

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of civil society and social movements in promoting human rights and democracy in Nigeria, a country that has faced multiple challenges in its transition from military rule to civilian governance since 1999. The paper draws on various sources, including reports by Amnesty International, the European Union, and civil society organizations, to highlight the main human rights issues and democratic deficits in Nigeria, such as insecurity, violence, media censorship, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, forced evictions, and climate change impacts. The paper also analyzes the different forms of civil resistance and disobedience that have emerged in Nigeria in response to these challenges, such as protests by women, students, activists, journalists, and prisoners. The paper argues that civil society and social movements have played a vital role in holding the government accountable, demanding reforms, and advancing the cause of human rights and democracy in Nigeria. The paper concludes by offering some recommendations for strengthening the capacity and impact of civil society and social movements in Nigeria.

Keywords: Civil society, social movement, Human rights, Democracy, Nigeria.

Background to the Study

As a result of an over-centralization of decision-making and a lack of stakeholder involvement, many developing countries are prone to all forms of human rights abuse and patronage by powerful special interests. There is a consensus among scholars (Amadi & Abdullahi, 2012; Ayodele-Bamisaiye *et al.*, 2015 and Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016), that lack of stakeholder buy-in inhibits policy processes, decreases efficiency, and adversely affects economic growth. As a result, civil society can contribute to greater transparency, human rights and accountability. "Civil society" serves as a mediator between individuals and governments (Kew & Lewis, 2011). While there is no clear-cut definition of civil society, most agree that it includes institutions such as religious organizations, labour unions, charities, community groups, nonprofits, and the media. The role of these institutions in advanced and virile democratic systems provides citizens with the chance to influence the culture, politics, and economies of their nation (Diamond & Plattner, 2018).

Human society has been characterized by participatory democracy since Aristotle and John Locke, and from Tocqueville to Lincoln. A participatory democracy seeks to broaden the

number of people who can participate in decision-making. Across time and space, it is believed that effectively increasing the range of participation makes for better efficiency and effectiveness in government and by extension solidifies legitimacy (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2018), and it is to this effect that CSOs geared in to participate actively in developmental processes and good governance which is characterized by upholding the human rights and a thriving democracy. Civil Society and social movements have been in existence all around the country with the assumed purpose of aiding developmental processes. It is becoming increasingly important as it exists between the citizen and the state while promoting public action. Their contributions have been celebrated increasingly in places where they are vibrant, purposeful and objective (Ibrahim & Igbuzor, 2012).

It is also important to note that civil society and social movement can be a part of the solution or a part of the problem. This is because in normal situations, every society gets the type of government it deserves. The attitude of civil society to corruption may also influence the attitude of government officials and the private sector to it. The converse is also true. Sometimes, if government does not respond to public concerns, civil society can, and will, organize to defend its essential interest. The real role of civil society must be to claim and defend its own core values, and not leave this integral function to those in power.

Nigeria is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, a vibrant and dynamic population, and abundant natural resources. However, it also faces many challenges, such as poverty, corruption, insecurity, ethnic conflicts, and human rights violations. Despite the return to civilian rule in 1999, after decades of military dictatorship, Nigeria has not achieved the full potential of its democracy. The quality of governance, the rule of law, the accountability of public officials, and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are still lacking in many aspects.

In this context, civil society and social movements play a crucial role in promoting human rights and democracy in Nigeria. Civil society refers to the space between the state and the market, where citizens organize themselves to pursue their common interests and values (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). Social movements are collective actions by groups of people who share a common identity, ideology, or grievance, and who seek to challenge or change the status quo. Civil society and social movements can act as watchdogs, advocates, educators, mediators, service providers, and innovators in the Nigerian society. They can also mobilize public opinion, influence policy-making, monitor government performance, expose human rights abuses, demand accountability and transparency, and foster social change (Joseph & Gillies 2016).

