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A Sociological Analysis of Civil Society Success in International Development Project

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Abstract - This paper examines the various determinants of civil society or NGOs success in the international development project.Civil society is a broader concept that consists of all the social groups and social relationships in which humans are embebbed, including family, community, social movements, religious organizations, schools, ethnic groups, clubs, professional associations, PTAs, etc.It refers to the quality of people"s social life which includes safety, improved healthcare, mortality, civility, respect for diversity, and so forth. Several scholars have identified various determinants for civil society success, notably in developing nations. These include NGOs" intermediary role; serving as a source for feed-back and integration; and cooperation among competing organizations. Others attribute the success to accountability; collaboration with international activist groups; diffusion of ideas through rapid communication carried out and advanced by certain „rooted cosmopolitans;" and availability of funds from international donors. The article examines scholars" centripetal and centrifugal on the subject matter and highlights some implications. It concludes that civil society contributes to the international development project through ensuring democracy by mobilizing the public, creating awareness, political participation, advocacy campaigns, and struggle for political rights. It finally posits that, the determinants for civil society/NGO success in international development project are multidimensional, advocating for adevelopment model that recognizes the role of religious organizations as civil society actors in order to have a meaningful, compatible, and sustainable development model.

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A Sociological Analysis of Civil Society Success in International Development Project

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Abstract - This paper examines the various determinants of civil society or NGOs success in the international development project.Civil society is a broader concept that consists of all the social groups and social relationships in which humans are embebbed, including family, community, social movements, religious organizations, schools, ethnic groups, clubs, professional associations, PTAs, etc.It refers to the quality of people's social life which includes safety, improved healthcare, mortality, civility, respect for diversity, and so forth. Several scholars have identified various determinants for civil society success, notably in developing nations. These include NGOs' intermediary role; serving as a source for feed-back and integration; and cooperation among competing organizations. Others attribute the success to accountability; collaboration with international activist groups; diffusion of ideas through rapid communication carried out and advanced by certain 'rooted cosmopolitans;' and availability of funds from international donors. The article examines scholars' centripetal and centrifugal on the subject matter and highlights some implications. It concludes that civil society contributes to the international development project through ensuring democracy by mobilizing the public, creating awareness, political participation, advocacy campaigns, and struggle for political rights. It finally posits that, the determinants for civil society/NGO success in international development project are multidimensional, advocating for adevelopment model that recognizes the role of religious organizations as civil society actors in order to have a meaningful, compatible, and sustainable development model.

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I. Introduction

Proceeding from reviewing the definition of civil society, this essay identifies what scholars have considered the determinants of civil society/nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) success in the project of international[1] development. It then explores how authors vary in terms of how they define "success," identifying areas of agreement and disagreement. The essay then examines the authors' sociological explanations for civil society success. Itfinally argues that the Western secular development models and approach fail to deliver in Africa because they contradict the culture and reality of the people, advocating for a holistic approach that is people-oriented, community-driven, and faith-related.

II. Definition/Operationalization of Civil Society Concept

Like many terms in the social sciences, civil society has many definitions[2]. The idea of civil society is the idea of a part of society which has a life of its own, which is distinctly different from the state[3], and which is largely in autonomy from it. Civil society lies beyond the boundaries of the family and the clan and beyond the locality; it lies short of the state (Shils, 2000). From this definition, three main components of civil society could be discerned: a part of society that comprises a complex of autonomous institutions[4]; society possessing particular complex of relationships between itself and the state and a distinctive set of institutions which safeguard the separation of state and civil society and maintain effective ties between them; and a widespread of refined or civil manner.

Persell (1997) defines civil society in terms of institutional and qualitative dimensions. Institutionally, it consists of all the social groups and social relationships in which humans are embebbed. This includes family, community, social movements, religious organizations, schools, ethnic groups, clubs, professional associations, PTAs, and so on. Qualitatively, civil society refers to the quality of people's social life which includes safety, improved healthcare, mortality, civility, respect for diversity, and so forth. Civil society therefore is a broader concept much more than simply the idea of social economy or the third sector since it includes formal and informal social relationships and networks, the institutions in the nonprofit sector, the family, as well as trust, social attitudes, tolerance, and so on.

An important point that Persell succinctly made from his delineation of civil society is its institutional and

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[1] Although, NGOs' service dimensions are numerous, an important distinction needs to be made between international development and humanitarianism. While international development focuses on long-term plans or sustainable projects, humanitarianism is a short-term "remedy" mainly during crisis, war, or disaster. What the two projects share is responsibility/empathy to others. Important tour discussion is that humanitarianism is part of international development and civil society/humanitarian NGOs equally contribute through it.

