CIVIL SOCIETY, SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NATION-BUILDING IN WEST AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in socio-economic development in West Africa is rendered weak by internal bickering, state monocracy, armed take-overs, pitiable organisation and mobilisation, regionalism, ethnicity, language differences, insufficient resources, suspicion of the state, absconding of prominent members to the state bureaucracy and the authoritative influence of 'big business.' The result has been a failure of the civil society to contribute meaningfully to genuine socio-economic development and nation-building in West African countries, in spite of ECOWAS recognition of the role it should play in development. The quest for development through the civil society has remained more of an illusion in this region as elsewhere in Africa. This paper suggests ways through which the civil society can surmount these hurdles to impact visibly, positively and durably in the nation-building project.

Much ink has been used in an attempt to examine the contribution of the civil society to shape events in such a way that these can lead to socio-economic development and nation building in Africa in particular and the world in general. Many scholars who have written on the civil society have both highlighted its strengths or weaknesses, successes and failures, and above all examined its very concept and activities (Tester 1992; Bayart 1993; Forje 2007; Sesay 1994; Mkandawire and Olukoshi 1995; Fatton 1995; Monga 1996; Ceesay 1998; Osaghae 1994 and 1998; Nzepa http://africa.rights.apc.org; Carothers 2000; Aiyede 2003; Edwards 2009). In spite of these arguments about the civil society, research on it remains

pertinent because of its visible role in socio-economic development, governance and democracy in contemporary African history. The civil society is a watchdog on the actions of government across Africa its shortcomings notwithstanding. Despite the several meetings that have taken place between the CSOs and ECOWAS over the years, several challenges continue to face these organisations on how best socio-economic services can be made available and where they exist, what can be done to improve on expedient delivery and arouse a strong sense of identity and belonging among the people of West African countries.

In AU summits the participation of CSOs has so far been to say the least, minimal and this has contributed to making the AU less democratic and exclusive (Adejumobi 2009:13) instead of being more democratic and inclusive. The situation is not different with ECOWAS although this regional body has been in regular consultation with the CSOs of the region. In this paper we restate, re emphasise and comment on the daunting challenges of the civil society in an increasingly complex West African environment with diversity in language, political systems and cultures. The study points a way forward to countries of the region and the benefits to be derived from a citizen driven effort to bring about socio-economic self-sufficiency for West African citizens and guarantee nation-building which is crucial for stability and development.

A civil society with a broader orientation for West Africa is important to overcome the narrow, self-effacing and conflicting civil society agendas today which have failed to contribute to nation-building. Some of them have a doubtful leadership and doubtful programmes. There is urgent need for a sustained deep thought on this issue by states and their people through organised and regulated civil society. Even more urgent is the need for a super structure for a sub-regional civic commitment to African nationalism which is drawn from the practical relationships of Africans with each other (Asante 2009:1) on a daily basis. In fact, the West African intellectual community working with civil society organisations at home and abroad should in synergy with decision makers or on their own blend talents with decisions and put them to practice if the civil society must effect meaningful socio-economic change in West Africa and contribute to nation-building.

Some of the crucial questions to be addressed include what should be the nature of relationship between states and civil society? How can this be practically mutually helpful to the state and the population? Besides, what is the nature of state and CSOs relations in West

Africa? How can the CSO serve a useful purpose for ECOWAS and how effective can this be? In this way progress is likely to be made guaranteed in socio-economic reforms targeting the population instead of a few selected individuals or countries of West Africa.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organisation formed on 28 May 1975 to promote cooperation and integration among West African countries. It seeks to promote development in all spheres of economic activity through the removal of all forms of trade barriers and obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods and services as well as the harmonising of regional sector policies (http://www.bidc-ebid.org/en/cedeao.php). By 2000 this regional organisation recognised the importance of the civil society in the integration process of West African countries. Following Article 9 of Decision A/Dec.7/12/00 adopted at Bamako Mali, the organisation officially recognised the important role of the CSOs in promoting integration and activities of ECOWAS.

