Civil Society and Accountability in Governance in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

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Civil Society groups in Nigeria played an invaluable role in the struggle that led to the restoration of civil rule in May 1999. However, following a brief lull that characterized their activities in the immediate period after the inauguration of the fourth republic, some scholars began to question the relevance of civil society in the post-dictatorship era. This paper, adopting the archival and content analysis (of documented intervention efforts of civil groups) methods of investigation, observes that rather than receding into permanent lethargy, CSOs have involved themselves in the promotion of accountability in governance since Nigeria’s democratic re-birth. The paper documents these efforts and the challenges facing CSOs in their bid to reform governance process in Nigeria. The paper concludes with some proposals on how the accountability works of civil society can be enhanced.

Keywords: Democracy, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), governance, civil society organizations (CSOs).

Introduction
May 29, 1999 marks a watershed in the political history of Nigeria. On that day, the country transited into civil rule after 15 years of unmitigated military dictatorship. Nigeria’s return to democratic rule was greeted with high hopes and expectations by the citizenry. Among the multiple expectations of the Nigerian people, two of them were salient. First, there were hopes that the post-dictatorship era would usher in a responsive and accountable political leadership that would be a radical departure from the authoritarianism that Nigerians were subjected to for one and a half decades. Secondly, the Nigerian people nursed the hope that democratic rule would bring about a marked improvement in their material condition. These two expectations are better appreciated if juxtaposed with the politico-economic circumstances of the Nigerian people under military rule. Having seized power through unconstitutional means, successive military regimes, beginning from 1984, unleashed unprecedented authoritarianism on the people with its attendant rights abuse. Needless to say that these regimes were neither accountable nor responsive. Policies and decisions which had direct bearing on the lives of the Nigerian people were formulated and adopted without any input from the people while the country was plunged into democratic ‘transition without end’ (Oyediran, 1995). On the economic front, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank- inspired the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), adopted by the Babangida regime unleashed, untold hardship on the hapless citizens, with the urban dwellers being the worst hit following the disengagement of the state from social provisioning. Instead of the economic growth and self-sustenance promised under the SAP regime, the realities were, among others; business collapse, loss of jobs in both private and public sectors of the economy and a worsening in living conditions. Corruption assumed the status of a policy under military rule, as the scourge became entrenched in the national political economy, particularly during Babangida and Abacha’s buccaneering regimes. Protest against anti-people policies of the military state were met with repression. Against this background, the Nigerian people in May 1999 embraced democracy and all the promises it held as a system of rule.
One group that played an invaluable role in the journey to the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria is the civil society. Having played a vanguard role in a similar struggle against the colonial rule, culminating into the granting of independence in 1960, the civil society continues to be an implacable thorn in the flesh of military regimes in its opposition to the unpopular policies of the regimes on the one hand, and its commitment to the enthronement of constitutional rule on the other hand. However, with the exit of the military from public governance, there has been a debate on both the missions and relevance of civil society organizations in the post-military dispensation.

Some scholars have argued that with the withdrawal of the military from direct political governance, the raison d’être of civil society, particularly the NGO sector of it (which is the focus of this study), has been eliminated.

This paper argues that since democratization is a process and not an event, the transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule does not condemn civil society organizations to irrelevance. Their presence of is still needed to check the power of the new democratic government, hold its leadership accountable and inspire a strong sense of citizenship among the people. It is widely acknowledged in the literature on civil society that any country with robust associational life has the prospect of democratizing and engendering good governance. This demonstrates the democracy-enhancing role of civil society. Beckman (1993), in recognizing this important role, contends that failure to achieve and consolidate democratization can be explained in terms of a weak civil society. Indeed, civil society intervention will ensure that the dividends of democratic rule are accessed by the people rather than being appropriated by the political class. The dividends of democracy can only be guaranteed where there is political accountability, leadership commitment to counter corruption and non-privatization of public resources by state managers. To achieve all these requires a vibrant and well organized civil society.

This paper investigates civil society efforts aimed at entrenching and institutionalizing accountability in the governance process in Nigeria’s fourth republic. The paper is divided into seven sections (including the introduction). The second section is devoted to the definition of concepts. The third section examines civil society in Nigeria in the authoritarian context, while section four investigates civil society and governance in the post-dictatorship era. Section five of the paper looks at the challenges facing civil society organizations in their promotion of accountability efforts, while section six suggests measures that can enhance the accountability works of civil society organizations. The last section of the paper constitutes the conclusion.

