



Nigeria Network of Non-Governmental Organisations

(No.7977 Established in October 1992)

Email: nnngo@nnngo.org Website: www.nnngo.org

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Tom Carothers,
Interim President,
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

29 July 2021

Dear Tom,

On behalf of the Board, members and staff of the Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGO), I write to express our grave concerns with the report written by Mr. Matthew T Page, a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published on Carnegie's website at https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/07/28/fake-civil-society-rise-of-pro-government-ngos-in-nigeria-pub-85041?utm_source=carnegieemail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=announcement&mk_t_tok=MDk1LVBQVi04MTMAAAF-jGqpg0Ro0tffbednVFFmt1b54oDL6UPwNel0qZwcqchLv_JunVFVLstV_byJK_tsUex4_H8uLD_rEhXpcksZBX1ZdHz7TuBBQDDnU0nBci_M on 28 July, 2021.

While we welcome a review of the civil society sector in Nigeria, we are worried that a research report such as the one published by Carnegie damages the reputation of civil society organisations in the South especially when it is not grounded in rigorous methodology and evidence.

NNNGO is the first generic membership organisation for nonprofits in Nigeria dedicated to improving the operational environment for nonprofits. NNNGO brings together more than 3,300 nonprofits from around the country focused on education, health, environment, gender, agriculture, social protection, youth, poverty, good governance, and other areas of progressing national development. Since 1992, NNNGO has worked to advance the common interests of the sector, providing programs that advance national development, civil society legitimacy, transparency, and accountability.

Our initial response will be limited to the "key takeaways" section and Note 3 titled *Based on analysis of a detailed, author-compiled data set of more than 360 pro-government NGOs. It is accessible at: <https://tinyurl.com/55bem3n8>* of the report at this time.

Context to NNNGOs' work and Engagement with Government.

The Nigeria Network of NGOs approaches its engagement with Government both locally and internationally using the participatory approach. This approach involves active compliance with regulations or evidence-based analysis of policies and laws while collaborating with critical stakeholders to change the laws or policies from within rather than from the outside. We maintain our independence and defend the sector from restrictive laws and policies. This approach informed our work on the Open Government Partnership and our Co-chairing the Citizens Engagement Thematic Working Group.

Our work is also guided by a consultation policy at <https://bit.ly/3ycTZoG>

We respect different strategies or response used by other organisations in their government engagement which in theory and practice from our work we have identified as 1. vocal opposition 2. litigation and 3. participatory (approach adopted by NNNGO). This is the beauty and richness in the diversity of civil society.

Our Response to the “KEY TAKEAWAYS”

The Report: Out of 360 pro-government Nigerian NGOs identified by this research, 90 percent have started operating since President Muhammadu Buhari took office in 2015. This correlation suggests that these groups receive high-level support and encouragement. Many are controlled by a small number of individuals who have personal and ethnic connections to Nigeria’s ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

Our Response: The Nigeria Network of NGOs was founded in 1992 and formally registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 1994. See our history at <https://nnngo.org/our-history/> A copy of our strategic plan is also available at <https://nnngo.org/download/7957/> and information about our governance at <https://nnngo.org/governance/>. Report of our projects and programmes are available on the “How we help” section on our home page at www.nnngo.org. Our list of funders and financials <https://nnngo.org/funders-and-financials/> (2012 to 2019) provides information on who our funders are. **We can also provide our financials for previous years from 2011 if you so want.** The management team at the Network can be seen at <https://nnngo.org/management-team/> and our Board at <https://nnngo.org/governance/#1589899003229-ae6bf7d8-d51c>

On a balance of the above evidence, we request a formal response from Mr. Page and Carnegie if our organisation merits this prescription in the report especially when our website- www.nnngo.org has been up and running since 2004 when the internet became more affordable and accessible in Nigeria.

A search on www.who.is – a public domain name search portal showed that nnngo.org was registered on 2004-01-07 and will expire 2023-01-07. (<https://who.is/whois/nnngo.org>). A search on Google using “NGOs in Nigeria” lists NNNGO’s address on the 1st page, our member page and Facebook address on the 2nd page. This is a basic parameter that we felt should have been used as part of the methodology for this type of research. We would like to learn of the methodology employed for this research by Mr. Page and Carnegie’s policy on publications of this nature.

