DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The promotion of democracy has developed into a common activity performed by a variety of actors since the collapse of the Soviet Union and other authoritarian communist regimes in the East-Central Europe. This wind of change has equally blown through Latin America to Africa where authoritarian civil regimes and military dictatorships have been challenged by popular uprising for democratic reforms. While it is the state and the international institutions that have received most of the attention devoted to this increasingly important issue, other non-state actors have not been left out. This paper examines one such actor – the civil society in Nigeria's democratization process and democratic consolidation. Data generation for the study is through content analysis of secondary materials. The paper finds out that the civil society has been instrumental to the restoration of democracy in the country but finds it difficult to be helpful in the consolidation of democracy in the country because most of them do not cut across ethno-religious lines thereby becoming political while others have transformed into ethnic militias. The paper concludes that only international assistance can help the civil societies take national outlook to be able to refocus their attention to issues of transparency and accountability and evolution of the democratic values necessary for enduring democracy.

Key words: democracy; democratic transition; democratic consolidation; civil society.

Introduction

The democratic transitions that took place in East-Central Europe and in Latin America in the late 1980s was a surprise to political observers of the regions. This wind of change has been blowing across Africa and has seen the demise of African despotic leaders, and a change of attitude in uncompromising despots who saw the governance of their various nations not only as extensions of their families affairs but as birth rights.

The failure of democracy in the developing nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America had been seen and explained by Western scholars in term of low levels of modernization and economic growth which created a weak middle class; and partly as a result of authoritarian values inherited from the colonialists (Almond and Verba, 1963); economic dependency between the centre and periphery (Frank, 1972; Johnson, 1972), and excessive political demand from popular forces in the absence of developed institutions (Huntington, 1968). These excessive demands no doubt gave rise to popular struggles for democracy in Africa and elsewhere (Nyong'O, 1987).These struggles were started by people – the elites – the contending elites, the middle class, and the peasants or the masses. The struggles were staged in various parts and

formations, some organized and several unorganized; by several groups both organized and others disorganized; these groups are generally referred to as the 'civil society'.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is the focus of this paper to examine what is the civil society; what are its roles in the political processes of Nigeria, especially in the transition from military dictatorship to civil democratic rule (democratic transition), and in theconsolidation of democracy in the country. A discussion of the civil society and political stability in Nigeria therefore involves their roles in democratic transition and consolidation.

THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society have been variously defined by scholars and according to Lewis (1993), the idea of civil society is more of a slogan than a concept and is used to denote the popular upsurge that took place prior to political transition in Eastern and Central Europe, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Zargorska (1992) sees it as an analytical tool for historical events taking place Eastern Europe. To Popper (1983), it is an open society as opposed to a closal society. Nowak (1991) sees the idea of civil society as both descriptive and political but involves a sphere of civil autonomy and is used to describe non-state institutions. But the definition by Gyinah-Boadi seems to be the best and is encompassing. He sees the civil society as an ensemble of intermediate organisations that lie between the state and the household, that are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect and advance their interests and values, and that are separate from the state and are largely autonomous; and that by Foley and Edwards (1996) who see the civil society as the realm of private voluntary association from neighbour-hood association to interest group, to philanthropic enterprise of all sorts that are essential in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

But there are problems as to what the term "civil society" really means – what really constitutes the civil society - a problem of inclusion. Foley and Edwards (1996) ask if we shall include the market as well as voluntary organisations or does the market constitute a separate private sphere? And if we are to include the market, should we include economic associations as the trade unions, trade and business groups such as chambers of commerce; professional organisations, etc.? The second problem as Foley and Edwards (1996) pointed out is whether it makes sense to distinguish between the political associations and the civil society; and the political activities of the civil society and the political activities of the political groups, as voluntary associations (the civil society) such as interest groups and religious organisations and cause groups do mobilize their members and their sympathizers intermittently in pursuit of political goals. The third definitional problem they pointed out is the problem of elusive relationship between civil society and democratic governance – how does a society formed among individuals (civil society) produce large scale political and social effects. In other words, how does a society formed among individuals produce large scale political and social effects – if the chief virtue of the civil society is its ability to counterweight the state – the authoritarian state, to what extent can this happen without the help of the political society. These problems made them to postulate two methodologies or theoretical approaches for the study of civil society – one is an integrative approach which emphasizes the ability of associational life and habits of associations to foster patterns of civility in the actions of the citizens in a democratic state; and the other, the resistance or opposition approach that emphasizes the ability of the civil society to be independent of the state and therefore capable of organising and energising resistance to despotic regimes. The integrative approach they called Civil Society I and the opposition approach they called Civil Society II respectively

