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Role of Civil Society in Public Service Delivery in Bangladesh: Opportunities, Constraints, and Policy Implications

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Abstract

This study critically examines the role and contribution of civil society in enhancing public service delivery in Bangladesh. In a context where state capacity is often constrained by limited resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and governance challenges, civil society organizations (CSOs) — including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and advocacy groups — have emerged as important actors in bridging gaps between the state and citizens. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative data from national public service performance indicators with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions involving beneficiaries, service providers, and civil society practitioners. The findings indicate that CSOs have positively influenced the accessibility, quality, and responsiveness of essential services such as health, education, sanitation, and social safety nets. Key areas of contribution include capacity building of local institutions, community mobilization, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and innovative service delivery models that complement government efforts. However, the study also identifies persistent challenges, including coordination issues with government agencies, funding sustainability, and regulatory constraints that hinder optimal performance. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening collaborative frameworks between the state and civil society, enhancing institutional support for CSOs, and fostering participatory governance to improve public service outcomes. This research underscores the indispensable role of civil society in promoting inclusive development and responsive public services in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Civil society; Public service delivery; Governance; Non-governmental organizations (NGOs); Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Public service delivery is a fundamental component of sustainable development and good governance, as it directly influences the quality of life, social welfare, and overall well-being of citizens. Effective public services in areas such as health, education, sanitation, social protection, and infrastructure are essential for promoting social equity, reducing poverty, and ensuring inclusive growth. However, in developing countries like Bangladesh, public service delivery continues to face persistent challenges, including limited institutional capacity, bureaucratic inefficiency, resource constraints, corruption, and weak accountability mechanisms. These structural problems often result in inadequate access to quality services, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations living in rural and disadvantaged communities.

Within this context, civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as significant non-state actors in addressing service delivery gaps and strengthening governance processes. Civil society in Bangladesh comprises a diverse range of organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), advocacy groups, and professional networks, which actively engage in community mobilization, awareness-raising, capacity building, and direct service provision. The growing involvement of civil society reflects broader global trends emphasizing participatory governance and collaborative development, where CSOs function not only as service providers but also as facilitators of citizen participation, social accountability, and institutional transparency. Despite their expanding role, systematic and comprehensive research on the effectiveness, sustainability, and institutional

integration of civil society in public service delivery in Bangladesh remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the nature, extent, and impact of civil society's contribution to public service delivery, with the aim of generating evidence-based insights to inform policy formulation, strengthen state–civil society collaboration, and improve the quality and equity of public services (Hossain, 2018).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the theoretical perspectives of social capital theory, governance theory, and participatory development theory to explain the role of civil society in public service delivery. Social capital theory emphasizes the importance of trust, networks, and civic engagement in facilitating collective action and improving institutional performance. From this perspective, civil society organizations contribute to service delivery by strengthening social networks, mobilizing community participation, and fostering cooperation between citizens and public institutions. Governance theory further explains how non-state actors enhance public sector effectiveness by promoting accountability, transparency, and institutional responsiveness. Together, these theories suggest that civil society plays both a functional and normative role in governance systems by supporting service provision while also strengthening democratic practices (Putnam, 1993).

Participatory development theory complements this framework by highlighting the importance of citizen involvement in development processes. It argues that sustainable and effective public services require active participation from beneficiaries in decision-making, planning, and monitoring. Within this framework, civil society acts as an intermediary that facilitates community voices, ensures inclusive participation, and bridges the gap between state institutions and local populations. Conceptually, this study views civil society as an independent but collaborative actor that influences public service delivery through mechanisms such as advocacy, service provision, capacity building, and social accountability. The interaction between civil society and the state is therefore understood as a dynamic process shaped by institutional contexts, political environments, and community engagement, ultimately affecting the quality, accessibility, and equity of public services in Bangladesh (UNDP, 2002).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Public service delivery in Bangladesh continues to face significant challenges despite notable socio-economic progress in recent decades. Issues such as bureaucratic inefficiency, limited institutional capacity, corruption, inadequate resource allocation, and weak accountability mechanisms have constrained the effectiveness of government-led service provision, particularly in critical sectors like health, education, sanitation, and social protection. These limitations disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable populations, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas, where access to quality public services remains uneven and inadequate (Ahmed, 2013).

