’s CSO sector on the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural aspects of development.

2. Highlighting the contributions of the CSO sector, particularly amplifying the economic, political, and social variables, in terms of reduction of unemployment, crime, social malaises, and poverty.

3. Conducting analysis on how the CSOs regulatory environment enables or limits their ability to impact.

APPROACH

Initial scoping meetings brought together researchers identified to lead the fieldwork and decided on the instruments, research tools and methodology to be adopted. In this research project, the scoping meeting was especially relevant, considering the need to factor in and ensure gender and social inclusion. Two further research meetings were held to review fieldwork findings and to validate the draft report. Geographically, the study covered Nigeria’s six geo-political zone with research conducted in Kogi, Kano, Borno, Lagos, Rivers and Enugu. The states selected were chosen based on their metropolitan character, as well as their history of being epicenters of civil society activities.

The method for data collection used a combination of insights from focus group discussion (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIs). In each of the states targeted the project held discussions with three distinct groups – CSO actors, representatives from communities where CSOs were carrying out their activities and operations, and with representatives of state/government institutions, including Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) with whom CSOs were engaged. The approach offered the best chance of interaction with and gathering information directly from representative samples of CSOs, the communities they work in, and the state institutions they engage with in the course of carrying out their activities. Additionally, an online survey of 191 people was also conducted, to elicit more information, including quantitative data with respect to job creation and employment opportunities contribution of CSOs. The fieldwork was undertaken in August and September 2021.

The necessity to cover the national landscape of civil society informed the rationale for selecting one state from each of the geopolitical zones.
CIVIL SOCIETY, CIVIC SPACE AND THE STATE

CONCEPTUALISING CIVIL SOCIETY

From the standpoint of liberal political theorists, the dominant global political order since the end of communism, civil society refers to a variety of organisations of different ideological persuasions that are not formally a part of governmental structures or the profit-driven private sector although they can collaborate with or try to influence them on whatever issues such organisations deem important. While civil society groups adopt a broad variety of strategies—lobbying, advocacy, public campaigns and sensitisation, litigation, protests, and more—to realise their goals, some notable exceptions, although not universally accepted, include violent agitations in the pursuit of such efforts and systematic attempts to directly take over state power.3

However, in many developing and emerging democracies where political ethnicism and ethnoreligious conflicts are common, the term civil society is sometimes not just cast in opposition to the state, but also recognises the extra-democratic struggles of aggrieved groups against the state or other dominant interests. Such “uncivil societies” as liberal theorists tend to frame them, are often either downplayed or completely excluded by Western theorists and international donor agencies from their conception of civil society, even if primarily they operate in the policy realm. The same applies to groups emanating from the complex and often problematic African traditional socio-political sphere some of which may manifest extra-democratic tendencies or espouse anarchist viewpoints.

In this paper civil society groups are designed to encompass diverse non-profit, non-governmental groups such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (primarily involved in advocacy, service delivery, or both); faith-based (Religious) groups; professional bodies/organisation; Community (grassroots) organisations; socio-cultural movements; labour and trade unions; lobby groups; cooperatives; mass social movements; and research institutions.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS DEFINITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The World Bank

The wide array of non-governmental and not for profit organisations that have a presence in public life, express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations.

United Nations

A civil society organization is any non-profit, voluntary citizen’s group which is organized on a local, national or international level.

European Union (EU)

All forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by the state.

African Development Bank

The full range of formal and informal organisations within society.

The ethnoreligious complexities of Nigeria, the politics of exclusion it constantly breeds, the perennial failure of political elites to effectively manage diversity, often exploiting it for parochial ends, along with the absence of strong democratic tenets and rule of law required of a just society, underscore the challenges of operationalizing civil society, a primarily Western ideal in non-Western societies like Nigeria. As a result, development partners, particularly those from the West, tend to keep some distance from the complex, ethnoreligious segments of civil society, favoring instead civic groups open to collaboration and engagement with other stakeholders in pursuit of the common good. These include professional associations, gender-based and women groups, as well as a broad network of voluntary civic organisations, as well as a broad network of voluntary civic organisations generally perceived to be more inclusive in contrast to groups and movements defined primarily by primordial ties and or religious affiliations that are or perceived to be exclusionary. Michael Edwards underscores civil engagement and potential collaboration among the key ethos of civil society thus: ‘in its role as the ‘public sphere’, civil society becomes the arena for argument, and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration: a non-legislative, extra-judicial, public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debates’. 

