

USAID'S CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SUSTAINABILITY INDEX IN NIGERIA (2009-2022): A TIME SERIES ANALYSIS

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.57233/zjpd.v6i1.01>

Abstract

This paper analyses time-series data from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for Nigeria, covering 2009 to 2022. The index was launched in selected countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, in 2009, and it was implemented for 14 consecutive years until 2022. The authors analyse the key factors that have contributed to the viability of the Nigerian CSO sector, adopting time-series analysis of the CSOSI data for Nigeria, spanning 14 years. The analysis is framed by systems theory; CSOs are viewed as crucial substructures of the political system that perform input functions for the system's proper functioning. The analysis shows that trends across the seven CSOSI dimensions indicate an evolving CSO sector in Nigeria from 2009 to 2022. The sector evolved in terms of sustainability throughout the 14-year lifespan of the Index, with slight improvements in organizational capacity, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. Advocacy showed the greatest improvement, rising from a score of 3.9 in 2009 to 2.5 in 2022, making it the only dimension with enhanced sustainability among the seven. However, the dimensions of the legal environment and financial viability did not improve. The analysis thus reveals a mixed picture of successes, challenges, and resilience of the CSO sector in Nigeria amid a paucity of funds, largely due to dwindling donor funding and a struggling local economy. Despite these difficulties, many organizations have shown a high level of resilience in advocating for reforms, providing services, and supporting the less privileged in society.

Keywords: CSOs, Dimensions, Nigeria, Sustainability evolving, Sustainability index.

Introduction

The term "civil society" derives from the Latin phrase *civilissocietas*, which refers to communities that adhere to norms that transcend the laws of the state (Katusiimeh, 2004). Globally, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in providing social services and contribute significantly to national development. In Africa, the roots of these organizations trace back to pre-colonial times; however, their current forms and characteristics are largely shaped by the legacy of colonialism (Omede& Bakare, 2014).

In Nigeria, the civil society sector is vast, with approximately 600,000 organizations operating at various government levels (CSOSI, 2022). This diversity is crucial as civil society organizations (CSOs) provide essential services to the poor and vulnerable, especially given that 31% of Nigeria's population was in extreme poverty as of June 2024 (World Poverty Clock, 2024). The effectiveness of CSOs in addressing poverty and supporting sectors like health and education depends on factors such as their operating context, funding, and organizational capacity. USAID assesses the strength of this sector to guide its programming, with indexes like the USAID-funded CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa evaluating its viability and sustainability.

The annual Index uses a combination of methods, including expert panel discussions, surveys, and a review of relevant country-specific documents to assess the CSO sector across seven dimensions – Legal Environment, Organisational Capacity, Financial Viability, Advocacy, Service Provision, Sectoral Infrastructure, and Public Image. Each dimension is assessed using indicators that are averaged within a seven-point scale to determine the dimension's score. 1 is the highest possible score, while 7 is the worst score. Also, the average score of the seven dimensions constitutes the overall country score, also called the CSO Sustainability score for each country. Each country is further classified into one of three sustainability categories, which are Sustainability Enhanced (for countries with scores ranging from 1 – 3), Sustainability Evolving (3.1 – 5), and Sustainability Impeded (5.1 – 7). The methodology of the Index allows for different measures of changes in each dimension's score year on year. Many factors determine the changes in scores; this could be the introduction of new legislation or policy, or certain changes in practice in the CSO sector. Also, the changes could be an improvement or deterioration in the CSO sector to varying degrees (CSOSI Codebook, n. d.).

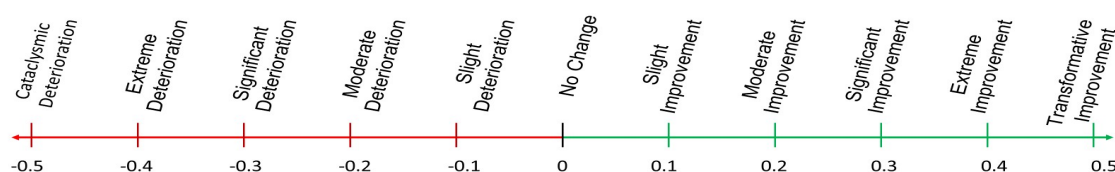


Figure 1: Level of Changes in Scoring

Source: CSOSI Codebook, n. d.

A 0.5 change in the score of a dimension from a previous year would suggest that ‘trends and developments in the sector have had a completely transformative positive effect on at least one or two indicators in the dimension which will affect other dimensions’, whereas a - 0.5 change in a score suggests a cataclysmic deterioration which further indicates a completely negative effect on a dimension (CSOSI Codebook – Instructions for Expert Panel Members). In the 14 years of the Index in Nigeria, changes (both positive and negative) in dimension scores from one year to another had been either slight or moderate, but in some cases, trends and developments in some dimensions did not result in any changes in scores.

The first edition of the Index in Sub-Saharan Africa was the 2009 NGO Sustainability Index, which assessed the overall sustainability of the CSO sector in 19 Sub-Saharan African countries. Since then, there have been 14 editions of the Index; the last one was the 2022 Index, which assessed only 6 African countries, including Nigeria.

This paper analyzes the sustainability of the Civil Society Organization (CSO) sector in Nigeria from 2009 to 2022. The focus on CSO sustainability is important because CSOs perform varied functions in

society, including advocating for pro-people policies and contributing to the development of many sectors such as education, health, and humanitarian relief. Therefore, the viability and sustainability of CSOs determine the extent of their influence on government policies as well as the continuation of their services, particularly to the vulnerable members of society. The period covered (2009 – 2022) in this paper coincides with the period of the index in Nigeria. Thus, the analyses cover the entire duration of the index. The authors, who implemented the project under the Centre for Research and Documentation in Kano, assess trends and developments in the sector, using the data from the CSOSI index. The paper is structured into five sections: an introduction, a theoretical discourse, an analysis of the seven dimensions, an examination of overall sustainability scores for Nigeria, and a conclusion.