In response to these persistent gaps, civil society organizations (CSOs), including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and advocacy groups, have increasingly emerged as key actors in supplementing and, in some cases, substituting state efforts in service delivery. Through community mobilization, capacity building, awareness-raising, and direct service provision, civil society has contributed to improving the outreach, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of public services. However, despite their growing involvement, there is limited systematic empirical evidence on the extent, effectiveness, and sustainability of civil society's contributions within Bangladesh's public service framework (Devine, 2003).

Moreover, the relationship between the state and civil society remains complex and is often characterized by coordination gaps, regulatory constraints, and questions of accountability and legitimacy. The absence of strong collaborative mechanisms and clear policy frameworks has sometimes resulted in fragmented interventions, duplication of efforts, and inconsistent service outcomes. Consequently, there is a critical need to assess how civil society actually contributes to public service delivery in Bangladesh, what institutional and political factors shape this role, and how these contributions can be better integrated into national governance and development strategies (Ahmed, 2008).

Therefore, the core problem addressed by this study is the lack of comprehensive and context-specific analysis of civil society's role in public service delivery in Bangladesh, which limits evidence-based policymaking and the design of effective partnerships aimed at improving service quality, equity, and sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Robert D. Putnam (2000), in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of civil society in governance and public service delivery. Putnam highlights the concept of social capital—networks, trust, and civic engagement—which enables collective action and improves governance performance. His argument suggests that societies with stronger civic networks and citizen participation tend to deliver public services more effectively. Although the study focuses on the United States, its theoretical framework has been widely applied to developing countries such as Bangladesh, where civil society organizations help mobilize communities and enhance accountability in service delivery (Putnam, 2000).

Similarly, Lester M. Salamon, S. Wojciech Sokolowski, and Regina List in *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector* (2016) examine the global role of nonprofit organizations in governance and development. The authors argue that civil society functions not only as a platform for democratic participation but also as an important provider of social services, especially in contexts where government capacity is limited. They emphasize that legal frameworks, financial resources, and institutional environments significantly influence the effectiveness of civil society

organizations in public service delivery (Salamon *et al.*, 2016).

Merilee S. Grindle (2017), in *Good Governance: The Inflation of an Idea*, critically analyzes governance reforms in developing countries. She argues that the concept of good governance has expanded excessively and often creates unrealistic reform expectations. Grindle highlights bureaucratic inefficiency, weak accountability, and limited citizen participation as key obstacles to effective service delivery. She suggests that governance improvements must be context-specific and should involve cooperation with non-state actors, including civil society organizations (Grindle, 2017).

In *Development Interrupted: Cycles of Debt and Global Inequality*, Naomi Hossain (2018) provides a critical perspective on the growing role of NGOs in development. She discusses the process of “NGOization,” where civil society organizations become deeply involved in development programs and service provision. In countries like Bangladesh, this trend raises questions about sustainability, accountability, and the long-term capacity of the state to provide public services (Hossain, 2018).

Overall, the literature suggests that civil society organizations play a significant role in supporting public service delivery, particularly in developing countries where state capacity is limited. At the same time, scholars emphasize the importance of governance structures, political contexts, and sustainability concerns when evaluating the contribution of civil society to development outcomes.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this research is to examine the role and contribution of civil society organizations in improving public service delivery in Bangladesh, but it has some specific objectives:

- i. To analyze the major areas of public service delivery (such as health, education, sanitation, and social protection) in which civil society organizations are actively involved in Bangladesh.
- ii. To assess the extent to which civil society organizations contribute to the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of public services.
- iii. To explore the strategies and mechanisms used by civil society organizations to support and complement government service delivery.
- iv. To identify the key challenges faced by civil society organizations in delivering public services, including institutional, financial, and regulatory constraints.
- v. To examine the nature of collaboration and coordination between government institutions and civil society organizations in Bangladesh.
- vi. To evaluate the impact of civil society involvement on citizen participation, accountability, and governance in public service delivery.
- vii. To propose policy recommendations for strengthening the role of civil society in enhancing inclusive and sustainable public service delivery in Bangladesh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine the contribution of civil society to public service delivery in Bangladesh. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are employed to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis. Quantitative data are collected from secondary sources, including government reports, policy documents, development indicators, and published statistics related to public service performance in sectors such as health, education, sanitation, and social protection. Qualitative data are generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including representatives of civil society organizations, public officials, and service beneficiaries. Purposive sampling is used to select participants based on their relevance and experience in public service delivery. The study also incorporates document analysis of legal frameworks, institutional policies, and program reports to understand the structural and regulatory context of civil society engagement. Data are analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative information and descriptive statistical techniques for quantitative data. This methodological approach enables triangulation of findings, enhances the validity and reliability of the results, and provides in-depth insights into both the scope and effectiveness of civil society's contribution to public service delivery in Bangladesh.

