

# The Role of Non-State Actors in The Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

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*Abstract- Non-State Actors (NSAs) have emerged as pivotal drivers of socio-economic transformation in Nigeria, stepping in to fill gaps left by state institutions while simultaneously shaping the dynamics of national security. This study examines their role in advancing socio-economic development and the implications of their activities for national security. The research aims to assess how NSAs, including civil society organisations, multinational corporations, community-based groups, faith-based institutions, and international development partners, contribute to national development while also identifying the challenges they face. A qualitative methodology was employed, drawing on secondary data from scholarly literature, policy reports, and institutional publications, complemented by case illustrations of NSA interventions across sectors such as education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and humanitarian assistance. The findings reveal that NSAs have significantly advanced Nigeria's socio-economic progress by complementing government efforts in poverty alleviation, job creation, healthcare delivery, education, and governance advocacy. Prominent examples include the Tony Elumelu Foundation's entrepreneurial support, Médecins Sans Frontières' healthcare interventions in conflict zones, the World Bank's AGILE project expanding girls' education, and GAVI's vaccination campaigns reducing child mortality. However, challenges persist, including regulatory bottlenecks, funding constraints, insecurity in conflict-affected regions, and corruption within some organisations. These constraints limit the scale, effectiveness, and sustainability of NSA interventions and, if unaddressed, risk creating service gaps that could be exploited by violent groups, undermining national security. The study concludes that NSAs are indispensable to Nigeria's development trajectory and recommends streamlining regulatory frameworks, diversifying funding sources through public-private partnerships, improving security for NSA operations, enhancing government, NSA collaboration, and strengthening accountability mechanisms. These measures will ensure that NSA contributions are sustained, coordinated, and aligned with national development priorities while mitigating threats to national security.*

**Keywords:** *Non-State Actors (NSAs), Socio-economic development, National security and Nigeria.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, non-state actors encompass a wide range of entities that operate independently of government control but significantly influence international and national affairs. These actors include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs), civil society organisations (CSOs), religious institutions, philanthropic foundations, and even informal groups such as community-based organisations and social movements (Charountaki, 2022). Their impact on economic development varies greatly, MNCs, boost investment, create jobs and stimulate technological advancement, while NGOs and CSOs often contribute through poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and advocacy for inclusive growth (Faroque et al., 2022).

The activities of Non-State Actors (NSAs) in promoting the development of a states and nations have become of increased importance in recent times. It is generally believed that the process of building an efficient and effective service oriented developed state requires the participation of both the government and NSAs (Oparah, Bassey, & Ohatu, 2020). Non-state actors play a significant role in the socio-economic development of nations, particularly in regions where state institutions face limitations in capacity, governance or resource mobilisation (Lambrechts, 2017). These actors include civil society organisations, multinational corporations, International Non-Governmental organisations (INGOs) and religious institutions.

Non-State Actors complement government efforts in service delivery and economic participation through advocacy, which helps foster development (Amirkhanyan, & Lambright, 2017). In this regard, civil society organisations promote good governance, transparency and social justice, while private sector actors drive economic growth through investments, job creation and technological innovations. Likewise, INGOs provide humanitarian assistance, education

and healthcare, particularly in conflict-affected or underserved areas where state presence is weak. Furthermore, NSAs influence policy formulation and implementation by engaging in public discourse, lobbying and forging partnerships with government institutions (DeWind & Segura, 2014).

Violent Non-State Actors, such as insurgent groups, armed militias and terrorist organisations, pose significant threats to socio-economic development by undermining peace, stability and governance (Akinyetun, 2022). Their activities often lead to widespread insecurity, displacement of populations, destruction of infrastructure, and disruption of economic activities such as agriculture, trade, and investment. In regions affected by violence, schools and healthcare facilities are frequently shut down, businesses are forced to close, and government presence is weakened, creating a vacuum that stifles development. The fear and instability generated by these groups deter both local and foreign investors, strain public resources through increased security spending, and hinder long-term planning and policy implementation, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment (Jegade et al., 2015).