**Conceptual Treatment of Civil Society, Accountability and Governance**

**Civil Society**

Civil society as a concept is characterized by conceptual and operational disputes or ambiguities. It is a contested concept involving ceaseless disputes about its meaning and use. There are two fundamental issues in the contestation over the meaning and use of the concept of civil society. The first issue borders on the proper constituents of civil society while the second relates to the relationship between a vibrant civil society and enduring democracy in Africa (Ekeh, 1992). The earliest conceptions of civil society effectively excluded civil groups such as ethnic-based and voluntary associations from the public space referred to as civil society. However, newer writers on African politics now accommodate these associations in their concepts of civil society. Abutudu (1995) has offered an insight into the forms of associational life that constitute civil society. In doing this, he identifies five major types of civil society namely: professional associations /occupational groups and student associations, human rights groups, ethnic and faith-based organizations, voluntary organizations and lastly the business community comprising banking, mining, manufacturing, agriculture and commerce sectors. Various organizations from these five sectors of the civil society played a prominent role in the sustained struggle against military dictatorship and the eventual restoration of civil rule in May 1999.

Chabal (1986) defines civil society as

... a vast ensemble of constantly changing groups and individuals who have acquired some consciousness of their externality and opposition to the state.

This concept of civil society paints the picture of unmitigated opposition between civil society and the state. Taking the same oppositional path as Chabal, Bayart (1986) views civil society as a
... society in its relation to the state ... in so far as it is in confrontation with the state or, more precisely, as the process in which society seeks to break and counteract the simultaneous ‘totalization’ unleashed by the state.

Chabal and Bayart’s concept of civil society portrays a state-civil society relationship as permanently confrontational. Their views veil the interdependence between the two which is crucial to their reproduction. Diamond (1995) draws attention to this interdependence when he observes that civil society needs institutionalized legal order created by the state to assert its autonomy, while the state needs civil society to earn legitimacy and expand state support within the non-state sectors. Kasfir (1998) also rejects the confrontation thesis of Bayart and Chabal, arguing that civil society still remains in existence even when its constituents are not locked in confrontational activities with the state.

Larry Diamond (1994) refers to civil society as

... the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by the legal order of a set of shared rules...it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions and ideas, or exchange ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold state officials accountable...

While Diamond admits state-civil society engagement, for example, through citizens making demands on the state, he emphasizes the autonomy of civil society from the state, with the former serving as a check against the excesses of the latter.

Keane (1998) defines civil society as

... an aggregate of institutions in which members are engaged in a complex of non-state activities, economic and cultural production, household life and voluntary associations and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions.

In a broad sense, civil society comprises ethnic-based associations, religious organizations, professional associations, trade unions, non-government organizations (including community based organizations), student organizations, human rights organizations and women’s organizations. This broad view incorporates such associations as rural-based and peasant groups that may not be engaged in pro-democracy and human rights advocacy works. Although attaining the public good remains the basic preoccupation of civil society, it does not aim at acquiring formal political power, but only seeks to engage the state and challenge the proclivity of state managers to constrict the public space.

Civil society represents a middle site between the family and the state in which independent action can be initiated by the citizenry to expand democratic space and uphold civil liberties. It is a platform through which the state and its officials could be compelled to act in a responsible way to protect the general interests of the citizenry. Though its positions and interventions lack legal enforcement, its moral weight and capacity to mobilize, put it in a counterweight position against the monopolizing tendencies of the state. It can be described as the ‘engine room’ and guarantor of good governance, state formation and reformation. Its heuristic value in transitional societies engaged in democratization and/or state reforming efforts cannot be over-emphasized (Osaghae, 2003).

In his study on civil society in Ghana, Ayee identified two major reasons for the proliferation of civil society organizations in Africa, particularly from the early 1980s. The first is the introduction of neoliberal economic policies on the continent at the behest of the Breton Woods institutions — the Bank and the Fund — which retrenched the state from the economic sphere with dire consequences for access to social services by African citizens. The hardship resulting from the implementation of the market logic propelled civil society organizations to cater for social, economic and cultural needs of the people. The second reason is the utter failure of the state bureaucracy to ameliorate the economic situation of the country. The countervailing capacity of civil society organizations to curtail the hegemonic control of the state over the citizenry makes them to be regarded as a substitute for the state in efficient service delivery, as well as defenders of the society against hegemonic system of governance.

