

## **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONs AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN WEST AFRICA: AN INSIGHTFUL DISCOURSE ON NIGERIA AND GHANA.**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

The system of governance in West Africa, Particularly Nigeria and Ghana can best be described as civil rule code-named democracy. To achieve Democracy, a society must first democratize. To democratize, non-governmental organizations like civil society organizations (CSOs) must play active yet defining roles like the role of a watchdog, advocacy for inclusiveness and promoting political participation, holding governments at all levels to account for their actions and inactions, and raising an army of critical citizens amongst others. To carry out this study, the researcher adopted the descriptive research design. Data for the study were collected using the secondary instruments of data collection and content analysis used to analyze the data generated. The study adopted the structural-functional theory as its framework for analysis. The major findings of the study is that despite the presence of many CSOs(both local and international) in west Africa

in general and Nigeria and Ghana in particular, they have had little impact on Democratization as democracy appears to be under existential threats especially with the resurgence of military coup and counter coup in the past seven years, widespread poverty, decline in democratic norms and ideals, insecurity exacerbated by terrorism and terrorist related activities, banditry and kidnapping, farmers-herders crisis amongst others. The study was also able to discover that CSOs are relatively making more significant impact in Ghana than Nigeria as a result of the enabling environment created for it to thrive. Amongst other recommendations, the study recommends that national governments within the sub-region should assign statutory responsibilities to CSOs, make funds available, provide more enabling environment by tolerating and accommodating dissenting views. With these and many more, CSOs will make significant contribution to reverse the pace at which democracy may go into oblivion in West Africa.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organizations, Democracy, Democratization, Nigeria, Ghana

## **Introduction**

The responsibility of ensuring not just the democratization of the West Africa sub-region in general but also that democracy is consolidated in the sub-region, requires collective effort. The institutions of government alone cannot guarantee a seamless democratic experience and transition especially in a multi-party democracy like Nigeria without the active support of non-governmental organizations like civil

society organizations (CSOs). Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate the experience, assistance and role of these CSOs to address the rising incidences of democratic decline experienced lately in the sub-region especially with the resurgence of coups, the increasing level of insecurity exacerbated by the activities of Boko-haram in Nigeria, and some parts of Cameroon, the activities of the Islamic States of West African Province and the threat it poses to the region, Banditry and Kidnapping, endemic poverty and rising unemployment level with its attendant economic implications, rising debt profile (both foreign and domestics), balance of payment deficits, amongst others. Arising from the above, it thus appears that there is serious concern and resentment amongst the army of critical citizens who now view democracy from the prisms of a political arrangement that cannot guarantee for the people; the desired economic growth and development they desire.

Today, with the resurgence of military coups and counter coups and the level of acceptability from the common man in the sub-region with countries like Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are all under military rule. According to Duzor and Williamson (2023), The African continent saw a significant increase in coup in the last three years with military figures carrying out takeovers in Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Guinea, Chad and Mali. Despite the resolve of the sub-regional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to openly and publicly reject coup and condemn in strong terms, the activities of these military

juntas, it has however not been able to convince them to return to democratic pathways.

The above situation has put a question mark on the continuous relevance of democracy as Duzor and Williamson (2023:5) aver that "... the latest power grabs in Africa have raised concerns that the region could be backsliding from its progress towards greater democracy and also." Also, in line with the popular maxim by George Berkley (1685-1753), an Anglo-Irish philosopher when he said "for forms of government, let the fools contest, for whatsoever is best administered is best", These and many more have questioned the democratic credentials of States in West Africa who are still under a democratic rule. Can Civil Society Organizations fill the void and complement the efforts of the democratic institutions by promoting democratic norms and values to ensure democratization, democratic stability and democratic consolidation in the region? These and many more is what the study investigated.

