

## **Civil Society and Economic Empowerment: A Case Study of Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (Cidjap)**

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**Abstract:** *The concept of civil society gained much prominence in the development debate of the late 1980s and 1990s. According to White's conceptual article, "civil society, democratization and development" (1994), he carefully brought out the competing, ambiguous, options in the definition and use of the concept. There is ambiguity over what to include as Civil Society and who can be seen to fit in into the concept. In addition, there is the question of categorization. For instance, does civic society institution such as state-regulated religious bodies, academic unions, and public sector interest groups whose members are state employees and, therefore, may be subject to special public rules and regulations fit into the definitional set. The conceptual outlook notwithstanding, the role of Civil Societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be underestimated, considering their tremendous output in projecting societal differences in political, social, cultural, environmental and economic reforms. In our paper, we shall focus on Civil Society institutions that are independent or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other voluntary non-profit establishments whose primary function has been to protect the interests and rights of the citizens, especially the downtrodden and those in distress, as opposed to their bourgeois counterparts by providing social and economic services. In Nigeria for example, with her diverse ethnic and religious differences, civil society organizations have helped in promoting unity, humanitarian services, paved way for new employment opportunities and have continued to establish new methods and strategies towards societal development. This work will use the activities of CIDJAP, a Nigerian and religious civil society group as a case study, by highlighting their modus operandi and milestone in economic management. Not minding the ambiguity in the conceptual outlook, we chose liberalism as theoretical framework. At its revival in the 1980s, civil society organizations were associated with empowerment, democratization and participation and for Africa, it has remained the same struggle, with the hope that social groups, viewpoints and institutions that were either previously excluded from policy making processes, or enjoyed limited spaces to influence the activities of the public domain, would gain voice, legality, strength and autonomy from the repressive grip of the state.*

**Keywords:** *Civil Society, economic empowerment, global influence, criticism, corruption, human rights, sustainability.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Civil Societies could be described in various contexts based on their nature, and origin. However, a more acceptable description by World Bank, as developed by a number of leading research institutes notes that "the term civil society to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations". In other words, they are citizen-oriented. According to Augustine Ikelegbe, "Civil society has been a central force in political and economic reforms. The activities and even proliferation of civil groups have been seen by several authors as vital to the democratization project and its sustenance." (2001,1)

As an independent organization, they are not completely negligent of governmental activities. Some of their activities could be carried out to complement those of government, especially in countries or areas where the government's operations are weak, for example, in post-conflict regions. They tend to matters which are insufficiently addressed by the government. Civil societies protect the social, economic and political interests of the people by indulging in matters that counter the selfish endeavors of those in authority. "It functions to check the excesses of government and its officials in power, human rights violations and monitoring of the application of constitutional provisions." (Nicholas N. Igwe: 18)

Civil societies play an important role in service delivery on socio-economic fields, implementation of developmental programs, and other societal shortcomings. Their influence in shaping global public policy remains a major objective. A World Bank review further shows that the influence of the civil society organizations has been on for the past two decades. This is exemplified by successful advocacy campaigns

around such issues as banning of land mines, debt cancellation, and environmental protection which have mobilized thousands of supporters around the globe. A recent study of the manifestation of the vibrancy of global civil society has been the World Social Forum (WSF) held annually since 2001 on different continents, and has brought together thousands of civil society groups to discuss global development issues. Another example is the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), an international civil society campaign advocating for debt relief and greater aid to poor countries. In 2008, GCAP is estimated to have mobilized more than 116 million citizens to participate in the Stand up against poverty events held in cities throughout the world.

In many countries in Africa, especially in Nigeria, civil society organizations abound. As a country with diverse ethnic societies and groups, there emerged an urgent need to unite the people to avoid any form of violent or economic eruption. The governments itself could not tackle the rising demands and needs of the growing population, hence the need for the formation of non-governmental societies to take care of the problems of the masses. Though these organizations could be formed in partnership by different interest groups or individuals, it could also be sponsored or established by a single entity or individual, mostly for philanthropic purposes. Institutions which can make up a civil society group include: religious organizations, environmental groups, foundations, cultural groups, academic group, trade unions, voluntary associations, cooperatives, charities, policy institutions, civic groups, community organizations, support groups, activist groups, etc. Examples of some civil society organizations in Nigeria are: Festus Okoye Human Rights Monitor (HRM), Shehu Sani Civil Rights Congress, Bala Dogo Care and Action Research (CARE), Abdul Yusuf Rural Women and Youth Development, Wasila Idris Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED), Rt. Rev. N.N. Inyom Ecumenical Commission for Justice and Peace (ECJP), Women for Women International, Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP), etc.