[2] Only a few will be used here

[3] Although different, but not totally separate: the autonomy is far from complete. Civil society works within the framework set by laws.

[4] Such as economic, religious, political, intellectual- which are distinguishable from the family, clan, locality and the state

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qualitative dimensions which can be viewed as the essence of civil society. Put differently, part of what the civil society concerns with is meeting a perceived need, advancing a cause, or promoting certain interests – which could be of the general public, particular clubs, professional bodies, interest groups, etc. Thus, ensuring improvement of quality of life (what may be considered as development) could be seen as one of the functions of civil society. In the same line of thought, Durning (1989) argues that real development is the process whereby individuals and societies build the capacity to meet their own needs and improve the quality of their own lives. At the individual level, it means self-respect that will enhance personal dignity and subsequently economic progress. Socially, it implies developing the institutions that can promote public good. Physically, it involves finding solutions to the basic necessities of life such as nutrition, access to health care, clean water, shelter and clothing. What are the determinants of NGO success? Mencher (2003) argues that determining success of NGOs in international development project is difficult due to variations in NGOs' missions, their methods of operation, size, location, organizational pattern, resources including sources, funders' interest and monitoring style, target population, and so on. As a result, there is no overarching theory that explains success. Different scholars have offered various explanations for what they consider as the determinants of NGO/civil society success. The next section reviews and contrasts some of these views with regards the project of international development.

III. Determinants of NGO/Civil Society Success in the Project of International Development

Development as a purposeful project of intervention toward improving the lives of people around the world gained popularity after World War II. The project was supported by a liberal philosophy of markets that called for increased financial aid to poorer nations to bolster their economic migration from pre-modern to development (Bonsu and Polsa (2011). The NGO[5] as a sector plays a very important role in the project of international development[6]. Smith (1996) back; provides the ability to liberate individuals and permits them the fullest possibilities for personal posits that in the past three decades the sector has significantly expanded its involvement in international development. Essentially, he argues, NGOs, especially in developing nations at the national and regional levels serve as intermediaries in channeling international assistance to the needy members of their societies. Similarly, Clark (1990) examines the role of voluntary organizations in democratic regimes in Africa, Asia and Latin America with focus on economic projects. His findings revealed that these NGOs have positively impacted on the lives of the rural poor through enhancing skills and resources as against aiming at political participation. He attributed their success to cooperation and partnership between national and regional NGOs with grassroots associations that they formed in order to have a meaningful improvement on their lives.

Keck and Sikkink (1998) identified the various roles of civil society by examining the key role that a network of activists played in ending gross violation of human rights in Argentina by the military in the late 70s. A striking point is how domestic NGOs in collaboration with international ones provided crucial information on the events, lobbied governments and INGOs to show concern, investigate, and effect change. This shows the success of civil society and its potentials to effect change not only at the grassroots level, but equally national as well as in the global politics[7].

With reference to empirical studies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, Fisher (1993) documents and shows how this success story led to a significant growth of such organizations. He had acknowledged the success of NGOs as alternative means of helping the poor and the oppressed in the developing states but was critical of the increase in numbers of the NGOs. He therefore attributed the proliferation of the NGOs to the availability of funds from international donors[8]. Between the mid-1970s and on, American, Canadian, and European NGOs received increasing amounts of home-government subsidies, and they found ready recipients in newly created intermediary NGOs in developing countries- many of which could neither have begun nor continued without foreign assistance (Fisher, 1993). Thus, the intermediary role of the NGOs was vital, yet the resources including funds, human, technical, ideas, etc. that the affluent countries sent were the determinants for success.

Smith (2012) examines the impacts of voluntary sector in some degree to any society to include

[5]Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations among other associations are called the nonprofit sector as the collective name used to describe institutions and organizations in American society that are neither government nor business (Source 2012). As a result, for the purpose of this essay, NGO and civil society will be used interchangeably.

[6] I am using international development project to mean the development projects that started after World War II, which focus on fighting poverty and alleviating suffering while improving the quality of lives in former colonized countries.

[7] Keck and Sikkink (2005) show how transnational advocacy networks influence policies by means of campaigns including at transnational levels. They examined how they contributed in campaigns such as for the abolishing of slavery and for woman suffrage, and foreshadow transnational campaigns in many areas.

