

**CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: ROLES,
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES.**

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ABSTRACT

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in promoting good governance in Nigeria by acting as watchdogs, fostering accountability, advocating for transparency, and ensuring citizens' participation in decision-making processes. They bridge the gap between the government and the people, amplify marginalized voices, and contribute to policy formulation and implementation. However, CSOs in Nigeria face challenges such as limited funding, political interference, weak institutional capacity, and restrictive legal frameworks, which often undermine their effectiveness. Despite these obstacles, opportunities abound in the growing use of digital platforms for civic engagement, the increasing demand for accountability by the populace, and the potential for stronger collaborations with international partners and government institutions. The study adopted the Democratic Governance Theory to explain the roles, challenges and opportunities of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in ensuring good governance in Nigeria. Simple percentage and chi-square was used to test the hypotheses while 568 sampled respondents completed a structured questionnaire that was used to collect data from respondents. The study finds among others that the CSOs play significant roles in ensuring good governance in Nigeria. The study recommends among others the need for CSOs to deepen collaboration and networking among themselves and with other stakeholders, including the media, private sector, and international partners, to amplify their voices and ensure that their interventions have greater impact in promoting good governance.

Keywords: Good Governance, CSOs, Challenges, Opportunities, Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as critical stakeholders in the democratic and developmental processes of nations across the globe, and Nigeria is no exception. These organizations, which include non-governmental organizations, professional associations, faith-based groups, community-based organizations, and advocacy networks, function as intermediaries between the government and the people. In Nigeria, where democratic governance faces multiple institutional and structural challenges, civil society has played a pivotal role in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. The growth of CSOs since the return to democratic rule in 1999 has significantly influenced the governance landscape, especially in areas where government presence is weak or absent.

The contribution of civil society to good governance in Nigeria is multifaceted. These organizations help in shaping public policy through advocacy, mobilizing citizens to demand accountability, monitoring elections, and providing social services, particularly in health, education, and poverty alleviation. By giving voice to marginalized and vulnerable populations, CSOs foster inclusivity in the governance process. Furthermore, they serve as watchdogs over government activities, raising awareness and calling out instances of corruption and abuse of power. This monitoring role has led to increased pressure on political leaders to act responsibly and uphold democratic values (Ansah, 2007).

Despite their significant contributions, civil society organizations in Nigeria face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness. A major constraint is the hostile political environment, characterized by government suspicion, intimidation, and restrictive legislation. Many CSOs struggle with limited funding, which affects their operational capacity and independence. Internal governance issues such as lack of transparency, weak leadership structures, and limited accountability mechanisms have also undermined their credibility (Ansah, 2007). Furthermore, in some cases, the proliferation of opportunistic or politically motivated organizations has diluted the overall impact of genuine civil society efforts.

Another notable challenge is the limited access to information, which impedes the ability of CSOs to engage effectively in governance matters. The absence of strong partnerships between civil society and government institutions has led to a lack of synergy and trust. Moreover, public apathy and limited civic education have made it difficult for CSOs to mobilize widespread grassroots support. In addition, insecurity and violence in various parts of the country create operational hazards, particularly for organizations working in conflict-prone and marginalized communities (Falade, 2014).

Despite these setbacks, the opportunities for civil society organizations in Nigeria to contribute to good governance remain promising. The increasing use of digital technology and social media has enhanced their capacity to mobilize public opinion, share information, and hold leaders accountable in real time (Falade, 2014). Donor agencies and international organizations continue to support capacity-building and institutional strengthening efforts. The growing awareness among citizens of their rights and responsibilities presents an opening for CSOs to deepen democratic culture and civic participation.

Ultimately, for civil society to realize its full potential in promoting good governance in Nigeria, there is a need for a more enabling legal and institutional environment. This includes the protection of civic space, improved regulatory frameworks, and sustained funding mechanisms. Equally important is the need for CSOs to enhance their internal governance, build coalitions, and engage more constructively with government actors (Ansah, 2007). By overcoming these challenges and leveraging available opportunities, civil society organizations can become more effective agents of change in Nigeria's democratic journey.

OBJECTIVES

to examine;

- i. How civil society organizations contribute to good governance in Nigeria
- ii. The challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria

HYPOTHESIS

- i. There is no significant relationship between civil society organizations and good governance in Nigeria
- ii. There is no significant challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**GOOD GOVERNANCE**

According to the United Nations (UN), governance refers to the activities of all political and administrative authorities to govern their country. Meanwhile, as stated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), governance is a concept in which a country is managed, including economic, policy, and legal aspects. Thus, in general, governance has the meaning: the decision-making process and the process of determining which policies will be implemented and not implemented.

