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Sustainable Governance Strategies for Civil Society Organizations in Indonesia: Navigating Institutional Challenges and Democratic Resilience

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Abstract: Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia play an important role in strengthening social development and democratic processes; however, their governance continues to face a range of challenges that limit their effectiveness. This study aims to analyze CSO governance in Indonesia by examining both enabling and inhibiting factors, particularly those related to human resources, funding, and public legitimacy, and to formulate strategies for strengthening the role of CSOs. This study employed a qualitative method with a literature review approach, drawing on reports, academic articles, and policy documents. The findings indicate that CSOs contribute to various programs in the areas of social welfare, community empowerment, and democratic participation, yet they are often constrained by weak leadership capacity, limited organizational management, dependence on unstable funding sources, and declining public trust resulting from cases of abuse of authority. To address these challenges, this study draws on the collaborative governance framework of Ansell and Gash, which emphasizes strategies such as building trust, maintaining commitment, fostering shared understanding, engaging private actors, sharing resources, and strengthening societal legitimacy. The study concludes that effective CSO governance requires synergy between internal organizational reform and collaborative strategies involving the state, the private sector, and society more broadly, thereby enabling CSOs to maximize their role as partners in sustainable social development and democratic governance in Indonesia.

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I. Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) function as institutional platforms for citizen participation in achieving public goals, advancing advocacy, education, community mobilization, and policy monitoring, alongside a wide range of activities that strengthen democratization, sustainable development, and social welfare (Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). CSOs, often referred to as community organizations, represent a collective of organizations that articulate the interests of civil society at both national and subnational levels. Their defining characteristics include voluntarism, self-reliance, and independence, and they operate in a free public sphere that enables citizens to participate actively in public affairs without excessive state intervention. Examples include community-based organizations, human rights advocacy groups, environmental organizations, and professional associations. Importantly, CSOs act as a counterbalance to state and market power while serving as key enablers of inclusive and sustainable governance.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia have undergone significant development, particularly since the 1998 Reform era, which opened up space for freedom of assembly and association. By 2016, the number of civil society organizations and NGOs had increased rapidly from thousands to hundreds of thousands (Wardani, 2024). These organizations not only serve as a counterbalance to the government but also act as partners in addressing social issues and promoting good governance, such as monitoring corruption and ensuring government transparency. NGOs and civil society organizations play a vital role in advocating for human rights, community empowerment, and government transparency. They contribute to the development of democracy and help maintain the balance of state power. As social, political, and economic complexities continue to evolve, the role of NGOs and civil society organizations has become increasingly crucial in shaping public policy and driving sustainable social change. The development of civil society organizations in Indonesia has shown significant progress, with CSOs playing a central role in democracy, empowerment, and government oversight, although they still face

various challenges regarding their operational space and organizational sustainability.

CSOs are key actors in a democratic system because they serve as a bridge between the state and society while also playing a role in advocacy, community empowerment, public policy oversight, and the provision of social services. In Indonesia, the role of CSOs has become increasingly strategic since the Reform era, marked by growing public participation in development processes, the protection of human rights, good governance, and environmental issues. However, despite this growing role, CSOs in Indonesia still face various structural challenges that hinder their effectiveness in bringing about sustainable social change. These challenges stem not only from internal organizational factors but are also influenced by political and economic dynamics, regulations, and shifts in international funding priorities (Pusat Kajian Politik, 2024).

One of the most fundamental issues is dependence on external funding, particularly grants from international donors. The project-based funding model has led most CSOs to focus more on achieving short-term program targets than on long-term institutional strengthening. An academic paper on a CSO funding management agency, published by the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas, reported that a 2021 survey of 100 civil society organizations found that approximately one-third faced a shortage of operational funding, while the funding available to these organizations was considered insufficient to ensure their institutional sustainability. Furthermore, an INFID survey conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 72% of CSOs experienced negative impacts on their financial conditions, and 23% were in critical condition, with their organizational survival threatened due to their high dependence on external funding sources.

This funding issue is not merely a matter of limited financial resources; it also highlights the weak institutional capacity of CSOs in Indonesia. Many organizations lack a funding diversification strategy, a social enterprise model, or a public fundraising system capable of sustaining their independence. As a result, shifts in international donor priorities are often followed by program closures, reductions in professional staff, and a decline in the quality of services provided to the

community. This phenomenon demonstrates that the sustainability of CSOs still depends heavily on short-term project funding rather than on building organizational capacity for long-term sustainability. From an organizational governance perspective, this situation indicates that the main challenge for CSOs is not merely securing funding, but rather building an institutional model capable of operating without donor dependence.

