

Civil Society and Development Assistance: USAID-Northern Education Initiatives (NEI) in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the impact of civil society groups in actualizing the developmental goals of donor agencies with specific reference to USAID-NEI project in Northern Nigeria. The article argues that civil society organizations involvement in implementing development programmes has significantly improved the life of the poor residence and brought about change in education system management. Thus, the civil society as agent of development has become a symbol of development assistance and also celebrated its unique attributes of emancipatory project. Within the case of USAID-NEI, the article has explained the implication of civil society active participation in development project and finally discussed the success offered by civil society groups in addressing problems associated with basic education in educationally disadvantaged society of Nigeria.

Keywords: civil society, donor agencies, development assistance, northern education initiatives,

Introduction

The presence, purposes and increasing involvement of civil society organizations in humanitarian assistance in the developing countries has greatly impacted the life of poor people mostly at the grassroots level. Their contributions and supports vary between societies and their impending predicaments and existing flights. Thus, majority of civil society organizations has chosen to involve with welfare, well-being and freedom of the people they are serving. Their concerned with individual welfare has motivated them to engaged with ideal community based organizations and local governments for programs that will change the life of poor residents. Resources availability and capacity of most civil society organizations had created ample opportunities for their political influence in societies where their programs have played a role in gaining benefits for local level development. Generally, civil society is associated with programmes of progressive social and political change, of which, its most well-known agents; Non-governmental organization (NGOs) take a leading role in promoting emancipatory projects (Abdelrahman, 2004).

There are two perspectives through which activities of civil society groups are perceived and theorized. One supported the existence of civil societies and their activities as important instrument for democratization and social provisioning; demonstrating the weakness of state and its institutions. The other perspective disagrees with the capacity of civil society organizations to

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replace the state in social services delivery, especially social and economic development (Muhammed, 2010). These conflicting perspectives are connected with existential realities associated with distrust level against civil society groups both by poor residents and government at all levels. And also, their ability to improve the life of peoples, especially, the poor in terms of local level development. This paper is aimed at examining civil society organizations and their commitments to achieving individual development with special reference to poor education system in Northern Nigeria. Using Northern Education Initiatives (NEI) introduced to Sokoto and Bauchi states of Northern Nigeria under the support of USAID. The article will evaluate the impact of this initiative. In doing that the study will also examine the extent to which Northern Education Initiatives (NEI) effects human development. The question is; how will improve education system introduced by such liberal intervention have affect the frequency of human development? First, let consider how specifically basic education might be related to issue of individual development.

Civil Society Groups as Agent of Development in Africa

The concept of development in this article is in the context of structural change and transformation in social, economic, cultural and political life of the people (Duffield, 2010). The central idea is that of civil society organizations presence in assistance programmes in the continent of Africa as a form of 'liberal interventionism' to support the poor southern population. It is not only its profound impact on political change but in the core aspect of human security and development (Hettne, 2010). The use of NGOs as important agents for development will also help us understand how this interventionism affected the life of the poor at the grassroots level. Therefore, to limit civil society organizations involvement in political processes alone will leave us with their activities "in nearly every sub-Saharan country to remove autocratic repressive governments and empower African people to reclaim control over their political destinies" (Harbeson, 1994:1). Thus, perceiving civil society organizations as agent of development will automatically link it as a component of western democracy promoting modernization project and ensuring structural change within developing countries, particularly the African countries (Adamou, 2010; Ziegler, 2010). To explicate civil society groups as agent of development in Africa, let's examines the nature of civil society organizations from its social provisioning perspectives.

According to Ziegler, civil society needs cooperation of the state to operate within a narrow political space and that enable foreign donors to effectively assist the development of civil society (Ziegler, 2010 815-816). As such, civil society organizations needs guide from the collaborative structures that will enable them reaching out to the poor local people. However, there exist some exceptions whereby civil society groups exceeded their limits to meet their ends. To describe civil society organizations, Bratton seem to believe that, civil society is about public political activity that occurs through collective action in which individuals join to pursue shared goals in an organized institutional form far beyond the boundaries of the household (Bratton, 1994). Others posited social movement and participation in assistant program to be the

very nature of civil society mostly in emerging democracies (Goetze, 2006; Adamou, 2010; and Ziegler, 2010).