CIDJAP, which is going to form a major area of study in this work, is an organization established by the catholic church (based in Enugu), with the aim of providing humanitarian services to the poor and needy in the society, in addition to peaceful and economic development.

### **Civil Society: A Historical Overview**

The meaning of civil society has evolved considerably since its use in the context of the 18<sup>th</sup> century European Enlightenment. Then it signified the realm of private interests, in practice the realm of the bourgeoisie, distinct from the state. While one current of thought retains that meaning its implications, others view civil society rather as the emancipator activity of social forces distinct from both state and capital (Robert Cox: 3).

Antonio Gramsci's thought embraced both meanings. To him, "civil society was the ground that sustained the hegemony of the bourgeoisie but also that on which an emancipatory counter hegemony could be constructed" (Cox: 3)

Micheal Edwards, reviewing Antonio Gramsci's thought, noted that "Gramsci did not consider civil society as coterminous with the socio-economic base of the state. Rather, he located civil society in the political superstructure... He underlined the crucial role of civil society as the contributor of the cultural and ideological capital required for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism." (10). In other words, Gramsci viewed civil society as the site for problem-solving.

Through historical times, the concept of civil society has been perceived in two ways, different from its original form. The first change was after the French Revolution, while the second was during the fall of communism in Europe. From a general perspective, civil society has been described as a political set up that governs social conflict by imposing rules that prevent citizens from destroying one another.

During the classical period, the concept was seen as no different from a state. It was used as a synonym for good society. The classical period places importance on the political discourse about the idea of a 'good Society' in ensuring peace and order among the people. There was no distinction between the state and the society. Classical scholars held that the state represented the civil form of society, in which 'civility' itself represented the requirement of good citizenship. They believe that as rational human beings, the people have the capacity to shape the nature of the society they belong to. By so doing, volunteer for a common cause of sustenance and maintaining peace in the society.

The topics discusses by the political philosophers, changed during the Middle Ages. The concept of classical civil society was no longer talked about, due to the rise of feudalism. Rather people preoccupied themselves with issues of 'just war', down till the end of Renaissance.

As a result of the Treaty endorsed by states as territorially-based political units with power, the monarchs were able to exert domestic control by emasculating the feudal lords, thereby, stopped relying on them for armed troops. The monarchs controlled the economy, in order to meet the administrative expenditures. This development gave birth to absolutism, which lasted till the middle of the eighteenth century in Europe.

In the Age of Enlightenment, the absolutist concept of the state was disputed. The Enlightenment thinkers raised fundamental questions as to the significance of government institutions. They wondered why some human beings should have more basic rights than others. In order to move beyond absolutism, they sought answers on the principles of the human mind. How the human mind operates. They believed in the inherent morality of the mind. They argued that the alliance between the church and the state was the great hindrance to human progress and well-being. This was because, the church legitimated monarchs by positing the theory of divine origin, whereas the state with its coercive apparatus, restrained the freedom of the people. Therefore, they were both seen as the enemy of the people.

Two political philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century that influenced the relationship between the state and its citizens are Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Thomas Hobbes saw the need of a powerful state to maintain the civility in society. To him, human beings are motivated by self-interests, which are often contradictory in nature. On realizing the danger of a lawless society, human beings had to look for a protective mechanism. Hobbes believes that rationality and self-interests made the people to agree to surrender in to a common and greater power (the state). In Locke's view, the consolidation of political power can be turned into autocracy, if it is not brought under reliable restrictions. He therefore, outlined two treaties on government with reciprocal obligations: (i) people submitting themselves to the common public authority (that has the power to enact and maintain laws); (ii) the limitations of authority, i. e., the state have no power to threaten the basic rights of human beings. As far as Locke was concerned, the basic rights of human beings are the preservation of life, liberty and property. Moreover, he held that the state must operate within the bounds of civil and natural laws.