In another draft declaration on the information society in West Africa, ECOWAS urged governments of member states, other community institutions including the CSO and the private sector to fully participate in policy decision-making related to internet governance. This regional organisation for West Africa was conscious of the state in society approach towards the attainment of integration for the heterogeneous West African countries. This fit into Migdal's, Kohli's and Shue's argument that society's affect states as much as or possibly more that states affect them (Migdal, Kohli, and Shue, 1994:2). In a sense, the sustainable security of states can mostly to be attained through the security of its people without which the state may not succeed to unite the people (Ekiyor 2008:27) and nation-building would remain a mirage or not attained.

Among the stakeholders who are engaged or committed to the promotion of unity in Africa and its sub regions are diverse CSOs. These organisations are grassroots or expected to be grassroots based. They are often expected to mobilise the population for their own common good and the stability of their respective countries. Non state actors like CSOs have in spite of enormous challenges confronting them contributed towards the prevention, management or resolution of the intricate and multifaceted problems of West Africa (Ekiyor 2008:27). These organisations have waged war with entrenched dictatorships in West Africa and called upon them to embrace democratic governance. This was the case in Liberia and Nigeria for

example where different CSOs petitioned the government to open up to diverse opinions in order to build strong state institutions and ensure stability.

Other important functions of some CSOs are that they are primary providers of basic social services like water and electricity where viable public institutions and state apparatus are non-existent or have been considerably weakened as was the case in Sierra Leone, Liberia and more recently in Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Niger due to internal dissension. These organisations have also offered humanitarian assistance, promoted human and women's rights (Ekiyor 2008: 28-9) with the aim of building trust and giving hope to people who are in a hopeless situation. Others tried to reinstitute the culture of community/town hall meetings and also developed community development councils which did not last long enough to impact on development initiatives in the different communities in Nigeria (Chukwuma 2005:8). The CSO also liberate individuals from bondage (Alasupo 2009:328) through various forms of empowerment. For a better appreciation of this paper, we have tried to contextualise our definition of relevant concepts.

Definition of Concepts

The concepts of civil society, development and nation-building have been debated by different scholars. With regards to the civil society, Edwards (2009:3) argues that a civil society has the attributes of equality, justice, democracy and tolerance. Besides, civil society means all forms of voluntary collective action which are formal and informal, traditional and modern, secular and religious. It also encompasses the public sphere where different visions are reconciled and political consensus pursued. On his part, Diamond (1994: 4-18) defines civil society as involving organised social life which is voluntary, self-generating, largely self-supporting, free from state control and based on a legal order. He adds the collective involvement of citizens in the public sphere to attain feats, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable to the population. From the definitions of Edwards and Diamond it is clear that the CSOs are free from state control and is well placed to check the excesses of the state or government institutions.

Another definition of the civil society is that of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union. The Council defines civil society as comprising social and professional groups, non-governmental groups, community based organisations (CBOs),

voluntary and cultural organisations among other segments in which women, youth, children, national diasporas and elements of the private sector such as market women's associations and the media are enlisted (Ekiyor 2008: 27-8). It is also described as the arena outside the family, state and the market where people associate to advance common interests. This phenomenon is very strong in West Africa where CSOs include formal and informal groupings such as traditional chiefs, queen mothers' associations, youth movements, market women, religious groups and the media (Ekiyor 2008: 28).

Nation-building is a concept that has undergone changes in its definition over time. Different authors have also examined the concept from different lenses.With regards to the definition of nation-building in the 1950s and 1960s, Hippler (2005) posits that it was closely related to the modernisation theories. These theories viewed the development process in the developing world as catching up with or imitating western models. Riemer (2005:375) argues that nation-building is a multi-step process and lacks a strict scientific foundation. On his part, Husin (2011:229) defines nation-building as the establishment of solidarity among people and which labels on them a new identity. In his own definition of nation-building, Emerson (1967:91-98) contends that nation-building involves the citizens loyalty towards their country of residence and in so doing reduces their prioritising towards their own ethnic group above the country. In a similar vein, Saad (2012) and Reinhard (1977) define nation-building in terms of greater integration of state and society. Nation-building has also been defined by Jasaitis (1971:19) as the process of creating a sense of identity, loyalty and commitment to the nation-state in the populace living within its boundaries. These definitions by Hippler, Riemer, Husin, Emerson, Reinhard and Jasaitis all point to one thing and that is a sense of belonging and the defence of it.

