

Social Capital, Civil Society and Social Change: The CLP Model

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### Abstract

This paper presents a model of grassroots civil society engagement, simply known as The Community Life Project (CLP) Model. The model demonstrates how the social capital embedded in the rich associational life of grassroots communities is an important resource for promoting social change. It also highlights two very salient realities: one, the existence of a popular civil society distinct from a clichéd civil society; two, grassroots civil society is largely excluded from the sphere of power and influence not only by the political and business classes but also by a narrow conceptualization of what constitutes civil society. The CLP model provides answers to key questions in actualizing popular participation: What is civil society in the African setting? How does Africa include the excluded populations? And how can long-term, inclusive, civil society engagement in the pursuit of democracy and social justice be sustained?

Key words: Grassroots, Civil society, Social capital, Popular participation, Social movement, Social change.

### Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of donor-funded, formal civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa. Many of such organizations are actively engaged in promoting development, democracy, transparency and accountability in Nigeria. However, a large section of grassroots civil society has been largely marginalized by this process. How to devise an effective mechanism for grassroots civil society engagement in the political space, scale up successful initiatives, build and sustain inclusive, resilient, citizen movements remain daunting challenges.

This paper presents a model of grassroots civil society engagement which has been remarkably successful in sustaining inclusive civic participation. It engages non-conventional sections of civil society from a social capital paradigm. The model has been tried and tested, for over 25 years. The model was subjected to a formal independent evaluation in 2007 before it was taken to a national scale. It has also been the subject of an externally commissioned case study on the scaling up of successful development interventions. It embodies some of the best principles of participatory community engagement. It is simple and adaptable. It provides a social framework for addressing just about any development and governance issue.

This paper describes the CLP model and discusses the critical success factors: why it works and why it has withstood the test of time. The hope is that the CLP model will contribute to solutions on how to actualize participatory democracy and achieve social justice in the African context.

### Literature Review

The concept of participatory development received serious attention in the 1990s in the international community (Rahman, 1995, p. 26). Beginning in the 1980s, several international human rights documents emerged expressing people's right to participate. The United Nations General Assembly (1986) declared that "the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development." In 1990, under the auspices of the United Nations, representatives of African governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) adopted The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation in Arusha (Meyer, 2018, p.259-260). Participation,

defined as “access to decision making and power” (UNDP, 1993, p.21), became intertwined with the notion of empowerment. Development practitioners and governments began to focus on approaches and strategies to advance community participation and empowerment. (Craig & Mayo, 1995, p.1).

The number of development NGOs recorded remarkable growth on the continent over the same period, due to two major factors. Irked by the perceived poor performance of African governments, the World Bank, Donors and Western countries began to shift international aid from governments to NGOs (Chege, 1999, p. 6). NGOs were seen as “filling the gap” (Ulleberg, 2009, p. 9), providing services in various sectors. Secondly, the return to civil rule and multi-party politics in many African countries opened the space for civic engagement (Adar, Finizio & Meyer, 2018). The idea of building civil society actors to hold government accountable and promote good governance increasingly became a “policy prescription” (Willems, 2014, p.47) in international aid circles. The concept of civil society in Africa became narrowly construed as ‘formal’, ‘NGO-Style ‘organizations’. Many of such civil society organizations (CSOs) were supported by international development agencies to become actively engaged in promoting development, democracy, transparency and accountability in various African countries. The consequence is a dominant tendency to ignore the existence of other forms of civil society (Willems 2014, Nkwachukwu 2009) and the exclusion of traditional African, grassroots civil society (Mamattah 2014, Tar 2014) from mainstream civic engagement. This, in turn, reinforced inequality in civic engagement and popular participation between grassroots civil society and their more elitist counterparts.

