

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION AS FOURTH ARM OF GOVERNANCE: THE CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETIES IN WEST AFRICA

Dele A Sonubi

Program Officer, Peace, Conflict and security, West African Civil Society (WACSO)

Dele4you2@yahoo.com

Preambles

It was J.S Mills and Thomas Hobbes who first gave the accounts of man in the early times of “state of nature” and “state of war” after which man decided to relinquish his rights to an administrator- a state- to govern and adjudicate in the affairs of men in the society. There and then emerge:

1. The legislature which is the arm of government that galvanizes popular opinion and people’s desire for rules and principles to guide their respective interactions and conduct;
2. The Executive which is the arm of government that executes and implements the law passed by the legislature; and
3. The judiciary, which is the arm of government that adjudicates and interprets the grey areas of the law.

As society and the dynamics of modern times began to evolve and the complexities of governance began to rear its head, there evolve new arm of governance that is growing and gathering momentous as a significant arm necessary for the state to function well. It is the civil society organization; the arm that watches, comments, criticizes and complements the other arms of government. It is the watchdog of social values inside the political and social domain.

An attempt to make a review of social development; where we have been, where we are and where we are going (with particular emphasis on West African sub-region), will lead this writer in the pathway of assessing the contributions of civil society organizations and their new status as important elements in Nation building.

This paper will therefore seek to explore the following areas:

1. **HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS:** How have CSOs collaborated successfully to aid integration democratization, peace building, conflict resolutions governance and human rights in the sub-region;
2. **CSO REPRESENTATIONS:** Are there sufficient spread of civil society organizations to ensure representation in different countries particularly in the sub-region;
3. **PROJECTIONS:** How prepared are the civil society organizations to complement the efforts of regional organizations such as ECOWAS, AU, ZADEC particularly regarding the areas of:
 - a. The governance structures of the CSOs;
 - b. Weakness and Strengths of civil society organizations in West Africa; and

- c. Strategies aimed at further strengthening of CSO's internal structures to respond to African challenges;
- d. How to organize a more effective and structural CSO network on thematic areas;
- e. The strategies for more effective collaborations and partnerships with regional bodies; and
- f. How can civil society forum such as WACSOF(West African Civil Society Forum) help in monitoring regional efforts at regional integration, free movements, democracy, early warning and conflict resolutions

OBJECTIVE:

- a. To make a broad review of effectiveness of civil society in its role as watch dog of democracy;
- b. To make assessments of the roles of CSOs in providing Africa with the political sense of direction;
- c. To make civil society organization actors aware of their emerging roles as lead actors in the fourth arm of governance; and
- d. To promote structures conducive for collaborations, representations and networking amongst CSOs from developed and CSOs from developing nations.