Being a permanent thorn in the ‘totalizing’ claims of the state, civil society is capable of being a critical
agent of democratization (Fattion, 1995). In the early 1990s, sustained pro-democracy agitation of civil society constituents such as trade unions, academic unions, professional associations and religious groups saw to the collapse of many autocratic regimes in Africa (Animashaun, 2006).

Accountability
Accountability simply means being answerable for one’s actions and inactions in the management of public affairs and resources. There are two points to note in the conception of accountability. The first is that public officials are accountable to the constituencies they represent for all their official responsibilities. The second point is that they are to render an account of how public resources put in their custody, are deployed. Accountability, according to Schedler (1999), has two important sides. The first side requires public officials to give an account of their official actions, while the second is the capacity of the people to sanction public officials who refuse to render an account of their stewardship.

The Nigerian experience demonstrates that the Nigerian people lack the capacity to demand accountability from public officials, while constitutional provisions for compelling accountability (such as ‘principle of recall’) are so cumbersome that they only discourage the people.

Accountability demands that government is conducted in an open and transparent manner consistent with the constitutional framework of democratic governance. It represents an important value of constitutional governance that needs to be entrenched and institutionalized in the management of public affairs in all democracies. But as the experience in transitional democracies has shown, entrenching accountability in governance requires an active civil society and a conscientious citizenry that can engage the government on pertinent issues that touch on the interests of the people.

Although accountability as a concept is not a recent issue in public administration, the contemporary scholarly interest in, and attention to the concept have been prompted by four important factors. The first is the growth, complexity and ever-expanding power of bureaucracy which could pose a serious threat to democratic rule. Secondly, the increasing influence of government, occasioned by its control over the commanding heights of the economy, which throws up the challenge of making government effective, efficient and accountable. Thirdly, the tendency to arbitrarily dispense power by government officials; and lastly, the brazen misappropriation of public resources by state officials which characterizes public governance in a country like Nigeria (Ezeani, 2003).

While there are various forms of accountability in public administration such as bureaucratic, political, legal, financial and professional accountability, political accountability which simply means answerability and responsiveness of those who occupy elective public office to the people constitutes the focus of this study.

Governance
Governance is another contested concept in social science discourse. There is a plethora of views by scholars and development institutions on what the concept connotes. The World Bank (1991) views governance as ‘the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development’.

This concept of governance demands that state managers deploy state resources in a manner that ensures material advancement for the people. For the World Bank, one of the areas rocking the post-colonial African state is the prevalence of unaccountable government (Egwu, 2005). Hyden (1994) refers to governance as ‘the conscious management of regime structures with a view of enhancing the legitimacy of the public sphere’. The United Nations Development Programme (1997) defines governance as

... the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country’s affairs comprising complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences.

In spite of the divergence of views on the foregoing concepts of governance, they all emphasize public accountability and rule of law as the foremost principles of good governance.

From the foregoing, it can be stated that a symbiotic relationship exists among the three concepts. In the current political dispensation in Nigeria, democratic governance can only impact on the lives of
Nigerians if public accountability is entrenched in the management of public affairs. This fact is not lost on civil society organizations and this explains why accountability forms the core of their efforts in the post-transition period, as will be demonstrated later in this study.

Civil Society in Authoritarian Context: 1985 – 1999
The analytic framework of the political activism of civil society organizations in the period between 1985 and 1999 can be built around the twin issues of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the inimical projects of successive military administrations that ruled the country during this period. This is, however, not to suggest that state civil society engagement/confrontation was lacking prior to this period. As a matter of fact, civil society groups such as Nigerian Medical Association, National Association of Resident Doctors and National Association of Nigerian Students engaged the Buhari/Idiagbon dictatorship in confrontation over certain policies of the state, perceived by these groups as harmful to the interest of their members. Thus, the scope of civil society activism was narrow before 1985. However, the introduction of SAP into the political economy of Nigeria, and the elastic transition programme of the Babangida administration, provoked the emergence of the ‘NGO industry’ (Alemika, 2003) with diverse areas of interest such as democratization, gender, human rights, poverty, conflict management, environment and health. Some hitherto conservative professional bodies were also transformed into militant groups by the exigencies of the market logic and transition programme.

