The Role Of Civil Society In The Electoral Process Of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Election is a major institutional pillar of liberal democracy. The conduct of regular elections is considered the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of the democratic context of the rule-based free, fair and credible election. However, for elections to represent the wish of the electorates it must be credible and the process leading to it must be free and fair. Thus, the electoral process must not be left to the government and government established agencies alone. Rather, it requires the vigilance involvement and monitoring of Non Governmental agencies like civil society to prevent the government of the day from wielding the power of incumbency to skew the electoral process in its favour. This essay therefore examined the roles of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in ensuring credible, free and fair elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Civil Society, Election, Nigeria, Democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian electoral history has not been a pleasant one. Nigerians have participated in many elections, beginning with the colonial era when the concept of elections was first introduced. The electorate has also grown from about 5,000 adults with 100 pounds sterling income per annum as qualification to be eligible to vote, to over 90 million voters of 18 years of age and above.

Since its attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria has been tormented by political instability fueled largely by an electoral process in crisis. The country and her leaders have refused to learn from history and avoid the pitfalls of past mistakes in order to pave the pathway for a secure political future. Instead, the electorates and politicians alike have continued to perpetuate the worst forms of our political processes characterized by ugly incidents of political thuggery and violence, electoral malpractices both at political party level and general elections, unending law suits, crisis of legitimacy, instability and chaos.

Over the period of Nigeria's existence as an independent nation-state, all these negative attributes of her political processes have often provided compelling reasons for military adventurists to seize power from its civilian collaborators. As earlier stated history of democratic elections in Nigeria especially ones that would be adjudged and accepted by the electorates as free and fair had always been a problem in the country, however the 1999 general election will be our point of departure.

In 1995, the European union which already imposed sanctions in 1993 suspended development aid and expelled Nigeria from the commonwealth as a result of various records of human rights violations by the Abacha administration. When Abacha died on June 8, 1998, his chief of defense staff, Major General Abdulsalam Abubakar assumed control. He released political prisoners including the former military leader, Olusegun Obasanjo. He permitted the conduct of local government elections in December 1998, state legislative elections followed in January 1999, and the federal legislative and presidential elections in February 1999 which completed the transition to civilian government. Olusegun Obasanjo was elected president on the platform of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) that won majority of seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives. There are persistent calls for creation of states in Nigeria and currently, the country is divided into 36 states and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory and 774 Local Government areas. In 2004 religious strife forced the government to declare a state of emergency in Plateau State. Ethnic strife complicated matters in the southeastern state of Benue where tribal warfare broke out in 2001. Also in the oil-rich Niger Delta, there was a regional conflict against the state by the Ogoni tribe and international energy facilities and workers. In April 2007, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the PDP won the presidential election and succeeded Obasanjo. After the election, Yar'Adua proposed a government of national unity and in June 2007, two opposition parties, the ANPP and the Progressive Peoples' Alliance (PPA) joined Yar'Adua's government. President Yar'Adua died in office on May 5th, 2010 paving way for his vice-president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (a southern Christian) from a minority ethnic group to become the president of Nigeria. In April 16, 2011, Jonathan contested and won the presidential election with a wide margin against his closet rival, Muhamadu Buhari (a northern Fulani-Hausa Muslim). Since then, the country has known no peace due to the insurgency of the Muslim sect, Boko Haram that has been terrorizing Nigerians especially in the north east and Abuja with serial bombings. In 2015 however a sitting president was defeated which to a large extent signifies development in the Nigerian electoral process.

Since the return of democracy in Nigeria after the era of military rule in 1999, Civil Society has remained an indispensable component of the evolving and fragile Nigerian democracy. As agents of social change germane for mass re orientation and mobilization, they have

helped in the sustenance and deepening of democratic governance by providing the critical socio-economic and political services to Nigerians in both urban and rural areas. The credibility of electoral process in Nigeria remains a challenge as election goes a long way in ensuring viable democratic governance. For a long time, elections in Nigeria have been characterized by fraud. Political parties and their respective candidates employ different forms of oppression in order to secure votes during election. Thus, it is common sight to see thugs being used to intimidate electorates on Election Day. In addition to this, Nigerian political parties do not have political ideologies unlike political parties in developed nations of the world. Absence of these makes it difficult to provide credible candidates to contest elections.

