Civil Society Organizations and the Development of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Recent studies have depicted Nigeria's foreign policy as constantly in a state of flux due to the internal and external dynamics inherent in any given administration or regime. In the case of Nigeria, the formation of Nigeria's foreign policy has gone through 14 different administrations in the past 53 years, out of which 35 years were under military regimes. To this end, Nigeria has very strong civil society organizations, which have had constructive influences in the country's foreign policies. They have acted as important forces and platforms for creating and recreating stability towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. They have nonetheless become the basis for a durable new political authority, regardless of the plethora of problems besetting them generally. It is against this background that this paper seeks to discuss the impactsof civil society organizations on the development of Nigeria foreign policy.

Introduction

In the last ten years, the Nigerian political climate has been heated up by an intense clamour for the democratization of political institutions, structures, and processes with the view to making them more citizens friendly. The foreign policy arena has not been left out. The general militarization of the polity in the decades of military rule had adversely affected Nigerian foreign policy making. The foreign policy process had assumed a command structure, characteristic of military rule in which the Commander-in-Chiefs and their tiny "kitchen staff' shaped Nigeria's external outlook in their bedrooms, lawn tennis courts, or officers' mess. The question is not whether there would be quality foreign policy outcomes passing through critical thinking and reflections; but that the domestic components of foreign policy making, which Beasle calls "decision units" (Beasley, 2001) are clearly out of the picture. This template was handed down to the next generation of politicians who from 1999 to date have managed the policy process as a closed system.

The increasing global trend towards democratization has opened up the political space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to play active policy influencing role. The promise of democracy becomes a reality when people's voices are heard by policy makers and when groups (especially marginalized sectors of society) begin to

participate in the marketplace of competing interests. According to a World Bank report, CSOs have become significant players in global development finance, and increasingly influencing the shape of global and national public policies (World Bank, 2004). The growing focus among policy makers and citizens on the need for good governance and greater transparency has also opened doors for CSOs as players in the development business. Parliamentarians, media and other opinion leaders increasingly rely on CSOs for information and policy advice.Therefore, CSOs are increasingly demanding involvement in the policy formulation process.

It has been argued that CSOs now play major role in the implementation of the policies that are formulated by governments, especially those that deal with sustainable development and poverty alleviation. In other words, the CSOs' programs are directly affected by government policies (Ekeh, 1999). It is also the opinion of CSOs that in order for the government to formulate policies that are appropriate for sustainable development, they should be involved in making important inputs to policy making processes. This involvement of CSOs in policy issues will increase the likelihood that they understand the policies fully as well as ensure policies are appropriate to the needs of the people, feasible and implementable (Miller, 1994). They often use grassroots experiences and innovations as the basis for improved policies and strengthening local capacities and structures for ongoing public participation.The CSOs can provide information that is vital for the development of policies, appropriate to the communities the policies are meant to serve. As watchdogs, they can also put pressure on the government to ensure that appropriate policies are enacted and implemented (Miller, 1994). In the implementation of policies, CSOs can monitor the application of laws and where compatible with community interests, design programs that complement rather than undermine or contradict government policies.

In most developing countries, CSOs have programs that complement the policy goals and programs of the government such as the MDGs. This necessitates a close working relationship between governments and CSOs in the formulation of policies (Ndegwa, 1996). Grassroots groups and support organizations help give voice to those who have been historically marginalized and provide them with crucial vehicle for exercising their rights and holding governments accountable. As such, they play vital role in strengthening democracy and the skills of citizenship essential to healthy societies (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1988). Increasingly, groups are concerned about gaining the necessary leverage and power, often through coalition-building, to expand these democratic opportunities and to ensure the success of their development and policy efforts.

However, inclusion in political systems long dominated by elites depends, in part, on the institutional strength of policy newcomers CSOs, and, in part, on the perceived legitimacy of their participation itself. The challenge of building an effective policy influencing organization increases as groups seek to shape positive policy environments as well as protest negative ones (Covey, 1994). For example, winning policy advantage requires that mobilized public opinion be accompanied by convincing analysis that is at least on at par with the analytic capability of the decision makers the CSOs are trying to influence (Igbuzor, 2016). The dual challenges of effectively mobilizing arguments as well as people are great.