Civil societies are expected to play this role in their activities within the community and within the nation-states. Even if some of them have actually fanned the flames of discord among different people, the argument remains that they should be promoters of unity and nation-building rather than encourage division in the West African region.These views emphasise the centrality of diverse citizen groupings and the state in achieving results or making progress in governance and nation-building. It also points to the difficulties encountered by the CSOs in their interaction and operations with different institutions geared

towards a common goal for all and sundry. The ECOWAS recognised the relevance of the CSOs to nation-building and decided to partner with it to attain this goal.

ECOWAS and the Civil Society

The ECOWAS regional organisation institutionalised the CSOs in its framework with the view to promoting integration of the economies of its fifteen member countries. In its draft declaration on the information society, ECOWAS stated the need for the governments, the secretariat of the organisation, other community institutions like the CSO and the private operators to be encouraged to fully participate in policy decision-making of the different member states. In addition, during a meeting in Bamako in 2000, the organisation in article 9 of Decision A/Dec.7/12/00, recognised the importance and active involvement of the CSO and other personalities in promoting the integration process in West Africa. Still in line with ECOWAS commitment to involve the CSO in developing a culture of peace, the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP) has been instrumental at the grassroots level in conflict monitoring. This is a broad part of the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (WAANSA).

In spite of this recognition and institutionalisation of the CSOs by ECOWAS in its structure there are still gaps in their effective functioning to promote development and nation-building in West Africa. While some countries like Ghana and Mali made progress in building a culture of peace and mobilising their citizens towards durable development, others are still to work in synergy with ECOWAS to initiate programmes that can fundamentally bring about development that will benefit the grassroots population in their countries. Mali has however witnessed internal strife which has weakened the gains of a viable civil society. Others preach peace only when there has been an escalation of war. The ECOWAS should also go beyond working with already well-established CSOs and ensure that the level of CSO awareness and contribution to development in the entire sub region is a permanent and sustained endeavour through empowering seminars and monitoring of their activities.

Furthermore, the civil society has been working closely with ECOWAS in the implementation of its instruments. For instance, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), WANEP, Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) and the West Africa Women's Association (WAWA) have worked closely with ECOWAS to

promote good governance, early warning, small arms proliferation and gender issues (Ekiyor 2008: 32). The partnership between ECOWAS and CSO was also witnessed when the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WASOF) was formed as an institutionalised platform for the CSO. This was to facilitate interaction and contribute to policy processes. It was visionary and showed that ECOWAS and the CSO were willing to be more collaborative in their activities (Ekiyor 2008: 32).

While the ECOWAS region has made progress when compared to other regions in working with CSOs there is need for socio-economic development to be permanently on the agenda. Much of the institutionalised collaboration is bureaucratic red-tapes and little time and effort is directed towards sustainable results. There must be a serious rethinking on the part of ECOWAS to engage these CSOs at a regional and country levels towards effecting economic development that improve the livelihood of the people. Collaboration should not be elite focused but should engage everyone in the neighbourhoods so that they can see the relevance of ECOWAS and CSO to their yearnings for improvement in the standards of living. This will entail a permanent mobility of staff of ECOWAS and other stakeholders charged with the task of development of West Africa as a region and the countries that constitute this regional organisation.