The Report: In addition to praising government and military leaders, Nigeria’s pro-government NGOs often attack legitimate civil society groups and even incite violence against them. Pro-government NGOs typically champion illiberal causes, defending the Nigerian government from domestic and international criticism and allegations of corruption, underperformance, and human rights abuses.

Our Response: While we respect the rights of nonprofits to praise or criticise their government as this is within their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and opinion. The Nigeria Network of NGOs has offered commendation when it is due to our government (<https://nnngo.org/4105-2/>) and recommendations including raising concerns (<https://nnngo.org/the-nigeria-network-of-ngos-is-concerned-about-the-ban-on-twitter-by-the-federal-government/> and <https://nnngo.org/situation-in-lagos-and-other-parts-of-the-country-statement-by-the-nigeria-network-of-ngos/>) when needed. The news section of our website at <https://nnngo.org/news/> and our Facebook page at <https://web.facebook.com/NNNGO> provides more details.



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Again, we would like to read from Mr. Page and Carnegie comments or evidence of how the Nigeria Network of NGOs fits the report's description under this section.

The Report: Nigeria's pro-government NGOs are all opaquely funded, likely through off-budget payments or contracts for consulting services. Political appointees known as special assistants will mobilize surrogates on behalf of their principal, usually a minister or agency head. Top military officers' aides play a similar role. Pro-government NGOs appear to operate sporadically, usually at the behest of their funders.

Our Response: Our audited financial statements and funders are available at <https://nngo.org/funders-and-financials/> (2012 to 2019). Those of 2011 to 2005 are available in our office and can be sent to Carnegie and Mr. Page. We pride ourselves as few of the nonprofits that publish their audit reports online. We are also a member of the Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice by Accountable Now -- <https://accountablenow.org/> -- where we peer pressure and learn about nonprofit accountability and transparency. The Network is a member of Civicus (www.civicus.org) since 2004 and FORUS (<https://bit.ly/3ypk0Bn>). We continue to train our members on nonprofit corporate governance as can be seen on our website.

The Report: Almost all of Nigeria's pro-government NGOs exist in name only. Fewer than 7 percent are listed on the country's corporate registry as is legally required. Many operate for only a short time before disappearing; 80 percent of groups examined for this paper held just one or two press conferences in total.

Our Response: The Nigeria Network of NGOs has been registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission since 1994 and our registration number is **RC7977**. This number is on our letterhead and used in all our correspondence with stakeholders since 1992. You can also see same on this communication with your organisation. A search on the country's corporate registry may show "invalid" at the present moment as the Corporate Affairs Commission has just started a full automation of its system with nonprofits now required to have an account on the portal. This is done directly by the Commission see <https://www.cac.gov.ng/public-notice-on-creation-of-entity-electronic-account/>. The Network has applied.

As part of our work, we continue to partner with the sectors regulators on regulatory issues, a letter to the Corporate Affairs Commission asking for the details of the Network would have provided Mr. Page and Carnegie the right information needed for this assignment in our opinion.

We are however concerned that Carnegie and Mr. Page have restricted legitimacy of civil society to government registration whereas the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of association and assembly which by interpretation means that citizens can form organisations without registering if they are not interested in enjoying incentives to register such as tax exemption, financial services, and waivers amongst others. It is worrisome that majorly coalitions and networks were labelled by Mr. Page as "fake" and "pro-government" because of this parameter.

It is instructive to add that NNNGO applied for ECOSOC in 2019 and has now been recommended by the NGO Committee for Special Consultative Status see <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/ngo911.doc.htm>. You will attest to the rigour of an exercise such as this.

We would like clarification from Mr. Page and Carnegie if this aspect of the report reflects the situation with our organisation.

The Report: Many pro-government NGOs thrive on the coverage they receive from a few little-known media platforms, some of which are run by their leaders or their allies. Mimicking legitimate civil society groups, pro-government NGOs often cite the work of supposed think tanks that validate their pro-government or illiberal views.

Our Response: The Nigeria Network of NGOs continues to enjoy the support of the media around its work as can be seen from the opinion and news articles in newspapers including media interviews granted on radio and TV.