Arguments that gain the attention of development policy makers on the one hand call for "expert" knowledge of both the issue and the decision making process, while public outcry and protest actions that constrain decision makers' power call for an active and organized grassroots constituencies. Policy influence efforts may or may not create conditions that foster greater popular participation in the future. A movement may not achieve its immediate policy objectives, but getting its issue on the public agenda expands the range of voices engaged in the political process, and so expands political space. On the other hand, attempting policy reform through means that too dramatically threaten vested interests may engender a dangerous backlash from social and political elites, a problem of special importance in less open political regimes (Salamon, 2004).Similarly, policy influence campaigns can be carried out in ways that strengthen grassroots organizations and their direct voice in affairs affecting them, or they can be implemented by intermediaries for whom the grassroots are clients. The latter can lead to the evolution of a civil society with a strong professional advocacy sector and a weak (unorganized and non-participative) grassroots base (Ndegwa, 1996).

Civil Societies' Strategies in influencing Policy

Covey provides a clear breakdown of strategies used by CSOsin influencing foreign policy. She says that CSOs use five strategies to influence national policy formulation. These strategies are education, persuasion, collaboration, litigation and confrontation (Covey, 1994).The education strategy is one where the CSOs provide the government with information, analysis and policy alternatives. They also educate the government by creating and testing innovative development approaches that could be adopted by the state. Education is done through workshops, conferences, physical visits and initiation of pilot projects. Education strategies may also target other groups such as the public and the media (Eigen, 1999).In using persuasion as a strategy, CSOs acts like a pressure group to press for policy changes and show public support. The idea here is to convince the government that CSOs supported policies or policy change should be recognized and enacted into legislation. Persuasion is done through various means such as meetings, workshops, and conferences, invitations to the site, lobbying, demonstrations and even strikes. The main aim is to pressurize the government into changing its policy direction.

The collaboration strategy is one where a CSO works hand-in-hand with the government. Relations are usually good and amicable between the government and the CSO that is collaborating with it. Collaboration calls for mutual trust between the government and CSOs. It also calls for transparency within the collaborating bodies. That is, both sides need to show all their intentions, interests, needs, goals, agendas, etc. to each other. This is the basis of building trust and relationships.In the litigation strategy, the CSOs use the courts to press for policy change. When a CSO believes that the law is being broken or misapplied, it can take the government or other offending parties to court for the issue to be legally dealt with. In Zimbabwe, the Commercial Farmers Union took the government to court over the new land policy, which the government used for land redistribution through the 1992 Land Acquisition Act (Sibanda, 1996).Lastly, confrontation involves protesting in various forms for policy issues. The protests usually involve radical tactics such as violent

demonstrations, destroying property, etc. In most cases, relationships between the government and the CSOs become sour and there is a lot of animosity between the two parties.

Civil Society Organizationsand Nigerian Foreign Policy

Civil societies have influenced the stabilization and strengthening of democratic governance and allows for an inclusive participation in all political-social life, including foreign policy making. Civil societies thus represents a socially, economically, and politically stable and conscious group that checkmates state power. Corwin observed that it deals with the nature and limits of power and the creation of a public sphere where despotism or tendencies towards bad governance can be minimized (Corwin, 2000). The implication of this is that there is either civil society or there is none. Civil society simply comprises a vibrant population that knows its rights, fights for it, and commands respect and a strong voice in public governance. With civil society, it is given that democratic governance is promoted. Without civil society, democratic governance may cave in for a one-man, one-party, or one-group tyranny, which President Sekou Toure of Guinea once referred to as "democratic dictatorship" (Ndegwa, 1996).

The relationship between civil society and foreign policy making in democratic governance is therefore not far from the prognosis. The existence of civil society would engender a foreign policy process that accommodates and reconciles citizens' views, desires, agitations, and interests as policy makers' articulate foreign policy (Page and Barabas, 2000). Also, other foreign policy decision units such as the foreign ministry, other ministries, legislature, policy-related research institutes, universities, pressure and interest groups, and opposition parties would have a say in policy making.

