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*Civil society in Nigeria:
A force for social inclusion and
sustainable development?*



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Essien D. Essien teaches Social Ethics, Comparative Religious Ethics and Christian Ethics in the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This is a working paper based on theoretically-informed empirical research on Nigeria's civil society sector and organisations. It presents an overview of the sector, as well as some of the opportunities, challenges and constraints on achieving socially inclusive sustainable development in Nigeria. The argument suggested is that Nigerian society is largely exclusionary, and primarily works to benefit its urban elites at the expense of rural populations. Comments and responses are welcomed by the author in contributing to ongoing research in this area. Copyright remains with the author, and any errors are the author's own. Please cite as Essien D. Essien, 'Civil society in Nigeria: A force for social inclusion and sustainable development?' The Davies Papers: Africa Series #1, January 2014.

Abstract

Contemporary studies surrounding the creation of civil society in Africa have revealed two important findings. First, despite the effort of civil society organizations in supporting inclusive democratic governance, promoting participation in governance processes, advocating for transparency and accountability as well as defending human rights, sustainable development and stability remain elusive due to the challenges which originate in the practice of social exclusion in many African societies. Second, institutions central to the exercise of governmental powers exhibit inefficiency, weakness, lack transparency, and suffer from low credibility which worsen extreme poverty, inequality, and deprivation. Drawing upon extensive contemporary literature on social exclusion and inclusive growth and supported with qualitative methodology, this study examines the role of civil society organisations in representing the interests and experiences of those who experience poverty, exclusion and inequality. The study argues that the management of socio-economic demands and the distribution of services in the Nigerian society is largely inefficient and exclusionary, leading to a myriad of social problems and protests. Many structures and institutions continue to work according to the old social order and rules centred on exclusion and control that favours only the interests of a few elites. This study outlines the strategic and practical importance of civil society in supporting social inclusion for sustainable development, although it warns that, as currently structured, Nigeria's exclusionary civil society primarily benefits its urban elites at the expense of rural dwellers who continue to lack basic social and infrastructural services, such as healthcare, shelter, roads, education, and drinking water.

Introduction

Creating a society for all is a moral obligation and one that must reflect the commitments to upholding at least the minimum core of fundamental human rights and the principles of equality and equity (Busatto, 2007). Despite efforts made toward achieving socio-economic development, promoting wider support for democratic values and strengthening collaborative relationships among societies, social institutions and civil society worldwide, inequality and exclusion not only persist, but are expanding in many parts of the world, both within and between societies. Many societies are facing negative social conditions, such as widening disparities and marginalization of certain groups and/or communities (Beall and Piron, 2003). This has also resulted in conflicts and violence as well as militancy, as in the case of Nigeria's Niger Delta region. To prevent the further increase of social tensions among their members, it is vital that societies be equipped with strategies and tools for adequately assessing the realities and addressing existing challenges in a more proactive, constructive and holistic way, so that they may become better prepared for new challenges, more resilient in confronting them, and better able to adjust to emerging imbalances. Against this backdrop, there are strong instrumental reasons for promoting social integration and inclusion. Deep disparities, based on unequal distribution of resources or wealth and/or differences in people's backgrounds, reduce social mobility and ultimately exert a negative impact on growth, productivity and well-being of society as a whole (Agbaje, 1993). The simple understanding is that promoting social integration and inclusion will create a society that is safer, stable and just, which is an essential condition for sustainable economic growth and development.

For any society to be stable, it must interact with many who are engaged in associations that directly participate in the public sphere. The core ideas of a good society include equality of opportunity, well-being, non violence and tolerance (Agbaje, 1997). These lend credence to the fact that associations within the society must therefore collectively draw on these values and give opportunities for participation as well as voice to all groups in society without recourse to discrimination, marginalization, intolerance or violence. In this regard, one significant area of progress recorded over the past decade has been the growing influence of civil society organizations toward influencing and driving policy change, be it local, national and international. In many societies such as Nigeria, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community based organizations (CBOs), professional associations, trade unions and other civil society organizations (CSOs) or groups are regularly called upon to help in designing and implementing key development strategies, especially poverty reduction. Their participation is also solicited and built into special initiatives, like the 'Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria', as well as initiatives targeting socio-gender inequalities and harmful traditional practices (Dreze and Sen, 1995). These approaches are based upon the three fundamental roles of civil society in every society: as participants in the designing of strategies for development, as service providers through community based organizations and national NGOs, and as watchdogs to ensure governments fulfil commitments.

The cardinal objective of this paper, therefore, is to analyze and assess the contributions of these increasingly important development actors in Nigeria. What can civil society organisations do to promote inclusive local economic growth and development? Are civil society organisations truly effective advocates of policy change in Nigerian society? Do they have a role in ensuring greater accountability and transparency in governance? What is their contribution in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)? These are some of the questions this study attempts to address. In trying to do this, efforts were also made to underline the opportunities, challenges and threats faced by civil society organisations in the pursuit of their objectives.