There are very few indices that evaluate the activities of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) across multiple dimensions in Nigeria. Besides the USAID's Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index, the only other index that comes close in terms of coverage is the CIVICUS Index. However, the CSOSI is more comprehensive, as it assesses seven dimensions of the civil society

sector. Therefore, this paper focuses on the CSOSI.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

The philosophical etymology of the concept of civil society is traceable to Aristotle and has assumed different interpretations over time from other philosophers such as Hegel, Gramsci, Marx, and Tocqueville, among others (Katusiimeh, 2004; Olukotun, 2018). The concept can be said to be in vogue in the contemporary global system, given the level of attention being attracted by the concept. Like most social science concepts, the concept is fuzzy, complex, and contentious. Despite its fuzziness, complexity, and contentiousness, civil society [as a concept] has penetrated every sphere of contemporary life. As Forbrig (2004) observes, the concept “has been appropriated for a wide range of purposes, has been applied to a variety of phenomena, and has been attributed with a myriad of tasks and functions” (p. 15). As such, despite its preeminence in the contemporary global system, civil society is characterized by a lack of conceptual and definitional clarity; what exists is a plethora of perspectives, with each author or commentator choosing a definition in agreement with his/her orientation.

In this paper, civil society is conceived as a specific sub-structure of society promoting the creation of an environment for the public’s good life. Society, being the foundation of social life, houses all forms of social associations or sub-systems through which its essence is accomplished. Civil society is one of these sub-systems; a social realm distinct and separate from the state. We, therefore, share the perspective of Fox (1995), who defines civil society as

“the realm of associational life between the household and the state, which is manifest in shared civic norms, intermediary structures, and voluntary association; it is autonomous from the state and market and provides networks of public communication” (p. 7). It is also from this line of thought that the Centre for Civil Society (2006) defines civil society as “the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values” (Quoted in Kastrati, 2016, p. 65). To Kastrati, though civil society is distinct from the state and market in its institutional forms, in practice, the boundaries between the three are often complex, blurred, and negotiated.

Diamond's (1996) and Schmitter's (1997) conceptions of civil society largely capture the purpose of this paper. Diamond (1996) conceives civil society.

... as the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by legal order or set of shared rules.

It is distinct from ‘society’ in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold the state officials accountable. Civil society is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state. Thus, it excludes individual and family life, inward-looking group activity, the profit-making enterprise of individual business firms, and political efforts to take control of the state (Quoted in Forbrig, 2004, p. 101, emphasis in the original).

In the same vein, Schmitter (1997) conceptualizes civil society as:

... a set or system of self-organized intermediary groups that: (1) are relatively independent of both public authorities and private unit of production and reproduction, that is, of firms and families; (2) are capable of deliberating about and taking collective actions in defence or promotion of their interests or passions; (3) do not seek to replace either the state agents or private (re)producers or to accept responsibility for governing the polity as a whole; and (4) agree to act within pre-established rules of a 'civil', i.e. mutually respectful, nature (Quoted in Forbrig, 2004, p. 101).

As a mosaic of social institutions that link citizens with the political institution (where public decision-making takes place) and arena of societal governance (where non-state actors perform public governance functions) (Fox, 1995), civil society covers a multitude of spaces, actors, and institutions with varying degrees of formality, autonomy, power, and influence. It embraces non-governmental organizations such as community development organizations, charity organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, etc. (Centre for Civil Society, 2006, cited in Kastrati, 2016, p. 65). This is in tandem with the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI)'s conception of CSO. As defined in its Codebook, CSOs are:

... organizations, whether formal or informal, that are not part of the apparatus of government, that do not distribute profits to their directors or operators, that are self-governing, and in which participation is a matter of free choice. Both member-serving and public-serving organizations are included. Embraced within this definition, therefore, are private, not-for-profit health providers, schools, advocacy groups, social service agencies, anti-poverty groups, development agencies, professional associations, community-based organizations, unions, religious bodies, recreation organizations, cultural institutions, and many more (CSOSI, n.d., p. 3).

The defining attributes of civil society, as identified by Fox (1995, p. 9), include voluntariness i.e. self-generating nature of the associations, created for the purpose of advancing shared interests or addressing collective needs; autonomy i.e. high degree of organizational delink from the state and market; organizational structure and capacity i.e. a minimal level of operational feasibility and legal recognition from the state; non-profit orientation i.e. primarily altruistic in the sense that their principal organizing motive is to advance and protect public interests; and commitment to democracy and democratization i.e. a shared commitment to democratic principles and values and deepening of democracy.

As a sub-system of the social system [state] which carries out a series of activities for the stability of the system, the paper examines the civil society sector within the prism of system theory. CSOs

are perceived as crucial sub-structures of the political system that perform input functions for the proper functioning of the system. They are informal sub-structures of the state that perform input functions such as political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication. As a sub-system of the political system, civil society plays an active role in the formation of demands (input) for the political system and pressures the political system to supply relevant answers (output) to the demands. It also plays a key role in diffusing output into the political environment and the formation of feedback. Its vibrancy or otherwise determines not only the pace of development but also the pace of democratization. Consequently, civil society has become an essential mediating structure in most countries as it serves as a buffer between the public and the state. It also plays a key role in cultivating citizenship as well as generating and maintaining values in society (Forbrig, 2004).

