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Pressure groups and policy process in Nigeria: a case of fourth republic

Okeke, Vincent Onyekwelu Sunday Phd

Faculty of Social Sciences, Department Of Political Science, Anambra State University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: okekevos@yahoo.com; Phone: 08033847373

The policy process is a large process with so many actors participating in it and contributing to as well as influencing its outcome. Pressure groups have existed in Nigeria even before independence. The height of their activities was during the military rule when the political environment was too restrictive on their activities leading to the banning of some of the pressure groups. However, the fourth republic in Nigeria has also witnessed rise in their activities. Based on the enormous work which pressure groups do in every political system in especially in the policy process and the ensuing argument over their usefulness, this work has studies pressure groups in Nigeria in the fourth republic to ascertain the role they have played in the policy process in the fourth republic. This work is located in the Group Theory of policy making and analysis. In the methodology, the work was carried out using qualitative research method. Data was collected from already existing literature while the analysis was carried out with qualitative content analysis method. The work found out that pressure groups in Nigeria have actually influenced to a great extent policy processes and outcomes one of which is the passing of the Freedom of Information Law. The research has recommended more strengthening of the pressure groups in Nigeria to ensure that a lacuna is not created in their roles.

Keywords: Pressure Groups, Policy Process, Nigeria and Fourth Republic

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Democracy is popularly described as that type of government that seeks to support the full participation of the people in decision making and for the welfare of the general people. It is also a situation where the people's government is run by the representatives elected by the people as is available in modern democracies. Since the countries today have large populations spread over vast territories, almost all the democratic governments are representative governments. People get themselves represented in the government by participating in the affairs of the government and the most notable participation of the people takes place through elections.

Most of the candidates who contest for positions during elections are often nominated by political organizations known as political parties, though some of them contest elections as independent candidates. Though many political parties put up their candidates in elections, participation of the people does not begin and end with elections. They also participate in the process of governance mostly through groups known as pressure groups or interest group. A pressure group is an interest group which exerts pressure on the government or the decision-makers for the fulfillment of their interests. It is important to make a distinction between an interest group

and a pressure group. Interest groups may exist without even exerting influence on the government or the decision-makers. But unless a group exerts such pressure to influence or pressurize the authorities in order to achieve the desired objects, it may not be a pressure group.The policy process is influenced by a range of interest groups that exert power and authority over policy-making. These influences affect each stage of the process from agenda setting, to the identification of alternatives, weighing up the options, choosing the most favourable and implementing it. 'Policy practices are not in fact just a rational search. A crucial aspect of all policy practice is actually and specifically what and who is included. Grindle and Thomas (1991) summarise the wide-ranging debate within political science on interest groups and the exertion of power and influence.

Furthermore, the biggest instrument for operation of every government is public policy. Private interest groups and administrative agencies have come to be the principal originators of policy, while legislative groups, along with administrative and private groups, are the major shapers of public policy. The role of private groups depends upon the cultural setting within which they operate and the nature of the policy-making process. An interest group may succeed in shaping public policy when it is able to identify its conception of desirable policy with prevailing attitudes of the public and when it has access to the major centers of policy determination. The ability of a group to gain or exploit access is limited by certain factors which, to a large extent, are not subject to its control. Interest groups plausibly include all intermediary bodies that form the substance of state and society. They mobilize voters in elections, influence the representative process, provide people with various opportunities for participation, disseminate various kinds of information, exert influence on policy making and implementation, and attempt to have favorable information and opinion reflected in decision making. Pressure Groups are distinct from political parties in the sense that they do not seek political posts and they do not contest elections. But one important element that makes them what they are is the function which they play in every political system and more, in a democratic state. This function has to do with being a watchdog to the government, ensuring that the government does not make policies that are arbitrary to their members and indeed, the entire populace in the state. They achieve these objectives through different means like strikes, protests, lobbying, petitions and others.

