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THE INSIDE BUSINESS"-NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE NIGERIAN PROJECT: A STUDY OF TEMIDAYO MAKONJUOLAAND INEM KINGS BABY FARM.

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of Non-governmental Organizations/foundations in Nigeria has witnessed a tremendous increase in recent times. Though most of these organizations front charity and humanitarian aid to the unsuspecting public as their modus operandi, allegations of behind-the-scene activities that mitigate the presumed objectives have been forwarded by alleged victims and concerned individuals. This paper investigates the activities of these Non-governmental Organizations and foundations through the lens of the film Baby Farm, produced by Temidayo Makanjuola and Inem King. The findings reveal that some of these organizations have what the researcher refers to as "the inside business" conspicuously hidden from the glares of the unsuspecting public, from which they exploit the very people they claim to serve. The study is anchored on Social Development theory and The Elite Theory. Drawing from Elite Theory, the study observes that the hidden activities of NGOs are made possible by the support of "powerful" individuals within the leadership class, who manipulate institutional structures to protect and benefit from the illegitimate business. Furthermore, through the lens of Social Development Theory, the study highlights how these exploitative practices hinder genuine community empowerment and obstruct the pathways to sustainable development for the poor masses. The study concludes that some of these non-governmental organizations in Nigeria do more harm than good to the vulnerable populations they claim to serve. Therefore, we recommend that registering agencies for these organizations should desist from registering them based merely on paperwork presentation; rather, thorough investigations should be carried out on their set objectives before allowing them to operate in Nigeria. In addition, routine impromptu checks and inspections should be conducted, not

just on the facade but on their all-round activities; sponsors and channel of fund, materials and service distribution inclusive.

INTRODUCTION

The sustainability of government initiatives and social delivery has been a global challenge largely because of the ever, escalating expenditures and failing fiscal revenue. To bridge this gap, Government partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) across the globe and other stake holders become an alternative venture towards the provision of social services to the citizenry. Non-Governmental Organizations are organizations saddled with sole responsibility of contributing to the reduction of human sufferings through various means and techniques such as project funding, humanitarian aids/services and capacity building. They are organizations preoccupied with special interest in the communal and social life of the people and the Nation. World Bank defines it as private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interest of the poor, protect the environment, provide social services or undertake community development. Furthermore, Anure Joseph defines it as "organizations created on the bases of peoples voluntary initiatives and deal with issues that concern development through participation"(144).They serve as contributory agents in the development of a country supplementing government efforts in the empowerment of the common citizens. They also help in strengthening social justice. According to James and David, "NGOs ease the suffering of those affected by natural disasters, diseases and war by providing essential health care services and embarking on sustainable development projects that center on training and retraining"(90), hence they are perceived as contributory agents in the development of a country, supplementing government efforts towards the empowerment of the people. Generally, NGOs are major contributors in the promotion of social, environmental and political changes aimed at influencing public policies by raising awareness to specific issues of social concern.

Historically, modern NGOs can be traced to the 1800s; mostly associated with humanitarian aid cases such as anti-slavery movements. This period witnessed the fo3rmation of groups like International Committee of Red Cross Society (ICRCS) and other humanitarian aid groups. However Francis Abe, tracing the origin of NGOs states that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as we know them today are generally thought to have come into existence around the mid-nineteenth century and was officially recognized by the United Nations about a century later. Lewis David affirms to this by stating that "the term non-governmental organization

attained common usage after the founding of United Nations in 1945, when the Article 71 of the UN Charter recognized the constitutional role of NGOs in international affairs"(1056).

The 1980s onwards witnessed the proliferation of international NGOs on the African continent at large and Nigeria in Particular. This is not suggesting that NGOs are the first non-governmental humanitarian group in Africa, because historical evidence shows that communities across the continent had some forms of voluntary service organizations that contribute to the social and humanitarian needs of the people. In Nigeria, for instance, traditional community-based groups such as age grades, town unions, and cooperative societies functioned as proto-NGOs, providing welfare, mutual support, and collective action for the community, long before the arrival of modern NGOs confirming voluntary services as integral part of most African communities. Records have it that it is common among Africans to volunteer in sheltering orphaned children and displaced people within the community, and in some case, from neighboring communities. For instance, among the Igbos of Nigeria, the Age grade and the 'Umuada' usually engage in voluntary community services such as security services, sanitation, law enforcement and all-round development of the community. These groups traditionally organize themselves effectively to handle various aspects of community services, working hard for the progress of the society by carrying out development-oriented projects voluntarily. Ibe and Ndubuisi affirm that "the age grades are observed to be actively engaged in the mobilization of local resources, promoting social and economic improvement and development" (5).