To Gramsci, CSOs are social organizations that exert collective pressure on conventions, morals, and patterns of thinking and behaviour for social cohesion and orderliness (Gramsci, 1980, cited in Zinecker, 2011). Habermas understands civil society as an autonomous social sphere that initiates problem-solving discourses on issues of public interest. To him, civil society embodies the aggregate of individual and collective initiatives directed toward the attainment of the common good (Habermas, 1998, cited in Zinecker, 2011). Keane (1989) also observes that most European political thinkers, such as Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, saw civil

society as social associations that interact with the state to ensure peaceful order and good government. Tocqueville, for instance, highlighted the critical role of individual autonomy and the power of people to organize themselves and create meaningful associations (Neubert, 2011). This ability is fundamental to fostering a vibrant society.

In the post-Cold War global system, civil society is portrayed as a positive, ethical sub-system of nation-states necessary for the promotion of democracy and good governance, most especially in developing countries. The failure of the state in bringing about socio-economic development has brought about a shift from a state-centered approach to development to a civil society-centered approach. As such, civil society has become the new channel of providing the public good in the contemporary global system. Hitherto, the public good has been the domain of state institutions. With the disappointing performance of these institutions, on the one hand, and increasing differentiation in the needs and interests of diverse people, on the other, the responsibility for the public good is now diffused among civil society, sometimes working in collaboration with state institutions.

The Western conception of civil society may not apply to Africa, as it is considered too narrow to capture the complexity of African socio-political structures. Groups such as militant social movements and social defense units are often excluded from this conception (Neubert, 2011). Additionally, civil society organizations in Africa do not operate in the same ways as those in Western countries. Those in Africa and other developing countries differ in

their dependence on international donor agencies from the West, have limited capacity to operate as a result, and are largely constrained by authoritarian regimes or influenced by external forces that fund their activities (Neubert, 2011). Thus, CSOs in Africa are viewed as agents of imperialism, representing the interests of economic liberalization (Bagu, 2010).

Methodology

This paper employs an adaptive time-series approach to analyze the CSOSI data collected over a span of 14 years. The data is organized into seven dimensions: Legal Environment, Organizational Capacity, Financial Viability, Advocacy, Service Provision, Sectoral Infrastructure, and Public Image. These dimensions reflect the state of the civil society sector during this period. The data is presented in line graphs to illustrate the trends of CSO activities across these seven dimensions.

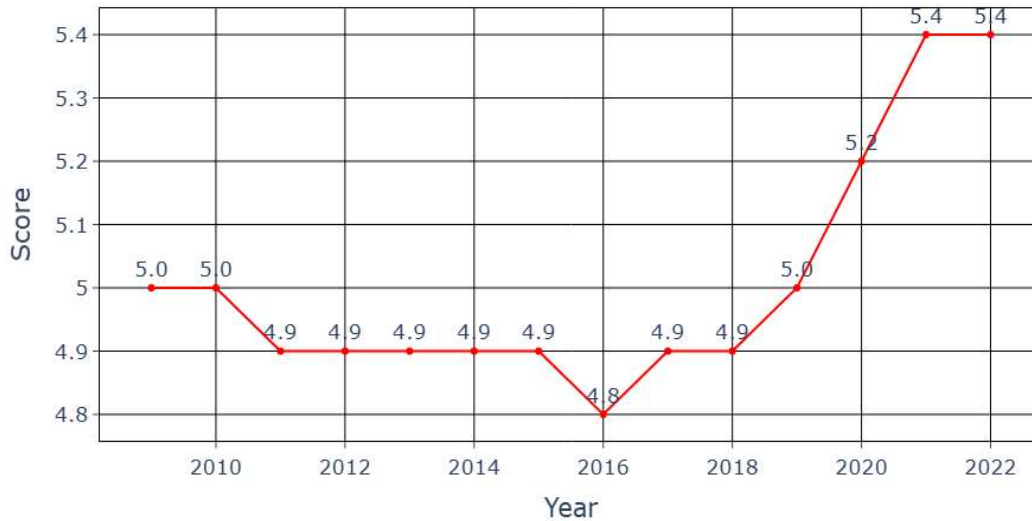
This analysis allows the authors to identify the factors contributing to changes in these dimensions throughout the years of the index. A descriptive analysis of the data offers insights into the patterns and trends of CSO activities in Nigeria from 2009 to 2022.

The CSOSI in Nigeria: Dimensions and Trends (2009-2022)

This section presents the trends and developments in each of the seven dimensions throughout the 14-year implementation period of the index. Generally, changes recorded in this period for each dimension ranged from slight to moderate from one year to another.

1. Legal Environment

Figure 1: CSO Legal Environment in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