In the 1990s, the World Bank became the first international institution to adopt the concept of good governance into lending arrangements for developing countries and introduce the idea to the general public. In its 1992 report entitled "Governance and Development", the notion of good governance was written as the way in which power is used to regulate the economic and social resources of a country for development. The term good governance has often been used by national and international organizations. Good governance aims to minimize corruption, take into account the opinions of minorities, listen to the voices of the oppressed people in the decision-making process, and respond actively to the needs of the community now and in the future (Abdul, 2019). According to Oguma, Adogbeji, & Ejumudo (2025) the concept of good governance has eight principles. Participation in the concept of good governance here is an opportunity for everyone to voice their opinions through institutions or representations. In addition, everyone, without exception, has the right to freedom of association and expression. To implement good governance, the legal framework in the country must be enforced impartially, especially concerning human rights law. Transparency means that every policy taken and implemented by the government must be carried out under existing regulations. In addition, there must be a guarantee that any information related to the policy can be accessed by everyone, especially those who are directly affected by the policy. Good governance needs institutions and processes to attempt to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time. When the decision-making process cannot accommodate everyone's wishes, then at a minimum, the decision must be a decision that can be accepted by everyone and does not harm anyone. Good governance ensures justice for the community. Everyone has the same opportunity to maintain and improve their welfare. Every decision-making process and its institutions must be able to produce decisions that meet every community need. Community resources must also be utilised optimally by the government. All institutions involved in good governance have full responsibility to the public for the sake of improving the quality of society and accountability.

Smith B.C. (2007) outlines that Good Governance is an opening Policy for establishing strong determination, where decision makers are to create point of view after consensus period in institution for the decision making. The productive policy making for the institutional production is the prime objective of the concerning body .It pays an important role to reorganize the infrastructure of governing machine. The social and political problems' identifications are expected on organization mechanism which needs administration for the implementation plan ,therefore, there shall be strong mechanism of Political and Social system for strengthening economical values are possibly achieved by the good governance .The good governance is the only source of providing fundamental rights freely.(Smith, 2007)

The World Bank defines Good Governance into two sections. Firstly, Good Governance is subjected to Political System of an organization, Institution or Government to establish a strong power exercise mechanism through legitimate vote from grass root level to peak and bring an administrative scale for the betterment of the region. The Political power exercise describes the systematic approach of reformation for the sustainable development, casting position of National reformation for the national integrity in Social, Economic development. Secondly, Good Governance produces Social and Economic resources for the Human Development. The devised mechanism for creating Social Progressive atmosphere for the economic development is composite for the common man. The

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is inspired to redefine Good Governance in framework of Capacity building of civil servants, Staff incentive Program, Administrative values, financial devolution and dialogue between stakeholders such as Government and Civil society (Akindele, 2003).

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Often described as the arena outside the family, market, and state where individuals associate to advance common interests, civil society is significant in promoting transparency, accountability, and participation in governance (Levkoe et al., 2023). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a pivotal role within civil society. These organizations act as intermediaries between citizens and the state, advocating for policy reforms, raising awareness on critical issues, and holding governments accountable for their actions (Levine et al., 2023).

Civil society refers to networks and associations that are voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, mainly autonomous from the state, and governed by a legal order or set of common standards. Civil society differs from "society" in that it involves people acting collectively in the public sphere to express their interests, passions, preferences, and ideas, to exchange information, to achieve collective goals, to make demands on the state, to improve the structure and functioning of the state, and to hold government officials accountable.

Civil society is composed of autonomous associations which develop a dense, diverse and pluralistic network. As it develops, civil society will consist of a range of local groups, specialized organizations and linkages between them to amplify the corrective voices of civil society as a partner in governance and the market" (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005). Gramsci (2006) conceptualization of civil society as a terrain of ideological contention posits civil society organizations (CSOs) as agents capable of challenging hegemonic structures and advocating alternative societal visions. Similarly, Jurgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere elucidates civil society's role in facilitating rational- critical deliberations that shape political discourse and decision-making (Susen, 2023).

The key features of successful civil societies which emanate from various definitions include the following: separation from the state and the market; formed by people who have common needs, interests and values like tolerance, inclusion, cooperation and equality; and development through a fundamentally endogenous and autonomous process which cannot easily be controlled from outside. The experience of developing countries highlights a wide range of such organizations, from large registered formal bodies to informal local organizations, the latter being far more numerous and less visible to outsiders. These include traditional organizations (e.g. religious organizations and modern groups and organizations, mass movements and action groups, political parties, trade and professional associations, non-commercial organizations and community based organizations). Civil society should not be equated to non-government organizations (NGOs). NGOs are a part of civil society though they play an important and sometimes leading role in activating citizen participation in socio-economic development and politics and in shaping or influencing policy. Civil society is a broader concept, encompassing all organizations and associations that exist outside the state and the market (Akindele, 2003).