FINDINGS

Key Empirical Findings

The findings of this study indicate that civil society organizations (CSOs) play a significant and positive role in improving public service delivery in Bangladesh, particularly in contexts where government capacity is limited. Empirical evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data analysis reveals that CSOs contribute to enhancing service accessibility, efficiency, and inclusiveness. Respondents consistently reported that CSO interventions have increased community awareness, reduced service delivery gaps, and strengthened citizen engagement in public institutions. The study also finds that civil society initiatives are especially effective in reaching marginalized populations, including women, children, ethnic minorities, and low-income communities, who often remain underserved by formal government systems (WB, 2021).

However, the findings also highlight notable challenges. Despite their contributions, many CSOs face financial constraints, project-based donor dependency, limited technical capacity, and regulatory barriers that restrict long-term sustainability. Additionally, variations in organizational effectiveness were observed, with larger and well-established NGOs performing more effectively than smaller community-based organizations. These disparities influence the overall impact of civil society on public service outcomes, suggesting that institutional strength and resource availability are key determinants of CSO performance (Lewis, 2011).

Sector-Wise Analysis

In the health sector, CSOs have significantly contributed to improving primary healthcare access, maternal and child health services, vaccination awareness, and nutrition programs. NGO-led community clinics, health education campaigns, and mobile health services have been particularly effective in rural and remote areas where public healthcare infrastructure is weak. In the education sector, civil society initiatives have supported non-formal education, adult literacy, school enrollment, and dropout reduction, especially among girls and disadvantaged children. Many NGOs operate community schools, provide scholarships, and offer teacher training programs that complement government efforts (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013).

In the sanitation and water sector, CSOs have promoted hygiene awareness, safe drinking water practices, and low-cost sanitation technologies. Community-based water management programs and behavioral change campaigns have contributed to improved public health outcomes. In the area of social protection, civil society organizations have supported vulnerable groups through microfinance, livelihood training, legal aid, and social safety net programs, thereby strengthening community resilience and reducing socio-economic inequalities (Ahmed, 2009).

Role of NGOs and CSOs

The study finds that NGOs and CSOs perform multiple roles in public service delivery. First, they act as service providers, directly delivering essential services where government reach is limited. Second, they function as facilitators and intermediaries, linking communities with public institutions and helping citizens navigate administrative procedures. Third, CSOs serve as advocates and watchdogs, monitoring public service performance, raising awareness about rights and entitlements, and pressuring authorities to improve accountability and transparency (Edwards, 2014).

Furthermore, CSOs contribute to capacity building by training local leaders, strengthening community organizations, and enhancing institutional skills among public service providers. Through participatory approaches, they empower citizens to engage in planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes, thereby promoting ownership and sustainability of service initiatives (Cornwall, 2008).

Patterns of Collaboration with Government

The findings reveal mixed patterns of collaboration between civil society and government institutions. In some sectors, particularly health and education, formal partnerships exist in the form of joint programs, public-private partnerships, and service contracts. These collaborations have facilitated resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and coordinated implementation, leading to improved service coverage and efficiency. Local government bodies often rely on NGOs for technical support, community outreach, and program implementation (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013).

However, in many cases, collaboration remains informal, ad hoc, and fragmented. Weak coordination mechanisms, lack of clear policy frameworks, and mutual trust deficits often

limit the effectiveness of partnerships. Some CSOs reported difficulties in accessing government data, securing official recognition, and participating in policy decision-making processes. As a result, civil society initiatives sometimes operate in parallel to government systems rather than being fully integrated, which reduces the potential for long-term institutional impact. Overall, the findings suggest that while collaboration between the state and civil society exists, it requires stronger institutionalization and policy support to maximize its contribution to sustainable public service delivery in Bangladesh (Banks and Hulme, 2012).

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial and multifaceted role in improving public service delivery in Bangladesh, particularly in sectors where government capacity is constrained. The empirical results indicate that CSOs contribute significantly to enhancing service accessibility, quality, and inclusiveness, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations. Their effectiveness in community mobilization, awareness-building, and direct service provision demonstrates that civil society functions as a vital intermediary between citizens and the state. However, the study also reveals that the impact of civil society is not uniform across all contexts. Variations in organizational capacity, funding availability, and regulatory environments influence the extent to which CSOs can deliver sustainable and large-scale outcomes. These findings imply that while civil society has considerable potential, its effectiveness remains conditional on structural and institutional support mechanisms (WB, 2021).