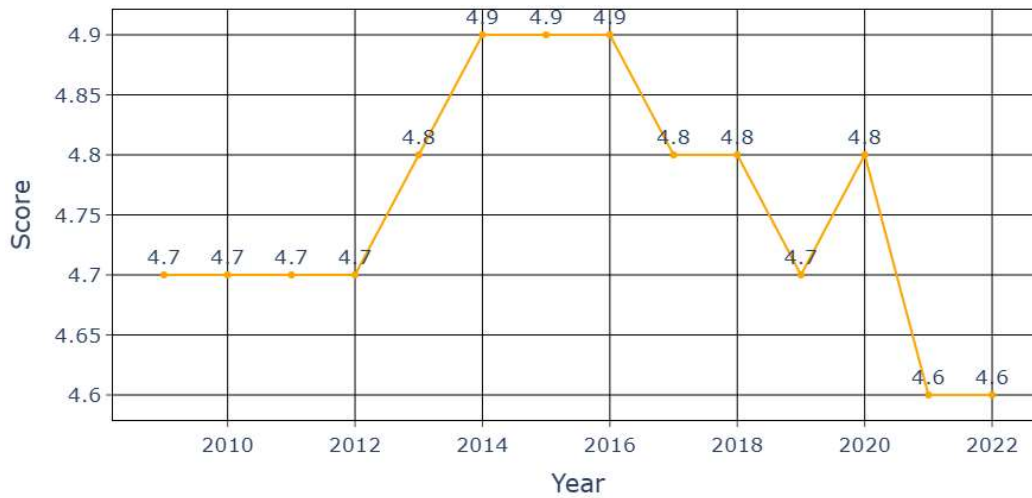
Source: CSOSI, 2009 – 2022

Regarding the legal environment, the index shows that Nigerian CSOs operated in a constrained environment from 2009 to 2022. Over the 14 years of the USAID CSO Sustainability Index, the legal environment showed only a slight, momentary improvement. Starting with a sustainability evolving status (5.0) in 2009, which was retained in 2010, the legal environment slightly improved in 2011 (4.9), maintaining the dimension in the sustainability evolving status. This tempo was maintained up till 2016 when the environment slightly improved (4.8), but slightly deteriorated back to 4.9 in 2017 through 2018. However, it remained in the sustainability-evolving status in 2019 with a 5.0 index score. Moderate deterioration was recorded in 2020 and

2021, with 5.2 and 5.4 index scores, respectively moving the dimension into a sustainability-impered status. The situation in 2022 was not different from that of 2021. The worsening nature of the legal environment, most especially from 2019, was due to a series of anti-CSO acts by the state and its agencies. These include the CSO Regulatory Commission Bill, the Social Media Regulation Bill, frequent clampdown on media houses, and harassment of social activists and media practitioners. This environment was further constrained by the replacement of the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 1990 with CAMA 2020 as the CSO regulatory law. The latter contains some provisions that stifle CSOs' operations.

2. Organizational Capacity

Figure 2: CSO Organizational Capacity in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



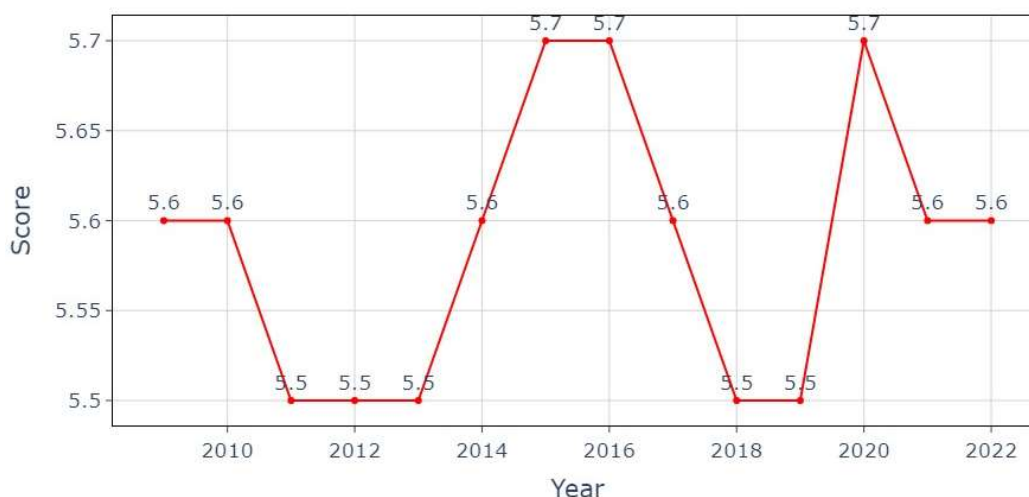
Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

In terms of organizational capacity, the Nigerian CSO sector maintained a sustainability evolving status throughout the Index, albeit with slight deteriorations and improvements in between. Starting with an index score of 4.7 in 2009, the dimension remained unchanged until 2013, when it slightly deteriorated (4.8) due largely to the high rate of staff attrition recorded; many local CSOs' employees moved to large foreign-based NGOs. The year 2014, also recorded a slight deterioration (4.9) due to a paucity of funds and capacity-building programs for staff development. The situation remained the same until 2017, when CSOs began to collaborate to build capacity and execute projects. This slightly improved their

organizational capacity from 4.9 in 2016 to 4.8 in 2017. This was retained in 2018. A slight improvement was also recorded in 2019 (4.7) as many CSOs could mobilize human and material resources to support the electoral process. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs' organizational capacity deteriorated slightly in 2020 (4.8). The dimension improved moderately in 2021 (4.6), largely due to the increased adoption of technology by the CSOs in carrying out their activities. Though CSOs' use of technology continued to expand in 2022, many CBOs were still technologically incapacitated. As such, CSOs' organizational capacity in 2022 did not change from that of 2021.

3. Financial Viability

Figure 4: CSO Financial Viability in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

Under Financial Viability, the Index assesses CSOs' viability using six indicators, including CSOs' ability to diversify their income streams, the extent to which they can assess local funding sources, and their reliance on foreign funding sources. Other indicators include CSOs' fundraising capacity, their ability to earn income from the sales of products and services, and their financial management systems. From the inception of the Index in 2009, CSO Financial Viability in Nigeria had been impeded and oscillated between 5.5 and 5.7 scores across 14 years. This has also been the worst sector for CSO sustainability in the country. Several factors are attributable to the weak sustainability of this dimension. A major factor has been the over-reliance of local CSOs on foreign funding sources for their operations and programming. Hence, due to requirements such as registration and audited financial reports, etc., that foreign donor agencies attach to their grants, only a few large CSOs in major cities like Abuja, Kano, and Lagos etc. can access such grants. Also, the dwindling nature of donor funding has had adverse effects on

the sector. In 2015, 2016, and 2020, Financial Viability had its worst score ever of 5.7. This was because of a shift in focus for donor funding. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many donors diverted their resources to fund pandemic-related activities, which left many local CSOs inactive. Although the Index has shown many CSOs in the country resorting to local sources of funding, such as crowdfunding, the sales of goods and services, and seeking grants from local philanthropic foundations, these sources are still marginal when compared to foreign sources. Overall, as shown in the Index scores for this dimension, the sector is expected to remain impeded for as long as local sources of funding are not well developed, especially with the country grappling with multiple economic challenges.