The structural adjustment programme (SAP), which was introduced in 1986 by the Babangida regime, was packaged by the Bretton Woods institutions as a response to the serious balance of payment problems occasioned by the sharp decline in terms of trade facing the countries of the South, beginning from the early 1980s. While authoritarianism, inhered in the different modes of accumulation that existed before the introduction of SAP, the implementation of the policy components of SAP expanded the totalizing and authoritarian thrusts of the state (Gana, 2000). The major policy components of SAP included the formal introduction of the second tier foreign exchange market (SFEM); removal of petroleum subsidy, privatization and commercialization of state enterprises, wide-ranging introduction of deregulation; removal of controls in profit repatriation to stimulate foreign investment, and reduction of public expenditure etc (Kukah, 2000).

Structural adjustment basically led to the disengagement of the state from economic production (parastatals), leading to a worsening of the financial conditions of the people. There are two important things to note about civil society intervention under SAP. First, government’s gradual withdrawal from economic production and social provisioning led to the emergence of civil society particularly community-based organizations (CBOs) as alternative sites of economic production and social service delivery. Secondly, the authoritarian context within which SAP was implemented and the negative consequences of its implementation on the material conditions of the citizenry pitched civil society organizations in a deadly confrontation with the state.

The implementation of SAP led to political repression and exclusion which further expanded the social gulf between the state and civil society. The deleterious impact of SAP on the material status of the people propelled civil society organizations not only to stage mass protests and organize civil disobedience against the state but also to canvass for the democratization of the social space (Momoh & Seteolu, 2006).

The elaborate transition programme to civil rule of the Babangida administration provided the civil society organizations another opportunity to demonstrate their vibrancy and militancy in a profound manner. This they did in two major ways. First was the ceaseless pro-democracy agitation against the Babangida junta over its manipulation of the transition process as a strategy of perpetuating military rule. Civil organizations such as the Constitutional Rights Project, the Civil Liberties Organization, the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and others mounted pressure on the administration to abolish its harmful programmes.

In 1991, several pro-democracy organizations teamed up to form a national pro-democracy coalition, Campaign for Democracy, with the aim of ensuring military withdrawal from political governance. The coalition also attracted membership from professional groups and trade unions and it played a vanguard role in the eventual restoration of civil rule in 1999. Secondly, shortly after the cancellation of the June 12
presidential election in 1993, the political class was handicapped to defend the sanctity of the election due to many factors bordering on crass opportunism and ethnic biases. The civil society picked up the challenge of defending the mandate given to Chief M.K.O. Abiola, who ran on the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Civil society groups did not only condemn the annulment, they embarked on sustained agitations, including organizing street protests to compel the Babangida regime to de-annul the election. The sustained pressures by civil society groups forced General Babangida to 'step aside' as Nigeria’s military president on August 27, 1993, handing over power to the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan. Shonekan’s administration was declared illegal by a Lagos High Court in the middle of November 1993, which later led to its collapse after 81 days in office. General Sani Abacha took over from Chief Shonekan on November 17, 1993.

The initial public support enjoyed by the Abacha dictatorship was squandered by the regime following its attempt at transmuting into a civilian president through a phoney transition programme. This led civil society groups to resume pro-democracy agitation, and the agitation only abated following the death of General Abacha and the announcement of a transition to civil rule programme by his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar in May 1999.

It is important to point out that successive military administrations during the period embarked on several measures to curb the resilience of civil society. One of these was the attempt to co-opt some civil society groups and/or their leaders into government. Some civil society groups were bribed by the government to advocate for the extension of military rule. Government also resorted to repression of vocal civil society groups including the independent media in order to weaken their pro-democracy agitation.

Civil Society and Governance in the Post-J dictatorships, there has been a fundamental shift in state-civil society relations since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. Civil society was accommodated in the policy space by the state with the Obasanjo administration creating a unit to coordinate the relations of the state with civil society under the headship of a Special Adviser. Civil society now participates in legislative and policy processes thereby enriching the processes and widening their support.

There has been a raging debate on the vibrancy and militancy of civil society organizations in the new democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Some scholars (Adejumobi, 2002; Oche, 2003) have argued that the civil society has receded into lethargy and was severely hit by lack of focus in the post-transition period. This view clearly exaggerates the dilemma of civil society during this period. The challenge that faced the civil society then was that of reviewing its strategy of engaging the state which has been transformed from dictatorship into ‘democracy’. This kind of challenge is expected in transitional democracies, particularly the ones that emerged from military supervised transitions. The scenario witnessed in the civil society sector in Nigeria, in the immediate period following the inauguration of the Fourth Republic, had earlier played itself out in South Africa in 1994. With the end of the April 1994 polls and subsequent inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first post-apartheid president, the NGO community was hit with a loss of focus with many of them struggling to re-define their mission under a democratic dispensation (James & Caliguire, 1999).

