

ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION IN POLICY ADVOCACY IN NIGERIA

Danjuma Abdullahi

Department of Local Government and Development Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Corresponding Author's email: dancolgis@gmail.com



Abstract

This paper examined the role of Non-Governmental Organizations in development programmes particularly their role in policy advocacy, using Zamfara state of Nigeria as a unit. Qualitative research was adopted. Unstructured interviews were conducted with five informants. Thematic analysis was used and ATLAS ti8 software was used in the analysis of the data. The findings show that NGOs in Nigeria lack expertise knowledge on the modalities involve in conducting good policy advocacy. Other findings include poor funding of NGOs due to the fact that many of them relies on charity without alternatives sources of funding, intimidation of NGOs staff by government officials, NGOs are term as anti-government as well as dentation of members of NGOs which is affecting their capacity to influence government policies and programmes. The paper recommends training of NGOs staff, adherence to rule of law as well as respect of fundamental human rights.

Keywords: *Advocacy, Nigeria, NGOs and Policy.*

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are playing important role in global governance. The activities of NGOs ranges from issues such as Human rights, child abuse, water supply, environmental, education, health, poverty and inequality, they cover almost all aspect of people's lives. In Developed world, NGOs are playing important role in policy advocacy than developing world, looking at their activities they are mostly concentrated in countries like United States of America, United Kingdom and Sweden. In United States for instance there are approximately 1.5 million NGOs (Transparent hand, 2020). High level of illiteracy, poverty, low self-esteem, poor developmental initiative, weak civil society are common in developing world which is affecting the policy capacity to govern (Akogwu, Celestina, Offorma, Onyekuru & Apeh, 2020).

In Africa, the activities of NGOs are regionally based, most of the NGOs are concentrated in South Africa. In Nigeria, NGOs are mostly concentrated in Southern part of the country, only a few NGOs exist in the Northern Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the Legislature, Political parties, political leaders and elected officials play an important role in policy development and implementation. As mechanisms for organizing ideas and building consensus, political organizations are key players in initiating both the proposals and the public debates that can lead to sound policy outcomes for a society. However, in many societies, and particularly those in transition, this isn't always possible. Political parties newer to governing do

not acquire the capacity to develop policy proposals, or they might be hesitant to invite broader public consultation on their ideas. Many countries undergoing transition enter into a form of power-sharing in the early stages. Power-sharing can be an ideal way to bring violent conflict, political instability or power disputes to an end, but it does not always engender an environment that supports the development of robust policy ideas. Too often, power-sharing is about distributing resources in a way that keeps the parties in a dispute satisfied long enough to make some form of progress (Connel, 2020).

In this arrangement, the needs of the biggest or loudest party can take precedent over what is best for the society as a whole. It is difficult for better policy outcomes to become a priority. Therefore, it is vital that NGOs, community leaders, and individual citizens play an active role in advancing policy proposals through advocacy as, without their engagement, vigorous policy proposals are unlikely to see the light of the day. NGOs often have a high degree of technical and specific issue expertise. This can even exceed that of legislators and other decision-makers and means that their input into policy proposals is vital. NGOs and community leaders frequently have more direct interaction with citizens than elected officials. Therefore, they have a better sense of the needs and problems of local communities, and what might actually work in practice. In every society, citizen intervention plays a vital role in ensuring a healthy political, economic and social life, but this is even more important in countries undergoing a major transition. The more citizens are involved in developing transition plans and policies, the more likely they are to work (Connel, 2020).

At the bottom of the ladder are service delivery, raising awareness and building capacity. These are the areas of core functions of NGOs. They focus on local communities, playing a key role in delivering different types of services, building awareness around certain issues and building capacity in the communities they serve. Though, there are many studies on policy implementation in Nigeria no research was conducted on role of NGOs in policy advocacy in Zamfara state, Nigeria that is why this study is filling the gap.

Research Question

The following are the research questions: -

- i. What are the role of NGOs in policy advocacy in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the problems of NGOs in policy advocacy in Nigeria?
- iii. What are the ways of improving NGOs/ Governance relations in Nigeria?

Research Objective

The following are the research objectives:-

- i. To explore the role of NGOs in policy advocacy in Nigeria.
- ii. To examines the problems of NGOs in policy advocacy in Nigeria.
- iii. To suggests ways of improving NGOs/ Governance relations.