Civil societies have a major role to play when it comes to advocating for free and credible elections. For example, as an organization which seeks to promote democratic governance, human rights, accountability and youth participation in politics, Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) it must put in place mechanisms that can promote and monitor the electoral process in Nigeria.

Civil society organizations have globally become active non-state agents of democratic governance saddled with the multifaceted responsibilities of providing social welfare, economic empowerment, humanitarian services, political participation, human capital development and economic activities (Keane 1989, Ikelegbe 2013:2). Besides, civil society has become important agents for engendering good democratic governance through the promotion of accountability, transparency, rule of law, curtailment of human rights abuses, and capitalist exploitation. Civil society is seen as the cumulus of voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, and autonomous associations different from the state, business and family and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules that is open to the public (Woods:1992). It is known as the third sector because it serves as a vibrant social intermediary between the state, business and family. Civil society in Africa and Nigeria in particular is a recent phenomenon that characterized the recent ascendancy of neoliberal democratic institution (Harbeson:1993). According to Ikelegbe, civil society provides the oil that lubricates the relationship between the government, business outfits and the people. He observed that emerging democracies especially in Africa and Nigeria cannot be consolidated or sustained without a virile and vibrant civil society (Ikelegbe,2007).

The states in Africa are incapacitated and irresponsive to the wellbeing of the people which it claims to protect. In the midst of these ad infinitum problems, the civil society is therefore, expected to serve as a watch dog against excesses of government and capitalists by providing a platform for aggregating and championing the interest of the people both in urban and rural areas to demand delivery of good governance from the government (Fatton (1995).

Election is a major institutional pillar of liberal democracy. The conduct of regular elections is considered the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of the democratic context of the rule-based free, fair and credible election. Thus, the electoral process must not be left to the government and government established agencies alone. Rather, it requires the vigilance; involvement and monitoring of Non Governmental agencies like civil society to prevent the government of the day from wielding the power of incumbency to skew the electoral process in its favour. This essay therefore examined the role of the civil society in the electoral process of Nigeria and how it's activities have ensured credible, free and fair elections in the

country since the return of democracy in 1999 and using the 2015 election as a paradigm of analysis.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFCATION
CIVIL SOCIETY

From a historical perspective, the actual meaning of the concept of civil society has changed twice from its original, classical form. The first change occurred after the French Revolution, the second during the fall of communism in Europe. The concept of civil society in its pre-modern classical republican understanding is usually connected to the early-modern thought of Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. However, it has much older history in the realm of political thought. Generally, civil society has been referred to as a political association governing social conflict through the imposition of rules that restrain citizens from harming one another. In the classical period, the concept was used as a synonym for the good society, and seen as indistinguishable from the state. For instance, Socrates taught that conflicts within society should be resolved through public argument using 'dialectic ', a form of rational dialogue to uncover truth. According to Socrates, public argument through 'dialectic' was imperative to ensure 'civility' in the polis and 'good life' of the people.

G. W. F. Hegel completely changed the meaning of civil society, giving rise to a modern liberal understanding of it as a form of market society as opposed to institutions of modern nation state. [While in classical republicanism civil society where synonymous with political society, Hegel distinguished political state and civil society, what was followed by Tocqueville's distinction between civil and political societies and associations, repeated by Marx and Tannies.

Sometimes the term civil society is used in the more general sense of "the elements such as freedom of speech, an independent judiciary, etc, that makes up a democratic society" (Collins English Dictionary).

According to the World Bank: "Civil society ... refers to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations."

The term became popular in political and economic discussions in the 1980s, when it started to be identified with non-state movements that were defying authoritarian regimes, especially in central and Eastern Europe and Latin America.

When mobilized, civil society sometimes called the "third sector" (after government and commerce) - has the power to influence the actions of elected policy-makers and businesses. But the nature of civil society - what it is and what it does - is evolving, in response to both technological developments and more nuanced changes within societies.