One of the areas that have engaged the efforts of the civil society since Nigeria’s democratic re-birth in 1999 is the promotion of accountability in the governance process. Accountability within civil society organizations complements those of the state institutions, charged with the responsibility of monitoring the official activities of state officials with the aim of compelling them to give an account of how public funds are disbursed. The intervention of the civil society in promoting and entrenching accountability on govern-nance is justified against the backdrop of financial profligacy, corruption and kleptomania that have been unleashed on the governance space by the politicians in all tiers of government since the restoration of civil rule. Through workshops, seminars, appearances at or memoranda to parliamentary bodies, advocacy, engagement of or collaboration with the
political embarrassment. Eight years after Media Rights
and press conferences/releases, civil society organizations have made efforts to push accountability to the front burner in the governing process. Civil society accountability efforts are also aimed at engendering transparency in the way public resources are deployed by those under whose custody the resources are put. In what follows, we shall examine the efforts of some civil society organizations aimed at either entrenching accountability and transparency in the conduct of government business or compelling political authorities to be accountable for their actions.

One civil society organization that has been resolutely committed to the institutionalization of accountability in the conduct of government business is Media Rights Agenda (MRA). This organization is the major pillar behind the Freedom of Information Bill submitted to the National Assembly in 1999. The objective of this bill is

\[ \ldots \text{to lay down, as a legal principle, the right of access to documents and information in the custody of the government or its officials and agencies as a necessary corollary to the guarantee of freedom of expression} \ldots \text{(MRA, 2003).} \]

After prolonged legislative debates on the bill at both chambers of the National Assembly which lasted for eight years, the passage of the bill into law suffered a major setback when the then President Obasanjo declined to give presidential assent to the bill. The MRA, in collaboration with other stakeholders, embarked on various moves including a visit to Obasanjo to ensure the signing of the bill before the end of the tenure of his administration. The Freedom of Information Coalition, a civil society initiative, formed to build advocacy to support the passage of the bill. They enlisted the support of the South African president, Thabo Mbeki to prevail on Chief Obasanjo to sign the bill. The advocacy of the Freedom of Information Coalition received international support with the Federation of International Journalists writing General Obasanjo on the need to sign the bill into law.

All these efforts came to nought as he refused to sign the bill before bowing out of office on May 29, 2007. However, with the recent amendment to the rules of the National Assembly to the effect that the federal legislature can pass a bill inherited from previous assembly, coupled with encouraging words from the incumbent president on the bill, it may sooner rather than later become an Act. The passage of the bill will inject greater transparency into the conduct of government business and ensure responsible and responsive governance.

The 'Model Local Government Initiative' is another effort by civil society organizations to institutionalize accountability in governance. This initiative is aimed at capacity building at the grassroots level with a view to empowering the local people to hold government officials accountable and promote transparency in local governance. Bauchi and Katagum Local Government Areas of Bauchi State were among the instruments of this initiative in 2002. The initiative was implemented in these two areas by the African Centre for Democratic Governance (AFRIGOV), a research and advocacy organisation based in Abuja. Participants were drawn from various community-based organizations (CBOs) within the two localities.

One significant outcome of the programme was the formation of a body named Vanguard of Democracy (VOD), created to monitor local governance and ensure accountability. The activities of this body, if sustained, are capable of increasing governance responsiveness at the grassroots.

In a related area, Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP), a non-government organisation with a mission to empower communities for participation in affairs that affect their lives and livelihood has been involved in improving democratic norms and practices at the local level. Between 2003 and 2004, the organisation organized a capacity building workshop for representatives of dam communities in Kebbi, Kwaras, Niger, Kogi, Zamfara and Sokoto states. With the goals of the programme defined as contributing to the inculcation of transparency and accountability in governance, and increasing the capacity of leaders of CBOs, and NGOs to participate in setting public (local) priorities, the trainees were exposed to training in public budget analysis. This will equip them to engage political authorities 'with a view to ensuring that pro-people public expenditure is given priority in their different areas' (Community, 2005).