Clarification of key terms

The concept of social inclusion or an inclusive society is not particularly well defined and theorized by scholars (Faria, 1995); it lacks a clear definition and coherent theoretical core. There are however, many competing and sometimes complementary definitions of concepts related to the idea of an inclusive society. These definitions have changed over time and differ according to the theoretical perspective or paradigms used. Even though there is no consensus and no single agreed understanding, for clarity a few key terminologies will be explained. They include the following: inclusive society, social inclusion, social exclusion, social citizenship, social integration, social cohesion and social participation.

Inclusive society

An inclusive society is a society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play (Gore, 1996). Such a society must be based on respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law. It is promoted by social policies that seek to reduce inequality and create flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people. It also

connotes a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction (Bullmer and Rees, 1996).

Civil society

There is no general consensus on the definition of civil society. But according to Imade (2007), Aristotle defined civil society as a “public ethical community of free and equal citizens, under a legally defined system of rule”. Alternatively, civil society can be defined as an arena in which people take common actions to pursue common objectives without reward of profit or political power. These organizations range from associations, unions, and mass organizations, networks, social organizations, to social movements. Civil society is both a way of describing aspects of modern society and an aspiration, as well as an ideal of what a good society should be like. The idea of civil society also represents one version of the democratic ideal, that is, the aspiration toward a form of social life in which individuals, by acting together, would set the patterns of social life on the basis of reasoned discussion and responsible choice. Nonetheless, the core of the concept of civil society is the recognition that human societies are grounded in and held together by shared norms and moral understandings (Gold, 1990).

Social inclusion

The term social inclusion is conceptually problematic in that it limits its scope to threshold issues and presents those being included as passive objects of policy, rather than as active participants in society (de Haan, 1997). Consequently, the concept of social inclusion is unlikely to provide a useful framework for driving social policy, without some modification or clarification. However, depending on the national and ideological context in which it is used the concept can take different meanings. In this study, social inclusion is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of background, so that all can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes. In another perspective, social inclusion is understood as the process by which societies combat poverty and social exclusion (de Haan, 1997).

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It is understood as the condition (barriers and process) that impede social inclusion. Social exclusion is a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from fully participating in all aspects of life of the society in which they live, on the grounds of their social identities, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture or language, and/or physical, economic, and social disadvantages (Hanney, 2002). It goes beyond the analysis of resource allocation mechanisms, and includes power relations, agency, culture and social identity. Social exclusion may mean the lack of voice, lack of recognition, or lack of capacity for active participation. It may also mean exclusion from decent work, assets, land, opportunities, access to social services and/or political representation. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Hudson, 2007).

The term social exclusion originated in France in the early 1970s to describe various categories of people such as the mentally and physically disabled, the aged, abused children, single parents, marginal, asocial persons, 'misfits' and others who were excluded from the employment-based social security system. The term however continued to be redefined to include new problems and forms of exclusion. In the 1980s, the term referred to various types of social disadvantage related to social problems arising from economic crises and crises of the welfare state, long term unemployment, ghettoization, slum settlement, growing instability of social bonds including family members, neighbourhoods, trade unions, etc (Stewart, 2003). Exclusion was also seen as the result of the rupture of social and symbolic bonds existing between individuals and society (Belkin, 2007).

The term gradually spread over Europe resulting in the passage in 1989 of a resolution by the European Commission to fight 'social exclusion' and foster 'integration' (Roseblum and Post, 2001). In a short time thereafter, this term replaced, or at least threatened to displace as the dominant concept, poverty in development and social policy discourse. The term subsequently became a buzzword among international agencies and organizations such as the UN, ILO, UNDP and World Bank, and development bodies such as the UK's DFID and other regional bodies in Asia, Latin America and Africa. These contexts have very different social, economic and political conditions, and the term competes for discursive dominance with more established terms such as poverty, deprivation, social disadvantage and others (Roseblum and Post, 2001).

However, a number of scholars have discussed not just exclusion in a general sense but the different domains of exclusion. It is in this regard that Sen (2000) differentiates between exclusion in terms of constitutive relevance (or intrinsic importance) and exclusion in terms of instrumental importance or its consequence as two ways in which social exclusion can lead to capability deprivation. A good example is when one is excluded in the sense of not being able to take part in the life of a community, which can directly impoverish a person's life. It is a loss on its own terms, in addition to whatever further deprivation it may directly generate (Sen, 2000). An example is not having access to credit to invest in a business, which by itself may not be of inherent importance but can, through causal linkages, lead to other deprivations such as income poverty etc.

