



Integrating Muslim Faith-based Organization (MFBO) into Civil Society Organization (CSO); An Empirical Review of Nigerian Islamic Organizations.

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Abstract

Civil society has been a central force in political, Socioeconomic reforms, and Nations Development. The activities of this groups has been seen by several authors as vital to the democratisation project and its sustenance. Only a few scholars have pointed to the Muslim Faith-based Organization (MFBO) that arises from the democratic ideals promoted by grassroots political activists and freedom fighters as the vanguard of educational struggle, health care institutions, and community-based development initiatives among Muslim faithful in South-West region of Nigeria.

Based on evidence from CSO groups in Nigeria, this paper tries to identifies goals, methods, strategies, and tendencies that should promote Muslim Faith-based Organizations (MFBO) as beacon of Muslim freedom, fountain for education and welfare development of the Ummah, protection of civil rights and resistance against state and other faiths repression of the Muslims, a mobilising platform for projection of substantive interests, the compelling force for religious moderation, and the epitome of popular struggles in an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence.

Originality/value - The paper uses a combination of literatures reviews from different articles by testing the connexion between Civil Society Organization (SCO) and Muslim Faith-based Organizations (MFBO). It identifies severe limitations as well as strengths in the kind of Muslim Faith-based Organizations (MFBO) approaches to the societal issues that should be seen as epitome to addressing key areas crucial to the attention of the Ummah and its implications.

Finally, it will clarify the dimensions in which Muslim Faith-based Organizations (MFBO) may play an important role as substitute for the welfare of the Ummah in an enabling sustenance of peace and tolerance for the betterment of the human society.

Keywords: Civil Society Organization, Muslim Faith-based Organizations, Community Development, Muslim Engagement Activities and Ummah.

1. Introduction

In Nigeria, civil society plays the crucial role of mouthpiece of human rights, legal, humanitarian services to democratisation and civil campaigns. They are associated with the wave of popular mobilisations against the brutal Military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha with popular slogan of 'IBB MUST GO' or 'Give us Democracy' as a wider protest against the Military junta and their regimes, failure to install democratically elect President in person of Chief M.K.O Abiola, a Muslim philanthropy to the extreme. Apart from the resistance to the Military regimes,

they are recognised with paradigm for societal resistance to state excessive abuse of human rights by the Military.

Furthermore, they are ideologically the social reform agent for good and relieve of the depressed. It has been identified as the composite of citizens, in usually non-partisan and non-situated and intermediating between the family hand and the government. Thereafter, civil society in Nigeria examined the relations to development activities and weaknesses of the government, democratisation and security of lives and properties with cognisance to national security, political culture of rights, obligations, Citizen Education, sensitisation with mobilization, and sustainable socio-economic and infrastructural development of the country.

Empirically, Nigeria civil society has much more contributions to the return of the country to the current democratic and civilian rule. These civic actions later transform into some political parties like Chief Gani Fawehinmi of National Conscience Party, Labour Party from the Labour Union, National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) to Alliance for Democracy (AD Party), and more.

Using several cases, this paper attempts to contribute to the limited literatures on Islamic activism in a multi-religious society like Nigeria by offering a Nigerian perspective on Islamic activism of Muslim Based Faith Organizations. Nigeria is an interesting argument for examining the meaning and practice of Islamic activism for many reasons in West Africa. One is the changing role of Muslim organizations in the dynamics of public space in Nigeria like an oriented Civil Society Organization. The study further explores and makes no attempt to take a normative position or to outline best practices with respect to the meaning and practice of Islamic engagement activities. It studies Islamic activities as neutral activities, to put it another way. The study begins by examining the framework in which Muslim organizations function in Nigeria to bring about an Ideal Islamic order as well as the socio-religious factors that positively affect the Muslim organizations and aid in development. Additionally, it does an exploratory examination of the local notion of Islamic engagement activities and socio-religious development like Civil Society Organizations using the findings from a purposeful survey of Muslim organizations regarding what is meant by the term "Islamic engagement activities." Finally, it discusses the conclusions that were reached after looking at the works of literature that are available.