A major highlight of the training programme was the formation of Coalition of Dam Communities in Nigeria (CDCN) to discuss the issues affecting dam
Communities such as decent and safe environment, comfortable resettlement and adequate compensation for landed property acquired from the communities for dam projects (Community, 2005).

Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) is yet another civil society group committed to accountability and transparency in the conduct of government business. With legislative advocacy as its primary mission, the centre has severally engaged the National Assembly on policy or legislative issues relating to transparency, accountability and due process. The centre carried out numerous advocacy works in support of the passage of three important anticorruption bills namely: the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative Bill, Fiscal Responsibility Bill and Public Procurement Bill. For over four decades, extractive industry business has been conducted under the ‘myth of confidentiality’ which has shielded transaction in the Nigerian Extractive Industries (EIs) from the prying eyes of Nigerians. NEITI bill aims at bringing transparency and due process to the Nigerian EIs through the publication and disclosure of payments made by international extractive resource companies and revenue accruing to the Nigerian government from extractive resources. This will enable the Nigerian people to engage state officials on the management of revenue earned from this source.

The Fiscal Responsibility Bill was initiated by the executive. It aims at ensuring fiscal prudence and sound financial management with the ultimate intent of achieving rational utilization of resources. The public procurement bill, on its own, is aimed at ensuring open and transparent processes of public contract awards not only to achieve value for money but also to promote competition among providers of goods and services.

Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre organized a series of workshops, seminars and dialogues, aimed at building public support for these bills, and keeping the case for transparent management of national resources in the public domain. The proceedings of these advocacy efforts including lead papers and communiqués have been published into book form by the centre with such titles as Civil Society and the EITI in Nigeria, Volume 1: Petroleum: Towards a Fiscal Responsibility Regime in Nigeria; The Civil Society - Legislature Nexus, 2006; Civil Society and the EITI in Nigeria Volume 2: Solid Mineral; and Towards a Fiscal Responsibility Regime in Nigeria: The Civil Society/Mass Media Intervention, 2006. These publications contain discussions on the key areas of these bills including the draft bills.

Public procurement and NEITI bills were signed into law shortly before the end of the Obasanjo administration. With the passage of NEITI bill, it is now a crime for extractive industries to ‘withhold information, give half-truth information concerning their finances in such a way that it affects their remittance by way of royalties and other payments to the Nigerian government’ (Legislative Digest, 2007).

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) is another civil society organisation which has the promotion of accountability as one of its intervention areas. The centre presented a memorandum at the Senate public hearing on the Review of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Act on March 1, 2003 in Abuja. While the centre admitted in the memorandum that independent oversight agencies can restore public confidence and faith in government, the ICPC Act, as then packaged, could not effectively stop police corruption in Nigeria. The measures suggested by the centre to improve the operation of ICPC and other governance structures include the appointment of commissioners who are well qualified, an improvement in remuneration, with an ensured tenure of office, funding and staffing.

Apart from individual efforts, civil society organizations also work through coalitions. Zero Corruption Coalition (ZCC) is a network of civil society organisations and state oversight agencies. It was formed in the year 2000 with the policing of public sector corruption as its raison d’être. The coalition has proposed to the National Assembly a bill meant to protect those who provide information (whistle blowers) about corrupt acts. The passage of this bill into law will strengthen anti-corruption efforts of the government. The ZCC also presented a memorandum during the public hearing organised by the Senate on the amendment of the EFCC Act in March, 2007.
Budget Transparency Network is another coalition of civil society organizations working on the aspect of budget monitoring. With its declared mission being ‘commitment to deepening and sustaining democracy and good governance through the budgeting process’ (BTN News, 2005), the coalition has carried out a number of activities revolving around democratizing budgeting process, making the process transparent and gender sensitive as well as mainstreaming human rights and pro-poor concerns in the budget. The Network prepared a Shadow/Alternative Budget in 2006 which gave prominence to pro-poor projects and programs. Apart from serving as an alternative to the official budget, the Shadow Budget could be used by the public to assess the state budget both in terms of priority areas and sectoral allocation. The coalition also organized a two-day workshop for the media in June 2005 with the twin objectives of sensitizing the media on the imperative of a pro-poor and people centred economic reform process and of building media capacity on current trends in budgeting and economic reforms.

In addition, the Network published a book entitled Critical Issues in Public Expenditure Management which dwells on the critical assessment of the structures and procedures of decision making in relation to the allocation and management of public resources.