Limitations of West African CSOs

These milestones and others not withstanding, the question remains that how much of success has the CSOs achieved in the socio-economic domains in member countries of the ECOWAS? There are still a number of hurdles to be surmounted at the national level before CSOs will effectively serve the socio-economic needs of a wider regional dimension. In addition, the collaboration between the CSOs and ECOWAS is still to bear realistic fruits worth the effort because the many meetings and resolutions have not been transformed into concrete action to benefit West Africa. There is need for directed action and not speeches and meetings.

The several hurdles militating against a meaningful contribution of the CSO to development and governance in West Africa include the nature of organisation of some CSOs, their unfriendly encounter with the governing authorities, their effective role in establishing a mutually beneficial or otherwise role between the society and the administrators. Other

associated problems of the civil society organisations are a poor level of mobilisation and education of the masses which is to say the least chaotic in many West African countries including Nigeria, the colossus of the region and Africa. These problems have degenerated because of the interference of some state authorities like in Niger for "dirty" political reasons. These have often turned out to benefit a few elite who thrive on their dubious activities. This is a discouraging phenomenon because other regions of the world like Asia, Europe and America are learning from their past and through CSO mobilisation have made strides in social and economic development. Other problems include the negative colonial experience and varying degrees of government intervention which are not to organise these CSOs but to promote them for selfish reasons. This has contributed to a weedy civil society in most of Africa. Some of these are at conflict with traditional social networks and this has in a way affected their wider appeal to members of the society in many parts of Africa.

One major problem like in Nigeria is that after the return of the country to civilian rule, the CSOs rapidly lost many of its influential people to the state sector and this helped to weaken them as a movement (Obadare 2005: 29). Many of the states like Guinea Bissau, Niger, Mali and Guinea have recently been bedevilled by ruthless military rule and dictatorship which has stifled the activities of the CSOs in these countries although some have continued to sensitise the population against the evils of their governments and negative impact on durable development. West African CSOs like those in southern Africa have rather been weakened by parochial social identities. These include ethnic groups, class and gender (Molutsi 1999:180-1). This situation cannot lead the member countries of West Africa to meaningful nation-building for the good of the citizenry and the ordinary people.

The ambivalence of the state in its activities and dealings with the CSOs, shortage of funds, poor organisations, government mistrust, antagonistic interaction between CSOs and personnel has rendered these organisations weak in the face of state exploitation of its citizenry (Olaitan 2006:61-3; Ekiyor 2008:27). Some are a problem to the state because they are financially accountable to interest groups outside Africa with ulterior motives. Today, many of them are mostly involved in war, post war reconciliation and politics. They have nothing to do with socio-economic advancement of their people. Many are not engaged in poverty alleviation for the suffering people who have been held in bondage by an aggressive capitalist environment which is driven by the profit motive.

In spite of the institutional safeguards within the ECOWAS which encourage the CSO to contribute to development in West Africa, many of them function only vertically without any horizontal cooperation. Besides, the benefits of mass mobilisation are absent for most of the time. Very few are also national in scope and there is no adequate legislative framework in different countries to keep the CSO vibrant and successfully measured. Others are poorly organised and are antagonistic to one another. Added to this is the tendency to focus on non-governmental organisations and the near exclusion of groups and associations that reflect the associational culture like traditional governance structures common in West Africa. In other countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, some CSOs have long been accused of aligning themselves with warring factions and assuming political positions in the conflict instead of the contrary (Ekiyor 2008: 27-8). These weaknesses are also common in other African countries (Vubo 2008:24; Nkwi 2006: 99-100). Very few CSOs have been engaged in the distribution of economic resources or in the economic empowerment of their people. This is because they have taken great interest in politics not necessarily to improve on the political culture of their people but to seek personal and other gains for themselves.

Furthermore, since CSOs have the ability to mobilise funds from foreign governments and donors, they are considered as direct rivals of the state in the competition for scarce economic resources. Besides, they more or less implement the agenda of these foreign governments and donors than what their people expect of them. Many governmental institutions work only with non-governmental organisations in the alleviation of poverty of the rural masses while neglecting other very important grassroots civil society groups like the CBOs and the traditional rulers (Ekiyor 2008:33) some of whom are very influential in areas like northern Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso. This has weakened the effectiveness of the popular grassroots organisations to mobilise funds and address the immediate social needs of their people like water and health facilities.