Additionally, the importance of religious organizations is being increasingly recognized across the World, as well as in the discourse on religion, social responsibility, and the public sphere. A precarious relationship is central to the discourse, as religious forces both complement and undermine the public realm. Going by this, the article identified the parochial goals, poor control, and poor effects of a segment of civil society in Nigeria democratic sustenance and stability. The study raises the need to make Muslim Faith-Based Organizations vibrant, effective and efficient in order to address the needs of the Ummah.

2. Non-Religious CSO and the Nigerian Muslims

The motley expressions of civil associational life were of various hues. First were associations that identified with the monitoring and protection of civil rights and liberties. They were quite numerous but included Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), and Constitutional Rights Project (CRP). The first of the groups, the CLO, was formed in 1987. Thereafter, the CRP was formed by some erstwhile members of CLO. Other groups followed. Second were associations that were focused on agitating and struggling for democracy and accountability. Among these were Campaign for Democracy (CD), Association of Democratic Lawyers (ADLN),

Democratic Alternative (DA), United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN), National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON), and United Action for Democracy (UAD). The CD, the first of the lot, was formed in May 1991 to mobilise the civil population to resist government subversion of the transition programme. Third were professional and labour associations, which became more social and political in their concerns. Among these were Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Nigerian Medical Association, National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Nigerian Union of Journalists (the petroleum sector unions affiliated to the (NLC). Fourth were associations that focused projection of substantive economic, social, and cultural among which were Manufacturers Association Women in Nigeria (WIN). Fifth, there were associations of a religious, and cultural nature, which were active in the struggle for governance, equity, and justice. These included the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Catholic Bishops Church, Northern Elders Forum, Afenifere, and Southern Solidarity Front among others. It is unfortunate that the Muslim Ummah do not have a diversified pro-human rights front and proactive mouthpiece as Muslim Right Concern (MURIC). These Associations are two interconnected catalysts with a focus on supporting the needy, the oppressed and strengthening an environment for the people.

3. The Rise of Gulf Support and the decline

Virtually all donor's agencies or organizations are from the Gulf countries mostly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through World Muslims League, World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Harramain Foundation, International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO), Kuwait, Qatar Charitable Organization, Qatar, African Muslim Agency from Kuwait, Monazzamah Dawah Islamiyyah (MDI) from Sudan and many other efficient and notable Organization who have seized to functions due to the September 11 and the promulgation of the New World Order. With the recent and ongoing New World Order and Islamophobia, many of these organization have been very sceptical about donating to Muslim Faith-Based Organizations. This has resolved into a very fragile and critical development for the continuous activities of human and welfare development of the Muslims in dire need of their aide for survival.

The forces behind this retrogressive actions against the Islamic Organization across the entire world perceived Islam as a rallying point for divisive and a negative force, irrelevant and a stumbling block to their conceived worldview.

4. Transformation of Vision and Objective of Muslim Faith-Based Organization

The 21th century emerging Muslim Faith Based Organizations(MFBO) assessment of the role of Islamic faith in development is increasing. They are crucial propagation for religious adherence and significant contribution to human capital development through educational projects and transformation of Zakat into poverty alleviation programme. They should try to become an influential voice in the

Communities and States by playing an important role in human capital development, and economic, political, and social justice issues. They can use their larger congregation across the length and breadth of the country to influence political changes, an economy hub for the Muslims, an organised network that constitute power block through highly effective channels of communication as well as channels of human and financial resources. This offers them the largest national constituencies as Muslims across the Nation are brothers with potentials to work powerfully in advocacy and reconciliation. It is also an institutional vehicle that provides a spiritual fuel for development. This offer the advantages to;

- **Providing Efficient Socio-Development Services at the Poorest at The Grassroots;**

Historically in Nigeria, The Christian Missionary have been at the forefront of providing vital services to the poor, particularly in terms of health and education. MFBS must learn from this crucial services and gear up in a more advance way to contribute to this important sector to develop and engage the grassroots development. Nigeria MFBS must be accessible where government services do not reach. According to Kumi Naidoo, 'FBOs probably provide the best social and physical infrastructure in the poorest communities. . . because churches, temples, mosques and other places of worship are the focal points for the communities they serve' (CIVICUS 2000).