Linkage with Literature and Theory

The findings align closely with existing theoretical and empirical literature on civil society and governance. From a social capital perspective, the results support Putnam's argument that civic networks and community engagement strengthen collective action and institutional performance by fostering trust and participation. Similarly, governance theory emphasizes the importance of non-state actors in enhancing accountability, transparency, and institutional responsiveness, which is reflected in the study's evidence of CSOs' watchdog and advocacy roles. Participatory development theory further explains the positive outcomes observed, as CSOs facilitate citizen involvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes, thereby improving service relevance and sustainability. The findings also resonate with Lewis's and Salamon's arguments that civil society acts both as a service provider and a governance actor, particularly in developing country contexts. At the same time, the challenges identified in this study echo critical perspectives in the literature, such as Hossain's critique of NGO dependency and fragmentation, suggesting that civil society's role must be understood within broader political and institutional constraints (Edwards, 2014).

Implications for Governance and Development

The implications of these findings are significant for governance and development in Bangladesh. The study

demonstrates that civil society contributes not only to service provision but also to strengthening democratic governance through citizen participation and social accountability. This highlights the need for policy frameworks that formally recognize and integrate civil society into public service delivery systems. Strengthening institutional partnerships between government agencies and CSOs can improve coordination, reduce duplication of efforts, and enhance service efficiency. Moreover, supporting civil society through regulatory reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and sustainable funding mechanisms can help maximize its development impact. From a broader development perspective, the findings suggest that inclusive and participatory governance models that incorporate civil society are more likely to achieve equitable and sustainable public service outcomes. Therefore, civil society should be viewed not as a substitute for the state, but as a strategic partner in advancing good governance and sustainable development in Bangladesh (UNDP, 2015).

OPPORTUNITIES

The expanding role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bangladesh presents several important opportunities for strengthening public service delivery and improving governance outcomes. These opportunities emerge from the evolving institutional landscape, growing citizen participation, and increasing recognition of collaborative governance models.

Strengthening State–Civil Society Collaboration

One of the most significant opportunities lies in the potential for stronger partnerships between government institutions and civil society organizations. As public service delivery becomes more complex, collaboration between state agencies and CSOs can enhance efficiency, resource utilization, and service outreach. Civil society organizations often possess grassroots networks and community-level knowledge that enable them to identify local needs more effectively than centralized government structures. Institutionalizing formal partnerships, joint programs, and co-production mechanisms can therefore improve coordination and reduce service delivery gaps (Kooiman, 2003).

Expanding Community Participation and Social Accountability

Civil society organizations have the capacity to facilitate citizen engagement in governance processes. Through participatory tools such as community meetings, social audits, and citizen report cards, CSOs can strengthen public oversight of government services. This creates opportunities to improve transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in public institutions. Increased citizen participation not only enhances the legitimacy of public service programs but also ensures that services better reflect local needs and priorities (Fox, 2015).

Innovation in Service Delivery Models

Another important opportunity is the ability of CSOs to introduce innovative and flexible service delivery approaches. Unlike many public institutions that operate

within rigid bureaucratic frameworks, civil society organizations often experiment with community-based models, pilot programs, and technology-driven solutions. Examples include mobile health services, digital education initiatives, and community-managed sanitation programs. These innovations can complement government programs and provide scalable solutions to persistent development challenges (OECD, 2016).

Reaching Marginalized and Vulnerable Populations

Civil society organizations are often better positioned to reach marginalized groups, including women, children, ethnic minorities, and populations in remote rural areas. Their community presence and trust-based relationships allow them to overcome social and cultural barriers that sometimes limit government interventions. This creates opportunities to improve inclusiveness and equity in public service delivery by ensuring that vulnerable populations receive adequate access to essential services (WB, 2021).

Capacity Building and Local Institutional Development

CSOs play a critical role in strengthening local institutions and community capacities. Through training programs, leadership development, and organizational support, civil society organizations can enhance the ability of local governments and community groups to manage development initiatives. These capacity-building efforts contribute to long-term sustainability by empowering communities to participate actively in planning, monitoring, and implementing service delivery programs (Mansuri and Rao, 2013).

Policy Advocacy and Governance Reform

Civil society organizations also create opportunities for policy advocacy and institutional reform. By conducting research, raising awareness, and engaging in policy dialogue, CSOs can influence public policy and encourage governance reforms that improve service delivery systems. Their watchdog role helps identify governance gaps, corruption risks, and inefficiencies within public institutions, thereby promoting accountability and policy responsiveness (Tarrow, 2011).