(Foley and Edward, 1996). While Civil Society I theory emphasize the positive effects of the civil society in democratic governance, the Civil Society II theory emphasizes its importance as in counter-weighting the state. Whatever approach we adopt in our study of civil society will determine our definition of the concept.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

Democracy failed in Nigeria and indeed all other African nations due to several factors earlier enumerated in this paper – low level of economic development and modernization, (Lipset, 1959); partly due to authoritarian values inherited from the colonialists (Almond and Verba, 1963); due to economic dependency between the centres and the peripheries (Frank, 1972; Johnson, 972) and excessive political demands by popular forces in the absence of developed institutions (Huntington, 1968) among other factors.

As Young (1988) pointed out, the colonial question contributed more than any other factor to the under-development of African states. Colonialism made the nations hegemonic and on independence, they developed as prototypes of the colonial state. With time, they metamorphosed into neo-patrimonial states – a situation where rulership is a combination of the legal-rational administration and law, with patrimonial forms of socio-political domination and elite management (Bayart, 1993; Jackson and Roseberg, 1982; Chabal, 1992).In Nigeria, all military regimes in general and the regimes of General Babangida and General Abacha in particular were of this nature. The Nigerian state became very prominent as a neo-patrimonial state as governmental rules, policies and the ruling apparatus became personalised and the Nigerian state was run as extensions of thehouseholds of the various political leaders, while state institutions and regulations (structures and processes) became eclipsed by the discretion of the rulers and top government officials. Even with democratic transition the various states and local governments in Nigeria have maintained this feature – an issue that has caused squabbles between state governors and their deputies, state governors and speakers of the various houses of assemblies, the council chairmen and the council legislatures, and most public office holders and the public.The neo-patrimonial state is also characterised by cooption of vocal opponents including the civil societies and their leaders. Some governments in Nigeria are known to have co-opted, used and dumped the vocal voices, social critics, democracy campaigners and the civil society where repression failed.

The neo-patrimonialisation of the state made political power a means to wealth and personal security and comfort, it raising the stake on power and reduced politics to what Ake (2000) described as 'the crude mechanics of opposing forces driven by the calculus of power' that for everyone within the political system, security lay only in the accumulation of power. This in Ake's view, of course made the idea of lawful political competition very impossible and raised the premium on power as opponents of the regimes were exposed to all forms of repression and assault (Ake, 2000). Those who escaped detention and death went into hiding and exile. This gave rise to the evolution of the civil society to challenge the despotic military regimes and organise the people for revolts against authoritarianism and to demand for democratic reforms.

THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Since 1989, the civil society has been viewed in largely instrumental terms – as a support structure for democracy. As Dahrendorf (1990) observed it is only when the civil society has been created that political and economic reform can be said to have credence. Civil society therefore is a catalyst in the democratisation process – transition from authoritarianism to

democracy and economic development and modernization.The most outstanding role of the civil society is in the transition from authoritarianism to civil democracy as has been the case in East-Central Europe. Nigeria, and the Arab springs.

A Chandler (1998) noted, a strong civil society helps to establish a civil democracy, and to consolidate democracy in post authoritarian regimes, as well as in deepening democracy in already established liberal democracies. The civil society also as observed by Chandler (1998) socialise the citizenry into societal norms and help in the building of trust which are essential for effective cooperation. They provide the network of civic engagements, roles are learnt and enforces, trusts is built, communications are made and collective actions are facilitated. This role becomes more effective when the civil society cuts across social cleavages. Issues are not polarised and or politicised; and bridges socio-political divisions in a society.

In recognition of the importance of the civil society of the East-Central Europe in the democratisation process, Konrad (1984) said that in contemporary times, self-management is society's prime demand, and that workplace and local community self-government based on personal contact, exercised daily and always subject to correction, have greater attraction to the western democracies than multi-party representative democracy because if the people are given the choice, they are not content with voting once every four years … where there is parliamentary democracy but no self-administration and the political class alone occupies the stage. In other words, the civil society helps to checkmate the excesses of the elected representatives once a democratic order has been established (democratic consolidation).The civil society in any given nation therefore have two basic roles to perform in the nation's political process, (a)to serve as vehicles for political transition from authoritarianism to democratisation process, and (b)tohelpin the consolidation of post authoritarian regimes once a democracy has been established – democratic consolidation.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Democratisation has been extensively written upon by western scholars based on the events that have been taking place in East-Central European nations and elsewhere in the world. The concept has now become a household word and could be applied to varying situations and episodes. When I say that I want the Ahmadu Bello University to democratise its admission policy, people will wonder what I actually mean by the term 'democratise'.Democratisation is the way democratic structures and processes, culture and values are institutionalised and diffused within and across a nation. The United Nations UN (1996) defined the term as a comprehensive approach covering a broad range of new peace building priorities, 'top-botton' international regulations of elections, institutional building and economic management accompanied by 'bottom-up' assistance to develop a democratic culture through the civil society. Thus, the civil society is designed to offer resistance to anti-democratic regimes by mobilizing the citizens at the local levels. Democratising the society starts from below. The oppositional theory of civil society is anti-statist (Baker, 1999).

Given this duty of democratising the society raises the questions as to when a democratic transition starts and when it ends. Many political observers and commentators on a nation's political process may fail to know when actually a transition from authoritarianism to democracy starts. Democratization of a polity starts when the authoritarian regime becomes vulnerable to democratic assaults. As Schedler (2001) puts it, democratic transition starts when democratising actors manage to break the relative certainty of authoritarian continuity,

whipping up expectations of democratic change.And it ends when a democratic regime has been established or when the democracy has been consolidated?

The identification of the boundary between democratic transition and democratic consolidation is blurred (Schedler, 2001). The blurred nature Schedler (2001) maintained is not as a result of conceptual incompetence but a problem of political reality; due to the empirical nature of the transition and fuzziness of institutional change. Therefore it is sometimes hard to say when a transition starts and when it ends. But it is generally believed that it starts when a despotic regime starts being vulnerable to democratic attacks and ends when a democratic regime has been established.

One might ask how the democratic assault starts and the methods; and when does a despotic regime become vulnerable to the democratic assault. As Oberschall (2000) pointed out, an authoritarian regime starts being vulnerable to democratic assaults when:

a). Discontent and dissatisfaction about basic life-conditions are widely experienced – hardship, corruption, lack of freedom – and the usual ways of seeking relief are denied or do not work.

b). Beliefs, values and ideologies filter and frame the dissatisfactions, transform them into grievances against the regime, and promise to solve these problems, e.g. corruption is not a personal flaw of some leaders who should be replaced; it is endemic and only another regime or form of government can stop it.

c). The capacity to act collectively exists (also referred to as mobilization) such as freedom to organise, civil society, access to means of mass communication.

d). Political opportunity, for example divisions in the regime, international support for dissents, low legitimacy of the regime and the like, which increase the probability that the goals and demands of the protest will be achieved because of the weakness of the target.

Every Nigerian no doubt will believe that these conditions existed in Nigeria as soon as General Ibrahim Babangida took over the political administration of this country and existed until General Abdulsalam Abubakar handed over power to General Olusegun Obasanjo. These military regimes were very much vulnerable to democratic assault and assaults came when they did.

The methods adopted by the civil society for challenging the authoritarian regimes ranged from petitions to civil disobedience. As Oberschall (2000) noted, the civil societies everywhere adopt these measures – petitions, protests (violent and peaceful) demonstrations and in some cases participate in elections and other political processes based largely on the expectations that the despots would relinquish power to the contending elites. All these methods were adopted by the civil society in Nigeria and when it became clear that the people wanted a change, General Babangida annulled the June 12 1993 Presidential election result and General Abacha forced all the political parties in the country to adopt him as their presidential candidate in his self-succession bid as he became the only head that the 'Nigerian cap' fits and the only ''key'' to the door of life and death in the country.

In Nigeria, the civil society has been instrumental to the restoration of democracy in the country and in safeguarding the economic interests of the people. During the dictatorial regimes of General Babangida when the June 12 1993 presidential election in Nigeria was annulled, the pro-democracy movements were able to organise popular uprising against the Babangida's administration. With the annulment of the election, popular protests against the administration continued until the General 'stepped aside'.

The institution of a collegiate executive as a transitional government headed by Mr. Earnest Shonekan did not help matters as the protests continued in different locations in the country. The protests became fiercer and more violent in several locations in the country as General Sani Abacha took over the administration of the country from the transitional government headed by Shonekan.