[8] The U.S. government in particular was providing more funding to such societies especially where military dictators were ruling.

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providing the society with partially tested innovations, the chance to choose and institutionalize what appears most promising; countervailing definition of reality and morality including ideologies and worldviews; the play (recreation) element of society; and creating social integration. Also, it serves as a source of negative feed-back; provides the ability to liberate individuals and permits them the fullest possibilities for personal capacities and potentials; and contributes to the economic system, particularly in modern industrial society[9].

Domanski (2012) shifts focus by examining competitiveness of NGOs as a determinant for success. His study reveals that the contrasting alternative to competition strategies is strategies of cooperation. He presents a considerably different result from the findings that exist in the U.S. or U.K. where competition between nonprofits is essential in these countries. Domanski argues that the nonprofit sector in the developing nations and particularly in his research area (Poland) is in its embryonic stage. Thus, cooperation among 'competing' NGOs determines the outcome. But perhaps this could be depending on a number of factors including if the donors' criteria for receiving funds require such cooperation or collaboration.

The civil society has succeeded in creating political space through activism, advocacy, and establishing international networks and links. They do that through collaboration with like-minded local and international NGOs, and sometimes appeal to international authorities. In most developing nations, especially in post-colonial Africa, the civil society has been the most powerful force in pressurizing military regimes to hand over to civilians. This has been the case with civilian administrations that aim at self-perpetuation (Kukah, 1999) as was evident in Nigeria during the Obasanjo administration in 2007. The determinants are utilizing professional associations including labor and professional unions, human rights activists, etc. to change the constitution in favor of democracy, participate in voter registration, voting, and other civic engagements.

Similarly, Keck and Sickink (2005) argue that NGOs, particularly advocacy networks[10] have helped and sustained several changes between the late 60s and mid 90s in the Latin America. They posit that these NGOs have built links among actors in civil societies, states, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in many areas, notably human rights, environment, and woman suffrage. Thus, the civil society's success in this regard can be seen through "the boomerang pattern[11]" (Keck and Sikkink 2005:12). Tarrow (2005) corroborates this view by examining the role of ordinary members of communities who gain new worldviews and help in the development of their societies. He attributes the success of this to the diffusion of ideas using rapid communication that result in new forms of action by the "rooted cosmopolitans" who sometimes come up with new identities due to contacts with others across their borders.

Diaz (2012) provides a critique, arguing that despite civil society emerges to address poverty, the sector does not address the needs of the poor and disadvantaged very well because many of the NGOs are run by elites, who neither feel the suffering of the poor nor deliver resources to them. He however exonerates few NGOs notably faith-related agencies. Accountability therefore, Diaz asserts, should be the determinant of the sector's success. Similarly, Diallo and Thuillier (2004) posit that the success of civil society in the international development projects cannot best be determined by only one dimension but by multiple dimensions/parties. It should include the project manager, coordinator, task manager, a supervisor, the project team, steering team, the beneficiaries, and the population at large. This gives a critique of the projects since the development projects, who are mainly technocrats are not the only ones to evaluate the impact of services provided. Similarly, the NGOs as project partners or intermediary are not the only ones to determine projects' success.

IV. Examining Authors' Centripetal and Centrifugal in Defining "Success"

From the above, it is evident that scholars vary on the determinants of civil society success in the international development project. While some attribute the sector's success to the intermediary role of NGOs, others focus on the transfer of resources from the global north to the global south, specifically to NGOs as against governments of the countries. Yet, other scholars attribute the success to cooperation and collaboration between civil organizations, diffusion of resources including ideas, money, technology, empowerment of women, etc. Similarly, accountability, civic engagement, and other indices have been suggested. What appears a consensus among the scholars is that all believe that there is inequality at

[9] Nevertheless, Smith cautions that there are as many negative consequences as there are positive sides of the sector in certain situations in relation to certain values. Thus, he seems neutral, depending on the society and circumstances.

[10] Keck and Sikkink assert that advocacy networks are at both local and international levels but collaborate through information exchange. Transnational advocacy networks must be understood as political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate-formally or informally- the social, cultural, and political meanings of their joint enterprise (2005:3).

[11] Instead of the civil society directly addressing the government, appeals to international community bounces back and pressure is mounted on governments to act, react, or change certain activities.