The key and sometimes overlapping roles of CSOs include:

- **Service delivery**
  - (e.g. provision of key social services like the running of schools, provision of basic health care support, etc.)

- **Advocacy campaigns**
  - (e.g. lobbying governments and businesses, striving to influence policy and legislation on issues and causes of interest to their members, stakeholders, and target groups, etc.)

**Sensitisation and knowledge creation**
- (creating public awareness about critical issues in society e.g. Climate change and conservation, gender equality, public health, and pandemics, etc.)

**Watchdog of power**
- (e.g. monitoring the abuse of power and rights not just by governments but other powerful interests in society and holding them to account).

**Civic engagement**
- (e.g. helping nurture an informed and active citizenry at all levels of governance that will help ensure good governance).

**Engaging in global governance processes**
- Engaging in global governance processes (i.e. to help ensure a better world for all).

**CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE**

Given the failure of the largely corrupt state to effectively deliver basic public services and the inability of the profit-driven private sector to step into the breach, Civil society organisations, have not only emerged as service delivery agents, but also as robust platform to hold a floundering state accountable primarily through their advocacy efforts. But state actors are resentful seeing well-funded CSOs increasingly step in to provide services, often more efficiently, in many areas where the receding state used to dominate. The antagonism of state actors is even more pronounced when it comes to CSOs primarily involved in advocacy, as all too often, such outreaches are viewed as an affront to government policies. Either way, whether with respect to advocacy or service delivery by CSOs, state actors see their power and influence eroding, amid concern of gradually becoming irrelevant.

Amid such concerns, African governments have, particularly since the late 1980s, adopted various measures, overt and covert, to control CSOs. This closing of the civic space has seen harsh regulatory and legislative mechanisms introduced. Such as those that subject CSOs to direct government control, threats, arrests, prosecution, and imprisonment often under the guise of national security, cyber security or accusations of money laundering. In some cases this has led to severe limits on freedom of association, expression and assembly and even outright bans.\(^9\)

In Nigeria between 2014 and 2017, NASS introduced draft bills that would have imposed severe restrictions on the ability of CSOs to operate independently and receive contributions from foreign sources. Although these failed to be passed into law, in 2020, the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) was amended and included provisions that tightened the registration and reporting requirements for CSOs.

**CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA**

From colonial times to the present moment, civic organisations in Nigeria have made significant contributions to national and human development. These precursors of today’s CSOs made important contributions to the anti-colonial struggle through raising awareness, organising, and mobilising citizens to demand the right to govern themselves from the colonial authorities. Notable actions include the Aba Women Protests of 1929 in which women of what later became the Eastern region mobilized against efforts to restrict their role in government as well as the 1949 Iva Valley (Enugu) massacre in which 29 striking coalminers were shot dead my police leading to massive protests. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, groups have continued to contribute decisively towards enabling and enhancing national independence, for instance in the mobilizations against the Anglo-Nigeria defense pact as well as during the anti-structural adjustment policy protests and movements under the military dictatorship of Babangida. Civil society also played significant roles in the anti-military and pro-democracy struggles under the regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The socio-political environment of the late 1980s engendered the first generation of organised civic advocacy groups in Africa, many of whom played key roles in the process of democratisation. Given Nigeria’s experience of very brutal military rule, it is not surprising that the first generation of these groups in the country, were almost exclusively human-rights focused.\(^10\) Prior to the mushrooming of organised CSOs, civic advocacy in Nigeria was largely the purview of such professional organisations like the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and student bodies such as the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). But now the sector contains hundreds of CSOs working on issues of governance and development as human rights, gender equity, human security, youth empowerment, education, rule of law, freedom of expression, environmental protection, anti-corruption, peacebuilding and conflict management, public health, countering violent extremism and interfaith dialogue. The exponential growth of the sector has consequently led to growing coalitions among like-minded organisations at the national level as well as networks of CSOs who, coordinate their programmes for more effective outcomes, help monitor each other’s activities as well as collectively address threats and challenges, particularly from state actors.\(^11\)

But a growing trend that has emerged is of CSOs that are specifically established by the government to advance its interests or who are co-opted to do so. In a July 2021 paper it was noted how these governmental non-governmental organizations (GNGO) have proliferated in Nigeria since the 1990s. “Nigeria’s top powerbrokers have cultivated a new generation of pro-government NGOs... who masquerade as authentic civil society groups singing the praises of top officials and attacking their critics”.\(^12\) Such groups, the report further noted, are very well resourced and backed by state media. However, the abuse of the sector is

