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An Assessment of NGOs and Civil Societies Advantages and Disadvantages to Africans Post of the Independence Era

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to identify the major advantages and disadvantages of NGOs and Civil Societies in the post independent Africa. A note I want to give is the terms 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' should be understood in a sense that the paper is not evaluating the works of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations but pinpointing their benefits and side-effects to Africa. For that reason, the terms advantages and disadvantages can be interchangeably used by 'benefits' and 'side-effects' respectively. Another case I want to notify is the types of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations/Civil Societies that will be discussed throughout the paper are the entities found at the international level; not the national or local ones. This is due to the fact that the NGOs and CSOs(which were/are steered by the Western Europe and the USA) at the international level had/have the lion's share influences in the Third World in general and Africa in particular. Ultimately, although the topic of this paper is wide, it is presented in a short and precise volume, henceforth, all each of the advantages and disadvantages are not listed but few of them. So, I hope this small book will be used to produce a larger volume on the same topic.

Keywords. Ngos, Civil Societies, Globalization, Self-Help Organizations, Post-Colonial Africa

Introduction

NGOs, Civil Society, and Globalization

The concepts of NGOs, Civil Societies and Globalization are among the most interesting issues inviting especially of the experts in the academic world to hot discussions (including controversies) due to the consequences they have brought to the present generation.

The assumptions concerning the three terms vary as equal as the number of the experts as a result of the scholars' view of point based on their life experiences. Different ideas have been being digested among different individuals in the world; a precise origin (time and place), definition, and consequences of the aforementioned concepts at global and continental level are not presented the same. Despite this, I have attempted to find out some common definitions of them as follows:

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are organizations that are not owned by a government but are one of sub-groups of organizations established by citizens, and providing services to the members and others; they are one of the constituents of a Civil Society.¹

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization

NGOs do have other alternative names such as Voluntary Organizations (VOs), Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs), Third-Sector Organizations (TSOs), Social Movement Organizations (SMOs), Grassroots Organizations (GOs), Self-Help Organizations (SHOs), and Private-Volunteer Organizations (PVOs).²

The above names are all in English; other languages label them in their own translations. Under here, we have a list of some popular NGOs in Africa.³ Among these: the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Doctors without Borders, Care, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, African Salvation Group, Save the Children and so on.

Civil Society Organizations or Civil Societies: Civil Society Organizations/Civil Societies are organizations independent of government, family and the private sector.⁴ The same source defines civil society as a political association governing social conflict via the imposition of rules that hold back citizens from harming one another. They are the summative of various non-governmental organizations that manifest interests and will of citizens.⁵

Civil Societies embrace such entities as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, community groups, women's organizations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, and the like.⁶

Globalization: The term globalization can be defined as the process of interaction and integration between people, companies and governments worldwide; or in an example, it is a process in which different peoples from different far places gather at a village and share what they have among themselves.⁷ Therefore, globalization is equivalent to villagization; faster the advancement of technologies, the easier and closer the peoples, to exchange ideas, fashions, cultures, services and goods and etc. This indicates that technologies are among the vanguard responsible factors speeding up the processes of globalization.

Historical Background of NGOs

International NGOs came into existence right after the late 18th century AD, and in the passage of time the number of NGOs began to increase.⁸ For instance, in 1914 there were about 1083 NGOs in the world; they revealed radical changes in terms of number after the establishment of the UN.⁹

Among the reasons that were responsible for the establishment of NGOs were the struggles made to avoid slavery and women's suffrage or in general the rising idea of humanitarianism.¹⁰

Historical Background of Civil Societies

The formation of Civil Societies is traced back to the time of Aristotle (a Greek philosopher who lived 384–322 BC¹¹), and the term was first used by him, and later by Cicero (a Roman philosopher and politician lived 106 BC – 7 December 43 BC¹²); the first civil

² Ibid.,

³ <http://ngos.org/ngos-in-africa/>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society

⁵ Ibid.,

⁶ Marire Mary Ijeoma and Ruby Ike, *Effect of Globalization on the Development of Civil Society Organization in Nigeria*, 2019, p.7.

⁷ Ibid., p.3

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle>

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicero>

societies were formed by a political community.¹³ The politics, fighting authoritarian regimes to bring about a free citizen on an equal balance under the rule of law in Europe was the pushing factor for the establishment of the Civil Societies.¹⁴

Historical Background of Globalization

There is no a commonly agreed starting point for the establishment of globalization; different scholars recommend the origin of globalization differently. Some say that it was started before the European Age of Discovery and Voyages to the New World; others present it in the 1820s.¹⁵ Even some take it back to the Third Millennium BC¹⁶. The term globalization began to be popular right after the 1970s.¹⁷

In fact globalization started in the early 19th century AD, after some time the expansion of the Industrial Revolution. This is because the advancement of modes of transportation and telecommunications are the hands that have been bringing peoples of the world closer to each other. After the Industrial Revolution, the fruits of the revolution have eased the possibilities of accessing peoples, products, and ideas from every corner of the globe. Hence, for me, globalization originated after some times of the inauguration of the Industrial Revolution.