Hence, in democratic governance, civil society is expected to engender citizen diplomacy. Generally, citizen diplomacy refers to a political situation in which all citizens-directly or indirectly-may participate in the foreign policy making process. It is a concept of average citizens engaging as representatives of a country or a cause, either inadvertently or by design (Gelder, 2006). It complements or may subvert official channels of diplomacy and could be more reliable when official diplomacy is no longer working effectively in a nation's interest. Such diplomacy may transcend formal state negotiations, but it could be more effective to reach successful negotiations, and to smoothen things when relations between two or more nations has broken down, or when two or more countries desire to start a relationship, or when a nation seeks to polish its image, or regain it (Holsti, 1992). At such rate, governments may step aside for an average and internationally respected citizens to take over through such informal channels as scientific exchanges, cultural and educational exchanges, sports or games, and so forth. While these are going on, governments may calculate and consolidate the gains and then step in.

From independence to date, foreign policymaking has been the exclusive preserve of the Head of State or President as the case may be, and their thin political group. The chief executive personalizes and personifies power-politics in Nigeria as a zero sum game with the winner taking all-and this extends to the foreign policy domain. In fact, foreign policy is seen to be understood only by the government, and the

hierarchy of power favors the chief executive to call all the shots. To be fair, universally, the President is the *primus* in external diplomacy of a state; there are however, mechanisms and structures that compel the President and Presidency to accommodate domestic pressures and constraints in foreign policy decision making (Gelder, 2006). In Nigeria, during military rule, at the helm of affairs, was the Soldier-President from who order flows down to the bottom of the political ladder. There was no room for questioning or checkmating. Decisions literally made at informal times and places among a thinner group outside the cabinet, were ratified and legitimated at the meeting of the high command. Such were transmitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who headed the clearing house for all external affairs, without any National Assembly, research institutes, or pressure groups consulted or acting as checks (Fawole, 2003).

Under democratic rule from 1999, little changed probably because of certain institutions and structures that came along with constitutional government that cannot be wished away. However, the existence of the checks has merely been on paper as the civilian administration steers the foreign policy in a manner not different from the military. The Obasanjo administration was particularly undemocratic as the National Assembly was reduced to the ordinary position of screening ambassadorial and (Foreign Affairs) ministerial lists; the Minister became a figurehead and important diplomatic decisions of the time were only known to members of the legislature, pressure groups, and citizens, after they have been reported in the press (Fawole, 2003).

The table of foreign policy making during civilian rule shows a primary place of the kitchen cabinet, and National Security Adviser, and the less than important role of the policy institutes, universities, interest groups, and mass media. The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) was more important in the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy than the Minister. The legislature and executive were constantly feuding over the sidelining and humiliation of the former in foreign policy decision-making (Fawole, 2003). This led to the direct antagonism and constitutional sanctioning of the Executive from handing over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon after the Washington agreement in 2006 between Obasanjo, Biya of Cameroon and Bush of USA without recourse to any democratic institutions in Nigeria (Maduekwe, 2007).

Both the military and civilian rules undermined CSOs participation in the foreign policy formulation and execution in Nigeria. The fact that the political scenario remained the same from 1999 is evidence of the absence of civil society and relative slow and poor democratization process. However, when the Yaradua-Jonathan administration came up with the concept and proposed thrust of citizen diplomacy, it was considered to be a paradigm shift, which would be an encompassing approach to democratize Nigeria's foreign policy processes while still catering more for its citizens' interest. But the Yaradua-Jonathan administration had only one perspective in mind (Maduekwe, 2007).

Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ojo Maduekwe in 2007 articulated a perspective of citizen-centered diplomacy that would constitute a shift for Nigeria's foreign policy. This refers to Nigeria's reactive response to the way its citizens were

treated or handled by other nations. By this approach, the foreign policy attitude of the nation towards other countries would no longer be based on geopolitical arrangements, but on merit, with individual nations judged by their disposition towards its citizens. Each nation would therefore account for its own stewardship towards the nationals of a particular country and expect same measure of treatment. Maduekwe put it thus: "If you are nice to our citizens; we will be nice to you; if you are hostile to us, we will also be hostile to you" (Maduekwe, 2007).In this context, the new external disposition rather venerated the ideals and expectations of the Nigerian people in foreign policy calculations, than on frittering away so many resources on regional, continental and global cause without direct bearing on the wellbeing of its people.