The influx of international NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s therefore, can be said to have been built upon the activities of these indigenous structures, creating a collaborative system of local and global civil society organizations. Non-Government Organization are seen as "import agents of change and development in the country especially at the grassroots" (Anure, 145). They are better equipped with the identification of the basic needs of the grassroot population. According to Eze Martins, "primarily, they are renowned for two distinct, yet, closely connected forms of engagement, the first involves providing essential services to individuals in various situations of vulnerability, while the second centers around orchestrating policy advocacy and public campaigns"(np). Considering their proximity to the grassroot and the trust and dependency they enjoy from the masses, they are expected to use their services to "achieve a strengthened civil society development and enhanced contribution to social justice, democracy and sustainable development" (Tumbah and David, 90). Thus, Eze, A.C. Rightly posits that "today, NGOs have become a third force in the society and serving as the moral pulse and conscience of the

exploited"(80). They operate as vehicles for providing goods and services to the vulnerable especially where government lacks the capacity or resources to reach to them. They also serve as contributory agents in the development of a country offering supplementary services to the government in the empowerment of the citizens, strengthening civil society development and contributing to social justice.

NGOs are widely celebrated for their role in supporting the grassroots and the vulnerable, advancing humanitarian relief and grassroot development. Yet, their credibility has increasingly witnessed public scrutiny connected to corruption, accountability failures and gross mismanagement, which limits their expected services and impact on the citizenry there by undermining their legitimacy and effectiveness. Asserting to this, Jalloh Charlse opines that "in the last several decades, the growing influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whether international, National or local, in character, has generated increasing concerns about their accountability, transparency, and legitimacy" (47) These negative tendencies, if not checked, can expose the Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) to the risk of exploiting the trust of the citizens entrusted in their care.

Globally, scholars and analysts have documented how scandals and systemic failures have eroded public confidence in NGOs. Zhang, Amanda, observes that "corruption scandals, financial mismanagement, and misconduct have transformed public perception of NGOs."(np). He cited the European Quatargate scandal as the most damaging recent examples of NGO's corruption where prominent NGO's were used as vehicles for bribery and political manipulations. This observation captures the growing unease that NGO's, once seen as moral alternatives to state and corporate actors, are now perceived as vulnerable to the same governance flaws. Similarly, Daniel Jordan in his study of NGOs in Nigeria observed that NGO's have faced declining confidence due to doubts about their conduct, effectiveness, and accountability. His findings in Imo state shows that it's only a few NGOs are genuinely active in the past decade but during the SACA competition for World bank sponsored AIDS grant, no fewer than seventy-nine applied "including many from organizations created solely in order to apply for the world bank SACA grant" (9); observing that "Nigeria elites have responded by creating a plethora of NGOs designed to tap and control these resources" (1).

Thus many NGOs in Nigeria have become contractors, chasing donor funds rather than serving the people they are meant to represent. Donor-driven agenda, such as this, commodify citizens who are frequently used as statistics in donor reports, aimed solely for attracting funds from

donor agencies. This practice reduces citizens to mere fundraising tools rather than active participants in development. Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) report of 2023, places procurement fraud cases in Nigeria at 42% while grant diversion fraud cases is placed at 31%.

In addition to the above, many accusations have been leveled against some NGOs in Nigeria confirming their neglect of the set objectives. For instance, The Save Niger Movement (SNM), a civil society organization network, has appealed to security agencies to profile the NGOs and civil society's organizations. This call is necessitated by the body's observation of illegalities in the activities of NGOs in the country.

Reports from 'The People's Gazette', an online newspaper, also shows that the Zamfara state government, in 2023, ordered all the NGO's in the state to exit the state, accusing them of many things including fueling insecurity within the area, illegal activities and no- registration with the government. In March 2025, the Federal Government of Nigeria made attempts to investigate some NGO's after US Congressman, Scot Perry, alleged that USAID funding was inadvertently used to support Boko Haram activities especially in the North. These and many more allegations propelled this research using the Nollywood film, "Baby Farm" as a case study,tolook into the activities of illegal NGOs in Nigeria.