Both scholars consider civil society as a community that maintained civil life, the realm where natural laws could produce civic virtues and rights. They established a system where peaceful coexistence among human beings could be ensured through social pacts or contracts. In contrast to the divine right (of the crown), Hobbes and Locke claim that human beings can design their own political order. This idea greatly influenced the Enlightenment thinkers, who argued that as rational human beings, people can actually shape their destiny. Hence, no need to submit to an absolute authority.

In contemporary society, civil societies play a major role in addressing issues that concern the masses. They are mostly independent of government activities and connections; therefore, they make issues that concern their personal life their priority, by joining hands to fight for their rights and for the indigent ones amongst them. On the other hand, they tend to care more for the poor and downtrodden; thus, their groups are out to attend to the plight of those in need.

### **Civil Society and Economic Empowerment**

To make sense of government policy, the appreciation of economics is essential. Economics could simply be described as the study of how resources are being managed, especially the supply and consumption of goods and services. The enormous change in global economy has led a lot of nations in seeking for alternative ideas to manage and sustain their countries economy.

Alfred Marshal in his book *Principles of Economics* describes economics as the "study of man in the ordinary business of life. It enquires how he gets his income and how he uses it. Thus, it is on the one side, the study of wealth and on the other and more important side, a part of the study of man" (1-2)

There are definitely many approaches to the definition of economics, but for the benefit and clarity of this paper, the financial, social and political aspect will be addressed. Therefore, how a country's resources are utilized is of utmost importance for the economic growth of any nation. The public itself do not have to leave everything in the hands of the government, especially here in Nigeria and most of Africa where the government itself has proven to be ineffective in most fields affecting the social life and condition of the populace. This is where the services of the civil societies come in handy. They provide for the people in those areas where the services of the government have proven inadequate. Consequently, the economy is expanded and there is a higher chance for development and improved lifestyle of the people.

In Nigeria for instance, managing the economy of the country has been a very big challenge to some civil society groups, starting with the issue of corruption. The government has managed the economy so badly over the years, leaving the nation in dire need of a messiah. Considering the abundance of natural resources in Nigeria, there is n doubt that if managed properly, it should be one of the richest and developed countries in the world; but as it stands, there are so many set backs which have been caused by selfish personal demands, leading to mismanagement and corruption. According to Igwe,

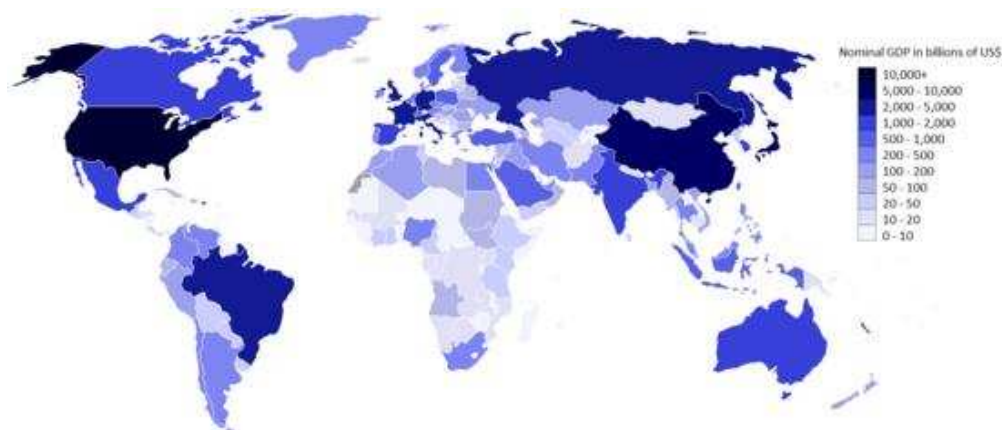
Compared with other African nations and Asian Tigers, especially Indonesia which is comparable to Nigeria in many respects, economic development in terms of development projects through transparent public procurement has not been very successful. Corruption, a cankerworm in the land...affects the efficiency of public spending and development partners' resources, ultimately affecting the quality of goods and services arising from such contracts. (18)

Combating the issue of corruption has been our major weakness. The unwillingness to sacrifice personal luxury and greed remains a battle yet to be won. The question remains, ‘who will bell the cat?’ Thus on this note, Igwe describes Civil Society as “an ethical ideal of the social order that harmonizes the conflicting demands of individual interests and social good. Civil Society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values” (18)

Below is a global representation of the economic changes recorded in the years 1990-2007.