The question of who constitutes civil society in Africa is critical to achieving popular participation. The non-inclusion of grassroots actors has created major gaps between rhetoric

and reality. As a result, participatory development remains largely elusive both at the national and regional levels in Africa. Admittedly, NGO-type CSOs have made significant contributions to advancing development and democratization, but their efforts are yet to garner the scale required to tip the balance in favor of the disadvantaged majority. One of the causes is a poor representation of grassroots voices in national and regional policy structures due to the urban and elitist bias of “influential” CSOs. (Ikome & Kode, 2018, p. 252). Scholars have pointed out the need to acknowledge and include Africa’s rich heritage of associational life in both the conceptualization and engagement of civil society. As Nkwachukwu (2009) points out, “it is important to broaden the concept to include traditional African organizations, such as communal, religious and occupational groups; such groups played an important role in the anti-colonial political movements. Including them in the definition of civil society will give a better insight into civil society’s role in advancing democracy and governance in Africa.” (p.82). Tocqueville was the first theorist to draw attention to the link between associational life and democratic culture. Tocqueville’s all-embracing list of associations states: “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types – religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute.” (as cited in Putnam, 1993, p.89). In fact, several studies support the strong connection between associational life and democracy, development and social change. Apart from Putnam’s survey of civic life in Italy, a survey of five countries by Almond and Verba found that members of associations displayed more political astuteness and participation. (Putnam, 1993, p.90). Furthermore, a case study of developing countries, by Esman and Uphoff concludes that “a vigorous network of membership organizations is essential to any serious attempt to overcome mass poverty.... we cannot visualize any strategy of rural development

combining growth in productivity with broad distribution of benefits in which participatory local organizations are not prominent” (as cited in Putman, 1993, p.90).

Networks of membership organizations are strongly associated with social capital, which embodies the dynamics of the relationships and social ties through which people access resources for their personal and collective interests and advancement. However, there is no consensus among scholars on how to define or measure social capital. Schneider (2016) highlights three schools of thought from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, led by Bourdieu in the field of Philosophy and Anthropology, Coleman in Sociology, and Putnam in Political Science. Putman views social capital as “social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance and trustworthiness.” (p. 211). Bourdieu considers it a “capital of social connections, honorability and respectability” (as cited Adam & Rončević, 2003, p. 159). Two major blocks emerge from these schools. While Putman’s block examines the role and implications of social capital in civic engagement, the Coleman and Bourdieu block focus more on the impact of social capital in regards to social justice issues. From a non-profit perspective, Schneider (2016) defines social capital as “Relationships based in patterns of reciprocal, enforceable trust that enable people and institutions to gain access to resources like social services, volunteers, or funding” (p.210). Social capital can also be understood through its various features such as trust and norms, which can be experienced as “bonding”, “bridging” and “linking capital”. (Schneider, 2016, p. 217). Bonding capital describes ties among people with a common cultural affinity, and bridging social capital describes relationships nurtured across groups over time, linking social capital describes ties that link people “across power relations” in a hierarchical relationship.

The breath of applications of the concept of social capital is such that, as Adam & Rončević (2003) put it, “In fact one may approach practically any social entity or situation through the conceptual framework of social capital.” (p.157).

This paper addresses the role of social capital, networks and associational life in the CLP Model of grassroots civil society engagement for promoting social change in Nigeria. The concept of social change adopted here is the one described by Wagner (2017) as the change that “addresses the root causes of problems”, which “implies that in addition to attending to the community’s immediate needs, the root causes of those needs must be understood and addressed.” (p. 237).

