Barriers Faced by Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Good Governance in Bo City

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Abstract

This study examines the barriers faced by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in promoting good governance in Bo City. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research employed both primary and secondary data collection tools to gather insights from stakeholders within the civil society landscape. The findings reveal that CSOs in Bo City encounter significant obstacles that hinder their effectiveness in promoting good governance. Key barriers identified include widespread corruption, which undermines trust and accountability; disunity among CSOs, leading to fragmented efforts and a lack of coherent advocacy; financial constraints that limit operational capacity; politicization of CSOs, which often aligns their agendas with political interests rather than community needs; and capacity gaps in skills and resources necessary for effective governance promotion.

The study highlights that these barriers not only diminish the influence of CSOs but also adversely affect the broader governance landscape in Bo City. In response to these challenges, the research recommends targeted interventions such as the provision of training programs to enhance the skills of CSO personnel, thereby fostering greater effectiveness in advocacy and governance initiatives. Additionally, improving local revenue mobilization strategies is suggested to alleviate financial constraints, allowing CSOs to operate more independently and sustainably.

Keywords: Civil Society Organizations, Barriers, Good Governance, Bo City

1. Introduction

The contemporary concept of civil society originated in the 18th century and was shaped by political thinkers such as Thomas Paine and George Hegel, who articulated civil society as a domain distinct from, although alongside, the state (Carothers, 1999).

Civil society has emerged as a significant concept in the discourse and practice of modern development. It now constitutes a pivotal component of the consensus within the Western 'development community' regarding reforming politics in African nations (and beyond) to enhance governance and ultimately foster accelerated development (David Williams, 1990). Civil society is a crucial element of democratization as it establishes an essential connection between citizens and the state.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are characterized primarily by their objective of enhancing collective welfare and advocating for a societal model founded on values and rights. CSOs advocate for safeguarding public goods, including environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation, peace, human security, universal rights access, and the implementation of democratic governance based on the rule of law. Sierra Leone is a post-conflict society grappling with the repercussions of a protracted civil war, enduring numerous disease outbreaks, and facing a precarious political environment characterized by contentious elections and leadership disputes. It requires a robust civil society that not only functions as a system of checks and balances but also ensures accountability from both the government and its citizens in the event of a failure to fulfill their obligations.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are essential in establishing democracies grounded on the rule of law, addressing public needs, and exhibiting accountability and openness to the populace. Moreover, civil society is often considered a crucial 'third' sector. Its strength can positively impact the state. It is regarded as a crucial actor in advancing good governance, including transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness, and accountability.

In environments where they can function autonomously without governmental censorship, Civil Society Organizations benefit from freedom of speech and association, as enshrined in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which they leverage to promote the collective welfare of humanity. This fosters an environment that enables them to significantly enhance transparency and accountability.

Civil society serves as a "space" that facilitates interaction between the individual and the State. It lacks a definitive characterization; however, there is a consensus that it includes institutions such as religious organizations, labor unions, charities, community groups, nonprofits, and the media. In mature democratic regimes, these institutions enhance formal processes like voting and assist citizens in influencing the culture, politics, and economy of their nation (John, 2012).

Participatory democracy has been a characteristic of human society from Aristotle to John Locke and from Tocqueville to Lincoln since ancient antiquity. Participatory democracy facilitates engagement and aims to expand the accessibility of such possibilities to a wider population. It is posited that enhancing participation across time and space improves governmental efficiency and effectiveness, thereby reinforcing legitimacy (John, 2012). Consequently, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are orientated towards active involvement in developmental processes and good governance.

2. Civil Society Landscape in Sierra Leone

The civil society landscape in Sierra Leone is dynamic, characterized by a rich history of activism, from advocating for independence during the colonial era to significantly contributing to the nation’s transition from dictatorship and conflict to peace and democracy. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) played a pivotal role in the Lomé Peace Accord and the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Since that time, they have proliferated and broadened their functions, with the direct assistance of development partners. They have also illustrated their significant roles during recent hardships by addressing deficiencies in public service provision, in the absence of an operational public sector (European Union, 2018).