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various levels: national (within developing nations) and at international (global north and south) levels. It was this inequality that led to the need for the international development project. All authors seem to believe that civil society gives voices to certain groups, notably the underprivileged. This does not rule out other elite and recreational or interest groups. In the same line of thought, Beckfield (2003) posits that global inequality has weakened INGOs and their member states from succeeding in the world polity. He argues that since 1960, the rich, core, Western states and societies dominated the world polity. An important question worthy to ask is "Have the international development projects that are controlled by these dominating nations through various agencies been genuinely programmed to address the causes of the problems, or are they providing palliative solutions?" The next section analyses how the authors agree or disagree.

In order to examine how the scholars agree or vary in terms of their definition of "success," let us treat thematically. Socially, it is striking how the authors, despite variation in the determinants of civil society success, appreciate the value for coming together as a group-based as against individual-focus to address certain issues. This shows that civil society is essential to social vitality and human progress. Free association of individual citizens in such organizations reinforces participatory norms, encourages cooperative interaction, and promotes interpersonal trust- all of which are believed to be crucial for achieving effective solutions to problems facing the wider community (Putnam 2000:171-76). But some scholars like Coleman (1988) will disagree, asserting that social capital is neutral. Still others like Heying (2001) believe that decline in membership and in activities is not a reliable indicator of social engagement. An example is the role of ideas using rapid communication by "rooted cosmopolitans" – a form of activism that has created "the darker side" of transnational relations which has created "clandestine cells of militants[12], international drug links, and traders in human beings" (Tarrow, 2005:43). It is in skepticism of these kinds of 'extreme voices' that Fiorina (1999) questions civic engagement, arguing it is not always absolutely good or does not do harm.

Economically, civil society has contributed huge amounts of dollars given as aids, donations, etc. to empower the poor; provided jobs for staff; and assisted women through credit and thrift societies. While some authors focus on the role of ideas, others focus on face-to-face contacts. Importantly, as Clark (1990) asserts, most NGOs focus on supporting economic projects that have some impact on enhancing skills or resources. It is evident that the civil society has succeeded in collaborating with their donors in innovative activities in areas such as small scale agriculture, water development, environmental protection, basic health and family planning, credit and management training, production and consumer cooperation, etc. Nevertheless, Smith cautions that "The poorest of the poor (the landless, the sick, the elderly, the handicapped) usually do not directly benefit" from all of these grassroots associations because "many NGOs – especially those that are cooperatives or credit unions- require a minimum of resources and skills to participate" (1990:222). In the same line of thought, Diaz (2012) insists, associations must be accountable via these dimensions: financial responsibility, good governance, mission faithfulness, and effectiveness. More so, NGOs[13] must be responsible to the public, members and staff, clients, donors, and government.

In terms of politics, civil society contributes to the international development project through ensuring democracy by mobilizing the public, creating awareness, political participation, advocacy campaigns, and struggle for political rights. Certainly, there are variations in determining "success" among scholars- civic engagement determines "democracy" or "democracy' determines civic or political participation. Put differently, is it the civil society that determines democracy or vice versa? Strikingly, many scholars agree that a strong civil society yields trust and trust is essential because it is the quintessence of a successful modern society. In addition, all scholars agree that democracy, as against despotic regimes is more desirable as it guarantees liberty. It seems all scholars agree or endorse a politically activated civil society that operates as group action as against individual action-level. But scholars differ with regards the relationship between the state and civil society. One conception imagines the civil society united against the state, and another stresses the irreducible pluralism of civil societies in modern days.

Lastly, there seems agreement among authors that civil society plays a very important role in improving the people's lives, especially the most vulnerable or marginalized members of society. Notwithstanding, there does not seem to be consensus as to the particular sector that requires more emphasis- health, education, vocational training, political participation, human rights, gender, or economic empowerment.

[12] Onuoha (2010) argues that radical groups under the banner of "Civil Society" in Nigeria including sectarian, ethnic and religious militants such as *Boko Haram* are dangerous as they pick up arms and engage in violence that claims the lives of many innocent persons. The acts of these militants are undoubtedly products of "rooted cosmopolitans" with negative attendant consequences on Sub-Saharan Africa and the international community.

[13] Smith (2010) examines why NGOs proliferated so widely in Nigeria and he found that most of them, especially in the health-related sector, are fake. What they actually do is follow the band wagon of donors- since the donors' focus is fighting HIV/AIDS and related diseases, then the "AIDS NGOs" shift their "missions," "visions," and "focus," to the directions of the donors.

