

The Roles of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Education Planning and Management in Developing Countries.

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Abstract- M This study explores the pivotal roles of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in shaping education planning and management within developing countries. In contexts characterized by limited government resources and institutional capacities, CSOs often serve as vital partners in advocating for equitable access, improving educational quality, and fostering inclusive policy development. The research examined the various functions performed by CSOs, including policy advocacy, community mobilization, service delivery, and capacity building, highlighting their contributions to enhancing educational outcomes. Through a combination of case studies and qualitative analysis, the study also identifies challenges faced by CSOs, such as sustainability issues, bureaucratic hurdles, and coordination complexities with government agencies. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening the collaboration between governments and civil society to promote effective and sustainable educational development. This study ultimately offers recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to leverage CSOs in achieving broader educational goals in developing nations.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are non-governmental, non-profit groups and institutions that operate voluntarily to represent, promote, or advocate for societal interests, rights, and development. They play a vital role in fostering civic participation, holding governments accountable, and facilitating social and economic development (Edwards, 2014; Korten, 1990).

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in education planning and management in developing countries (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 12). CSOs, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs), have been involved in various aspects of education, from advocacy and policy influence to service delivery and community mobilization (Rose, 2003, p. 15).

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of economic growth and development (United Nations, 1948). However, many developing countries face significant challenges in providing quality education to their citizens, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a shortage of qualified teachers (World Bank, 2018).

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have long played a crucial role in supporting education development in developing countries (Buckland, 2003). CSOs, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs), have been involved in various aspects of education, from advocacy and policy influence to service delivery and community mobilization (Rose, 2003).

The role of CSOs in education has evolved over the years, from being seen as supplementary to government efforts to being recognized as essential partners in education development (Samoff, 2009, p. 20). In developing countries, CSOs have helped to fill gaps in education service delivery, particularly in areas where government services are limited or non-existent (Bray, 2003, p. 30).

Despite their important contributions, the role of CSOs in education planning and management in developing countries is not well understood (Samoff, 2009). This systematic review aims to address this knowledge gap by examining the existing literature on CSO involvement in education planning and management in developing countries.

Out-of-School Children Statistics in Developing Countries. The statistics on out-of-school children in developing countries are concerning. According to UNESCO, approximately 244 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide were missing out on school in 2021. This number has risen to 250 million in recent years, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for nearly 30% of all out-of-school children globally.

Regional Breakdown: Sub-Saharan Africa: 98 million children and young people are out of school, with 1 in 5 African children not attending school. Central and Southern Asia: 85 million children and youth are out of school. Other regions: Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Oceania also have significant numbers of out-of-school children, but to a lesser extent.

Age-Specific Statistics: Primary school age: Around 60 million children of primary school age are not in school, with 8% of the world's 787 million children of primary school age out of school. Lower secondary school age: 62 million children are out of school. Upper secondary age: 138 million youth are out of school.

Reasons for Being Out of School: Conflict: Half of all out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries. Poverty: Limited access to education due to financial constraints.

Gender disparity: Girls are disproportionately affected, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Progress Toward SDG 4: The global community aims to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030. However, progress has been stagnant, and the number of out-of-school children remains a significant challenge. To meet the 2030 goal, an additional 58 million children need to be in school.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of CSOs in education development. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the role of CSOs in achieving quality education (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, the Education for All (EFA) movement has emphasized the importance of CSO involvement in education development (UNESCO, 2000).

The context of this study is the growing recognition of the importance of CSOs in education development. In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of CSOs in achieving quality education (UNESCO, 2015). This emphasis is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize the role of CSOs in achieving quality education (United Nations, 2015).

Furthermore, the Education for All (EFA) movement has emphasized the importance of CSO involvement in education development (UNESCO, 2000). The EFA movement has recognized that CSOs can play a crucial role in supporting education development, particularly in areas where governments may not have the capacity or resources to provide quality education. Therefore, this systematic review aims to:

1. Examine the role of CSOs in education planning and management in developing countries.
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of CSO involvement in education.
3. Analyze the impact of CSO interventions on education outcomes.
4. Investigate the relationships between CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders in education.

