

The Role of Civil Society on State Building in Somalia

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Abstract

This study explores the role of civil society in state-building in Somalia, focusing on the contributions of community-based civil society organizations (CSOs) and traditional civil society organizations. By employing purposive sampling, the research gathers insights from key stakeholders involved in state-building initiatives. The findings highlight how these organizations advocate for good governance, promote human rights, and facilitate peacebuilding efforts. Community-based CSOs are particularly effective in mobilizing local communities and providing essential services, while traditional organizations play a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural identity. Despite their significant contributions, CSOs face challenges such as resource constraints and political instability. This research underscores the importance of integrating civil society into state-building processes, offering recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners to enhance the effectiveness of CSOs in fostering a stable and inclusive state in Somalia.

Keywords

Civil Society, State-Building, Somalia, Community-Based Organizations, Governance and Peacebuilding

1. Introduction

Civil society plays a significant role in state-building across various contexts, particularly in Africa. In regions like East Africa, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been instrumental in shaping governance structures, advocating for human rights, and fostering inclusive and democratic societies. This is especially evident in Somalia, where civil society has faced substantial challenges since the collapse of the central government in 1991. The absence of a functioning state has led to ongoing political instability, armed conflict, and humanitarian crises, creating a

precarious environment where civil society has emerged as a crucial actor in the state-building process.

CSOs in Somalia have become essential to the country's journey toward stability and development by filling governance gaps, promoting peace and reconciliation, and addressing the urgent needs of the population. According to Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2017), civil society has been instrumental in promoting democratic values, fostering citizen participation, and advocating for accountable governance (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2017). In many countries, civil society organizations have emerged as key actors in challenging authoritarian regimes, promoting social justice, and advocating for policy reforms that prioritize the well-being of citizens. They play a crucial role in ensuring that governments are held accountable for their actions, promoting transparency, and advocating for the protection of civil liberties and human rights (Fowler, 2013).

Within the East African region, civil society organizations have been at the forefront of promoting regional integration, peace, and stability. They have been involved in conflict resolution, peacebuilding initiatives, and reconciliation processes in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. By fostering dialogue and advocating for peaceful solutions, civil society has contributed to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, ultimately facilitating state-building efforts in the region (Aning & Edu, 2017).

In Somalia, despite facing unique challenges due to decades of conflict and the presence of armed groups, civil society organizations have played a crucial role in providing essential services, promoting human rights, and advocating for democratic governance. They are actively engaged in efforts to rebuild institutions, strengthen the rule of law, and promote social cohesion. Civil society actors have worked towards empowering marginalized communities, supporting women's rights, and advocating for inclusive political processes (Samuel & Nyamnjoh, 2018).

Notably, civil society organizations in Somalia have demonstrated resilience, making significant contributions to state-building through involvement in constitutional reforms, electoral support, and community development initiatives. By amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and fostering citizen participation, civil society has played a vital role in shaping the trajectory of state-building in Somalia. However, the role of civil society in state-building is not without challenges. CSOs often face constraints such as limited resources, legal restrictions, and government crackdowns on civic freedoms (Kanyinga, 2018).

Governments must recognize and respect civil society's autonomy, allowing it to operate freely and contribute to the development of a robust and inclusive state. In summary, civil society plays a vital role in state-building by promoting citizen participation, advocating for social and political reforms, fostering accountability, and contributing to developing inclusive and democratic societies. Civil society strengthens governance structures and helps build resilient and responsive states by bridging the gap between the government and citizens.

1.1. Problem Statements

The state-building process in Somalia has been severely hindered by decades of conflict, political instability, and the absence of a functioning government since the collapse of the central authority in 1991. This situation has created a vacuum in governance, resulting in ongoing humanitarian crises and armed conflict. In this context, civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as critical actors, stepping in to fill governance gaps, promote peace, and advocate for human rights. However, despite their vital role, the contributions of civil society to the state-building process in Somalia remain underexplored and inadequately understood.