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Civil society has been widely recognized as an essential 'third' sector. Its strength can have a positive influence on the state and the market. Civil society is therefore seen as an increasingly important agent for promoting good governance like transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability.

Civil society further good governance, first, by policy analysis and advocacy; second, by regulation and monitoring of state performance and the action and behavior of public officials; third, by building

social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs, civic norms and democratic practices; fourth, by mobilizing particular constituencies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized sections of masses, to participate more fully in politics and public affairs; and fifth, by development work to improve the wellbeing of their own and other communities (Fadakinte, 2013). Civil society play a major role by contributing to greater transparency and accountability. Accountability has three dimensions: financial accountability implies an obligation of the persons handling resources, public offices or any other position of trust to report on the intended and actual use of the resources; political accountability means regular and open methods of sanctioning or rewards those who hold positions of public trust through a system of checks and balances; administrative accountability implies system of control internal to the government including civil service standards and incentives, ethnic codes administrative reviews (Rondinelli & Cheema, 2003) Through the free flow of information, which is clear and accessible, civil society groups, particularly a vibrant press, can serve as a monitoring mechanism to ensure that government policies are carried out in a manner intended and thereby significantly contribute to good governance.

Social mobilization – organization and strengthening of CBOs at grassroots/sectoral levels is another major contribution of CSOs. Many civil society groups are constituted around specific issues of social concern such as the environment, labour rights, gender equality and public health. The advocacy role played by these groups helps to bring these issues to the public spotlight and in some cases even helps to change prevailing social norms.

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Covey (1994) provides a clear breakdown of strategies used by CSOs to influence policy. She says that CSOs use five strategies to influence national policy formulation. These strategies are education, persuasion, collaboration, litigation and confrontation.

The education strategy is one where the CSOs attempt to give the government a lot of information, analysis and policy alternatives. CSOs also educate the government by creating and testing innovative development approaches that could be adopted by the state. Education is done through workshops, conferences, physical visits and initiation of pilot projects (Oni, 2014). Education strategies may also target other groups besides the government such as the public at large, the media, and CSOs or community members.

In using persuasion as a strategy, a CSO acts like a pressure group to press for policy changes and show public support. The idea here is to convince the government that the CSO supported policy or policy change needs to be recognized and enacted into legislation. Persuasion is done through various means, which cover meetings, workshops, and conferences invitations to the site, lobbying, demonstrations and even strikes. The main aim is to pressurize the government into changing its policy direction (Ukase & Audu, 2015).

The collaboration strategy is one where a CSO works hand-in-hand harmoniously with the government. Relations are usually good and amicable between the government and the CSO that is collaborating with it. Collaboration calls for mutual trust between the government and the CSO it is dealing with. It also calls for transparency within the collaborating bodies. That is, both sides need to show all their intentions, interests, needs, goals, agendas, etc. to each other. This is the basis of building trust and relationships.

In the litigation strategy, the CSOs use the courts to press for policy change. When a CSO believes that the law is being broken or misapplied it can take the government or other offending parties to court for the issue to be legally dealt with. In Zimbabwe the Commercial Farmers Union took the government to court over the new land policy by which the government aimed at redistributing land. The government intended to repossess land that it regarded as lying idle and to resettle people from the communal areas there. On the other side, the commercial farmers were arguing that their land

is private property. So the union took the government to court for embarking on the resettlement policy and legislating it by the 1992 Land Acquisition Act (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005).

Lastly, confrontation involves protesting in various forms for policy issues. The protests usually involve radical tactics such as violent demonstrations, destroying property, etc. In most cases, relationships between the government and the CSOs become sour and there is a lot of animosity between the two parties.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS CHALLENGES

Limited Resources: An important factor hindering the growth of the civil society sector is the scarcity of financial resources. Funding constraints limit the scale and functioning of CSOs, significantly impairing their ability to deliver and maintain services. In case of large NGOs, in particular, heavy reliance is frequently placed on funding from foreign donors. This is making CSOs more reflective of donor interests than those of their communities or designated target groups. Many CSOs have to review their missions or undertake work outside their mandate just to survive. The difficult economic conditions make local fundraising very difficult (Diprose, 2023). Competition for scarce resources is also limiting opportunities for coalition-building, long-term institutional development and other aspects of local capacity building. Their performance in terms of poverty reach and popular participation is also compromised. "In some instances they have neglected the landless, and other marginalized people, thereby failing to reach the poorest of the poor" (UN-NADAF, 1990-2001). Sometimes only certain regions are serviced by well-equipped CSOs, neglecting other areas more desperately in need.