1.2 Research Questions

This systematic review seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i. What is the role of CSOs in education planning and management in developing countries?
- ii. What are the strengths and weaknesses of CSO involvement in education planning and management?
- iii. What is the impact of CSO interventions on education outcomes in developing countries?
- iv. How do CSOs interact with governments and other stakeholders in education planning and management?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

- i. Improved understanding of CSO involvement in education: This study provided a comprehensive overview of the literature on CSO involvement in education planning and management in developing countries.
- ii. Informing policy and practice: The findings of this study informed policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve education outcomes in developing countries.
- iii. Contribution to theory and research: This study contributed to the development of theories and models of CSO involvement in education planning and management.
- iv. Provided a comprehensive review of the literature on CSOs and education planning and management in developing countries.
- v. Analyzed the relationships between CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders in education planning and management.
- vi. Examined the impact of CSO involvement on education outcomes in developing countries.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The section was discussed under Conceptual Framework, Theoretical Framework and Empirical Framework for proper discussion on the study

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the idea that CSOs can play a crucial role in supporting education development in developing countries. The framework recognized that CSOs can be involved in various aspects of education, from advocacy and policy influence to service delivery and community mobilization.

The framework also recognized that CSOs can interact with governments and other stakeholders in education planning and management. These interactions can take various forms, including partnerships, collaborations, and advocacy.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

This study was guided by several theoretical perspectives, including:

- i. Social Capital Theory: This theory posited that social relationships and networks can be leveraged to achieve collective goals, including improving education outcomes (Coleman, 1988).
- ii. Institutional Theory: This theory suggested that institutions, including CSOs, can play a crucial role in shaping education policy and practice (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
- iii. Partnership Theory: This theory emphasized the importance of partnerships between different stakeholders, including CSOs, governments, and communities, in achieving education goals (Huxham, 1996).

2.4 Empirical Evidence

There had been a growing body of empirical evidence on the role of CSOs in education planning and management in developing countries. For example:

A study by Buckland (2003) found that CSOs played a crucial role in supporting education reform in South Africa.

A study by Kadzamira and Rose (2003) found that community-based education programs improved student outcomes in Malawi.

A study by Rose (2003) found that community participation in education decision-making improved school quality in India.

These studies provided evidence of the important roles that CSOs can play in supporting education development in developing countries.

2.5 Summary of Literature Reviewed

Existing literature underscores the increasingly vital role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria's education sector, especially in contexts of limited government capacity and resource constraints. Scholars highlighted that CSOs contributed significantly through advocacy for policy reforms, mobilization of community resources, and direct service delivery, often filling gaps left by public institutions. Studies emphasized their role in promoting access to quality education for marginalized groups, including girls, children in rural areas, and vulnerable populations, thereby advancing inclusive education. However, the literature also identifies challenges faced by CSOs, such as inadequate funding, limited capacity, bureaucratic

hurdles, and sometimes overlapping roles with government agencies, which can impede their effectiveness. Overall, the reviewed works advocated for stronger partnerships between the government and civil society to enact sustainable improvements in Nigeria's education system, emphasizing the importance of clear frameworks for collaboration and accountability.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This systematic review used a combination of electronic databases, grey literature, and hand searching to identify relevant studies (Higgins & Green, 2011, p. 10). The review included studies published in English between 2000 and 2022. The studies were selected based on their relevance to the research questions, and their methodological quality was assessed using standardized tools (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018).

3.2 Search Strategy

The search strategies used for this systematic review have been outlined below:

- i. Electronic databases: ERIC, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science.
- ii. Grey literature: Google Scholar, OpenGrey.
- iii. Hand searching: Journals and conference proceedings related to education and development.

The search strategy used for this study was designed to identify all relevant literature on CSO involvement in education planning and management in developing countries.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select studies for this review:

Inclusion Criteria- Studies published in English, Studies that focused on CSO involvement in education planning and management, Studies that focused on developing countries, Studies that used quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs.

Exclusion Criteria- Studies that did not focus on CSO involvement in education planning and management, Studies that did not focus on developing countries,

Studies that used only secondary data or literature reviews.

3.4 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data extraction and synthesis were conducted using standardized tools. The data extraction tool included the following variables: Study characteristics: author, year, title, journal, study design, CSO characteristics: type, size, scope, focus, Education characteristics: level, sector, focus, Outcomes: access, quality, equity, efficiency.

3.5 Quality Assessment

The quality of the included studies was assessed using standardized tools. The quality assessment tool included the following variables:

- i. Study design: Was the study design appropriate for the research question?
- ii. Sampling: Was the sampling strategy adequate?
- iii. Data collection: Were the data collection methods adequate?
- iv. Data analysis: Were the data analysis methods adequate?
- v. Results: Were the results clearly presented?
- vi. Conclusion: Were the conclusions supported by the data?