In Nigeria, there are a lot of pressure groups which play different roles in different capacities. (e.g the Nigerian Labour Congress, Nigerian Union of Teachers, Nigerian Union of Journalists, the Trade Union Congress etc). These pressure groups have operated in different areas of the polity and have also contributed immensely. However, though they have been praised in some quarters for their contributions in the political system in

general and the policy process in particular, they have also received criticisms by some Nigerians and foreigners. The criticisms against pressure groups have often come on the selfish interest of their members which they most times pursue without considering the macro effect such interest will have on the entire masses and the political system in general. Most times, some of the policy demands which the pressure groups make on the government seem detrimental to the political system if actually implemented. At other times, when the government makes policies that may not be for the good interest of the people, some pressure groups tend to overlook such policies if it does not directly have any negative effect on their members. At other times, the means which they use in pursuing their interest too turn out to cause more harm than good on the polity. The lackluster attitude of the pressure groups in Nigeria have also helped in making it easy for the legislature in Nigeria to make meaningless laws for the country and laws that do not benefit the common man on the street. Thus, pressure groups have received many criticisms in Nigeria on account of their activities and their contributions to the policy process and the political system of the country.

Based on the above, this research work looks at the role of pressure groups in the policy process in Nigeria especially in the fourth republic especially in the light of arbitrary laws being made by the government in recent times that do not conform to democratic practices. The work also studies the role of pressure groups in Nigeria in the consolidation of Democracy in the country. Thus, we shall be guided by the following questions:

1.   Have Pressure groups in Nigeria contributed positively to the policy process in the country in the fourth republic?

2.   Have pressure groups strengthened the democratic process in Nigeria through policy process in the fourth republic?

We have chosen The Labour and Civil Society Coalition **(**LASCO) as our case since it encompasses many pressure groups that have come under one big umbrella as a coalition.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF PRESSURE GROUPS

PRESSURE GROUPS

Pressure or interest groups have been varyingly defined. They are seen as any organised groups which attempt to influence Government decisions without seeking itself to exercise the formal powers of government. They can also be described as 'interest groups', 'lobby groups' or 'protest groups'. Again, Pressure groups are organizations that seek to exert influence on government from outside. They do not therefore put candidates up for election or seek in other ways to 'win' government power. In that sense, they are part of civil society.

However, for the purpose of this research work, Pressure Group is construed in line with the general definition of groups that seek to influence government policies in any way for the favour of or against any group in the political system but who do not seek to win government power or seat. Thus, the term 'Pressure Groups' here is used to represent four categories of groups in Nigeria's political system. These include:

A. Specialised Research and Advocacy Groups: these are few without a membership base but effective think-tank research and policy advocacy NGOs. They have easy access to the Nigeria policy makers and have established cordial relationship with the foreign donors .e.g. Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD); Centre for Advanced Social Sciences (CASS); African Leadership Forum (ALF), Centre for Research and Documentation (CRD) etc. Some of these organisations do not only participate in drafting key policy documents for the governments, they also consult for the present regime on governance, economic, security and development issues. In a nutshell, these organizations share similar characteristics in term of influence over policy formulation with IDASA in South Africa (Robinson and Friedman, 2005). They have contributed significantly through research and advocacy to deepen democratic practices under the present Nigerian government.

B. 'Specialised' Human Rights and Democracy Advocacy Groups: These are organisations founded by individuals, mostly during the Military regimes. Democratic credential within these types of organisations is usually poor. Most of them do not have members but few board members that are appointed by the founding directors. However, they specialize in redressing and campaigning against gender and human Rights violations while majority of them are donor driven. (Work on election today and HIV/AIDs tomorrow). Few of them like Gender and Development Action (GADA), Women Advocacy Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Human Rights Law Services (HURILAW), etc are fairly active in policy influence and less donor driven. Nevertheless, most of these human rights and democracy focused organisations are yet to be transformed from adopting militant advocacy strategy in their dealings with the present 'democratic' government, hence their limited contribution to the democratization process in contemporary Nigeria.

C. Networks and Coalitions: These are coalitions and networks formed by individuals and organisations (NGOs and CBOs) to campaign for specific changes to the Nigeria policy and or legal frameworks; eg Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) established to campaign for a nationally acceptable Nigerian constitution, Electoral Reform Network (ERN) set up to campaign for a legitimate national electoral law, Transitional Monitoring Group (TMG) set up to monitor transition programmes. Members of these coalitions and networks come from different type of CSOs identified in this paper and each of the above coalition has more than 100 organisations as members across the country; other characteristics of these coalitions include elections of officials by members (majority of them have strong internal democracy, however 'regular' elections depend on availability of funds as most of these organisations depend on donors and not membership dues for survival); effective in policy influence- TMG, CFCR and ERN, for instance, have produced alternative electoral laws and constitutions for the country and some of their recommendations are presently finding their ways into the new proposed Nigerian Electoral law and Constitution being drafted by the Nigerian legislators.