According to DFID (2005: 4), FBOs provide 50 percent of health and education services in sub-Saharan Africa. Some argue that faith-based provision is not only more efficient than state-run services, but because it is often subsidised by the faith community it costs the state less.

- **having a long-term, sustainable presence;**

Religious institutions are generally more sustainable than most civil-society organisations (CSOs). As one international NGO worker put it: 'I know that when I go back to Kenya my church will still be there, but I don't know if my development organisation will be' (Chester 2002: 12). MFBO institutions in Nigeria must also create sustainable presences at every local government area as crucial agenda for human capital development and welfares of their faith followers.

- **being valued by the poorest people across faiths;**

Every poor community's areas in Nigeria have a church without presence of a structure mosque as religion serves as central point to the social, cultural, and moral life of these poor communities. Faith leaders are often the gatekeepers and opinion leaders in these communities because Faith is a key aspect of cultural identity and wellbeing (Ver Beek 2000; Clarke 2007) and religions are also strengthening in importance, particularly in Africa, where 'people are converting in large numbers to Christianity and to Islam' (Commission for Africa 2005: 27).

Muslim Faith Based Organizations (MFBO) having deep experience and activities for the benefit of the community and civil skills are indispensable to the Ummah as the Muslim communities needed civil skills and activities that connected individuals and the society and not just Ibadah.

- **providing an alternative to a secular theory of Civil Society;**

MFBO should provide public space where diverse societal values and interests interact, i.e. where people come together to discuss, associate, and seek to influence broader societal interest for the benefit of the Ummah. This can be done through;

1. undertake non-partisan political actions and educating citizens about rights and responsibilities'
2. provide funding for larger charity
3. provide public orientation for civic rights and report human rights abuses
4. conduct volunteer work and participate in collective community development activities.

Harbeson (1992: 294) has noted that civil society may act as 'broker, buffer, symbol, agent, regulator, integrator, representative, and midwife of different values and sentiments.

1. The United Nations Conventional report of 1993 that "the comparative advantages of NGOs include the following;
 - A. A capacity to reach the poorest, and 'outreach' to remote areas;
 - B. A capacity to promote local participation and to implement projects in direct collaboration with target beneficiary groups;
 - C. A capacity to operate at low costs;
 - D. A capacity to be innovative, experimental, adaptive, and flexible; and
 - E. A capacity to strengthen local institutions/organizations by empowering marginal groups".

Few MFBO like MURIC plays the activities of invigorated civil debates, media criticisms, political mobilisation, and contestation for increased participation of the Muslims in all spheres of life without fear and intimidation.

5. **MFBO IN NIGERIA; CHALLENGES AND WEAKNESSES**

The organisational and ideological weaknesses of civil society have been identified by some scholars (Makumbe 1998: 309-1 I; Diamond 1997: 24-5). First, there are the problems of crippling poverty corruption, nepotism, parochialism, and opportunism. Second, much of African civil existence and self-sustaining capabilities, donors, and sometimes on the state itself. As often determine the agenda of interest, orchestrated the proliferation of civil rights early 1990s. Third, the internal structures and groups reflect the absence of democratic participation, consensus, and competition. Fourth, depth knowledge and awareness of the workings the making, and consequences of public policy. articulate ethnic, regional, cultural, and sectional civil society may become an arena of intense groups of interests organised. The human rights group witnessed and splits resulting from conflicts which could be accountability, tribalism, manipulation, treachery, squabbles' (Kukah 1997). These same problems and ineffective in the struggle for human rights 1997; Jega 1997). The groups were unable ordinary people, and their activities were largely cities

and the press (Kukah 1997). Many efforts in parallel and multiple activities, propelled requirements, and rarely joined energies in pursuance as these were (Jega 1997). Their activities by wastage, dissipation, and inefficiency.