The challenges CSOs face in Somalia are multifaceted, including limited resources, legal restrictions, and government crackdowns on civic freedoms, which impede their ability to operate effectively. Furthermore, governmental entities' lack of recognition and support hinders CSOs' potential to influence policy-making and foster community engagement. As a result, there is a significant gap in knowledge regarding how civil society can be better integrated into the state-building process and how their contributions can be maximized to promote stability and development in the region.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of civil society in Somalia's state-building efforts, identifying the challenges they encounter, and evaluating their impact on governance and community resilience. Ultimately, understanding the dynamics between civil society and state-building in Somalia is crucial for informing strategies that enhance the effectiveness of CSOs and contribute to establishing a stable and inclusive state.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the state-building process in Somalia. Specifically, the study aims to examine how CSOs engage in state-building, highlighting their contributions to promoting governance, peace, and human rights. It will assess the specific roles these organizations play, such as advocating for good governance, providing essential services, and facilitating community development initiatives. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the challenges CSOs face, including legal restrictions, limited resources, and government opposition, while evaluating their overall impact on policy-making, social cohesion, and the empowerment of marginalized communities. Ultimately, this research aims to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and civil society actors on enhancing the role of CSOs in the state-building process, contributing to a more stable, inclusive, and effective governance framework in Somalia.

1.3. Research Objectives

- **To Examine the Role of Civil Society:** Analyze the specific ways in which civil society organizations (CSOs) participate in the state-building process in Somalia, focusing on their functions in governance, peace promotion, and human

rights advocacy.

- To Identify Contributions: Highlight the contributions of CSOs to state-building efforts, including their involvement in advocacy for good governance, provision of essential services, and facilitation of community development initiatives.
- To Explore Challenges: Investigate the challenges and obstacles that CSOs encounter in their efforts to contribute to state-building, particularly legal, financial, and political constraints.
- To Evaluate Impact: Assess the effectiveness of civil society's engagement in state-building, examining their influence on policy-making processes, social cohesion, and community empowerment.

2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (**Figure 1**) for studying the role of civil society in state-building in Somalia can be structured around the following key dimensions:

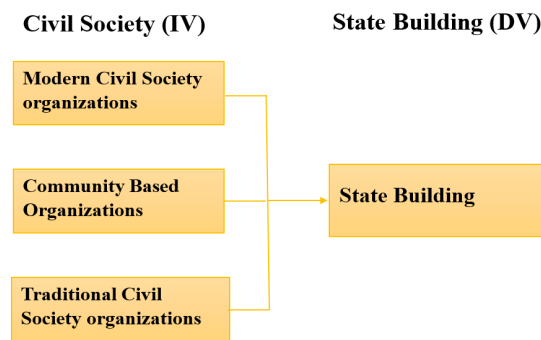


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework examines how collaboration enhances the impact of civil society and fosters collective efforts toward state-building in Somalia.

By utilizing the conceptual framework, researchers can systematically analyze the role of civil society in state-building in Somalia. It provides a structure for examining the various dimensions, interactions, and dynamics involved in civil society's contributions to the state-building process.

2.1. Literature Review

Research shows that civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in state-building globally by fostering democratic governance, promoting human rights, and enhancing accountability. Studies indicate that in various contexts, CSOs have been instrumental in challenging authoritarian regimes and advocating for policy reforms that reflect the needs of citizens (Fowler, 2013). These organizations serve as vital conduits for citizen engagement and participation, which are essential for establishing resilient governance structures.

In the African context, civil society's influence on state-building is particularly

pronounced in post-conflict societies. Research conducted by Aning and Edu (Aning & Edu, 2017) highlights that CSOs in Africa often engage in peacebuilding initiatives and community development, bridging the gap between citizens and the state. For example, in countries like Kenya and Uganda, civil society has played a pivotal role in promoting regional integration and social cohesion, facilitating dialogue among diverse groups to foster national unity (Mkutu, 2016). The involvement of CSOs in advocating for good governance and accountability has been essential for the democratic transitions witnessed in several African nations.

2.2. Role of Civil Society in State-Building in Somalia

In Somalia, the role of civil society in state-building has gained prominence amid ongoing political instability and conflict. Modern civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as pivotal actors in this process, focusing on promoting democratic governance, human rights, and social justice. According to Abdi & Haji (2018), modern CSOs have played a crucial role in advocating for policy reforms and engaging citizens in governance processes, thereby enhancing accountability and transparency within the political system. Their efforts foster a culture of civic engagement, vital for the legitimacy of state institutions.