The concept of civil society used in this essay include the groups Nkwachukwu (2009) has described as “traditional African Organizations.” (p. 82). This broader conceptualization of civil society is becoming popular in social development circles. As stated by the World Economic Forum (2013):

Civil society is recognized as encompassing far more than a mere “sector” dominated by the NGO community: Civil Society today includes an ever wider and more vibrant range of organized and un-organized groups, as new society actors blur the boundaries between sectors and experiment with new organizational forms, both online and off. (p. 5)

#### The CLP Model of Inclusive, Grassroots Civil Society Participation

The CLP Model was developed by Community Life Project (CLP), one of Nigeria’s leading NGOs working with grassroots civil society to promote development and social change. Founded in 1992, CLP has a vast network of grassroots partners with presence in 234 of

Nigeria's 774 Local Government Areas across the nation's 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). CLP's core partnerships have been sustained for over 25 years and new groups are being added. Its grassroots partners include networks of informal sector occupational groups and mutual-benefit associations such as artisans (carpenters, tailors, mechanics, welders), youth and women groups, cultural groups, primordial groups, faith-based organizations, community development associations and the community development departments of government at the Federal, State and Local Government levels.

Right from inception, CLP benefitted from some of the best practices in social action, community mobilization and participatory development. At the time of establishing CLP, I was a freelance consultant for international bodies. Before that, I was an activist for social justice and had played leading roles in the youth and students' movement, co-founded and led the foremost feminist organization in the country as well as two other Women's Health and Rights organizations. I learnt about some best and worst practices in social action, and these shaped my work at CLP. I shared the CLP vision with my assistant, at the time, Chuks Ojidoh, who is now CLP's Deputy Executive Director. Together, we fine-tuned the CLP idea and commenced activities in December 1992. Like many NGOs, I used my home and personal resources in CLP's start-up phase. The following year, CLP received a seed grant from the International Women's Health Coalition to open an office. The CLP Model was subsequently developed with funding from the MacArthur Foundation, then replicated and scaled nation-wide with funding from the Ford Foundation.

CLP, described by Jude Ilo, the Country Director of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) as "the powerhouse of grassroots mobilization" in Nigeria, has made tremendous success in mobilizing marginalized and disadvantaged citizens for civic



engagement. (CLP, 2018). Its work contributed significantly to improving the credibility of elections in the country (Bailard & Livingston, 2014; CLP, 2015). CLP also has a highly impressive record of pioneering innovative use of IT tools for popular participation (Kamau, 2011; Scialom & Banks 2011; Bailard & Livingston 2014;). CLP's success lies in the fact that it is achieving popular participation and mobilizing grassroots associations to engage the political leadership and governance processes. These populations have been on the margins of development and governance decision-making. A formal independent evaluation of CLP, commissioned by one of its funders in 2007, concludes that "CLP's Model of working with community organizations and social structures has proven effective in reaching marginalized populations and is unique. To the best of our knowledge, there is no other model able to reach these segments of the population" in Nigeria (Independent Evaluation Report, 2007, p. iv).

Another strength of The CLP Model is its ability to gather divergent interest groups with contentious relationships in society to work on a common platform and a shared agenda. These include groups across ethnic, religious and partisan, political divides. The participation of the sections of civil society that CLP is engaging is considered critical to achieving the transformative change that has eluded Africa since colonial rule. For this reason, it is important to reflect on the evolution and sustenance of this engagement.

### Origin and Evolution of The CLP Model

CLP's original goal was to expand the scope of community ownership of population and development programs through a two-step approach:

- 1) To develop a replicable model of inclusive civil society participation in the development process.
- 2) To engage development practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders in a broad scale replication of the model.

The project focused on creating a social framework, rooted in community life, through which the government and citizens could address critical development issues. The entry point for this 'social experiment' was HIV/AIDS prevention and control at the community level. HIV/AIDS was chosen for two reasons. First, AIDS was the major development challenge facing Africa at the time. Wrong approaches and poor responses from both African political leaders and the international community was claiming millions of African lives. Secondly, there was a dominant view in the development sector that community participation is easily achieved if the issue being addressed is perceived as a "felt need" like water and sanitation. CLP wanted to demonstrate that communities would commit themselves to any development issue if the right paradigm and approach were applied.