Civil society according to Chukwuma, (2005) is defined as a set of institutions, organization and behavior situated between the state, business world and family. These include non-governmental organization, private voluntary organization, people's organizations, civic organization, community based organization, cultural, gender, religious, and social organizations. In a similar vein, Ikelegbe (2013) defined civil society as the associational life of citizens characterized by common interests, civil and pubic purposes, and voluntary collective autonomous actions. It also stretches to include all those associations that enables citizens to participate voluntarily, freely and openly within the public realm, and operate and function independent of and outside state and corporate   powers though, relating with them. Civil society act as a buffer against the power of the central government

and in that capacity encourages individuals to follow their own courses without fear of intimidation from the central government. To Tocqueville, civil society refers to associational activity that that occurs in political space outside the state, an ideology that gained renewed momentum in the I980 and I990s as organizations and activists struggled to challenge dictatorships and illiberal regimes.

The term "civil society" generally is used to refer to social relations and organizations outside the state or governmental control. Sometimes it is also taken to mean outside the economic or business sphere as well. Usually "civil society" refers to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and associations that people belong to for social and political reasons: churches and church groups, community groups, youth groups, service organizations, interest groups, and academic institutions and organizations, for example. It also refers to the activities of these organizations.

Though independent of the governmental structure, these organizations frequently become involved in political activities. They try to influence governmental decision making and participate in a variety of public participation processes. As such, the establishment and maintenance of a healthy civil society is extremely important for the successful development and operation of democratic political systems.

TYPES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION (CSOs)

N a m e s	o b j e c t i v e s
• Humanitarian civil societ	Short-term relief to prevent death.
• Developmental civil societ	Long-term efforts to improve quality of life in economic, political and social sectors.
• Human rights civil societ	Efforts to create supportive political environment.
• Peace building civil societ	Works specifically to address conflict.

EXAMPLES OF CIVIL SOCIETIES IN NIGERIA

There are six Geopolitical zones in Nigeria and about 250 ethnic groups with over 521 languages. However, the Constitution of Nigeria as amended in 1999 permits freedom of assembly, associations and civil societies irrespective of the geopolitical zones, ethnic groups and languages. Civil societies plays a key role in the nation's development and growth.

Below is a list of notable civil societies in Nigeria :

- Oodua Peoples Congress
- Arewa People's Congress
- Ohanaeze Ndigbo
- PANDEF - Pan Niger Delta Forum
- Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
- Nigeria Labour Congress
- Women Awareness Organisation (WAO).
- Gender Development Initiative.
- International Committee for Rescue in Africa.
- Society for Human Development (SHD).

- Centre for Gender Education (CGE).
- Justice, Development and Peace Commission.
- Youth Patriot Foundation.etc

PRINCIPLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

It has been suggested by scholars that that there are three principles of civil society. Which are?

- Principle of participatory engagement : This principle states that all member of a group have access to participate in the group
- Principle of constitutional authority: This principle states that the right of every individual must be protected, the group is constitutionally legitimized.
- Principle of moral responsibility: This principle states that every member of the group have moral responsibility to use their civil liberties in the way that do not violate the human right of others.

THE STRENGTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY

- Long-term commitment
- Access to areas & people where government cannot reach
- Trust & legitimacy with local populations
- Flexible to adapt to changes in local context
- Local experience in addressing conflicts
- Understanding cultural, religious, & political context

THE FUNCTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

- Civil society makes state at all level to be accountable, responsive and to be more effective. They help to limit and control the power of the state
- It promotes political participation through the process of educating people about the about their rights and obligations as democratic citizen and also encourage them to participate in election.
- Building community; engagement and participation in voluntary associations also has the potential to strengthen bonds among citizens.
- Civil society provides training ground for future leaders at all level of government.

CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

- Diversity of missions and capacities
- Capacity of staff, funding, and skills are sometimes lacking
- Tensions and mistrust between government and CSOs
- Security situation may stop their work
- Service delivery may substitute or weaken state legitimacy

BRIEF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The origin of the term civil society goes back to Aristotle's phrase koinōnía politikḗ (κοινωνία πολιτική), occurring in his popular work "Politics ", where it refers to a 'community', commensurate with the Greek city-state (polis) characterized by a shared set of norms and ethos, in which free citizens on an equal footing lived under the rule of law . The telos or end of civil society, thus defined, was eudaimonia (τὸ εὖ ζῆν tò eu zēn) (often translated as human

flourishing or common well-being), in as man was defined as a 'political (social) animal' (ζῷον πολιτικόν zōon politikón). [Though the concept was mentioned in Roman writers, such as Cicero , it entered into Western political discourse following the translation of Aristotle's works into Latin (societas civilis) by late medieval and early Medieval writers such as William of Moerbeke and Leonardo Bruni , where it often referred to the ancient notion of a republic (res publica). With the rise of a distinction between monarchical autonomy and public law, the term then gained currency to denote the corporate estates (Ständestaat) of a feudal elite of land-holders as opposed to the powers exercised by the prince. It had a long history in state theory, and was revived with particular force in recent times, in Eastern Europe, where dissidents such as Václav Havel employed it to denote the sphere of civic associations threatened by the intrusive holistic state-dominated regimes of Communist Eastern Europe.

ELECTION

An election is a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Ujo (2000) defined election as "a procedure that allows member, of an organization or community to choice representative who will hold position of authority within it". The international encyclopedia of social science, vol. 5 defines election as one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind. Two key words (procedure and preferences) emerge from this definition; procedure refers to statuesque - a prescribed specific way of doing things whole preferences simple devotes choice among alternatives.

Election is the act of a party casting vote to elect an individual for some type of position. Elections may involve a public or private vote depending on the position. Most positions in the local, state, and federal governments are voting on in some type of election (Business Dictionary).Elections may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations.

The universal use of elections as a tool for selecting representatives in modern representative democracies is in contrast with the practice in the democratic archetype, ancient Athens, where the Elections were considered an oligarchic institution and most political offices were filled using sortition, also known as allotment, by which officeholders were chosen by lot. (Wikipedia)

Elections make a fundamental contribution to democratic governance. Because direct democracy a form of government in which political decisions are made directly by the entire body of qualified citizen is impractical in most modern societies, democratic government must be conducted through representatives. Elections enable voters to select leaders and to hold them accountable for their performance in office. Accountability can be undermined when elected leaders do not care whether they are reelected or when; for historical or other reasons, one party or coalition is so dominant that there is effectively no choice for voters among alternative candidates, parties, or policies. Nevertheless, the possibility of controlling leaders by requiring them to submit to regular and periodic elections helps to solve the problem of succession in leadership and thus contributes to the continuation of democracy. Moreover, where the electoral process is competitive and forces candidates or parties to expose their records and future intentions to popular scrutiny, elections serve as forums for the discussion of public issues and facilitate the expression of public opinion.

(https://www.britannica.com/topic/election-political-science/Functions-of-elections).

TYPES OF ELECTIONS

There are basically four types of election which are as follows:

- Primary Elections – Held by the political parties to select each party's nominee for the general election. In the primary, separate party ballots are printed, and the voter must choose between the ballot with Democrats running against other Democrats or the one on which Republicans run against other Republicans. If there are three or more candidates in a race, and if no one receives a majority of the votes cast, then a second primary election or runoff election is held between the two candidates who receive the highest number of votes in the first primary. The winner of this runoff election will be the party nominee.

- General Elections – Held to determine which political party, independent, or write-in candidate will occupy each office that is up for election. In the general election, a voter may split the ticket to select candidates from all parties on the ballot; however, a voter may choose only one candidate per office.

- Constitutional Amendment Elections – Held when constitutional amendments appear on the ballot. In a primary election, if a voter does not want to participate in one of the party primaries, he or she may vote on the amendments only.