While the West African region has made progress in the domain of some umbrella CSOs, the fierce competition over donor funding among the different network members has created a rift instead of cooperation and the sharing of information and experiences to produce better results. The failure to share has resulted in the duplication of efforts, initiatives and in the misuse of scarce economic resources for image building and other personal investments and benefits. Besides, the limited resources of the CSOs have made them to hardly influence

policy in their countries towards the improvement of the socio-economic situation of their people. Also, the absence of documentation has made it difficult for stock taking and improvement of the activities of the CSOs (Ekiyor 2008:33).

As ECOWAS encourages viable CSOs, many governments have resented the perceived intrusiveness of the civil society towards the implementation of development programmes (Chukwuma 2005:2-3). They have through various emasculating regulatory frameworks and registration processes weakened the role of the CSO as a partner in development and nation-building. The CSOs in West African countries like Nigeria have very limited space to participate in the formulation of policies that directly affect the livelihood of citizens by government agencies. This is an additional problem because governments are less inventive than the entrepreneurial citizens' organisations in the delivery of many social goods (Chukwuma 2005:9). Other CSOs have failed to provide socio-economic leadership because of the absence of an internal democratic culture, accountability and ethical conduct (Chukwuma 2005:10). Without a proper functioning of many CSOs, it is difficult for them to embark on projects to improve on the socio-economic position of their people. Other general problems not peculiar to West Africa include donor support to CSOs which make it embark on an anti-state agenda, and schism along ethnic lines (Matanga 2000:2; Uvin 2006:8).

Furthermore, there can hardly be an effective partnership between the State and CSOs to foster participation when in many instances the states view these societies as enemies (Forje http://apad.revues.org/documents461.html) and in some cases, the states have failed to command respect from a majority of its people. The outcome has been the failure of a synergy between the state and CSOs to promote socio-economic, political, scientific and technological developments to benefit the majority of its citizens.

One of the greatest hurdles for the CSO in Africa in general and West Africa in particular today is that many of them operate without a clear agenda of their own. Rather, they rely heavily on foreign interest groups (Edwards 2009:3) for hidden financial assistance and implement their own vested interests. In this way, many of them have lost touch with their own local institutions and the challenges that go with these institutions concerning social and economic development. Others have been co-opted and coerced into the ruling organ of the party and state machinery and instead of fighting for the common good they have defended their own interests. The dilly-dallying between CSO and the state like Cameroon has stifled

progress and put the CSO in doubt. Some CSOs leaders receive bribe to defend particular causes and they block communication between the base and top and the consequences are social crises and starvation which are anathema to successful nation-building endeavours.

Other CSOs since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s have fought with opposition parties for a common kind of welfare state and soon afterwards got swallowed up by these political parties. The CSO has therefore been caught up in the "dirty" politics of power. The immediate impact of this is that some African countries like Guinea Bissau, Guinea have fallen back into authoritarianism with unsuccessful resistance.

The towering influence of the state has made many to look up to it for survival. These hurdles are not a novelty in the plethora of literature on the civil society in Africa. Yet the question keeps coming up on how CSOs can effectively mobilise West Africans into economic development, social stability and nation-building. What then can be the best practices for civil society to adequately address the socio-economic needs of the people of West Africa?