D. Trade Unions and Professional Bodies: These are organisations established to influence policies in favour of their members. They are very active in influencing economic and less of political policies. One of the leading and effective members of this group is the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC); it has a vibrant internal democracy, financially viable (less dependent on foreign donors) and is popular in mobilizing Nigerian workers to go on strike when the need arises and the government is aware of this strength and it is well respected for it. However, this strength has not been effectively utilised to deepen democratic practices from 1999 to date. Some of these organisations are beginning to collaborate with pro-democracy organisations on governance and human rights issues but such collaborations have been less effective.

E. Community Based Organisations (CBOs): These are organisations formed by people living in the rural communities. The formation of most of these organisations dates back to 1980s and they were founded mainly to respond to the economic challenges of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). These organisations are still very active and effective on economic but ineffective on governance and democratic issues till date. There is also a strong disconnection between this group and the effective urban based pro-democracy, research and policy advocacy organisations and for this and other reasons; the CBOs have been less effective in influencing democratic practices at the local government level.

PRESSURE GROUPS: Definition and Types

Pressure group, body, organized or unorganized, that actively seeks to promote its particular interests within a society by exerting pressure on public officials and agencies. Pressure groups direct their efforts toward influencing legislative and executive branches of government, political parties, and sometimes general public opinion. According to Clarke (1998), "interest groups are private, non-profit, professional organisations, with a distinctive legal character, concerned with public welfare goals". Baldo and Sibthorpe (1998) are more comprehensive in their definition of interest groups: "Interest groups form part of civil society which is defined as the wide range of voluntary associations that occupy the broad terrain between the individual and state, and which are the primary means by which citizens can articulate their interests to both the state and to the society at large". All in all these groups have but one purpose and that is to influence the political decision-making process (Ball, 1988) while remaining apart from it (Duverger, 1972). The term *pressure group* is used interchangeably with such terms as *interest groups* or *organized interests*. Henry Ehrman (1972) defines pressure groups as voluntary associations of individuals who band together for the defence of a particular interest. *Interest* in this sense is a conscious desire to have a public policy or the authoritative allocation of values, and to move in a particular, general or specific direction. Barber (1975) categorized pressure groups generally into two, namely *defensive pressure groups* and *promotional pressure groups*. While defensive pressure groups are basically concerned with the protection of their members' interests and have a defined membership, promotional pressure groups are concerned with promoting some general public interest as opposed to their own self-interest. Trade or industrial unions, professional associations and human rights associations therefore fall into the category of promotional pressure groups, otherwise referred to here as functional pressure groups. According to John and Erna Perry (1976), interest groups or pressure groups are many and varied. Some are formally organized, others are not. However, the more formally organized tend to be the more durable whereas those informally organized usually dissolve after the crisis that originated them is resolved. The longevity or durability or these groups, their consistency as well as their high sense of commitment to the realization of set goals all contribute to making them functional.

Functional pressure groups can therefore be defined as those pressure or interest groups whose activities are not limited or restricted to the promotion and protection of parochial interests but who are vocal and determined in pursuing policies and goals that have relevance to citizens in their own society. Viewed within the context of political participation, such groups often criticize unpopular or unfavourable government policies,

organized conferences, seminars, rallies, and even demonstrations or protest marches to express their displeasure and, in some cases, to suggest alternatives to programmes or policies which they consider unfavourable. Functional groups work towards sensitizing and mobilizing the populace against unpopular acts of government. In this respect, mention could be made of such groups as the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), human rights organisations such as the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), as well as pro-democracy groups such as the Campaign for Democracy (CD), Academic Staff Union of Universities, (ASUU), National Association of Nigerian Students, and the Press.

