

Civil Society Organizations and the Strategies for Tackling Corruption in Nigeria: A Review of Serap and Cislac

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ABSTRACT

The fight against corruption, is a governance issue necessitating the participation of scores of stakeholders. Among many others, civil society organizations (CSOs) are critical in this struggle. While this is the case, there are not clear positions on the nature of strategies deployed by CSOs in supporting the fight against corruption in Nigeria. Thus, the study seeks to examine the nature of the strategies deployed by CSOs to advance the fight against corruption using CISLAC and SERAP as guides. Being a case study research, qualitative tools of interview and focus group discussions served as the instruments used to generate data. The data was also qualitatively analyzed using narrative analysis. The findings of the study shows that research, advocacy capacity building and sensitization are among the chief strategies that drive the efforts of CSOs in Nigeria towards enhancing anti-corruption. The study concluded that until these strategies and many others are galvanized for better performance, the fight against corruption would have limited impact on anti-corruption in Nigeria. To enhance the effectiveness of tackling corruption through the strategies of CSOs, the paper recommends for synergy in the use of these strategies and for the anti-corruption agencies to deploy similar strategies in the course of fighting corruption. Accordingly, international actors should provide more support in the technical and logistics front to strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders in their deployment of the above strategies in order to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes that could impact in managing corruption in Nigeria.

Key words: Anti-corruption, CSOs, CISLAC, SERAP, Nigeria Ibrahim Baba Shatambaya PhD; Umar Magaji Umar, Saudatu Tukur Umar

INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations across the globe form a strong layer of partners in the fight against corruption. Depending on their strength, they contribute in advancing courses that promote accountability and transparency in governance. In Nigeria, the civil society space has been active occasioned by the activities of civil society organizations. Thus, civil society organizations in Nigeria, have long historical antecedents dating back to the era of colonial rule. The CSOs were active in the struggle for independence; struggle against military rule and clamour for return to democracy. Decisively therefore, the return to civil administration in 1999 ushering in the fourth republic owes a lot to the activism of pro-democracy, good governance and human rights activists all of whom operated under different civil society groups. Upon return to democratic rule in 1999, civil society organizations directed their efforts to promotion of human rights, good governance, promotion of justice and the institutionalization of democracy. In all these, corruption stood out as an intractable problem that must be addressed.

The government of President Obasanjo therefore, set the pace for anti-corruption activities which gave room for Civil Society Organizations among other stakeholders to step in and support the process. Many civil society organizations thus, picked interest in this regard and rolled out programmes and activities to support the fight against corruption. So far, the Civil Society Legislative and Advocacy Center (CISLAC) as well as the Socio-

Economic and Rights and Accountability Projects (SERAP) are among many CSOs that are working in the area of anti-corruption. In the course of their anti-corruption activities, they have deployed series of strategies to engage government and other stakeholders in ensuring the success of fight against corruption. While there are scores of literature on the strategies used by CSOs in fighting corruption on a general scale, few exist that contextualize same in specific country context. This is more so when looking at Nigeria where empirical works on the role of CSOs in tackling corruption are scant with none focusing on the strategies deployed by CSOs in addressing corruption from a national point of view.

This paper, therefore, examined the nature of the strategies used by Cislac and SERAP in supporting the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The study on CSOs and their role in combating corruption has been in topical one among scholars and writers. This is so especially viewed from a general premise of appreciating CSOs as critical stakeholders in the governance realm. While this reality posits a positive development, the absence of relevant literature and empirical works on country specific cases of CSOs in anti-corruption programmes are at best scant. In Nigeria for example, the strategies deployed by CSOs that partner with anti-corruption agencies to reduce corruption in Nigeria has not been understood clearly owing to a gap in existing empirical works in this regard. It is on the basis of this that the study investigated the nature of strategies deployed by Cislac and SERAP in tackling corruption in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study is hinged on the following objectives:

1. To examine the nature of strategies deployed by Cislac and SERAP in tackling corruption in Nigeria
2. To Discuss the ways in which the strategies utilized by Cislac and SERAP are Deployed in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Method of Data Collection

In doing this, the qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was deployed. Interview and focus group discussion served as the instruments of data collection. The respondents for Key Informant Interview were fourteen (14), selected from Anti-Corruption bodies which include EFCC, ICPC, CCB, and NFIU. Others were drawn from the Academia, relevant National Assembly committee members as well as CSOs like Cislac, SERAP and Zero Corruption Coalition. The Secretary of the Presidential Advisory Committee against Corruption (PACAC) was also interviewed. Two focus group discussion was also conducted with two groups of CSOs members to balance the responses of their executive members who were interviewed. The data collected was analyzed using discourse analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Document evidences show that civil society organizations are seen as an active agent of lobbying for desired outcomes from the government and other stakeholders through advocacy. This explains the position of Geo-Sung and Macao (2009) that advocacy remains an indispensable tool for civil society organizations in shaping the legislative framework of the state. They have engaged various committees and legislators to influence the nature and character of scores of legislations; principally to ensure transparency and accountability of public agencies and parastatals as well as government processes and procedures. In essence, CSOs have been able to influence public policy to be more impactful on specific groups or the general public using advocacy as a strategy (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2010). Therefore, Lafenwa (2014) noted that through advocacy, civil society organizations bring about the betterment of the society. In addition, CSOs engage in advocacy as an instrument to support the fight against corruption through engagements with relevant government agencies and personnel (Carr & Olithwaite, 2011).