The European Union (EU) is one of the major partners of Nigeria in supporting its democratic development and human rights protection. The EU has provided various forms of assistance to Nigeria in areas such as electoral support, security sector reform, justice sector reform, anti-corruption, human rights education, civil society strengthening, media development, gender mainstreaming, conflict prevention and peace building. The EU also engages in regular political dialogue with Nigeria on human rights issues through various mechanisms such as the EU-Nigeria Joint Way Forward, the EU-Nigeria Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Nigeria Ministerial Meeting.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is another important partner of Nigeria in advancing democracy, human rights and governance. USAID works directly with a diverse representation of Nigerian civil society and media organizations, building their internal management capacity and strengthening their ability to engage with the government on issues of fiscal accountability, budget monitoring and transparency within extractive industries. USAID also supports the organizational development of political parties and the independence of the electoral commission. The promotion of human rights and democracy in Nigerian society is not only a moral duty but also a strategic necessity for ensuring peace, stability and development in Nigeria. It is also a shared responsibility that requires collaboration among all actors who have a stake in Nigeria's future. By working together towards a common vision of a democratic, inclusive and prosperous Nigeria that respects human dignity and diversity. This paper therefore seeks to examine the role of civil society and social movements in promoting human rights and democracy in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, but also with many challenges in terms of human rights and democracy. The country has experienced several periods of military rule, civil war, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption and poverty. Despite its return to civilian rule in 1999 and its adoption of a democratic constitution, Nigeria still faces serious threats to its stability and development from various sources of violence and crime, such as the terrorist group Boko Haram, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes and farmer-herder disputes (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These conflicts have resulted in massive violations of human rights, such as killings, torture, rape, displacement, arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.

The Nigerian government has ratified many international human rights instruments and enacted laws to protect the rights of its citizens (UN, 2019), but the implementation and enforcement of these legal obligations have been weak and inconsistent. Many government institutions lack the capacity, independence and accountability to carry out their mandates effectively and transparently (UN, 2004). The judiciary is often hampered by delays, corruption and interference. The media is under pressure from censorship, harassment and intimidation. The civil society is constrained by limited resources, access and influence. The electoral system is marred by irregularities, violence and fraud.

The promotion of human rights and democracy in Nigerian society is therefore a crucial and urgent task that requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders, including the government, the civil society, the media, the private sector, the international community and the citizens themselves. It is against this background that this paper seeks to investigate the role of civil society and social movements in promoting human rights and democracy in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to examine the role of civil society and social movements in promoting human rights and democracy in Nigeria.

The specific objectives for the study are to:

- i. i. examine how civil society and social movements define and articulate their visions of human rights and democracy;

- ii. ii. assess the main strategies and tactics that civil society and social movements use to promote human rights and democracy;
- iii. iii. investigate the main opportunities and challenges that civil society and social movements face in their efforts to promote human rights and democracy;
- iv. iv. examine how civil society and social movements interact with other actors, such as political parties, media, international organizations and donors, in their efforts to promote human rights and democracy; and
- v. v. determine the main impacts and outcomes of civil society and social movements' actions on human rights and democracy.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do civil society and social movements define and articulate their visions of human rights and democracy?
2. What are the main strategies and tactics that civil society and social movements use to promote human rights and democracy?
3. What are the main opportunities and challenges that civil society and social movements face in their efforts to promote human rights and democracy?
4. How do civil society and social movements interact with other actors, such as political parties, media, international organizations and donors, in their efforts to promote human rights and democracy?
5. What are the main impacts and outcomes of civil society and social movements' actions on human rights and democracy?

Literature Review-Concept of Human Rights and Democracy

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, regardless of their nationality, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or any other status (Online Oxford Dictionary, 2019). Human rights are based on the principle of respect for human dignity and the inherent worth of every human being. Human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated. This means that they apply to everyone, everywhere, at all times; that they cannot be taken away or divided; that they are connected and support each other; and that they require cooperation and solidarity among states and peoples. The concept of human rights has a long and diverse history, influenced by different philosophical, religious, cultural, and legal traditions. Some of the earliest expressions of human rights can be found in ancient texts such as the Code of Hammurabi, the Cyrus Cylinder, the Magna Carta, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The modern human rights movement emerged after the atrocities of World War II, which led to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations in 1948. The UDHR is a landmark document that proclaims the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. It has inspired many other international and regional human rights treaties and declarations, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (UN, 1998).

Human rights are not only moral principles or legal norms, but also practical tools for achieving justice, peace, development, and democracy. It also empowers individuals and groups to claim their rights when infringed upon. Democracy is a form of government in which the people have the power to choose their leaders and to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Democracy is based on the principles of equality, freedom, and human rights. Democracy can take different forms, such as direct democracy, representative democracy, or constitutional democracy, depending on how the people exercise their power and how the government is structured.