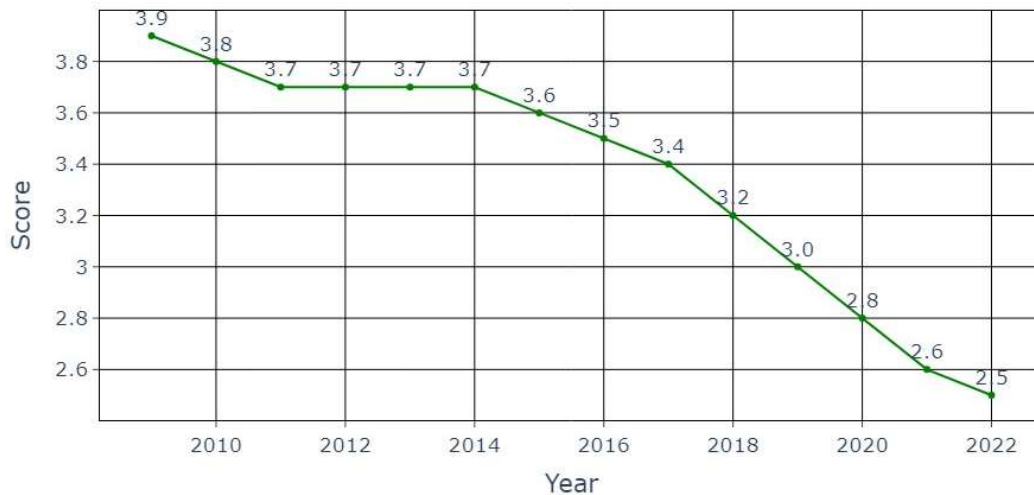
4. Advocacy

Many CSOs in Nigeria emerged as advocacy groups in reaction to the dreadful socio-economic and political conditions in the country's history. Intermittent military dictatorships from the 1960s to the late 1990s, as well as a

struggling economy, had resulted in the emergence and proliferation of CSOs in Nigeria. Many civil rights organizations contributed to the return of democracy in the country in 1999 and have continued to

push for political and economic reforms. Hence, the CSO Advocacy dimension in the country, as shown in Figure 5, has grown strongly over the years.

Figure 5: CSO Advocacy in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

The Index assesses advocacy using four broad indicators, such as cooperation with governments, policy advocacy initiatives, lobbying efforts, and advocacy for CSO law reforms. In 2009, with a score of 3.9, the dimension was categorized as evolving. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, CSO advocacy, for the first time, became enhanced as CSOs pushed for, and succeeded in influencing several government policies towards addressing the plights of Nigerians. With a score of 2.5 in 2022, the CSO sector had its best performance in the advocacy dimension. This has been attributed to the culture of civic engagement and growing cooperation with the government at all levels. Also, from 2021, CSOs in the country initiated self-regulatory measures for the sector to avert stringent control from the government. These initiatives have yet to gain wide acceptance across the CSO

sector, especially from CSOs at the state and grassroots levels.

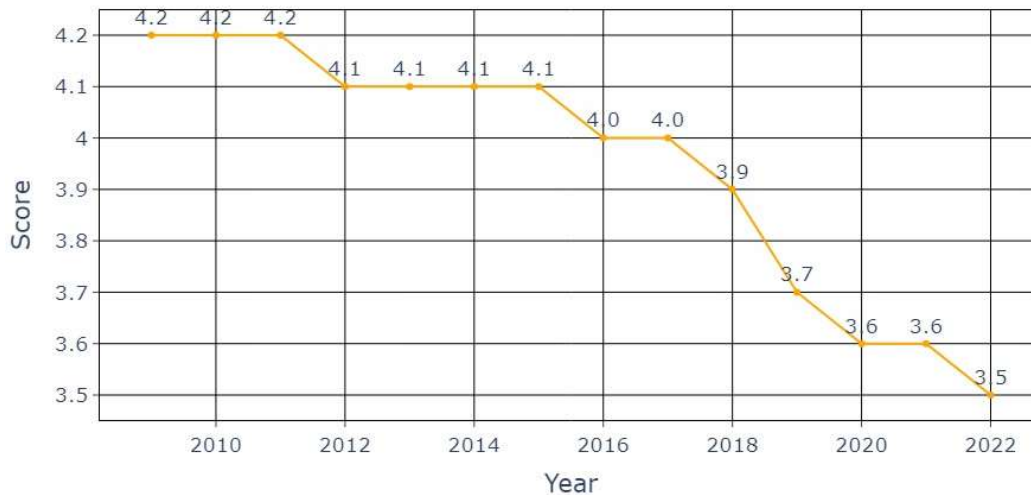
5. Service Provision

The service provision dimension improved slightly, on average, from the onset of the report in 2009 to 2022. Throughout the 14 years of the Index, the sector was still evolving in terms of sustainability in service provision. From 2009 to 2011, service provision maintained an index score of 4.2. CSOs offered a wide range of services in sectors such as health, education, and environment. This period marked the beginning of the government's recognition of the role of CSOs in service provision and collaboration with them. In 2009, for instance, some NGOs were engaged by the federal government to monitor and evaluate the performance of the Virtual Poverty Fund (VPF) Project across six states of the federation. In 2010, the Federal Ministry of Finance

collaborated with some CSOs to develop a Medium-Term Expenditure Framework. CSOs were also involved in the formation of the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI). In 2011,

CSOs carried out a series of services on the electoral process. However, most NGOs had weak marketing skills and lacked adequate knowledge of the demand for their goods and services.