Alignment with Global Development Agendas

The increasing emphasis on participatory governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships within global development frameworks—such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—provides an enabling environment for civil society engagement in development processes (Ezeanyim *et al.*, 2026; Farid *et al.*, 2026; Ogbodo *et al.*, 2026; Olayanju 2026; Singh and Garg, 2026). Bangladesh's commitment to these international development agendas creates opportunities for CSOs to collaborate with government agencies and international partners in implementing programs aimed at achieving inclusive and sustainable development outcomes (UN, 2015).

CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Despite the significant contributions of civil society organizations (CSOs) to public service delivery in

Bangladesh, their effectiveness is constrained by several structural, institutional, and financial challenges. These limitations affect the sustainability, scalability, and long-term impact of civil society initiatives within the public service framework.

Regulatory and Institutional Constraints

One of the major challenges faced by CSOs in Bangladesh is the complex regulatory environment governing their operations. Legal requirements, administrative procedures, and oversight mechanisms sometimes create bureaucratic obstacles that delay project implementation and restrict organizational flexibility. Strict regulatory frameworks related to foreign funding, registration, and reporting can limit the operational autonomy of civil society organizations. These constraints may discourage innovation and reduce the ability of CSOs to respond quickly to community needs (Rahman, 2016).

Dependence on Donor Funding

Many civil society organizations in Bangladesh rely heavily on external donor funding to sustain their activities. While donor support has enabled CSOs to implement numerous development programs, excessive dependence on project-based funding often creates financial instability. Short-term funding cycles can limit long-term planning and institutional sustainability. Additionally, donor priorities may not always align perfectly with local development needs, potentially influencing the focus and direction of CSO programs (World Bank, 2006).

Limited Coordination with Government Institutions

Although collaboration between government agencies and civil society organizations exists in certain sectors, coordination mechanisms remain weak and fragmented in many cases. The absence of formal partnership frameworks often results in overlapping responsibilities, duplication of efforts, and inefficient use of resources. In some instances, mutual distrust between government institutions and CSOs further complicates collaboration. Limited information sharing and lack of institutional communication channels can reduce the effectiveness of joint service delivery initiatives (Haque, 2012).

Capacity and Resource Constraints

Not all civil society organizations possess the same level of institutional capacity, technical expertise, or organizational resources. Larger and well-established NGOs often have stronger infrastructure, professional staff, and financial stability, allowing them to implement large-scale programs. In contrast, smaller community-based organizations frequently struggle with limited human resources, insufficient training, and inadequate management systems. These disparities can affect the consistency and quality of services delivered by CSOs (Devine, 2003).

Issues of Accountability and Transparency

While civil society organizations often promote transparency and accountability within public institutions, they themselves sometimes face questions regarding internal governance and

financial accountability. Weak monitoring systems, lack of standardized reporting practices, and limited oversight mechanisms can raise concerns about transparency in certain cases. Strengthening internal governance structures is therefore essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring responsible use of resources (TI, 2013).

Political and Institutional Sensitivities

Civil society organizations occasionally operate in politically sensitive environments where advocacy activities or monitoring roles may be perceived as challenging government authority. This can create tensions between CSOs and state institutions, particularly when civil society actors raise concerns related to governance, corruption, or policy implementation. Such political sensitivities may limit the ability of CSOs to engage fully in advocacy and accountability initiatives (Hossain, 2018).

Sustainability of Community-Based Initiatives

Another key challenge is ensuring the long-term sustainability of community-based service delivery initiatives. Many programs implemented by CSOs depend heavily on external funding and technical support. Once project funding ends, maintaining the same level of service provision becomes difficult. Without strong institutional integration with government systems or community ownership mechanisms, some initiatives risk declining after initial project periods (Banks *et al.*, 2015).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Government Policy

The findings of this study suggest that government policy in Bangladesh should formally recognize civil society organizations (CSOs) as strategic partners in public service delivery rather than treating them merely as external or supplementary actors. Policies should promote inclusive governance by institutionalizing participatory mechanisms that allow CSOs to engage in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring processes. Strengthening decentralization policies and empowering local government institutions to collaborate with CSOs can improve service responsiveness and contextual relevance. Additionally, government policies should focus on developing clear regulatory frameworks that facilitate cooperation, ensure transparency, and reduce bureaucratic barriers faced by civil society. Establishing standardized guidelines for public–civil society partnerships can enhance coordination, accountability, and efficiency in service delivery across sectors (Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Implications for Civil Society Organizations