**Environmental Context:** When CLP began work in 1992, Nigeria was under the military rule of General Ibrahim Babangida, which began the transition to "civil" rule by organizing general elections in 1993. But, inexplicably, Babangida unilaterally aborted the process, resulting in a public pressure that forced him to "step aside" in a palace coup. General Sani Abacha succeeded him as Head of State. From 1993 to 1998, Nigerians engaged in a bitter and bloody struggle to overthrow the military. The country returned to civil rule in 1999 following the sudden death of General Abacha.

In mainstream development work, marginalized and disadvantaged communities were largely seen as people to be helped, as “target groups” and “beneficiaries” of development programs and services. Approaches to help them tended to be exclusionary as their local leadership roles and agency were ignored. Lip service was sometimes paid to including them. Although the development community was agog with buzz words like “community participation”, “bottom-up approach” and “community ownership”, they rarely received any concrete expression. CLP, therefore, set out to demonstrate the inherent value in the existence of grassroots community associations as constituents of the authentic civil society in Nigeria. Rather than problematize their existence, CLP engaged and acknowledged them as constituting a critical part of the solution to Nigeria’s governance and development problems.

How CLP Engaged Grassroots Civil Society Groups: The CLP Strategy is to harness social capital for building and sustaining partnerships with grassroots civil society on development issues. CLP started work in Isolo, the community where I lived and had strong social networks. It commenced work with the National Association of Automobile Technicians (NATA), beginning with my mechanic. I spoke to him about HIV/AIDS. He had never heard of it but was eager to know how to protect himself and his family from this new deadly disease without a cure. He introduced CLP to NATA Executives who bought into the idea of having an AIDS Education Session with the Association. Next, NATA invited CLP to its meeting to get its members’ endorsement. The meeting, held in an open shed, constituted a committee to plan the AIDS Education Session.

This first activity created two major outcomes. First, NATA requested CLP to conduct other educational sessions on such HIV-related issues as Sexually Transmitted Infections and Drug

Abuse. Secondly, NATA members, through word-of-mouth, began to pass our message to their various reference groups. Before long, CLP started receiving invitations to conduct AIDS Education Sessions in Churches, Mosques and similar establishments in Isolo. CLP became community-driven. Each AIDS Education Session became opportunities for enlightening associations in other areas of interests and introducing CLP to personal reference groups in the community. Within five years, CLP's network of partners included 16 Grassroots Civil Society Networks, 33 Schools, several Faith Groups, 12 health facilities, and the Local Government. CLP was also running a Youth Program, a Scholarship Program for very disadvantaged children and working with couples to improve family relationships. Workshops took place in CLP partners' locations, Markets, Churches, Mosques, and Schools.

Through these partnerships, CLP pioneered some of the best practices in AIDS prevention and control, which were later scaled up across Nigeria by Government and other Development Agencies and NGOs (Ashoka, 1996).

Scaling Up: Leveraging Innovative Internet Technologies and Mobilizing Grassroots Citizens for Free and Fair Elections

This section describes how CLP leveraged social capital, using innovative internet technologies, to amplify grassroots voice in promoting electoral integrity in Nigeria, thereby scaling up its activities nationwide.

The social networks in Isolo, the CLP home base, were the driving force behind the successful scale-up of the Project. From 1994, based on increasing demands by the community, with support from the MacArthur Foundation, CLP began expanding and adapting its HIV/AIDS educational modules to such other issues as Reproductive Health,

Life Skills, Sexuality Education, Family Health, Livelihood, and related community empowerment issues. Simultaneously, it steadily grew the type and number of partner organizations beyond artisans and occupational associations to faith-based organizations, schools, and health facilities.

In 1997, with support from the Ford Foundation, CLP expanded geographically from its base in Isolo to two neighboring communities – Mushin and Oshodi. Groups and networks in those communities had learnt about CLP’s work from their counterparts in the Isolo community and wanted to partner with CLP. In 2002, CLP scaled to a national level when, through a partnership with the Federal Community Development Department, it replicated its model in six pilot states across Nigeria’s six geo-political zones. This partnership with a Federal Government Agency was one of the outcomes of a Public Forum CLP had convened to engage policy makers and the development community in the broad scale replication of its model.

Finally, again with support from the Ford Foundation, CLP created what is arguably the most robust non-partisan, grassroots social movement in Nigeria. The 2011 presidential and other elections in Nigeria presented an opportunity for two very important steps in the life of CLP. One, to scale up nationally. Two, to engage grassroots groups in promoting electoral integrity and social accountability. Work on elections is an area that had been the exclusive preserve of human rights advocacy civil society organizations, who focused on legal instruments, policies and regulations, and rarely involved grassroots engagement. To scale up nationally and work on electoral integrity, CLP had to create a platform and identity for the social movement. The platform was christened *ReclaimNaija*, a slang for Reclaim Nigeria.

*ReclaimNaija* had online and off-line components. Offline, *ReclaimNaija* was the vast network of partners all over the country who had been organized and mobilized to form a formidable social movement. Online, *ReclaimNaija* was Ushahidi technology, which CLP innovatively integrated into its platform, [www.reclaimnaija.net](http://www.reclaimnaija.net). The Platform allows citizens to report incidents of election fraud or irregularities, by sending text messages or calling dedicated numbers in Nigeria's four major languages (Hausa, Igbo, Pidgin English and Yoruba). It was also a one-stop-shop on electoral information – from voting guidelines to the electoral act, to the list of polling units, and much more. After deploying the technology and creating a movement, CLP established a working partnership with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria's Election Management Body. This critical relationship with INEC enabled CLP to achieve its goal of improving the electoral process through popular participation. If citizens were going to take the trouble to send election incident reports, it was important to have an election management body that was willing to promptly act on those reports while elections were still ongoing. CLP knew it was embarking on something that would completely change the paradigm of election management in Nigeria. Through its growing grassroots partnership networks, CLP trained hundreds of voter educators drawn from the leadership of grassroots civil society networks and government agencies. They, in turn, organized voter education for members of their networks and other community leaders. For the 2011 Elections, voter education was held in 193 local government areas. Twenty-four thousand community leaders across 36 states were trained to carry out voter awareness in their reference groups. That second layer of trainees received resources to further replicate voter education and crowd-sourced volunteer election observers from the communities.

In its strive to assist INEC to achieve the objective of producing an updated and reliable Voters' Register, the *ReclaimNaija* movement used Ushahidi technology to send INEC reports of the voter registration exercise. It was the first time that Ushahidi technology was being deployed for pre-election work. CLP's grassroots partners across Nigeria sent over 12,000 reports on incidents relating to producing an authentic Voters' Register and improving the integrity of the electoral process. For example, based on CLP reports, INEC extended the deadline for voter registration by one week and another two days for the city of Lagos due to its large population. This helped to ensure that citizens were not disenfranchised. A few days before the election, INEC published, in the media, the *ReclaimNaija* phone numbers for reporting election incidents by text messages. The release of phone numbers for reporting election incidents further increased citizens' confidence in INEC's political will to conduct credible elections. On election days, grassroots citizens observed activities at the polling units where they were registered to vote and, through text messages or phone calls to the [www.reclaimnaija.net](http://www.reclaimnaija.net) election incident reporting platform, reported happenings at the polling units. Those reports were sent to INEC in near real time. The reports were also collated and google-mapped for INEC to view online in its situation room, making *reclaimnaija.net* INEC's virtual situation room!

*ReclaimNaija* completely transformed election observing into popular participation in election-day management. Before *ReclaimNaija*'s transformative role, the practice of election observation was routine: Specialized election observation groups, accredited by INEC as observers, would observe the elections, make notes on the exercise according to a checklist. At the end of the election, they would release statements on their observations to the media and send reports to INEC. *ReclaimNaija* added popular participation and real-time incident reporting, empowering any citizen of voting age to observe and send election incident reports

to INEC, which instantly acted on such reports, while the elections were still on, resulting in improved election day management.