By underscoring the risks of these neglect and mismanagement collectively, critics opine that NGOs, while claiming to serve the communities, often exploit them through financial misuse, dependency creation, donor-driven misrepresentation among others. Nollywood's intimacy with the everyday experiences of the people has endeared the industry with a unique capacity of dramatizing the struggles and aspirations of the Nigerian society. Its impact on the populace has made it a central site for negotiations of central identity, social norms and political values. According to Barthlomew, Obiora, Adikuru and Nnaemeka, "Nollywood has emerged as a powerful medium for addressing societal issues, just like social media, which raises users' knowledge and brings about attitude and behavior change"(65). Their studies have also shown that audiences perceive Nollywood films as both realistic and cathartic, recognizing their own individual life experiences in the narrative. Nollywood films play their social roles by reflecting on societal challenges and inspiring viewers to advocate for change, thus, Nollywood films contribute to a more informed and active citizenry, which is essential for maintaining social stability. Films "represent the realities in the societies" (112) and "promote cultural values and morals as well as expose social ills that affect the image of the country" (2).

The Nigerian movie draws its thematic concerns mainly from the society, recounting their stories and capturing their imaginations by exploring the everyday events in the society with the aim of showcasing them for societal action. Thus, Helen Aghamelu, a Nigerian film analyst, opines that "film is the magic movement used for entertainment, information and elevation" (226). Films serve as cultural text that highlight pressing issues of social concern, positions itself, like every other art form, as mirror of social realities through the exploration of the ills in the society satirizing obnoxious norms and x-raying the society at large. These social rolls of film qualify the choice of the film, *Baby Farm*as a case study for this paper.

The Social Development Theory of Hartan, Cleveland and Garry Jecobs and the Elite Class theory of Mills C. Wrights, are used as the theoretical foundations for this paper. The social development theory defines social development as the application of the powers of the mind to organize the physical materials, social activities and mental ideas of humanity to achieve greater material, social, and spiritual experiences. The social development theory offers insight into the structural changes within the society that can aid in the effective realization of set objectives. This theory emphasizes that social development is not just about economic growth but about unleashing human creativity and building institutions that reflect evolving values. In Nigeria, NGOs embody this because they mobilize communities, foster democratic practices, and fill gapscreated by government structures. They are practical agents of the trial-and-error process that Cleveland and co describe, pushing Nigerian society toward higher levels of organization and accomplishment.

Elite Theory, on the other hand, posits that power and decision-making are concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals or institutions, the elites, who shape the direction of social and organizational development. Within businesses and NGOs, elites such as founders, board members, and donors wield disproportionate influence over priorities, resource allocation, and strategic direction. Their decisions often determine which communities are served, which projects are funded, and how organizations interact with government structures.

Synopsis of the Film "Baby Farm

The film is a narrative of the experience of four young girls with an NGO named Evans Foundations. This foundation owned by an expatriate couple specializes in luring unsuspecting pregnant and vulnerable young girls into their home with the help of paid agents. These unsuspecting, innocent, naive and helpless young women are firstly presented with a very juicy offer that is quite attractive. The story follows Adanna, a young pregnant lady who comes to

Lagos insearch of the father of her unborn child. After a fruitless effort to locate her lover, she was taken into Evans Foundation by a sex worker who doubles as a paid agent for the foundation. Her eventual realization that she has been tactically lured into a criminal network that operates a" baby farm" as an "Inside business" forms the films narrative. Her desperation to save her babies makes her seek for escape route that has to involve other inmates, exposing them to danger and leading them to a social media blogger, whose assassination serves as a catalyst for exposing the criminal network. The film highlights the manipulations, deceit, desperation, struggle for survival, betrayals and eventual exposure and destruction of the foundation, but not without some casualties.

Analysis of *Baby Farm* and the Negative Effects of NGOs in Nigeria

The film *Baby Farm* is a social commentary that critiques illegal activities of some NGOs in Nigeria, confirming that NGOs can become complicit in exploitation rather than empowerment. Evans foundation is an organization that fronts charity and humanitarian aid service to the public but thrives on selling babies. The 'Makers' as the inmates are referred to, are lured into the foundation deceptively and later imprisoned with the sole aim of making babies for sale. Adanna finds herself in the foundation believing that her problem has come to an end

The deception within the foundation runs deep. At first, the girls are welcomed with warmth and made to feel at ease on the day of their arrival. They are fed sumptuously and treated with so much love and care. Yet, this initial kindness is nothing more than a façade. Soon after, they are subjected to humiliation, intimidation, and a systematic stripping away of their dignity. What begins as a promise of care and love quickly unravels into an environment of fear and manipulation, exposing the foundation's true nature. As Adanna is led by Ebun to join the other 'Makers' she expressed her supprise thus;

Adanna: Where are we goingto? This is not where I was shown yesterday.