Theoretical framework

This study is based on the theory of equality and opportunity and complemented by the institutional theory of Meyer, Rowan, DiMaggio & Powell. This emphasizes the role of social and cultural pressures on institutions that can influence organizational practices and structures (Scott, 1992). In the contention of Karp and Sullivan (1997), civil society is both a way of describing aspects of modern society and an aspiration, an ideal of what a good society should be like. Civil society is actually an old term, first introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries. It has recently been revived by a variety of thinkers to emphasize the capacity of societies to organize themselves through the active cooperation of their members (Diamond, 1999). The notion of civil society is contrasted with rival theories which see social order either as the necessary outcome of economic and technological forces or as an imposition from an outside agency such as the state. At the same time, the idea of civil society also represents one version of the democratic ideal: the aspiration toward a form of social life in which individuals, by acting together, would set the patterns

of social life on the basis of reasoned discussion and responsible choice (Karp and Sullivan, 1997). Many scholars are of the opinion that civil society is a product of modern capitalism and formal democracy.

However, despite being polysemous in nature, as well as the need and growing importance of civil society organizations in many societies today, civil society remains only partially understood. Even the basic descriptive information about these institutions such as their number, size, area of activity, sources of revenue and the policy framework within which they operate is not available in any systematic way (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005), particularly in countries like Nigeria. According to Tandon (2008), it is often argued that civic associations are emerging as arenas for collective actions by the people in response to new challenges facing modern societies. While this is true to some extent, it would be incorrect to equate civic associations with modernity. Long recognized as providers of relief and promoter of human rights, civil society organizations are now increasingly viewed as critical contributors to economic growth and civic as well as social infrastructure essential for a minimum quality of life for the people (Salamon and Anheier, 1997; Fukuyama, 1995; OECD, 1995). This ideological standpoint which civil society is construed and analyzed in relation to its anti-authoritarian tendencies and regulative strategy depicts civil society as a crucial social institution, which finds much resonance in understanding and tackling social exclusion.

Engaging Nigerian civil society in social inclusion

Nigerian civil society organizations have come a long way in their achievements in working for development and democracy in the country. Though civil society struggle in Nigeria started during the colonial era fighting for political independence, their operations became prominent during the fourteen years of military dictatorship (1983-1999). This however, was a period of great abuses of office, executive lawlessness and when reckless political decisions became the order of the day and the state became the property of the military ruling class (Ojo, 2012). These events activated an upsurge of civil society in Nigeria. Determined to check the erosion of human rights, freedom and civic values, the period was characterized by intense restlessness among citizens and civic groups, which demanded inclusion, participation and justice. Civil society organizations have played vital roles in Nigeria. Some of the ways they have impacted include:

(a) Fight for return to democracy: It is evident that many of the civil society organizations such as Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and Civil Liberties Organizations (CLO), were instrumental in the restoration of civil rule in Nigeria. Between 1993 and 1999, in collaboration with the Nigeria Labour Congress, these groups brought the Nigerian military to a standstill. They mobilised students under the umbrella of National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and workers for civil disobedience, strikes and protest marches across the country (Ojo, 2012). Many in their ranks were killed and maimed while some lucky few were able to make good their escape into exile.

(b) Good governance and social inclusion: Civil society organizations in Nigeria working in the area of democracy and governance have also been able to access funds from many donor agencies to execute diverse programmes such as voter education, election observation, campaign finance monitoring, election tribunal monitoring, electoral reform advocacy, conflict mitigation, access to justice, public interest litigation, budget tracking, constituency outreach as well as research and documentation in thematic areas

of democracy and governance (Olukoshi, 1997). These initiatives have had a lot of impact in checking government excesses and in the consolidation of democracy for inclusive growth. This is evident as reports of activities carried out by civil society organizations have become the barometer through which international organizations and governments assess the democratic temperature of the country. Since these civil society organizations are presumed non-partisan and non-governmental, their opinions are generally regarded as objective and fair.

(c) Accountability and good governance: Civil society organizations also serve as safeguards against democratic threats and corruption. For instance, when President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration attempted to tinker with the Nigerian constitution (2005-2006) to insert a tenure elongation clause, that scheme was primarily shot down by the parliamentarians with pressure from the civil rights groups (Olukoshi, 1997). Civil society organizations also rose to the occasion to demand recognition of the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as the Acting President when his boss late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was away in Saudi Arabia for medical treatment between November 2009 and March 2010. Civil rights organizations such as the "Save Nigeria Group" and "Enough is Enough Group" seized the initiative, mobilised and marched on the National Assembly to demand a resolution that would recognise the vice president as acting president. This led to the adoption of the now popular 'Doctrine of Necessity' by the National Assembly in 2010. The recently passed Freedom of Information Act (FOA) would have been a mirage but for an NGO called "Media Rights Agenda" which alongside other partner organisations sponsored a private member bill on the issue at the National Assembly (Oyediran, Larry, and Anthony, 1997).

(d) Election credibility: During the preparations for the widely acclaimed June 12, 1993 elections, civil society organizations played a prominent role in ensuring that the elections were credible for the first time in the history of Nigerian electoral processes. First, they embarked on vigorous voter education using both the traditional and social media for their campaigns. Some other civil society organizations deployed thousands of observers to follow through and report on the electoral process. Some members of civil society have also sacrificed their position as armchair critics by joining the political fray to contest elections. Many other members of civil rights groups have as a result been appointed into board positions or as ministers and commissioners. In their own little way they have, as individuals, been able to assist with the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Ojo, 2012).