In addition to funding, accountability, transparency, and public legitimacy have also received increasing attention. Although CSOs play an important role in promoting government transparency, some organizations have not yet applied the same governance standards internally, particularly with regard to financial reporting, program impact measurement, and mechanisms for public accountability. This situation creates an institutional paradox: some organizations that advocate for good governance do not apply the same principles to their own governance practices. This gap can undermine public trust in some CSOs, particularly when they receive funding from foreign institutions without adequate mechanisms for communicating program objectives, the use of funds, and outcomes to the public. In a democratic context, a lack of transparency can facilitate the spread of disinformation and undermine the legitimacy of CSOs in the public sphere (OECD, 2022).

Furthermore, in recent years, civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia have faced a shrinking civic space, a trend that became increasingly visible in the late 2010s and intensified between 2020 and 2025. This trend may constrain CSOs' ability to engage in advocacy, mobilize communities, and oversee public policy. Various studies show that civil society organizations in several regions face obstacles such as limited access to policymaking processes, increasing pressure on activists, regulatory complexities, and limited legal protection for human rights defenders and grassroots organizations. A recent report by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Indonesia on the state of civil society in Eastern Indonesia also shows that civic space challenges vary across regions; however, in general, CSOs continue to face challenges related to funding, organizational capacity, and legal protection, as well as limited access to policymaking, for local organizations in remote areas. The report

recommends strengthening institutional capacity, simplifying funding mechanisms, and providing long-term support for local CSOs as prerequisites for creating a more inclusive civic space.

These issues demonstrate that the main challenges facing CSOs in Indonesia extend beyond technical organizational issues to broader governance issues within the civil society ecosystem as a whole. Dependence on donors, weak institutional capacity, low funding diversification, limited accountability, and the dynamics of civic space interact to form a vicious cycle that hinders organizational sustainability. Therefore, strengthening CSOs requires a more comprehensive approach through organizational governance reform, the development of sustainable domestic funding sources, increased transparency and impact measurement, and the creation of a policy environment that supports civil society participation. Without improvements in these areas, it will be difficult to optimize the contribution of CSOs as pillars of democracy and strategic partners in national development amid the increasing complexity of social, economic, and environmental issues in Indonesia (OECD, 2022).

Research on issues related to civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, particularly regarding organizational sustainability, governance, accountability, public legitimacy, and relationships with stakeholders. However, these studies generally still examine each issue in isolation, with few integrating these various dimensions into a single analytical framework for organizational sustainability. The following section synthesizes previous studies to provide a state-of-the-art review of the field.

Research conducted by Dewi, Manochin, and Belal (2021) developed a conceptual framework on beneficiary accountability in nongovernmental organizations through a case study in Indonesia. The study shows that CSO accountability has thus far been directed more toward donors than toward beneficiaries. Consequently, the organizations' reporting mechanisms are more oriented toward meeting donors' administrative requirements than toward creating social value for the target communities (Dewi et al., 2021). This accountability issue is further highlighted by a study by Dewi, Manochin, and Belal that examined the role of

volunteers in enhancing the accountability of humanitarian organizations in Indonesia. Based on 46 in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions, the study found that volunteers served as “bridging actors” between organizations and beneficiary communities, thereby enhancing transparency, communication, and public trust. However, the effectiveness of this mechanism depended heavily on the organization’s capacity to manage volunteers and establish a participatory governance system (Dewi et al., 2021).

From the perspective of public sector governance, a study by Shahib et al (2020) published in *Advances in Environmental Accounting and Management* analyzed the annual reports of Indonesia’s three largest environmental organizations using a critical discourse analysis approach. The study shows that CSOs play a crucial role in promoting the social and environmental accountability of local governments through policy advocacy, oversight of natural resource management, and the dissemination of information to the public. This study confirms that CSOs not only function as implementers of social programs but also serve as democratic checks on the government. A broader examination of civil society organizations’ capacity was conducted by Hans Antlöv, Derick W. Brinkerhoff, and Elke Rapp in 2026. The study showed that the capacity of CSOs to support democratic reform is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, including weak implementation of bureaucratic reform, low state trust in CSOs, limited civil liberties, and uneven organizational managerial capacity. This study emphasizes that strengthening organizational capacity cannot be separated from the institutional and political context in which CSOs operate (Shahib et al., 2020).