### **Conceptual Classification**

#### **The Concept of Civil Society Organizations**

The civil space is littered with myriads of conceptualizations as scholars, educationists, and others make attempt to mirror down their interpretation of civil society organizations (CSOs) to reflect their exposure, experience, perspectives and perception. However, what appears to be the key word amongst views held and expressed is that it is the arena of voluntary, unforced collective action around shared interests, purposes and

values. According to Hussein (2024), Civil Society Organizations are characterized by their wide diversity as they include a wide range of actors, ranging from small local organizations to large international organizations. Amongst other roles, CSOs also serve as platforms through which individuals can organize, express their views, and influence public policy, thus; reinforcing democratic values (Chukwudi and Ojo, 2023). In the modern era, the term 'Civil Society' refers to non-profit and individual self help groups, institutions and agencies that have been recognized as key tools for advancing democracy, good governance, civil rights and democratization (Sule, Sambo and Yusuf, 2021). According to Chukwudi and Ojo (2023:3), they described CSOs thus:

Civil Society Organizations are regularly described as a collection of groups that are not owned or controlled by the government and they do not have interest in profit making but what will benefit their members and others in their society with good reference to cultural, political, scientific, religious or Philanthropic consideration.

In countries like Nigeria, where democratic institutions are still evolving, CSOs act as watchdogs, advocating for transparency and equitable representation (Musa and Okafor, 2021). Citing Ademola (2020), Musa, Hamza and Rabba (2025: 4) posit that:

The effectiveness of CSOs can vary while the vibrant CSOs can drive positive reforms, the passive or compromised organizations may

inadvertently hinder development..... CSOs they maintained also play vital role in changing the political culture of the people, enhance their political participation and reduce political apathy. CSOs encompass diverse arrays of actors, including trade unions, student associations, professional bodies, and grassroots organizations (Nnamdi, 2022). However, it is also instructive to note that it is not all non-governmental organizations that are CSOs. Inasmuch as CSO is a non-governmental organization, supporting the above, citing Chukwudi and Ojo (2023), Ademola (2020), Edwards (2021) and Afolabi and Eze (2021), Musa, Hamza and Rabba (2025:123) submit that

While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) represent a significant portion of civil society, they are not synonymous with it. Traditional groups, such as market associations, and religious institutions also play a role in advocacy and social justice. CSOs influence policy by mobilizing citizens, advocating for reforms and holding governments accountable. Their activities range from electoral monitoring to public awareness campaign.

Therefore, CSOs are well organized group of like minds who have submitted and subordinated their individual interest relatively to the pursuit of the common good.

### **Democracy and Democratization**

Democratization will be difficult to conceptualize except we make an illustration between democracy and democratization. Whereas democracy in a system of

government was ultimate power belongs to the people but is exercised directly or indirectly through their elected representative, democratization refers to the process of transition from an authoritarian or non-democratic system to a democratic system.

Democratization involves the creation and consolidation of democratic values, practices and institutions. Democracy is a concept that virtually defies definition (Arend, 1977). To be considered democratic, a country must choose its leaders through fair and competitive elections; ensure basic civil liberties and respect the rule of law (Charles, 2002). Boutros Boutros Ghali, the former United Nations' Secretary-General describes democracy as a system of government which embodies, in a variety of institutions and mechanisms, the ideal of political power based on the will of the people (Broutrous, 1996). It also means a "political system, one of the characteristics of which is the equality of being completely or almost completely responsive to citizens (Dahl, 1971). He presented three opportunities needed by citizens for democracy to be a reality.

- To formulate their preferences
- To signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action
- To have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government, that is, weighed with no discrimination because of the context or source of the preference (Dahl, 1971:4).

Conceptualizing democracy, Longley, (2024:1) defines it thus:

Democracy is a form of government that empowers the people to exercise political control, limits the power of the head of state, provides for the separation of powers between governmental entities and ensures the protection of natural rights and civil liberties.