According to Bello-Imam & Obadan (2014), democracy has many benefits for the society, such as:

- i. It promotes accountability and transparency of the government, which can prevent corruption and abuse of power.
- ii. It encourages civic engagement and political participation of the citizens, which can foster social cohesion and trust.
- iii. It protects the rights and interests of minorities and marginalized groups, which can enhance diversity and inclusion.
- iv. It allows for peaceful resolution of conflicts and disagreements, which can reduce violence and instability.
- v. It fosters innovation and creativity, which can stimulate economic growth and development.

However, democracy also faces many challenges and limitations, such as:

- i. It can be influenced by external factors, such as media, propaganda, or foreign interference, which can manipulate public opinion and undermine democratic processes.
- ii. It can be hindered by internal factors, such as ignorance, apathy, or polarization, which can reduce civic awareness and involvement.
- iii. It can be threatened by authoritarian regimes or extremist groups, which can undermine democratic institutions and values.
- iv. It can be difficult to implement and sustain in diverse and complex societies, which can pose challenges for representation and legitimacy.
- v. It can be slow and inefficient in responding to urgent and complex issues, which can compromise effectiveness and performance.

Therefore, democracy is not a perfect or static system, but a dynamic and evolving one that requires constant vigilance and improvement. Democracy depends on the active participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, including the government, the civil society, and the citizens. Democracy also requires respect for the rule of law, human rights, and democratic values, because democracy is not only a form of government, but also a way of life that empowers people to shape their own destiny (Anifowose & Enemu, 2009).

The concept of human rights and democracy is one of the most important and influential ideas in modern history. Human rights and democracy are closely linked, as they both aim to protect the dignity and autonomy of individuals, and to promote their participation in society. Human rights provide the foundation for democracy, as they ensure that people can express

their opinions, associate with others, access information, and hold their leaders accountable. Democracy provides the framework for human rights, as it creates institutions and mechanisms that can protect and promote human rights, such as courts, parliaments, civil society, and media.

However, human rights and democracy are not always guaranteed or respected in practice. They have evolved over time and across cultures, reflecting different values and experiences. Many people around the world still face violations of their human rights, such as torture, discrimination, censorship, arbitrary detention, or violence. Many countries still lack democratic institutions or processes, such as free and fair elections, independent judiciary, pluralistic media, or effective checks and balances. Therefore, human rights and democracy require constant vigilance and advocacy from all actors in society, including governments, international organizations, civil society groups, and individuals.

One way to do so as opined by Alubo & Isah (2018). is by supporting civil society organizations that work on human rights and democracy issues. Civil society organizations are independent groups of people who share common interests and values and who seek to influence public policies and social change. They can play a vital role in raising awareness, advocating for reforms, monitoring violations, providing services, and empowering communities.

Another way to promote and protect human rights and democracy as submitted by Alemika & Chukwuma (2005).is by engaging in international cooperation and solidarity. International cooperation and solidarity involve working together with other countries and organizations to address common challenges and achieve common goals. They can help to foster dialogue, exchange best practices, provide technical assistance, mobilize resources, and apply pressure when needed.

Human rights and democracy are essential for human dignity and well-being. They are also interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, we should strive to uphold human rights and democracy in our own countries and support them in other countries as well.

HOW CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS DEFINE AND ARTICULATE THEIR VISIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Civil society and social movements are key actors in promoting and defending human rights and democracy around the world. They often challenge the status quo, expose injustices, demand accountability, and mobilize citizens to participate in decision-making processes. But how do they define and articulate their visions of human rights and democracy? What are the sources, principles, and values that inform their perspectives and actions?

There is no single or universal answer to these questions, as civil society and social movements are diverse and dynamic entities that operate in different contexts and circumstances. However, some common elements can be identified across different cases and regions. These include:

- **A holistic and indivisible approach to human rights:** Civil society and social movements tend to view human rights as interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible, meaning that all rights are equally important and cannot be separated or prioritized. They also recognize that human rights encompass not only civil and political rights, but also economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, as well as the right to development and the right to peace.
- **A participatory and inclusive conception of democracy:** Civil society and social movements understand democracy as more than just a system of government or a set of formal institutions. They see democracy as a way of life that requires the active involvement of all people in shaping their own destinies and influencing the policies that affect them. They also advocate for the inclusion and representation of marginalized and oppressed groups, such as women, minorities, indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities.
- **A transformative and emancipatory vision of social change:** Civil society and social movements aspire to create a more just, equal, and sustainable world for present and future generations. They challenge the structures and systems that generate poverty, inequality, violence, oppression, and environmental degradation. They propose alternative models of development, governance, economy, culture, and education that respect human dignity, diversity, solidarity, and ecological balance.

THE MAIN STRATEGIES AND TACTICS THAT CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS USE TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Civil society and social movements are key actors in the struggle for human rights and democracy around the world. They mobilize people, raise awareness, challenge oppression, demand accountability, and advocate for change. But how do they do it? What are the main strategies and tactics that they use to advance their causes and achieve their goals?

There is no single answer to this question, as different contexts and situations require different approaches and methods. However, as agreed by Alao & Olaniyi (2018) in their study that some of the most common and effective strategies and tactics that civil society and social movements use are:

- i. **Campaigning:** This involves organizing and coordinating actions around a specific issue or demand, such as ending violence against women, protecting the environment, or supporting political prisoners. Campaigning can take various forms, such as petitions, rallies, marches, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, or civil disobedience.
- ii. **Networking:** This involves building and maintaining relationships with other groups and individuals who share similar values and objectives, such as human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, academics, artists, or religious leaders. Networking can help to exchange information, resources, skills, and solidarity, as well as to amplify the voice and impact of civil society and social movements.

- iii. **Advocacy:** This involves influencing and engaging with decision-makers and stakeholders who have the power or responsibility to address the issues or demands of civil society and social movements. Advocacy can take various forms, such as lobbying, policy analysis, research, reports, letters, statements, media outreach, or public hearings.
- iv. **Education:** This involves raising awareness and knowledge among the public and specific groups about the issues or demands of civil society and social movements. Education can take various forms, such as workshops, seminars, trainings, publications, documentaries, podcasts, or social media campaigns.
- v. **Capacity-building:** This involves strengthening the skills and abilities of civil society and social movements to carry out their work effectively and sustainably. Capacity-building can take various forms, such as mentoring, coaching, peer learning, technical assistance, funding support, or security training.

These are some of the main strategies and tactics that civil society and social movements use to promote human rights and democracy. However, they are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. Civil society and social movements often combine and adapt them according to their needs and opportunities. Moreover, they constantly innovate and experiment with new ways of mobilizing and influencing for change.

THE MAIN OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES THAT CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Because civil society and social movements are key actors in advancing human rights and democracy around the world, which contribute to the protection, promotion and advancement of human rights by holding governments accountable, raising awareness, mobilizing citizens, providing services, advocating for change, and building bridges across different groups and regions, play a vital role in supporting democratic transitions, consolidating democratic institutions, and fostering democratic culture and values, they also face many challenges and obstacles in their work. According to Agbiboa (2013), some of these challenges are:

- i. **Repression and shrinking civic space:** Many governments restrict the freedom of expression, association and assembly of civil society actors and social movements, using various legal, administrative, financial, and security measures. They also harass, intimidate, detain, torture, and kill human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers, and others who challenge their authority or expose their abuses. According to Freedom House, more than 100 countries have experienced a decline in civic space since 2010.
- ii. **Lack of resources and capacity:** Many civil society organizations and social movements struggle to secure adequate funding and resources for their activities, especially from domestic sources. They also face challenges in building their organizational capacity, skills, networks, and legitimacy. They often have to compete

with other actors for attention, influence, and support from the public, the media, the donors, and the policymakers.

- iii. **Fragmentation and polarization:** Civil society and social movements are not monolithic or homogeneous entities. They reflect the diversity and complexity of societies they operate in. They have different agendas, ideologies, identities, strategies, and tactics. Sometimes they cooperate and coordinate with each other; sometimes they compete or conflict with each other. They also have to deal with the polarization and division within their societies along political, ethnic, religious, gender, or other lines.
- iv. **Adaptation and innovation:** Civil society and social movements operate in a dynamic and changing environment. They have to respond to new opportunities and challenges arising from globalization, digitalization, migration, climate change, pandemics, and other factors. They have to adapt their methods and approaches to changing contexts and audiences. They have to innovate new ways of mobilizing people, communicating messages, creating impact, and measuring results.

Despite these challenges, Adebayo (2019) opines that civil society and social movements also have many opportunities to enhance their role and effectiveness in promoting human rights and democracy. Some of these opportunities are:

- i. **International norms and mechanisms:** Civil society and social movements can leverage the international human rights framework that has been developed over the past decades. They can use various international treaties, institutions, mechanisms, and networks to monitor human rights situations, report violations, advocate for change, and seek justice and accountability. The international human rights framework consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the nine core human rights treaties that cover civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all people. These treaties are legally binding on the States that ratify them and establish legal and other mechanisms to hold governments accountable for their human rights obligations. Additionally, there are regional human rights systems in Africa, Europe, and the Americas that provide further protection and avenues for redress (Abubakar, 2019). Civil society and social movements can engage with these systems by submitting complaints, participating in hearings, providing information and evidence, and following up on recommendations and judgments.
- ii. **International solidarity and cooperation:** Civil society and social movements can also benefit from the international solidarity and cooperation that the international human rights framework fosters. They can join forces with other actors who share their values and goals, such as other civil society organizations, human rights defenders, experts, academics, journalists, lawyers, and activists. They can also seek support from international organizations, such as the United Nations, regional bodies, specialized agencies, funds, and programs that work on human rights issues. These actors can provide technical assistance, financial resources, capacity building, advocacy platforms, protection measures, and emergency responses to help civil society and social movements promote and protect human rights in their contexts.

- iii. **International awareness and mobilization:** Civil society and social movements can also use the international human rights framework to raise awareness and mobilize action on human rights issues that affect them and their communities. They can use various tools and strategies to communicate their messages and demands to a global audience, such as social media, online campaigns, petitions, demonstrations, art, music, literature, and education. They can also use international days, events, awards, and commemorations to highlight their causes and achievements. By doing so, they can generate public opinion pressure on governments and other actors to respect and fulfill human rights obligations. They can also inspire and empower others to join their struggles and movements.

HOW CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS INTERACT WITH OTHER ACTORS, SUCH AS POLITICAL PARTIES, MEDIA, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND DONORS, IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Civil society and social movements are key actors in the promotion of human rights and democracy around the world. They often challenge the status quo, raise awareness of injustices, mobilize public opinion, demand accountability and advocate for change. However, they do not operate in isolation. They interact with other actors, such as political parties, media, international organizations and donors, in complex and dynamic ways that can have both positive and negative effects on their goals and strategies (Ake, 1996 and Akpan & Ering, 2010).

Political parties are essential for representative democracy, as they offer citizens a choice of policies and leaders, and form the basis of government and opposition. However, political parties can also be sources of corruption, polarization, violence and exclusion. Civil society and social movements can collaborate with political parties to advance common agendas, influence policy-making and monitor elections. They can also criticize and challenge political parties when they fail to uphold democratic principles or human rights standards.

Media play a vital role in informing the public, exposing abuses, holding authorities accountable and facilitating public debate. However, media can also be biased, manipulated, censored or controlled by powerful interests. Civil society and social movements can use media to amplify their voices, reach wider audiences and mobilize support. They can also monitor and challenge media when they spread misinformation, propaganda or hate speech. International organizations are entities that operate across national boundaries, such as the United Nations, the European Union or the African Union. They can provide norms, frameworks, resources and mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy. However, international organizations can also face challenges of legitimacy, effectiveness, coherence and accountability. Civil society and social movements can engage with international organizations to influence their agendas, policies and actions. They can also monitor and challenge international organizations when they fail to respect or enforce human rights and democracy.

Donors are individuals or institutions that provide financial or material support to civil society and social movements. They can enable them to carry out their activities, enhance their

capacities and sustain their efforts (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). However, donors can also impose conditions, expectations or agendas that may not align with the needs or priorities of civil society and social movements. Civil society and social movements can cooperate with donors to secure adequate and flexible funding. They can also negotiate and resist donors when they interfere with their autonomy or legitimacy.

Civil society and social movements interact with other actors in their efforts to promote human rights and democracy in diverse and dynamic ways that entail both opportunities and challenges. These interactions are shaped by various factors, such as the political context, the nature of the issue, the type of actor, the mode of engagement and the balance of power. Civil society and social movements need to be aware of these factors and adapt their approaches accordingly to maximize their potential and minimize their risks (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010).

THE MAIN IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS' ACTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

There are numerous impacts and outcomes of civil society and social movements' actions on human rights and democracy, based on examples from different regions and contexts.