- Special Elections – Held in extraordinary situations such as the necessity to fill a vacancy that occurs during the term for which a person was elected, or when a referendum is held on some particular question or proposition such as the issuance of bond. (http://www.elmorecountyelections.org/types.html)

CHARACTERISTICS OF ELECTIONS

Characteristic	Description
• Suffrag	The question of who may vote is a central issue in elections. The electorate does not generally include the entire population; for example, many countries prohibit those who are under the age of majority from voting, all jurisdictions require a minimum age for voting. Suffrage is typically only for citizens of the country, though further limits may be imposed.
• Nominatio	A representative democracy requires a procedure to govern nomination for political office. In many cases, nomination for office is mediated through pre-selection processes in organized political parties.
• Electoral system	Electoral systems are the detailed constitutional arrangements and voting systems that convert the vote into a political decision.
• Schedulin	The nature of democracy is that elected officials are accountable to the people, and they must return to the voters at prescribed intervals to seek their mandate to continue in office.
• Election campaign	When elections are called, politicians and their supporters attempt to influence policy by competing directly for the votes of constituents in what are called campaigns. Supporters for a campaign can be either formally organized or loosely affiliated, and frequently utilize campaign advertising.

Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election

FUNCTIONS OF ELECTIONS

- Elections thus provide political education for citizens and ensure the responsiveness of democratic governments to the will of the people. They also serve to legitimize the acts of those who wield power, a function that is performed to some extent even by elections that are noncompetitive.

- Elections also reinforce the stability and legitimacy of the political community. Like national holidays commemorating common experiences, elections link citizens to each other and thereby confirm the viability of the polity. As a result, elections help to facilitate social and political integration.
- Finally, elections serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings. Whatever other needs voters may have, participation in an election serves to reinforce their self-esteem and self-respect. Voting gives people an opportunity to have their say and, through expressing partisanship, to satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging. Even nonvoting satisfies the need of some people to express their alienation from the political community. For precisely these reasons, the long battle for the right to vote and the demand for equality in electoral participation can be viewed as the manifestation of a profound human craving for personal fulfillment. ((https://wwwbritannicacom/topic/election-political-science/Functions-of-elections).

IMPORTANCE OF ELECTIONS

Election is important in following ways
- People get opportunity to elect their representative as They wish
- Election create a political competition among parties and candidates
- It give deserving and capable people to represent
- Election is always better than selection
- Election give an opportunity to political parties to form government etc. (www.quora.com)

CHALLENGES OF ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Professor Jega in a lecture titled," Challenges of Fraud free Elections under a democratic dispensation", delivered at a Book launch on Fraud Election by Mustapha Akanbi Foundation(MAF),Ilorin noted that," there are some key challenges confronting efforts to conduct fraud-free elections in an environment like ours", which he also noted are surmountable. These factors include the following:

•Insecurity.

•Funding: Processes that will guarantee fraud free elections cost money, which is hard to come by.

•Attitude of political class

•Apathetic and inactive citizenry.

•Delay in amendment to the legal Framework.

•Completion of the review of electoral constituencies and Prosecution of election offenders.(www.vanguardngr.com/2014/03)

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Elections were used as early in history as ancient Greece and ancient Rome, and throughout the medieval period to select rulers such as the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope.

In Vedic period of India, the Raja (chiefs) of Gana (a tribal organization) was apparently elected by the gana. The raja belonged to the noble Kshatriya varna (warrior class), and was typically a son of the previous raja. However, the gana members had the final say in his elections. Even during the Sangam Period people elected their representatives by casting their votes and the ballot boxes (Usually a pot) were tied by rope and sealed. After the election the votes were taken out and counted. The Pala king Gopala (ruled c. 750s–770s CE) in early medieval Bengal was elected by a group of feudal chieftains. Such elections were quite common in contemporary societies of the region. In the Chola Empire, around 920 CE, in Uthiramerur (in present-day

Tamil Nadu), palm leaves were used for selecting the village committee members. The leaves, with candidate names written on them, were put inside a mud pot. To select the committee members, a young boy was asked to take out as many leaves as the number of positions available. This was known as the Kudavolai system.

The modern "election", which consists of public elections of government officials, didn't emerge until the beginning of the 17th century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe.