Civil Society Organizations and Globalization

Civil Society Organizations and globalization do have both direct and indirect correlations each other. We have some illustrations for their direct relations: As an illustration, some international NGOs are purposely established to expand the Western identities (missions) such as political, economic and social systems. Others are not but propagate the Western missions on their ways to their wished-for other targets.

Civil Society Organizations are the one which intensively applying the fruits of the Industrial Revolution in order to dispatch their respective missions to diverse angles of the world. Thus, they are among the vanguard agents that increase the aspects of globalization such as technologies, political and economic systems, dressing styles, music, religions, ideas etc all over the world.

Similarities and Differences between NGOs and Civil Societies

In fact, the differences between NGOs and Civil Societies look like confusing. Throughout the materials I went through, I came across some challenging statements about the similarities and differences between the two entities. Regardless of this, I have tried to put the basic and clear similarities and differences between them as follows:

Similarities

NGOs and Civil Societies are not owned and managed by a government but by civilians/individuals who established them.¹⁸

Both of them don't stand for profit, which means they are not business oriented.¹⁹

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵ Mary and Ike, p.3.

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-civil-society-and-NGO>

¹⁹ Ibid.,

Both of them stretch their hands in the political, economic and social aspects of the peoples they reach,²⁰ but, this does not mean that a political party is an NGO or a Civil Society !!

They can be organized at local, national or international level.²¹

N.B: The NGOs and Civil Society Organizations that will be discussed all the way through this paper are that of found at the international level.

Differences

An NGO is a subset of Civil Societies.²² Therefore, Civil Societies are the conglomeration of NGOs, activists, academician thinkers, and so on.

An NGO is a recent concept, while a Civil Society is an older concept.²³ (Refer 'Historical Background of NGOs, and Civil Societies.)

An NGO performs both the advocacy* and service roles, but a Civil Society works on advocacy.²⁴

Advantages and Disadvantages of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations/Civil Societies

Everything does not come to this world with single aim. If it come for good (though the degree varies), there is/are usually a side-effect/s behind and vice versa. When we turn this fact into our context, from the inception NGOs or Civil Society Organizations were conceived always as good doers or supposed to benefit the whole society in target, but they have witnessed that they came to the globe with disadvantages too.

First let us spell out some of the advantages of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in Africa after independence:

Advantages of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations/Civil Societies in the post independent Africa

NGOs and CSOs (Civil Society Organizations/Civil Societies) delivered/have delivered immediate financial and material help for the needy. Hence, though not permanent, they have given relief for the social section under absolute poverty.

Civil Society Organizations are thankful in that they contributed a lot in minimizing some evil cultures such as female genital mutilation, early marriages, raping, abduction, unplanned family size, gender inequality and so on. Some of them have been engaging in the health care, education and development projects etc.

Civil Society Organizations played great roles in bringing about the concept of democratization by working against authoritarian regimes since the 1990s following the collapse of Communism in the Soviet bloc,²⁵ but the process of democratization lacks consolidation and sustainability in the continent.²⁶

NGOs and CSOs played roles in the economic sector in terms of mitigating corruption, one of the evils that has been impoverishing Africa. For instance, in Uganda a coalition of NGOs and CSOs poured into the streets in 2012 by holding a slogan entitled "Return our money and

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Ibid.,

²² Mary and Ike, p.7.

²³ <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-civil-society-and-NGO>

²⁴ Adapted from <https://www.climate-policy-watcher.org/global-climate-2/advocacy-and-operational-ngos.html>

*Advocacy is when the NGOs or Civil Societies providing principles-based supports to a particular society through campaigns or other means in the issues of human rights, social justice, environmental movements and related cases. In short, it is the act of delivering advices to and encouraging the concerned society humanitarian and other political issues

²⁵ <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/16739>

²⁶ The political situations what we are observing in many African countries are the evidences for the fact that democracy is still at its infant stage.

resign!!" ²⁷ In South Africa too, Civil Societies were in active movements in fighting corruption since the 1990s.²⁸ Such entities did the same thing in Tunisia against the ruling party of President Ben Ali in 2011.²⁹

The entities are advantageous in that they have the ability to access the poor society who live in geographically-difficult-to reach areas better than the government of that particular country can do.³⁰

Since African states are economically weak, citizens settling far from the center had/have no the chance to be visited by the government due to its lack of finance to build infrastructures and provide services to them, whereas NGOs had/have the potential to reach these kind of societies due to their policy of 'help the specified one (society)'.