Legal Treatment: A further factor impeding the development of the nonprofit sector in Nigeria has been the legal environment within which nonprofits must operate. Certainly in civil law countries such as Brazil, Thailand, and Egypt, where no "basic" right to organize is automatically recognized in law, formal law can shape the environment for action rather fundamentally. Reflecting the generally authoritarian politics that have characterized these countries during much of their recent history, the legal structure for civil society activity has been quite restrictive. For example, the Religious Bodies Registration Act of 1981 in Ghana revoked the legal status of all religious CSOs and required them to reapply through a highly restrictive registration procedure. In Brazil, Law 91 of 1935, regulating the public utility status of CSOs, was used as a means of political control and favoritism. In Egypt, Law 32 of 1964 establishes de facto government control of large segments of the civil society sector and in Thailand, the Cremation Welfare Act of 1974 was passed by the military government to preempt feared infiltration by communists. The Act required all existing local cremation and related communal welfare societies to register with the central authorities in Bangkok and to submit to State supervision (Diprose, 2023).

In other cases, the basic legal provision affecting CSOs in India, Pakistan and Ghana were borrowed from those in force in late 19th and early 20th century England through a system of legal ordinances. The environment for CSOs in these countries therefore appears quite open. To get around these general legal provisions, however, governments have added various restrictions to limit their general thrust and make them more cumbersome. Thus, for example, tax laws and related legislation often establish significant obstacles to the operation of CSOs. What this makes clear is that establishing an enabling legal environment for civil society action is only a first step towards opening a way for a viable civil society sector (Robet et al., 2023). A variety of other obstacles can easily frustrate the intent of even the most supportive legal provisions.

The Development Paradigm: One other factor helping to explain the historically constrained pattern of civil society sector development in the third world is the changing fashion in development policy and development ideology. During the 1950s and 1960s, development thinking emphasized the importance of a State as the principal agent of modernizing reforms. As a consequence, considerable

effort went into differentiating a sphere of State action outside the pre-modern structures of tribe or community, and into creating modern, secular administrative structures that could effectively operate in this sphere. This development framework included a sphere of business in addition to that of government, but it downplayed, if not excluded, CSOs which were viewed as only marginal in the frame of affairs. The shift to "structural adjustment" in the 1980s did not change this fundamentally. To the contrary, the "structural adjustment" paradigm of development merely replaced government with the private business community as the mode of development. In the process, however, it reinforced an essentially two-sector model of society that left little room for a vibrant civil society sector (Robet et al., 2023). The lack of civil society growth is thus understandable given that it been historically neglected in the central policy debate.

In short, the development of the third sector seems to have been inhibited by a long history of authoritarianism; by colonial heritage and a history of limited economic growth that restricted the growth of an independent urban middle class; by religious traditions that placed less emphasis on "modularity" and the fostering of independent institutional structures; by legal structures that often placed impediments in the way of civil society formation; and by development policies that stressed the creation of a modernizing State and later the development of private enterprise rather the promotion of independent institutions outside the confines of the market and the State.

CSOs are perceived as more flexible, participatory and responsive to local needs of the poor - all prerequisites for sustained development. State bureaucracy and corruption erodes finances and policies are often motivated by institutional, political and even kinship interests. These policies are typically urban based, delivering to politically favored areas (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005). CSOs can counter this by targeting pockets of poverty better. CSOs can potentially foster and support grassroots organizations to become more numerous, sizable, resourceful, and self-reliant. Also, grassroots contacts enable CSOs to provide critical information on potential crisis and thus contribute to early warning systems. Typically, CSOs require less financial inputs than government agencies and therefore are more cost effective, an attribute that is important in financially constrained third world countries. CSOs can be more resourceful and innovative as they involve local communities in the identification and resolution of development problems which are more cost effective, more sustainable, and more compatible with community values and norms. Over and above these direct development roles, CSOs also have a very important advocacy role to play in promoting effective governance.

Financial constraints and dependence on external funding sources also limit their ability to conduct work effectively. Civil society organizations in Nigeria face significant financial constraints that limit their capacity to operate effectively, often relying heavily on external donors for funding. This dependence on international aid creates challenges of sustainability, as funding cycles are typically short-term and may not align with the long-term needs of communities. It also exposes these organizations to donor-driven agendas, which can sometimes divert attention from pressing local priorities. Limited access to domestic resources, weak philanthropic culture, and inadequate government support further exacerbate the problem, leaving many civil society organizations struggling to maintain independence, continuity, and impact in their advocacy and development roles.

Civil society organizations often face significant capacity challenges, particularly in the areas of leadership and governance, which hinder their ability to effectively fulfill their mandates. Weak leadership structures result in poor decision-making, lack of strategic vision, and internal conflicts that compromise organizational cohesion and credibility. Similarly, governance issues such as inadequate transparency, weak accountability mechanisms, and limited stakeholder engagement erode trust and limit access to funding and partnerships (Diprose, 2023). Many organizations also struggle with succession planning, leading to overdependence on a few individuals and creating

risks of stagnation or collapse when leadership changes occur. These challenges collectively undermine the sustainability and effectiveness of civil society organizations in driving social change and holding governments accountable.