On their effectiveness, civil society in Sierra Leone has been historically weak since independence. From independence until 1990, the public space essential for the development of civil society was not only absent but also significantly constrained (CIVICUS, 2004). Civil society has most often aligned its advocacies with the government in power, occasionally acting in its favor. Some civil society movements were established by political regimes, resulting in a deficiency of autonomy, credibility, and neutrality. This revealed an irony in that these civil society groups recognized the necessity of holding public officials accountable yet opted not to, due to their self-interests (Jean Grugel, et. al, 1999).

From 1990 to 2000, Sierra Leone had growninto a dynamic civil society movement. The early 1990s can be characterized as the era of civil society in Sierra Leone. The coup by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) against the All Peoples Congress Government of Dr. Joseph SaiduMomoh on April 29, 1992, was a pivotal moment in the evolution of civil society in Sierra Leone.Since that time, civil society in Sierra Leone has been revitalized. In the nation's contemporary history, diverse voluntary societies and civic organizations have been instrumental in uniting individuals to advance the common good. Their endeavors have resulted in the establishment of a vibrant multicultural civic activity that has significantly influenced public opinion from

grassroots levels. The initial endeavors to establish a space independent of political institutions served as a precursor to the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that arose in postwar Sierra Leone.

Also, the birth of a novel operational paradigm of CSOs in Sierra Leone resulted from the aftermath of the nation's decade-long civil conflict. It was further strengthened by the changing of NGO policies, following the quick rise of CSOs in post-war Sierra Leone (Shellac Davies, 2010).

The increasing number of Civil Society Organizations in Bo District encompasses both formal and informal entities, extending from local community control to national levels. These organizations participate in a range of activities, from essential everyday services to efforts aimed at influencing state policy. CSOs operate in diverse domains and are often distinguished by their overlapping programs and activities. The efficacy of successful CSOs in performing their role is predominantly contingent upon their institutional capacity as agents of consolidated democracy (Diamonds, 1999). Although the necessary institutional capability may exist, it cannot be explicitly stated that Democratic Governance is readily attainable. A good performance of democratic governance typically occurs when there is a synergistic partnership and alliance between civil society organizations and the government.

The provision of CSO services has grown throughout the years, as organizations became vital information sources during the 2018 election period and coordinated efficiently with the government in service-related endeavors. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) deliver services in multiple domains, such as education, healthcare, land and environmental management, natural resource stewardship, food and agriculture, infrastructure, governance, democracy and electoral processes, and local administration.

3. Civil Society Organizations and Good Governance

Good governance has existed since the inception of governance. Recent discussions over effective governance have been prompted by the endemic power outage in Bo, pervasive poverty, enduring corruption, higher food and commodity prices, and other socioeconomic challenges in the nation and their correlation with government actions. Effective governance necessitates a responsive administration that handles emerging societal challenges through appropriate legislation and regulation.

The Civil Society Index evaluation indicates that civil society values are deficient in Sierra Leone. CSOs do not adhere to principles of good governance and gender justice. Civil Society Organizations are marked by a culture of secrecy and corruption. Most CSOs lack internal democracy, accountability, and transparency, with leadership predominantly held by its founders. Occasionally, the CSOs are established as family organizations to secure donor financing (Civil Society Index Report for the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2004-2006).

At times, only some locations receive services from adequately equipped CSOs, while other places in greater need are overlooked. Besides functioning as channels for service delivery and development promotion, donors have aimed to establish CSOs as advocates and enforcers of governmental accountability. International development partners aim to assist organizations involved in public accountability initiatives, fostering citizen participation in civic affairs, and impacting governmental policy.