A Google Search with the parameter “punch newspapers Oyebisi Oluseyi” returned the following:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=punch+newspapers+Oyebisi+Oluseyi&oq=punch+newspapers+Oyebisi+Oluseyi&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i64.19321j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Using Channels TV Oyebisi Oluseyi as the search parameter shows this

https://www.google.com/search?q=Channels+TV+Oyebisi+Oluseyi&sxsrf=ALeKk01ebd12SgIzCbRV0MbYI0fAijCaEQ%3A1627521771607&ei=6wICYdjJMb9gAbetpHwCg&oq=Channels+TV+Oyebisi+Oluseyi&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EANKBAhBGAFQuYwFWIejBWDapgVoAXAAeACAAfgFiAG5JpIBCjMtMTAuMS4wLjGYAQCgAQGgAQdnd3Mtd2l6wAEB&sclient=gws-wiz&ved=0ahUKEwiY672lj4fyAhXGPsAKHV5bBK4Q4dUDCA8&uact=5

News Agency of Nigeria: <https://nannews.ng/tag/mr-oyebisi-oluseyi/>

TVC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC3890fzVhs>

Splash

FM

Interview:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QOb6ioFzfmIRKqSZZoC317Zvm9xrwYCx/view?usp=sharing>

Note 3 titled *Based on analysis of a detailed, author-compiled data set of more than 360 pro-government NGOs. It is accessible at:* <https://tinyurl.com/55bem3n8>

Our Response: On the excel sheet, NNNGO is listed on line 313. The main person listed is Kunle Idowu and Yemisi Ransome-Kuti whereas Mr. Idowu worked at the Network between 2001 and 2015 and has since retired. Ms. Yemisi Ransome-Kuti is the Founding Executive Director of the Network who handed over to the present Executive Director, Oyebisi, B. Oluseyi in 2012. Ms. Ransome-Kuti sits on the Board of the Network, and is publicly listed on our governance page at <https://nnngo.org/governance> .

The Network was listed as anti- USA, whereas the Network has enjoyed the support of the US Government (USAID) through sub-grants from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (www.icnl.org). The Network’s Executive Director sits on the Civil Society Pillar of the Community of Democracy and has been supported by the US Government to attend meetings of the Committee both in the United States and elsewhere.



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We would like to know where Mr. Page and Carnegie have found the Network being anti-USA. This is an allegation that we do not take lightly and would require evidence. It is instructive to note that unlike other organisations listed Mr. Page and Carnegie could not link NNNGO to any political party, government institution or politician.

A link to Mr. Idowu's LinkedIn page was added on the excel sheet (Note 3). We wonder how Mr. Page and Carnegie got the link without being able to find the Network's social media pages and website to carry out a "detailed analysis" for their "author-complied data". since the page listed Mr. Idowu as the Networks Communications Director. See <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kunle-idowu-00190735/?originalSubdomain=ng> This singular act makes us suspect a malicious intent on the part of Mr. Page and Carnegie.

The Network prides itself as a knowledge leader on civil society strengthening and cites its own work. Our work has also been cited by respectable organisations such as in the recent CAF World Giving Index 2021 report at

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lh8685KDEdriR0t05XGYcu_3raTXbRFU/view

A list of some of our publications is available at

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xrCAUrIXSArMI5WyMIROXFGA-hsw0d1b/view?usp=sharing>

Our demand

Reports such as this is damning to the reputation of organisations like the Nigeria Network of NGOs and erodes public confidence and trust in our work and that of the entire civil society sector. It further puts the life our Board and staff in danger as they may be attacked. Further to this, the Network being listed as anti-USA has implications for our relationship with our civil society colleagues in the United States and may hinder our ability to operate effectively. This report shrinks the Network's civic space and is tantamount to bullying by a resource rich Northern based nonprofit.

In this context, we request Mr. Matthew T. Page and Carnegie to provide evidence supporting their analysis of the Nigeria Network of NGOs being a "fake civil society and pro-Government NGO" within 7 days or

In the short term:

1. Tender a public apology via the same means (on a permanent link) the report was published to the members, Board, partners, and staff of the Network.
2. Publish the apology in a national newspaper in the United States and Nigeria.
3. Remove Nigeria Network of NGOs' name from the list.
4. Include in the report our letter as an appendix.

in the medium term:

5. Review Carnegie's methodology for research such as this in consultation with the academic community and civil society organisations across the world especially those based in the South.

If the above short-term conditions are not met by close of business on 4 August 2021, the Board of Trustees of the Network will institute a legal action against Mr. Page and Carnegie.

We hope that Mr. Page and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace will seek redress as a matter of public and global urgency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oyebisi, B. Oluseyi', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Oyebisi, B. Oluseyi
Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs.