



Application of Federal Character Policy: Role and Constraint of the Civil Society in Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of civil society in the application of the federal character policy in Nigeria is the focus of this study, with emphasis on the opportunities and constraints that civil societies face in promoting and ensuring the adherence of the policy in the country. Considering the fact that task of policy application would become a mirage if the government isolates the civil society whose conspicuous role in the overall adherence of the policy cannot be overemphasized. And in order to achieve the objectives of this study, secondary source of data was used with content analysis. The study discovers that civil society in Nigeria remains an important and crucial stakeholder in the application of the federal character policy especially in the area of advocacy and policy orientation. However the efforts of the civil society are being hampered by some constraints like lack of strong constitutional recognition and finance challenges amongst other. Hence the study recommends a constitutional role for the civil society and financial support in the overall interest of achieving the policy objectives of the Federal character.

Keyword: Civil society, Federal character policy, Policy change, Advocacy and Policy agenda

Introduction

The civil societies play a pivotal role in the policy cycle of every country in the world. Research findings shows that developed countries like United States of America the civil society is a means to an open door participation in the political, social and economic wellbeing of the citizen, while in Canada the civil society is a important means through which the citizen of the country show their solidarity and compassion to the policy agenda of the country through financial, technical skills support and the welfare of the citizen (Steinbach, 2000). In Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and the entire Latin American Countries the civil society is that voluntary associations which assist in shaping the social life and the rule which govern the policy process of the country (Scholte, 2002) Ecuador in particular the civil society demands from the government not only transparency and accountability but greater opportunities in the formulation of the development policy trust of the state (Thindwa, et al 2007).

The civil society in the Africa in continent is not different. In the last decades the continent has witnessed continuous rise of civil society which have contributing significantly to many Africa states and help in advancing the regional integration, building of national and cross-national capacity in all aspect of policy agenda of the continent (Iweala and Kwaako, 2009; Orji, 2009). In South Africa for example the civil society was in the forefront in the struggle against the apartheid regime during 1994 democratic transition and change of policy mechanism (Phiroshaw and Anne, 2002), in

Kenya the civil society an essential part of the developmental strives of the government especially in the area of policy initiation, promotion and strengthening of dialogue between the citizen and the government and it a pillar of innovation in the country (Muok and Kingiri, 2015) which is equally applicable in most African countries.

The Nigerian civil society has a long history of resistant and support which dated back to colonial era although they operated under the guild of student union bodies, nationalist political parties, trade union, labor unions, and these groups played important roles in the political independent of the country from the colonialist which resulted into her independent in 1960. Through propaganda, strike actions, protests, and civil disobedience the civil society were able to register their presence and put their demands before the government (Akinboye and Oloruntoba, 2007). It is imperative to note that the civil society in Nigeria has been affected by the political nature of the country after her independence putting before them new challenges and shift in emphasis from the nationalist outlook during the liberation of Nigeria to policy advocate (Omede and Bakare, 2014).

In the light of these new challenges the study sorts to assess the role of the civil society in Nigeria as a catalyst in the application of the federal character policy in the country, hence the study is divided into five sections the first section is the introduction, the second section is the conceptualization of civil society and federal character policy, the third section considers the role of the civil society in the application of the federal character policy, the fourth section is concern with the constraint of the Nigerian civil society and the final section is the conclusion and recommendation and reference.

Conceptual framework

Civil Society

The concept of civil society like many other concepts in the field of social sciences has no universally acceptable definition as scholars and researcher tend to read different meaning to it. The civil societies are those associations or groups which ensure that the citizens fully participate willingly, openly and freely in the public phase, and whose operation and function remains independence (Ikelegbe, 2013). The civil society (CS) as both an organization structure and analytical tool usually use for politics and developmental analysis, which content and boundary is often contested in both structural and analytical framework (Ikelegbe, 2013)

Civil society is a sphere in the social interaction between the states and the family which is usually reflected in the cooperative community norms, voluntary structured association and the public communication network; norms here represents the values of trust, inclusion, tolerance and reciprocity which is important in solving problem, while the structured association represent the both formal and informal organization through which the people of a country pursue their interest (Veneklasen, 1994). Thindwa, et al (2007) defines the civil society as that arena which is different from the market and the state were the people come together in order to pursue their common interests through collaborative action, which is neither for profit nor political power exercise. The civil society is those section apolitical associations or groups established for the purpose of pursuing certain interest which is often helpful to the whole citizens of the nation or country were they are allowed to exist.

The civil society is that collection of people living in a defined territory which usually comprise of various families in pursuance of what might benefits them and the community in which they live (Omede and Bakare, 2014). The civil society is that counter-hegemonic social movements, which main targets are the political and societal players, by playing the role of watchdogs in order to legitimize or guild the state with no intention of taking over the power of the state (Imade, 2007).