Operations and Tactics of Pressure Groups

Interest groups have a wide array of tactics and political strategies at their disposal. Different groups have different characteristics that produce a variety of strategies of influence (Whiteley and Winyard, 1987). According to Sadie (1998), no group confines itself to a single strategy or tries to exert influence through just one channel. Two types of influencing techniques can be discerned: direct personal communication with decision-makers and indirect contact via the media as well as public opinion. Strategies of direct communication include deputations to politicians and the personal presentation of research results and testimonies at legislative hearings. These techniques are found to be the most effective (Sadie, 1998). Litigation can also fall under this type of contact and can be just as effective (Hjelmar, 1996). Less effective methods of impersonal communication are letters, telegrams and public relations campaigns. Tactics that fall under indirect communication include petitions, protests, strikes and demonstrations to civil obedience (Sadie, 1998). The techniques commonly employed by pressure groups to achieve their aims include campaigns, demonstrations or marches, and strikes. Specifically in Nigeria, pressure groups like the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), as well as National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), have made themselves relevant not only in terms of what they have been able to achieve for their members but also for the larger society. The NLC, for instance, successfully negotiated a new minimum wage with the Shagari administration in 1981 after an effective general strike. Similarly NMA has consistently been in the forefront of negotiating an exclusive and improved salary package for its members. In the same vein, the opposition to the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme, spearheaded by NANS in 1989 led to the introduction of SAP relief packages for Nigerians, particularly the working class. However, political developments in the country in the

1980s and early 1990s have not only toughened some pressure groups but have also resulted in the emergence and growth of new ones. This development has led to the increased involvement of more assertive pressure groups in efforts to attain and sustain a stable democratic order in the country. Occasionally, interest groups manage to have their representatives appointed to government boards that have advisory or regulatory power over their interests. The need for pressure group as a vehicle to obtain access to government is also prompted by the rather high degree of diffidence individual citizen's show towards personally approaching officials at any level of government. Pressure groups may also use a variety of methods to pursue their requirements. These include – lobbying state members and the Parliament via petitions, letters and deputations; consulting with ministers or senior public servants; hiring professional lobbyists; taking legal action through injunctions or appeals to higher courts; campaigning for, or opposing, certain candidates at elections; demonstrating outside Parliament and government offices or marching in the streets; and using the industrial muscle of strikes for political purposes.

Because of the complexities of modern government, and the pluralistic nature of contemporary world, pressure groups provide a means by which ordinary citizens can participate in the decision-making process, as well as maintaining a check on government activity. Similarly, governments can be better informed of the electorate's sensitivities to policies, because of the pressures articulated by these groups.

Pressure/Interest Groups' Strengths and Weaknesses

Interest groups, like political parties, form one of the major links between government and the governed in today's society (Heywood, 1997), and they are distinguishing features of democratic regimes (Sadie, 1998). However, they also encounter several problems in the political system. A myriad factor that can further or hamper influence can be identified. Such indices can count in their thousands and can, at worst, sketch a very confusing picture. To simplify matters, these factors can be divided into three main categories: those that have a bearing on the characteristics and nature of the group itself, those related to the nature of the political system, and those related to the political culture in a society (Sadie, 1991).

Regarding the characteristics and nature of the group, the following aspects can play a role: the size and cohesion of the group, its degree of legitimacy, the sanctions it can bring to bear in pursuit of its objectives (and conversely its usefulness to those in power), and the relationship between the group and the party in power. The group's aspirations should fit in with the general values held by society (Sadie, 1991) otherwise they will hamper their influence. The type of group that is trying to influence the state can also be an indicator of the group's effectiveness. Insider groups enjoy a privileged and usually institutionalised access to government through routine consultation or representation on government bodies. Outsider groups, both in relation to the government and geographically (i.e. situated outside the country) are either not consulted by government or only consulted irregularly and not usually by a senior level. Radical groups in the field of environmental protection fit this profile of being outsiders. Their goals are frequently out of step with government policy (Heywood, 1997) and are therefore not very influential. The nature of the political system, both internally and internationally, is also an important factor that can help or impair influence. Nationally, in pluralist systems that accept social diversity within an agreed framework, the expression of social interests is relatively unhindered, and indeed even encouraged by competition between parties (Sadie, 1991). Because of the pluralist character of a society, the impact of interest group influence is greater in the advanced industrial states than in the developing world (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1997). The party system, structure and ideology can also help in the exercise of influence. If political parties are weak, party discipline is lacking and there are no strong ideological differences between parties, the interest groups have a greater chance of exerting influence. How open to advice the head of government or state department is, is also important (Sadie, 1991). The character of the international political system can play a role in the influence exerted by interest groups across borders. States remain the dominant actors in world politics. Their interests, capabilities and goals shape world politics. However, the supremacy of the state has been severely challenged. World affairs are increasingly being influenced by organisations transcending international borders (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1997). This does not mean that interest groups are on a par with the states. There is still a clear hierarchy or pecking order in the world political system. At the top of this order are states, followed by international governmental organisations (IGOs), like the United Nations (UN), and lastly by interest groups. To Kegley and Wittkopf (1997), 95% of international organisations are non-governmental.