The key takeaway from longlegs definition of democracy is that it empowers individuals to exercise political control over the form and functions of their government. Though, it comes in several forms, they all feature competitive elections, freedom of expression and protection of individual civil liberties and human rights. It is a form of government where the people, “the demos” possess and exercise political power in the best interest of the entire population. (Ogbonna and Ogbonna 2021). Citing Pennade (1979:7), Ogbonna and Ogbonna, (2021:234) defines it as “... the government by the people, where liberty equality and fraternity are secured to the greatest possible degree and in which human capacities are developed to the utmost by means including free and fair discussion of common problems and interests.” Acknowledging the people-centric nature of democracy, Ogbonna and Ogboma, (2024:235) avers that “Basically, democracy tends to challenge the status quo power equation through reassigning power from the elite to the ordinary people and thus, redefine the actual custodian of power”

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory is the center of gravity of every discipline (Aja, 2022). Theory may also be taken as a statement of what

causes what and why under predictable patterns and outcomes. Every theory has four key functional activities.

- To describe
- To explain
- To analyze
- To predict events and outcomes in future (Aja, 2022:4).

The study therefore adopted the structural- functional theory as its framework for analysis.

The theory is an offshoot or a derivative of the systems analysis. The systems theory on the other hand was borrowed from the biological sciences, Biology to be precise. David Easton's work in that regard focuses on understanding politics as a system that processes inputs and produces outputs with the goal of maintaining stability and survival. Though, our focus is not on the systems theory but on structural functionalism, hence the above introductory note.

Structural functionalism was borrowed and applied in political science from anthropology and sociology by American political scientist Gabriel Almond, who is widely regarded as the father of structural functionalism in political science. His structural functional analysis was influenced by earlier sociologist like Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski and Talcott Parsons. Gabriel Almonds work on "the politics of the developing areas", published in 1960 was a seminar work which applies the structural functional theory to the study of

political systems in developing countries. However, his most famous work on structural functionalism was published in 1966 titled “comparative politics: A developmental approach. The analysis of structural functionalism” is a means of explaining what political structure perform what basic functions in the political system, and it is a tool of investigation. (Ball, 1971:14) for Palombara (1970: 23), he contends thus:

Regardless of what the individual political scientist may want to do (or not do) with functionalism, he must acknowledge that it is from this theory that we learned of conceptualizing the political system as a set of finite inter-related functions essential to its existence and that the manner in which such functions are performed anywhere in space and time is not necessarily bound to a specific set of institutions. We learned too that it is not merely a formal institution that may represent a structure of a political system but that other analytically interesting and important patterns such as value systems, economic allocation, attitudes towards innovation and so on, can also be viewed from a structural functional vantage point.

The thrust of the structural functional theory is that the survival and maintenance of a social system require that society must be having a well-functioning economic system, a legal system, a system of values and so on. In this scheme, the political system would appear as the sub-system, performing the distinctive function of

making legitimate policy decisions or to use shorter expression, the function of goal attainment for the society of which it is a part of Beer and Ulam (1968). To understand the structural functional theory and its implication and nature, let us look at its basic assumptions and postulates:

1. Structural functionalism views society as a complex system composed of interconnected parts that work together to maintain social order and stability.
2. The theory assumes that every social institution, role or practice has a specific function that contributes to the overall stability and survival of the system.
3. It assumes that all parts of the system are interdependent, meaning that changes in one part can affect other parts of the system.
4. The theory assumes that social systems tend towards Homeostasis, or a state of balance and equilibrium, and that mechanisms exist to maintain this balance.
5. Structural functionalism assumes that social order is maintained through consensus among members of the system, rather than through coercion or conflict.
6. The theory assumes that certain social institutions, like family, education and government are universal and necessary for the survival of any society.
7. It assumes that social changes occur gradually through a process of evolution and adaptation rather than through

sudden revolution and upheaval (Almond & Powell, 1966).

8. The theory is most suitable because Civil Society Organizations are a structure with functional expectations. Therefore, the survival of the system hinges partly also on the ability of this structure (CSOs) to effectively and efficiently perform its functions.