When considering the existing discussions, it is obvious that civil society presence in many developing countries has direct linkages with its emancipatory project and welfare to the poor residents. But the question of whose interest civil society organizations is protecting remain a topic of scholarly debate that cannot be ignored. Despite the existence of conflicting theories over whose goal civil society groups, especially, NGOs strives to achieve, the involvement of civil society organizations in local level development in Africa has created great opportunities for addressing problems. When looking at the efforts of addressing problems associated to economic and social flights in the continent, civil society organizations has proven its impact in the development process as well as having considerable influence in decision making process. To be effective and free from restrictions, the activities of civil societies require some degree of freedom or spaces to connect to the poor. As noted by Callaghy, once a link is made between political liberalization and economic rehabilitation, civil societies will strengthen to attract changes to socio-economic life of the people (Callaghy, 1994). Now that almost all African states are democratized, civil societies has interacted with a great number of poor residents. This permitted them share the experiences of different communities and know much of their problems and challenges particularly issue related to education, health care delivery and the like. Studies show that collaborations between civil societies with the state and other donor agencies were often indicative of presence of civil societies and their assistance programmes on health and education in local areas. Engagements into public life and desire to improve the living conditions of the people mostly the poor has been adduced to consider civil society organizations as agents of local levels development. They reach out through various ways and serve people both concrete and in material terms.

Why Assisting the Local Poor Matter?

Many scholars have noted why civil society groups concerned more about development. Reducing poverty and empowering vulnerable people especially children has long been considered by civil societies a significant aspect of sustainable development. Shigetomi, for instance, asserts that, “the existence of people who have been left out by both the state and the market seems to be the most fundamental factor behind the establishment and continued existence of NGOs in developing countries” (Shigetomi, 2002). This simply means that the current globalizations reordering and restructuring has systematically excluded a large number of people mostly from the grassroots and this is evident from the persistence of monetarism and rolling back of the state from provision of essential social services.

Another important aspect that motivated civil societies to engage more in helping the poor residents has connection with the internal structure of the state that vividly exposes its weakness as to why it insidiously failed to manage available resources. In Africa, states work with modern institutions but only that “there are factors which dominate the weak state, making it powerful

without being capable of governing effectively”. (Whaites, 1996:28). Thus, government inability in meeting up the yearning and aspirations of the people is what led to lack of development therefore promoting civil society groups as an important factor in the development thinking. Adoption of collective mechanisms and village level project has boast growth of local organizations through which civil societies promote its emancipatory project. In Nigeria, civil society’s active involvement in social provisioning has fastened interaction of social change and growth of civil society groups within the country development process which in return nurture development.

In 2007, Nigeria country office of UNICEF highlighted that; “the global figure for out-of-school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million being girls. Over 80% of these girls live in sub-Saharan Africa”. It further illustrated that, in Nigeria girl’s access to basic education especially in the northern states has remained low indicating possibility of having high illiteracy among women in the northern region at the time of this investigation. The outcomes of the study shows that, it is only few as 20% of women in the north west and north east of the country are literate and have attended school (UNICEF, 2007). And this is what intimated USAID to initiate education programme, knowing fully that, education is a right and instrumental in advancing humanity. Likewise, it is also essential in ensuring investment in local people and their local level development.

USAID-Northern Education Initiatives (NEI) in Nigeria

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is one of the United States’ foreign assistance working around the world to expand democracy, free markets and improves the life of individuals in developing countries. Its partnership with Nigeria is all about assisting the citizens of the country to build sustainable development and healthy relocated population. Thus, it supports the government of Nigeria in all aspects of human life, more especially nowadays the goals of the Millennium Development Goals. Most of USAID/Nigeria’s development activities are executed with the help of Nongovernmental organizations that are receiving grants and on contrast basis. According to Public Affairs section of United States Embassy, in Nigeria, the quality of basic education in Nigeria is poor; therefore it leads to poor performance among children. The section also estimated that seven million children of primary school-age in the country are not enrolled in school.

From these indices, the Northern region is seriously the most affected with high numbers. UNICEF (2007), for instance, has reported that; in Nigeria, girl’s access to basic education, especially in the Northern States has remained low. As such there exist wide variations across states and the zones. And in the Northern part of the country, the number of children out of school is particularly high. It is thus that, USAID’s support pay attention on initiating activities to strengthen education systems at the state level. Although, there are different names given to different intervention or support, the Northern Education Initiative (NEI) is what USAID introduced in two states of the Northern Region: Bauchi and Sokoto. Through coordinated

programs the initiative improves the capacity of both state and local governments in the selected areas. It assists in delivering key education services through effective management, sustainability and oversight functions. NEI also have enabled vulnerable children to acquire basic education and other important services through innovations and improves formal education system. Girl-child education program helped reasonable numbers of girl-child to be enrolled, mostly orphan and vulnerable children. Teachers were trained to support the system, for the simple reason that educating a girl-child is all about educating the family.