However, the remaining 5% are more important to states because their members are states. The IGOs that governments create and join will remain important as long as the importance of states persists. Because of this, interest groups might try to influence IGOs, whose members are states, and in turn these IGOs might have an influence over states. This is a form of indirect influence. Interests groups can operate in a consultative capacity to IGOs that operate as servants of the state, but only if states allow these interest groups to play a role in IGOs. Globalisation also has an effect on the

operation of interest groups. Interest group activity has increasingly adjusted to the impact of this phenomenon and the strengthening of supranational bodies. The groups that are best suited to take advantage of such a shift are charities and environmental bodies, such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (FOE), which already possess transnational structures and an international membership (Heywood, 1997). Does this mean that they are more effective in their influencing endeavours? They seem to be better placed to exert influence because of globalisation. Globalisation has had an effect on the influence of interest groups in that states have become more porous to outside sway and transactions (Holsti, 1995). The advent of modern communication systems means that more people can be reached *via* the media and the internet, and that ideas can flow more easily across borders. Not only can interest groups reach more people, but they are also able to form coalitions that span the globe, and so enhance their ability to exert more influence. This does not mean that they are always successful in influencing of policy decisions. The third aspect that promotes or handicaps influence is the dominant political culture in a society. Political culture refers to the set of values inherent in a political system. The political culture, according to Heywood (1997), is crucial for two reasons. Firstly, it determines whether or not interest groups are viewed as legitimate or non-legitimate actors, and whether or not their formation and influence are permitted and encouraged. For example, in communist and some developing countries interest groups are not generally tolerated. Secondly, it affects the willingness of people to form or join organised interests or to engage in group politics. Internationally, the aspect of toleration of interest groups has an effect on the operation of interest groups across borders. The end of the Cold War had a profound effect on the influence of interest groups over states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many communist and military ruled countries in the developing world embraced democracy. This presented fertile ground for interest groups to exert influence over other governments.

PUBLIC POLICY: Definitions

Public policy is the principled guide to action taken by the administrative executive branches of the state with regard to a class of issues in a manner consistent with law and institutional customs. Siegel and Weinberg (1977) once argued that "public policies are shaped (or made) when government or comparable authorities decide whether or not to alter aspects of community life)". They further argued that "polities are public to the extent that they involve governmental or quasi-governmental decision

making and determine the interest of the community." And, that whenever we dwell on public policies, we focus on governmental actions and the consequences that flow from them". Contributing to the explanatory efforts on the subject - matter of public policy, Eyestone (1977) broadly defined public policy "as the relationship of a government unit to its environment, a position that tallies with that of Anderson (1975) in his system analysis to demands arising from its environment". While Dye (1972) defined public policy as "whatever government choose to do or not to do", to Richard Rose (1969) public policy is "a long series of more or less related activities." James Anderson (1975) sees it as "a purposive course of action followed by an actor or a set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern*."* He has additionally examined the concept of public policy through various theoretical perspectives. These ranged from the perspective of political system theory, group theory, elite theory, functional process theory, institutional theory, incrementalism, game theory to public choice. Each of these perspectives viewed the subject matter of (public) policy differently in terms of the compelling influences and authoritativeness involved in public policy-making.

Factors that Shape Public Policy

Literature also exists on what actually transpires in the policy process. It has been established that certain factors affect public policies while they are being made. This is the concern of scholars like Sharma and Sadana (2010) who stated that:

> Policy is not made in a vacuum. Those who are in charge of formulating it are constantly subject to influences of various kinds. First and foremost influence on policy-making is that of the environment in which a political system operates. Environment broadly comprises institutions (economic and social), history, law, ethics, philosophy, religion, education, tradition, beliefs, values, symbols, myths etc, which may be described as material as well as non-material culture.