Best Practices for CSOs, Socio-Economic Development and Nation-Building

In spite of the limitations of many CSOs in West Africa, a lot can still be done to improve on their performance rate in the delivery of social and economic services to their people working in partnership with their governments and the ECOWAS. The CSO in West Africa like in the Southern African countries of Zambia, Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa a few years ago should unite and exert persistent pressure and boycott government unpopular actions (Obadare 2005:183) and this will facilitate change for social and economic benefit of their people and ensure state stability. This is more compelling because CSOs have in the past played a crucial role in dislodging entrenched authoritarian regimes and introduced democratic government in Africa and accompanying economic development through foreign and domestic investments. In the past, these CSOs in West Africa were more successful in ending military dictatorship, advocating pluralist and open societies and encouraging democracy and good governance (Ekiyor 2008:28). This was because of concerted action among the different CSOs like trade and student unions, women's groups and professional associations. If the CSOs engage in horizontal linkages, they will succeed but if they continue to be divided and challenge each other, they will fail to make an impression which is aimed at

alleviating poverty and promoting socio-economic development among citizens of ECOWAS member countries.

A strong and coordinated CSOs in West Africa will make them to go beyond the provision of humanitarian relief, advocate against the proliferation of small arms and the dangers of arms production to create confidence in society and mobilise the people to use their energy towards the provision of basic household needs and improvement of the health of the poor in society. These are proactive measures that should create harmonious co-existence in society and prevent the outbreak of war and civil strife like in many different parts of Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Niger, Guinea and Guinea Bissau. At present, many of these CSOs like WANEP, FOSDA and WAANSA are rather serving a retroactive instead of a proactive role in addressing immediate needs of the people. This partly explains why the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) and West African Civil Society Forum (WASOF) have made very little progress in preventing war and at the same time concentrating on socio-economic development which is essential in ensuring stability of the governments of West African countries.

The ECOWAS must continue to seek more practical ways of organising the civil society sector and make it more professional through training. The elitist collaboration between governments and the western supported civil societies has often excluded more relevant and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) like health committees, youth groups, spent thrift societies, traditional councils among others. It has given a false impression that the civil society has been sufficiently mobilised towards impacting positively on socio-economic development and nation-building. The conscious strengthening of the CSOs in the member countries through collaborative action of the different stakeholders will provide an enabling environment for the proliferation and proper control of CSOs which facilitate the cleanliness and other basic problems of the people of the quarters, villages and towns.

Where there exists a very strong culture of community/town hall meetings as platforms for citizen engagement with local governments this should be institutionalised by member countries of ECOWAS. Other avenues like the community development councils should be used to disseminate information on socio-economic development since these are located in the community and manned by people who live in these communities and want them to be improved upon. At no point should the impression be given that it is government alone or

government and NGOs that can best dictate to the people what their priority socio-economic needs are. This is what obtains in most cases and has instead alienated the people from projects initiated from without and the peoples' input not taken into consideration. It is by working in collaboration with the very basic CSOs that the governments of West Africa can possibly address the huge social and economic inequalities in countries like Nigeria.

One of the best practices of the CSOs should generally be to adapt programmes that are responsive to the local dynamics, needs and pre-existing relationships and social support networks (What 2006:1). Many of the CSOs have adapted programmes as dictated to them by their donors and which are in conflict with the needs of the people and which do not recognise pre-existing relationships and social support networks because they are considered as moribund. Here lies the predicament of the many CSOs in West Africa where there is now much confusion because the terrain where these societies work has not been properly studied; mapped out and understood within a complex network which needs to be reinforced and used to address the peoples most pressing needs. Uvin emphasises this point arguing that the key to succeed in the promotion of CSO is not to continue to identify more lessons that have been learnt but in understanding local dynamics and needs and adapting programmes to be responsive to them (Uvin 2006:10) This should further be reinforced by a bottom-up consensus building effort for the diverse CSOs. The result will be a neutralisation of the purely conflict generated individual group approach to solving socio-economic problems and nation-building.

Although CSOs encounter numerous challenges as they strive to contribute meaningfully towards a united West African community, these remain grassroots contact points for the subaltern to boost the commitment of ECOWAS to create a suitable and secure environment for the West Africans in the third millennium. Through them, both commoners and the rich will be mobilised for common socio-economic development in West Africa in spite of its linguistic and cultural diversity. The mass mobilisation of West Africans through responsible and forward looking CSOs is likely to convince unbelieving leaders with a parochial interest to look beyond their own selfish gains for those of their region for the present and the future.