Post-election, the *ReclaimNaija* movement has been working on social accountability, by enhancing the capacity of grassroots civil society leaders and Local Government officials to participate in making and administering budgets. It organizes Town Hall Meetings where community leaders meet with government officials to identify issues for inclusion in Local Government budgets. It also actively participates in community monitoring of capital projects. (CLP, 2016).

#### Grassroots Engagement by CLP: Critical Lessons

The paradigm of engagement is critical to success: A major lesson from CLP's work is that the paradigm of engagement is a critical success factor in achieving inclusion and popular participation. Paradigm shapes the approach and methodology to adopt in engaging with marginalized communities. CLP's paradigm was informed by its philosophy of social change, from which it derived its Vision and Mission. CLP believes that most of the misery that people face in the world in different areas of human life are traceable to the way human beings view and relate to one another. Relationships are key to achieving well-being, peace, prosperity, and happiness, be it within families, communities or between nations. Achieving that well-being depends on the quality of the relationships that people have, on whether the relationships are just, fair and nurturing.

This outlook drives CLP's vision of "a society where there is respect for human dignity, social and environmental justice" and its mission to "radically reduce human misery by engaging the people as agents of positive change." The philosophy also informed CLP's



concept and choice of the sections of civil society to engage. This includes the sections of society that are vulnerable to greater human misery, those on the margins of political power and influence, people who have to struggle the most for access to opportunities, resources, and services. CLP also needed to devise an approach for promoting inclusion and participation that is strategically hinged on human relationships. Social capital is central to CLP's strategy. Because of its commitment to reaching people who, at that time, were marginalized from mainstream communication channels, it had to adopt a social capital paradigm, to rely on the networks and personal connections within its community, for promoting inclusion and agency.

Using Social Capital to Facilitate and Sustain Partnership Building, Community Organizing, and Social Mobilization:

Another lesson from the success of The CLP Model is that the existence of dense social networks in the community facilitates partnership building, community organizing and social mobilization on a vast scale. The grassroots associations CLP partners with are mostly network organizations. They have local units, and branches at zonal, local government, state, and national levels. Community-level branches linked CLP to branches at higher levels. Partnerships initiated with national-level branches oftentimes led to the integration of lower-level branches. Engaging as partners put the grassroots networks in a leadership role and at par with CLP on the decision-making table. The power of relationships was demonstrated in the fact that CLP appeared to have lost ownership to the community associations, right from the very first activity organized with NATA.

In no time, CLP moved from an NGO working on AIDS, to one that was concerned with wider but related issues. It was no longer in control of deciding the general direction of the

program. Apart from NATA, the only other groups CLP initiated partnerships with were sex workers, health facilities and government agencies. The bulk of its work came mainly from referrals and invitations from community groups. Since the partners largely own and control the process and decide what they want to work on, CLP was unable to bring inappropriate projects to them. That had its constraints in terms of relationship with funders. Consequently, because CLP was not donor-driven, it had to forego certain funding opportunities when donors' objectives could not fit the community agenda. That was not an easy position for CLP when it was struggling financially.

Furthermore, the leadership role played by the grassroots civil society meant that activities were naturally tailored to fit into the lifestyle of the partners and the larger community members. CLP did not have a single "focus area" or "single target population", like many NGOs. Rather, it uniquely affirmed community life, making it easy for people to become and remain engaged and enduring. The name, Community Life Project, vested in the dynamics of its activities, was coined one year after the Project took off.

Trust and reciprocity also play vital roles in growing and sustaining the network of associations involved in building the *ReclaimNaija* movement. Accountability in the NGO sector is usually to donors, governments, and Boards. But CLP, inspired by the partnership paradigm, is primarily accountable to the partners, like the shareholders in a private corporation. CLP and its partner associations do not sign Agreements, Contracts or Memoranda of Understanding, yet partners act as leaders and spokespersons of the *ReclaimNaija* movement at the State and Local Government levels. A culture of accountability and integrity pervades the affairs of the movement. Each party trusts that the

other(s) will perform when activities, roles, and responsibilities are outlined at joint planning meetings.