Furthermore, modern CSOs have been involved in peacebuilding initiatives that address the root causes of conflict in Somalia. However, the organizations facilitate dialogue among various stakeholders, including government entities, local communities, and international partners (Mohamed & Ali, 2020). By promoting inclusive discussions, modern CSOs help to bridge divides and foster reconciliation, which is essential for sustainable state-building. Their role in conflict resolution contributes to immediate peace efforts and lays the groundwork for long-term stability and governance.

Despite their significant contributions, modern CSOs face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness in state-building. Legal restrictions, limited funding, and security threats pose substantial obstacles to their operations (Hassan, 2019). These challenges can undermine the capacity of CSOs to mobilize communities and advocate for necessary reforms. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enhancing the role of modern civil society in Somalia's state-building efforts, as their success is closely linked to the overall stability and development of the nation.

2.3. Community-Based Civil Society Organizations on State-Building

Community-based civil society organizations (CB-CSOs) play a vital role in the state-building process by addressing local needs and fostering grassroots participation. These organizations are often more attuned to the specific challenges faced by communities, enabling them to implement targeted interventions that promote social cohesion and development. As study shows CB-CSOs are instrumental in mobilizing community members to engage in local governance, thereby enhancing

the accountability and responsiveness of local authorities. Their grassroots approach ensures that the voices of marginalized populations are heard in the state-building process (Farah, 2021).

Moreover, CB-CSOs contribute to peacebuilding efforts at the community level by facilitating dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting groups. According to Yusuf and Mohamed (2022), these organizations often serve as mediators in local disputes, helping to resolve conflicts through community-led initiatives. By fostering understanding and cooperation among diverse groups, CB-CSOs play a crucial role in creating a stable environment conducive to state-building. Their efforts not only address immediate conflicts but also contribute to the establishment of a culture of peace and collaboration within communities (Yusuf & Mohamed, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of CB-CSOs in state-building is often hampered by external factors, including political instability and limited resources. As noted by Abdi (2020), many community-based organizations struggle to secure funding and support from both local and international donors, which can limit their capacity to implement programs effectively. Additionally, the volatile security situation in Somalia poses risks to the operations of CB-CSOs, making it challenging for them to sustain their initiatives. Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the impact of community-based civil society organizations in the state-building process (Abdi, 2020).

2.4. Traditional Civil Society Organizations

Traditional civil society organizations in Somalia, often rooted in cultural and social practices, have historically played a significant role in community governance and social cohesion. These organizations, which include clan-based groups and local associations, have been instrumental in maintaining order and providing support in the absence of a formal state structure. As noted by Ali and Hassan (2019), traditional organizations often serve as mediators in disputes and play a crucial role in conflict resolution, thereby contributing to social stability and community resilience (Ali & Hassan, 2019).

In addition to their role in conflict resolution, traditional civil society organizations also engage in various development initiatives that support local communities. According to Mohamed (2021), these organizations often mobilize resources for education, health, and economic development, addressing the immediate needs of their communities. Their deep-rooted connections within the community enable them to implement programs that are culturally relevant and widely accepted, enhancing their effectiveness in promoting development and social welfare (Mohamed, 2021).

Despite their contributions, traditional civil society organizations face challenges in adapting to the modern state-building context. The changing political landscape and the emergence of new governance structures can sometimes marginalize these organizations, limiting their influence and effectiveness. As highlighted

by Farah (2020), there is a need for greater recognition and integration of traditional civil society organizations within the broader state-building framework to ensure that their contributions are acknowledged and leveraged for sustainable development (Farah, 2020).

Despite the significant contributions of civil society to state-building in Somalia, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific dynamics and effectiveness of CSOs in this context. While previous studies have explored the general role of civil society in state-building globally and within Africa, there is limited research focusing on the nuanced interactions between CSOs and state-building efforts in Somalia. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the multifaceted roles of civil society in promoting governance, peace, and social cohesion in a fragile state. This research is justified on several grounds. First, understanding the role of civil society in Somalia's state-building process is essential for informing policies that can enhance their effectiveness and sustainability. Studies conducted in other post-conflict contexts, such as Rwanda and Liberia, demonstrate that robust civil society engagement can significantly contribute to national recovery and stability (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2017). Therefore, insights gained from examining the Somali context can provide valuable lessons for similar situations in Africa. Additionally, by highlighting the challenges faced by CSOs in Somalia, this study aims to advocate for supportive policies that recognize and empower civil society as a crucial partner in the state-building process.