### **Civil Society Organizations and the Democratization Process in West Africa**

The discussion on the role of CSOs in the West African democratic space cannot be isolated from colonialism and the immediate pre-independence era. It is so because the activities of civil societies like the West African students Union, the West African Youth League, amongst others with their pan-regional focus influenced pressured and pushed for the independence of countries in these sub regions. The West Africa Civil Society Institute, (2015: 11) submits that:

Colonial civil society had an expressly political aim; to expose the falsity of colonial claims and assumptions about Africans and African history, organize Africans for self- rule. Leading that charge was an emergent intelligentsia that mobilize indigenous histories and cultural repertoires to fashion a narrative in which Africans emerged as authentic and autonomous historical agents

No doubt, it was this crop of intelligentsias and elites who also took charge and held sway after independence in most countries in West Africa. With the spate of coups

and counter coups in the West African sub region that ensued few years after independence, and the obvious and popular ban on the activities of all civil society organizations under the military system of government, the ascendancy of CSOs and her influence whittled down in the region. However, with the third wave of democratization in the late 1980s, when most authoritarian regime lost their legitimacy, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, saw most countries in West Africa transiting to democracy. Whereas the thrust of the study is not on the origin of democracy parse, but on the role of CSO's in enhancing democratic values and institutionalizing it. However, it was necessary to understand the past in order to discuss the present and predict the future.

In this period according to the West African Civil Society Institute (2023), a wave of democracy swept across the region beginning with the ouster of Mathieu Kerekou in Benin. This period (1990s to early 2000's) can be described as the golden years for CSOs in West Africa. From the above, there were global support, especially from the United States and the United Kingdom for democratic missions. At the sub regional level, CSO actors came together and formed the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF) in 2003. CSOs have gone through some evolutionary phases in the sub region to support democratic stability. Though the resurgence of coup in the sub region, particularly since 2020sthat were successful in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso and failed attempts in Niger and Guinea Bissau and

many other factors too have posed serious threats to the regions Democratization process, Yet, despite these setbacks and more, the activities of CSOs have surged culminating in the West African CSOs launching a pro-democracy network in Ghana where about 400 civil society organizations from the 15 West Africa countries met and launched the West Africa democracy solidarity network (WADEMOS) to address democratic backsliding and collapse as well as strengthen democracy in the sub region (WADEMOS, 2023).

As a follow up to WADEMOS, Ojo (2024:1) submits thus:

On April 2024, civil society organizations on the platform of the West Africa Civil Society Institute with funding support from the Ford Foundation met in Lagos to find a lasting solution to the threats to democracy in West Africa sub region... The meetings came on the heels of a similar one held in Accra in November, 2023 and in March 11, 2024 with the leadership of the Economic Community of West Africa States.

According to the Center for Human Rights (2023), there are nearly over 3,000 active CSOs in West Africa that work on various issues including human rights, education, promoting dialogue security sector reforms, conflict-sensitive development, election monitoring, gender equality and post conflict reconstruction.

## **Civil Society Organizations and the Democratization Process in Nigeria and Ghana**

There are a lot of roles played by CSOs in Nigeria and Ghana in particular and in West Africa in general. Though what we have in West Africa is more like a coalition of CSOs unlike Nigeria where we have CSOs like campaign for democracy (CD), center for democracy and development (CDD), Committee for defense of human rights (CDHR), civil liberty organization (CLO), national democracy coalition (NADECO), amongst others which played individual and collective roles to ensure the restoration of civil rules in 1999. As Adebawale and Violet (2021) posits that "the involvement of civil society groups as national observers' separate from the interest of the ruling political elites and the opposition political parties has brought in progressive constructive engagement to the electoral process."

Supporting the above and noting the key roles played by CSOs in the electoral process, the policy and legal advocacy center cited by Adebawale and Violet (2021:175) avers that the key roles of CSOs includes advocacy and monitoring which enable them to take part in observers mission on the field and in the collection centers. There are also others like the Cleen Foundation, Yiaga Africa, Policy and Legal Advocacy Center (PIAV), Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR), Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), amongst others. According to Cvetkovic (2024), in societies where democratic values are under threat, the civil sector serves

as a critical voice, a community mobilizer and a guardian of the rule of law. In line with the above, Diamond (1994:7) argues thus

The democratic function of CSOs are numerous but the most significant role is building and raising the level of democratic political culture and developing the necessary democratic values, thus creating the prerequisites for the democratic functioning of state institutions.