The government's lack of cooperation significantly hinders the operational effectiveness of civil society organizations in service delivery. In numerous countries, particularly when democratic governance is underdeveloped, governments perceive civil society organizations as allies of opposition politicians and so employ bureaucratic and administrative measures to intimidate them. The absence of governmental goodwill towards civil society organizations (CSOs) has hindered collaboration between the government and CSOs, hence diminishing their effectiveness and efficiency, and occasionally preventing them from attaining their

established aims and objectives.

The government's disregard for civil society organizations has rendered their working environment inhospitable. Consequently, several prominent government officials have publicly shown disdain for the operations of civil society organizations within Bo City, further exacerbating the relationship between CSOs and the government. This suggests that despite the alignment of objectives between CSOs and the government in serving the same populace, the government's prevailing environment is undermining and disrupting the synergy necessary for effective collaboration in serving citizens. This is a challenge that the government must promptly confront.

Insufficient competency levels among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in any professional environment influence the skill and training levels, which in turn affect the organization's overall competence, effectiveness, and efficiency. It is discouraging to discover that the majority of civil society organizationsin Bo City have difficulties in acquiring a trained workforce, particularly social workers.

Civil society organizations exhibit diminished transparency to the public, resulting in numerous issues remaining unobserved. The majority of Civil Society Organizationsin Bo City do not generate annual reports. Such has undermined their ability to demonstrate accountability to the people they serve on projects and activities implemented. A further issue related to CSOs is inadequate professionalism and management. Numerous civil society organizations lack qualified personnel. They possess insufficient competence in fundraising, strategic planning, and related areas. Some civil society organizations are closely associated with certain political parties.

Since the establishment of Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organization (SLANGO) as an overarching entity tasked with the unification of all Civil Society Organizations in the nation, there’s now an available data on the number of registered CSOs, and the type of activities they undertake. This has resulted in an increase in information dissemination and networking. During an interview with some CSOs in Bo, they pointed at the bureaucratic processesat SLANGO which often dissuade new organizations from joining the overarching regulatory body.

The emergence of these advocacy groups initiated efforts that facilitated public empowerment, prompting numerous donors and particular governments to invest significantly in civil society as a means of transformation. Civil societies were not confined just to the realm of political and civil liberty; they were also perceived as instruments for fostering development, alleviating poverty, and distributing humanitarian relief. Civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations, played significant roles and emerged as powerful advocates for development in many African countries, including Sierra Leone.

International development partners and assistance agencies have contended that the efficacy of development and democratic governance relies on a strong state and a dynamic, competent, and healthy civil society. A robust and competent civil society can assume a collaborative rather than competing role, serve as an interface with governments and other stakeholders, and fulfill a watchdog function in the development process. Civic engagement is essential for enhancing responsive, responsible, and accountable governance structures and practices. A robust and effective civil society necessitates access to information, the capacity to collect and utilize evidence to shape its policy recommendations, and comprehensive engagement with the government (Africa Forum on Civil Society and Governance Assessments, 2011).

The significance of CSOs in democratic governance in Africa is vital. Some of these organizations not only focused on establishing a democratic system but also aimed to alleviate the populace's suffering by addressing social and economic issues, including health, education, youth empowerment, and good governance, among others. They serve as the voice for society.

4. Literature Review

Civil society, or "civic space," functions as an intermediary between the government and the private sector. Civil society demonstrates an understanding of the public domain and a dedication to the collective welfare. It is a realm of voluntary public service wherein both the government and the citizenry are reminded of their obligations to the state and held accountable for their acts.

Ghaus-Pasha (2004) observed that during the past thirty years, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have increasingly influenced public policy at local, national, and global levels. These civil society organizations view themselves as champions of the public interest, tasked with addressing the physical, environmental, and social harm they claim has been caused by corporations and governments. They promote worldwide regulation or prohibition of specific behaviors they deem harmful and actively demand increased openness and accountability from governments and industries. In specific cases, these organizations obtain formal recognition in the regulatory process and have the power to appoint representatives to tribunals, supervisory boards, and other bodies that implement and oversee regulatory functions.