For Cooper (2018) advocacy is one instrument through which civil society pushes for changes in governmental processes and expresses grievances with happenings around government agencies. In the same vein, advocacy is considered as a traditional activity that Civil Society Organizations is known to be using in their participation in many activities (O'Driscoll, 2018). Explaining how advocacy is a major tool for opening up the governance space to mainstream issues of public need Williamson and Rodd (2016) emphasized that it is one major way to get into the operations of the government. Through advocacy, civil society organizations have exercised enormous influence in the substance, direction and focus of public policy. This explains why advocacy is an important gateway for partnership and engagements between the government and civil society organizations. Therefore, through advocacy, civil society in Nigeria have promoted desired outcomes in the activities of government by ensuring that the needs of the people are prioritized. On the basis of this, government's operating in democratic systems often open their doors for engagements through various advocacy channels of civil society organizations (Oke & ATUFE-Musa, 2021).

Available literature equally show that sensitization is one of the core activities of civil society groups. They carryout public enlightenment to make available information to support the people to engage the government effectively (Mohan, 2002). Indeed, through sensitization, CSOs educate the citizens and build a culture of civic engagement and tolerance (Gyimah-Boadi, 2006). In the quest to promote participation Labelle (2006) argued that CSOs depend mainly on creating awareness and enlightenment to ensure involvement of the people in the affairs of the state. In their analysis of the roles of civil society organizations Paffenholz and Spurk (2010) argued that through public enlightenment, they contribute in agenda setting by way of educating the people to be on the right track of events that will be beneficial to them. Fidelis (2015) also maintainee that civil society groups in Nigeria have been forthcoming in educating the people on issues of corruption, elections as well as human rights abuses. They have mostly utilized sensitization and public enlightenment in this regard. For Ukase and Ben (2015), civil society organizations engage in information sharing as a means to enlighten the people. On his part, Igwe (2006) averred that information sharing is one element which ensures that the people are linked to the government through an intermediary which are the CSOs.

Accordingly, sensitization through which awareness is created among the general populace is one of the essential elements of civil society operations across the globe. Through various means, including modern technological platforms like social media outlets, civil society organization mobilize the people for effective participation to promote accountability and transparency (Bahman, 2016). By the same token, civil society groups have been recognized to reach out to the people through various techniques of raising awareness and disseminating relevant information. With this tendency, more people are reminded of their civil duties and the need to exercise same (Williamson & Rodd, 2016). Raising awareness on issues, giving a voice to the marginalized is an effective tool through which civil society organizations relate with the people on issues of governance. They empower the people by educating them on existing trends and the role they should play in them (O'Driscoll, 2018). For Cooper (2018) sensitization is a link that establishes the relationship between the people and civil society organizations. It is that connection through which the people are educated and mobilized to support CSOs in improving the governance processes within the state.

In discussing the role of civil society organizations, Mohan (2002) recognized that they conduct series of capacity building activities to empower various categories of individuals in diverse aspects of governance issues. Yand (2008) also discussed how the civil society organizations influence happenings in the society through the instrumentality of capacity building, noting that, training and re-training of manpower carried out by CSOs has remained a necessary tool to check government activities. This is with the view to enhancing the development of the state. Fidelis (2015) also acknowledged that capacity building has been one of the major strategies of engagement to improve governance in the area of elections, anti-corruption, human rights, rule of law and due process. This has manifested in many areas of improvements courtesy of the efforts of CSOs and other stakeholders.

Moreover, civil society groups are active in undertaking conferences and series of training for the benefit of various stakeholders. Some of these stakeholders include government officials and other civil society groups. They have, therefore, enhanced the capacity of manpower within the country and impacted on governance (Oke & ATUFE-Musa, 2021). Along this line of thought, civil society organizations are known for their penchant for capacity building activities. Attracting audience from various areas in the value chain of governance and

government and civil realms, civil society organizations have offered robust training exercises to which the state has benefited from in terms of quality manpower development (Omede & Bakare, 2014). Accordingly, Lafenwa (2014) emphasized that one of the roles of civil society organizations through which they connect with the society is through training in order to build capacity in specific areas of governance. Ingram (2020) recognized that through civil society organizations, capacity building has benefitted scores of organizations. This is critical due to the poor level of capacity in dealing with issues of governance. However, with the efforts of civil society organizations in capacity building, a lot has been done to reduce challenges of manpower in key sectors of the economy.