Based on these various studies, the Scopus-indexed literature on CSOs in Indonesia is still dominated by studies that focus on accountability, organizational governance, relationships with beneficiaries, and institutional capacity building. Although each study makes an important contribution to the development of CSO management theory and practice, a research gap remains: there is still no model that comprehensively links funding dependence, institutional capacity, digital transparency, accountability to stakeholders, and organizational sustainability within a single conceptual framework. In the

context of a changing global funding landscape, increasing demands for public transparency, and the growing complexity of development issues in Indonesia, such a multidimensional approach is necessary to explain the factors that determine the effectiveness and sustainability of CSOs more comprehensively. This synthesis indicates a strong need for further research that integrates the dimensions of governance, financial sustainability, and social impact in explaining the performance of civil society organizations in Indonesia.

Although various previous studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the governance of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia, these studies still tend to be sector-specific and fragmented. Some studies focus on accountability to beneficiaries (Dewi et al., 2021), the role of volunteers in strengthening organizational accountability (Dewi et al., 2019), organizational capacity building in support of democratic reform (Antlöv et al., year), and social and environmental accountability in the context of local government (Shahib et al., 2020). Each of these studies has made a significant contribution to the development of CSO management theory and practice; however, they have not fully explained how these various dimensions interact to shape sustainable organizational governance. Consequently, the existing literature has not yet provided a conceptual framework that integrates institutional capacity, funding sustainability, multi-stakeholder accountability, cross-sector collaboration, digital transformation, organizational adaptability, and the external institutional environment as a unified governance system.

Based on this gap, this study makes a novel contribution by developing an Integrated Sustainable Governance Framework for Civil Society Organizations in Indonesia, which integrates various dimensions that have thus far been studied separately into a comprehensive conceptual model. This framework views the sustainability of CSOs as determined not only by internal governance or the ability to secure funding, but also by their ability to foster accountability toward various stakeholders, strengthen institutional capacity, diversify resource sources, leverage digital transformation, build collaborations with the government, the private sector, and communities, and enhance adaptive capacity in response to changes in the policy,

social, and economic environments. Thus, this study shifts the perspective on CSO governance from a fragmented approach toward a systemic one that treats each dimension as an interdependent component of organizational sustainability.

More broadly, the novelty of this study lies in transforming the findings of previous, standalone studies into an integrative model capable of explaining the cause-and-effect relationships among the components of CSO governance. Unlike previous studies, which generally stopped at identifying individual factors, this study aims to produce a framework that can serve as a basis for analysis, evaluation, and formulation of strategies to strengthen CSO governance in a sustainable manner. Thus, this study does not merely add new variables to the literature but constructs a governance model that unifies the key dimensions of organizational sustainability within a coherent analytical framework. This approach is expected to enrich the literature on nonprofit and civil society organization governance while providing a stronger foundation for the development of policies and practices regarding CSO management in Indonesia.

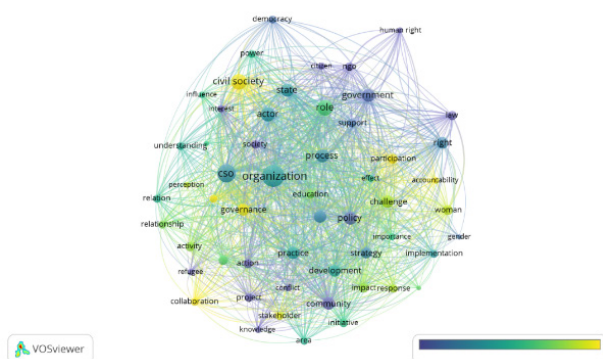


Figure 1. Results Overlay Visualization from VOSviewer

Based on Figure 1, the analysis of Scopus-indexed journals using the keyword civil society organization identified 908 articles published between 2023 and 2025. The analysis conducted with VOSviewer reveals that the linkage between CSOs and stakeholder strategies has emerged as a relatively new topic, as indicated by the yellow clusters (civil society, collaboration, stakeholder, participation, governance, and accountability). This article aims to develop strategies grounded in the existing conditions of civil society organizations in Indonesia, examined through multiple perspectives,

including the lens of collaborative governance for sustainable CSO management. The objectives of this article are to analyze the current state of CSO governance in Indonesia, identify the enabling and constraining factors affecting CSO governance, and propose strategies to strengthen sustainable CSO development in Indonesia.