(e) Lobbying on political issues: An example of where civil society organisations have intervened in recent debates is on the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria. On one hand, the recent removal of fuel subsidies by the Federal Government of Nigeria was said to save the government a total of 8 billion USD, thus freeing up resources that can be devoted to social services such as health and education. Proponents of this approach also argue that savings from the subsidy removal would recover decades of lost investment in infrastructure, health and education (Ojo, 2012). In 2006 the IMF conducted a study, entitled, "The Magnitude and Distribution of Fuel Subsidies: Evidence from Bolivia, Ghana, Jordan, Mali, and Sri Lanka," on the impact of fuel subsidies in five countries. The study revealed that the direct effect of subsidy removal on low income households was minimal ranging from 0.9% to 2% (David, Moataz, Robert, Kangni, Paulo, and David, 2006).

However, in Nigeria, this approach has proven disastrous in the short term, as the removal of the subsidy has increased fuel, food and transportation costs which have adverse effects on the population. This decision paralyzed the nation, resulting in losses of N100 Billion daily. The subsidy was one of the few benefits that Nigerians gained from the nation's tremendous resource wealth (Ojo, 2012). While the subsidy removal is to free funds for development purposes, there is no guarantee that these funds will be effectively utilized, especially considering the high levels of corruption in the nation. This approach brushes issues of corruption, mismanagement and insecurity under the rug and places an emphasis on marginal issues (Ojo, 2012). The "Trade Union Congress" (TUC) and "Nigeria Labour Congress" (NLC) called for the subsidy removal project to be halted and the subsidy to remain intact and for fuel prices to remain around N65 per litre. They argue that the subsidy provides Nigeria's poorest households, who account for 70% of the population, with access to low fuel prices. The weakness of this argument is that the subsidy was an exclusionary policy for the patronage and benefits of those with close ties to the government. Most of the subsidies are stolen by middlemen so it does not reach those that it is intended to benefit. The Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria notes that in 2011 the cost of the subsidy paid to importers exceeded N16 billion (Ojo, 2012).

The following table provides some details on the most important civil society organisations in Nigeria.

NAME	ACRONYM	SECTOR	PROFILE	AREA OF OPERATION
Academic Staff Union of Universities	ASUU	Academics	Education	National
Nigerian Labour Congress	NLC	Nigerian workers	Workers' welfare	National
Trade Union Congress	TUC	Umbrella organization for trade unions	Welfare of members of trade unions	National
Nigerian Medical Association	NMA	Medical Doctors	Welfare of Medical Doctors	National
Nigerian Bar Association	NBA	Legal Services	Legal	National
Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People	MOSOP	Grassroots Movement, Mobilization, Awareness Creation, Governance	Better resource management and control, Peacebuilding, civil awareness and grassroots mobilization	Niger Delta Region
Niger Delta Human and Environmental Rescue Organization	ND-HERO	Environmental Education	Promoting the general well being of the Niger Delta people, environmental conservation & development.	Niger Delta Region
Entrepreneurial Development Initiative	ENDIP	Income Generation, Livelihood Security, Education and Research	Providing skills training for unemployed youths in the Niger Delta.	Niger Delta Region
Anpez Center for Environment and Development	ACFED	Environment & Research	A Consultant NGO on Environmental Law, provision of services needed for economic growth, environmental education and research.	Local, State, Niger Delta, national and International

Save the Earth Nigeria	SEN	Environment	SEN addresses environmental neglect associated with the oil extraction in the NigerDelta through education, advocacy, research, networking.	Niger Delta Region
International Federation of Women Lawyers	FIDA	Women's Human Rights	FIDA advocates for women's rights using legislative process, training and legal counselling.	National
International Press Centre	IPC	Media, democracy, and governance	Media resource centre for advocacy	State/Regional
Citizens' Forum for constitutional reform	CFCR	Constitutional Reform	Coalition of NGOs for advocacy on constitutional reform	National
African Strategic and Peace Research Group	AFSTRAG	Conflict	Action - oriented research group on security and development	International/National
National Council of Women Societies.	NCWS	Women's Human Rights	Coalition of Women Society	National
Zero Corruption Coalition	ZCC	Transparency and Accountability	Network of NGOs advocating for transparency and accountability	National
Social - Economic Rights Initiatives	SRI	Economic reform, transparency and accountability	NGO with strong research base on advocacy for transparency reforms.	National
Coalition of Eastern NGOs	CENGOS	Community/Rural Development Environment, Human Rights, Democracy & Governance, Youth and Educational Development, Public Health, Micro Credit, Poverty Alleviation	Coalition of a broad variety of NGOs with strong women's rights focus	Areas of coverage include: South-Eastern Region/ National eg. Covering states of Anambra, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebony, Cross Rivers, Bayelsa, Rivers & Akwa Ibom
Nigeria Union Of Local Government Employees.	NULGE	Public Sector	Union of local government employees	National
African Women Agribusiness Network	AWAN	Agribusiness Agricultural Production Agricultural Processing Agricultural Export	Women's Rights and Agriculture	International, National & Regional
Federated Anglican Women's Groups	FAWWOG	Women Empowerment, Public Health, Vocational Skill, Training, Child Care, Micro Credit, Democracy and Governance and Moral Training	Women's Rights Democracy and Governance	National (Mostly Christian States).
Rice Farmers Association Of Nigeria	RIFAN	Agriculture Grassroots Empowerment	Agriculture	National
Centre For Constitutional Gov. & Dev.	CCGD	Women Rights & Empowerment Child Right & Care Dev. Youth Empowerment	Women's Rights	2/3 States
Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines & Agriculture	NACCIMA	Business Advocacy & Economic Empowerment	Economic Growth	West Africa & Nigeria