Noting the role of civil society organizations in the area of research, Tuhaise, (2014) averred that they are organizations with skilled personnel who often conduct research as a policy priority. They are very well-informed about various national and international issues due to their exposure. Thus, CSOs avail the society and key stakeholders of the information generated from data analyzed from researches conducted. In addition, Fidelis (2015) underscored the veracity of most of the investigations and researches conducted by civil society groups in Nigeria. The author remarked that the capacity of CSOs in the country gives them the advantage in conducting research and the findings of some of their research works have been critical inputs of policy and governance discourses. This is also the position of Omede and Bakare (2014) who were poised to note that the skills which many civil society organizations pride themselves are largely due to the training and orientation of their staff in conducting research. Thus, their research in various areas have found reckoning among national and international stakeholders who may need certain specific technical information on various issues of governance and development. Through researches conducted from time to time, civil society organizations are conversant of the challenges facing the people, the way the state should operate, as well as the current state of affairs across various sectors. This promotes in them skills of activism and the need to take actions in order to ensure that things are done in the right way (Larsosen, 2019). Government, it is believed, benefits immensely from findings of researches conducted by civil society organizations (Ingram, 2020). However, other stakeholders also utilize reports depicting findings from the researches carried out by experts within the ranks of civil society organizations. Indeed, civil society organizations publish periodic reports of the outcome of their research for public consumption (Geo-Sung and Macao, 2009). Thus, Grimes (2008) advanced that research serves as a valuable tool through which CSOs function effectively in the area of anti-corruption. They bring their knowledge of systematic investigations to support the drive to tame corruption across local and international boundaries. Indeed, without expertise in research, the fight against corruption suffers from crisis of uninformed decisions.

According to Mohan (2002) Civil Society Organizations use legal advocacy which has to do with a legal case in court that seeks to improve a situation for a particular group of people who may be at disadvantage. In the same vein, civil society organizations commonly refer to legal means to get things done in the right manner and in tandem with laws of the land. This is done in the spirit of rule of law and justice which civil society groups seek to protect (Tuhaise, 2014). In addition, Bahman (2016) acknowledges that the legal system is often utilized by Civil Society Organizations especially in the areas of human rights and justice. This prism allows for CSOs to advocate for the rights of the less privileged by ensuring that the government acts in ways that do not place the people in a more disadvantaged situation. Legal assistance also serves as one of the aspects that civil society has intervened in to create value. They have severally sought the position of various courts with a view to determining the best position from the angle of the law (Fidelis, 2015). Civil society organization are known for utilizing legal tools in confronting corruption. They do so through litigations and prosecution (Bachleitner, Csaba, & Orlov, 2019). According to Davidson (2007) and Grimes (2013) direct action which may come in the form of private prosecution is of value to civil society organizations. Through the legal means they have protected themselves from abuse of the government, while at the same time deploying same to ensure that justice is carried out on corrupt individuals and groups. They sometimes hire or use the expertise in their ranks to convince the court on cases of corruption brought before it.

The above review shows that the major tools utilized by civil society groups to support anti-corruption include advocacy research, sensitization, legal process, capacity building and sensitization among others.

Empirical Discourse

The data collected from the field having been classified into themes and sub-themes shows that key functions of CISLAC and SERAP on the fight against corruption revolves around many strategies. Many as they are, five among them stand out. They are: Advocacy, Sensitization, Capacity Building, Research and Legal Process.

Advocacy

On advocacy, R1 acknowledged the strides CISLAC has been making in advancing the course of the fight against corruption in Nigeria. He noted that the review of the EFCC act as well as several legislations which have to do with whistle blowing, assets recovery and management and even the Freedom of Information Bill (FOI) which have now become laws all enjoyed the support of CISLAC through its evidence-based advocacy. The center engages in advocacy visits to legislators, members of the executive, anti-corruption agencies as well as international organizations to garner support for legal, legislative as well as other activities that have to do with anti-corruption (Interview, 2025). Accordingly, CISLAC and other CSOs supporting the fight against corruption have utilized advocacy as a potent strategy to sway the government and other stakeholders into adopting certain measures (R3, Interview, 2025) that could impact on the anti-corruption activities of the country. Through this advocacy, officials of government across all the branches of government are aware of the watch-dog role of CISLAC and other anti-corruption-inclined CSOs which make them cautious of their actions and decisions on issues relating to anti-corruption.