It has also become important agents for engendering good democratic governance through the promotion of accountability, transparency, rule of law, curtailment of human rights abuses and capitalist exploitations (Danladi and Tanko, 2016). Amongst other functions, CSOs have played the following roles to support the democratic process in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana. These roles includes but not limited to:

### **1. Making Inputs on Electoral Reforms**

No doubt, CSOs play vital roles in the democratic space of Nigeria and Ghana during electoral reforms. According to the Nigerian Democratic report (2024: 1),

Calls for more electoral reforms deepened on Wednesday when a coalition of civil society organizations proposed a comprehensive list of changes to Nigerian laws to strengthen democracy to the National Assembly for consideration. Their demand is tagged citizen's memorandum and covers aspects of the constitution, the electoral Act, and the Independent National Electoral Commissions rules and regulations.

According to the report stated above, the key areas of significance were targeted at enhancing electoral transparency and credibility, strengthening the independence of the electoral management body (INEC), strengthening electrical offences prosecution, promoting inclusive participation, adapting to technological advancement, strengthening voters confidence and trust, enhancing civic engagement amongst others (NDR, 2024:2). The CSOs who were members of the coalition includes but not limited to Yiaga Africa, the Civil Society Legislature Advocacy Centre, the Center for Media and Society, the International Institutes for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, amongst others.

## **2. Advocacy for People -Centric Policy**

CSOs through their advocacy can contribute by engaging the government to formulate policies that will spur up economic growth and development, reduce poverty rate, and create employment opportunities. According to Ongom and Marunga, (2023:1), they submit thus:

CSOs play a vital role in advocating for social change and promoting the interests of marginalized communities. Advocacy is an essential tool for COSs to influence public policy, raise awareness about issues and bring about positive change in society. Whether they focus on human rights, environmental protection or economic justice, CSOs often have to navigate complex radical, social and economic landscapes to achieve their goals through different strategies, including advocacy.....

### **3. Election Monitoring**

Credible elections are one of the strongest support systems of democracy and democratic stability. CSOs are also actively involved in pre and post election monitoring. It is an important area in which the CSOs are proactive and successful to some extent, particularly in Nigeria. To effectively perform this role, the Nigeria civil society situation room (NCSSR) was established in 2010 prior to 2011 general election as response to boost civil society cooperation and a proactive engagement in the process of electoral conduct. (Sule, Sambo, Ahmed and Yusuf, 2021). Their roles (NCSSR) were consolidated and expanded in election monitoring in 2019 more than in 2015 because of a collaboration with local monitoring agencies such as Centre for Democracy and Development, Yiaga Africa, and other International Monitoring Groups like the African Union, the European Union, the National Democratic Institute, the International Federation for Electoral Systems, and several others (Sule et al., 2021:4).

### **4. The Advocacy that Governments at all levels must be Accountable**

In a democracy, ultimate power resides with the people. These powers are exercised by their elected representation. As a result, the CSOs through advocacy, insist that governments at all levels must be responsible and accountable for the mandate entrusted to them by the people. As noted by Ugbudu and Jev, supporting the call for accountability which is one of the roles played by CSOs submits thus:

CSOs can also improve the quality of governance by limiting corruptions and strengthening accountability of responsible agencies. Both at national and international level, CSOs have for long been active in the fight against corruption through public advocacy awareness campaign activities that have made an important contribution to building national accountability capacities (Ugbudu and Jev, 2021:232).