II. Methods

This study employed a literature review as the primary approach to examine strategies for strengthening the sustainable governance of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia. The literature search was conducted systematically to identify effective governance practices relevant to sustainable CSO governance. The review covered academic publications, national policy documents, and relevant reports from international institutions. The inclusion criteria required sources to be peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, or research reports published within the five years preceding the review and written in either Indonesian or English. The analysis involved categorizing the literature into key themes, including governance principles, organizational sustainability, community participation, and policy strategies.

The quality of the literature was assessed based on content relevance, data currency, and methodological rigor. The narrative review involved systematically identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant literature to examine the current state of CSO governance in Indonesia, identify the enabling and constraining factors affecting CSO governance, and propose strategies to strengthen sustainable CSO development. To ensure the breadth and validity of the search, literature was retrieved from multiple databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and Garuda. The entire analytical process employed a thematic synthesis approach to identify patterns, research gaps, and effective practices, which then served as the basis for developing strategies in the Indonesian context.

This study employed relevant peer-reviewed literature indexed in Scopus as its primary source of data to examine good practices implemented in other countries and those currently implemented in Indonesia. The selected studies focused on various aspects of civil society organizations

(CSOs) and their governance. To answer the research questions, the literature was analyzed through a narrative review approach, with the analytical framework guided by collaborative governance theory. Specifically, the findings were synthesized and interpreted based on the core dimensions of collaborative governance to identify the current state of CSO governance, the enabling and constraining factors, and strategies for strengthening the sustainable development of CSOs in Indonesia. A limitation of this study was that it did not comprehensively utilize primary data. Therefore, future research should incorporate more comprehensive primary data to provide a deeper and more robust understanding of the research subject.

III. Results and Discussions

A. Civil Society Organizations in Indonesia: An Overview

This section draws on secondary data from policy documents, official ministry reports, local government records, and relevant academic literature to analyze the historical development and regulatory dynamics of CSOs in Indonesia. The collected data were processed using documentary and thematic analysis to examine regulatory trends, the dynamics of CSO-government relations, and governance accountability challenges. Furthermore, this approach provides a comprehensive overview of the legal frameworks that shape the operational landscape of civil society organizations across different periods. By synthesizing these diverse documentary sources, the analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how historical policy shifts have influenced CSO governance standards over time. Ultimately, this foundational context explains both the systemic constraints and enabling environments that CSOs face in contemporary governance structures.

Prior to the reforms, CSOs were under the full control of the New Order government. This was evident in political restrictions that prohibited organizations from holding ideologies or principles contrary to Pancasila. At the same time, the scope of organizations' activities was also limited to prevent them from posing a threat to political stability. During that period, CSOs were used as tools for control and mobilization to suppress opposition groups, organize political support, and

secure state projects. Loyal organizations received legitimacy and financial support, while critical ones faced marginalization or outright dissolution.

In the post-Reformasi era, civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia have functioned as formal agents of civil society, serving to channel public aspirations, promote community empowerment, and safeguard social and national values (Poti & Khairie Ahmad, 2021). CSOs were established to enhance public participation and capacity in preserving religious values, as well as to foster national unity and cohesion through the preservation of norms, values, morals, ethics, and cultural heritage (Hadi, 2023). However, weaknesses in governance remain, as many organizations have yet to comply with established administrative standards and continue to demonstrate limited transparency and accountability in financial management. These issues are further compounded by data inconsistencies, whereby the number of registered CSOs does not necessarily reflect their actual activities (Hadi, 2023).

Data from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights indicate that, by the end of 2023, approximately 568,000 CSOs were legally registered with the ministry, reflecting the large scale of organizational activities in Indonesia. At the provincial level, local regulations concerning CSOs have also been strengthened. Local governments have the authority to reject applications for a Certificate of Registration (SKT) from CSOs deemed inconsistent with the values of Pancasila or potentially disruptive to public order. In terms of CSO registration, the Provincial Government of Bali has recorded 298 CSOs. In Central Java Province, as of 2024, a total of 2,044 CSOs had been registered, of which 1,336 received grant funding from the Regional Government Budget (APBD). These organizations play diverse roles in the religious, social, and national spheres and form part of local government efforts to promote community empowerment (Lestari et al., 2024).