Regarding MFBO, they are likely to be infected with the danger of ethnicity by organizing their primary activities and project in a certain region of Nigeria or that the resources are certainly for the tribe. There exist many Islamic organizations mostly propagating irreconcilable ideologies and working at cross-purposes. So while tremendous energy is expended by them in the Islamic work, the total effect is often zero and sometimes negative due to “picking on one another’s mistakes, neglecting positive contributions, and belittling others’ achievements.

The daily blackmailed and portrayed of Islam as a violent religion due to the incorrect ideology of ‘Boko Haram’ and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (shite) group generalised Islam that as supportive of violence or that Muslims are ‘terrorists’.

The Nigerian Muslim community lacks many basic needs: Muslim hospitals, adequate standard Muslim schools, and unavailability of the Qur’an and books of ahadith in local Nigerian languages. In public and private schools from the primary level to the tertiary institutions, there is a progressive decline in the number of Muslim students. In the North, there are some 10 million almajiris, wandering the streets for alms (MUHAMMED, A.T. 2013).

In Nigeria today, only 6 oriented Universities are Muslim Faith owned – Al-Hikma University, Fountain University, Crescent University, Al-Qalam University and Summit University, Al-Istiqama University, Sumaila, Kano– while the Christians have well over 10. At the secondary school level, there are few Muslim schools and even these are mostly of low quality such that many Muslims still prefer that their children go to Government schools where the use of Hijab is prohibited or ambiguous and teaching of Islamic studies are not available.

In his book, *Agenda For Muslims*, Abu Umar Al-Faruqi lamented the ineptitude of Muslims in high places. Among lawyers, medical doctors, skilled engineers, academics, and bigwig media practitioners, the Muslims constitute a tiny proportion. By the reverse, names like “Abdur-Razaq,” “Yekini,” “Habeeb,” etc, populate the garages, gambling centres, brothels, clubhouses, and the ranks of messengers.

It is still disheartening that despite the huge population of Muslims in Nigeria, the application of the Shariah has been restricted to Islamic Personal Law issues like marriage, divorce, and inheritance because of the antecedent of Christian Association of Nigeria who sees everything from the Muslim Ummah as an attempt to Islamize Nigeria.

6. MFBO: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA

Lack of effective and efficient Muslim oriented CSO over the past two decades’ have subjected the Muslims to instrument of repression, injustice, inequity, and group vendetta.

Consequently, the numerous Organizations like Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) emerged to articulate the injustices and grievances of the Muslim Ummah. The biased tendencies against the Muslims is a manifestation of long frustration and persisting character of the State non-responsive, arrogance against the fundamental right of religious practices in Nigeria. This includes prohibition of hijab at Nigeria law School, Nigeria Schools or Colleges of Nursing and Health Sciences, Nigerian Secondary School in the South-West of the country, and forceful removal of Hijab during National Identification exercises like International passport and Voters cards.

This study of how Muslims Students are treated at Secondary Institutions of learning, Universities, and Nigeria Law School over Hijab (Head-Cover) are barbarities which amount to crucial danger and fragile democratic governance of the country which the continuous marginalization of the Muslims will reveals problems of ethnicism, sectionalism, pluralistic societies, civil incoherence and conflicts, and lack of the rule of law.

7. Youth Response to Intolerance against Muslims: Good Practices and Lessons Learnt

Muslim youths in Nigeria are known to be agent for the promotion of respect for diversity and mutual understanding, in response to rise of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. Various youth initiatives were being initiated aims at promoting inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and raising awareness about Islam and Muslim cultures.