Political repression stands as a formidable barrier, with the government often resorting to crackdowns on dissent and curtailing freedom of expression. Restrictions further exacerbate the situation, with laws like the Law on Mass Organizations imposing stringent registration requirements, curtailing organizational freedoms, and limiting advocacy efforts. The chilling effect of these laws inhibits the ability of CSOs to advocate for human rights and social justice effectively.

Harassment, intimidation, and violence directed at CSOs and activists compound the challenges they face, with human rights defenders, environmental activists, and journalists often bearing the brunt of such attacks (Robet et al., 2023). These threats endanger individuals' safety and security and foster a climate of fear and self-censorship within civil society. Financial constraints present yet another hurdle, as many organizations struggle to secure sustainable funding amidst heavy reliance on international donors (Diprose, 2023). This dependence raises concerns about autonomy and accountability, with CSOs often pressured to align their agendas with donor priorities. Moreover, the proliferation of CSOs in Indonesia has increased competition for limited resources, hindering collaboration and collective action. Organizational capacity constraints further impede CSOs' ability to plan and implement programs effectively, with many lacking expertise in critical areas such as project management and financial planning. Leadership challenges compound these issues, with succession planning, governance, and transparency often falling short of best practices (Irawan, 2023). Strategic planning, essential for navigating complex challenges, remains underdeveloped, leaving many CSOs vulnerable to external disruptions and shifting political landscapes.

Internally, CSOs grapple with decision-making processes, accountability mechanisms, and organizational culture issues. Inclusivity and transparency in decision-making are often lacking, leading to conflicts and mistrust among staff and volunteers (Annahar et al., 2023). Similarly, weak accountability mechanisms hinder organizations' ability to assess and improve their effectiveness (Hastono & Ratnasari, 2020; Prince, 2023). Cultivating a culture of transparency and integrity remains a challenge for many CSOs, impacting staff morale and organizational cohesion. Thus, the myriad challenges facing CSOs in Indonesia underscore the need for concerted efforts to safeguard civil society space, promote transparency and accountability, and bolster organizational capacity.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS OPPORTUNITIES

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria enjoy significant opportunities to strengthen democratic governance and accountability. As intermediaries between citizens and the state, CSOs have the platform to amplify the voices of marginalized groups, demand transparency, and advocate for reforms in governance. The rise of democratic institutions and constitutional provisions that guarantee freedom of association and expression provide fertile ground for CSOs to actively participate in policy advocacy, election monitoring, and civic education (Irawan, 2023). These opportunities allow them to play a pivotal role in ensuring that government policies reflect the needs and aspirations of the people.

Another key opportunity lies in Nigeria's growing digital space, which has transformed the way CSOs operate and engage with citizens. Social media platforms and digital tools offer civil society a cost-effective medium for advocacy, mobilization, and public awareness campaigns. With a large youth population that is digitally active, CSOs have the chance to harness technology to reach millions of citizens, mobilize collective action, and hold leaders accountable. This digital expansion also enables them to overcome traditional barriers such as geographical limitations and lack of physical infrastructure, thereby enhancing their visibility and influence in national and international discourse (Prince, 2023).

CSOs in Nigeria also benefit from opportunities for collaboration and partnership with both local and international stakeholders. International donor agencies, development partners, and global organizations provide funding, training, and technical support that can strengthen the institutional capacity of CSOs. Locally, they have the potential to build alliances with community-based organizations, professional associations, and even progressive elements within government to advance common causes such as poverty reduction, gender equality, human rights protection, and environmental sustainability (Irawan, 2023). These partnerships not only enhance their resources but also increase their credibility and impact.

Furthermore, Nigeria's socio-economic and political challenges create avenues for CSOs to remain relevant by filling gaps where government institutions are either weak or absent. Issues such as insecurity, corruption, unemployment, poor service delivery, and environmental degradation provide spaces for civil society to intervene with innovative solutions, advocacy campaigns, and community empowerment initiatives. By aligning their programs with the needs of citizens, CSOs can enhance public trust and position themselves as vital actors in nation-building. Ultimately, these opportunities allow civil society in Nigeria to shape policies, influence reforms, and contribute significantly to social justice and sustainable development.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND GOOD GOVANCE IN NIGERIA

Good governance a central place in the discourse on development. It is being argued that without an appropriate governance structure, developing countries will not be able to either sustain economic growth or a momentum towards rapid poverty reduction. This has been the conclusion of a number of research studies trying to figure out why, despite resource allocation and good policies, broad improvements in human welfare have not occurred and improvement in services, freedom from hunger, illness and illiteracy still remain elusive.