Citizens' participation in the foreign policy process cannot be overemphasized. This is possible first when democratic institutions such as the mass media, National Assembly, academia, and policy-based research institutes make informed contributions in the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Talking about execution, emulating the American system in giving the citizens the opportunity to participate directly and indirectly in the foreign policy process is necessary for Nigeria (Ogbeidi, 1997). This is against the background of when Nigeria's image is at its lowest ebb and being categorized as a terrorist state, as well as embroiled in other conflicts. Thus, Nigeria's foreign policy requires credible and internationallyrespected persons to be engaged in visits, meetings, businesses, and other levels of informal diplomacy to launder Nigeria's image abroad (Ogbeidi, 1997).

This can be done by government asking such personalities to present Nigeria's agenda and influence the international community in its favor. For instance, on the inclusion of Nigeria on the terrorist watch-list, government could set up a Committee of Friends of the USA including very influential and respected figures in the American society and international circles to visit Washington DC and put pressure on the US government to reverse its decision. By this, the Nigerian authorities could expand the base of their citizen centered diplomacy to also include the participation of civil-society (students, teachers, entertainers, pastors, etc), and should strongly consider public opinion and pursue a more people-oriented and not elite-driven national interest.

Nigeria could engage its think-tanks in public policy making and foreign policy formulation. The business of governance is a very huge burdenthat government alone cannot handle, therefore Government needs help, and requires the technical know-how to run the affairs of the state. There is the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (at the University of Ibadan) and Development Policy Center (DPC), whose insights and depth on policy research could guide government in policy decisions (Olise, 2016).

Again, Nigeria could accomplish its long-range objective of becoming most significant African power when it institutes cultural, educational and social programs of exchange in which scholars and students, cultural groups, nationals of Africa, are together to foster a better understanding and cooperation, and open

doors for constructive connections and peaceful interaction. By this, a Pan-Nigeria may be achieved rather than frittering away the nation's wealth in endless African conflicts with the view to just be called "Giant of Africa" (Lake, 2009). The big powers in the world today use such subtle socio-cultural and economic instruments to establish unquestionable hegemony than wasting resources on nations that would later turn against them like in the case of Nigeria. For instance, Liberia and Sierra Leone – two countries it helped out of wars, have been scrambling with Nigeria to occupy the only African slot in the UN Security Council's Non-Permanent Seat, and Ghana (on whose behalf Nigeria supplies electricity to Togo and Benin), Egypt (for whom Nigeria mobilized African support during the Arab-Israel Wars) and South Africa (for whom Nigeria fought for its liberation from apartheid), have been contesting Africa's slots of the UN Security Council's Permanent Seats (Adesowa, 2016).

Foreign policy is no longer about defining physical frontiers of countries or keeping people away through military actions, despite the fact that these two aspects may be important for some countries. The point here is that foreign policy today is not only about "taking care of my country or my society;" it is also about "taking care of our global village, our global society." Thus, trouble anywhere in the world is instantly reported and has immediate implications for everyone else. Knowing that one country has discovered the cure for HIV/AIDS will be of interest to everyone, not just to those who suffer from the terrible disease. By the same token, knowing that your neighbor, or anyone else for that matter, possesses nuclear capability becomes of interest to everyone.

Many UN conferences and meetings have taken place during the last three decades, touching on a large number of very important issues and collective concerns. One witnesses the debates about the collective future daily on the floor of the UN and, to a large extent, at the World Bank, where many of these problems are debated from different angles. Some global consensus is emerging, like the need to address the Millennium Development Goals (World Development Report, 1990). Civil society has played a pivotal role in bringing forward the voices and the interests of those who live in poverty. Therefore, civil society plays crucial roles in two important extremes of the public-policy-making spectrum (PPMS): local and global (for completeness, one may also add the regional). And, given the porosity that has been created by globalization, we can see today how the local has become part of the global (e.g., on human security, human rights) and how the global has become part of the local (e.g., migration, the right to development) (Adeyemo, 2002).