Other factors that affect policy making, according to Sharma and Sadana include external environment, as states are members of the comity of nations, ideology of the state, political leadership and personalities of the leaders, political parties and pressure or interest groups, the bureaucracy, and constituency of the administrative policy with the constitution. In the same vein, Sharkensky, as cited by Yahaya in Maduabum (2003), believes that:

Several features of the economic, social and political environment of a jurisdiction can influence the kind of policy decisions which officials make and they can influence the translation of policy into outputs and impact. Certain features of the environment may intervene between policies and their outputs or between outputs and their impact on the community.

Yahaya further maintained that:

The environment therefore, constitutes a dominant factor in policy formulation and execution. Perhaps, we should add the cultural aspect to the environmental elements which have been identified above. We also need to emphasize that the factors influencing policy-making can be external or internal to the particular system we are analyzing.

In their view, Dimock et al (1953:354), stated that many policies are decided by top executives but often their hands are forced by pressure groups. This is especially true of course, in government service; but with the growing power of organized labour and the tendency of government increasingly to interfere in the private sector of the economy, pressure groups are now also a significant factor in business enterprises.From the literature review, we can understand that public policy is an instrument in the hands of government for controlling and organizing the state. The outcome of a policy can be influenced by many factors one of which is the nature of the environment of such policy and pressure groups form part of the environment of public policy. They, in fact bear strong influence on the policy process. We shall demonstrate in this work how this process has worked out in Nigeria's fourth republic.

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

We generated the data used in this work from books, journals, newspapers, magazines, government publications, internet materials and non-governmental organizations. The available data were analyzed using content analysis method in conjunction with the theoretical framework adopted in the work.

Group Theory

The group theory of politics emanated as a failure of the elite theory in explaining politics in a pluralist model, in which power, instead of being concentrated in the hands of a group or class, is treated as diffused among many interest group or class, is treated as diffused among many interest groups competing against each other for power. The group theory which emanated from the classic work of A.F Bentley's "*The Process of Government*" (1908), argues that groups are not just important, but they define the policy process (John, 1998). The society itself, according to Bentley, is nothing but the complex of groups that compose it. The group theorists argue that public policy is the product of group struggle. According to Anderson (1975), Group theory rests on the contention that interaction and struggle among groups is the central fact of political life. Continuing, Anderson states that, the individual is significant in politics only as he is participant in, or a representative of groups. Public policy, at any given time, will reflect the interests of dominant groups. Bentley (1908), to whom the origin of the group theory in its present form can be traced introduced the concept of "interest" in trying to answer the question as to what gives direction to group activity. According to him, it is this interest that differentiates a genuine group from a coincidental collection of people or what he refers to as "castigational group". However, this interest which is a shared attitude concerning a claim or to be made by one group upon certain other group in a social system sometimes are in conflict (Varma, 1975). The ability or capability of the state therefore to absorb these various interests which are later expanded on the state as demands could go a long way to ensure stability for the entire system as a whole.

Truman (1951), another group theorist contribution of concepts like access and other related concepts such as resources, organization, and leadership and so on would include that a group ability to influence government decisions as a function of the group access is dependent upon the group resources, leadership, and organization and so on. On the other hand, these means that a group's inability to influence government decision could be adduced to lack of resources, influence, access which can hinder their effectiveness. Pressure group ineffectiveness in Nigeria's political can be explained in terms of lacking the necessary pre-requisite to stand independently from the state. As a group therefore, there is need not only to define their interest but also to have access to decision making or influence decision making in the party.

Though the group theory has mainly been criticized on the grounds that it reduces everything to the working of group, and leaves both the individual and the society out from its consideration, the group theory captures well, the analysis of pressure groups and public policy process in Nigeria, as several groups have continued to play different roles in it. Nigerian politics and political environment comprises many groups with different interests. These groups have made different contributions to the policy process in the country as we shall discuss later in this work. Thus, the group theory of policy process is very adequate for showing the relevance of

pressure groups in the policy process in Nigeria.