These point to what Peter Eke says about the norms and values that govern the two publics in Nigeria; that the CLP model is operated in the realm of the other (primordial) public where there is integrity, accountability, and allegiance, and contrasts with the norm in the political public that is corrupt. (Eke, 1975). However, the fact that this allegiance is not to an entity promoting primordial gains contextually contradicts Eke's view.

The commitment exemplified in The CLP Model and *ReclaimNaija* aligns with a civic cause which transcends primordial interests and strongly underlines the harnessing of social capital in associational life as an effective strategy for nation-building. The CLP Model unites diverse groups with trust, represents a counter force to the divisive manipulation of religion and ethnicity by politicians and makes cultural values a potent resource for nation-building.

Yet another lesson of The CLP Model is that, beyond trust, shared hope and common faith endure in social networks in the Nigerian cultural context. Given the chronic institutional inefficiencies, the ability of grassroots civil society networks to sustain civic engagement relies, not only on trust but also on the strength of the collective spiritual energy of the movement. A tradition of associational life at the grassroots where people have learned to lean on each other to survive infuses a spirit of solidarity. Within each of the partner-networks, there already exists values such as compassion, belief in caring for one another as a duty and moral obligation or as a fulfillment of one's religious obligations. In addition, CLP's civic education content emphasizes common humanity and allows participants to express their spirituality and philosophy when discussing participation in development and

governance decision-making. When the CLP model scaled up nationally by creating the *ReclaimNaija* grassroots social movement, it richly benefitted from these values by relying on the bonding and spirit of solidarity within its constituent networks.

Social capital encourages and motivates agency, and CLP finds these on the part of its partners. Unlike the elitist civil society, the self-help, mutual-benefit associations that CLP works with do not waste time idealizing, conceptualizing and debating. They are action-oriented. They make quick decisions and take action. The ties, connections and support people derive from associational life spur them to action because they create avenues for access to resources for personal advancement. As Putnam (2000) cautions, social capital “can be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes.” Networks of grassroots associations can be exploited to cause harm to society or harnessed to enthrone corrupt public officers and bad governance. Or, engaged to fan the embers of ethno-religious sentiments and prejudices, which tend to heighten during elections. Hence, it was important, in the *ReclaimNaija* movement, to apply social capital and promote social change within a value system and a clearly-defined, positive spiritual framework.

Lastly, CLP finds, as Bourdieu (1986) points out, that social capital can be converted to other forms of capital. With the *ReclaimNaija* movement, CLP has converted social capital to political capital. The vast network of groups under the *ReclaimNaija* movement has conferred a position of power and influence on CLP and its grassroots civil society partners who are thus able to engage with state institutions from a position of strength. Similarly, CLP’s educational programs for leaders of grassroots civil society gives it a share of minds as it helps to develop Nigeria’s human capital through thousands of civic-minded grassroots leaders rooted in community life.

## Conclusion

Through the CLP model, grassroots civil society in the CLP network has demonstrated resilience and commitment to engaging the State on governance issues. The concept of civil society needs to be broadened to include the excluded traditional, grassroots civil society. The social capital inherent in the rich associational life in Nigeria is an asset that can be converted to political capital to drive positive social change. Social capital enables grassroots networks to exercise agency and voice with the opportunities and tools they are able to access. Despite their socio-economic disadvantage, grassroots civil society organizations show courage and determination to improve well-being. Long-term donor funding and development programming is crucial to promoting inclusive civil society engagement. The most powerful lesson is that self-governing associations and mutual-interest groups have the potential for transformative nation-building. Influencers in society need to invest in them.

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