Knowing fully that, the project is for the period of four years (2009-2013), and the funding is estimated to reach \$3,800,000 (US Dollars). Its expected results are strengthened key education management systems in target states, strengthened delivery of teacher training services for primary schools, improved capacity to develop and deliver education services to at-risk populations, improved student performance, policy decisions based on strategic information at state and local levels (USAID 2013). The intervention involves both governmental and non-governmental institutions to ensure successful delivery of formal and informal education services to the pre-primary school population as well as marginalized out of school children, including itinerant Qur'anic students (Almajirai) and girls. In Bauchi State, the mission has affected all the 20 local government areas of the state. Considerably, more finance was channeled to various local authorities through State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), of which provisions of basic traditional inputs like books, equipment and instructional materials were provided. While the civil society groups were supported with innovative policy to approach both the enrollment system and the quality assurance and sustainability, the programs and its development activities uses contracts to engage or hire to provide specific services and goods, while grants were given to enter into partnership and collaboration with local organizations (USAID, 2013).

Civil Society and Education: Implication for Human Development

The influence of civil society on education depends on local authority's recognition of its role as partners in education sector, its contributions in the scaling up of activities and about all collaboration with international donors. Focusing on education is important as an instrument for human development as well as public responsibility in the society, primarily; the concern for basic education particularly in the Northern region of Nigeria is in connection with global efforts to address challenge of illiteracy and making education accessible to all for the development of human being. This is in line with international commitments aimed at achieving universal basic education for all by 2015. UNICEF in its 2005 state of the world's children report observed that, more than 121 million primary school age children are out of school, and the majority of them are girls (UNICEF, 2004).

Civil society organizations works in education has essentially connected to its role in social provisioning as a strategic intervention, with some innovative approaches to ensure sustainable human development. In most cases, the self-reported areas of focus of civil society groups shown

advocacy campaign, assisting orphans and the vulnerable to attain school has dominated the thematic priority in education. For example FOMWAN one of the beneficiary and partner in USAID project has been using enlightenment campaigns to reach out to local level residence and encourage them to allow their children attend school at their early age. Also they use to enroll orphans in their own primary and secondary schools as part of support in meeting the goals of USAID-NEI Project in Bauchi.

Technical and financial support that government institutions like SUBEB received from USAID-NEI project also help significantly in assisting many civil society groups; in areas like man power training, provision of materials and equipment to support orphans under their control in schools and other education system. Provided that human development at individual level concern more on how one overcome major requirement of life, education right from early age has been arguably became an important yardstick by which possibilities of one's development is measured. Literate societies are always considered societies with sense of social transformation and productivity. Thus, development as perceived by different thinkers has greater linkages with what really transform society in terms of their practical changes in social, political and economic spheres of life. Once the level of education among individuals is effective, there is every tendency that such society will improve the socio-economic capacity of that society in question. An illiterate society on the other side can be said to have shown its inability to transform its economy to achieve certain positive changes that in return help improve the quality of life of individual and the productivity of the state as well.

As such, civil society group's commitment to ensure every family educate its child at least with basic education has demonstrated how such groups become active in child education, at least in its emancipatory project and social change plan. By giving assistant to educate individuals in society with high rate of uneducated children has elucidates in practice high commitments to improve local level development for future development of the society and the state as well. For, example Routley (2011) has pointed out that within development policy civil society groups, NGO in focus which stood out as effective NGOs are always associated with profound desire and engagement to ensure public goods are distributed equitably and efficiently among members of the society. This concern about the human development, specifically education has corroborate with the goals of most donor agencies like USAID and international interventionism like UN-MDGs plan to improve human security and development in the year 2015. The activities of civil society groups as regard to reaching out to poor residence at the grassroots symbolizes key concern among civil society groups to ensure at local level there is increases in open access to education which increasingly become difficult to poor residence or rather poorly delivered to societies due to their location in remote areas.

Apart from encouraging poor people mostly in local areas to allow their children access to basic education, civil society organizations has remain the most effective organization reaching out to schools and offer adequate training with innovation to teachers and principal officers. Among other things the new education management techniques has been effective for quality assurance.