**A world map of GDP growth (annualized), from 1990 to 2007.**



**A Map of world economies by size of GDP (nominal) in \$US, CIA World Factbook, 2011.**

From a closer assessment of the maps, it could be seen that Africa generally is still lagging behind in economic development, but with the advent of some these non-profit and volunteer groups, there is hope for a better society with a hopeful increase in its gross domestic product.

Civil society organizations therefore provide a lot of economic benefits such as, provision of employment opportunity for the masses, especially the youths who are prone to indulge in indecent sources of livelihood. Through skills acquisition programmes and educational scholarships, young men and women are given the opportunity to acquire knowledge and utilize their creative talents which can be of great benefit to the society; rural empowerment programmes enlightens the people and train them on how to improve their wellbeing. Other benefits include: it helps limit the excesses of adverse government activities and violation of human rights; serves as an alternative group to a political union, instills in the people a sense of pride and belonging among a conflicting and complex society; “it provides alternatives for negotiation within a multifaceted society by mitigating the excesses of fundamentalists extremists and maximalists’ who tend to have a narrow view of life. It serves as a recruiting ground for and training of prospective members of the political or economic class to enhance the quality of participation in governance” (L. Diamond: 9-10)

### **Cidjap And The Process Of Societal Development**

In Africa, Nigeria was one of the countries affected by the military regime, as many were left little or nothing to feed on, high rate of unemployment, insecurity and subjugation. In a land of plenty, only a few people have access to the resources of the land.

With the current civilian democratic leadership, not much has changed. Ibrahim puts it that, “both leaders at the national and state levels pursued policies that kept the masses in perpetual agony” (132). The great gap of inequality has left the nation highly underdeveloped and insecure.

Enugu State, being one of the major cities in Nigeria was not so violent towards these outcomes, though they partook in the oppression like other citizens in other states. Between 1986 and 2003, according to M.H. Kukah, “its inhabitant, like other Nigerians, were subjected to prolonged frustration orchestrated by repressive regimes of both military juntas and civilian leaders; economic insecurity brought about by Structural Adjustment Programme - SAP and other liberalization measures; insecurity produced by ethno-religious and political crisis; and mismanagement of state resources” (51-62). This crisis gave rise to a lot of atrocities in the country such as, “violation of human rights, armed robbery, poverty, high unemployment rate and lack of infrastructural development became common characteristic such that many people could not boast of common basic needs of water, food, shelter and good health” (T. Ferrest: 56 -70).