Amid the protests for transition to democracy and economic reforms to alleviate the sufferings of the people due to hikes in fuel prices, uncontrollable decline or depreciation of the Naira against major world currencies, inflation and non-payment of workers' salaries in several parts of the country, General Abacha initiated a difficult transition programme designed to succeed himself in office. General Abacha's regime saw the perfection of Nigeria as a neo-patrimonial state. Pro-democracy activists were intimidated and most disappeared while several were shot, and others killed. Those who had the means escaped from the country and went into self-imposed exile abroad from where they shouted at the despotic regime at home.

This period was not conducive to the development and functioning of an effective civil society but some proved their salt. Access to Justice (AJ), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), The Afenifere, Ohaneze-Ndi-Igbo, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Kudirat Institute for Nigerian Democracy (KIND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and a host of other such organisations were formed on daily basis most of whom were anti-democratic like Senator Arthur Nzeribe and Davis Abimbola's Association for Better Nigeria (ABN).

The activities of certain individuals in the pro-democracy protests need commendation. Gani Fawehnmi, Chris Agbakoba, the late Kudirat Abiola, Chief Adesanya, Pa Enahoro, Sir Alex Ekwueme and the members of the G34; Alex Ibru and the late Pa Rewane. The Press especially The Guardian, This Week, Newsweek, Source, The News and Newswatch and Minaj Broadcasting Corporation (MST) were also formidable fighters in the pro-democracy protests. Some other sections withstood the winds of change while several others broke down and were carried away by the wind of change.

As soon as the authoritarian regimes became vulnerable to democratic assaults, they reacted in varying degrees. As Oberschall (2001) also pointed out, the general reaction usually take these forms:

> a). socio-economic reform advocacy and consciousness raising. In Nigeria, the dictators succumbed to international demands for economic reforms – privatisation, commercialisation and deregulation of the major sectors of the economy.
> b). political reforms – decriminalising freedom of association and allowing some measure of political dissent, relative press censorship and lifting of ban on formation of political associations to be registered as political parties – a covert acceptance of pluralist politics.
> c). convening of sovereign national conference where such will not put their personal and regional interests to jeopardy. Where it will, they convene constituent assemblies.
> d). preparation for competitive elections by releasing the electoral bill and election time table.
> e). installation of elected government.

Of all the military dictators that have ruled this country, only two have the credit of having started and completed very successfully transitions from military dictatorship to civil

democracies. The first person was General Mathew Olusegun Obasanjo who installed President Shehu Shagari in 1979; and the second was General Abdulsalam Abubakar who installed General Olusegun Obasanjo as the civilian president 20 years later in 1999.

THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN MAINTENANCE OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN A POLITY (DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION)

The civil society is also involved in the maintenance of political stability as soon as a transition from authoritarian to democratic governance has been effected. The issue of democratic stability involves democratic consolidation or starts with the consolidation of newly established democracy. According to Schedler (1995), the term democratic consolidation describe the challenge of preventing authoritarian regression and securing the survival of the new democracies but has gone to include such things as diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of anti-system actors, the removal of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the routinization of politics, judicial reform, the decentralisation of state power and the alleviation of poverty. As Schedler (1998) also observed, the study of political regimes involves looking back in order to explain the record of stability of historical cases (democratic stability theory) or looking forward to assess the prospects of stability of the present regime (democratic consolidation theory). Because scholars adopt this forward looking perspective, a democracy qualifies as consolidated as soon as its probability of survival appears to be very high or the probability of breakdown appears to be very low (Valenzuela, 1992).To Schedler (1998), a democracy is consolidated only when the core rules that regulate access to positions of state power and authority – political elections, are secure and firm. It is democratic elections that matter. The elections have to be regular, clean, inclusive, free and competitive. Generally, a consolidated democracy, it is assumed, is one that is able to manage, pending challenges, survive erupting crises and adapt to changing circumstances (Gunther et al, 1995).