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10. These include the Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Free Speech, Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) etc. Such coalitions at the national level include the Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGO) which was established in 1992 (https://nnngo.org) as well as the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (https://situationroomng.org) which primarily works in support of credible elections and good governance in Nigeria.

not limited to the state as there have also been cases of bad CSO actors emerging – driven by the finances on offer. Critics have described such organizations as “self-interested and potentially rent-seeking” and labelled them “brief-case NGOs” who primarily set up shop to play “the aid game”. But overall CSOs have made an immense contribution towards safeguarding democracy, achieving democratic consolidation, and holding government accountable with a view to enabling the deepening of the democratic space and the delivery of good governance to citizens. Omede and Bakare identify five decisive outcomes of sustained civil society engagement towards engendering democratic consolidation and enhancing good governance.¹⁴

These are the civil society driven agitations and engagement that truncated the purported third term agenda of then President Obasanjo; the agitations and engagements around opposition to so-called so-called fuel subsidy removal by the government of President Jonathan in January 2012, which brought into wider focus the urgent necessity for radical and comprehensive pro-people reform of the oil and gas sector; the decade long engagement that culminated with the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act; the sustained agitation at the height of the succession crisis, when then President Yar’Adua was incapacitated by ill health but failed to hand over powers to the vice-president, which led to the passing by the National Assembly of a binding resolution invoking the doctrine of necessity and paved the way for the vice-president to formally and constitutionally exercise the powers of the president in an acting capacity; as well as the continuing engagement with the electoral reform process, leading to amendments to the electoral law and the constitution regarding elections, and which has helped to improve the conduct and management of elections, at least at the federal level.

¹⁴. Ibid Omede and Bakare, ARJ, January 2014
Key Findings
Key Findings

For ease of analysis and understanding, the key findings from the field survey have been categorised into six main themes in accordance with the overall goal and specific objectives of the research, accommodating findings from the online survey and the field research. These are (i) analysis of online survey; (ii) role and relevance of civil society; (iii) civil society contributions to development – national and human development; (iv) state–civil society relations; (v) civil society and relations with communities; and (vi) Nigeria’s civil society and international development partners.

Analysis of Online Survey

191 respondents from civil society organizations across the country took part in the online survey. 13.6% of the respondents were from Rivers state. This was followed by the FCT (13.1%); Akwa Ibom (8.9%); Kano (6.8%); Lagos, Edo, and Adamawa each 5.2%; Zamfara and Enugu (4.7%) and Delta and Gombe (3.1%). On whether the responding organisations have branches, that is more than one office location, 50.8% of respondents said yes. When asked to characterize the nature of their civil society organisation 48.4% of respondents characterised themselves as conventional NGOs; with 41.6% self-classifying as a Community Based Organisation (CBO), and 7.4% as a membership-based organisation.

The survey also enquired as to whether the CSOs employed staff, and if they also took on volunteer staff, and interns. Only 11% did not employ any staff with most of these respondents’ membership based organisations, given that members take on the roles and responsibilities that would normally be undertaken by employed staff. For those that employ staff; 82.2% have 1 – 10 admin staff; 73% have 1 – 10 program staff; and 74.9% have 1 – 10 finance staff. With respect to taking on volunteers, 93.1% of respondents admitted that their organisation did so. 60.4% also regularly employed interns to support the work of their organisation. Given that internships are essentially on-the-job training programs, and dependent on existing and available strong in-house capacity, it is not surprising that fewer CSOs take on interns, or run internship programs, than those who take on volunteers.

Respondents were also asked to indicate where they primarily carry out their activities, with options including national, state, local government area (LGA) or community levels. 50.5% of respondents indicated that they primarily carry out their activities at the community/LGA level, with 28.4% conducting state level work and just 12.6% operating at a national level. When asked about the primary nature of the activities 67.4% indicated a combination of advocacy, service delivery and capacity development, with the remaining respondents focused primarily on either advocacy (15%), training and capacity development (5.7%) or advocacy (9.3%).

How Will You Characterize Your Civil Society?