Questions of suffrage, especially suffrage for minority groups, have dominated the history of elections. Males, the dominate cultural group in North America and Europe, often dominated the electorate and continue to do so in many countries. Early elections in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States were dominated by landed or ruling class males. However, by 1920 all Western European and North American democracies had universal adult male suffrage (except Switzerland) and many countries began to consider women's suffrage. Despite legally mandated universal suffrage for adult males, political barriers were sometimes erected to prevent fair access to elections. (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election)

The history of election in Nigeria however dates back to the colonial era and it's evolution has continued after it's attainment of nation hood in 1960 Nigeria from the United Kingdom on October 1, by an act of the British parliament. In 1963 Nigeria became a republic within the commonwealth. Nnamdi Azikwe (an Igbo) became the republic's first president and Tafawa Balewa (a Fulani-Hausa) the first prime minister and since then election has become a periodic ritual in Nigeria.

THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS OF NIGERIA

An active civil society is an indicator of a functioning and democratic state. Civil society both works in partnership with the state to complement and supplement its capacity and to hold the state to account for its responsibilities and transparent governance. The literature on relations between civil society and democratic political society in which election is its key tenets have their roots in classical liberal writings like those of Alexis de Tocqueville. However they were developed in significant ways by 20th century theorists like Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, who identified the role of political culture in a democratic order as vital, argued that the political element of political organizations facilitates better awareness and a more informed citizenry, who make better voting choices, participate in politics, and hold government more accountable as a result. The statutes of these organizations have often been considered micro-constitutions because they accustom participants to the formalities of democratic decision making.

More recently, Robert D. Putnam has argued that even non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy. This is because they build social capital, trust and shared values, which are transferred into the political sphere and help to hold society together, facilitating an understanding of the interconnectedness of society and interests within it.

Democracy is about equality and elimination of discriminations irrespective of race, class or ethno-religious or cultural affiliations. In this perspective, Ikelegbe(2007) asserts that civil society organizations ensure that there is adequate constitutional provisions that promote equity and to also monitor and advocate for its implementation and practice in a democratic nation. It is expected that civil society stimulate good democratic governance by promoting equity in all ramifications especially by reporting cases of discriminations to the public. To this end the following constitute the role of civil society in the electoral process:

- Maintain a partnership and dialogue with all of those, internally and internationally, who wish to see strong democracy in Nigeria.
- Encourage democratic culture within the political parties.
- Maintain a frequent and regular dialogue with political parties.
- Promote and protect the legal, procedural and behavioral components of independence.
- Encourage voter participation in the election, with special emphasis on over-coming barriers caused by social, religious and geographic factors, through partnership with the electoral commission and the security agencies.
- Ensure that all eligible voters are on the electoral roll once and that those who are not eligible are not on the electoral roll Strengthen election planning process and capability.
- Encourage political party compliance with the law and
  regulations through a mixture of dialogue and enforcement.

Jega (2006) also asserts that a democratically included civil society group has roles as:

- Promotion and defense of the constitution and rule of law
- The enhancement of the integrity and efficiency of the democratic institution and processes.
- The development of a viable democratic culture in the polity.

The 2015 Nigeria general elections was one of the most keenly contested in recent Nigeria history. For the first time, opposition political parties came together and provided a strong challenge to a ruling party resulting in elections that saw the defeat of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room played an active role in bringing together a cohesive civil society observation of the elections. Thus the role of the "Situation Room "will be our area of concern because it is made up of different civil societies;

The Situation Room is a platform of more than 60 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on good governance and election related issues. It was created in 2010 ahead of the 2011 Nigeria general elections. The purpose was to unite leaders and key CSOs to play an active role in the election process. In the 2015 general elections, the Situation Room widened participation in its activities, deploying a nationwide coverage and observation of the 2015 elections. It relied on its partner organisations located in different parts of the country to receive field reports that informed its analysis of the 2015 general elections. Reports received from the field focused on routine voting information, incidents during elections including violence, security breaches, general conduct of elections, security and political party officials. The aggregation of this reports informed the analysis of Situation Room and the call it made on the general elections. Where necessary Situation Room intervened directly with election stakeholders to correct or inform on Election Day happenings. The election stakeholders with whom Situation Room intervened include INEC, the police and security agencies etc. The Situation Room operated through the active participation of its partner groups facilitated through regular meetings and conversations held by telephone, email and other forms of social media communication. Through its active and vibrant communication system, the Situation Room is often able to deliberate on pressing issues, issue press statements or even carry out advocacy visits. The situation through its analysts plays the following roles in the success of the 2015 general election:

- Helping the internal observer groups to have a wider sense and understanding of issues in the conduct of the elections
- Expressing civil society feelings and positions on the observance of the rules and conduct of support agencies
- Sounding warnings on developments that could mar the integrity of the elections Putting government agencies and INEC including security personnel that they were being watched and their acts of omission or commission to compromise the process could lead to violence
- Promoting the transparency and integrity of the 2015 elections Interventions were helpful in improvements in the conduct of the governorship and state assembly elections after the Presidential and National assembly elections.

Generally civil society in a democratically grounded society are expected to perform four key functions, these includes:

- Voter's education: Voter education means providing citizens of a democracy with basic information about participating in elections. Voter education is often provided by the state itself, often through a national electoral commission but in recent times the Civil society has taken over that function, so it is therefore important that it is politically non-partisan.
- Information dissemination: Information dissemination requires systematic collection, organization, and storage of information relevant to the needs of the political milieu.
- Monitoring of the electoral process: the Civil Society through its field agents monitor election to ensure transparency in the voting, collation and counting processes.
- Finally it servers as watchdog: Here the attention is on curtailing the excesses of government.

   RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the above the civil society to a large extent have played a vital role in the electoral process of Nigeria since it's attainment of nationhood in 1960.., and they can do better if afforded the needed environment to thrive. It is to this end that Jega (2006) listed seven (7) recommendations to secure the independence of the civil society organizations in Nigeria. These recommendations according to him to a large extent will serve as a means of attaining a democratic and independent civil society. They include the following:

- Acquisition of basic facilities and equipments which are necessary for organizational efficiency, effectiveness and measurable output.
- Promotion of increased and focused network among civil society groups.
- Training of cadres of grass root mobilization and advocacy
- Training of cadres for acquisition of leadership and good governance skills.
- Promotion of collaborative joint programmes of advocacy and mobilization.
- Diversification of sources of funding through creative revenue generation activities.
- The need to coordinate and control the NGO phenomena in order to reduce reliance on foreign grants.

In the same vain at a Presentation to NGO Leaders, February 10, 2004,Convention Center, Baghdad the following are identified as what civil society must do to ensure the development of democracy which election is anchored upon:

- The first and most basic role of civil society is to limit and control the power of the state. Of course, any democracy needs a well-functioning and authoritative state. But when a

country is emerging from decades of dictatorship, it also needs to find ways to check, monitor, and restrain the power of political leaders and state officials.

- Expose the corrupt conduct of public officials and lobby for good governance reforms. Even where anti-corruption laws and bodies exist, they cannot function effectively without the active support and participation of civil society.

  Civil society organizations can help to develop the other values of democratic life: tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing points of view. Without this deeper culture of accommodation, democracy cannot be stable. These values cannot simply be taught; they must also be experienced through practice. We have outstanding examples from other countries of NGOs—especially women's groups—that have cultivated these values in young people and adults through various programs that practice participation and debate.

- Civil society can strengthen democracy by providing new forms of interest and solidarity that cut across old forms of tribal, linguistic, religious, and other identity ties. Democracy cannot be stable if people only associate with others of the same religion or identity. When people of different religions and ethnic identities come together on the basis of their common interests as women, artists, doctors, students, workers, farmers, lawyers, human rights activists, environmentalists, and so on, civic life becomes richer, more complex, and more tolerant.etc

CONCLUSION

Nigeria has been hailed globally for achieving a rancour-free change of leadership at the centre, with the displacement of the ruling party – the Peoples Democratic Party – through a near-perfect electoral process, which many have described as a work-in-progress. The success achieved in the general elections has been attributed to a combination of factors, which included the existence of an electoral umpire with a focused leadership, a well-coordinated opposition forces and a vigilant citizenry, driven by observant civil society organizations (CSOs).

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