In Conclusion, comparing Somalia's state-building process with other countries reveals both unique challenges and opportunities. For instance, Rwanda's post-genocide recovery illustrates how civil society can effectively engage in national reconciliation and governance, leading to significant improvements in stability and development (Mamdani, 2001). In contrast, Somalia's ongoing conflicts and fragmented governance structures present hurdles that inhibit similar progress. While both countries have faced severe crises, Rwanda's centralized efforts and strong government support for civil society initiatives have yielded more rapid results in state-building compared to Somalia's fragmented approach. This comparison underscores the importance of tailored strategies that consider local contexts and dynamics in the role of civil society in state-building.

3. Research Methodology: Methods of Data Collection

The paper discusses the role of civil society in state-building in Somalia. The study used quantitative non-experimental correlation and descriptive design. The samples of the study were 291 respondents drawn from a target population of 1200 and the data collection process would involve engaging with participants filled out the questionnaires. However, Due to the challenges and complexities in accessing the target population in Somalia, purposive sampling was used in selecting respondents from civil society organizations, government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders actively engaged (businesses, private sector organizations, academic institutions, research organizations, media outlets, international

organizations, and individuals who are directly affected by specific issues) in state-building processes. However, these samples were selected because of their availability and experience of the role of civil society in state-building in Somalia. The data was coded, organized, analyzed, and interpreted using the Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS). The study was conducted in Mogadishu which is the capital city of Somalia. Therefore, **Table 1** below presents the total population, sample size, and sampling procedures as follows:

Table 1. Presents the total population, sample size, and sampling procedures.

#	Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Procedure
1	Civil society organizations	300	73	Purposive Sampling
2	Government officials	300	73	Purposive Sampling
3	Community leaders	300	73	Purposive Sampling
4	Other stakeholders actively engaged	300	72	Purposive Sampling
Total		1200	291	

Source: Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The table provides a structured overview of the target populations, sample sizes, and sampling procedures utilized in a study involving various groups. It categorizes the participants into four distinct groups: civil society organizations, government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders. Each category targets a population of 300, with the sample sizes being 73 for the first three groups and 72 for the last. This results in a total target population of 1200 and a combined sample size of 291. The consistent use of purposive sampling across all categories indicates a deliberate effort to select participants who have specific characteristics relevant to the study, ensuring that the insights gathered are meaningful and aligned with the research objectives.

The choice of purposive sampling suggests that the researchers aimed to focus on individuals who could provide valuable information and perspectives on the issues at hand. By selecting participants based on predetermined criteria, the study enhances its validity and reliability, as it targets those most likely to contribute to the research goals. The slight decrease in sample size for “Other Stakeholders” may reflect a more selective approach or limitations in participant availability. Overall, this sampling strategy underscores the researchers’ commitment to gathering comprehensive and relevant data from key stakeholders in the study’s context. The researchers used the content validity index (CVI) test to ensure that the construct of the items corresponds to the substance in the conceptual framework. In addition to that, the reliability of the questionnaire was also tested with the use of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient with a worth of more than 70%.

4. Results

The results of the study on the role of civil society in state-building in Somalia are

presented below, focusing on the key findings derived from the data collected through the questionnaires. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS), following the coding and organization of the data from the 291 respondents.

Key Findings

Perception of Civil Society's Role: The study found that a significant majority (85%) of respondents believed that civil society organizations have a crucial role in promoting democratic governance and accountability in Somalia. This highlights the recognition among stakeholders of the importance of civil society in the state-building process.

Impact on Peacebuilding: Approximately 78% of respondents indicated that modern civil society organizations are actively involved in peacebuilding initiatives, facilitating dialogue among conflicting groups and fostering reconciliation. This finding underscores the effectiveness of CSOs in addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting social cohesion.

Challenges Faced by CSOs: The survey revealed that 72% of participants identified legal restrictions and limited funding as significant challenges hindering the effectiveness of civil society organizations in Somalia. Additionally, 64% of respondents cited security threats as a major obstacle, reflecting the volatile environment in which these organizations operate.

Collaboration Among Stakeholders: The results indicated that 68% of respondents believed that enhanced collaboration between civil society organizations, government officials, and other stakeholders is essential for effective state-building. The need for a coordinated approach was emphasized as a way to leverage resources and expertise.