The Economic, social and cultural council of the African Union established in 2004 sees the civil society as those groups representing the children, elderly, women, youth and people with special needs and disability and professional association such as the artists, health workers, engineers, social works, teachers, sports associations, media, legal professionals, academic, business organization, workers in industries, employers, national chambers of commerce and agricultural associations and the private sectors all these comprises the civil society organization (ECOSOCC, 2014). Ikelegbe (2013:6) outline the important characteristic of civil society as follows:

- The activities and associational life of different sets of voluntary organizations which to some extend are autonomous of the government but relate to the government and the political sphere; that are;
- Involved in more socio-political purposes as against their private and economic interests and;

- They guarantee and advance the interests, needs and demands of members, communities, supporters and champion and address social realities on ground
- Through voluntary activities, cooperation and collective action, and
- In information: they utilize information linkage and networks of public communication
- All actions are within the normative framework of constitutional rights of the citizen, rule of law, civility and development

The characteristics of some civil society in Nigeria as showed in the table below: the civil society in Nigeria from the type, which shows the categories from their grouping; their leadership which shows their coverage; their support based which shows their number/rank of support they derive; their dominant activities which shows what they tend to pursue; their dominant orientation which could be radical/progressive or right/development orientation; their territorial base, which could be urban/major cities; and their examples which associations and ethnic groups

Table 1: The characteristics of some civil society in Nigeria

Type	Leadership	Support	Dominant Activities	Dominant Orientation	Territorial Base	Example
Trade Unions	Representative	Mass Based	Workers welfare, socio political	Radical/ Progressive	Urban/major cities	
Civic Associations	Representation	Mass Based	Socio-political		Urban/major Cities	
Gender Groups	Limited Representation/ Sometimes leadership perpetuation	Limited mobilization of special groups	Gender issues, socio-economic empowerment poverty alleviation civil/human rights	Rights and Claims	Urban	
Non-Governmental Organizations	Founders/Board of Trustees	Special Groups	Social Services Technical support Advocacy development activities	Rights and Claims. Development orientation Radical	Urban/major cities	
Faith Based Organizations	Religious leaders often founders	Religious based	Social welfare human capital Humanitarian Assistance	Parochial		
Media	Owners of Media House	Readership/ Broad based	Information, enlightenment, outlet for diverse views, public scrutiny of governments	Governance and development	Urban based	
Professional Associations	Representatives	Members, sympathizers supporters	Protection and projection of professional interests, public advocacy	Professional, Governance	Urban based	
Students and Youth Groups	Representatives	Support Youth, Sympathizers	Protects against misrule, advocacy,	Mobilization, radical, contentious politics	Urban and Community based, Educational	

			mobilization		institutions	
Business Groups	Representatives	Business Sector, Corporate bodies	Economic governance issues, policy advocacy	Collaboration with government, Remedial actions	Urban based	Farmers Association Chambers
Socio-Cultural Associations	Representatives Founders	Identity groups, Communities kinship groups	Articulation of socio-political and cultural interests, contentious politics, public scrutiny policy advocacy	Parochial, Conservative	Community based	Ethnic, Regions, Communities, Clan association
Uncivil Groups	Representative Founders	Members Socio-Cultural leaders	Militant resistance violent engagements	Militant, Aggressive, Radical	Urban based	Militias, Cult Groups, Vigilantes
Clubs/Development Associations	Representatives	Members, Opinion leaders and Kins	Socio-economic interests of members	Social and Economic Empowerment and support	Rural and Urban	
Constituency Groups	Representatives	Members, families, interested others	Concerns of Constituents	Mutual and Welfare	Urban, Semi Urban and Rural	Associations of Women traders, farmers, artisans, the elders etc.
Organizations of Survival	Representatives	Members, families, interested others	Socio-economic welfare interest of members	Welfare and Support	Urban Semi Urban and Rural	Mutual Savings Groups

Source: Ikelegbe, 2013:10-11

The civil society is those voluntary nonprofit associations or institutions which operate outside the control the state but under the constitution of the territory which they exist and which major concern are the socio-political and economic development of its member and the generality of the people at large. The civil society is a formation of the organized social life of the citizens, which spread outside the state's social life, which create an environment where autonomous voluntary groups compete, cooperate and collaborate over interest and preference (Ikelegbe, 2013).