One of the main impacts of civil society and social movements' actions is to raise awareness and educate the public about human rights issues and democratic values. By using various forms of communication, such as media, social media, publications, campaigns, protests, art, and culture, they can inform and inspire people to take action and join their causes. For instance, in Myanmar, civil society groups have been using creative ways to resist the military coup and spread information about the situation, such as using drones to display messages, painting murals on walls, and organizing flash mobs. These actions have helped to keep the spirit of resistance alive and to attract international attention and solidarity.

Another impact of civil society and social movements' actions is to influence policies and institutions that affect human rights and democracy. By engaging in advocacy, lobbying, litigation, monitoring, reporting, and dialogue, they can pressure governments and other actors to respect human rights standards and democratic principles. They can also propose alternative solutions and reforms that address the root causes of human rights problems and democratic deficits. For example, in Chile, civil society organizations and social movements have been actively involved in the process of drafting a new constitution that reflects the demands and aspirations of the people. They have participated in public consultations, submitted proposals, monitored the elections of the constitutional convention members and advocated for a more inclusive and participatory constitutional process.

A third impact of civil society and social movements' actions is to empower and support the victims and defenders of human rights and democracy. By providing legal aid, humanitarian assistance, psychosocial support, capacity building, protection, and recognition, they can help those who suffer from human rights violations and those who risk their lives to defend them. They can also create networks and alliances that foster solidarity and cooperation among different actors and sectors. For example, in Belarus, civil society groups have been providing various forms of assistance to the protesters who have been facing brutal repression from the

authorities. They have offered medical care, legal advice, financial aid, shelter, counseling, education, and documentation. They have also formed coalitions with other groups from different backgrounds and professions to coordinate their actions and amplify their voices.

These are some of the main impacts and outcomes of civil society and social movements' actions on human rights and democracy. However, these actions are not without challenges and risks. Civil society and social movements often face obstacles such as censorship, harassment, intimidation, violence, criminalization, and shrinking civic space (Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2014). Therefore, they need more support and protection from the international community and other stakeholders who share their values and goals. By working together with civil society and social movements, we can contribute to building a more just and democratic world.

Summary

Civil society and social movements are essential actors in advancing human rights and democracy around the world. They play a vital role in raising awareness, mobilizing people, advocating for change, holding governments accountable, and providing services and support to marginalized groups. To conclude, civil society and social movements are crucial for promoting human rights and democracy in the world. They face many challenges but also have many opportunities to overcome them. They need to be supported by other actors who value their contributions and respect their autonomy. They also need to be self-reflective and adaptive to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

Civil society and social movements are key actors in advancing human rights and democracy around the world. They provide various forms of support and advocacy for excluded and oppressed groups, challenge injustice and inequality, and hold governments accountable for their actions and obligations. They also contribute to building a culture of participation, solidarity and citizenship among people who share common interests and goals.

However, civil society and social movements face many challenges and constraints in their work, such as political repression, legal restrictions, social stigma, lack of resources, and internal divisions. They also need to adapt to changing contexts and opportunities, and forge alliances and partnerships with other actors across state and society. To be effective and sustainable, they need to balance their roles as service providers, watchdogs, educators, mobilizers, innovators, and negotiators.

Conclusion

In this paper, the researchers have been able to explore the role of civil society and social movements in promoting human rights and democracy around the world. It has been seen how these actors can challenge authoritarian regimes, demand accountability and justice, and mobilize citizens for social change. The researcher has also discussed some of the challenges and risks that civil society and social movements face, such as repression, co-optation, fragmentation, and donor dependence. The paper has argued that civil society and social movements need to be supported and protected by the international community, as well as by local actors, in order to sustain their vital work for human rights and democracy. It is hoped

that this paper has espoused more about the role of civil society and social movements in Nigeria, and to join them in their efforts to make the world a better place.

Recommendations

The researchers made the following recommendations based on the findings from the study:

1. Strengthening of the capacity and coordination of civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movements to advocate for human rights and democracy in Nigeria
2. There is need to support the participation and representation of marginalized groups, such as women, youth, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities, in decision-making processes and public institutions.
3. All hands must be on deck to enhance the collaboration and dialogue between CSOs, social movements and government actors to foster mutual trust and accountability
4. There is need to promote civic education and awareness on human rights and democratic values among the general public, especially in rural areas and conflict zones
5. There is a need to monitor and document human rights violations and abuses by state and non-state actors and seek redress through legal and non-violent means
6. Mobilization and engagement of civil societies with regional and international human rights mechanisms and networks to amplify the voices of Nigerian civil society and social movements.

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