The dynamics of CSO development have not always progressed smoothly, either for the government or for communities outside these organizations. Law No. 17/2013 on Civil Society Organizations underscores the need for revision to strengthen oversight, particularly regarding CSOs' financial management and auditing, as

well as to address deviant practices carried out in the name of civil society organizations. The Coalition for Freedom of Association considers this approach overly repressive and argues that it diminishes the democratic space for CSOs, emphasizing that the issue lies in weak law enforcement rather than the absence of regulation (Firmansyah, 2025). Pursuant to Surabaya City Regulation No. 8 of 2024, oversight of CSOs has also been strengthened in Surabaya through a monitoring team (Timdu) established to coordinate supervision and mitigate potential misuse of CSOs' roles. However, significant challenges remain, including the absence of integrated data, limited resources, and the lack of specific local regulations (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). To date, the government has increasingly intensified the dissemination of regulations concerning CSOs. In South Kalimantan, this has been carried out through legal outreach activities emphasizing the importance of legal standing, registration procedures, and transparent governance, enabling CSOs to operate lawfully and in alignment with democratic values.

The dynamics of CSOs in the post-Reform era highlight the importance of government regulation. Such regulations must serve as instruments for policy formulation and capacity building to enhance public participation and transparency. On the other hand, tightening oversight through the formation of an integrated team risks resulting in a repressive approach that is seen as limiting the space for democratic participation. However, the high number of legally registered organizations does not correlate directly with the level of activity and accountability of these organizations on the ground.

Furthermore, the distribution of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia varies significantly across provinces. Nationally, as of March 5, 2024, official data from the Ministry of Home Affairs reported a total of 554,692 established CSOs. This distribution is uneven across regions. Data from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kemenkumham) in 2024 further highlighted the substantial number of legally incorporated CSOs, with East Java reporting 118,129, West Java 116,627, and Central Java 110,474. Other regions, such as Jakarta (DKI), Banten, and North Sumatra, reported comparatively lower figures (Lubis, 2025). Together, East Java, West Java, and Central

Java account for approximately 63% of CSOs, indicating a high concentration of CSOs in Java.

From a governance perspective, this suggests a concentration of resources, legal infrastructure, and access to political information in the main growth centers. The situation is quite different outside these regions, where civil society faces challenges related to limited organizational capacity and effective resource management. Addressing these disparities requires appropriate regulations and policies to strengthen human capital and support a more equitable distribution of civil society organizations across Indonesia.

Moreover, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in promoting social development and democracy across various contexts (Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). CSOs act as intermediaries between the state and citizens, connecting the two to support peaceful coexistence and democratic governance (Ifejika, 2022). They engage in community-based projects that promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and empower local communities (Puteh & Wan, 2023). CSOs also engage in lobbying and public campaigns to influence legislation and shape policies that promote human rights and social justice. They work closely with policymakers and government agencies to ensure that laws and policies reflect the needs and rights of citizens (Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024).

Civil society organizations (CSOs) function as two-way communication bridges, articulating community needs to the government while simultaneously facilitating the dissemination of government programs (Gustafsson et al., 2025). They also play a pivotal role in community empowerment and capacity building across various social, cultural, and environmental domains. In Jambi Province, 563 CSOs were officially registered as of 2024. Major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah extend their activities beyond religious affairs to include education, health care, and local economic empowerment. Likewise, the Lembaga Adat Melayu (LAM) and the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) are actively engaged in promoting development grounded in local wisdom and social justice values (Gustafsson et al., 2025).

In Malang City, CSOs are envisioned as platforms for community participation that

advocate for rights and social justice while also contributing to the preservation of harmony amid cultural diversity (Subekti & Khurun'in, 2020). Ahead of the 2024 General Election, the government and CSOs were engaged in efforts to safeguard peace and prevent the spread of narcotics in North Kalimantan (Anwar et al., 2025). CSOs are recognized as key partners in fostering democracy and maintaining public order.

In Banggai Regency, CSOs are considered to play an important role in ensuring the success of the 2024 local elections, serving as guardians of democracy, helping to prevent social conflict, and serving as bridges between the government and the community. Civil society organizations occupy a crucial position as pillars of an inclusive and effective democracy (Haruna, 2025). The Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs emphasizes that CSOs hold significant potential for collaboration in advancing democratic development in Indonesia (Azhar et al., 2026). Although the majority of CSOs contribute to strengthening democracy and development, some also misuse their legal status for illicit activities such as intimidation, persecution, and violence (Tampubolon & Silaban, 2020). This poses a serious threat to national unity and the rule of law.