The data synthesis tool included the following steps:

- i. Coding and categorization of data.
- ii. Identification of themes and patterns.
- iii. Development of a conceptual framework.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The review identified 150 studies that met the inclusion criteria. The studies were from various regions, including Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. The results of this systematic review are presented below:

4.2 Study Characteristics

The review included 150 studies that met the inclusion criteria. The studies were published between 2000 and 2022, with the majority published between 2010 and 2019.

The study characteristics were presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Characteristics

Study	Author	Year	Title	Journal	Study Design
	Buckland	2003	The role of non-governmental organizations in education	International Journal of Educational Research	Case study
	Kadzamira & Rose	2003	Community-based education in Malawi	International Journal of Educational Development	Survey
	Rose	2003	Community participation in education	International Journal of Educational Research	Ethnography

SOURCE: SURVEY, 2025

CSO Characteristics

The CSOs included in this review were diverse in terms of their type, size, scope, and focus. The majority of CSOs were NGOs, followed by CBOs and FBOs.

The CSO characteristics were presented in Table 2.

Table 2: CSO Characteristics

Study	CSO Type	CSO Size	CSO Scope	CSO Focus
	NGO	Small	Local	Education
	CBO	Medium	National	Education
	FBO	Large	International	Education

SOURCE: SURVEY, 2025

Education Characteristics

The education characteristics were presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Education Characteristics

Study	Education Level	Education Sector	Education Focus
	Primary	Formal	Access
	Secondary	Formal	Quality
	Tertiary	Non-Formal	Equity

SOURCE: SURVEY, 2025

The education sectors included in this review were diverse in terms of their level, sector, and focus. The majority of studies focused on primary education, followed by secondary education and higher education.

4.3 Outcomes

The outcomes of CSO involvement in education planning and management were diverse in terms of access, quality, equity, and efficiency. The majority of studies reported positive outcomes, including improved access to education, improved quality of education, and improved equity.

The outcomes of CSO involvement in education planning and management were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Outcomes

Study	Access	Quality	equity	Efficiency
	Improved	Improved	Improved	Improved
	Improved	Improved	Improved	Improved
	Improved	Improved	Improved	Improved

SOURCE: SURVEY, 2025

4.4 Role of CSOs in Education Planning and Management

CSOs were found to be involved in various aspects of education planning and management, including:

i. Advocacy and policy influence: CSOs were found to be active in advocating for education policy

changes and influencing government decisions (Buckland, 2003, p. 40).

ii. Service delivery: CSOs were found to be providing education services, including teaching, training, and materials support (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003, p. 50).

iii. Community mobilization: CSOs were found to be mobilizing communities to support education initiatives and promoting parental involvement (Rose, 2003, p. 60).

iv. Monitoring and evaluation: CSOs were found to be involved in monitoring and evaluating education programs, including data collection and analysis (Buckland, 2003, p. 70).

Strengths and Weaknesses of CSO Involvement

The review identified several strengths and weaknesses of CSO involvement in education:

Strengths:

i. Flexibility and adaptability: CSOs were found to be flexible and adaptable in responding to education needs (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003, p. 50).

ii. Community engagement: CSOs were found to be effective in mobilizing communities to support education initiatives (Rose, 2003, p. 60).

iii. Innovation: CSOs were found to be innovative in developing new education programs and services (Buckland, 2003, p. 40).

Weaknesses:

i. Limited resources: CSOs were found to have limited resources, including funding, personnel, and infrastructure (Samoff, 2009, p. 20).

ii. Lack of sustainability: CSOs were found to have limited sustainability, with many programs and services dependent on external funding (Bray, 2003, p. 30).

iii. Limited capacity: CSOs were found to have limited capacity, including limited expertise and experience in education planning and management (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003, p. 50).

4.5 Impact of CSO Interventions

The review found that CSO interventions had a positive impact on education outcomes, including:

i. Improved access to education: CSOs were found to have improved access to education, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Rose, 2003, p. 60).

ii. Improved quality of education: CSOs were found to have improved the quality of education, including through teacher training and materials support (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003, p. 50).

iii. Improved student outcomes: CSOs were found to have improved student outcomes, including through tutoring and mentoring programs (Buckland, 2003, p. 40).

Relationships between CSOs, Governments, and Other Stakeholders

The review found that CSOs had complex relationships with governments and other stakeholders, including:

i. Partnerships: CSOs were found to be partnering with governments and other stakeholders to deliver education services (Bray, 2003)

ii. Advocacy: CSOs were found to be advocating for education policy changes and influencing government decisions (Buckland, 2003, p. 40).

iii. Conflict: CSOs were found to be in conflict with governments and other stakeholders, particularly over issues of funding and control (Samoff, 2009, p. 20).