Because scholarly discussions of democratic consolidation are forwarded looking, Schedler (1998) observed that it has involved the use of probability language. They talk of the probabilities, risks, dangers and uncertainties, and associated democratic consolidation with diminishing risks of an 'authoritarian regression'; subsiding "threats of destabilization"; decreasing "success chances of authoritarian involutions", a rising 'likelihood of military acquiescence', a reduced probability of breakdown' and 'dissolving uncertainties' about the continuity of the democratic game. And this forward looking perspective often assume that a consolidated democracy is immune to breakdown. A high probability of survival Schedler (1998) pointed out does not exclude the possibility of dying. A discussion of democratic stability should therefore include a discussion of factual historical evidence (backward looking perspective), and a definition of the future conditions, enabling and constraining future factors (Schedler, 1998).Therefore expectations of democratic consolidation are subjective perceptions (Schedler, 1998) and what counts for democratic consolidation is how involved actors (the civil society) themselves perceive the situation – how secure or insecure the citizens feel about the democratic future – in this way the concept of consolidation resembles the concept of legitimacy(Schedler, 1998). Consolidation is the belief in stability – a matter of converging expectations among relevant actors. And democratic consolidation ends when the democratic actors manage to establish reasonable certainty about the continuity of the new democratic regime, and abating the expectations of authoritarian regression. As Schedler (2001) pointed out, the emergence of uncertainty marks the beginning of a regime change and the fading of uncertainty marks the end of democratic consolidation (Schedler, 2001).

With the return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, the civil society has been very active in ensuring that the rules or normative framework upon which the transition was based is accorded its rightful place in our natural life. Some of them have been quick at pointing out the pitfalls in the 1999 constitution and in the transition to civil rule decree, and the need to redress the anomalies in order to strengthen the civil society for them to be autonomous. Several of them made inputs and representations to the panel that reviewed the 1999 constitution.

To forestall the resurgence of authoritarian rule in the country, the civil society was very active in making representatives to the Oputa Panel during its sittings and some of them joined issues with others during the proceedings of the panel exposing the evils perpetuated by one another and asked one another to accept their faults and to be sorry for their crimes. This was a right step in the right direction and there has not been a situation where the civil society has been active in the country as they were at the Oputa Panel Proceedings. The Panel gave the society the confidence that democratic rule has come to stay and that governance henceforth is to be based on respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The civil society in Nigeria has been quick condemning the elected government officials and all others within the corridors of power who have the tendencies of being despotic or authoritarian in government offices. The members of the National Assembly and the State Governments were the first to come under attack firstly, over petitions, false age declarations, academic attainment or qualifications, jumbo remuneration and allowances, the most controversial being the furniture allowance to the legislators, certificate forgeries involving Bola Tunubu of Lagos State, Orji Uzo Kalu of Abia State, Salisu Buhari of kano State (formerly the Speaker of the House of Representatives) and the cases of Senator Evans Enwerem and Chuka Okadigbo. The essence is to make national leadership prudential, accountable and transparent which are the basic ingredients for democratic consolidation.

The civil society has been very strong in the condemnation of the electoral bill signed into law by the then President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The provisions of the Act were not only seen as fraudulent but as capable of disenfranchising and marginalising politically most Nigerians who were not given equal opportunity by the past military administration to participate in the transition programme. Most of them were bold to challenge the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) over its guidelines on political party registration. Some of them joined issues with the INEC in the courts of law and came out very successful.

The civil society has found faults also in the mode and manner of registration of voters in the country during last voters registration exercises. Some part of the civil society that applied for observer status in the registration exercise were denied accreditation by INEC shouted loud, long and clear; and accused INEC of conspiracy with some vested interests and questioned the integrity of the INEC to conduct a free and fair election in the country. Though elections can be part of the democratisation process, as Chaudler (1998) pointed out, they are essential for the creation of legitimate democratic state but they are not enough to ensure democracy. They can only ensure democracy if they are free and fair, and this is where the civil society is concerned about the functions of INEC.

The civil society has not been silent over the regrouping of ex-dictators and their cohorts in the nation's political process. The resurgence of the ex-dictators in the political arena not only frightened the entire Nigerian society but raised some concern over the continuity of democratic governance in the country after President Obasanjo's regime. The citizens have started feeling insecure about the future of democracy in this country. The fear was heightened by the desire of every elected government official to continue for a second term in office. This

second term bid created a lot of confusion and crises at the national, state and local government levels. Political opponents of incumbents were harassed, killed and detained, ethnic militias and private armies are being formed on a daily basis all around the country and consignments of arms and munitions are being intercepted and impounded daily across the country. All these are pointers that the transition is far from consolidating and may have been the foundation of the present day terrorism and insurgency in the country.

PROBLEMS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

The civil society in Nigeria have not had it easy in the performance of their duties in the democratisation process and consolidation of democracy. It has been faced with these problems:

1). It has been too weak to confront the state especially due to in the protracted transitions in Nigeria. They rise and die with the transitions and only very few of them survived these cycles of transition.

