

Research Article

An Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Mechanisms Used by Civil Society Organisations in Sierra Leone in Facilitating Citizens' Participation in Governance

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Abstract

This paper aims to assess five (5) of the mechanisms used by CSOs to facilitate citizens' participation in governance and to determine the most effective ones based on accessibility to citizens, cost of using it, appropriateness, size of participants and reachability. The mechanisms include the dissemination of information; public consultation and dialogue; citizen mobilization and training; seminars and workshops; and civic education. This study adopted a quantitative research approach that was grounded in the theory of direct democracy. Questionnaires were used to collect data from selected CSOs. The study targeted CSOs in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Freetown is the capital city of Sierra Leone and it is a hub for many CSOs. The study selected and included sixty (60) CSO staff through purposive sampling. Descriptive analysis was done to ascertain the frequencies, percentages and means that informed the appropriateness of each mechanism. Empirical findings from this paper show the most appropriate mechanisms that CSOs use to facilitate citizens' participation in governance. It suggests that the most appropriate mechanism is the dissemination of information, followed by public consultation and dialogue, citizen mobilisation and training, and seminars and workshops. However, civic education is not effective in facilitating citizens' participation in governance. The research method adopted provided only a broad overview of the mechanisms, so a comprehensive analysis of them was not provided. Additionally, it did not capture the underlying reasons and contexts in which these mechanisms are effective. Also, the study might have failed to assess the variety of mechanisms since it only focused on five (5) mechanisms and focused on a small group of CSOs at a single place. Moreover, the effectiveness of each mechanism has been assessed based on five factors, which may not be the only considerations in selecting a particular mechanism. This paper makes recommendations that are useful in ensuring that CSOs properly utilise these mechanisms to foster citizens' participation. It has also filled in a research gap found in earlier studies and helped evaluate the different ways that civil society organisations (CSOs) help people get involved in government.

Keywords

Citizens' Participation, Mechanisms, CSOs, Effectiveness, Democracy

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1. Introduction

Democratic practices are not only limited to electioneering processes. They also involve citizens' participation in governance. According to Özden, giving citizens control over participation makes real democracies special [1]. The implementation of the public participation process leads to the democratisation of social values and the better planning and fulfilment of public needs [2]. It is now considered a means to reconfigure democracy through an act that expresses individual will. So, it is important to mention that citizen participation is influencing the way in which governments make decisions and assume political power [3].

Irrespective of how participation occurs, the idea of participation always rests on a sharing of power between the citizens and the government. Besides, it is the boundary found somewhere between policy-making by administrative fiat and direct democracy [4]. Interactive forms of governance strive to respond to the problems caused by previous public management doctrines that have neglected the role of civil society and positioned citizens as passive recipients or consumers [5]. However, Axelsson et al. argue that the question of who should participate and how is thus very difficult to answer [6].

The involvement of the community in its entirety is done through a development mindset that perceives the community as the subject of regulations with a diversity of behaviours [7]. Additionally, participation can focus on wider governance issues or more specific questions and it may also relate to long-term processes or single activities [8]. However, Kim and Lee argue that it is difficult to evaluate the performance of various citizen participation programs in collaborative governance [9]. Similarly, Malek et al. emphasise that despite immense organisational support, stakeholders encompassing the government and citizens are still plagued with difficulties in achieving genuine engagement [10].

Citizens' participation in governance is important for so many reasons. First, their participation significantly increases legitimacy and unquestionably encourages and fosters accountability and the transparency of governance processes [11]. Additionally, direct participation would let the public have more control over public affairs and would offset the power of government bureaucracies and sectoral interest groups [12]. In policy implementation, citizens' participation is useful for timely understanding the public's interests and requirements. Moreover, it can increase citizens' awareness and support of the content of public policy implementation and enhance the sense of trust in the government [13].

The aim of this study is to assess the various ways CSOs facilitate citizens' participation in governance and determine the most appropriate ways in the context of Sierra Leone. In this paper, citizens' participation, citizens' engagement, citizens' involvement and public participation will be used interchangeably.

1.1. Research Problem

In order for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Sierra Leone to bring about democratic changes, they need to use the right tools that can have a positive effect on the way government works and get more people involved. These CSOs recognise this and employ a variety of mechanisms. While some CSOs use civic education, public consultation, dialogue, community mobilization, and advocacy, others use unconventional methods, such as the dissemination of information, to facilitate citizens' participation. However, it remains unclear which mechanisms CSOs should employ to ensure they are cost-effective, easily accessible to citizens, appropriate, and encourage the participation of a large audience. This raises concern about the effectiveness and scope of the mechanisms employed by CSOs in enhancing meaningful civic engagement. It also shows that significant gaps exist when it comes to how CSOs facilitate citizens' participation in governance and limited attention has been paid to the assessment of the various mechanisms used by CSOs. Therefore, this study seeks to assess five of these mechanisms employed by CSOs and determine the most effective ones based on five criteria: cost-effectiveness, accessibility, appropriateness, size of participants and reachability.

1.2. Research Question

What mechanisms are effective based on accessibility to citizens, cost-effectiveness, appropriateness, reachability and size of participants?