These institutions are imperative in protecting the rich,³¹ because while the poor is provided with aids in cash or kind the youngsters are likely not engaging in crimes such as looting and thefts on the economically better class.

NGOs and Civil Society Organizations are thankful for providing humanitarian services. **Save the Children** is one of the well known NGOs in Africa. **Oxfam** and **Plan International** have kept themselves busy in similar activities.³²

The entities are appreciated for producing local manpower that is able to run big institutions.³³ Formerly, the NGOs staffs were overwhelmed by whites, but later local staff began to join and get experiences in management and other skills.

Disadvantages of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in the post independent Africa

It is a universal truth that many of the NGOs and CSOs were/are initiated and managed by the developed countries; while it has been the Third World receiving the gifts from the NGOs and CSOs. As they have roses (merits), they do have thorns (demerits) too to the continent of Africa. Here are some of the major side-effects of the NGOs and CSOs in the post independent Africa:

The donations from the organizations transferred Africa from poor to poorer.³⁴ Indeed, this statement may make us laughed and sometimes it is paradoxical. Financial and material supports have been pouring into Africa. The same source indicates that international donors give about \$50 billion each year, but no tangible changes in the lives of African poor societies. For me, the reason for this supposition is, because Africans are waiting for the aids from the international donors, they are not courageous to work hard for extra income to be more productive. This has made Africans not to be self-contained economically, when the aids are stopped the society that used to get them become terrorized (loses its confidence); hence, this is one of the justifications for Africans being poorer.

One of the authors recommends the following idea about what the NGOs and CSOs should do if really they want Africans to be divorced from poverty:

...the mandate of NGOS in Africa should be shifted from that of a conduit for advocating good policy, good governance, and disseminating western aid, to that of a channel for capacity

²⁷ <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/rise-civil-society-groups-africa>

²⁸ Ibid.,

²⁹ Ibid.,

³⁰ <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/politics/advantages-disadvantages-ngos-5937.php>

³¹ <https://newafricanmagazine.com/16536/>

³² Ibid.,

³³ Ibid.,

³⁴ <http://ngos.org/ngos-in-africa/>

*building and local community empowerment. This is the only way that long-term development and economic growth can be encouraged and achieved in Africa.*³⁵

The organizations have left African countries debt-laden and inflation-prone.³⁶ As mentioned in the above paragraph, Africans receive around \$50 billion each year from the developed world through the NGOs and Civil Society Organizations. This is an addition to the already existing currency circulation in the respective country. Again this distorts the economy of the continent by causing inflation. To the worst, some Civil Society Organizations were/are providing credits to be returned after some time; this will result in headaches to the society in particular and the whole country in general that received the credit.

The aids from the NGOs and CSOs undermine the sovereignty of African states and this puts the peoples at the mercy of donors.³⁷ Indeed, this is what the underdeveloped world is being humiliated with. Especially, donors from the Western Europe and USA use NGOs and Civil Society Organizations as one of the best devices to manipulate the economically poor countries just to let them obey the words what the developed states of Europe and the USA utter. They intimidate the poor countries with their donations, if the countries are not likely to fulfill what they want from them. Therefore, this is one of the most serious evil of NGOs and CSOs against Africa.

Africans have always been owed to the Western Europe, USA and other nations' aids while Africans without being pulled out from poverty. This is due to maybe the NGOs not willing to empower the receivers of the aids to be productive. (i.e. multiply the money they collect from the NGOs through various creative businesses). But, the fact is that the receivers take the money to buy bread, pieces of clothes for a day; tomorrow, the same thing is done too. In this situation, Africans don't seem to be separated from poverty.

Consequently, NGOs and CSOs help them in the short run, not in the long run. No more deep-seated political and economic changes, even though aids have been bucketing into the continent. One of the sources witnesses this fact as:

*...but it is hard to know how much money has been sent by NGOs and where it goes. One of the biggest criticisms of these organizations is that their funding is opaque and their impact is hard to measure.*³⁸

Just relating to the above point, the NGOs have dehumanized Africans. According to Manji, one of the men who worked as the director of the Amnesty International, development agencies and NGOs conceive Africa in terms of underdeveloped or in need of modernization while African had their own political, economic and social systems.

*Development agencies and NGOs frame Africa in terms of being underdeveloped or in need of modernization. The whole experience of colonialism and its continuity after independence has been one of the **dehumanization** of people". The only way Africa can fight back – and learn to depend on its own institutions – “is to actually invent what it means to be human. For me that’s the big task that we face”³⁹*

NGOs and CSOs have continued to contaminate the indigenous cultures of the post independent Africa. Given that these entities are among the leading agents in disseminating the aspects of globalization from the Western Europe and USA to the rest of the world in general

³⁵ Ogechi Njoku, *NGOs and Africa's Development and Economic Growth*, International Institute for Justice and Development, Nigeria, 2006, p.2.