As the foregoing demonstrates, civil society organizations have committed a lot of resources to the promotion of accountability as one of their key governance concerns. However, if these efforts have not engendered the kind of sanity needed to make the governance process sufficiently meaningful, responsive and accountable, it is certainly not for lack of effort on the part of the civil society, but for certain operational challenges which tend to limit the impact of civil society efforts. The next section of the paper examines some of these challenges.

Civil Society and Entrenchment of Accountability in Governance: Challenges of operation.

One of the most serious challenges facing civil society organizations in Nigeria is that of funding. It is a well known fact that Nigerian NGOs depend heavily on external bilateral and multilateral agencies and independent foundations for their funding. This reliance on external funding support not only creates legitimacy crisis for these organisations but may reduce them to mere instruments of implementing externally generated agenda. Two explanations can be given for the heavy dependence of NGOs on external funding. The first is the ‘underdeveloped’ nature of local philanthropy in the country, particularly as civil society organizations rank lowest in the attraction of the philanthropic community. The second explanation is the absence of state funding for NGOs. But a more troubling dimension of external funding of NGOs is the fact that foreign funding is fast shrinking, thereby threatening the survival of many NGOs. The international donor community has either reviewed its funding priorities or has introduced new strict eligibility requirements for accessing grants. If this situation persists, many NGOs may be forced to close shop.

Another operational challenge facing civil society organizations in Nigeria is what may be termed as ‘corporate misgovernance’. The principle of internal democracy in many civil society organizations is low or even non-existent. Leadership of some civil society organizations in Nigeria has been privatized, while leadership succession is criminalized. Indeed, scholars and civil society activists tend to exaggerate the flourishing of internal democracy in civil society as Nigerian experience has copiously demonstrated that some non-state organizations are as morally bankrupt as the state they seek to reform. The undemocratic manner in which the affairs of some civil society organisations in Nigeria are directed seriously challenges the moral authority of the civil society to function as a ‘school of democracy.’ As Adejumobi (2002) contends: ‘if civil society lacks democratic character it loses the moral right to compel such character from those directing state affairs’.

The impact of accountability efforts of civil society organisations in Nigeria is also limited by their elitist character which is partly manifested in their heavy presence in the urban centres. The activities of most civil society organisations are targeted at urban-based institutions of the state, with little or no attention paid to local governance. This has produced a situation where those at the helm of public affairs at the local level privatize local resources. With local citizens generally ‘disempowered’ to compel accountability from local leaders, development and good governance continue to elude the grassroots.
The hostile and repressive tendencies of the state also constitute a serious challenge to the accountability efforts of civil society. The state is yet to fully recognize the civil society as a stakeholder which must be regularly engaged not only for consolidating democratic rule but for democratizing development project.

Enhancing Civil Society Accountability: What has to be done
Against the background of the crucial role of the civil society in reforming and making governance responsive and accountable, it is imperative that civil society is well positioned to perform this all-important role. There is a need for public funding of civil society organizations through grants sourced from the national budget which will be made available to recognized civil society organizations. This will not only increase the 'sense of service' of civil society organizations, it will also enrich state/civil society engagement. Civil society activists must ensure that responsible corporate governance thrives in their organizations as a basis for their intervention efforts. There is the need to pass into law the Freedom of Information bill in order to facilitate the accountability of civil society organizations. Free access to information in custody of the state, its officials and agencies constitutes a facilitator of accountability in public governance. Accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs cannot be attained if the information at the disposal of government continues to be treated with the myth of secrecy. Finally, there is the urgent need by state officials to accept civil society organizations as a partner in the development and governance process.

Conclusion
This paper has attempted to unearth the efforts of civil society organizations aimed at institutionalizing accountability in the governance process since the restoration of democratic rule in May 1999. Democratization is an incremental and phased process which graduates from transition to inauguration and finally to consolidation. Although most countries in sub-Saharan Africa have succeeded in holding consecutive elections, democratization still remains at the level of inauguration. The challenge of taking democracy in Africa from inauguration to consolidation where accountability becomes an entrenched value in public governance thrusts enormous responsibilities on the civil society. However, given the fact that the mere presence of the civil society does not a guarantee the entrenchment of accountability in the governance process, what is required in the words of Ekch (1992) is

... to search for ways that will enable the state and Africa's civil society to be mutually engaged in the public arena; lessening the claims of the state for total ownership of the political space of the public realm and encouraging the competence of the individual with respect to his view of who owns the public realm where the state operates.

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