Federal character policy:

The concept of federal character policy like other concepts in the field of social sciences equally has no generally acceptable definition. Scholars like Majekodunmi (2013) sees federal character policy as a policy mechanism of the government of Nigeria to ensure equality in the distribution of recruitment or employment, as well as equal distribution of administrative and political offices among all the segments of the country. The policy came about to allow for the conduct and composition of public institution and other institution of government in their employment, which is expected to reflect the diversity that exist in Nigeria (Majekodunmi, 2013).

Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) sees the federal character policy as a policy measure aimed at integrating the diverse ethnic group in Nigeria by fostering peace, unity and creating equal opportunity in employment, resource and integration of less advantage groups. While Oyediji (2016) sees federal character policy as established to redress perceived inequality,

imbalance and injustices in Nigeria and to correct prevailing grievance in the land through equal distribution of employment across every segments of the country.

The role of the civil society in the application of the federal character policy

Budget Monitoring

The budget is a basic component of improving the application of federal character policy which requires transparency in the formulation, planning and implementation because it serves as the underling fiscal policy tool of the Nigerian government which provides and present the expected activities and functions of the agency (Iweala and Kwaako, 2007). It is no longer news that the Nigeria's budget cycle is divided into four (4) stages, the drafting stage, legislative stage, implementation stage and monitoring stage (Iweala and Kwaako, 2007). The civil society has a greater role to play in monitoring and implementation of the budget of the federal character commission in order to guarantee the purpose of which it is appropriated is achieved.

Advocate of Transparency and Corruption Free Policy

The Nigeria civil society can ensure progress in the area of the application of the federal character policy in the country by ensuring and focusing on transparency and corruption free agency. Nigeria remains the 136 least corrupt countries out of the 175 countries according to Transparency International corruption perception index this goes to show that the presence of the civil society is still not much felt in most aspects of the governance in the country hence special focus need to be given to the federal character policy especially in the area of it application in the civil service of Nigeria (Trading Economic, 2017).

The Nigeria civil society over the years has helped in exposing some government officials perceived to be corrupt. A number of cases of exposure occasion by the action of civil society like the James Onanefe Ibori the former governor of Delta state of Nigeria which was later convicted in the United Kingdom (Gberebie, 2013) and the series of cases of exposure of perceived corruption in the ministries, agencies of the government and parastates in Nigeria. The impact of corruption in Nigeria was greatly shown in the study carried by the Price Water House Coopers Limited which present the level of corruption on the economy of Nigeria has assume an alarming proposition if not manage it could cost the country 37% of GDP by 2030 which is equated to around \$1,000 per person as at 2014 and \$2,000 per person by 2030 in availably will impact negatively on the country's quest for policy implementation (PWH, 2016). Thus, the civil society in Nigeria can equally channels their effort in this area of application of the federal character policy in country to ensure it adherence, guarantee transparency and corrupt free implementation of the policy in Nigeria.

Civil Society and Policy Change

The role of the civil society over the globe have become pronounced in the area of development financing, increasingly influencing the world and national public policy and shaping the focus of government and drawing attention to the need for good and transparent governance structure (World Bank Report, 2006). The presence of the civil society is beginning to be felt in right from the formulation process of policy, playing a major role in the implementation stage, especially in the area of suitable and timely implementation of policy (Pasha, 2005).

The Nigerian civil society have not only provided important information in the policy agenda, they equally serve as watchdogs to the government and by ensuring that proper policy decisions of the government are appropriate at any time in the country's strive for equality in the distribution of employment and resource among then states in the country. The civil society mobilized the Nigerian citizen against the government in January 2012 on the policy of fuel subsidy removal which prompted a large protest in Nigeria because it was perceived as an insensitive act of the government because of the continuous economic incapacitation of the majority of people of the country (Omede and Bakare, 2014). The Freedom of Information Act passage by the Nigerian National Assembly was another policy which the civil society played an active role in pursuing through. The achievement made on this act can be attributed to the relentless struggle of the coalition of Nigerian civil society groups who strongly advocated for the act in order to guarantee transparency in governance, the Open Society Justice Initiative, Media Rights Agenda, Right to Know Movement amongst other civil society groups champion these cause (Omede and Bakare, 2014).

Civil Society, Accountability and Responsibility

The role of the civil society cannot be overemphasized as it ensures the accountability and responsibility of the government towards her citizen especially in the area of the application of the federal character policy. The Nigerian civil society ensures that governmental activities are always held with high sense of accountability and responsible through high standard of performance, transparency and objective assessment in the discharge of duties (OHCHR, CESR, 2013; Bissio, 2015). The aspect of accountability can be ensured through the three elements of answerability, responsibility and enforceability which are all mutually interlinked (DDP, 2015).

Civil Society as an Awareness and Orientation

The civil service in Nigeria can assist in ensuring the application of the federal character policy in Nigeria through continues awareness and constant orientation of the general public on what the policy objectives are and what it intend to achieve. The civil service in Nigeria can take the duty of awareness or orientation body championing policy implementation especially the policy as important as federal character policy.