Ebun: That was just for the first night

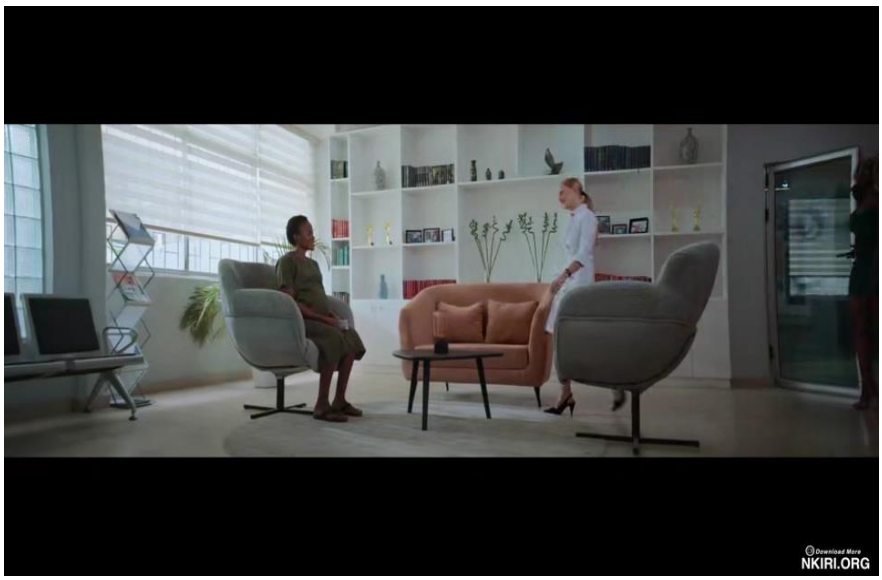


Plate 1: Adannareceiving a warm welcome from SIS. Barb. Source: Film screen shot.



Plate 2: Adanna in a very comfortable room on her first night. Source: Film screen shot.



Plate 3: Adanna's introduction with other 'Makers' in the Hostel after her first night. Source: Film screen shot.

The film also reveals that running a fake NGO has become an increasing lucrative business that can lunch the owners into societal recognition. The couple in charge of Evans Foundation, Dr.Evans and Sr. Barbara, attest to the difference in their financial and social status since the foundation becomes exploitative compared to when they were following the ethics of NGOs.

SR.BARBARA: Do you ever think that maybe we have gone too far?

DR.EVANS: How?

SR.BARBARA: We are moving too fast, pushing too hard. Things were just simple and cleaner when we were just trying to help.

DR.EVANS: Have you forgotten how poor you were, Florence Nightengale…Now look at you, rings on your fingers, Diamonds on your ears. Here we are fucking royalty.

The conversation above is a confirmation that the foundation actually derailed from the original objective of its establishment and the managers are benefiting generously from the spoils while the masses suffer.

It is a poorly governed society that exists without law. Non-governmental organizations in Nigeria operate within weak governance structure, making them susceptible to patterns of mismanagement. Evans attests to this thus:

DR. EVANS: There is no law here!!!. Money is the law. We are the law!!!

The Elite control, which is synonymous with the Elite theory, and its contribution to the corruption and sustenance of illegalities in Nigerian NGOs is highlighted in the film.The police inspector, Chief Alabi, in an attempt to cover the crimes of the foundation advices Dr Evanson what to do to save their skin thus;

CHIEF ALABI: Better start thinking of the statement you are going to make (taking him aside, he whispers). Your staff betrayed you right? …I wouldn't be part of any scandal…Set fire to your office and get out of here now!!!... You owe me.



Plate 4: Police Inspector Alabi, with Dr. Evans and Sis. Barb on the day of Reckoning planning how to cover the crime.Source: Film screen shot.

These powerful connections and elite backing these illegitimate NGOs leverage on, make it almost impossible for them to be detected. These elites are also used as deceptive measures by NGOs to conceal their illegalities from the unsuspecting public bearing in mind that the Elite have the power to make the rest of the society accept their decision without much resistance.

Social development theory stresses empowerment, helping individuals build capacity to meet their own needs. Here, the opposite is the case; humiliation and intimidation perpetuate systemic inequality. The inmates generally addressed as "Makers" are kept in a prison-like environment with close monitoring, punishments is given regularly, and they are made to conceive as many times as possible irrespective of their health conditions with any available mate assigned to them. Ebun, an 18 years old, "Maker" has been forced to conceive six times since she entered the Evans Clinic despite her age and successive still births. Excerpts:

EBUN: I've been pregnant for six times…It doesn't matter… because I lost the baby all the time

ADANNA: You mean outside?

EBUN: Inside here.

ADANNA: (Shocked). I don't understand. How long have you been here?