In Nigeria, various categories of NSAs have contributed significantly to different sectors. Private firms like the Dangote Group and MTN Nigeria drive industrialisation, job creation and digital transformation through large-scale investments. Civil society organisations, such as the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), promote transparency, accountability and policy reforms to strengthen governance (Ayantunji, 2022).

Furthermore, Multinational Corporations (MNCs) operating in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta also play a role in promoting development, particularly in response to environmental degradation caused by oil spills. Companies such as Shell, Chevron and ExxonMobil have implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of oil exploration (Emeka-Okoli et al., 2024).

In conflict-affected regions, particularly in northeastern Nigeria, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) play a crucial role in humanitarian relief and long-term

development. Organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provide emergency medical assistance, food relief and shelter to internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by Boko Haram insurgency. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) ensures continuity in education by supporting displaced children and offering legal aid for victims of conflict (Ogu & Yacob-Haliso, 2024). These interventions provide life-saving assistance and stabilise vulnerable communities facing the immediate effects of violence and displacement.

## II. OVERVIEW OF NON-STATE ACTORS (NSAS)

According to Ryngaert and Noortmann (2015), NSAs encompass a diverse array of organisations, including multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other entities that operate beyond the direct control of sovereign governments. Oparah, Bassey, & Ohatu, (2020) submit that Non-State Actors are wide range of development participants other than governments. It consists of the private sector and all economic and social collaborators including the civil society and trade union organisations in all forms and varieties.

Babalola, (2022) categorises NSAs based on their functions, such as humanitarian organisations, terrorist groups and private military companies, highlighting their role in either stabilising or destabilising regions. Below are detailed list of entities that constitute NSAs in Nigeria, as relevant to our study:

### A. Private Sector & Multinational Corporations (MNCs)

This subsector comprises a lot of actors, mainly involved in profit-oriented endeavours in commercial, trading, oil and gas exploration, farming, mining and other areas. Its importance has grown dramatically since the emergence of democratic rule in Nigeria with the attendant economic empowerment programmes of successive government. It ranges from large corporate entities and oil giants, to small and medium scale entrepreneurial actors who provide gainful employment to a large number of citizens (De la Cruz-Fernandez, 2021).

*B. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs):* These are one of the most visible constituents of NSAs in Nigeria. It is regarded as the largest and oldest in terms of coverage and number of members. They are mostly engaged either in capacity development activities or in advocacy activities. However, they seem to be limited in scope and operate in small geographical areas, mostly attracting small groups of people. In right advocacy, their activities usually manifest in areas such as sanitation, community poverty, women and children rights, HIV awareness, etc. Some are involved in more complex issues like gender inequality, human rights, poverty reduction, economic empowerment as well as social and political empowerment (Oparah et al., 2020)

*C. International Development Partners/Multilateral Organisations*

These are organisations, institutions and countries that provide financial, technical and policy support to promote economic growth, social development and governance reforms in other nations, particularly in developing and conflict-affected regions. These partners include multilateral institutions e.g., the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, bilateral agencies e.g., United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID), international NGOs e.g., Oxfam and Save the Children) and philanthropic organisations e.g., the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Their role is to collaborate with governments, civil society and local communities to implement projects in areas such as health, education, infrastructure, governance and security (Verheijen et al., 2022).

*D. Civil Society Organisations*

Civil Society refers to an aggregation of entities and organisations that interact with the government, the business circle and the household. They usually pursue the interest of the populace and seek to implement social norms, etc. Some of these organisations are Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, West Africa), Centre for Law Enforcement Education CLEEN Foundation (Nigeria), BudgIT (Nigeria), ActionAid Nigeria and Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, Nigeria (SERAP), Trade Unions and Professional Associations such as Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) (Chidi, 2020)

*E. Community-Based Organisations (CBOs)* Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are local, non-profit groups that operate within specific communities to address social, economic and developmental challenges. CBOs are grassroots entities formed by community members to advocate for their needs, provide essential services and promote sustainable development. These organisations typically focus on issues such as education, healthcare, women's empowerment, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and conflict resolution (Eswarappa, 2020).