Advocacy remains a vital tool that allows stakeholders, especially, the CSOs, to engage in issues of governance. CISLAC and other anti-corruption CSOs have utilized this medium to make contributions into relevant policies and programmes of government on the fight against corruption (R5, Interview, 2025). This is with a view to ensuring the success of those programmes such that corruption would be addressed and managed in the most efficient way. Generally, “CISLAC and SERAP through their advocacy, are watchdogs over the government, promoting anti-corruption and the aims of the state. They also promote transparency and openness of government which are critical elements of democracy” (R4, Interview, 2025). Advocacy, in itself, is essential for the institutionalization of transparency and accountability which are critical to any anti-corruption process. The civil society organizations angle on the fight against corruption whose leaders include SERAP and CISLAC usually call on the government through their continuous advocacy to do what is expected as regards fighting corruption (R6, Interview, 2025). It is when advocacy fail that other strategies come to the fore. However, advocacy has a unique utility in achieving the goals of CSOs and it has always come in handy for partners that are involved in supporting anti-corruption in Nigeria.

The role of advocacy as a strategy deployed by CSOs in making input to the fight against corruption is very important.

Our organization has received many CSOs through various advocacy efforts. CISLAC, SERAP, among others, have made efforts to support our activities through advocacy. This has promoted understanding between us and we have been able to clarify on many misconceptions associated with tackling corruption from our own point of view (R9, Interview, 2025).

Consequently, advocacy has the power of ushering a synchronized regime on the fight against corruption such that, the actors could have a common ground to approach difficulties of fighting corruption. As part of the advocacy for good governance to which the fight against corruption finds expression in, “we are partnering with CISLAC and other CSOs to ensure that our loud voice is heard in placing anti-corruption in its rightful pedestal and ensuring the social and economic rights of Nigerians are protected through responsible accountability” (R2, Interview, 2025). Indeed, advocacy allows interactions through which issues bothering on the rights of the people are directly brought before government officials that have the responsibility to protect same. This process would directly have bearing on reducing corruption if such officials heed to the demands made by the CSOs.

According to R7, CISLAC and SERAP carryout advocacy. They visit anti-corruption agencies to bring forth their criticisms, suggestions and relevant information that could assist in enriching anti-corruption activities (Interview, 2025). The criticisms and input made by organizations like CISLAC and SERAP are necessary in

shaping the fight against corruption against dangerous trajectories that could prove destructive to anti-corruption. For R13 Civil Society Organizations are consistently active like SERAP and CISLAC, among the few, in the anti-corruption domain. They engage legislators through advocacy to keep them abreast of what the situation of the fight against corruption is, in reality, and how certain laws and policies have fared in that regard (Interview, 2025). They also advocate for the need to enact and/or formulate the required laws and/or policies that are needed to improve on anti-corruption. “CSOs have been so helpful because they see things as they are, unlike the politicians. YAGA, CISLAC and SERAP among many of them interact with us at various levels, in trying to see what are those relevant laws we can amend or create” (R11, Interview, 2025). The national assembly and all its committees, according to R12, operate an open-door policy and, therefore, supports advocacy from anti-corruption actors like CSILAC and SERAP (interview, 2025). The two CSOs have not relented in bringing to the table unexplored lines of thought that could enhance anti-corruption through their advocacy visits.

In addition, in the area of law review, the advocacy of SERAP and CISLAC has mostly been useful. The CSOs have drawn the attention of relevant authorities on the issue of enabling laws to place anti-corruption in a better opposition to operate (R8, Interview, 2025). CISLAC and SERAP also provide intelligence on issues of anti-corruption which have proved to be valuable. The two CSOs (CISLAC and SERAP) have, through advocacy, created an avenue for partnership, especially with the government on issues of policy in the fight against corruption (R10, Interview, 2022). This partnership has promoted some level of understanding between many stakeholders proving the usefulness of advocacy as a strategy for supporting anti-corruption deployed by CISLAC and SERAP (FGD, 2025). Thus, CISLAC and other CSOs have done well in legislative advocacy and engagements with other government agencies to address corruption (R14, Interview, 2025). In essence, SERAP and CISLAC have created a lot of value to support anti-corruption using advocacy as a strategy to influence key government partners like the legislators, anti-corruption agents, office of the Attorney General of the Federation among others. The veracity of this strategy lies in the possibility of the CSOs meeting one-on-one with key government functionaries and explaining to them from the point of view of knowledge, experience, and evidence of the realities and needs of the anti-corruption efforts to be successful.