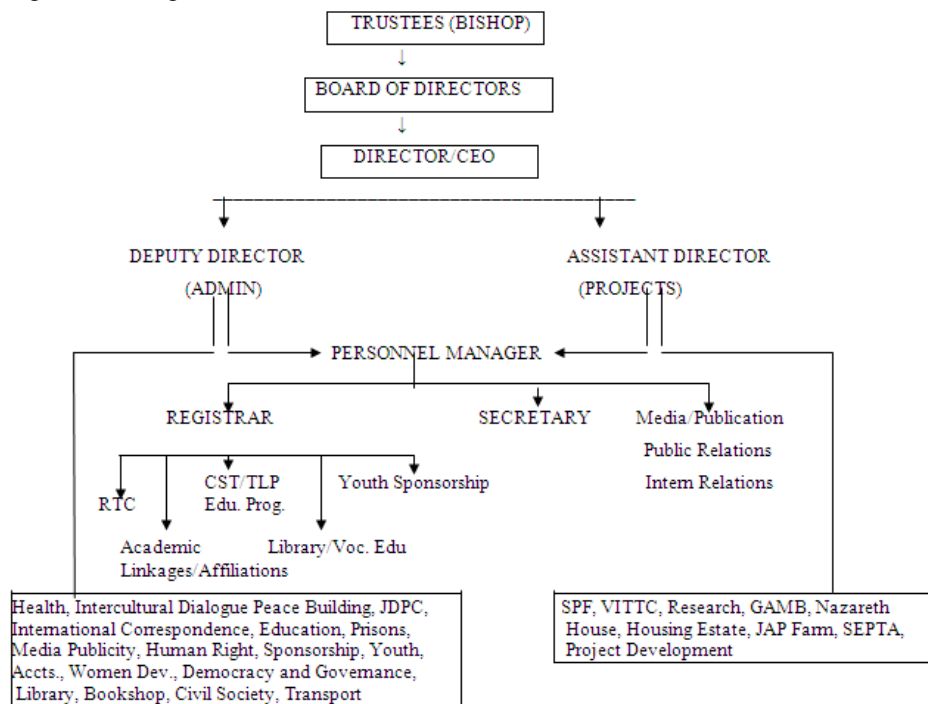
Having recorded such bizarre changes, the effects could not be denied. Even though there was no record of Enugu state participating in any violent demonstration, the effect of the drastic and repressive changes could not be denied. J. Galtung notes that, “the effects of structural violence - unjust, repressive, or oppressive political and economic structures that result from policies of nation, states or bureaucrats which involve the denial of equity that can be averted, and engender inequality, hunger, starvation, diseases, lack of education and freedom of expression and assembly (167-91) - were prevalent in the state. Galtung states that, it was within this context that the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace – CIDJAP, was established by the Catholic Diocese of Enugu in 1986, to embark on a struggle for peace, development, exploitation through injustice and denial of human rights without physical or direct violence.

The Catholic Institute for Development Justice and Peace is one civic organization that has distinguished itself in various ways through its most thoughtful and inspiring humanitarian services. This organization was established out of genuine thought and concern for the indigent in the society. As the name implies, it is a religious institute, but their aim is not limited to religious group alone, but to all who are in need. Located in Enugu Nigeria, CIDJAP has immensely touched the life of the citizens so much so that it has become no just a means of improving the basic needs of the people, but also enhancing their economic life. Thus, it has become a very effective vehicle for the spreading of the gospel.

CIDJAP was founded in the year 1986, as a non-governmental organization by Monsignor Obiora Ike, with the aim to empower people, promote integral development, challenge structures of injustice, create hope for the people and work for peaceful coexistence.

Inspired by the scriptural teachings of the church, CIDJAP visualizes a world in which: ‘the good things of creation are, developed and shared by all; the right and dignity of person are respected, discrimination ended and all people are gathered into a single human family from which no one is excluded; the voice of the poor is heard and lives no longer dominated by greed.’

Below is a diagram showing the structure and activities of CIDJAP:



### **Assessment Review on the Activities of CIDJAP**

Since its inception, CIDJAP had remained steadfast in their respect and response to human rights in the society. More than that, the organization has established so many training and hospitality centres to improve the living standard of the people. Some of the organs established by CIDJAP include the following:

Vocational and Technical Training Centre – with the name “Oluaka Dimma Vocational and Technical Training Centre,” at Coal Camp Enugu, this centre trains youths, both young men and women, to acquire technical skills such as automobile mechanic, automobile electrical engineering, welding, iron works, painting, bead making, computer training, Christian ethics and moral studies. This project was founded in 1998 and had from the time impacted positively on the society, as its activities had led to policy shift by the state government towards skills acquisition for youth empowerment, reduction on unemployment rate, access to training, poverty reduction, self-reliant businesses and wealth creation. Currently, there are about 250 students running different programs with a minimum of 18 months training and later, industrial attachment.

Prisoners Welfare – According to CIDJAP annual report 2012, the department in charge of prisoner’s welfare visited the prisons up to 80 times, providing medical services, toiletries, food, water and other services as the case may be. They also provide legal assistance to prisoners who have been condemned to death, with no hope of release, by intervening on their behalf and possibly giving them a new light and second chance to life.

Caritas – the major objective of the caritas department is to take care of the less privileged in the society by providing healthcare services, paying hospital bills, financial grants as well as emergency relief supplies of food, medicine and clothing.