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was established based on the theory of direct democracy. Direct democracy concentrates on the creation of policy by way of popular vote by citizens and it is a key mechanism by which voters themselves can initiate policy change [14]. Direct democracy promises to solve some of the problems of representative democracy-or, in the case of partly free democracies, to give people at least some influence over political decisions [15]. Therefore, they adopt a significantly different approach to democracy. The view of this theory establishes that besides regular elections, democracy also implies the active, direct participation of individual citizens in government [12]. As used in this study, this theory supports the role of CSOs in promoting citizen participation in governance, which bridges the gap between citizens and the state. Such is done through advocacy, mobilisation, policy dialogue, and digital platforms. For example, by disseminating information on governance issues, the public is likely to become aware and get involved in policy-making. Their concerns and issues will be communicated to policymakers, serving as a means of problem identification.

3. Literature Review

This section explores CSOs' mechanisms for citizen participation in governance, their effectiveness, and challenges. It synthesizes findings from conceptual reviews, empirical studies, and case analyses. Additionally, it explores civil society's role in governance and citizens' participation, focusing on key definitions and theoretical frameworks to frame the literature review and also delves into various mechanisms that reveal the diverse nature of CSO activities and their importance in promoting citizen engagement.

3.1. Civil Society Organisations

The conceptual history of civil society provides a philosophical perspective, which is indispensable for the examination of the contemporary debate on civil society [16]. The modern-day academic construct of civil societies, however, gained popularity with the emergence of capitalism. First, capitalism brought about a clearer distinction between political and non-political spheres. Additionally, it thus prepared the grounds for the emergence of civil society as a domain independent from the state [17]. CSOs being political in the public interest could be part of a continuous legislative and even electoral process for state power acquisition [18]. This implies that CSOs, often non-political, advocate for public interests, influence policy, and indirectly influence state power acquisition, increasing citizen engagement in governance and thereby being perceived as political.

Political thinkers, especially Aristotle, Locke, Hobbes, Plato, Cicero and Socrates, were amongst the people who supported the idea of civil society. For example, Cicero introduced the term "societas civilis," which became popular among the Romans. The idea of civil society is deeply rooted in the tradition of Western political thought and this term "civil society" can be traced through the works of Cicero and other Romans and Greek philosophers [16]. According to Aristotle, "CSOs are associations that enable people to share in their righteous task of the state and the citizens". However, Song et al. think that civil society plays a small role in decision-making, management, and monitoring even though it is an important stakeholder in public governance [19].

Foreign multilateral and bilateral agencies universally supported and financed the formation of CSOs, often for the purpose of service and democracy promotion [20]. Civil society exists "when people make combined efforts through voluntary associations to mould rules: both official, formal, legal arrangements and informal social constructs [16]. All non-market and non-state organisations that people organise for shared objectives constitute CSOs [17]. Bahmani asserts that the government does not control civil society, in contrast to the state [21]. It is made up of institutions, organisations, and pressure groups that deal with both private and public issues.

3.2. Citizens' Participation in Governance

Both Kimutai and Amisi as well as Oliveira and Ckagnazarof concur that participation tends to occur more frequently along two distinct lines [22, 23]. However, while the former authors talk about direct and indirect participation, the latter authors categorise participations into political and citizen (social) participations. According to Kimutai and Amisi, it is direct when citizens own the government and participate in state decisions, while the opposite occurs in a representative democracy where elected officials and professional administrators act on citizens' behalf [22]. Oliveira and Ckagnazarof define direct participation as citizen participation, while indirect participation is synonymous with political participation [23].

Citizens' involvement in governance fosters a robust state-citizen relationship, promoting open, transparent, inclusive, and participatory governance. While Song et al. opine that it is the right of citizens to participate in governance issues, especially in a democracy [19], Lahdili et al. view it from the perspective of citizens as a form of self-expression [24]. However, Ruvalcaba-Gomez comments that participation has also been considered a threat to the "status quo" because of the reach and empowerment of citizens [3]. It poses a threat because it has the potential to influence how governments make decisions and assume political power. Citizens' empowerment is enhanced as their participation is not limited to simple electoral processes for government legitimacy.

Citizens' participation in governance is important for improving public policies and achieving good governance [9, 13, 24-26]. This relevance encompasses greater public performance through the engagement of varied interests and the pursuit of ecumenical solutions, increased political and social participation, and heightened perceptions of governmental transparency and openness in processes and decision-making. For this reason, Manes-Rossi et al. suggest that citizens allocate their time and competence in participating in governance processes [27]. From a democratic perspective, citizen participation is seen as a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making [28].

Public participation is the process through which the government engages citizens in the decision-making and implementation of government programs [29]. Governments can involve citizens in program implementation through consultation, co-production, volunteerism, and monitoring, ensuring they are engaged participants, and enhancing the efficacy and accountability of government initiatives. Due to the relevance of citizens participation in governance, empirical studies have been done to assess the factors affecting citizens' participation in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects [30], in policy decision-making [31], in national budget processes [32] and in the formulation of public policy [33].