The World Development Report, 2004 documents three ways in which services can be improved:

- i. By increasing poor clients' choice and participation in service delivery, so they can monitor and discipline providers.
- ii. By raising poor citizen's voice, through the ballot box, and making information widely available.
- iii. By rewarding the effective and penalizing the ineffective delivery of services to poor people.

Accountability is a pillar of democracy and good governance that compels the state, the private sector and civil society to focus on results, seek clear objectives, develop effective strategies and monitor and report on performance measured as objectively as possible. Transparency promotes openness of the democratic process through reporting and feedback clear processes and procedures and the conduct of actions by those holding decision-making authority. It makes information understandable and keeps clear standards accessible to citizens (Rondinelli & Cheema, 2003).

CSOs feel that in order for the government to formulate policies that are appropriate for sustainable development, their involvement is necessary since they work for development and can make important inputs to the policy making process. This involvement of CSOs in policy issues increase the likelihood that the CSOs understand the policies fully as well as ensure that policies are appropriate to the needs of the people, feasible and implementable on the ground. They can use grassroots experiences and innovations as the basis for improved policies and strengthening local capacities and structures for ongoing public participation.

CSOs provide information that is vital for the development of policies that are appropriate to the community the policy is meant to serve. CSOs, as watchdogs, can also apply pressure on the government to ensure that appropriate policies are enacted and implemented. In the implementation of policies, CSOs can monitor the application of the laws and also, where compatible

with community interests, design programs that complement rather than undermine or contradict government policies (Rondinelli & Cheema, 2003).

In Nigeria, CSOs have programs that complement the policy goals and programs of the government such as the MDGs. This necessitates a close working relationship between governments and CSOs in the formulation of policies. Also, the grassroots groups and support organizations help give voice to those who have been historically marginalized and provide them with a crucial vehicle for exercising their rights and holding government accountable. As such, they play a vital role in strengthening democracy and the skills of citizenship essential to healthy societies. Increasingly groups are concerned about gaining the necessary leverage and power, often through coalition-building, to expand these democratic opportunities and to ensure the success of their development and policy efforts.

ROLES OF CSOS IN PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA: Civil society plays a critical role in strengthening electoral processes in Nigeria by promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. Through voter education campaigns, civic groups sensitize the electorate on their rights and responsibilities, thereby reducing voter apathy and enhancing informed participation. Civil society organizations also serve as election observers, monitoring polling activities to discourage malpractice and ensure compliance with democratic standards. They advocate for electoral reforms, pushing for greater independence of electoral bodies, improved use of technology, and fair representation of marginalized groups. In addition, civil society provides platforms for dialogue between political actors, security agencies, and citizens, thereby fostering peaceful elections and reducing incidences of violence. By holding electoral institutions accountable and empowering citizens to demand credible elections, civil society remains central to the democratization process in Nigeria (Vande & Jooji, 2017).

ANTI-CORRUPTION AND POLICY ADVOCACY: Civil society plays a vital role in anti-corruption efforts and policy advocacy by promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance in both public and private sectors. Through watchdog activities, awareness campaigns, and grassroots mobilization, civil society organizations (CSOs) expose corrupt practices and demand reforms that strengthen institutional integrity (Irawan, 2023). They engage in research, monitoring, and public enlightenment to influence policies that curb corruption and foster inclusive governance. By providing platforms for citizen participation, CSOs amplify public voices in policy dialogues, lobby for legal and institutional reforms, and hold government officials accountable to their commitments. In doing so, civil society contributes to building a culture of integrity and accountability, which is essential for sustainable development and democratic consolidation.

WAR AGAINST PUBLIC CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT: Civil society plays a vital role in the war against public corruption and mismanagement by acting as a watchdog that holds government institutions and public officials accountable (Irawan, 2023). Through advocacy, public awareness campaigns, investigative reporting, and citizen engagement, civil society organizations expose corrupt practices, demand transparency in public spending, and push for institutional reforms that promote accountability. They also empower citizens to participate actively in governance processes, thereby reducing the culture of impunity that often shields corrupt actors. By fostering collaboration with the media, international partners, and anti-corruption agencies, civil society strengthens the fight against mismanagement of public resources and ensures that governance serves the collective interest of the people rather than the personal gains of a few individuals.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study relies on Democratic Governance Theory which emphasizes the principles of participation, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, and the rule of law as fundamental to effective governance. It argues that governance is not limited to the activities of the state but involves the collective roles of government institutions, civil society, and the private sector in decision-making and policy implementation (Guo, 2006). The theory underscores the idea that legitimacy in governance is derived from the active involvement of citizens in shaping policies that affect their lives, as well as from leaders being accountable to the people through democratic institutions and processes. By promoting equity, respect for human rights, and responsiveness to citizens' needs, Democratic Governance Theory provides a framework for ensuring political stability, sustainable development, and social justice within societies.