Transition Monitoring Group	TGM	Civil Education Election Monitoring	Elections	National
Women Environment Program	WEB	Gender Imbalance In Environment Issues, Social & Economic Rights Of Women Of Women And Youths.	Women's Rights	National
Women Development Project Centre	WDPC	Income Generation, Public Health, Democracy & Governance, Human Rights and Environment	Democracy and Governance, Health, Environment	Regional - South Eastern States
International Federation Of Women Lawyers	FIDA	Legal Services for the less privileged especially women & children, those living with HIV AIDS Awareness	Women's Rights	International
Community Action For Popular Participation	CAPP	Advocacy Training Research Publication (Pace & Prospect)	Advocacy, Democracy and Governance	National
African Centre For Democratic Governance	AFRIGOV	Advocacy & Research on Governance, Democracy, Gender, Human Rights	Advocacy, Democracy and Governance	Abuja
Medical & Health Workers Union Of Nigeria	MHWUN	Labour Activities Advocacy For Workers Rights	Labour	National
Nigeria Union Of Teachers	NUT	Education	Education, Labour Union	National

Source: Uchendu 2000 - 6:54

Major challenges for social inclusion in Nigeria

Social marginalization and exclusive control of the country's resources and power are among the reasons why Nigeria has been mired in crisis and conflict since independence. A common characteristic in the history of social exclusion and exclusive policies are a reputation for corruption, and unpopular political leaders with immense personal fortunes. Such leaders often pursue a divide and rule strategy, favouring a few faithful allies and violently repressing public discontent (Milante, 2007).

Nigeria is commonly referred to as the giant of Africa because of its wealth, influence and population. It plays a significant role in regional and international relations. But domestically, the situation in Nigeria and the reality on ground is dire because of social exclusion. There is overdependence on the oil economy, high youth unemployment, increasing insecurity, a lack of social safety and laudable underdevelopment substantiated by poor infrastructure development. The youth unemployment rate for 2011 was 41.6% according to the Central Bank of Nigeria (Ojo, 2012). Poverty rates are also an area of concern, currently 70% of the population lives below the poverty line which is a stark increase from the 2004 figure of 54%. The North East, North West and North Central have the highest incidences of poverty and this has been the case since 1985. These factors persist despite tremendous oil wealth; for instance, in 2010 alone, oil revenue in Nigeria totalled 59 billion USD (Azaiki, 2003).

In Nigeria, confidence in the state is significantly undermined by its inability to deliver public goods: i.e. “security, health and education, employment opportunity, economic opportunity, good governance, law and order, and fundamental infrastructure” (Donald, 2004). The fuel subsidy removal protests, sectarian violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, incidences of crime and high profile killings as well as unsettled grievances in the Niger Delta region are all indicative of state failure (Robert, 2006). Social exclusion in Nigeria is a problem that must be overcome as it is a moral imperative for the civil society to show social solidarity in providing everybody with better opportunities in life (Nadad, 2006).

Activities of social exclusion touch almost all dimensions of life in Nigeria; both the individual and the society are all affected by the impact and ripple effects of exclusion. However, the dimensions in which social exclusion take place in the Nigerian society can be categorized into the following different ways:

DIMENSIONS	EXCLUSION ELEMENTS	INCLUSION ELEMENTS
Cultural	Exclusive policies and legislation	Inclusive policies and legislation
Economic	Lack of respect for human rights	Access to clean and safe places for living, work and recreation
Social	Discrimination, segregation, intolerance, stigma, stereotyping, sexism and racism	Access to information and Communication
Environmental	Fear and psychological insecurity	Access to public spaces
Legal	Lack of access to basic services, including education, health care, clean water and sanitation	Access to basic services, including education, health care, clean water and sanitation
Physical	Lack of access to decent work and employment	Adequate income and employment opportunities
Political	Lack of resources to sustain livelihood	Opportunity for personal development
Relational	Lack of access to land	Affirmation of human rights
Spatial	Lack of access to credit	Access to resources
	Lack of transparency in decision-making	Transparent and accountable decision-making processes
	Lack of access to political processes	Respect for diversity
	Lack of access to information and communications	Freedom (of choice, religion, etc.
	Lack of transportation	Access to transportation
	Lack of access to public spaces	Participation in decision-making
	Physical Insecurity	Social protection
	Violence and abuse	Solidarity