15. A conventional NGO is here for the purpose of the online survey described as an NGO, with professional staffing, in contrast to a FBO or CBO.
This finding is indicative of the fact that very few CSOs specialise in just one mode of engagement and primary activity; and that most find the three primary activities as interconnected, and mutually dependent and reinforcing. As such they consider developing and acquiring capacity in all three as a more efficient way of responding to the needs of the people, meeting their goals and achieving their mandates.

ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The findings presented in this section are qualitative ones generated from the FGDs and KIIs. Across the six states, one each from each of the six geopolitical zones of the country, and across the various groups of diverse stakeholders in society, including state actors from the MDAs, community actors from communities where CSOs operate, and civil society actors themselves, there is near-unanimous agreement on the relevance of civil society organisations in the society. In our interviews with civil society actors in Kogi, community actors in Borno, Kano and Enugu, and state actors in Lagos, respondents frequently agreed that:

"Civil society often has a better understanding of the needs of citizens and communities than government." 

Other reasons adduced included that:

"NGOs are recognised as major stakeholders by the government because we would not have been able to record some of the milestones in this present democratic dispensation without NGOs and CSOs."

Or that:

"Without civil society interventions, many communities would have been wiped out by the insurgency. Civil society contributed to enhancing community resilience."
The evidence from the field survey highlights the diverse and decisive nature of civil society contributions to advancing societal development in Nigeria. Although these can be broadly categorised into key areas, the emphasis varies from state to state, reflecting the major issues of development present and being contended with across the different geopolitical zones of the country. Where there was unanimity about the contributions made by CSOs, was in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown and responses.

Community actors and state actors acknowledged that civil society made positive contributions towards ameliorating the sufferings occasioned by the lockdown. In addition to distributing palliatives and relief materials during the lockdown, they also participated in monitoring government distribution.

From the KII and FGDs, CSOs were seen to be playing key roles in promoting accountability and transparency in governance; amplifying the voice of the voiceless; defending the vulnerable and marginalised; promoting access to justice; promoting human rights and defending citizens against abuse; enabling service delivery in education, health, agriculture and food security; promoting peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution; among others. Civil society relevance which underpins their role in society can be summarized as in their capacity to complement the state in the delivery of good governance, and in particular through reaching otherwise hard to reach, excluded, vulnerable, and marginalised groups and communities across the country. In general, a positive attitude towards the relevance and useful role played by CSOs prevailed in our interviews. Where there were reservations, they centered around the perceived attitude of some civil society organisations by state actors, communities, and even civil society actors themselves.

HOW CSOS HELPED AGIDUMA COMMUNITY IN ENUGU STATE TO ACCESS BASIC SERVICES

The name of our place is Agiduma, Agiduman ni ye in Amagine Nkanu East LGA in Enugu state it is like a place that is cut off and removed, government does not remember our people but immediately the NGOs came to our place, they built schools. The village had a primary school, we did not have a secondary school we didn’t have anything in our place it's only this primary school that we had and even the primary school, the zinc has fallen off, pupils were under the trees learning. But immediately the NGOs came to our town/place, they demolished that primary school and rebuilt the school.

Another issue was that during elections, we used to walk for more than five miles to cast our vote such that an old man or woman, pregnant woman cannot participant due to long distance. But immediately after the NGOs came in, they tried and struggled for us so that we got a close place to cast our votes, we now have a polling unit in our place now as we are talking.

Now the major challenge that is disturbing is infrastructure related. There is a bridge that separated us from our neighbouring town, but it was poorly constructed and collapsed during the rainy season thereby making it impossible for us to pass and go about our businesses. I contacted one of the NGOs that I know, they helped us to advocate and lobby on radio and other media and before long the state governor had heard about it and so we could now talk to him and try and get the state to fix it.

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CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The evidence from the field survey highlights the diverse and decisive nature of civil society contributions to advancing societal development in Nigeria. Although these can be broadly categorised into key areas, the emphasis varies from state to state, reflecting the major issues of development present and being contended with across the different geopolitical zones of the country. Where there was unanimity about the contributions made by CSOs, was in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown and responses.

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20. Perspective shared by civil society actors and community actors across each of the six states
of palliatives, thus promoting accountability and transparency. Additionally, groups monitored rights abuses which the conditions of the lockdown tended to make more common; and provided support to women and girls to mitigate against rising incidences of sexual and gender-based violence.