CSOs play a dual role as both bridges for partnership and guardians of democracy at the grassroots level. This demonstrates the significant role CSOs play as catalysts for local public services, election monitors, and agents of community empowerment. However, this great potential is tempered by internal contradictions, as some entities masquerading as CSOs engage in vigilantism, intimidation, and abuse of their legal status, actions that undermine the legitimacy of civil society. If this continues, public trust in civil society organizations may continue to decline.

B. Constraining and Supporting Factors in the Governance of CSOs

Human resources are integral to the success and sustainability of CSOs (Taraza et al., 2024). By focusing on professional management and robust volunteer engagement, CSOs can overcome resource constraints and enhance their organizational performance. These efforts contribute to the overall mission of CSOs in

providing social goods and services where the public and private sectors may fall short (Vretenar et al., 2020). CSOs can enhance their effectiveness by strengthening these capacities, ensuring that they are better equipped to fulfill their missions and achieve their goals (Tsara & Zinyama, 2022). These strategies not only improve organizational performance but also contribute to the sustainability and impact of CSOs in their respective fields (Rigoni et al., 2021).

The quality of human resources (HR) constitutes a crucial component of the governance of civil society organizations (CSOs). In the Indonesian context, many CSOs continue to face challenges in establishing professional leadership and well-structured managerial systems. Weak organizational structures and limited leadership capacity often result in suboptimal planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs. The absence of regular training and internal accountability mechanisms also represents a major constraint. Many CSOs lack properly documented financial reports or work plans. As a result, it becomes difficult for both the public and the government to objectively assess organizational performance. Such limited capacity not only undermines program effectiveness but also erodes public trust in CSOs' role as agents of social change.

On the other hand, CSOs have begun adopting modern, results-oriented management approaches. This development has been driven by mentoring programs from donor agencies, corporate social responsibility (CSR) partnerships, and training initiatives provided by local governments. The revitalization of human resources within CSOs can be pursued through the integration of leadership training grounded in democratic values, organizational administrative development, and the encouragement of cadre regeneration. The renewal of inclusive and accountable organizational systems also serves as an essential foundation, enabling CSOs not only to survive but also to grow and make tangible contributions to society.

Thereafter, funding issues represent a long-standing challenge for most CSOs in Indonesia. Many organizations rely on membership fees, contributions from sympathizers, and even

resources from political actors with hidden interests (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2023). Such dependence often results in organizational activities that are unsustainable or implemented sporadically. This situation is further exacerbated by limited financial literacy in organizational budget management.

Several CSOs still lack transparent financial recording systems or systematic internal audits. In the absence of sound financial management, the risk of fund misappropriation becomes significant, which in turn may trigger a crisis of trust among the public and partner institutions. Nevertheless, a number of CSOs have demonstrated creativity in exploring alternative sources of funding. Some have successfully established strategic partnerships with the private sector through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, developed social enterprises, or accessed grants from donor agencies.

Strengthening financial governance can begin with financial literacy training, the formulation of accountable financial standard operating procedures, and the regular disclosure of budgets to members and the public. Sustainable and transparent funding will reinforce organizational legitimacy and enhance CSOs' capacity to respond to increasingly complex social needs. The primary sources of funding for civil society organizations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Primary Sources of Funding

Source	Characteristic
Government	Grants and conditional grants; can channel civil society organizations toward institutional advocacy
Private foundation	Grants for charitable purposes; do not detract from the content strategy
Foreign funds	The primary source of funding for civil society organizations in repressive countries; this can trigger government restrictions
Corporation	Funding tied to visibility; has the potential to create conflicts of interest

Source: (Alawiyah, 2013; Holid & Izzatusholekha, 2024; Nanda, 2020; Yunanto et al., 2023)

In this regard, public legitimacy constitutes a vital element of the sustainability of CSOs, particularly amid the spread of disinformation and acts of violence carried out in the name of civil society organizations. The negative image of certain CSOs involved in intimidation, sweeping actions, and vigilantism has undermined public trust. The government has also acknowledged the existence of CSOs that deviate from their social objectives. Vigilantism under the guise of CSOs poses a serious threat to national unity and fosters public cynicism toward what should otherwise be their positive contributions.