*F. Faith-based and Religious Organisations*

These are organisations that are structured around a common belief in a supreme being and shared interest. They help members of their congregations to get together and pool resources, including sharing ideas to tackle common problems. They are also involved in activities such as training in basic trades and skills, educational services, health services as well as community-based services like sanitation, water supply, etc. Their basic financial sustenance is guaranteed by the contribution of their members. They include churches, mosques, missionary institutions, etc (Manuel & Glatzer, 2019).

*2.2 Overview of Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria*

Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and most populous country, has experienced mixed socio-economic development over the decades. The country is rich in natural resources, particularly oil, gas and solid minerals and has a diverse economic base spanning agriculture, manufacturing and services. The country has made progress in certain areas, including telecommunications, financial services entrepreneurship and manufacturing sector but issues like corruption, political instability and insecurity continue to hinder sustained development (Trends, 2017).

Nigeria's socio-economic progress is measured by key indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, Human Development Index (HDI), literacy rates, life expectancy, and employment levels. The literacy rate has improved to around 62%, with over 86 million children enrolled in early education, yet 26% of primary and 25% of lower secondary school-aged children remain out of school (Sasu, 2024). About 3% of Nigeria's GDP is invested in the health sector yet access to medical services

remains a challenge, with many Nigerians' having to pay for medicine out of their own pockets. While vaccination coverage remains low, only 56.6% of children are fully immunised against Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis (DTP) (UNICEF, 2023). The youth unemployment rate remains high, with around 13.4% of young people aged 15-24 being unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2024). Poverty is widespread with over 40% of the population living below the national poverty line and 63% classified as multi-dimensionally poor highlighting the need for stronger social and economic interventions (World Bank Group, 2022).

Additionally, insecurity caused by insurgencies, banditry and communal conflicts disrupts economic activities and hinders investment. Similarly, NSAs have played a key role in Nigeria's socio-economic sectors in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and workers' rights, complementing government efforts and filling critical service gaps.

### 3.1 Contributions of Non-State Actors to Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

Non-State Actors (NSAs) have played a significant role in the socio-economic development of Nigeria. It has been instrumental in poverty alleviation and economic empowerment through various initiatives. Organisations like the Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) have provided funding and mentorship to over 20,000 entrepreneurs across Africa, including thousands in Nigeria, boosting job creation and economic growth (Olasoji, et al., 2024). Similarly, the Lift Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO) has been instrumental in implementing innovative Social, Health and Economic Empowerment Programmes (SHEEP) across the country. The development has provided microloans to small-scale entrepreneurs, enabling them to start or expand their businesses and improve their livelihoods (LAPO, 2023).

Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society Organisations have also made significant contributions to social development in Nigeria. Organisations like the British Council's Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) Programme have worked to strengthen the capacity of CSOs to operate effectively (Rafique & Khoo, 2018). The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project has been instrumental in holding the government accountable for mismanagement of public funds, advocating for transparency and improved

governance (Justice, conflict and security in Nigeria, 2020).

In the health sector, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been actively providing medical assistance in Borno State since the Boko Haram insurgency escalated in 2009, with a major expansion from 2013 onward (Mahmood & Ani, 2018). By 2016, MSF reported treating over 10,000 malnourished children in Borno and providing over 15,000 medical consultations per month in conflict-affected areas like Maiduguri, Monguno, and Pulka. In 2022, they conducted over 100,000 outpatient consultations and performed more than 2,000 emergency surgeries in northeastern Nigeria (Bamimore, 2024).

Similarly, the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) has been providing emergency medical aid and disaster response services in insurgency-affected areas. By 2021, NRCS had distributed over 500,000 relief materials and trained more than 1,200 first responders in the Northeast. Furthermore, The Society for Family Health (SFH), has distributed over 50 million insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) since 2010, reaching malaria-prone communities, and facilitated HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns benefiting over 5 million Nigerians (Salihu et al. (2025). Additionally, ActionAid Nigeria has implemented rural empowerment programs, reaching over 30,000 women in northern Nigeria with small-scale farming initiatives and vocational training, significantly improving household incomes and gender equality (Worth, 2013).