Various Muslim Youth societies are on the rise apart from the motherly Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) who are driven by youthful, vibrant, and emotionally intelligent personalities. A case in point is Siddiqah Institute that feed the poor all over Nigeria with the main goal of eradication of poverty and empower women across the country.

Other examples were given of support and advocacy services for young Muslims facing a wide range of social problems, such as insecurity, lack of confidence, mental health problems, cultural taboos, educational underachievement, unemployment, drug abuse, and criminal activity.

8. Discussions

This work examines and investigates the contributions of Islamic engagement activities in Nigeria and how it affects socio-religious and national development challenges just like the civil society organizations. The study suggested that there is positive relationship between Islamic engagement activities and national development and that Muslim organizations promote socio-religious development of the people and religious cum government interests on national issues such as insecurity, human rights abuses, kidnapping, and religious violence. The premise was supported by the research findings on poverty and lucrative extortions of money through kidnapping businesses, government security negligence, and divided political interest are factors contributing to Islamic extremism and violence in the country. This shows that Muslim organization networks have should take advantage to engage the Muslim faithful on peaceful coexistence existing

in the glorious Qur'an and *ahadith* to transform the societies. Second, the link between the understanding and practice of Islamic engagement activities and the peaceful spread of Islamic teachings in Nigeria were also supported and consistent with the above arguments. In other words, it seems that the spread of Islam can be linked to Islamic social engagement and the trustworthiness of the Muslims.

Finally, an important meaning can also be concluded from the literature reviews that Islamic social engagement contributes to the development of the Muslim communities in several fields such as education, health services delivery to politics, and large populations.

9. Ways forward

The Nigerian Government through the Central Bank of Nigeria should create and mandate a unit for financial intelligence to monitor, scrutinize and audit the account of MFBO with a view to produce positive results for long-term development and transparency as a means of averting any link with terrorism and terrorist-sponsoring activities. Clearly stating, as at today, no Nigeria-based Islamic Organizations has been link to any act of global terrorism but the Government should tighten the corner and nuke holes provided that it is done well without witch-hunting any Faith-Based Organizations.

Furthermore, donors need to become faith literate neatly and tidy. It will challenge secular desires for a clear division between faith and development work. But just because it is challenging does not mean that it should not be done. Faith in development has always been around. It is here to stay. Faith is a vital fuel for development. But like all fuels, it needs to be handled with understanding and care.

10. Recommendations for MFBO

1. Ensure that minority youth, including those with Muslim background, have equal access to health, housing, employment, education, counselling, and other social services, by developing effective integration policies for their access to those services;
2. Increase the quality and quantity of cultural exchange programmes between Muslims and other groups, both domestically and internationally, including student exchanges, study trips, and cultural centers servicing Muslim communities in host societies;
3. Extend governmental outreach initiatives with Muslim Ummah to include issues beyond security and prevention of radicalization, which can reinforce stereotypes that Muslims are a security problem;
4. Provide systematic financial and political support for grassroots MFBO working actively to promote tolerance, acceptance, and non-discrimination;
5. Ensure that Muslim students' right to freedom of religion and belief is respected and protected at all levels of the education system, in accordance with

international human rights standards and protection of minority rights;

6. Promote empirical and analytical research on the causes and consequences of intolerance and discrimination against Muslim communities;
7. Develop formal and informal educational projects, teaching materials, and activities to counter anti-Muslim prejudices and enhance the understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity among Muslims communities;
8. Develop educational policies and proposed framework to define and operationalise Muslim civil society in a holistic and multi-dimensional manner that fit the sharia compliance and combine academic research with participatory approaches in a way that empowers MFBS to balance contextual validity and cross-country capability to manage the needs of the Ummah.
9. For efficiency and effectiveness needed for social transformation, The Muslim Faith-Based Organizations (MFBO) needs to work with Civil Society Organization (CSO) to realize that all faiths' traditions provide the foundation for a set of common fundamental rights, including the right to physical and mental health and to envision common denominators in human dignity and human rights.

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