Sensitization Campaigns

CISLAC and SERAP have also used sensitization to support anti-corruption in Nigeria. This is clear going by the responses collated and analyzed in this study. This is one of the major instruments that CISLAC and SERAP utilize in getting to the people and mobilizing them for the purpose of supporting the fight against corruption (R1, Interview, 2025). Sensitization is a medium through which the general public is brought into the fight against corruption. They get to be informed of the ills of corruption and how they could make input towards actualizing the objectives of anti-corruption. Through sensitization, CISLAC and SERAP disseminate critical information that raises awareness on issues bothering on anti-corruption. The general public have important roles to play in fighting corruption and mostly, it is through sensitization that they are well informed of the kind of support they could render in that regard (R4, Interview, 2025). Proceeding along this line of thought, R5 maintained that CSOs are mostly the get-way to the people and they usually reach out to them by carrying out series of sensitization programmes on many topical issues. The respondent noted that SERAP as well as CISLAC, as champions of anti-corruption within the CSOs realm, have been effective in carrying out sensitization on the trends and perspectives within which local and international dimensions of corruption are carried out vis-à-vis workable trajectories to which such dimensions could be addressed (Interview, 2022). It is within this context that some level of consciousness and awareness is raised among the people who may hitherto be unaware on issues of the fight against corruption.

From another angle, civil society organizations, “like SERAP and CISLAC have done well in sensitizing Nigerians on policies of government on anti-corruption. Take the whistle blowing policy alone, they have done well in promoting it and even guiding the people on how to report credible suspicion of corruption” (R13, Interview, 2025). Some of these civil society groups have even received information on corrupt officials, guided the informants on how to report the cases and even provided them legal protection if the need arises. In a related pattern, civil society organizations have partnered with anti-corruption agencies to publicize and inform the general public on some of their activities and the role Nigerians are expected to play in assisting the agencies to succeed in tackling corruption. “We have worked for a long time with CISLAC on tracking illicit financial flows. They, have alongside other anti-corruption CSOs, sensitized other stakeholders on how to participate and

contribute in tracking transactions that surpass benchmarked amounts” (R10, Interview, 2025). Thus, sensitization, through information dissemination has served as a medium through which CISLAC and SERAP engage in anti-corruption activities.

In the course of their sensitization, CISLAC and SERAP undertake campaigns using posters, handbills and pamphlets to sensitize Nigerians on the need to jettison corruption and support the anti-corruption agencies with credible intelligence (R5, Interview, 2025). Open campaign remains a potent approach through which SERAP and CISLAC reach out to multitudes of people; as well as display and distribution of banners posters and pamphlets containing condensed but key information on the fight against corruption which has also helped to bring more people into the anti-corruption space. Thus, sensitization of this kind increases the knowledge of people on anti-corruption. Another dimension to sensitization offered by SERAP and CISLAC is in the area of civic education which enables people to hold government to account pertaining to corruption and other governance malfeasance (R2 Interview, 2025). As a result of the foregoing, more people are now interested in what the government is doing on the fight against corruption and are engaging the latter through various means including social media platforms.

Accordingly, sensitization mostly carried out by CSOs have increased the awareness of the people on governance. CISLAC, SERAP and others have succeeded in raising the awareness of people to such an extent that the level of criticisms against the government has now increased (R7, Interview, 2025). It is therefore, instructive that through sensitization, many people are now interested in what is happening on anti-corruption and others are sharing information with the relevant authorities to assist in tackling corruption. For R11, SERAP and CISLAC, from time to time engage the general public through various sensitization activities. They share information that promote the awareness of the people on what the government is doing to tackle corruption and how they could support this fight (Interview, 2025). Similarly, R12 advanced that the national assembly through its relevant committees have supported the activities of CSOs in the fight against corruption. CISLAC and SERAP is known to conduct sensitization activities to educate Nigerians (Interview, 2025). Related to the foregoing, CISLAC and SERAP through sensitization create awareness and enlightenment among Nigerians on the situation of the fight against corruption in the country (R8 and R14, Interview, 2025). Given their knowledge, training and information on various aspects of anti-corruption, as well as the fact that all Nigerians have a role to play, civil society organizations rely mostly on sensitization to cover the mass of the people and pass on the required information they need to contribute in various issues of governance.

Thus, SERAP and CISLAC have over the years utilized sensitization as a means to share information to the general public (R3, Interview, 2025). This information on varied areas of the fight against corruption keeps the struggle for anti-corruption alive. It always reminds the government that people are watching and aware of all its activities. In addition, R9 emphasized that enlightenment through sensitization is one of the strategies adopted by CISLAC and SERAP in supporting anti-corruption in the country. Through sensitization the two CSOs (CISLAC and SERAP) have educated Nigerians on many aspects of anti-corruption and by so doing elicited their support in that regard (FGD, 2025). In essence, anti-corruption CSOs like SERAP and CISLAC have mainstreamed their activities in the public domain using sensitization to share information, raise awareness, provide civic education and enlighten the general public on various aspects of the fight against corruption and ways they could make input in the process.