A vibrant traditional and grassroots civil society is likely to provide the kind of direction for West Africa and its people. Although some regional CSOs have been involved in building a strong democratic structure from which socio-economic development can thrive, they have

paid very little attention to direct and urgent needs of the rural poor and this has left these people to the whims and caprices of the government. Such governments often argue that the people need to support their party before they can receive the attention of the government in terms of projects in their areas.

The civil society can play a meaningful role in socio-economic development in West Africa if hard lessons are drawn from its failures. One of the first lessons which seems to be a serious lacuna in the way CSOs function today in many African countries is the neglect or non-involvement of traditional and community based instruments of involving the community in the decision making process of countries and the entire West African region. This has estranged the CSOs from their target population. Some of them are elitist in leadership, mobilisation and activities and this has made them to fail to impact positively on the socio-economic landscape of the regions of their operation. They can be more effective if they make use of traditional channels of mass mobilisation such as the services of town criers and messengers.

Furthermore, some CSOs function more or less as political parties or as affiliates of existing political parties. It is a serious weakness because for CSOs to make an impact in their societies, they should be non-partisan, critical of poor and lopsided policies and act as the watchdogs of the society rather than become the sounding boxes of some political parties. Many of their leaders who were also influential members of political parties transformed them into the sounding boxes of these political parties. This was unfortunate and some of them fizzled into oblivion. A successful federation of West African states cannot be built on these kinds of unreliable CSOs because they have clearly shown their limitations and are more likely to sink deeper into forgetfulness now than before.

Going beyond mere rhetoric will effectively promote dialogue through broad based consultations with a view to establishing a viable institutional framework for all West African countries that will survive unforeseen difficulties. This is likely to be the case if the CSOs are restricted from seeking endlessly power for its own sake and not for the socio-economic improvement of the lot of the people. Broad based consultations should not be limited to particular segments of the society and not necessarily directed by the leaders but community elected leaders from among the ranks of the masses. In fact, the success of the CSO is as

much the independence of the society as it is the unreserved willingness of the powers to work together to make this a reality.

A permanent synergy of CSOs at the intra-regional level will be a veritable instrument in measuring social and economic development in West Africa. What obtains now is selective synergy and competition among these organisations not because of any meaningful desire to change things for the better but to do so for limited interests. There is much to benefit by way of a synergy between the CSOs at both national and regional levels. It reduces duplication of functions and has the power of influencing and enforcing decisions. The exchange of experiences will improve the lot of the CSO in different African countries. Above all, it will facilitate the dissemination of information and mass mobilisation whenever the need arises.

Respect for, education and participation in civil society activities will boost their activities. Massive education of the people of West Africa from a revamped CSO should have as one major priority, the systematic and regular education of the masses using available traditional and modern means of communication. When people are misinformed or uninformed it is difficult to mobilise them into concerted action and beneficial plan. This is one of the predicaments of some West African CSOs today. Many of them do not have adequate finances to embark on the sensitisation and assistance of the population they represent. With effective means of communication and a trusted leadership, the masses will meaningfully contribute to nation building in West Africa. West African integration through socio-economic integration will go a long way to lay a firm foundation for the civil society to contribute to stability of the region. At the moment, there are lots of disparities in the socio-economic domains.

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined how ECOWAS through several mechanisms recognises and works with CSOs towards the development of West African countries. Although there has been a determined effort from the regional body, there are still a number of hurdles that the civil society encounter in an attempt to contribute more meaningfully to social and economic development and nation-building in West Africa. Besides, much attention has been focused on relief during war and a scuffle between the CSOs and governments of their respective

countries. Such hurdles need to be carefully diagnosed and made more grassroots centred or else, the CSOs will remain elitist and conflict more often than collaborate with one another to improve the socio-economic lot of the people of ECOWAS member countries. There is therefore no gainsaying that the CSOs in collaboration with ECOWAS can promote socio-economic development and contribute more meaningfully to nation building in West Africa

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