Democratic governance theory provides a useful lens to explain the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria. CSOs serve as watchdogs by monitoring government actions, exposing corruption, and demanding accountability, while also fostering citizen participation in policymaking and strengthening democratic values. They create platforms for marginalized voices, advocate for social justice, and push for reforms that promote transparency and responsive leadership. However, their effectiveness is challenged by limited funding, weak institutional capacity, restrictive government regulations, and political interference, which often undermine their independence. Despite these challenges, CSOs in Nigeria have significant opportunities to leverage digital activism, international partnerships, and grassroots mobilization to expand their influence, enhance policy advocacy, and contribute more meaningfully to consolidating democracy and promoting good governance.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Using the survey approach, the study used a descriptive research design. The data were presented and analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square analysis. People with good knowledge and who have participated in one way or the other in civil society organizations activities in Delta State was used for this study. The purposive sampling techniques was employed to choose the survey respondents. A structured questionnaire was employed as the data gathering tool. There are two section to the questionnaire. The three sections of the instrument correspond to the research questions that were developed for the study. The four-point likert scale was scored as follows: 4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for strongly disagreed and 1 for disagreed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the six hundred questionnaire (600), only five hundred and sixty eight (568) were found. This suggests that the instrument thirty two (32) copies could not be accounted for. This is sufficient for data analysis since it shows that 94.7% of the questionnaire were returned and 5.3% were lost. Thus, the 568 collected questionnaire served as the basis for the data analysis.

Table 1: Analysis of demographic characteristics of respondents

| Items | | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Age | 18-25 | 98 | 17.3 |
| | 26-33 | 195 | 34.3 |
| | 34 and above | 275 | 48.4 |
| | Total | 568 | 100 |
| Sex | Male | 430 | 75.7 |
| | Female | 138 | 24.3 |

| | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----|------|
| | Total | 568 | 100 |
| Religion | Christianity | 389 | 68.5 |
| | Islam | 53 | 9.3 |
| | African Traditional Religion | 126 | 22.2 |
| | Total | 568 | 100 |
| Marital Status | Married | 221 | 38.9 |
| | Single | 347 | 61.1 |
| | Total | 568 | 100 |
| Education | SSCE | 87 | 15.3 |
| | B.Sc | 298 | 52.5 |
| | M.Sc | 112 | 19.7 |
| | PH.D | 71 | 12.5 |
| | Total | 568 | 100 |

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 1 show the demographic characteristics of respondents. 98 respondents of 17.3% are between the age group of 18-25. 195 respondents of 34.3% are 26-33 years old. 275 respondents of 48.5% are between the age of 34 and above. Thus, the study is dominated by respondents between the age group of 34 and above. 430 respondents of 75.7% are male while 138 respondents of 24.3% are female. Thus, this study is dominated by male gender. 389 respondents of 68.5% are Christians. 53 respondents of 9.3% are Islam while 126 respondents of 22.2% are of African Traditional Religion. Thus, this study is dominated by Christians. 221 respondents of 38.9% are married while 347 respondents of 61.1% are single. Thus, this study is dominated by single respondents. 87 respondents of 15.3% are SSCE holders, 298 respondents of 52.5% are B.Sc holders, 112 respondents of 19.7% are M.Sc holders while 71 respondents of 12.5% are Ph.D holders. This shows that the study is dominated by B.Sc holders.

Table 2: How civil society organizations contribute to good governance in Nigeria

| Statement | SA | A | SD | D | %A | %D |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| Does Civil Society Organizations contribute to good governance in Nigeria? | 178 | 224 | 72 | 94 | 70.8 | 29.2 |
| Civil Society Organizations agitations influences Government policies | 155 | 201 | 104 | 108 | 62.7 | 37.3 |
| Civil Society Organizations agitate for the interest of the common man and equity | 172 | 252 | 59 | 85 | 74.6 | 25.4 |
| Civil Society Organizations act as voice of the deprived and oppressed in the society | 177 | 266 | 50 | 75 | 78 | 22 |

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 2 shows the simple percentage analysis of how civil society organizations contribute to good governance in Nigeria. 70.8% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations contribute to good governance in Nigeria while 29.2% of respondents disagreed. 62.7% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations agitations influences Government policies while 37.3% of respondents disagreed. 74.6% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations agitate for the interest of the common man and equity while 25.4% of respondents disagreed. 78% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations act as voice of the deprived and oppressed in the society while 22% of respondents disagreed.