Nine major areas of CSO contribution to development were identified by fieldwork respondents:

**Humanitarian and relief response and assistance**

To those impacted by the insurgency in the northeast, those impacted by armed banditry, and mass kidnappings and abductions, those impacted by intra and inter-communal conflicts, those impacted by floods and natural disasters, and those impacted by mass demolitions of slums.

**Influencing policy and legal reforms, and enactments of pro-people legislations**

Examples included the law establishing the Kano Anti-Corruption Agency and a law establishing an agency for youth development in Kogi state.

**Influencing changes and reforms in traditional and cultural practices and norms**

For instance, changing widowhood practices and enabling the appointment and representation of women in the cabinets of traditional rulers in Enugu state.

**Raising human rights awareness and promoting the protection of human rights of citizens.**

In particular the rights of marginalised, vulnerable, and excluded groups in society; including providing legal and paralegal assistance in the pursuit of defense of these rights and to get justice for victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

**Livelihood interventions to support farmers and traders and artisans.**

Providing resources and know-how to enhance their livelihoods systems. In these livelihoods interventions, women and widows were specifically targeted for support.

**Skills acquisition training and capacity building.**

Aimed to promote access to means of livelihood for the marginalised and vulnerable youths, boys and girls, and women. These also included the provision of starter packs for the take-off of vocational enterprises after training and the provision of after training continuous management development support.

**Service delivery programs and interventions.**

These work to build, equip, and ensure supplies are delivered to healthcare delivery services, schools and training facilities, water and sanitation facilities, and hygiene services.

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22. Kano FGDs and KIIs
23. Kogi and Rivers FGDs and KIIs
24. Lagos FGDs and KIIs
25. Rivers and Lagos FGDs and KIIs
26. Kano CSO and state actors FGDs
27. Enugu FGDs
28. Across all six states
Provision of basic community infrastructures

Including bridges, culverts, and flood control canals.

Support for rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons.  

Including the conducting of needs assessments to understand reconstruction, rehabilitation and resettlement needs and priorities, and providing support with logistics and basic necessities to facilitate these processes among displaced persons across the country.

For example, in Borno state, CSO actors emphasised the role played in enabling the conduct of needs assessment at local government and community levels as part of the budgetary process in the state. This contributed towards improving accountability, particularly with regards budget performance.  

Whilst communities in the state emphasised the contributions of CSOs in building the capacity of community leaders on conflict resolution; the provision of shelter and improving access to services like healthcare; enabling community participation in the budget process; and support to widows and victims and survivors of violence. State actors in Borno also drew attention to the capacity building work done by CSOs that had enhanced their ability to deliver on mandates; contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation and supported efforts to eradicate corruption through the promotion of accountability and transparency in government processes.

Similar narratives were heard across the country. In Rivers state, community representatives acknowledged civil society contributions to development in areas of livelihood interventions to improve farming, improve access to necessary inputs for farming and improved seedlings and seeds; contributions towards combatting the menace of drug abuse and addiction, and associated youth gang violence – through supporting communities to identify and report drug traffickers and by offering support for treatment and rehabilitation to drug abuse victims; and in the capacity building, skills acquisition and vocational training provided for women and youth – to enable them to establish viable livelihoods through the provision of starter packs.

State actors in Rivers state referenced civil society contributions to development in the area of capacity building support to state actors; contribution to defense and promotion of human rights, in particular women’s rights and the rights of the vulnerable, as well as support to victims to seek redress and get justice for abuse; contributions to the creation of enabling environment for peace and security in the state through their engagement with security agencies and communities on peace and security; and their contributions in promoting transparency and accountability in governance processes to curb corruption and enhance the delivery of good governance.

Civil society actors in Rivers acknowledged that they prioritized contributions to development in the areas of enabling and improving access to basic services in health and education, claiming that without CSO intervention in these areas, some communities would have no healthcare or education services; contributions in empowerment, vocational training, and skills acquisition to promote access to enhanced means of livelihoods for citizens – particularly, women and young persons; advocacy for social justice and the promotion and defense of human rights of citizens – including women’s and environmental rights; and noted their work on the promotion of transparency and accountability in governance processes to improve the delivery of good governance and curb corruption; among others.

STATE–CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS

Whilst there appears to be a congruence of opinion among community actors, state actors and civil society actors not only about the critical role, essential relevance, and decisive contributions of civil society to development, what explains the apparent tension in state-civil society relations in Nigeria.