Private sector investment has been a driving force behind economic growth in Nigeria. It has significantly contributed to Nigeria's economic growth through investments in infrastructure, technology and job creation. Companies like Dangote Group have invested billions in industries such as cement, agriculture, and oil refining, with the Dangote Refinery, the largest in Africa, set to reduce Nigeria's dependence on imported fuel (White & Rees, 2018). The MTN Foundation, through its education and ICT programmes, has provided scholarships and digital literacy training to thousands of students across Nigeria (Ukwoma, et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Globacom (Glo) has expanded Nigeria's telecommunications infrastructure with over 10,000 kilometers of fiber-optic cables, enhancing internet connectivity and boosting the

digital economy (O'Connor et al., 2020). Also, United Bank for Africa (UBA) has driven financial inclusion, disbursing over N200 billion (\$500 million) in SME loans and extending banking services to underserved communities (MacArthur, 2021). Likewise, Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing (IVM) has driven local manufacturing, reduced car imports and generating employment in the automotive sector (Chipanje et al., 2021). Moreover, in technology, fintech companies like Flutterwave and Interswitch have revolutionized digital payments, fostering financial inclusion and supporting SMEs (Damilola, 2022). These contributions highlight how NSAs continue to drive socio-economic development in Nigeria, complementing government efforts and fostering sustainable growth.

International development organisations have significantly contributed to Nigeria's socio-economic progress through funding, technical assistance and humanitarian support. Organisations such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) have implemented projects in healthcare, education and infrastructure. For instance, the World Bank-funded Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) project has improved school enrollment rates for girls in several states in Nigeria, including: Borno, Ekiti, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, and Plateau. Subsequently, the initiative expanded to include additional states, reaching a total of 18. As of February 2025, the AGILE project has successfully enrolled approximately 3.9 million girls in secondary schools across these states (Erunke, 2025). Additionally, Global Alliance for Vaccines Immunisation (GAVI) has played a vital role in Nigeria's immunisation programmes, reducing child mortality through widespread vaccination campaigns (Okesanya, et al., 2024). These efforts have helped to address critical development challenges and promote sustainable economic growth in Nigeria.

Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) have been essential in driving development at the grassroots level by addressing local needs in health, education, and economic empowerment. In rural Kaduna, organisations like the Fantsuam Foundation in Kaduna State provide microfinance loans and digital literacy training to low-income communities, helping small businesses grow. Similarly, The Women

Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN) has made significant strides in empowering rural women in Nigeria. For example, through its ICON2 project, WOFAN has supported 52,000 women and youth farmers with agricultural inputs like improved seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides to cultivate 1,733 hectares of rice and maize. Additionally, WOFAN has empowered 54,000 women in agro-produce marketing across nine states, providing resources and financial inclusion opportunities to enhance their economic prospects (WOFAN, 2024).

Religious institutions in Nigeria have long been involved in providing social services, particularly in education, healthcare and humanitarian aid. Churches and Islamic organisations run schools, hospitals and relief programmes for the underprivileged. Catholic Mission hospitals offer affordable healthcare services in various parts of Nigeria, particularly in southeastern and southwestern states, where Catholic institutions have a strong presence, while Islamic organisations like the Jaiz Foundation support orphanages and skill acquisition programmes in northern Nigeria, particularly in states such as Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto. Additionally, faith-based charities such as The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) has been actively engaged in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives across Nigeria, providing scholarships and food aid to vulnerable communities. These efforts are ongoing and not limited to periods of crisis, demonstrating the significant role of religious bodies in social development (Adebote, 2023).