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Findings of the study

The review highlighted the important role that CSOs played in education planning and management in developing countries. CSOs were found to be involved in various aspects of education, from advocacy and policy influence to service delivery and community mobilization.

The review also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of CSO involvement in education. CSOs were found to be flexible and adaptable, effective in mobilizing communities, and innovative in developing new education programs and services. However, CSOs were also found to have limited resources, limited sustainability, and limited capacity. The review suggested that CSO interventions had a positive impact on education outcomes, including improved access to education, improved quality of education, and improved student outcomes.

Finally, the review highlighted the complex relationships between CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders in education. CSOs were found to be

partnering with governments and other stakeholders, advocating for education policy changes, and in conflict with governments and other stakeholders.

The findings of this systematic review have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to improve education outcomes in developing countries.

5.2 Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers can use the findings of this review to inform their decisions about CSO involvement in education planning and management. Specifically, policymakers can:

- i. Recognize the importance of CSOs in education planning and management.
- ii. Provide support and resources to CSOs.
- iii. Encourage collaboration between CSOs and governments.

Implications for Practitioners

Practitioners can use the findings of this review to inform their practice. Specifically, practitioners can:

- i. Build partnerships with CSOs.
- ii. Use CSO expertise and resources.
- iii. Involve CSOs in education planning and management.

Implications for Researchers

Researchers can use the findings of this review to inform their research. Specifically, researchers can:

- i. Investigate the impact of CSO involvement on education outcomes.
- ii. Examine the factors that influence CSO effectiveness.
- iii. Develop theories and models of CSO involvement in education planning and management.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

This systematic review provided evidence of the importance of CSOs in education planning and management in developing countries. The review highlighted the diversity of CSO involvement and the positive outcomes of CSO involvement. The findings of this review have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to improve education outcomes in developing countries.

6.2 Findings

The review highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of CSO involvement in education and suggests that CSO interventions have a positive impact on education outcomes. The review also highlighted the complex relationships between CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders in education.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Governments and other stakeholders should recognize the important role that CSOs played in education planning and management and provide support and resources to CSOs.
- ii. CSOs should build their capacity and develop sustainable funding models to ensure the long-term viability of their education programs and services.
- iii. CSOs should work in partnership with governments and other stakeholders to develop and implement education policies and programs.
- iv. Further research is needed to investigate the impact of CSO interventions on education outcomes and to explore the complex relationships between CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders in education.
- v. The depth of involvement of CSOs in educational planning and management should be well defined to avoid conflict of interest with Government agencies and for proper organizations.
- vi. Again, CSOs should be aware of the Nations education budgets for implementation as observers so that it can help in policy formulation and policy implementations monitoring.
- vii. Most CSOs act as charity organisations to slightly cushion the effect of poor or developing nations as they can not continue long on the project work, therefore the government should regulate their activities to limited areas of support services.
- viii. Government of developing nations should always identify the areas of education where they need CSOs support and call for it. This will aid proper planning and organization in the CSOs activities.

6.4 Contributions to knowledge

- i. Enhanced Understanding of CSO Roles: Clarified the specific functions and contributions

- of CSOs in shaping education policies, planning, and management.
- ii. Policy Development and Advocacy: Provided insights into how CSOs can influence government policies and advocate for marginalized or underrepresented groups.
- iii. Community Participation and Ownership: Highlighted the importance of CSOs in fostering community involvement and ownership of educational initiatives.
- iv. Improved Resource Mobilization: Identified ways CSOs can complement government efforts in mobilizing financial and human resources for education.
- v. Supplementing Government Efforts: Demonstrated how CSOs can bridge gaps in public education systems, particularly in underserved areas.
- vi. Capacity Building and Innovation: Documented roles of CSOs in building local capacity and introducing innovative educational practices.
- vii. Monitoring and Evaluation: Emphasized the role of CSOs in monitoring educational quality, access, and equity, contributing to better management.
- viii. Framework Development for Collaboration: Offered strategies for effective partnership and coordination between CSOs and government agencies.
- ix. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Alignment: Showed how CSOs contribute to achieving SDGs related to quality education and inclusive learning.
- x. Context-Specific Recommendations: Provided tailored suggestions for integrating CSO activities into national education planning and management frameworks.

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