CSO actors are primarily concerned about federal

30. Borno FGD with CSOs
31. Borno community FGD
32. Borno FGD with state actors
33. Rivers FGD with communities
34. Rivers FGD with state actors
35. Rivers FGD with CSOs
legislation and policies and the overarching effect it has on the civic space and on civil society’s ability to act and carry out their activities. In Kano and in Kogi states, in particular, the deleterious effect of federal legislation on civil society was stressed with particular reference to the Company And Allied Matters Act [CAMA] 2020. The civil society organisation, SERAP, wrote an open letter to the president asking him to send the legislation back to the National Assembly “to address its fundamental flaws, including by deleting the repressive provisions of the Act, particularly sections 839, 842, 843, 844 and 850 contained in Part F of the Act, and any other similar provisions”.36 These provisions allow the government to exercise overly broad and discretionary powers to arbitrarily withdraw, cancel or revoke the certificate of any association, suspend and remove its trustees, take control of finances of any association, or to merge two associations without their consent and approval of their members. Many CSO respondents express the fear that these provisions are part of an increasing arsenal of policies being enunciated by government, and which ultimate combined effect is the constraining of the civic space.37

Beyond these provisions, civil society actors at state and local levels also expressed concerns that whereas bigger national NGOs may be able to meet the CAMA requirements and other provisions on tax as well as being registered with the Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering (SCUML), smaller NGOs at the state level are unlikely to be able to do so. SCUML certification in particular, is now a precondition for civil society organisations to open and operate bank accounts. But obtaining this certification is difficult and this will likely constrain their ability to secure the required financial support not only to carry out their activities and programs but to also enable them to build and develop their institutional capacities.38

Other restrictive measures cited included repressive broadcasting codes and the relentless crackdown on peaceful protesters and civil society organization’s programs by Nigeria’s security agencies. Furthermore, as yet unsuccessful attempts to pass a NGO Regulation Bill (2016) and a “Social Media Bill” (2019) – the former would have introduce extensive opportunities to control

What is driving these growing tensions? Several state actors adduced the reason for this rising tension to what they refer to as the sometimes unnecessary confrontational and adversarial attitude of some civil society actors against the government. One respondent from Kogi state noted that “some civil society organisations are too confrontational and never see anything good in government. This antagonizes my principal, the commissioner”.39 State actors also expressed the view that sometimes tensions exist when civil society actors are known to supporters of opposition political parties or even members.40 Regardless of whether this is the case, an individual’s political persuasion should not be a reason or justification for state repression or persecution.

From the view within CSOs, as well as from community actors, the tension that sometimes arises in state-civil society relations is linked to the opacity and lack of transparency and accountability in the way governance is overseen. Because CSOs tend to demand accountability and expose hidden processes, they tend to draw the ire of political office holders and some civil servants enmeshed in such practices as a result.41

All actors – community, civil society and state – generally agree that the relative level of tension between state and civil society is dependent on whether the focus of civil society intervention is in the area of service delivery - in which case the working relationship is likely to be more cordial - or whether the civil society is engaged in human rights advocacy, demanding accountability and transparency, and or enabling citizens access to justice and amplifying their voice particularly, where issues of social justice are involved – in which case the relationship tends to be more contested. Evidence from the field interviews also seems to suggest that state civil society relationship is often more or less cordial when it is the relationship

36. Open letter by SERAP to President Buhari to rescind ascent to CAMA. 22 August 2020.
37. FGDs and KIIs with civil society actors in Kano, Kogi, and Rivers states.
38. Kano and Kogi FGD with civil society actors
39. FGD with Kogi state actors
40. FGDs with state actors across the states
41. FGDs and KIIs with civil society and community actors across the states
between technocrats and civil servants, on the one hand versus when it is between political office holders – elected or appointed - and civil society, on the other hand. Political office holders often believe that civil society criticism and critiques of some of their policies and actions are in bad faith and that it plays into the hands of the opposition, and hence the tension. In Borno state for instance a state actors argued that “civil society actors and civil servants have better relationship because we participate in the same programs, and we are often the direct beneficiaries of the capacity building support given to state institutions by civil society”.

Civil society and state actors also reported more cordial relationships, and improvement in relationships as a result of working together on several issues, and in particular through the framework of the Open Government Partnership initiative.

**CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELATIONS WITH COMMUNITIES**

Communities may be geographical, and located in specific areas, such as towns, villages, campuses, cities, and their neighborhoods or they may be representative of specific groups of persons sharing the same interests, and occupation, and or defined and characterised by similar attributes, such as students, teachers, workers, farmers, artisans, professionals, and so on.

When CSOs involve either of these communities in their programs from program design, through program inception and implementation, they are more likely to achieve community buy-in and ownership of the project. This lays the foundations not only for sustainability, but also for the cordial and reciprocal relationship of trust and confidence between the civil society and the community. This was an argument made by FGD respondents in Kano. Further when CSOs are transparent, open, and accountable with communities, they tend to enjoy a warm and cordial relationship with them which, in turn, tends to amplify the impact of the intervention.

In Kogi and Borno states, for instance, stakeholders across the board noted that when NGOs are sincere, when they have integrity, and when they fulfill their promises to communities, they enjoy a better relationship with the communities, the projects are owned by the communities, and the communities defend the civil society actors against slanders and attempts to cause animosity. But respondents in Rivers and in Lagos raised concerns with respect to activities of fraudulent, one person, and unaccountable NGOs, which are often established clandestinely by state actors, political office holders and their partners and are fronted by their relations and or friends. All as part of a process to divert funds. The activities of such NGOs tend to cast aspersion on the image of all NGOs it was argued.

In summary, the relationship between civil society organisations and communities is dependent and contingent upon the perceived credibility of the CSO within the community, the integrity of its personnel, the degree of transparency and accountability of the organisation, the level of inclusion and quality of participation of the community in the program or project being implemented, as well as on the quality of impact of the program on the community; that is the degree to which it is impacting their lives and conditions positively.

**NIGERIA’S CIVIL SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS**

International development partners are respected, and their contributions valued, by the majority of respondents, however several concerns were raised about their actions. The lack of real opportunities for Nigerians CSOs to participate in processes that determine donor and development partner priorities in the country was raised across the board. Many CSOs feel compelled to deliver on donor priorities that they have not been involved in articulating, and that are not always the issues that would have been considered priorities by them.

42. FGDs and KIIls with civil society actors and state actors across the states
43. FGD with state actors in Borno
44. FGDs and KIIls with civil society and state actors in Kano, Kogi and Enugu states
45. Kano KII
46. Enugu FGD with communities
47. Kogi and Borno community FGDs and KIIls with strategic stakeholders
48. Rivers and Lagos FGDs with civil society actors and KIIls with strategic stakeholders
49. Kano, Rivers, Enugu, Kogi, Borno, Lagos FGDs with civil society actors, as well as KIIls with strategic stakeholders in these states
There is also a perception among state-based CSOs that international development partners to favour and concentrate support to a few National NGOs often based in Lagos and Abuja, to the detriment of smaller NGOs based in the outlying regions and states. In addition, it was argued that international partners do not provide sufficient institutional capacity support, thus impacting the growth and development of many national NGOs, particularly at state levels. What this does is to have an overall limiting impact on the capacity of CSOs to grow, survive, and deliver quality and impactful services. It also contributes to breeding tension between and among organisations, as well as between civil society organisations on the one hand, and government on the other hand, particularly with respect to interest and agenda setting. Citizens and local and national CSOs are best positioned to understand their problems and articulate solutions to them. What they need to do this is the support that facilitates the process, not the support that dictates what is to be done.

**CHALLENGES FACING CIVIL SOCIETY**

CSOs in Nigeria face significant challenges as they strive to undertake their various engagements. These are posed either consciously by deliberate state policies and legislations, or unconsciously through practice and convention by state actors. Many CSOs are also small, with limited capacity, and struggle to attract funding and institutional capacity support to enhance growth and improve program quality as a result. The space is dominated by a few large, disproportionately endowed, and adequately capacitated NGOs, who unconsciously block opportunities for smaller NGOs. These are often favoured by donors and the state is motivated to engage with them because of this as such engagements may enhance its credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of development partners. Achieving synergy and coordination among civil society also has been difficult. Despite this context, CSOs have built, and continue to explore, the strategy of networking and building alliances and coalitions for specific engagements and purposes.

Respondents raised concerns around the need for greater coordination and synergy, including common accountability processes among civil society, as opposed to the need for regulation. Many civil society actors are convinced that a mutual accountability mechanism needs to be instituted, but they are strongly opposed to state regulation, even though they concede that if some form of self-regulating framework does not emerge within civil society, then the state will always be tempted to impose regulation from without.