For civil society to act effectively in addressing the great challenges facing humanity and to reshape the state of foreign policy making, it is essential to shift, once again, the development paradigm. Without such a shift, many dimensions of what is occurring in foreign policy will be lost. To propose a paradigm shift in a world that moves rapidly in favor of all forms of fundamentalisms may be seen as an oxymoronic proposition. As we shift towards a new paradigm, foreign policy will have to change accordingly. This change demands significant shifts in the role of civil society (Salamon, 2004).One area of debate is civil society's representativeness at the global level, particularly by those leaders or organizations that do not truly represent the leadership or interests of local communities. This gap in

representation may be the result of inadequate financial resources to operate simultaneously at the local and global level. Local and indigenous NGOs and other civil society organizations are often handicapped by resources and thus, unable to participate in the formulation of national and global foreign policy. In addition, these groups may be constrained by the lack of indigenous capacity; therefore, it is essential to implement major capacity enhancement programs everywhere.

Clearly, a shift in paradigm must also be accompanied by a major change in the existing development architecture at the global level (Marta, 2002). While many changes have been proposed to date, these are either not comprehensive enough or significantly ignore the fundamental forces at play that have kept the present system in power. More specifically, many of the claims that have been made with particular emphasis on drastic changes, such as democratization in governance of international development institutions do not hold true in relation to their principles and predicted outcomes. For example, it is not self-evident that the democratization of development institutions, understood as a one-country-one-vote system, will result in allocating more capital resources to developing countries or changing very significantly the composition of its allocations. Certainly, the questions of global governance deserve a much more comprehensive discussion than this paper devotes to them. The issues of global governance must be discussed at the open and within the context of the present system of decision making.

Civil Society organization has also used top-down approach which consists in influencing authorities and impacting their policy making process by expressing cultural, spiritual, political, social, environmental and ethical concerns (Salamon, 2010). Advocacy can take the form of counter-power actions and protests. This includes notably bringing issues to the agenda through awareness campaigns and "name and shame" (Guay and Sinclair, 2004)strategies. But it can also be a cooperation between CSOs and authorities as the latter consult civil society and incorporate its propositions in its policy making process. This top-down approach is mainly used when CSOs act at a global level (by impacting international institutions and TNCs) and at a national level (by influencing governments). But in some cases it can also be local actions sometimes called "community building" activities, especially in the culture and recreation sector. The current trend of advocacy CSOs is to try to define their objectives beyond specific advocacy goals. Most CSOs define their ultimate goal around the concept of democracy building, which mainly consists in giving voice to the people and create a citizen's governance (Olise, 2016).

Another approach in influencing policy is the service provision.It is a rather bottom-up approach which consists in acting as a socio-economical agent by providing concrete services to the population, businesses or governments and international institutions. This includes in particular welfare services to the population (education, recreation, health, family etc.), humanitarian support, development project implementation and advice & expertise services to businesses, governments and international institutions (Steffek, 2005). This bottom-up approach is essentially local and very concrete. However service provision it is not only restricted to the local level and can sometimes scale up to a more global level. This is for instance the case when CSOs bring local concerns to the global agenda and discuss these issues with global actors when providing advice services to them, or when niche expert

groups provide their expertise and spread technical or social innovation within public authorities and/or TNCs. In these cases service provision becomes very close to advocacy and the bottom-up-top-down loop becomes complete as grassroots issues are incorporated within global bodies (bottom-up) which eventually implement top-down policies.

Conclusion

Though inadequacies of the system are known, there is still no panacea for attaining consensual solutions. However, whatever option one chooses to adopt, this should not ignore the potential role of civil society. A critical path and a road map of concrete steps must be drawn, and it is essential to find the political will to implement them. Without political will and political leadership, nothing will materialize. Finally, the shift in paradigm demands a major revolution in values. One cannot create conditions for a new world without values that become the inner catalysts of that new world. In this regard, the tendency is to focus on the humanistic values of the collective society. These are the most important values that must be supported. Materialism is only one side of human reality. Our non-material existence also requires nourishment and care. Spiritual values are, and will become, essential for a consistent and humanistic paradigm shift. These are the values of individual and collective identity, of quality and orientation of development, and of shaping our human destiny.

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