EBUN: Six years. I was the first girl here.



Plate 5: EBUN in the labour room the sixth time. Source: Film screen shot.



Plate 6:Dr. EVANS about to mate with one of the Makers.Source: Film screen shot.

The inmates of Evans Foundation live under very strict rules, without privacy, as their daily activities are monitored on camera including when they are copulating. Disciplinary measures are imposed on the girls irrespective of the stages of their pregnancies and health conditions. They are seen as commodities not humans and in events of casualties; they are disposed of as waste as is the case of Emen.

After helping Emen to deliver her baby, Adanna, realizes that Emen and her baby are nowhere to be found. She inquires of their where about but gets no positive response. The incident fuels Adanna's suspicion of the happenings in the clinic and her desperation to escape: Excerpts:

ADANNA: Where is Em… where is her baby?

COMFORT: I don't understand you

ADANNA: I've changed my mind…I don't want to give my baby for adoption again…

SR. BARBARA: Maybe you want to think, what is best for your baby.

ADANNA: No,I don't want to think about it… I've decided that I want to leave.

The response Adanna gets after the above agitationis solitary confinement. She is sent to the punishment room where she spends the night on a cold b floor.



Plate 7: Ebun bringing food for Adanna in the Punishment room the following morning. Source: Film screen shot.

Social development entails individual and communal growth through access to resources, education, and supportive social structures. Where these structures are absent or misappropriated, vulnerability increases. This lack of accountability allows criminal networks to thrive under NGOs' cover as witnessed in the film. Poverty and deprivation strip individuals of choices and opportunities. The social development theory, advocates that unmet basic needs (food, shelter, education) create dependency on external actors. Fraudulent NGOs exploit this dependency by presenting themselves as hope for the hopeless, leveraging on their characteristic simplicity, perceived proximity to the masses and their supposed equipment for better identification of the basic needs of the masses. The film exposes how poverty, lack of education, and desperation make the girls easy targets to fraudulent NGOs. Ebun, for instance sees the foundation as her only refuge because she comes from the streets, driven by her own mother, constantly stressing that "here is home" despite the suffering she experiences.

EBUN: I dropped out of school…I grow up on the streets…I didn't know my father…and my mother has many boyfriends and they would…I told my mother and she gave me serious beating. So, I ran away.

Adannna, ends up in the foundation after running away from her home to find the father of her unborn baby, losing her job and being thrown out by her roommate because she couldn't meet up

with the rent. The foundation offering accommodating to her is a welcomed respite for her plight. Emen's story is similar to the rest because she ends up in the foundation after getting involved with drugs and eventually getting pregnant, resulting in her parents throwing her out of the house.

Ebun, Adanna, and Emen's stories highlight exclusion from family, education, and stable housing. Social development theory argues that exclusion erodes self-worth and pushes people toward institutions that promise belonging. The foundation manipulates this need for inclusion, offering false refuge, reinforcing systematic inequality rather than alleviating the conditions of the inmates. Thus, instead of empowering the girls, the foundation uses their vulnerability to maintain dependency and control, there by falling short of their obligation as non-governmental organization.

Conclusion

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have long been celebrated as vital actors in advancing social justice, humanitarian relief, and grassroots development. Yet, their credibility has increasingly come under public scrutiny associated with mismanagement, corruption, and accountability failures. Both global analyses and Nigerian voices converge on the concern that NGOs, without proper monitoring, risk the exploitation of the trust placed on them by citizens while failing to deliver promised programs. The film, Baby Farm uses the metaphor of an NGO-run "farm" to expose the dark side of Non-Governmental Organizations in Nigeria, warning that some NGOs operate as fronts for illegal activities and exploitations of the vulnerable population. The Evans Foundation becomes a case study of how deceptive institutions can hijack the language of development under the protection of the powerful Class Elite while perpetuating irregularities. The film, also indirectly critiques the Nigerian regulatory environment, where oversight of NGOs is often weak

Recommendations

While NGOs are often celebrated as drivers of social progress, there is need, for strong oversight, transparency, detachment from Government and elitist control,and alignment with grassroots needs; to ensure their sustainable impact in the society.NGOs as alternatives to state institutions, should strive to distance themselves from replicating the same leadership and accountability flaws, and perpetuating the very poverty and underdevelopment they were designed to combat.

Therefore, for NGOs to maintain credibility, both globally and in Nigeria, they must prioritize transparency, community-centered agendas, and robust monitoring mechanisms. Failure to do so

exposes them to the risks of perpetuating the very vulnerabilities they were established to address.

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