The above roles of CSOs is not Nigeria specific, the roles are similar in all countries as it is in Nigeria, so it is in Ghana, Sierra-Leon, Senegal and other West African countries that are presently not under military rule though with varying degrees of impacts on each countries democratization journey. For example, in Ghana according to Botchway (2018), CSOs like the Institute of Economic Affair (IEA), the Center for Democratic Development (CDD), and the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) have contributed immensely to the deepening of Ghana's democracy. It is widely acknowledged that CSOs have significantly contributed to Ghana's enviable record of relative peaceful election and political transitions. Danso, Aubyn and Boateng (2023), citing Dubgu (2012). For Danso et al (2023:125), all past eight elections in Ghana have witnessed the active support and participation of CSOs whose divers interventions have complemented the works of the election stakeholders such as the electoral commission (EC), the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the Security Agencies, the National

Peace Council (NPI) and the National Media Commission (NMC). The same line of thought was expressed by Barnes (2006:8) when he contends that:

In an attempt to help ensure sustainable peace in violence prone communities in Ghana, the role of CSOs cannot be overemphasized. In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the role CSOs can play as partners with government and inter-governmental organizations in all conflict resolution and peaceful agenda.

Democracy thrives in an atmosphere of peace. Available data reported pockets of violence in virtually, all elections held in Ghana since 1992. In Ghana's election circle, electoral violence remains protracted, adversely affecting lives and properties (Danso et al., 2023:171). Nevertheless, CSOs in Ghana have also organized community forum, dialogue sessions, durbars and radio/television programmes to educate people about why they should vote, how to vote, the use of non violent approaches to address concerns, avoiding the use of vituperative language and the consequences of engaging in election violence (Danso et al., 2023:9). In Ghana, CSOs have been known to influence public policy in three main ways: through being at the table during the early stages of policy formulation; advocacy, and indirectly by influencing the choices made by political actors (Civicus Global Alliance, 2006). Lending his voice to the issue under investigation, Ghaus – Pasha, (2004:3), cited by Frimpong (2017) posits that:

Civil society can further good governance, firstly by policy analysis and advocacy, secondly by

regulation and monitoring of state performance, and the action and behaviour of public officials, thirdly by building social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs civic norms and democratic practices; fourthly by mobilizing particular constituencies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized section of masses to participate more fully in politics and public affairs, and fifthly by development work to improve the wellbeing of their own and other communities.

From the literatures reviewed, it has been established that CSOs have made more impacts in Ghana's Democratization journey compared to Nigeria. It is no longer news that Ghana is severally recognized as one of the leading, most stable democracies not just in the West African sub region but also in the continent. Both Ghana and Nigeria have not created adequate enabling environment for the activities of CSOs to thrive. Though comparatively, Ghanaians government have been more engaging with CSOs because of their more stable democratic environment, stronger civic space, better funding opportunities amongst other compared to CSOs in Nigeria. To support the above, admin the CJID (2024:1) in its democracy index for 2023 avers that:

Ghana is one of the most highly ranked democracies in Africa; with 6.30 points, and is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> regionally and 65<sup>th</sup> worldwide..... Nigeria retains its score of 4.23 from 2022, it has moved to 104<sup>th</sup> place worldwide instead of

105<sup>th</sup> in 2022 but still maintains its regional ranking at number 19.

There are other scholarly works and data to buttress the points expressed above. Therefore, with the decline in democratic sentiments across the West Africa sub-region as a result of the actions of elected officials, there is need and it has also become necessary to fully re-integrate CSOs to save the sub-region from democratic recession.

### **Challenges of Civil Society Organizations in the Democratization Process in Nigeria and Ghana**

#### **1. The Existence of Weak Legal Frameworks for CSOs both Nationally and Regionally**

Every CSOs is a creation of an enabling law. These laws maybe International (like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (UDHR,)), and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. They may be regional like the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR). Sub-regional frameworks may be absent in the West African sub region, but the economic community of West African States (ECOWS) have adopted measures to strengthen the activities of CSOs like the creation of the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF) in 2003 amongst others. As a result, the operationalization of CSOs is more domestic in geography and impact than international. For example, in Ghana, most CSOs are registered as companies limited in guarantee under the companies code, Act 179 of 1963, as voluntary association under the Trustee Act 1962 (act 106), or as professional bodies under the