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A reflection at this point may be on the service dimensions of the NGOs[14]. The UNDP Report of 2003 posits that NGOs have recorded a huge success in improving the living standards of the poor. They have increased women empowerment, assisted farmers, fought diseases, and many more. What accounted for their success was targeting women and involving them in support groups, establishing credit and thrift societies, emphasizing empowerment, health and family planning programs, and attitudinal reorientation. This has in the long run led to eroding some stereotypes that were neglecting women as actors in the implementation of meaningful development. Women empowerment, fighting poverty, access to and improved healthcare are certainly some of the challenges in the developing world. But how are these measured: qualitatively or quantitatively? Who measures them? Using what indices or scales?

As Portes (1998) argues, involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community as a staple notion, whose source can be dated back to the works of classical sociologists like Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. Durkheim's work on social solidarity emphasizes group life as an antidote to normlessness or anomie and self-destruction. On the other hand, Marx's distinction between an atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-for-itself shows how mobilization, civic engagement, and collective action can influence change[15]. Similarly, Reid (1999) posits, NGOs strengthen democracy by giving citizens a variety of opportunities to meet and talk, build civic skills, and assemble their resources for joint action (1999:291). This is similar to Max Weber's (1991) Rational Action[16] – which views human actions or behaviors (example by joining voluntary associations)as related to cause and effect in the social realm. The implication of this extends to all actors: individuals in civil society, politicians or bureaucrats representing the state, the donor agencies, and the society at large.

V. Conclusion

This essay began by definition of civil society, and then identified various authors' views on the determinants of civil society/NGO success in the project of international development. It then examined how the authors agreed or otherwise vis-à-vis defining "success." Finally, the essay attempted to critique determinants of the success, providing some sociological explanations. Generally and broadly, civil society plays many important roles including socialization, public and quasi-public functions, as well as representative functions at grassroots, national, and international levels. Despite challenges, the civil society in the target countries (developing nations) nevertheless, continues to contribute to the project of international development. The sector has served as an intermediary between donors and the target population in virtually all aspects of human life, notably health, education[17], politics, and social. There are many points of divergence among scholars on the meaning of civil society, its role in the society, and what factors determine the success of the sector in the international development project and in sustainable development. It can be argued that the different conceptions of civil society's definition have led to variations in scholars' expectations about what its role is vis-à-vis modern polities as well as its relationship to the state. Nevertheless, there seems to be agreement among scholars that there is inequality at various levels, notably in the developing nations as well as at the global north and south. More so, scholars do not seem to disagree on the need to assist in improving the quality of people's lives in the global south which faces many problems from lack of democracy, corruption, poverty, diseases, illiteracy, human rights violations, marginalization, etc.

Importantly, despite disagreement about the determinants of "success," scholars believe that the governments in many of these countries may not be able to deliver or "develop," thus creating a niche for the civil society to perform intermediary or complementary functions. Some dilemmas notwithstanding are: What kind of development do these countries need? Whose understanding of the problem? Who defines or determines the development model: donor agencies or the people? Should the development project be funding-driven or community-oriented? How is the relationship between the donors and the recipients: mutual or appendage/exploitative? How genuine and accountable are the NGOs that serve as intermediaries? What conditions will warrant the flourish of civil society and what then will be the role of the state in these countries?

Certainly, as Kukah (1999) rightly asserts, Africa seeks some form of democracy, civil society and the associated institutions as a result of survival- which the present political elite and the development agencies are unable to deliver. It is against this background that this articleadvocates for a development model that is compatible with the target societies for the international development projects. In Africa for instance, secular

[14]For details about various forms of NGOs including service agencies and dimensions see Smith and Lipsky (2012).

[15] This does not mean Karl Marx believes or sees civil society in positive terms. Instead, he views civil society as the sphere where the interest of the bourgeoisie is protected – civil society as the realm of inequality, plurality, and competing interests meant little more than "man's exploitation by man" (Marx, [1873] (1996) On Jewish Question

[16] Weber classified human social action into: rational, instrumental, affectional, and traditional

[17] It is interesting that in Nigeria and many other developing nations now private universities are springing up in collaboration with the advanced countries. Some examples are the ABTI-American University, the Nigerian-Turkish international school, etc.

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development models usually fail partly because, they do not fit the realities of the people. Corroborating this view, Deneulin and Rakodi (2001) posit, "[T]he role of religious organizations as civil society actors has to be reckoned with, not only in the delivery of social services but also in advocacy" (2011:8). As if invoking Deneulin and Rakodi on that, Clarke concludes, "Put simply, in development contexts, *faith matters*[18]" (2006:846).

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[18] Emphasis in original

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