Different groups of people gained from what civil society contributed not only in the area of education but in other important aspects of community like political and social freedoms, poverty alleviation and empowering homeless and the poor. This is particularly clear from commitment of NGOs in activities of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In partnership with state, NGOs supported by USAID-NEI project in northern Nigeria has been a workable collaboration going by what are expected to be the outcomes of the project. Within the selected areas of Bauchi and Sokoto states, local authorities are found to be working with NGOs actively involved in supporting poor people more especially in pro-poor policies which education happened to be one of the most important aspect of human development. Donor agencies like USAID have supported the programme as design in their policy directives. Likewise in financial terms the USAID have played a role in seeing all needed are provided to civil society groups and authorities partnering to actualize the success of such intervention. The relationship exhibited in this collaborative efforts has demonstrate how effective USAID intervention is, and how relevant it is to assisting the poor not only in single human life such as education, but generally as its affects economy, good governance and businesses aimed at reducing the hardship poor residence are faced with. It is by using the civil society organizations as middle actors in social services delivery that development assistance civil society groups more especially NGO's become effective and successful in gaining benefits for poor residences in Nigeria (Muhammad 2007, Routley 2011). Thus, what civil society organizations has done help significantly in supporting proper functioning of the state, and also their action represent attempt at reaching the goals of donor agencies idealized from desire to improve human development in the continent of Africa.

While in practice what come out as development assistance from donor agencies is the realization of the goals in terms of reaching the poor or delivering to the right needed person. It has resided with logical effort of civil society groups as emancipators. NGOs' contribution in concretizing and organizing the poor residence on how they will go about pressing the state to actualize certain policies or even influencing the state to pay more attention to issues related to human right helped a lot against issues that are trivial. These in turn have different implication for the ability of the poor residence to become literate and productive in the future by virtue of following the strategies and tactics employed by civil society groups. Shigetomi (2002), for instance have acknowledged that, civil society groups in most of the developing countries are effective and have some concern on welfare of the people especially in taking steps in addressing issues of development and empowering the poor. Lack of education among most people is to a greater extent linked with the condition they found themselves in the state. Therefore lack of basic knowledge that will determine their involvement in productive sector of the economy is profoundly among the reasons why large number of poor people persists. Not only that, the skills they need to improve on what they are doing to earn a living or relation with financial institution also has direct linkages with one's education and his/her ability to operation within the system.

The Impact of USAID-NEI on Education Development in Northern Nigeria

It is without doubt that, United States policy on educational development in Nigeria has recorded certain degree of improvement and change in the manner in which access to good education is becoming a mirage to poor residence. The policy has achieved a lot especially in increasing the number of children enrolled in schools and also in improving the quality of teaching as well as innovative change enshrined in education system and management. Among these achievements is promoting learning in educationally disadvantaged states in Northern Nigeria, training of teachers, increasing community involvement and supporting infrastructure improvements for schools.

According to Akunga (2010), development assistance and interactions in education, more especially in areas with acute deprivation and weak governance has tremendously encourage access to education by making schools safer and creating enabling environment for girl-child education which realistically promote learning and also became acceptable to parents. This corroborates with what in practice USAID achieved. NEI project in partnership with civil society groups has provides numerous assistance to education sector alone as part of the intervention. For example, in 2010, USAID-NEI enrolled over 64,000 students in the 200 NEI demonstration schools; about 15,000 of those students were identified as orphans and vulnerable children. A total of 317 administrators and other officials were trained on Mid-term Sector Strategy (MISS) Planning, Support and Monitoring, Education Management Information System (EMIS) Utilization and State Education Accounts (USEA) implementation in Bauchi and Sokoto States of Northern Nigeria. Likewise, in 2011 teachers and educators were trained to support basic education delivering in the same states (USAID-NEI 2011).

According to United Nations-Nigeria country report on girl-child education 2011, the 2005 National school figures revealed that substantial proportion of children of primary school age are not enrolled in school. But in 2011 after United Nations Girl-child Education project had involved civil society organizations to push NGEI agenda in some states in Nigeria, the outcomes provide policies promoting Girl-child education and increased in numbers of institutions supporting the realization of its goals in education (Okogie, 2011).

Conclusion

From what the research explored as regards to USAID-NEI and NGOs relationships or rather partnership for human development, it is apparent that the role played by civil societies make significant improvement in the life of individuals particularly in respect of their access to education and ability to bring innovative mechanisms to help education management as a whole with the support of USAID policy direction in Nigeria. This justify the use of civil society organization in promoting development provided that the goal is emancipating the poor from hardship and total denial of basic needs. So long as CSO are concern with human development

and human security, then their functions as well as environment they operate became relevant for analysis.

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