Table 3: The challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria

| Statements | SA | A | SD | D | %A | %D |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| Civil Society Organizations faces the challenges of financial incapability to push for their goals | 168 | 236 | 76 | 88 | 71.1 | 28.9 |
| Civil Society Organizations faces the challenges of military threat to their members and access to detail information's to work with | 187 | 257 | 56 | 68 | 78.2 | 21.8 |
| Civil Society Organizations provide opportunities for the common man and oppressed to seek justice and better life in the state | 121 | 213 | 106 | 128 | 58.8 | 41.2 |
| Civil Society Organizations provide opportunity for better policy formulation and implementation for the good of all | 158 | 224 | 90 | 96 | 67.3 | 32.7 |

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 3 shows the simple percentage analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria. 71.1% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations faces the challenges of financial incapability to push for their goals while 28.9% of respondents disagreed. 78.2% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations faces the challenges of military threat to their members and access to detail information's to work with while 21.8% of respondents disagreed. 58.8% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations provide opportunities for the common man and oppressed to seek justice and better life in the state while 41.2% of respondents disagreed. 67.3% of respondents agreed that Civil Society Organizations provide opportunity for better policy formulation and implementation for the good of all while 32.7% of respondents disagreed.

Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: there is no significant relationship between civil society organizations and good governance in Nigeria

Table 4: Chi-square analysis of questionnaire for the relationship between civil society organizations and good governance in Nigeria

| Sources of Variation | Responses | | Df | X2-Cal | X2-Crit | Alpha Level | Decision |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|----|--------|---------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| | Observed | Expected | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree (SA) | 682 | 142 | 3 | 130.57 | 7.82 | 0.05 | Significant Ho1 rejected |
| Agree (A) | 943 | 142 | | | | | |
| Strongly Disagree (SD) | 285 | 142 | | | | | |
| Disagree (D) | 362 | 142 | | | | | |

Source: Field Work 2025

Table 4 shows that there is significant relationship between Civil Society Organizations and good governance in Nigeria. The calculated value of 130.57 is greater than the chi-square table value of 7.82. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between Civil Society Organizations and good governance in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: there is no significant challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria

Table 5: Chi-square analysis of questionnaire for the significant challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria

| Sources of Variation | Responses | | Df | X2-Cal | X2-Crit | Alpha Level | Decision |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|----|--------|---------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| | Observed | Expected | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree (SA) | 634 | 142 | 3 | 112.11 | 7.82 | 0.05 | Significant Ho2 rejected |
| Agree (A) | 929 | 142 | | | | | |
| Strongly Disagree (SD) | 328 | 142 | | | | | |
| Disagree (D) | 380 | 142 | | | | | |

Source: Field Work 2025

Table 5 shows that there is significant challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria. The calculated value of 112.11 is greater than the chi-square table value of 7.82. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were drawn based on the major findings of this study:

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in promoting good governance in Nigeria by acting as watchdogs, advocates, and mediators between the government and the citizens. They contribute to transparency, accountability, policy advocacy, civic education, and the protection of human rights, thereby strengthening democratic values. Despite facing challenges such as limited funding, political interference, weak institutional capacity, and restrictive laws, CSOs have continued to provide platforms for citizen participation and demand for accountability. Their efforts have been instrumental in shaping public opinion, monitoring government activities, and pushing for reforms that enhance democratic governance.

However, the effectiveness of CSOs in promoting good governance in Nigeria largely depends on how well they can overcome the challenges that limit their operations and seize the opportunities available in the democratic space. By embracing partnerships, capacity building, and the use of technology, CSOs can expand their reach and influence in governance processes. Furthermore, strengthening collaboration between civil society, the media, and international organizations can create stronger advocacy networks that push for systemic reforms. Thus, while the road to achieving

good governance in Nigeria remains complex, civil society organizations remain indispensable actors whose roles, if fully harnessed, can contribute significantly to building a more transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance system.

RECOMMENDATION

In the light of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Civil society organizations in Nigeria should strengthen their capacity for policy advocacy and constructive engagement with government institutions to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance. This requires building stronger research and data-driven advocacy to influence decision-making processes effectively.
- ii. There is a need for CSOs to deepen collaboration and networking among themselves and with other stakeholders, including the media, private sector, and international partners, to amplify their voices and ensure that their interventions have greater impact in promoting good governance.
- iii. CSOs should invest more in civic education and grassroots mobilization to enhance public awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities, thereby fostering active citizen participation in governance and holding leaders accountable.
- iv. It is important for CSOs to adopt innovative funding strategies and improve internal governance structures to overcome financial and credibility challenges, ensuring sustainability and maintaining public trust while carrying out their roles in promoting good governance.

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