Definitions of NGOs

NGOs are variously described as autonomous, non-profit-making, self-governing and campaigning organizations with a focus on the well-being of others. They have been characterized as organizations whose stated purpose is the promotion of environmental and/or social goals rather than the achievement or protection of economic power in market place or political power through the electoral process (Stanovci, Metin & Ademi, 2019). NGOs are responding to failures of governmental and corporate self-regulation, grassroots mobilization for citizen involvement, and the perceived need to give greater legitimacy to governance processes. Such multi-stakeholder arenas allow for structured NGO. There are five major role played by NGOs in governance, they are collecting, disseminating, and analyzing information; providing input to agenda-setting and policy development processes; performing operational functions; assessing environmental conditions and monitoring compliance with environmental agreements; and advocating justice (Arond, Bebbington, & Dammert 2019). NGOs contributes immensely in addressing problem of leadership. Engaging with political elites and institutions is a necessary means to resolve the crisis and enact meaningful reforms. NGOs also preaches respect of human rights, NGOs also cooperate with serious politicians to improve policy output. NGO also plays a paramount role in sharing ideas and proposals with the government instead of only exchanging them with other groups (Risley, 2015). In some cases of policy making, members of NGOs have shaped the policy agenda, contributed information and analysis, collaborated with government officials in the formulation of policy, and pressured legislators to adopt reforms, whereas in other instances, they have been less active and influential. The Individual groups that succeed in joining forces can pool resources, coordinate their actions, achieve strength in numbers, and present a united front to governing elites and the broader public. This original, agency-centered theory of civil society participation in policy making helps solve the puzzle of NGOs involvement in countries where formal channels for (Risley, 2015).

Definitions of Policy Advocacy

According to International Centre for Policy Advocacy (2020) Policy Advocacy is a process of influencing decision of Public Policy. It is a deliberate process of persuasive communication with the aims of targeting a particular audience to understand, be convinced, and take ownership of the ideas presented. By influencing policy makers to urgency to take action based on the arguments presented. It is a process a process that normally requires the building of momentum and support behind the proposed policy idea or recommendation. Trying to make a change in public policy is usually a relatively slow process as changing attitudes and positions requires ongoing engagement, discussion, argument, and negotiation. It is conducted by groups of organized citizens. Normally advocacy efforts are carried out by organizations, associations, or coalitions that represent the interests or positions of certain populations, but an individual may, of course, spearhead the effort. Policy advocacy is the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders, and, ultimately, decision makers take ownership of your ideas, evidence, and proposals, and subsequently act upon them. Many people tend to immediately associate the term advocacy with media campaigning, high profile legal challenges, or the street-based activism of persons, posters, and demonstrations. This is because these are the most visible actions of actors attempting to make or force policy change. However, this represents only one piece of the puzzle, and in order to further situate the process of policy advocacy and develop and define concepts that are commonly associated with the

process. Advocacy is been carried out by representative of civil society groups, private institutions and media (Aborisade & Ramon, 2020).

Policy advocacy refers to organized initiatives that seek to change official policy or legislation, or the manner in which these regulations are applied. Policy advocacy efforts typically try to establish new policies, improve existing policies or challenge the development of policies that create a difficulty or an injustice for specific groups in society, particularly more vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. To be engaged in policy advocacy, organizations and individuals need to know not only how to identify problems, but how to isolate causes, analyze evidence, work with research, develop sound, viable policy options and understand how to cost these (i.e., measure what it would cost to implement the policy). Because it involves altering legislative mechanisms, policy advocacy often seeks to influence policy at the decision-making level, such as public officials, civil servants, elected officials and legislators. To be truly effective, however, policy advocacy must also involve citizen participation, so that local communities have the opportunity to actively participate in making the policy change happen. Endeavors to implement longterm, sustainable solutions to problems, incorporates best practice on using evidence, research and developing policy, involves both lobbying decision-makers and mobilizing citizen audiences. Policy advocacy is particularly vital in countries going through a significant transition, such as those trying to progress out of a period of violence or instability, or trying to end high levels of poverty, or trying to rebuild after a major disaster (Connel,2020). A society that is undergoing a major social, political or economic transition need political consensus, economic development, law and order and social progress.

Methods used by NGOs in Policy Advocacy

The following are some of the method used in Policy Advocacy:-

Advising: One of the methods used by NGOs in policy advocacy is that they counsel or recommends to policy makers on a particular issue affecting the populace or community.

Media campaigning: many advocacy organizations decide to include a public dimension to their campaign as they feel some type of public or external pressure on decision makers is required to achieve results. This type of approach is commonly used by watchdog organizations that monitor government action, for example, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, or Transparency International.

Lobbying: face-to-face meetings with decision makers or influential people are a commonly used approach for many organizations that are defending the interests of a certain group of people, such as business (for example, the American Chambers of Commerce Abroad, professional or community associations, or unions. These types of organizations tend to have ready access to powerful people and focus their efforts on being present and visible during government and public discussions concerning their interests.

Activism: petitions, public demonstrations, posters, and leaflet dissemination are common approaches used by organizations that promote a certain value set, such as, for example, environmentalism in the case of Greenpeace, or have a defined constituency and represent or provide a service to a group of people who are not adequately included within government social service provision like the victims of domestic violence or refugees. The main work of the larger groups centers on providing a service to their constituency, but they also have a policy advocacy function.

Principles of Policy Advocacy

The following are the principles of policy advocacy: -

- i. It is a two-way channel of communication process: one of the advantages of advocacy is that it serves as a way of communication to members of state, national and local government by ways of providing input in governance.
- ii. In another development, policy advocacy also serves as a forum for negotiation, where by grey areas are highlighted and table before legislatures for further scrutiny as well as passage as law.
- iii. The most likely outcome is policy influence, rather than direct impact.
- iv. It is a way of seeking for expert opinion on a particular action of government, it involves the seeking for specialist expert audiences and also more interest-based coalition on-building and bargaining with more political audiences.
- v. Context is key, as processes are always specific, evolving, and unpredictable (International Centre for Policy Advocacy, 2020).

Policy advocacy is a form of advocacy, but it's a little different from the most familiar forms of advocacy. There are three types of advocacy. As follows: -

Case Advocacy: Case advocacy (often called casework) attempts to solve one person's, one family's, or one community's problem at a time. For example, if Abu Danjuma's family does not have potable water in their home, we work with the local authorities to address this problem for his family and his home.

Issue Advocacy: Issue advocacy is about raising awareness around a broader problem or issue. For example, if a local community does not have access to potable water or if domestic violence is not being taken seriously by the local police, we launch a publicity and activism campaign about these problems to draw attention to them and, ideally, create change as a result.

Policy Advocacy: Policy advocacy is solution-based. Instead of solving a problem for one person at a time, or simply raising awareness about a problem, in policy advocacy we analyze the causes of a problem and develop policy-based solutions to address these in a manner that creates sustainable and enduring change. Formal policy mechanisms, such as laws or government regulations, are a key part of policy advocacy as this type of work often seeks to alter the way that official institutions address or spend money on the issue.

Political Consensus

Efforts must be made to achieve some form of agreement on how the society will be governed and what the standards and qualifications for governance will be.

Agreed Law and Order

Law and order emerges when rules of behaviour within a society are agreed, when these rules are largely enforced and respected, and when the bodies responsible for enforcing these rules are respected.

Economic Development

Economic development refers to investments that support a society's economic growth and bring jobs and income to its population. These can include: the construction of roads, bridges and other infrastructure projects; expanding access to the internet and increasing internet speeds;

improving sewerage and access to clean water and sanitation; upgrading structures for delivering reliable electricity and other power sources; building schools and other community facilities, etc.

Social Progress

Social progress has to do with the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens. This can include health care, housing, education, play and leisure facilities, the expression of cultural traditions, healthy community life, opportunities for young people, and equality of opportunities for all citizens, including women and other traditionally-disadvantaged groups, etc.

Organizational capacity for policy advocacy

Credibility: organization legitimately speak on behalf of those affected by this issue, organization perceived as objective and trustworthy and perceived political neutral.

Problem identification: That is ability of organization to conduct such as a survey, community assessment, focus groups, or other form of research, using standards for best practice.

Research, analysis and policy development: Issue identification is very paramount, organization capacity to collect and analyze data or conduct original research is very important, access to other forms of reliable data and the ability to apply findings to this issue and ability to analyse data.

Community Outreach and Grassroots Organizing: Ability of organization to be respected by the community, having strong relationship with community leaders, resources and skill capacity to organize outreach and mobilization activities.

Relationship with decision makers: organization must be known and respected by those with the authority to make decisions on this issue, organization have the relationships necessary to secure meetings and other forms of engagement with decision-makers on this issue.

Understanding decision making process: The ability of the organization to understand how decision are carried out in a particular political system is also very important in policy advocacy.

Communication: have the capacity to transform language from research and policy into short, clear messages for targeted audiences, ability to identify key audiences for

Mobilization, find out where these audiences get their information and what means of communication will be most effective with them and strong leadership in the organization for policy development and advocacy.

Networks and coalition: That is interaction with legislature civil society organizations, community leaders and government departments.

Resource management: Ability of organization to have expertise that could conduct policy advocacy is also very important. Capacity to recruit and train volunteers within the timeline of our policy advocacy campaign, have sufficient financial resources to achieve our policy advocacy goals (Connel, 2020).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is Governance theory as highlighted by Garry Stoker and the basic trust of the theory are as follows:-

- i. Governance refers to series of actors that are drawn beyond government;

- ii. Governance identify boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues;
- iii. Governance identifies power dependence involved in relationship between institutions and collective actions.
- iv. Governance is about autonomous self-governing network of actors
- v. Governance recognizes capacities to get things done which does not rest on power of government to use command or use it authority. It sees government as use of techniques to steer and guide (Stoker, 2006).

Research Design

The study was mainly qualitative research.

Population of the study

The population of the study comprises some selected NGOs in Zamfara State.

Sample and Sampling techniques

Convenient sampling was used to gather information from the respondents.

Methods of data collection

Both primary and secondary data were used, Primary data was sourced using unstructured interview, 5 respondents were interviewed as follows:-

Table 1.1 Informants interviewed

Informants	Number interviewed
NGOs	3
Legislatures	2
Total	5

Source: Authors computation (2020)

Method of data analysis

Thematic analysis was used and Atlas ti8 was used to analyse the data.

Findings

Demographic data of the respondents

Five respondents were interviewed on the role of NGOs on Policy Advocacy in Nigeria and the Demographic data of the respondents are as follows: -

Table 1.1. Demographic data of the respondents

The following are the demographic data of the respondents: -

Informants	Code	Sex	Age	Qualification
Informant 1	D1	Male	43	M.Sc.
Informant2	D2	Male	39	B.Sc.
Informant3	D3	Male	45	B.Sc.
Informant4	D4	Female	36	B.Sc.
Informant5	D5	Male	42	HND

Source: Authors computation (2020)

From the table above, it could be seen that five informants were interviewed, in order not to reveal their identity in line with suggestion of Creswell (2009), the informants were coded D1 to D5, four of them were males and only one female, their ages ranges from 39-45 and their qualifications ranges from Msc, Bsc and HND. As a result, Atlas ti8 was run and the following themes and subthemes were developed.

Problems of NGOs in Policy Advocacy

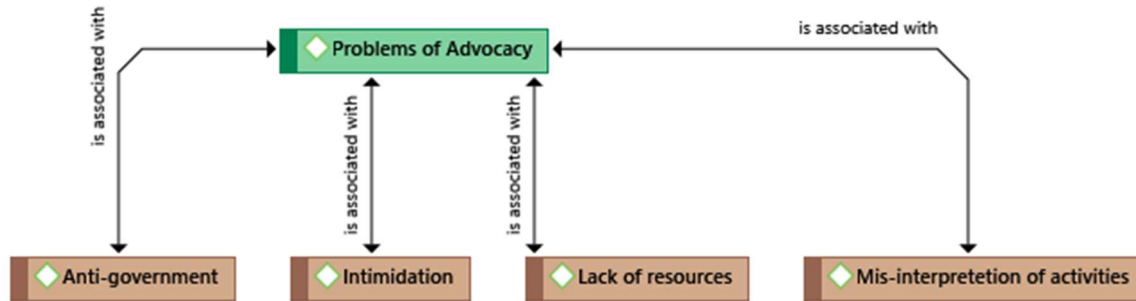


Figure 1.1 showing concept map for Advocacy in NGOs

Source: Authors computation

Figure 1.1 above showing concept map on the problems of policy Advocacy in Nigeria and the sub-themes developed are Anti- government, Intimidation, lack of resources and misinterpretation of ideas.

Anti-government: One of the sub- themes developed after running ATLAS ti8 is that government term the activities of advocacy groups especially NGOs as opposition to government policies and programmes as observed by some of the informants “Government see us as opposition, not knowing that we are creating awareness on policies of government, whatever they are doing if it is right we praise them and in case of failure we correct them”(D1 & D4). In addition to the above, an Informant also added that “Government is thinking that members of opposition are colliding with NGOs to bring government down” (D2).