Constraint of the Nigerian civil society

The Nigerian civil societies are faced with series of challenges despite the important role they play in the pursuance of the application of the federal character policy in the country:

- **Corruption and Embezzlement** One of the problems confronting the civil society in Nigeria remains corruption and embezzlement of fund by some leaders and members of the group. These challenges has weakens the quest and moral standard of confronting the government and has prevented people of great moral value from joining the civil society (Akinboye and Oloruntoba, 2007). The transparency which the civil society tends to advocate for in governance they are equally being accused of same lack of transparency and corruption especially in the utilization of donor-funds from international organization, foreign government and local institutions are often converted for personal use (Odeh, 2012). The burden of corruption and embezzlement has over the years slow down the effectiveness of the civil society in Nigeria.
- **Lack of Capacity** The Nigerian civil society groups in general lacks the technical knowhow, knowledge, skills and advocacy methods needed to achieve their aims (Odeh, 2012). The Nigerian public policy runs a system that requires better placed and well equipped civil society in the area of knowledge driven civil society to be able to understand and redirect the government towards achieving governmental agenda of the Nigeria government
- **Limited Financial Resources:** Funding is another major hindering factor of the civil society in Nigeria, it limit the scale of work the group would have achieved or delivered because they reliance heavily on funding from the foreign government and foreign institution for their sustenance and when it is not forthcoming they tend to relax in their pursue of policy monitoring and awareness in the country (Pasha, 2005). This financial constraint has negatively limited the activities of the civil society in Nigeria.
- **Lack of Unity and Internal Democracy:** The civil society in Nigeria is faced with serious lack of unity and internal democracy. The lack of unity as trend in the civil society of Nigeria happens to be along regional, ethnic and sometime religious lines, leading to disunity, lack of trust, and disagreement among them especially in the decision making process, making it difficult if not impossible to come up with a common position wherever they engage the government of the state on the issue of public interest (Odeh, 2012).
- **Political Perception:** The civil society in Nigeria is faced with the negative perception from the political class and the government who always see them as an enemy in some cases. The state is always watchful of its power, hence any attempt by the civil society to advocate for better deal for the citizen, is always seen as a challenge to the state legitimacy (Pasha, 2005), thus the states sees the civil society as a competitors or challenger to power, legitimacy and the influence of citizens against the government, rather than seeing them (civil society) as partners for enhancing the development agenda of the state (Odeh, 2012; Pasha, 2015).
- **The lack of clear-cut objective and the disconnection of the civil society:** Most of the civil society groups in the Federal Republic of Nigeria came about as result of one quest for self enrichment and they exhibit great lack of experience required to champion the cause of any civil society, with a high sense of organizational discipline lacking in most aspects of the groups which obviously played out in the cause of their activity through the clear disunity among the members and other similar civil society groups (Kukah, 1999; Dakyyen and Dang, 2014). The

civil society in Nigeria present a picture of an 'all comers activities' or 'all comers jobs' which represent the reasons for their many and unending internal contradiction because they were founded on undefined aims, without clarity of purpose and clear-cut objective and model of operation (Kukah, 1999; Dakyyen and Dang, 2014).

The Nigerian civil society happens to be disconnected from the state (Songonuga, 2015), and not only the state but the people, especially the rural populace which they tend to represent. The activities of most of the civil society groups in the country are concentration in the big cities like Lagos, Abuja the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Kano and Rivers states respectively, lacking national recognition and spread, making it difficult for many citizens of country to be carried along (Odeh, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examines the role and constraint of the civil society in the application of the federal character policy in Nigeria. It observed that the Nigerian government will achieve much in the area of the application of the policy federal character towards a better and equal distribution of employment in the country with the civil society ensuring transparency, accountability, budget monitoring and use of available resources in providing adherence to the federal character policy. Although, the civil society is faced with series of challenges like limited resources, lack of capacity, corruption and embezzlement but the important role it plays cannot be over emphasized especially in the area of advocacy and putting application of the federal character policy in proper shape in a bit to achieving the objective of improving equal employment distribution in the country.

Also, the paper established that the civil society can assist in the application of the federal character policy when the antagonist perceptions of it are removed. The time has come for the civil society to given constitutional role or recognition as advocate of policy adherence; and financial support should be accorded to civil society in Nigeria and a strong unity of purpose should be the encouraged among the entire civil society in the country this can be achieved through quarterly joint session amongst themselves in which a review of their purpose, aim and model of operation can be reexamined. The time to give the civil service in Nigeria constitution recognition is now.

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