Capacity Building

Taking another strategy in the fight against corruption, SERAP and CISLAC are known for their capacity building activities based on the responses generated in the course of engagements with respondents. In the area of anti-corruption, CISLAC and SERAP have demonstrated high level of capacity through their capacity building programmes targeting anti-corruption agents, and other civil society groups (R9, Interview, 2025). Within this context, they have added value to the strides of the government in advancing anti-corruption towards ensuring accountability and transparency in government business. Through the support of international organizations in terms of funding and technical support CISLAC and SERAP have organized series of workshops to empower relevant stakeholders to function better in their tasks on the fight against corruption (R10, Interview, 2025). Through these workshops, avenues have been created for synergy and the required exchanges between and among many anti-corruption stakeholders. In this regard, cooperation has been improved such that

key players appreciate each other's stake and boundaries. In essence, civil society organizations like CISLAC and SERAP enjoy a good standing before international donor organizations that are championing anti-corruption across the globe. Therefore, they are technically equipped with expert trainings which are expected to be cascaded to other local stakeholders (R14, Interview, 2025). Therefore, knowledge in the area of anti-corruption, which some of these CSOs personnel acquired, is usually shared through trainings and workshops, thereby enriching the stock of local capacity in addressing corruption.

Within the context of anti-corruption agencies "our organization have benefitted immensely from trainings organized mostly by CISLAC. Our personnel have received series of trainings from these CSOs on how to perform their roles better in line with established global traditions" (R8, Interview, 2025). This has helped in improving the profile of the ranks of anti-corruption agents and other civil and community-based associations. The following was affirmed by R11 and R12 noting that Committees of the National Assembly on anti-corruption and civil society groups have participated in a number of capacity building programmes for anti-corruption officials organized by many CSOs prominent among which are CISLAC and SERAP. Many of such programmes benefit from experts across many fields who share knowledge and experiences on several aspects of the fight against corruption. Some of the experts have come from different parts of the world to assist in strengthening the fight against corruption through capacity building.

In corollary to the above, R7 argued that through capacity building programmes carried out by organizations like CISLAC, the implementation of sub-regional, continental and global protocols on anti-corruption ratified by Nigeria has been improved. They are recognized by various international governmental and non-governmental bodies; they have been funded to train and retrain government officials that are involved with the fight against corruption. Acknowledging capacity building as one of the strategies for tackling corruption by CSOs, the following remarks are instructive:

We have attended conferences and training sessions organized by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). This has exposed us to various ways of tackling corruption and how to support government agencies to deliver in tackling corruption. We have therefore engaged government partners and other civil society organizations that are part of the coalition against corruption through capacity building workshops to enhance their knowledge and share experiences of success stories from other systems (R2, Interview, 2025).

Enhancing the knowledge of anti-corruption officials is a critical need for the fight against corruption to succeed. This explains why leading civil society organizations embark on capacity building programmes as another strategy to support anti-corruption. Indeed, through conferences and workshops CISLAC and SERAP have become known in promoting good governance generally, and the fight against corruption specifically (R5, Interview, 2025). They push for quality approaches in addressing the scourge of corruption and promote the need for best practices in the anti-corruption milieu. "Working with a network of CSOs, we champion the course to build their capacity to engage in activities that will enhance anti-corruption in Nigeria" (R1, Interview, 2025). The support offered by CISLAC, SERAP and other CSOs through capacity building programmes is critical in that the fight against corruption would not succeed if key actors do not have the requisite skills to tackle corruption.

Furthermore, anti-corruption in Nigeria would not succeed without continuous training of anti-graft agents and other partners through seminars and workshops as it is being done by CISLAC and other CSOs (R4, Interview, 2025). CISLAC, SERAP, among others, have well-trained staff in the aspect of fighting corruption. They have over the years, assisted in training some officials of many CSOs as well as officials of EFCC, ICPC and other government staff (R3, Interview, 2025). Being elite organizations in the realm of CSOs in Nigeria, (CISLAC and SERAP Staff) have attended scores of international programmes on anti-corruption which place them in apposition to train other CSOs in the country regarding many aspects of the fight against corruption (FGD, 2025). To this end, responses as discussed, demonstrate the adoption of capacity building by CISLAC and SERAP as a strategy to improve on anti-corruption in Nigeria. Through capacity building, the two CSOs have engaged international bodies and local partners with a view to updating the skills of the manpower required to effectively reduce corruption and address all the challenges that may arise in the process.

In discussing the role of civil society organizations, Mohan (2002) recognized that they conduct series of capacity building activities to empower various categories of individuals in diverse aspects of governance issues. Yand (2008) also discussed how the civil society organizations influence happenings in the society through the instrumentality of capacity building, noting that, training and re-training of manpower carried out by CSOs has remained a necessary tool to check government activities. This is with the view to enhancing the development of the state. Fidelis (2015) also acknowledged that capacity building has been one of the major strategies of engagement to improve governance in the area of elections, anti-corruption, human rights, rule of law and due process. This has manifested in many areas of improvements courtesy of the efforts of CSOs and other stakeholders.