Misinterpretation of activities: There was misconception of NGOs efforts which aimed at improving the working of government as some informants put it “There was misconstruction of some of our activities, government view our activities as being sponsored by other organization to tarnish the image of government which is affecting government-NGOs relations” (D2 & D5). Government assume that NGOs are being sponsored by opposition which is affecting their relations with government.

Intimidation: there are many instance where the members of NGOs suffers from imprisonment and sometime harassment by government officials as some informants put it “Some of our members were affected as a result of their activities in trying to influence government policy as they suffer arrest and dentation, NGOs stand for the voice of the voiceless which is affecting running of the organization” (D5 & D3).

Lack of resources: NGOs lack funding as well as experts, institutional access required for policy engagement. Although NGOs’ involvement has indeed been limited in some cases of policy making. Groups have sometimes been able to influence the agenda-setting, formulation, and

adoption phases. Levels of participation in policy making is very insignificant both within and across democratic process. Some informants put it that:-

Many NGOs in Nigeria are facing problems of limited skills as well as funding gaps in embarking on rigorous policy advocacy, most of them ended as sole proprietor ship due to lack of funding and the challenge of technical know-how on how to carry out affective policy advocacy due to the problem of skilled that many NGOs faces (D2, D4 & D5).

Table 1.2 Code coding summary table

Theme	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	Total
Anti-government	1	1		1		3
Misinterpretation of activities		1			1	2
Intimidation			1		1	2
Lack of resources		1		1	1	3
Total	1	3	1	2	3	9

Source : Authors computation (2020)

Conclusion

The paper examined the role of NGOs in policy advocacy in Zamfara state, Nigeria. The findings show that many NGOs in the study area lack expertise knowledge on the modalities involve in conducting good policy advocacy. Other findings include poor funding of NGOs due to the fact that many of them relies on charity without alternative sources of funding in which many NGOs ended up as sole proprietor ship without sustainability. The findings also reveal that there was problem of intimidation of staff of NGOs by government officials, many NGOs are also termed as anti-government as well as dentation of members of NGOs which are affecting their capacity to influence government policies and programmes.

Suggestion for further research

Further research should be conducted on Anti- Government activities of NGOs and their sponsors.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations with the hope that if put in place will help in solving problems of policy advocacy in Nigeria and indeed the world at large.

- i. First and foremost, NGOs need to acquire necessary skills needed to conduct policy advocacy, therefore, NGOs needs to train their personnel through workshops on recent development in literature on methods of conducting policy advocacy.
- ii. A forum should be created to foster good relationship between NGOs and government officials especially the legislature, in order to appreciate their roles in governance.
- iii. Government at federal, state and local levels should adhere to the principle of rule of law as well as respect of fundamental rights of individuals.
- iv. NGOs should carry out sensitization campaign on their activities so that people can know more about their role in governance.
- v. People should be encourage to participate in politics as well as contributing to policies and programmes affecting their lives.

References

- Aborisade, R. & Ramon, O. (March,10, 2020). *Nigerians Storm Senate, Reject Anti Social Media Bill*.<https://www.google.com/amp>
- Akogwu,I Celestina, O. Offorma T. J. Onyekuru A.N. Apeh, C.C (2020). Rural Transformation in Liberia: Strategies for Civil Society Participation. *International journal of NGOs*, 15(1), pp1-6.
- Arond, E., Bebbington, A. & Dammert, J.L. (2019) NGOs as innovators in extractive industry governance. Insights from the EITI process in Colombia and Peru. *Elsevier journal of extractive industry and society* 6, 665-674
- Connel, S. (2020). *Policy Development and Advocacy work book*. New York: Macmillan
- International Centre for Policy Advocacy(2020). *Definitions of Policy Advocacy*. Retrieved from <https://advocacyguide.icpolicyadvocacy.org/21-defining-policy-advocacy>
- Risley,A. (2015). *Civil Society Organizations, Advocacy, and Policy Making in Latin American Democracies*. New York: Macmillan.
- Stanovci, M.K., Metin, H., Ademi, B. (2019) Financial Sustainability of NGOs: An Empirical Study of Kosovo NGOs. *Science direct IFAC PapersOnLine* 52-25, 113–118
- Transparent hand (2020). *List of top 10 NGOs*. Retrieved from www.transparenthands.org.