

African development puzzle: Scaling up NGOs contribution in West Africa

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Abstract

Community development is seen as a fundamental responsibility of every individual in a society to help in the development of his/her community. Sometimes this development is brought upon by a voluntary individual or group of individuals through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The NGOs are broadly known for their positive influence on community development. In spite of this, there are diverging views on whether NGOs are for community development or personal development. It is in this context that this paper attempts to discuss and critically evaluate the activities of NGO in West Africa sub-region: their services and contribution in solving developmental challenges of West Africa, the key sectors of the subregion with NGO participation, NGOs success rate in tackling the developmental issues and the state of the sector of intervention. The study also presents the challenges faced by NGOs, the various criticisms made against NGOs and appropriate recommendations on how to scale up NGO impact in achieving sustainable development of West Africa.

1. Introduction

The rise of NGO in the past few decades has been driven by an often implicit assumption that private agents, including private-not-for profit, are effective tool in solving the development puzzle of developing countries, expanding freedom via a robust civil engagement, providing services when national government lack sufficient resources and political will in addressing societal issues through participatory and market-based methods (Brass, Longhofer, Robinson, & Schnable, 2018). These are the reasons why African and Latin American countries see large growth in NGO activities. The question of whether NGO has the specific capacity to solve the African development puzzle skirts the mind of researchers and policymakers (see, e.g., Anderson, 2017; Hearn, 2007; Manjur Morshed & Asami, 2015; United States Agency for International Development Bureau for Africa, 2002). This question cannot be answered outrightly. Let us define development according to Amartya Sen (1999) who stated that "Development is an expansion in freedom, not only political freedom but also social opportunities, protective securities, economic opportunities and transparency guarantees." The outcomes associated with these freedoms include improvement in health, education, justice, sanitation and democratic governance. For this research, we define NGO broadly in tandem with the CSO nomenclature according to Brass, Longhofer, Robinson, & Schnable (2018) who see NGO as any non-profit, non-governmental organization that works in development, humanitarian, advocacy, or civil society sector. Included in this definition are civil society organizations, community-based organization (CBO), grassroots organizations, private voluntary organizations, or faith-based organization (FBOs). They can be international regional, national or local.

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