Research

Responses from the field also show that research is another strategy through which participation in anti-corruption activities by CISLAC and SERAP is carried out. Evidence from the field shows that the two CSOs carry out scientific investigations into issues bothering on corruption and how they could be overcome. CISLAC for example, engage in forensic investigations and reveal their information to concerned authorities. In the same vein, the periodic press releases made by SERAP show that they engage in serious research work (R6, Interview, 2025). Press releases on account of various investigations conducted by the two organizations (CISLAC and SERAP) provide systematic and verifiable information and intelligence to aid the anti-corruption drive in Nigeria. R13 equally alluded to the detailed investigation to which SERAP and CISLAC conducts to reveal information on corruption that may not be known to anti-graft agencies (Interview, 2025). The painstaking nature and meticulous processes employed by these CSOs almost always make their intelligence very credible. The centrality of information and the need to scientifically generate and analyze data for the purpose of tackling corruption is an indispensable aspect of anti-graft. Considering the poor structuring of most government agencies in conducting researches, civil society organizations like CISLAC and SERAP step in to fill this void (R10, Interview, 2025). It is also noteworthy that these civil society organizations have skilled personnel who have undergone trainings, mostly by international organizations like transparency international in the area of conducting research. Thus, they have experts who conduct researches on various aspects of the fight against corruption and make relevant releases containing critical information.

It therefore, follows that most of the facts and evidence-based trajectories of the fight against corruption in Nigeria enjoy largely inputs from researches conducted by CSOs such as CISLAC and SERAP (R8, Interview, 2025). Their operations are mostly driven by facts that are systematically generated and analyzed. This is why they are reliable partners in the fight against corruption. According to R14 “the operations and activities of anti-graft agencies, the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption as well as International Organizations including Amnesty International benefit from rich data generated and analyzed by SERAP and the likes” (Interview, 2025). Their familiarity with governance issues and local manifestations of corruption place them in a good footing to undertake studies on matters such as the fight against corruption and contribute immensely in that regard. Apart from voluntary researches carried out by these CSOs, sometimes the legislature and even some anti-graft agencies commission them (CISLAC, SERAP and others) to carry out researches in various areas of interest relating to the fight against corruption (R12, Interview, 2025), mostly because of the neutral stance of these CSOs and their capacity and experience in areas of investigative governance.

Connecting research to the fight against corruption R1 opined that CISLAC, SERAP and host of other CSOs have made valuable discoveries to justify the need for transparency, accountability and information sharing to make the fight against corruption successful. In essence, most of the laws on anti-corruption have directly or indirectly benefited from the researches and publications of CSOs. Some CSOs are known for quality publications. Some of these publications made by CISLAC and SERAP are products of research which have opened outlets for reliable information in the fight against corruption in Nigeria (R4, Interview, 2025). Through this strategy, many variables that affect the fight against corruption have been identified, revealed and taken cognizance of in policy formulation and implementation on anti-corruption. On the other hand, researches conducted by SERAP and CISLAC have helped in providing information that serves to checkmate the excesses of the government (R5, Interview, 2025). Given the quality of researches done by CSOs like CISLAC and SERAP, some international organizations utilize data from some of these researches in their policy focus on Nigeria in aspects of governance including anti-corruption (2, Interview, 2025). This is not unconnected to the

verse training and professionalism with which many of these CSOs are operated. It also explains why officials of some of the CSOs easily secure employment with some of the international organizations. CSOs like CISLAC and SERAP make informed decisions because of the information at their disposal arising from their research-inclined disposition. Another respondent pointed out that:

As a staff of one of the leading anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria, I have interacted closely with CISLAC and SERAP. I can tell you that they are very good at conducting researches. They assist our agencies with credible sources of policy and intelligence. Our partnership is beneficial mostly in the area of information sharing (R7, Interview, 2025).

The loud voice with which SERAP and CISLAC approach anti-corruption is largely a function of the information available to them through their various research endeavors. It is within this context that they have established themselves as strong partners in the fight against corruption in Nigeria (R11, Interview, 2025). Accordingly, publications have been made periodically by both SERAP and CISLAC on some of their findings for the stakeholders involved in anti-corruption and for public consumption. The 2022 Law Report by SERAP; and CISLAC's quarterly publications are evidences of research-based publications by the two CSOs. Thus, research serves as one of the major strategies used by CISLAC and SERAP to support anti-corruption activities in Nigeria. Using their various researches, CISLAC and SERAP have shared critical information on transparency and accountability to government agencies and other stakeholders involved in the fight against corruption (FGD, 2025).