THE ROLE OF PRESSURE GROUPS ON PUBLIC POLICY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Pressure Groups in Nigeria have played different roles in the policy process in Nigeria especially in the fourth republic. In this work we have categorized these roles as follows:

i. Protection of Human Rights - Child Labor and Human Trafficking

Every day in our society, children are exploited and forced to work to supplement family incomes. A major result of this situation is that the child is unable to access education, which hinders his or her development. To curb this ugly situation in Nigeria, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on human rights and children's rights issues have partnered with the state for the enactment of the Child Rights Law. The legislation has been passed in 11 states of the Federation (CSI, 2007). However, more effort is needed to ensure the law is passed in all states of the federation. Secondly, People involved in human trafficking, do export young people across borders for the purposes of prostitution and related forms of exploitation. According to a study conducted by CSI (2007), CSOs have responded to this through advocacy campaigns. The establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition in Trafficking of Persons (NAPTP) indicates some success by CSOs.

ii. Monitoring the National Budgeting Process

According to CSI (2007), CSOs have established the Budget Law and the fiscal responsibility initiative to help monitor the process. They are also working with the legislature to develop inclusive budget laws at national and regional levels. Despite these initiatives, it is still early to make conclusions on the effectiveness of CSOs in the national budgeting process, since they have only been active in this area since 2003.

iii. Campaign for Legal Reforms in the National Assembly

The passing of the Freedom of Information Act would have been a mirage in Nigeria but for a CSO called Media Rights Agenda, which alongside others, sponsored a private member bill on the issue at the National Assembly (Ojo, 2011). An ongoing struggle of CSOs is the campaign for a new constitution for the country through the convocation of a sovereign national conference (SNG). This has not been achieved because the issue has been given an ethnic coloration among the CSOs (Ikubaje, 2011). However, hopes are high that it will one day come to light.

iv. Guarding against Unpopular Policies

Pressure Groups in Nigeria have succeeded greatly in forcing the government to revert several unpopular policies. This is achieved through several strategies one of which is by strikes and protests. Kunle (2012) observed that when the federal government unilaterally removed subsidy on petrol or Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), with its attendant increase in fuel prices and hardships on the citizens in January 2012, CSOs, led by the NLC, mobilized Nigerians from all walks of life for what they described as the "mother of all protests". The government reversed the policy to N97.00/litre, in favor of the citizens, thereby forestalling unnecessary pressures that could jeopardize the democratic process.

THE ROLE OF PRESSURE GROUPS IN DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Generally, Pressure groups in Nigeria have performed very significant roles in democratic consolidation in Nigeria in the current fourth republic. These roles are performed by the different groups which we have categorized generally as pressure groups in the definition of terms (civil society organizations, trade unions, NGOs etc). The roles which pressure groups in Nigeria have played in the fourth republic to ensure the consolidation of Nigeria's Democracy and in the long run improve policy process are discussed below.

i. Monitoring Role

This varies from one programme and organisation to another. The monitoring of the executive and legislatures for accountability and good governance for instance are most prevalent among the specialised research and advocacy NGOs while census, elections and budget implementation monitoring are common among the Networks and coalitions. They have been performing this role, pointing to mistakes and how governments can overcome such mistakes.

ii. Capacity Building Role

Training and sensitization of citizens on their democratic and human rights and how these rights can be protected e.g. the rights of the citizens to hold accountable the elected representatives etc. This capacity building is not

restricted to the citizens alone, the elected representatives have also benefited from such trainings e.g., democratic control of military and security establishments, the making of participatory and gender sensitive budgets etc. This type of capacity building role is common among all the civil society groups aside from the CBOs.

iii. Advocacy Role

Like the above two, CSOs advocacy role varies. One area that CSOs have significantly contributed to the deepening of democratic governance from 1999 to date is through the campaign for legal reforms and introduction of new laws. For instance, the Freedom of Information Bill that has been passed into law by the House of Representative but awaiting the Senate passage was initiated by Freedom of Information Coalition (FOI) This private bill was initiated by CSOs and handed over to the legislature for passage.