In Kano, as well as in Kogi, Rivers, and Lagos states civil society actors called for some form of self-regulation and peer review mechanisms, as an alternative to state regulation. One proposed suggestion was for a voluntary ‘code of conduct and code of practice’, that CSOs can choose to acceede to, and that could become something like a badge of integrity, that could become one of the criteria for accessing funding, and entering into program partnerships with national civil society organisations, international development partners, donors, and relevant state agencies for project implementation. Such a mechanism will include processes for peer review with respect to compliance with the voluntary codes, as well as include frameworks and mechanisms for enabling access to funding by smaller NGOs through subgrants and accessing institutional, along with personnel capacity support, for smaller NGOs. A tenure-limited governing board, self-constituted by CSOs, could be instituted to ensure oversight.

For this framework to function effectively and be inclusive and representative, it would require the establishment of a registry of CSOs that have acceded to the voluntary code of conduct and of practice. But there appears to be support for such a process among leading CSOs. What most civil society actors and organisations want is not a framework that is limited to regulation; they are much more interested in a framework that creates an enabling environment for the diversity and variety of CSOs to grow and realize their mandates, much like a community of practice. An additional consequence would be that having such a mechanism could also reduce the necessity and justification for the state to impose harsh regulatory frameworks on the sector.

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50. View and perspective shared by civil society actors at subnational levels across all states
51. FGDs with civil society actors and KIs with strategic stakeholders.
52. FGDs with civil society actors.
CONCLUSION

This research argues that CSOs have played, and continue to play, a pivotal role in Nigeria’s development in the past two decades. For most Nigerians, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, CSOs have stepped in to replace a receding, and in some cases, a non-existent state with respect to the delivery of basic, often life-saving, services. Further, CSOs advocacy work and watchdog role in monitoring government, promoting rights and freedoms, and fostering the overarching human security of citizens is, overall, viewed positively.

However, these feed into the prevailing perception of civil society as a counterweight to, and for some, an outright alternative to the state, which breeds intense resentment among state actors concerned about becoming irrelevant. All too often, the tension between civil society and the state in Nigeria revolves around dubious concerns about national security, which even if it has any credibility, is based on a very narrow state-centric conception of the idea. A fundamental and more expansive re-articulation of the concept of national security in Nigeria is necessary to foster better state-CSO relations and such an effort must be operationalized primarily from the perspective of the human security of citizens.

Additionally, as can be seen from this research, civil society also serve as a site of employment, providing job and career opportunities, while also being a site for training and upskilling the capacity building of those employed. The volunteering opportunities provided by civil society, enable many to not only contribute to human and community development but also provide opportunities to the volunteers to further enhance their expertise and competences, as well as their sense of fulfilment and self-worth in society. But given Nigeria’s myriad of developmental challenges no one sector can tackle them alone. A collaborative rather than adversarial relationship between the three sectors – state, private sector and civil society - is a win-win for all. There is the need to change the “them versus us mindset”, that reinforces false binaries which are inimical to transformative development.
RECOMMENDATIONS
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CSOs should improve their community and citizen engagement strategies and mechanisms, ensuring the inclusion and participation of all stakeholders in the programming from conception and design all the implementation phases.

2. Existing legislation and regulations that control the registration and operations of the organisations, including CSOs, should be streamlined with appropriate support mechanisms put in place to facilitate compliance.

3. Efforts should be made, and mechanisms put in place, to enable and ensure appropriate levels of institutional capacity support to different types of CSOs exist.

4. Civil society and state actors should develop strategic engagement frameworks, to improve understandings of the complementarity of their roles and functions.

5. State actors should be trained to understand that civil society engagements, including when they are raising demands for accountability and transparency, is in the best interest of societal development.

6. State actors must understand, respect, and take steps to protect the rights of citizens, and the right to freedoms of association, expression, and assembly, understanding that it is the responsibility of the state to protect, not constrict, the civic space as this undermines societal and human development.

7. International development partners should work with civil society organisations to create a more equitable space for civil society engagement. There needs to be greater participation and involvement of civil society in determining strategic thrusts and priorities for engagement.

8. Efforts should be put in place by civil society organisations to initiate a commonly endorsed peer review mechanism, based on a voluntary code of conduct and of practice. This would aid mutual support, mutual learning and strengthen transparency and accountability within the civil society sector.