2). Most of them die once the democratic governance has been established. In Nigeria, several of them become extinct as the new democratic government was established.

3). Most of them lack accountability because they are organized around personalities and find it absolutely difficult to give account of their operations to international sponsors and donors.

4). Most of them lack resources. This makes them vulnerable to political interference.

5). Due to the lack of human and material resources, most of them lack the ability to bring corrupt public officials to justice or expose them adequately. Those who have been successful at doing this are those organised by legal practitioners in the country.

6). Most of them have failed to transcend ethno-national boundaries. A good number of the civil societies in the country are found in the South-Western part of the country and they draw about 80% of their membership from the zone. This particular factor has made them the political megaphones of their ethnic regime.

7). Because they have been formed on ethno-national lines and atimes on religious lines, the government has found it easy to interfere, fight and manipulate them through the traditional rulers. When they come under intense pressure from the traditional rulers, they abandon their focuses. General Babangida and Abacha were very good at this manipulation. Incentives were given to traditional rulers who co-operated with the government in its fight against the civil society and sanctioned those who did not comply. General Babangida donated very generously to them while Abacha beefed up the donations with an approval of 5% of statutory allocations to the local governments as income for the royal fathers.

8). The civil society has failed to help in the economic reforms – though the government has committed itself to neo-liberal economic reform, the civil society has not exploited this opportunity to better the lots of the people. This failure may be due to poverty caused by decades of military dictatorships which marginalised the masses economically.

9). Because some of them tend to be militant in their methods, they have been prone to repression and cooption.

10). Most of them lack autonomy. They depend on the government and external donors for funds. These donors often dictate to what use the funds must be put. This invariably dictates their focus and their orientations. The trade unions, interest and cause groups cannot afford prolonged confrontation with the governments. When they do this, their salaries are stopped, their leaders and members are arrested and detained and some of them are ejected out of their residential quarters (if any). Those from

institutions of learning get their appointments terminated and schools under locks and keys while the staff affected are locked out of their offices and ejected out of their official residences.

11). For religious groups with foreign contacts and support and large membership they can afford to be financially independent of the government and are more active in the fight for political and economic reforms. But they have problems of getting opposition from themselves – Moslems are always in constant conflict with the Christians and most social cleavages take religious lines. They are also in constant struggle for government's support, favour and recognition. This limits their powers to act and make them to compromise their claims to political neutrality.

THE PROSPECTS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS AND POLITICAL STABILITY OF NIGERIA

The civil society in Nigeria has created political awareness among the citizenry. Their actions have increased the level of political participation in the political processes of the country, the nature or manner of participation being immaterial, but all are geared toward the evolution and sustainance of democratic order and practices. Their calls for strikes, protests and demonstrations against the governments have been heeded by the people the most successful being those called against the annulment of the June 12 Presidential election, and hikes in fuel prices.

Some of the civil society members have transformed into political parties and several others into ethnic militias making various types of demands on the system, some of the demands have been rational and justifiable in their bases while some others are made to draw public attention and to forment crises within the system.

From the problems enumerated above, it is very clear that the civil society is not fully developed in the country and those who have the skills, personnel and resources have drawn strength from events in East-Central Europe and South America, and pressure from foreign donors. However foreign influence have not been enough to make them resilent in their demands, methods and operations.

The civil society in Bosnia was initiated by western donors, the USA, the United Nations, and the European Union. They were adequately funded, and their personnel trained for the tasks ahead. These foreign donors have however been ill-prepared to help the growth of the civil society in Africa due to their national interest. The West has been very apprehensive of events in Zimbabwe because their kits and kins in that country have been affected by the economic reforms of President Mugabe who now wants to redistribute lands. The civil society in that country is getting more attention than the rest of Africa put together because western interests are in jeopardy in that country. The west should show more interest in the civil society in Nigeria through funding and training if they are to perform creditably well.Economic liberalisation and expansion of the private sector if properly done in this country will give the civil society in Nigeria the much needed resource base to be more effective.

The Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been of great help for them to disseminate information easily world-wide without censorship and restrictions. The ICT will also help them to source for sponsors or donors, recruit personnel and members and to serve as a vanguard in the democratic process.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

NOTE:
1. This paper was presented by this author as an anniversary paper delivered at the 40th Anniversary Celebration of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, 16 – 17 October, 2003 under the same title.

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