Figure 6: CSO Service Provision in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

From 2012 to 2015, CSOs' service provision improved slightly, as they expanded their services to other areas such as disaster relief, policing, peacebuilding, climate change, child right protection, and electoral services among others. For instance, many CSOs provided relief materials to victims of the 2012 flooding and sensitized the populace on Ebola prevention strategies during the outbreak of the disease in 2014. Some CSOs also engaged in voters' education and election monitoring activities during the 2015 general elections. It is also noteworthy that most CSOs started taking steps to ensure that their services meet the needs of communities. The period also witnessed increased collaboration between CSOs and state governments. However, instances of collaboration between CSOs and local

government were very rare. This was largely due to financial constraints and the overbearing influence of state governments on their activities. Slight improvement was also recorded in 2016 and maintained in 2017. This was largely due to increased intervention of NGOs in the Northeast, where they provided humanitarian relief to the victims of the Boko Haram insurgency. However, while the impact of urban-based NGOs was felt greatly, rural-based CBOs did not make much impact.

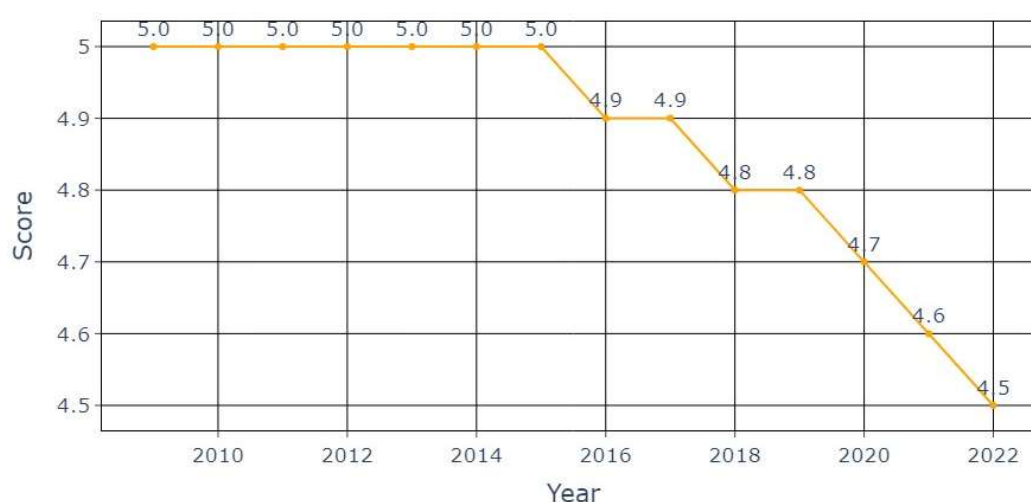
A slight improvement was recorded in 2018 from 4.0 in 2017 to 3.9. Communities' demand for CSOs' services increased due to governments' gradual withdrawal from social provisioning because of dwindling revenue. Some

CSOs also extended their service to areas such as filmmaking and legal services for the victims of domestic violence. However, the presence of the CSO sector was needed in social housing provisioning. Moderate improvement was recorded in 2019 with an index score of 3.7. In the same year, CSOs provided a plethora of services related to the electoral process, IDP welfare, prison decongestion, and boot camp for good governance among other new services. Slight deterioration was recorded in 2020 with an index score of 3.6 which was maintained in 2021. This

was largely due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown in most parts of the country that prevented in-person service delivery by most CSOs. 2022 witnessed a slight improvement. The increasing withdrawal of government from social service provision, especially in the post-COVID-19 era, necessitated CSOs to take up the responsibility. In addition, CSOs played invaluable roles in assisting people affected by flooding in 2022 and provided voter education services in preparation for the 2023 general elections.

6. Sectoral Infrastructure

Figure 7: CSO Sectoral Infrastructure in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

The Nigerian CSO sector performed better in service provision compared with sectoral infrastructure during the period under analysis. Although the sector is evolving in both dimensions, the pace of improvement in the former is better than that of the latter. Starting with an index score of 5.0 in 2009, as of 2022 Sectoral Infrastructure had a score of 4.5. For seven

years (2009-2015), CSOs neither improved nor deteriorated in sectoral infrastructure. During this period, only a few Intermediary Support Organizations (ISOs) were available to provide support services to the CSO sector while the few available resource centres were ill-equipped and difficult to access. Training opportunities could only be accessed by

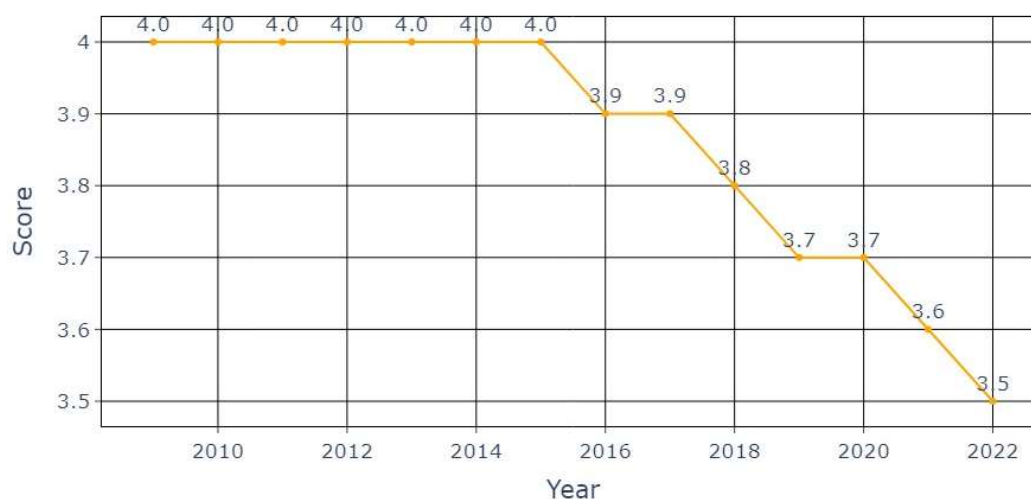
big urban-based organizations, while CBOs did not have such opportunities. Also, trainings were mostly conducted in English language; training manuals were rarely translated into local languages.