³⁶ Ibid.,

³⁷ <https://theconversation.com/the-role-of-ngos-in-africa-are-they-a-force-for-good-76227>

³⁸ <https://www.theafricareport.com/777/ngos-blessing-or-curse/>

³⁹ Ibid.,

and Africa in particular, new models of life styles have been flocking to the continent. For a case in point, key personnel and other staff members in the NGOs come to Africa with their own dressing styles, food (a recent phenomena is the popularity of McDonald (McDonalozation), religion (Christianity) and other of their identities.

The African youths have begun to model all styles of the personnel; step by step, these styles reached to the remaining population throughout the continent. As a result of this, African organic cultures could be faded out.

A number of researchers have begun to systematically examine how globalization is changing the lives of youth in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Arab countries, in sub-Saharan Africa, and in Southeast Asia. More and more young people in these areas have access to global information; they copy the styles of U.S. teenagers, sing English-language songs, have more leisure opportunities for dating, and are more likely to be playing similar computer games. In many of these places, rural households shrink as a result of youth migrating to urban areas in search of work and other opportunities. Gender roles are also transformed. While many observers see globalization as positive, promoting economic development and intercultural exchanges, there are also corrosive developments, such as globalization's threats to century-long traditions, religious identities, authority structures, values, and worldviews.⁴⁰

Generally speaking, the NGOs and CSOs had/have the aforementioned (and others but not mentioned in this paper for the time being) advantages and disadvantages in Africa in the post independence era.

Conclusion

NGOs and Civil Society Organizations are non-governmental entities working for citizens in need of political, economic and social help. The origin of NGOs is traced back to the late 18th century AD; NGOs became popular after 1945 (the time when WWII ended and the UN established).

Civil Societies' history goes back to the 4th century BC in the Roman period in the works of Aristotle. Political matters were the fundamental factors for the formation of civil societies during that time; and still politics has been the core point of civil societies.

Civil Society Organizations and globalization have both direct and indirect kinships. This is because the organizations were/are the agents intensifying the features of globalization. The process of globalization was started in the 1820s. The Industrial Revolution was responsible for the intensification of globalization, since it has put visible benchmarks and hastened the pace in facilitating conditions in bringing peoples, goods and ideas closer to each other.

NGOs and CSOs share common features and have differences too. Both of them are non-governmental institutions; they are not business oriented; and they are taking part in the political, economic and social affairs of the society who need the help.

*It should be noted that, political parties are not categorized under the list of NGOs or Civil Societies.

NGOs and CSOs are different in that a Civil Society Organization is a common name given to organizations: (not owned by a government, a non-profiting, a non-political and religious; and providing humanitarian and other services to the needy society); whereas NGOs are one examples of a Civil Society Organization/Civil Society; and NGOs came into existence after Civil Societies were established.

⁴⁰ Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Desirée Baolian Qin-Hilliard, *GLOBALIZATION: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, University of California Press, 2004, p.7.

NGOs and Civil Societies are found at local, national and international levels, but the international ones have overwhelming weight over the rest of the politically, economically and socially fragile countries in general and Africa in particular in the post independence period.

The influences can be viewed from both benefits and side-effects over Africa. Among the major benefits of the NGOs and CSOs: They played great roles in the advocacy for and with the poor; the organizations have attempted to influence government policies and programs on behalf of the marginalized section of societies. As a result of this, this has added a little bit to the processes being made to bring about democratization in the continent, though there is no consolidation and sustainability.

The entities have given temporary reliefs on poverty. They are reaching the poor dwelling in the periphery better than the government of that particular state; hence, eased the burdens of the government.

They have the share in mitigating crimes committed by the poor youngsters against the economically-better social class, as the entities provide with some temporary basic needs to the poor youngsters.

They have given technical experiences to the local personnel in the management profession and other skills when they employed them in the NGOs staff. They are thankful in minimizing some economic and social evils such as corruption, female genital mutilation and so on.

NGOs and CSOs have side-effects in the short and long terms too: Especially, political and economic dependency upon their former colonial powers is the most serious bad legacies of NGOs and CSOs, or in brief they have caused *neocolonialism*.

Through their (NGOs and CSOs) financial and material aids African states became debt-laden and inflation-prone; the frequently flowing aids from the NGOs haven't made Africans politically, economically and socially confident, since Africans were/are dependent on NGOs and CSOs driven by especially of the Western Europe and USA. Due to this, sovereignty is usually under question.

The other major demerit of the entities under discussion is they have infected the indigenous African cultures through various ways such as importing the life styles and ideas of Europe and USA via the personnel who worked/working in the NGOs/CSOs, and importing technologies. Here, technologies, ideas and life styles may have or haven't been imported deliberately to destroy the indigenous cultures of Africa but the fade out of African cultures was inevitable

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