Collins (2005) examined global governance concerns and noted that, in affluent nations, the role of civil society organizations was prioritized in national development, unlike in poor ones. His assertion was influenced by the observation that in developed nations, civil society organizations are afforded an unrestricted platform to engage in the governance process, whereas, in developing nations, such autonomy to participate in governance is not granted by individuals in pivotal leadership roles. The equilibrium of power has not been attained in these nations, which has resulted in reports of authority and power abuse.

Governance has emerged as a critical worldwide concern, linked to the movement in individuals' aspirations towards their interests. Johns (2005) examined the elements of governance and noted that it encompasses a discourse that extends to human rights issues. This orientation is regarded as a multifaceted issue that intersects with the political, social, technological, religious, ethnic, and economic structures of society. Individuals in these regions desire optimal government performance, as they lack the capacity to mobilise the requisite force for a cohesive and esteemed perspective. Consequently, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have emerged as the sole entities capable of orchestrating the necessary efforts to confront those who wield power within governance systems.

Most CSOs in Bo City exhibits their strengths in advocacy by opposing the government, while also failing to educate the populace about their civic responsibility to the state. Panny (2011) asserts that the civil society movement should not solely focus on opposing the government, but rather on assisting the government in executing its goals, as this is the sole pathway to achieving genuine growth. Civil society emerges as a pivotal stakeholder in the national agenda within such an atmosphere. Civil society, as a principal stakeholder, exerts influence on constitutional matters and the execution of government initiatives to achieve its goals. Studies consistently demonstrate that political affiliations of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) compel them to operate and wield influence in markedly distinct manners. Consequently, whether addressing external agendas or initiating their own actions, possessing either an instrumental or expressive focus, or operating on the periphery or within the mainstream, the importance of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is frequently intertwined with the particular activities they engage in at any moment (Pollard & Court, 2005).

Furthermore, civil society organizations can serve as pivotal agents in the creation or dissemination of certain terminology within policy discussions. The formulation of terminology is crucial, as it frequently transcends mere wordplay. Consequently, it is essential to determine which views and interests are acknowledged and which are disregarded (Pollard & Court, 2005).

5. Research Methodology

The research utilized both primary and secondary data collection methods. The study focused on the challenges faced by civil society organizations in Sierra Leone, specifically in Bo City in their efforts to promote good governance. Key informant interviews were conducted with civil society organizations and government stakeholders. The research employs a descriptive approach and extensively utilizes various secondary data sources, including reports, academic journal articles, magazines, and newspapers, to illustrate the barriers faced by civil society organizations in promoting good governance.

6. Discussions of Findings

Although CSOs undertake several duties to enhance good governance, they encounter significant problems that impede their capacity to advocate for societal needs and effectively hold the government accountable for its obligations to citizens. The research findings identify the following challenges as barriers hindering the efforts of CSOs in advancing good governance.

Systemic Corruption

Corruption is prevalent among Civil Society Organizations, plagued by insufficient internal democracy, accountability, and openness. Corrupt practices by both government personnel and civil society organizations were identified as a significant factor constraining the impact of civil society on government. During an interview with civil society activists in Bo, they indicated that specific 'unwritten rules' must be adhered to in order to obtain government funding or affect public policy. This compromise has undermined their capacity to advocate for rights and justice. Individuals who disregard these 'unwritten rules' may face exclusion, penalties, or even intimidation. Such actions undermine the ethical credibility of several Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and make them readily overlooked when advocating for improved political and socio-economic governance in the country. A report from Audit Service Sierra Leone implicated prominent Civil Society figures in the embezzlement and misappropriation of emergency money designated for combating Ebola in the country (Audit Service Sierra Leone, 2015). All of these factors undermine public trust in the activities of Civil Society Organizations in Sierra Leone thereby limiting their influence on governance.