The situation slightly improved in 2016 with an index score of 4.9. In the same year, academic institutions, such as the Lagos Business School, and the Kaduna Business School started providing training, capacity building, and information services to CSOs. However, most CSOs could not access their training services due to their location or financial constraints. The situation remained unchanged as of 2017. The situation improved slightly in 2018 as the year witnessed more CSOs enjoying training opportunities and increased collaboration for capacity building. CSO-media collaboration also flourished during the year. The situation in 2019 was not

significantly different from that of 2018. There was a slight improvement in 2020, 2021, and 2022. In 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, many CSOs embraced the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to carry out their activities; the year witnessed increased use of online platforms for training activities by the CSOs. In addition, training programmes organized by Intermediary Support Organizations (ISOs) and Resource Centres were mostly online at no or little cost to participants. As COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed in 2021, there was an intensification of collaboration and network building among CSOs. In 2022, CSOs could access improved services from ISOs and engage more effectively in networking and coalition building. ISOs and resource centers offered a generous array of training (both online and in-person) to the CSOs during the year.

7. Public Image

Figure 8: CSO Public Image in Nigeria, 2009 - 2022



Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

Public image as implied here refers to the perception and reputation of civil society organizations (CSOs) among the public. It

encompasses how the organization is perceived, its credibility, trustworthiness, and the overall impression it leaves on the

public. A positive public image is crucial for CSOs as it can enhance their influence, attract support, and enable them to effectively advocate for their causes. For instance, in Nigeria “Local CSOs have a good reputation in the Northeast and are trusted above the government because of their accessibility and prompt response to disasters” (CSOSI, 2019). Conversely, a negative public image can hinder their ability to mobilize resources, gain public trust, and achieve their goals. For example, “While CSOs are applauded in communities across most regions of Nigeria, in the Northeast, international CSOs are seen as agents of international imperialism or business rather than humanitarian service providers” (CSOSI, 2019). Public image is influenced by various factors, including the organization's transparency, accountability, communication strategies, track record, and the perception of its impact on society (Walker, 1999; USAID, 2011).

Public image in the earlier years of the Index stagnated at a score of 4.0, which indicated sustainability evolving for the dimension. Since then, there has been no record of degeneration or improvement from 2009 up to 2015. In 2016, the dimension's score improved slightly to 3.9, maintaining the same score in 2017. In 2018 the dimension experienced further improvement to 3.8 and 3.7 in 2019 through 2020 regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further improvements were recorded in 2021 and 2022 with 3.6 and 3.5 scores respectively. This clearly shows the gradual improvement in the rating of public image perhaps due to factors such as wider acceptance of civil society by the public in Nigeria due to their involvement in election awareness creation, and wider

media coverage of their activities by local newspapers both print and electronic such as *Daily Trust* and *Premium Times* and several human rights campaign such as #EndSARS in Southwestern Nigeria and awareness raising campaign during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic and proliferation of community radio stations such as Berekate radio station in the preceding years 2021 and 2022 respectively (CSOSI, 2022).

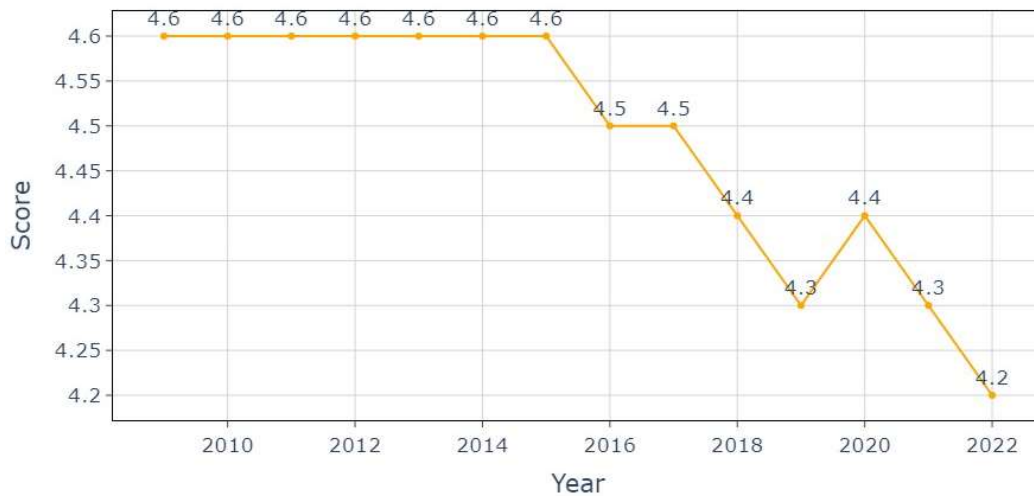
Moreover, public image in Nigeria is often influenced by various factors, ranging from the perception of bias. This can be justified because some CSOs in Nigeria are perceived to be biased towards certain political or ethnic groups, which can affect their public image. This perception is often fuelled by political interests or misinformation. Another factor could be a lack of transparency which is a key factor in building public trust. Some CSOs in Nigeria have been criticized for their lack of transparency in their operations, including their funding sources and decision-making processes. This can lead to skepticism and a negative public image. Another factor could be the media which plays a significant role in shaping public opinion. CSOs in Nigeria often face challenges in getting their messages across due to limited media coverage or negative portrayal by certain media outlets. This can impact their public image and limit their ability to effectively disseminate their activities. Government interference could equally affect CSOs. In Nigeria, CSOs often face challenges from the government, including restrictions on their activities, harassment, and intimidation. These actions can create a negative perception of CSOs among the public, especially if the government's narrative is