Public trust increases when CSOs are able to demonstrate tangible contributions to society, such as through social activities, economic empowerment, education, and crisis response. During the pandemic, many CSOs were at the forefront of providing logistical assistance, educational outreach, and psychosocial support. The Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs (Kemenko PMK) reported that CSOs contributed up to 30% of pandemic response efforts, indicating that public confidence in their civic role was high. Thus, partnership also serves as an important indicator of legitimacy.

CSOs with extensive networks involving government, the private sector, and international organizations are better positioned to access resources and strengthen their influence in public policymaking. At the same time, regulation functions both as an enabling and constraining factor. Inconsistent regulatory practices, such as unilateral revocation of permits or the stigmatization of certain CSOs as extremist, may generate tension and legal uncertainty. Therefore, it is essential for the government to establish clear, fair, and capacity-building policies that regard CSOs not merely as objects of oversight but as genuine partners in development. Public legitimacy can be enhanced through organizational integrity, transparency in reporting, and active engagement in addressing social issues relevant to local communities.

C. Sustainable Governance Strategies for Civil Society Organizations in Indonesia

Strategies for strengthening the role of civil society organizations in Indonesia cannot be separated from the framework of collaborative governance.

As stated by Ansell and Gash (2008), collaborative governance is understood as a process of collective decision making that involves both state and non-state actors within formal and informal forums, grounded in the principles of participation, consensus, and shared accountability (Ansell & Gash, 2008). This perspective is relevant for examining the dynamics of civil society organizations in Indonesia, as they function not merely as objects of government regulation but also as strategic partners in the co-creation of public policy. Accordingly, the collaborative governance approach offers an analytical lens through which to address various challenges faced by CSOs, ranging from human resource capacity and public legitimacy to funding sustainability and regulatory frameworks.

Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasize that the primary prerequisites for the success of collaborative governance are trust-building, commitment, and the establishment of a shared understanding among actors. The condition of civil society organizations in Indonesia, characterized by limited human resource capacity, funding constraints, and weak public legitimacy, indicates that these prerequisites have not yet been fully met. For instance, weak internal accountability undermines public trust; reliance on political funding erodes the independent commitment of CSOs; and repressive regulations hinder the development of a shared understanding between government and civil society. Therefore, strategies for strengthening CSOs need to be situated within the framework of collaborative governance, which emphasizes not only the technical aspects of organizational management but also the cultivation of trust, commitment, and equitable spaces for dialogue to ensure sustainable collaboration.

Studies of collaboration between CSOs and government affirm that such collaboration constitutes an important strategy for addressing limitations in the provision of public services (Sijabat et al., 2025). Research shows that most civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia frequently partner with the government in delivering social assistance, whether in the form of cash transfers, food aid, or community-based health services. However, such collaboration is constrained by several challenges, including bureaucratic complexity, a lack of integrated data systems, and limited resource capacity at

the local level. Nevertheless, these experiences demonstrate that CSOs function as catalysts for bridging the gap between national policies and local community needs, while simultaneously strengthening the legitimacy of public services through participation and public trust.

Examining the experiences of other countries with characteristics similar to Indonesia, Ghana illustrates that civil society organizations occupy an ambivalent position in national development (Kumi et al., 2025). On the one hand, they play a crucial role in democratic consolidation through civic education, policy advocacy, and the provision of social services to communities. On the other hand, their contributions are often constrained by shrinking civic space, limited access to information, challenges to their legitimacy, and heavy reliance on external funding.

This dynamic resembles the Indonesian context, in which civil society organizations are recognized as vital pillars of social development and democracy but remain constrained by limited human resource capacity, funding challenges, and regulatory frameworks that tend to be repressive. Therefore, in both Ghana and Indonesia, strengthening the role of civil society requires a collaborative governance framework that enables state-civil society relations to move beyond patterns of co-optation or confrontation toward policy co-creation and more inclusive, sustainable development.

India, meanwhile, demonstrates that the shrinking of civic space is not solely the result of structural state repression but rather unfolds through a dynamic relational process between the state and civil society organizations. The state frequently employs strategies of delegitimization, marginalization, and functional diversion to restrict the role of CSOs, while at the same time leaving room for collaboration when political interests converge (van Wessel et al., 2025). This pattern is also evident in Indonesia, where regulations on civil society organizations are often employed to control groups perceived as disruptive to stability, while those deemed aligned with government agendas are more frequently facilitated in their role as providers of social services.