Source: Uchendu 2000 - 6:54

It is worth noting that elements of exclusion and inclusion cannot be limited to only one dimension, but need to be dealt with from various angles. Discrimination for example, can be addressed not only through the social dimension, but also through legal, cultural, and political dimensions (Mutfang, 2000). Another example is poverty. Poverty eradication strategies, one of the key areas in which social inclusion objectives needs to be mainstreamed, requires interventions in a wide range of areas, from macro-economic, to employment, social protection, housing, education, health, information and communications, mobility, security and justice, leisure and culture. It is necessary, therefore, to mainstream the objective of social inclusion into all relevant policy areas (Uchendu, 2000). For a successful social inclusion project to take place, it is necessary to examine the areas in which inclusion is not strong enough and where exclusion

is most widespread; where engagement is least successful and participation is sitting on the fence. It is also pertinent to ask some salient questions such as: how and why are people being left out of the processes that make up society? Who does exclusion affect and what are the economic, social and political implications?

Major areas of social exclusion in Nigeria

There are several key areas in which social inclusion objectives may need to be integrated into many societies. In Nigeria for instance, poverty, employment and sustainable development stand out as crucial areas. Poverty eradication and employment creation are considered to be two major areas to achieve the goal of creating an inclusive society. Conversely, the promotion of social inclusion in any society is considered to be an important determinant of attainment of poverty eradication and employment creation.

The living standard and the welfare of Nigerians living in Nigeria have since independence continued on a downward progressive slide in the face of abundant material and human resources due to corruption in public offices, misplacement of priorities and exclusionary policies. The basic human needs and instruments which facilitate leading a good life and expanding people's choices have remained scarce commodities (Mutfang, 2000). Poverty is especially exemplified in the area of water supply with statistics indicating disappointing figures of less than 40% having access to piped water and an embarrassing 60% of Nigerians drawing their water from rivers, streams, ponds and taps located sometimes many kilometres from their residence (Oyen, 1997). Moreover these waters are often not in a drinkable condition. The World Health Organisation/United Nations Children's Fund Joint Monitoring Program, in its 2012 progress report on drinking water and sanitation, ranked Nigeria third behind China and India on the list of countries with the largest population without access to improved drinking water (Oyen, 1997).

In the area of food security, less than half of the national population cannot afford three square meals per day in Nigeria. In a recent publication by the World Bank entitled "Where is the Wealth of Nations? Measuring Capital for the 21st Century" Nigeria is embarrassingly ranked the world second poorest nation in the world (Dixon, Hamilton & Kunte, 1997). Little wonder then why despite Nigeria being a major oil producing nation, poverty, lack and deprivation reign supreme as 90% of Nigerians live on less than \$2 per day (Dunning, 2005). Similarly, with regards to the health sector, health facilities in the country are largely insufficient, not strategic in location, over stretched, underfunded, poorly managed and maintained, ill-equipped and understaffed with poorly motivated staffs that lack modern medical capacity to deliver. Amidst these things, politicians prefer to travel abroad to treat minor and insignificant health abnormalities like headaches and high temperature rather than to fix the health system in the country. Human development is at its lowest ebb (Ojo, 2012). Recreation centres are largely insufficient and often function as places for further inflicting a psychological inferiority complex on the poor in society. There is a growing divide between the rich and poor.

Besides food and clothing, the third basic most important human need is shelter. 'Shelter' refers to security and covering, and therefore cannot be compromised. Comfortable living standards and affordable housing have continued to elude a large number of Nigeria's population both in urban and rural communities (Mutfang, 2000). This situation is most worrisome in slum areas around the major cities where the majority

who constitute the work-force live, frustrated with the high cost of rent or building houses in the cities where they work. The high cost of buying land and building materials has left many relying on substandard building materials (Ikubaje, 2011). This in turn has led to the loss of many lives in collapsed buildings, while others live in uncompleted buildings thereby exposing them to mosquito bites and other pests.

Turning to infrastructure, Nigeria has one of the worst power supply records in the world. Some 60% of the rural areas are not connected to the national grid, while some urban cities remain without electricity for months. The state of roads has gone from bad to worse and from manageable to inaccessible. Nigerians do not have good roads hence our leaders and politicians have a penchant for jeeps which can jump pot-holes. It is estimated that Nigeria ranks next only to China and India in accident rates (Kukah, 1999). In its half-year report, the Nigerian Federal Road Safety Commission claimed that deaths resulting from road accidents had increased by 21% last year (2011). The Corps Marshal, Osita Chidoka, rightly blamed bad roads, partly, for most of the accidents. He said that, in a survey of the state of global roads, Nigerian roads placed 191st out of 192 countries (Ikubaje, 2011).