widely accepted. The most critical factor is awareness which many Nigerians may not be fully aware of the activities and impacts of CSOs in the country. This lack

of awareness can lead to misconceptions and a limited understanding of CSOs' role in society.

Nigeria's CSO Sustainability Index, 2009 – 2022: Overall Assessment

Figure 9: Nigeria CSO Sustainability Index, 2009 - 2022



Source: CSOSI, 2009 - 2022

The trends in the seven dimensions, as shown in the preceding section reflected the changes in the overall CSO sustainability in Nigeria within the 14 years of the Index. From 2009 to 2022, the overall CSO Sustainability scores as shown in Figure 9, ranged from 4.6 to 4.2 depicting a CSO sector that is still evolving. Development in the CSO sector stagnated at a Sustainability score of 4.6 from 2009 to 2015. This meant that the activities in the CSO sector within that period were not enough to drive any changes in the overall CSO Sustainability score. However, in 2016, there was a slight improvement in the Sustainability score (4.5) owing largely to an improvement in the public's reception of CSO work

occasioned by economic difficulties in the country. Also, CSOs could register at the national level more easily owing to the introduction of an online registration platform by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) including other success stories (CSOSI, 2016). The Sustainability score stagnated in 2017 at a score of 4.5 as CSOs strengthened the gains achieved in the previous year amidst continued economic difficulties including a recession (CSOSI, 2017).

In 2018, CSO Sustainability improved to a score of 4.4 as five dimensions showed gains. As reported in the 2018 CSOSI report for Nigeria:

The CSO sector's financial viability was stronger as more CSOs used crowdfunding to raise funds locally. Advocacy strengthened as CSOs successfully lobbied the Senate to pass the Digital Rights and Freedom Bill and pushed the president to sign the #NotTooYoungToRun Bill, which reduces the age of eligibility for political office. Service provision expanded as CSOs filled the gap left by the government's gradual withdrawal from providing social services, and the sectoral infrastructure improved with new training opportunities and increased collaboration between CSOs and other sectors. CSOs' public image was boosted by positive media coverage, facilitated by proliferating community radio stations and the newly established Human Rights Radio (p. 1).

In 2019, there was yet again a slight improvement in the overall Sustainability of the CSO sector compared with the previous year. As the Nigerian economy showed a marginal improvement, the CSO sector strengthened across four dimensions. CSO advocacy had a moderate improvement as important advocacy successes were recorded, such as the increase in the national minimum wage from NGN18,000 to NGN30,000. Service provision also improved moderately as CSO provided election-related services. CSOs' organizational capacity had slightly improved, and the public had a more positive perception of organizations in the sector due largely to their election-related activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 affected the activities of the CSO sector in Nigeria as many organizations became inactive in compliance with government restrictions to control the spread of the virus. This resulted in a slight deterioration of the sustainability score of the CSO sector from 4.3 in 2019 to 4.4 in 2020. However, as

pandemic restrictions were eased in 2021, many CSOs could provide an assortment of services in varied sectors including health, humanitarian relief, etc., to support the poor and vulnerable in society. This led to a slight improvement in the sector's sustainability score to 4.3 in 2021. The Index ended in 2022 with the highest-ever sustainability score (4.2) for the CSO sector in Nigeria. CSO advocacy became stronger with many successes, including the passage of the Electoral Act of 2022, the removal of nonprofits from the definition of designated non-financial institutions, etc. Other CSO dimensions such as service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image recorded varied improvements even as CSOs' legal environment, organizational capacity, and financial viability remained unchanged from the previous year (CSOSI, 2022).

Conclusion

The Nigerian CSO sector is diverse and complex, with many organizations operating at different levels, national, state, and local, and focusing on areas of interest largely determined by the availability of donor funds. The USAID-funded CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa depicted the development and dynamics of the CSO sector in Nigeria. The Index revealed a mixed bag of successes, difficulties, and resilience of the CSO sector in Nigeria, amidst a paucity of funds due largely to dwindling donor funding and a struggling local economy. Regardless of these difficulties, including a legal environment that stifles the operations of CSOs in the country, many organizations have shown a high level of resilience in advocating for reforms, providing services, and supporting the less privileged in society.

Overall, the CSO sector had been evolving in the 14-year life span of the project, even as slight improvements were recorded within this period. This was also reflected in four dimensions (organizational

capacity, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image) with scores that can be classified as sustainability evolving. Within the 14 years of the Index, CSO advocacy had the greatest improvement from a score of 3.9 in 2009 to 2.5 in 2022, making it the only dimension with enhanced sustainability among the seven Index's dimensions.

Conversely, two dimensions were impeded in 2022 as financial viability had a score of 5.6, the same score it had in 2009. CSOs' legal environment was 5.4 in 2022, even as its maiden score was 5.0. These scores indicate that CSOs' legal environment has not been conducive for many CSOs. Also, their over-reliance on foreign funding sources has harmed their financial viability as donor priorities keep shifting away from Africa to Europe and the Middle East.

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