Prolife Child Rights and Orphanages – according to 2007 annual report on CIDJAP, fifteen newborn motherless children were admitted at the Guardian Angels Motherless Babies (GAMB) Home, Emene Enugu. While the Holy Child Motherless Babies Home located at Holy Ghost Cathedral houses 80 children. In the year 2012, GAMB had about 55 children, with 78 at Holy Child, totaling to 133 children. The Orphanages hold counseling sessions for teenage pregnant girls; medications are provided for the children by a team of medical experts from Nigeria and abroad. Primary and Nursery education are availed to the children.

Children’s Sponsorship – this department bridges the gap between the educated children and the uneducated, by providing quality education for the poor and vulnerable children in the society. In 2012, the department had 410 children who receive sponsorship from CIDJAP sponsorship desk. These children are spread in the nursery/primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Small Projects Fund – this is a project mapped out for the main aim of providing funds/loans for small business owners, thereby, enhancing lives, providing self-reliant businesses and reducing poverty among the people. This scheme progressed so much, owing to the support of both local and international sources that it later yielded to a bigger project, the establishment of the micro bank (Umuchinemere Pro-Credit Microfinance Bank – UP-MFB). Today, the Bank is branded as one of the best Nationwide with capital base and investments running into billions of naira.

Other programmes and establishments of CIDJAP comprises: Human Resources Development, Capacity Building and Training, Human Rights, Printing Press and Bookshop, Library, Healthcare, Democracy and Good Governance, Ofu Obi Africa Centre, Nwanne Di na Mba Low Cost Housing, Information and Communication Technology, Research Media and Publication, Legal Department, Ntasi Obi Ndi no n’Afufu Specialist Hospital employing hundreds of Nigerians.

Suffice it to say that CIDJAP as an organization has immensely projected the need for a strong economic and peaceful community. This due to the fact that 80% of what the organization does is strictly geared towards improving the economic and social life of the people. They have assisted the government so much, in meeting some of its fiscal goals and policies. In a speech present by the Director, Monsignor Obiora Ike, on the Annual General Meeting (6<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2013) of the shareholders of the Umuchinemere Pro-Credit Microfinance Bank, it could be seen that the organization is indeed gearing towards economic expansion. According to him, “...the Catholic Church which trade-marks are: Unity, Holiness, Apostolicity and Universality can dream to use UP-MFB as a model for poverty eradication, economic transformation, employment and job creation, wealth generation and financial sustainability” (12)

## **II. Conclusion**

The recent trend in human development whereby issues of governance, equity and general wellbeing of citizens worldwide is being globalized demand a collective effort. In Africa most nations where there are unimaginable deprivations, Civil Societies have a responsibility to intervene and fill the continually expending gap, between the segments of the polity. Due to their independent and non-governmental basis, they are seen by some government officials as anti-government. Some have been accused of debasing governmental authority, therefore, devaluing the essence of democracy. Rather on the contrary, they preach what a democratic government should all be about. They provide a situation whereby the interest and voices of the masses should be propelled to improve their total well being. As NGOs, they reach out to those in the rural community with the

aim of bettering their lives. They protect the interest of the people by making them aware of their human rights and to have the courage to address them. They in so many ways improve the economy of the country by providing employment opportunities through these organizations. For example, CIDJAP in Enugu State, Nigeria has provided a lot of people with employment opportunities through its various establishments.

As a religious civil society, CIDJAP has touched the lives of many both physically, spiritually, psychologically and otherwise. One of its major objectives and in which it has continued to achieve productive results, is the search for continuous peace and justice. B. Ghali states that "The most desirable and efficient employment of diplomacy is to ease tensions before they result into conflict, or, if conflict breaks out, to act swiftly to contain it and resolve its underlying causes... preventive diplomacy is to avoid crisis, post conflict peace-building is to prevent a recurrence" (www.un.org).

Therefore, the economy of any state is under continuous exploit for the mere fact that we are social beings. And in our social life, we consult the economic reserve, thereby, play a major role in determining its stability and growth. As a civil group, Civil Societies know better than to abuse the economic resources available to them, instead, they transform these resources (human, natural and economic) into effective use for the benefit and better service to humanity. These attributes, we think, CIDJAP has enhanced thereby leaving up to the basic issues of empowerment, democratization and participation of the citizens in the affairs concerning them.

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