Legal Advocacy

SERAP and CISLAC has also deployed legal advocacy as a tool to engage in the fight against corruption. According to one of the respondents, legal advocacy has mostly been the dominant tool of SERAP and sometimes CISLAC to press for certain rights and to ensure that justice is obtained on cases related to anti-corruption (R2, Interview, 2025). SERAP in particular has stood out among its peers in resorting to initiating cases in court against mostly, the government in order to secure favorable judgement that could impact on the fight against corruption in Nigeria. For R1, CISLAC has been to court on many occasions challenging happenings across the anti-corruption space. SERAP has also been vigilant in using the legal angle to press for certain changes that would improve the fight against corruption (Interview, 2025). The legal tool may attract some misgivings especially in the relationship between the government and the CSOs, but it has the utility of serving as a check on the government against abuse of power.

Generally, CSOs are watchdogs over the government that promote the aims of the state. SERAP and CISLAC have been able to promote transparency and openness of government which are critical elements of democracy sometimes by way of instituting cases against the government or any part thereof. (R4, Interview, 2025). This tradition makes the government to be on alert and operate with caution by being diligent in its activities on anti-corruption. In this regard, prosecution has served to maintain some balance in the activities of government vis-à-vis civil society organizations (some of which are CISLAC and SERAP) in the quest to make the fight against corruption functional and result oriented (R5, Interview, 2025). Through prosecution, the government has been challenged to do what is expected and officials found to be corrupt but not investigated have been brought before the courts to face justice. "The main approach of SERAP is from the purview of legality" (R6, Interview, 2025). They have many cases pending before various courts of law; while others have been completed with judgements in their favour or to the contrary. Some of these cases are on corruption and lack of transparency and accountability of many government agencies.

The interpretation of the law on issues of corruption and anti-corruption by competent courts of law have been pushed by CISLAC, SERAP and other CSOs that form part of the anti-corruption coalition in Nigeria (R11, Interview, 2025). Through this strategy the laws on relevant areas of anti-corruption are better understood and implemented for the betterment of the country and in the interest of justice. From another angle, SERAP and CISLAC has joined the government in prosecution of certain allegations of corruption forming effective partnership to secure conviction (R8, Interview 2025). This is done in order to boost the capacity of the prosecution to make a sound case that would result in the conviction of the accused. Therefore, litigation is an instrument that SERAP is mostly concerned with and CISLAC also deploys it in rare instances in the course of

promoting the fight against corruption (R14, Interview, 2025). This position is affirmed by R9 noting that anti-corruption agencies have been supported by SERAP and CISLAC in some of their prosecutions. While on other occasions they have been called upon to respond to litigations against them, by some of these CSOs (R9, Interview, 2025). In any case, litigation or legal advocacy serves to prevent impunity and instills the spirit of rule of law which stipulates adherence to existing laws in the fight against corruption.

Along the same line of thought, SERAP and CISLAC have been involved in anti-corruption for a long time employing legal techniques in ensuring that corrupt officials are brought to face justice and that impunity does not become the order of the day under the guise of anti-corruption (R13, Interview, 2025). The legal option is another valuable window to ensure that the fight against corruption is neither personalized, nor is it used as a tool to witch-hunt the opposition. Thus, the civil society groups resort to legal means when abuse becomes imminent. From another perspective, the fight against corruption could not succeed without formidable legal arrangement to ensure that laws are not operated out of context. It is with the legal advocacy embarked upon by groups like CILSAC and SERAP that anti-corruption is legally advanced in Nigeria (R10, Interview, 2025). According to R3, CISLAC and SERAP has always been forthcoming in resolving areas of controversy relating to laws on the fight against corruption as well as with processes and procedures of anti-corruption by seeking legal clarification from courts in the country. It is on this basis that R12 narrated that SERAP is very active in referring issues of anti-corruption before courts of competent jurisdiction. By so doing, the government is always mindful because it is being watched by these CSOs. In the same vein, the two CSOs accord value for resorting to the judiciary by initiating cases before relevant courts in the country for the purpose of strengthening the fight against corruption (FGD, 2025). In summary, legal advocacy is one of the potent strategies utilized by CISLAC and SERAP to seek justice, request interpretation of laws, check government impunity and serve as a watch-dog on the activities of government and its agencies on anti-corruption.

CONCLUSION

After articulating the responses of the respondents, it was discovered that multiple tools formed part of the agenda of CSOs in combating corruption in Nigeria. Although, advocacy, sensitization, capacity building, research and legal instruments dominate the activities of anti-corruption within the CSOs realm, many other tools are bound to exist in this regard. Thus, it is only when more vigor and commitment is deployed using the above-mentioned tools and many others that the CSOs would make more impact on the fight against corruption in Nigeria. It is on the basis of the foregoing reality, that the study advocates for the harmonization and strengthening of these strategies with a view to synthesizing them for optimum value and outcome; synergizing the tools and strategies of CSOs with that of anti-graft agencies; as well as development and deployment of additional strategies to tackle the menace of corruption in Nigeria.

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