professional bodies registration decree (NRCD 143) of 1976. Star Ghana (2013) cited by West African Civil Society Institute, (2020). In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution (as amended) expressly guarantees the protection of freedom of expression, assembly and association. Freedom of expression is protected under Section 39 of the Nigeria Constitution (WACSI, 2024). However, the main regulatory framework for CSOs in Nigeria is the Companies and Allied Matters Act (AMA). Despite these legal frameworks, CSOs in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana appears weak. The frameworks make provision on how to create them (CSOs) and not how to empower them to be relevant and contribute significantly in the regions Democratization process.

## **2. Funding**

Finance have remained the life wire of any and every organization be it public, private or non- governmental organizations. To survive impact and subsist, CSOs also need proper funding. According to a report by WACSI (2023: 1),

Overtime, foundations and donor organizations have become more transactional in their engagement with CSOs. Funding has shifted towards short term projects with expected outputs rather than long term institutional building and strengthening with expected outcomes. This shift has resulted in limited resources for core operational support weakening the overall capacity of CSOs.

Where these funds exist, especially from donor (international) agencies, it may be inadequate to sustain CSOs advocacy and the resources needed to drive it.

### **3. Lack of an enabling Domestic Environment**

There are a lot of constraints laid by the governments of the host countries of these CSOs that makes it difficult for them to purposefully engage them in countries they operate. Citing the West Africa Regional Consultation organized by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). Nwankwo (2024) submits that “.....these is a common thread from conversation of participants from Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra-Leone which is that CSOs face similar challenges in their different countries and struggle against authoritarian regimes seeking to constrict the space in which they operate.”

### **4. Vulnerability to Cyber Activities**

The mandate of CSOs in the West Africa sub-region appears to be under severe attack and digital security challenges that is affecting their activities. According to the WACSI report (2023), 31% of CSOs in West Africa experienced a digital security attack in the last 12 month. Also, 23% of these attacks happened multiple times. While digitalization is bringing remarkable economic and societal benefits to majority of the global population, it is worth noting that these technologies, irrespective of the opportunities they create, have inherent risk such that when taken advantage of by cybercriminals could have detrimental effects on individual, enterprises, societies

and Nations at large (The Cyber Security Authority, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

With the resurgence of coup in West Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea, pro-democratic CSOs have a new vista of task to carry out. Today, democracy appears to be under existential threats in the sub-region with the growing wave of terrorism, terrorist related activities, criminality like kidnapping, Banditry and the herders.- Farmers crisis, the task ahead of CSOs as the harbingers and advocates of good governance, human rights, democratization and democratic consolidation amongst others is more demanding, difficult and complicated.

There is a general feeling of disconnect and disaffection occasioned by the inability of the West African brand of Democracy to address the concerns and issues raised above. In the past few years, there have been noticeable decline in democratic norms and weakening of democratic institutions. According to the U.S embassy, Ghana (2024), this decline has been characterized by a resurgence of authoritarian regimes, a rise in violent extremism, pervasive corruption, alarming human rights abuses by security forces, discrimination against minorities, restriction on press freedom and free speech, and a failure to share economic prosperity equitably.”

It is however not too late to salvage the situation and return the region fully and permanently to the democratic

pathways. The measures to achieving the above are listed below as recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

The study made the following recommendations.

1. National Government within the sub-region should not only provide legal frameworks for the establishment of CSOs but also allocate or assign statutory roles/responsibilities to it. This will enable CSOs to significantly contribute to the democratization process.
2. CSOs are not profit making organizations that is not to say that they don't need funds to operate. Therefore, national governments should through legislation, make provisions for the funding of CSOs so that they can contribute meaningfully towards democratization in the region.
3. National governments should provide an enabling environment by accommodating and tolerating dissenting views, ensure the security of lives and properties and encourage the activities of CSOs as an active participant in the democratization project in West Africa in General and Nigeria and Ghana in particular..

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