For civil society organizations, the study highlights the importance of strengthening internal governance, accountability, and professional capacity to sustain their role in public service delivery. CSOs should invest in institutional development, evidence-based program design, and impact evaluation mechanisms to demonstrate effectiveness and credibility. Enhancing coordination among CSOs through networks and coalitions can reduce fragmentation, avoid duplication of efforts, and increase collective influence in

policy advocacy. Furthermore, CSOs should diversify funding sources beyond donor dependency by exploring partnerships with government agencies, private sector actors, and community-based financing models. Such strategies can enhance financial sustainability and enable long-term engagement in service delivery and governance reform initiatives (Tarrow, 2011).

Institutional Reforms

At the institutional level, the study underscores the need for reforms that promote collaborative governance and integrated service delivery systems. Government institutions should establish formal platforms for dialogue and partnership with civil society, such as joint committees, consultative forums, and co-production mechanisms. Capacity-building programs for public officials and CSO leaders can strengthen mutual trust, technical skills, and collaborative competencies. Moreover, reforms in public financial management and procurement systems are necessary to enable transparent contracting and funding of CSO-led service initiatives. Strengthening legal and institutional safeguards for civil society autonomy and participation will further enhance democratic governance and ensure that civil society's contributions are effectively integrated into national development strategies (UNDP, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Practical Recommendations

At the practical level, it is recommended that government agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs) strengthen community-based service delivery models to ensure that public services effectively reach marginalized and underserved populations. Joint needs assessments should be conducted at the local level to identify service gaps and prioritize interventions based on community demands. CSOs should be encouraged to expand grassroots engagement through participatory tools such as community meetings, citizen report cards, and social audits to enhance transparency and accountability in service provision. In addition, capacity-building initiatives should be implemented for frontline service providers, including training in project management, monitoring and evaluation, and digital service delivery systems, to improve operational efficiency and service quality.

Strategic Recommendations

From a strategic perspective, long-term collaboration frameworks between government institutions and CSOs should be developed to move beyond short-term, project-based partnerships. Establishing national and sector-specific coordination platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and policy dialogue among key stakeholders. CSOs should also adopt strategic planning and evidence-based advocacy approaches to align their programs with national development priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, strengthening CSO networks and alliances can enhance collective bargaining power, improve policy influence, and foster innovation in public service delivery.

Institutional and Policy Reforms

At the institutional and policy level, comprehensive reforms are necessary to create an enabling environment for effective civil society participation in public service delivery. The government should revise and update existing legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency, reduce administrative barriers, and safeguard civil society autonomy. Introducing formal partnership policies and guidelines for public-civil society collaboration can institutionalize co-production mechanisms and clarify roles and responsibilities. Additionally, reforms in public financing systems should allow for transparent funding channels, performance-based contracting, and accountability mechanisms for CSO-led service initiatives. Strengthening institutional support structures, such as independent oversight bodies and participatory governance platforms, will further enhance the integration of civil society into national development strategies and promote sustainable, inclusive, and responsive public service delivery in Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the contribution of civil society organizations (CSOs) to public service delivery in Bangladesh and finds that civil society plays a significant and positive role in enhancing service accessibility, quality, and inclusiveness, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations through community-based approaches, participatory mechanisms, and innovative service delivery models. The sector-wise analysis reveals notable contributions in health, education, sanitation, and social protection, where CSOs effectively complement government efforts by filling service gaps, mobilizing communities, and promoting awareness. The study contributes to existing literature by providing a comprehensive and context-specific understanding of civil society's dual role as both a service provider and a governance actor, thereby extending theoretical debates on governance, participatory development, and collaborative governance in developing country contexts. It also offers important policy-relevant insights by highlighting how civil society enhances accountability, citizen participation, and institutional responsiveness. However, the study has certain limitations, including reliance on a mixed-methods approach with a limited sample size, a focus on selected sectors and relatively established CSOs, and potential response bias due to self-reported data, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research should incorporate larger and more diverse samples, conduct longitudinal and comparative studies across different countries, and explore the political economy of civil society-state relations, including regulatory frameworks, power dynamics, and funding structures, to better understand the long-term sustainability and broader governance implications of civil society's role in public service delivery.

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Conflict of Interest

There is not any conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/ or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy, have been completely observed by the author.

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