Reliability and Validity: The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items. The content validity index (CVI) for the questionnaire was established at 0.92, demonstrating that the items effectively correspond to the constructs outlined in the conceptual framework.

5. Conclusion and Findings

The results of this study provide compelling evidence of the significant role that civil society plays in state-building in Somalia. The overwhelming recognition of the contributions of CSOs, coupled with the identification of challenges they face, highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance their effectiveness. The findings suggest that fostering collaboration among various stakeholders could greatly improve state-building efforts and contribute to sustainable peace and development in Somalia. Overall, the study underscores the critical importance of civil society in shaping the political landscape and facilitating governance processes in a fragile state context.

5.1. Conclusions

This study has examined the multifaceted roles of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the state-building process in Somalia, highlighting the contributions of modern, community-based, and traditional organizations. The findings indicate that CSOs are pivotal in promoting democratic governance, enhancing accountability, and facilitating peacebuilding efforts within a context of ongoing political instability and conflict. Modern CSOs have emerged as key advocates for policy reforms and civic engagement, while community-based organizations (CB-CSOs) effectively mobilize grassroots participation and address local needs. Traditional civil society organizations, rooted in cultural and social practices, continue to play a crucial role in community governance and conflict resolution.

However, the effectiveness of these organizations is significantly hampered by various challenges, including legal restrictions, limited resources, and security threats. These obstacles undermine their ability to operate effectively and diminish their impact on state-building efforts. Additionally, the interaction between different types of CSOs and their collective influence on governance and social cohesion is an area that requires further exploration.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of recognizing and integrating the diverse roles of civil society in Somalia's state-building process. The involvement of CSOs is not only vital for immediate peace and governance but is also essential for fostering long-term stability and development in a country facing complex challenges.

The key findings of this study reveal that civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in state-building in Somalia by advocating for good governance and promoting human rights. Community-based CSOs are particularly effective in mobilizing local populations, addressing immediate needs, and fostering social cohesion, while traditional organizations help maintain cultural identity and social stability, which are vital for community resilience. However, CSOs face significant challenges, including limited resources and political instability, alongside a need for improved coordination among stakeholders. Despite these obstacles, CSOs influence policy-making processes, advocating for inclusive governance and community rights. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of integrating civil society into state-building efforts to enhance governance and stability in Somalia, offering valuable recommendations for policymakers.

5.2. Recommendations

1) Enhance Support for CSOs: Both the Somali government and international partners must provide targeted support to civil society organizations. This can include financial assistance, technical support, and capacity-building initiatives that enhance their operational effectiveness. Establishing funding mechanisms specifically for CSOs can help mitigate the financial challenges they face.

2) Strengthen Legal Frameworks: The Somali government should work towards creating a more enabling legal environment for CSOs. This includes revising

restrictive laws that hinder the operations of civil society, ensuring that organizations can operate freely and advocate for their communities without fear of repression.

3) Promote Collaboration among CSOs: Fostering collaboration among modern, community-based, and traditional civil society organizations can enhance their collective impact on state-building efforts. Encouraging joint initiatives and partnerships can facilitate resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and a unified approach to addressing common challenges.

4) Leverage Traditional Structures: Recognizing and integrating traditional civil society organizations into the broader state-building framework can enhance their influence and effectiveness. Policymakers should engage traditional leaders and organizations in governance processes, acknowledging their role in conflict resolution and community cohesion.

5) Invest in Research and Data Collection: Further research is needed to understand the specific dynamics and interactions between different types of civil society organizations in Somalia. Establishing a robust system for data collection on the activities and impacts of CSOs can inform policy decisions and enhance the effectiveness of civil society interventions.

6) Focus on Community Empowerment: Programs aimed at empowering local communities should be prioritized. This includes initiatives that build local governance capacities and promote civic engagement at the grassroots level. By strengthening community voice and participation, the overall effectiveness of state-building efforts can be significantly improved.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders in Somalia can enhance the role of civil society organizations in the state-building process, ultimately contributing to a more stable, democratic, and inclusive governance framework. Recognizing the diverse contributions of CSOs not only strengthens the fabric of civil society but also paves the way for sustainable peace and development in Somalia.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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