**3.2 Challenges Facing Non-State Actors in Nigeria**  
NSAs in Nigeria face significant policy and regulatory constraints that hinder their operations. Funding and resource limitations also present major obstacles for NSAs, particularly local organisations that rely on external grants. Many CBOs and grassroots initiatives struggle to secure sustainable funding, making it difficult to implement long-term development programmes (Sogge, 2020). Even large international organisations face challenges. One recent example is the USAID. The organisation recently cut off its funding for health programmes in Nigeria, which have affected HIV/AIDS treatment and maternal healthcare services (Okorie, 2025). Furthermore, government-NSA relations and bureaucratic challenges often lead to delays in project execution. The government's reluctance to fully

engage with NSAs, coupled with complex approval processes, often results in inefficiencies (Agoha, 2015).

Security threats and corruption further complicate NSA activities. Many organisations operating in conflict-prone regions, such as Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) in Borno State, face threats from insurgent groups and bandits, limiting their ability to provide humanitarian aid. Additionally, corruption and mismanagement within NSAs undermine their credibility and effectiveness. For instance, in 2020, an investigation revealed that some NGOs involved in the Northeast humanitarian response diverted funds intended for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Instead of providing food, shelter, and healthcare, these funds were allegedly used for personal enrichment by officials. This mismanagement not only deprived vulnerable populations of critical support but also eroded donor confidence, leading to reduced funding for legitimate organisations (Ushie & Okpa, 2021).

#### 4.1 Implications of Non-State Actors to Nigeria National Security

The contributions of NSAs to Nigeria's socio-economic development have significant national security implications. By addressing poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare. For instance, the Tony Elumelu Foundation and LAPO's economic empowerment programmes equip individuals with resources to improve their livelihoods, potentially reducing youth involvement in criminal activities such as cyber fraud and militancy. Additionally, international development organisations like the USAID and the GIZ support vocational training programmes, fostering skill acquisition and employment, which can deter youth radicalisation, especially in conflict-prone regions. However, when NSA activities are disrupted due to funding cuts or government restrictions, gaps in service delivery can exacerbate socio-economic grievances, creating opportunities for extremist groups to exploit vulnerable populations.

Despite their significant contributions, such as TEF's empowerment of over 20,000 entrepreneurs, MSF's provision of over 100,000 medical consultations in conflict zones, LAPO's distribution of microloans for small businesses, the World Bank's AGILE project

enrolling 3.9 million girls in school, and GAVI's support in reducing child mortality, Non-State Actors (NSAs) in Nigeria face numerous challenges that can impact both their effectiveness and national security. Funding constraints often limit the scale and sustainability of their interventions, while regulatory restrictions and bureaucratic bottlenecks hinder timely project implementation. In conflict-affected regions, insecurity can obstruct access to vulnerable communities, further straining their capacity to deliver essential services. These limitations can result in service gaps, increased public frustration, and the potential exploitation of underserved populations by violent or extremist groups, thereby posing a threat to social cohesion and national stability.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

NSAs have significantly contributed to Nigeria's socio-economic development through various initiatives in entrepreneurship, healthcare, education and job creation. Their interventions in poverty alleviation, skill development and governance advocacy have complemented government efforts in addressing pressing societal challenges. From international organisations such as the USAID and the World Bank to local NGOs and faith-based institutions, these actors have provided critical services and resources to communities, empowering individuals and enhancing national growth. Additionally, private sector investments in technology, infrastructure and financial inclusion have further boosted job creation and economic stability. Despite facing challenges such as regulatory constraints, funding limitations and security threats, the NSAs remain integral to Nigeria's development landscape.

#### 5.2 Recommendations

- i. The Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment should streamline regulatory processes for NGOs, CSOs and private sector actors, ensuring that policies are transparent, stable and conducive to long-term planning.
- ii. The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning and NSAs should diversify funding sources by leveraging public-private partnerships (PPPs) and strengthening local fundraising mechanisms.

- iii. The Federal Government through the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) should improve security measures to ensure the safe operation of humanitarian and development-focused NSAs, especially in insurgency-affected regions.
- iv. The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development should foster stronger collaboration between NSAs and government institutions to ensure coordinated socio-economic development efforts.
- v. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) should strengthen governance and financial accountability structures within NSAs to prevent corruption and mismanagement.

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