A Divided Civil Society Organizations

Even with the existence of Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), CSOs are divided on many fronts including policy, finance, politics, and the public interest. The divided nature of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bo City severely impede initiatives aimed at fostering good governance. This fragmentation results in redundant initiatives, weakened advocacy, and a deficiency of unified strategies which may frustrate stakeholders and dwindle the overall efficacy of their advocacies. The disunity of CSOs weakens their collective voice, hindering their ability to influence politicians and hold public institutions accountable. In addition to fostering rivalry for scarce resources, disunity undermines cooperation on fundamental issues and divert attention from common objectives. The absence of collaboration may lead to wasted opportunities for combined campaigns that could affect significant change. Moreover, division undermines public trust in civil society, as communities may view civil society organisations as self-serving rather than dedicated to the collective welfare. The lack of unity impedes CSOs' capacity to advocate successfully for openness, accountability, and participatory governance, which are crucial for establishing strong democratic institutions.

Low Levels of Institutionalization

Although Sierra Leone possesses numerous formal Civil Society Organizations, the majority do not function as institutions. This does not imply that institutions are inherently beneficial. Institutions can be detrimental. Nevertheless, institutions possess enhanced capacity for organizational autonomy, mandate coherence, functional boundaries, and procedural reliability and compliance. Organizations lacking these attributes possess

limited capabilities for enforcing responsibility. These are the characteristics predominantly absent in civil society organizations in Bo City.

Many official Civil Society Organizations lack administrative and financial regulations. Some are portfolio organizations and do not have office space. A significant proportion of civil society organizations in Sierra Leone are individually owned, and established solely to obtain global funding. A DFID assessment (2003) regarding civil society in Sierra Leone has labeled them as 'ghost' organizations. They consistently extend mandates and functional limits to pursue any initiative funded by donors.

Weak Financial Base

The lack of independent financial revenue generation severely impairs the efficacy of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Bo City by constraining their operational capability, sustainability, and autonomy. In the absence of consistent financial sources, CSOs encounter difficulties in retaining personnel, executing programs, and conducting vital advocacy efforts. This financial instability frequently compels organizations to depend on donor money, which may impose particular agendas or restrictions, thereby compromising their autonomy and capacity to really meet community needs. Thus, this reliance may result in a mismatch between the objectives of CSOs and the priorities of their donors, inhibiting growth and adaptability. Furthermore, insufficient financial resources hinder outreach initiatives, constraining their capacity to foster community engagement and support. The absence of independent financial support jeopardises the sustainability ofCSOs and undermines their capacity to foster accountability, social justice, and public engagement, which are essential elements for a robust democratic society.

Lack of Capacity

Civil society organizations exhibit a significant deficiency in specialized skills for interacting with and engaging the central government, funders, or other civil society entities. In many cases, prospects for outside assistance are what motivate civil society's interactions with the state. Most CSOs in Bo City cannot engage communities on governance due to finance, expertise, and space. This implies that numerous additional challenges necessitating civil society's attention may remain unaddressed without external funding opportunities.

Despite Civil Society Organizations identifying specific issues and working with the state, deficiencies in negotiation and lobbying skills often hinder their capacity to effect change. They frequently succumb to pessimism on the efficacy of their accountability demands or resort to improvised, disorganized, and unprofessional practices. In certain instances, violent confrontations with government officials have been integral to civil society's negotiation for changes in social responsibility demands in Bo City.

The low level of advocacy and engagement skills significantly constrains CSOs in their endeavors to advance democratic good governance in Bo City. In the absence of proficient advocacy abilities, Civil Society Organizationsencounter difficulties in clearly conveying their messages, thus impeding their capacity to influence policymakers and garner public support on initiatives that promote good governance in the country. Lack of capacity may result in limited community participation, hence lessening the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at fostering transparency and accountability. When Civil Society Organizations fail to communicate or interact effectively with diverse stakeholders, they forfeit opportunities to establish coalitions and promote collaboration, which are crucial for facilitating systemic change and development. Moreover, insufficient negotiating and conflict resolution skills hinder CSOs from properly tackling barriers and dissenting perspectives, by further distancing them from decision-makers within the city. This skills gap not only erodes their credibility but also reduces their ability to educate the public and fight for policies that support democratic values. The rising frequency of power outages, unemployment, and youth violence has heightened tensions with government officials as civil society seeks to negotiate reforms in social responsibility demands in Bo City.