Meanwhile, just like roads, schools structures and facilities in Nigeria are in a shameful shape nationwide. Yet, no Nigerian leader or politician is willing to train their children in Nigeria. This is a glaring scenario of social exclusion. The introduction of private schools also has not only fostered social exclusion, it has brought about an educational system that is neglected. Recently, an international Universities and Colleges ranking directory (www.4ic.org) ranked University of Ibadan (the premier University) as the best in Nigeria but only 32nd in Africa. This nullifies the self-acclaimed status of "giant of Africa". *Punch* newspaper on 29 March 2012 reported that secondary school candidates recorded 90% failure in National Examination Council (NECO) examinations. The newspaper went ahead to say this is the fifth year that senior school certificate examination (SSCE) candidates churned out a woeful performance (Ikubaje, 2011).

The structure of government also contributes to the challenges of development in the country. For instance, the total cost of servicing government and those on the government payroll has continued to maintain over 70% of the annual budget in the last 12 years while just little is left to do capital projects or foster human development. This is exemplified in the patterns of Nigeria's Appropriation Act of 1999, 2000, and 2001-2012 (FRN Budget Office, 2012). Perhaps the main factor that has been identified over the years as the number one factor challenging development is the exclusionary political culture. Nigerians have also lost their trust in government and institutions due to the way the country has been managed since independence, which has accounted disenchantment in civic duties as evidenced in low turn-out in recent elections (Kukah, 1999).

Economically, although the nation has continued to record some minimal economic progress following the ceasefire by militant groups like MEND in the Niger Delta, this has not in itself translated into development as poverty remains widespread and standard of living is very poor. Armed insurgency by the dreaded Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, has further damaged hopes of development. Various government and privatization policies are exclusionary and unpopular since the return to democracy in 1999, which has led to losses of jobs and a poor unemployment record. There are no efforts at creating fresh job opportunities for graduates who are sent out from the nation's institutions yearly (Ojo, 2012).

Another critical issue that has continued to undermine inclusive growth and development in Nigeria includes ethnic divides and religious violence. This is also coupled with corruption in high places which has led to the unbridled squandering of state/public resources by people elected into government offices and those in public offices. Perhaps it is noteworthy to state also that government's inability and lack of political will to effectively implement social inclusion policies and make agencies function without undue political influences from friends of those in politics has also hindered development. Security of life is cheap and poverty is dire; tradition and discriminatory practices also exerts a considerable force against woman's equality. This ensures women remain on the fringes of society (Ojo, 2012).

Critical elements for creating an inclusive society

In the remaining sections of this paper a number of critical elements for creating an inclusive society in Nigeria are proposed. These will require a sincere effort by development actors and governmental agencies in demonstrating that a 'society for all' is indeed possible.

(a) The rule of law and human rights: An inclusive society is based on the value of fundamental human rights and the rule of law, that is,

all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. As a pre-requisite, respect for all human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law, both at the local, national and international levels, are fundamental. Every member of society, no matter what his or her economic resources, political status, or social standing, must be treated equally under the law (Laury, 1998).

In this regard, the legal instruments to ensure the guiding principles that will guarantee equity, justice and equal opportunities for all citizens must be present. Violators of human rights should be brought to justice. The judiciary which serves to protect just societies must be impartial, accountable and inclusive to giving weight to the opinions of those who defend the inclusiveness of the society at the local, regional and national levels. This is lacking in many respects in Nigerian society (Miller, 2004).

(b) Providing security: Security is a problem in many African societies today. Maintaining the security of all individuals and their living environment is paramount in creating a feeling of inclusion and an atmosphere of participation in society. Also, to create and sustain inclusive societies, it is critical that all members of society are able and motivated to participate in civic, social, economic and political activities, both at the local and national levels. A society where most members, if not all, feel that they are playing a part, have access to their basic needs/livelihoods, and are provided with the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, is a society that will best foster principles of inclusiveness (Jordan, 1996).

(c) A strong civil society presence: The existence of a strong civil society is fundamental for active participation and making public policies and institutions accountable. It fosters respect for the rights, dignity and privileges of all people, while assuming that they fulfil their responsibilities within their society. There must be freedom for people to express diverse views and develop unconventional ideas. Members

of society must have the confidence to engage and interact with each other, and build mutual trust while acknowledging their differences (Jordan, 1996).