Again, the campaign for a new constitution for the country through the convocation of a sovereign national conference is also part of the advocacy role of CSOs. The 1999 Nigerian constitution was drafted by the military regime; Nigerian civil society argues that the constitution is legal but illegitimate and it would take the convocation of a national sovereign conference of all Nigerian representatives to make a legitimate constitution for the country. Initially, the government condemned outrightly, the civil society's demands that the government should convene a conference to draft a new constitution "sovereign' or no sovereign". It argued that the national assembly has the constitutional power to amend the Nigerian constitution but due to pressures, it accepted to organise a National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) at last. The recommendations of the NPRC are part of what the National Assembly is presently working on to draft a new constitution for the country.

iv. Disciplinary Role

Finally, the civil society has also been mobilising the citizens and call on government to discipline some of the elected representatives and bureaucrats for misconduct while in office through recalls and dismissal (though they have not been successful in this role). More efforts and capacity building- training and fiscal resources are needed to be successful in this role.

v. Ensuring credible Elections

In electoral terms, observation implies systematic and comprehensive gathering of information about a process in order to be able to come up with a qualified judgment.

Igbuzo (2011) noted that the 1999 and 2003 elections saw CSOs conducting voters' education programs. Citizens were mobilized to come out to vote for candidates of their choice. Unfortunately, citizens came out but were disappointed when they realized that in some cases, votes did not count. Despite this, there is a need for CSOs to build more efforts on voters' education, because, it is basic to engaging other strategies. Igbuzo (2011) further stated that CSOs indeed trained some citizens and communities on the protection of mandate in preparation for the 2007 elections. This, according to him, involved a series of tools and strategies that citizens could use to engage political parties, security agents and electoral officers to prevent manipulation of electoral franchise.

However, Ojo (2011) revealed that the 2007 elections and bye-elections were characterized by massive rigging, ballot snatching, violence and other corrupt practices. The late President, Musa Yar'Adua, actually admitted that the elections were flawed, despite the inputs of CSOs in the system. Furthermore, during the preparations for the 2011 elections, CSOs embarked on voters' education. Some other CSOs deployed thousands of observers to follow through and report on the electoral process. Ojo (2011) noted that some members of the civil society also shed the toga of being armchair critics by joining the political fray to contest elections. Examples are; Governors Adams Oshiomole and Kayode Fayemi. Nevertheless, it was observed that there were violent protests in the North, as the Northern political elites claimed that the elections were rigged by the ruling party. Many lives and properties were lost in the carnage. This implies that the CSOs need to step up on voters' education in Northern Nigeria. The challenge in this regard, however, has been the persistent religious crisis and insecurity in that part, which has made it difficult for CSOs to have the needed results.

vi. **Guarding against Democratic Threats**

Ojo (2011) stated that ex-President Obasanjo's administration had attempted to tinker with the Nigerian constitution in 2005/2006, to insert a tenure elongation clause, but the plot was primarily shot down by the parliamentarians with pressure from the civil rights groups. Thereafter, in 2010, CSOs rose to the occasion to demand for the recognition of the then Vice President G. Jonathan as the Acting President, when late President Musa Yar'Adua was ill disposed abroad. CSOs such as the Save Nigeria Group and Enough is Enough Group actually seized the initiative and demanded for a resolution that will give due recognition to vice president as acting president. This led to the adoption of the now popular 'Doctrine of Necessity' by the National Assembly in March 2010. (Igbuzor, 2011). It should be noted that the CSOs need to cover more grounds in this role. For

instance, they have not done much to curb the unprecedented corruption among the ruling class, which has become a great threat to the survival of democracy in Nigeria.

With the above cases cited, it is very glaring that pressure groups have contributed immensely and positively to the policy process and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Pressure/Interest groups are major channel through which citizens express their opinion in political system. In Nigeria, they have contributed immensely in checkmating the excesses of both the legislature and the executive including the judiciary. More importantly, they have made policy suggestions and inputs that have resulted in major policy outcomes as well as laws made by the National Assembly. Though they may sometimes be selfish in their demands on the government, their contribution to the policy process and democratic consolidation is still very important because their total absence creates a very big vacuum which may not easily be filled by any other group. Sometimes too, the means through which pressure groups pursue their goals may be not be favourable to the entire political system or to the rest of the people. These are part of the criticisms of pressure groups. Thus, there is need for the members of pressure groups to always consider the spillover effects of their activities and the means of pursuing their aims and ensure they checkmate those acts that will cause more harm than good to the entire political system in Nigeria.

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