Politicization of Public Interests

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Sierra Leone are experiencing heightened politicization, which compromises their autonomy and usefulness in advocating for societal needs. A plethora of Civil Society Organizations have traditionally fulfilled crucial functions in lobbying, human rights, and community development. The increasing influence of political parties over the work of civil society organizations, however, has resulted in their alignment with certain agendas, therefore undermining their founding objectives. This politicization is evident in financial reliance on government or party-affiliated sources, which distort priorities towards political goals instead of community needs.

Furthermore, political actors often utilize civil society organizations to enhance their legitimacy, resulting in an ambiguous distinction between advocacy and partisanship. This self-serving interest has compromised their ability to voice out their opinions on bad governance. The resulting breakdown obstructs collective action and undermines public trust in civil society organizations, which are vital for democratic participation. Consequently, the primary goal of these organizations—to function as autonomous watchdogs and promoters of public engagement—becomes progressively challenging to realize in the present political environment.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Civil Society Organizations are valued for their ethical support of good governance and service delivery. They have the potential to reduce authoritarianism, improve public accountability, encourage popular engagement, and defend the rule of law to improve government and service delivery. Civil Society Organizations are receiving greater donor funding to communicate and advocate with the government on crucial policy issues, widening public conversation and making decision-making processes more transparent. Notwithstanding the endeavors of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to foster good governance, the research findings indicate that their activities are constrained by many structural impediments, including corruption, insufficient capability, politicization, financial deficits, inadequate organizational frameworks, and internal divisions. These obstacles have frequently led to the perception of CSOs as entities that priorities their self-serving interests over community benefit, rendering them susceptible to manipulation and abuse by politicians and donor partners.

The following are recommendations to improve on the activities undertaken by CSOs in promoting good governance in the Bo.

1. Invest in extensive training programs to augment the competencies of CSO personnel in Bo City, focusing on advocacy, community engagement, and financial management. These training initiatives can enable them to champion the social welfare requirements of the populace. Bo City faces challenges including recurrent power outages, inadequate road infrastructure, higher crime rates, and substandard health services. Enhancing the advocacy capabilities of CSOs through workshops and mentorship programs can empower these organizations to articulate their objectives, mobilize resources, and engage stakeholders effectively.

2. The CSOs in Bo need to breathe new life into their networks and coalitions with the goal of promoting collaboration and collective action. When organizations work together, they can share knowledge, amplify their voices, and tackle common issues more effectively. This will increase their influence on governance. Additionally, by working together, there will be less duplication of activities and less fear of any one organization becoming too dominant on social issues.

3. In order for CSOs in Bo to have objective, non-biased opinions, they should be able to get their financial support. They must advocate for measures to broaden their financing base beyond just foreign contributors. Fundraising events, collaborations with businesses, and requests for grants from local foundations are all

examples of what could fall under this category. An organization's ability to stay in operation and meet the needs of its community is directly correlated to its level of financial independence.

4. The function of CSOs should be better understood, and more citizen engagement encouraged, through the launch of community outreach programs. They will encounter fewer obstacles in their pursuit of excellent governance in Bo City as a result of these initiatives, which can be more accurately reflected in community goals when local communities are engaged through seminars and awareness-raising activities, which can build trust.

5. The effectiveness of CSO efforts to promote good governance in Bo may be assessed by establishing rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems. Organizations can find ways to develop by keeping track of their progress and outcomes. Then, they can show their stakeholders what they've accomplished and get their support.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in the publication of this paper.

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