(d) Availability and access to public infrastructure and facilities: In order to encourage all-inclusive participation, there must be universal access to public infrastructure and facilities (such as community centres, recreational facilities, public libraries, resource centres with internet facilities, well maintained public schools, clinics, water supplies and sanitation). These are the basic services which will create, when partly or fully put into place, conditions for people to have a sense of belonging by not suffering the painful consequence of being unable to afford them (Askonas and Angus, 2000). As long as both the advantaged and disadvantaged have equal access to or benefit from these public facilities and services, they will all feel less burdened by their differences in socio-economic status, thus alleviating a possible sense of exclusion or frustration. It is important to note though, that access alone does not necessarily ensure use of public facilities, as unequal relations within communities and households may inhibit the use of facilities by vulnerable groups. Addressing the unequal power relations is therefore a necessary step to increase participation.

(e) Access to information: Correspondingly, equal access to public information in any society plays an important role in creating an inclusive society, as it will make popular participation possible with well-informed members of society. Information that pertains to the society, such as what a community owns, generates, or benefits from, should be made available to all. Collective participation, through accepted representations of all classes and backgrounds, in the planning, implementation and evaluation of community activities, should be sought. Publication/information sharing and increasing accessibility of data on the community's activities will eliminate doubts and suspicions which could otherwise create a sense of exclusion. The mass media can be used as an effective tool to educate and enlighten members of society (Saloojee, 2007).

(f) Fairness in distributing wealth and resources: Another critical element of inclusive society is equity in the distribution of the wealth and resources. How resources are allocated and utilized will significantly affect the orientation of a society, either towards a more integrated, inclusive society, or an exclusive, polarized, and disintegrated one. Therefore, socio-economic policies should be geared towards managing equitable distribution and equal opportunities. Inclusive policies, instructions and programs that are sensitive to and cater to the less advantaged and vulnerable need to be put in place in all areas/sectors, including public health, and effectively implemented. There is a need for a strong monitoring and evaluation tools to demonstrate whether inclusiveness is actually achieved, as well as to highlight areas for improvement.

(g) Cultural diversity: An additional dimension of inclusive societies is tolerance for and appreciation of cultural diversity. This includes societies that celebrate multiple and diverse expressions of identities. By celebrating diversity, there is recognition and affirmation of the differences between and among members of society, which enables societies to move away from labelling, categorizing, and classifying people, towards more inclusive policies. Also, enabling a diversity of opinions provides checks and balances crucial for the development of society, while allowing for the greatest amount of diverse opinions to enter every discourse (Evans, 1998).

(h) *Education*: Education plays a critical role in this area, as it provides opportunities to learn the history and culture of one's own and other societies, which will cultivate the understanding and appreciation of other societies, cultures and religions. Particularly for young people, education provides the opportunity to instil values of respect and an appreciation of diversity. At the same time, education can empower those who are marginalized or excluded from participating in discussions and decision-making. Learning about historical processes and changes allows people to understand the way in which they and others have been affected by socially inclusive or exclusive policies, which ultimately influences the values, choices and judgments of individuals, in particular, those who are in decision-making positions (Diamond, 1999).

(i) *Effective leadership*: Effective leadership is crucial to the development of an inclusive society. Where leadership is not representative of the society, a disconnect between the people and their leaders is likely. The most common way of addressing this critical element at the local level is by engaging in open consultations about municipal issues such as the budget, and enhancing the free and timely flow of information to citizens and other stakeholders (Eifert, Edward and Daniel, 2010). Popular participation in decision-making and policy formulation processes could be sought at all levels of governance. At the same time, there must be an effort made to achieve transparency and accountability by all decision-makers and stakeholders.

Conclusion

Forms of social exclusion and inequality are produced systematically in every society. There is the likelihood of an explicit or implicit preoccupation with social cohesion and integration, and fear of social disintegration due to social exclusion or lack of participation, in the life of any society. Therefore understanding how the dimensions of inclusion are structured and realizing its diverse nature is necessary for tackling the phenomenon (Bhalla and Frederic, 1997). This paper surveyed the evidence of the extent to which associational life and governance of civil society organizations manifests and models social inclusion. This paper suggests that at the moment these CSOs are working as part of an exclusionary society.

The first step toward an inclusive society should be more inclusive policies, but experience has shown that this is not enough. Nigeria has adopted and ratified so many international conventions/protocols/declarations/policies to correct social exclusion at all levels, but these have not gone beyond mere lip service. For effective social inclusion, there is a need to carry citizens along, the CSOs/NGOs/CBOs, political parties, trade union, labour unions, business people, and every group and all individuals must be involved.

Exclusion is understood to be the result of three interlocking sets of processes in a particular society: exclusionary economics; social discrimination; and lack of a political voice (Gore, 1995). These three things come together to keep certain groups of people poor. In addressing this problem, there is increasing interest in the potential of civil society to act as a countervailing force to address certain social issues (Olukoshi, 1997). While we can be different in many perspectives, we all need to be provided with equal opportunities and access. Accommodating people with different backgrounds and working together to build a common future is a core value of an inclusive society. Developing a concept of inclusion in which people get together, are interconnected, and share sense of belonging as well as sense of responsibility, is necessary for an inclusive growth in the annals of 21st century.

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