Conversely, critical civil society organizations are often labeled as radical or perceived as threats to public order, thereby diminishing their advocacy

role. Thus, in both India and Indonesia, state-civil society relations are not static but instead reflect an ongoing negotiation among co-optation, control, and opportunities for collaboration. Within this framework, the collaborative governance approach serves as an important reference point for transforming such relations toward the co-creation of more inclusive and sustainable public policies.

The various challenges faced by civil society organizations in Indonesia are therefore highly relevant to the collaborative governance framework developed by Ansell and Gash. From a collaborative governance perspective, strengthening the role of CSOs in Indonesia requires emphasis on three fundamental prerequisites for successful collaboration: trust-building, commitment to process, and the creation of shared understanding. The challenges currently facing CSOs in Indonesia, particularly in human resource capacity, financial sustainability, and public legitimacy, underscore the need for systematic collaborative strategies involving the state, civil society, and the private sector.

These strategies aim to strengthen CSO capacity through ongoing training, enhance internal transparency and accountability to build public trust, and establish regular dialogue between the government and CSOs to foster mutual understanding and shared commitment to social development goals. The strategic framework for strengthening CSOs is illustrated in Figure 2.

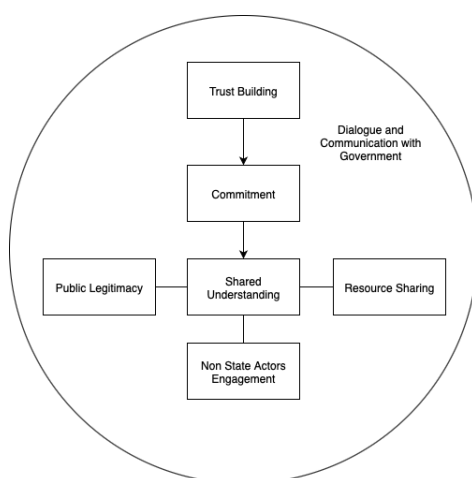


Figure 2. Strategies for Strengthening Civil Society Organizations

Strategies for strengthening civil society organizations within a collaborative governance framework begin with building trust as a fundamental prerequisite for fostering long-term commitment between the state and civil society. This trust is reinforced through ongoing dialogue and communication between the government and CSOs, which facilitates the development of a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each actor.

This shared understanding provides a foundation for CSOs to strengthen public legitimacy, foster engagement among non-state actors, and develop cross-sector resource-sharing mechanisms that support sustained collaboration. This approach aligns with Ansell and Gash's framework, which emphasizes trust-building, commitment to process, and shared understanding as key elements of successful collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008). These findings are consistent with studies in Indonesia that highlight limitations in the government's capacity to provide social services to vulnerable groups, thereby underscoring the need for close partnerships with civil society organizations (Sijabat et al., 2025).

They are also consistent with (Kumi et al., 2025), who emphasize the importance of legitimacy and financial independence among civil society organizations in national development. In addition, the state not only engages in delegitimation and marginalization but also continuously negotiates the role of civil society organizations in response to changing political interests. Accordingly, strategies for strengthening CSOs should be approached as a relational process that emphasizes the co-creation of more inclusive and sustainable public policies.

IV. Conclusion

The findings show that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia play an important role in democratization, community empowerment, public advocacy, and social development. Greater collaboration between the government and CSOs may further strengthen the relationship and clarify the respective roles of government and civil society in advancing collective objectives. However, their sustainability is constrained by limited organizational capacity, dependence on short-term funding, weak transparency and

accountability, limited public legitimacy, and restrictive regulatory arrangements. At the same time, active civil society networks, digital platforms, community support, and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration provide important enabling conditions for strengthening CSO governance.

From a collaborative governance perspective, sustainable CSO development requires stronger trust, shared commitment, inclusive participation, and regular dialogue among government institutions, CSOs, communities, universities, donors, and private-sector actors. Therefore, this study recommends establishing permanent multi-stakeholder forums, developing transparent multi-year funding schemes, simplifying accountability and reporting systems, strengthening CSO managerial and financial capacity, and reviewing regulations that may restrict civic participation. These measures should particularly support small and locally based CSOs that often have strong community legitimacy but limited resources.

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and Scopus-indexed literature, which may not fully represent informal and local CSOs across Indonesia. The analysis draws on Scopus-indexed articles to examine good practices and implementation models from other countries and compare them with existing practices in Indonesia. Future research should incorporate interviews, surveys, and comparative case studies to examine how regulatory frameworks, funding mechanisms, and collaborative governance practices influence CSO legitimacy and organizational sustainability.

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