Some authors identified the mechanisms used to foster citizens participation [22, 34, 35]. These include public hearings and sittings, citizen advisory councils and citizen

panels, neighborhood or resident association meetings and surveys, citizen focus groups and interaction on social media, training and creating awareness. Yazhen and Hong observe that in China, citizens participate in governance through elections, villager autonomy, citizen participation in public decision-making and citizen oversight [36]. Thelma focuses on the impact of civic education on citizen participation [37]. The study shows that civic education can foster citizens participation in governance.

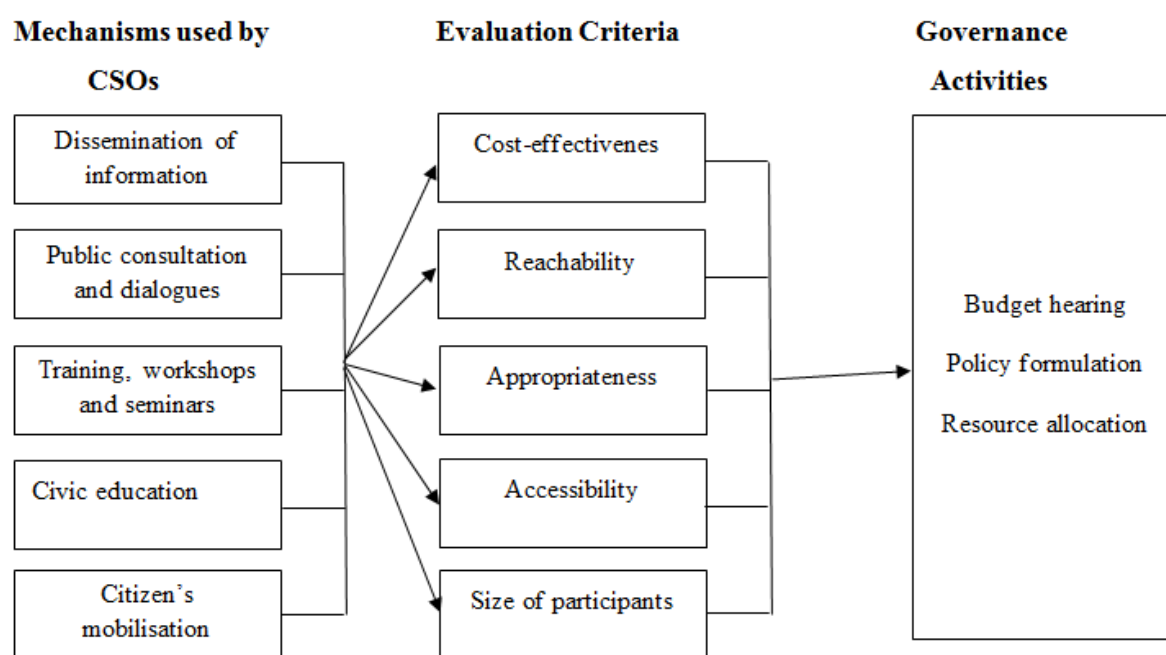
3.3. Research Gap

Based on the literature review, the author acknowledges that not many studies have assessed the mechanisms used by CSOs in facilitating citizens' participation in governance. The focus of authors has been on the forms of citizens' participation as well as the factors affecting citizens participation. Additionally, while some of these studies were not em-

pirical studies, others that are empirical focused on only one mechanism-for example, Thelma focused on only civic education [37]. Moreover, the few empirical studies did not assess the mechanisms based on any predefined criteria that the current study would utilise.

3.4. Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework demonstrates the process of assessing the effectiveness of the five mechanisms using pre-defined criteria. The arrows moving from the mechanisms to the evaluation criteria show that each mechanism is evaluated based on these criteria to determine whether they are effectiveness. The arrow pointing at governance activities explains that an effectiveness mechanism can facilitate citizens participation in governance. The study defines the key terms included in the framework.



Source: Researcher (2024)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

1. Governance refers to the management of public affairs, such as public policy making and resource mobilisation.
2. Citizen's participation involves the active involvement or engagement of citizens in governance processes.
3. Citizen participation is used here as a term that describes the involvement of individuals or communities in the planning, design, implementation and maintenance of projects and policies.
4. Civic education (also known as citizen education or democracy education) can be broadly defined as the provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes.
5. Dissemination of information deals with the process of informing the public about governance activities such as policies and budgetary hearing etc.
6. Citizen's mobilisation: Citizen mobilization is the process of organizing individuals for collective action, often achieved through protests or petitions.
7. Public consultations and dialogues involve inviting citizens to provide their views, suggestions and concerns

and open discussions between government and the public.

8. Training, workshops and seminars are tools used to empower citizens with the skills and knowledge to actively engage in governance processes.

4. Material and Methods

4.1. Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research design to assess the various mechanisms used by CSOs to facilitate citizens' participation in governance. The quantitative research design was appropriate since it allowed the researcher to use statistical approaches to arrive at a conclusion.

4.2. Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

This study limited its target population to CSOs in Freetown that concentrate on governance. Freetown was selected since it is the hub of numerous active CSOs. Additionally, Freetown, as the capital city of Sierra Leone, serves as a prime example of the broader governance issues in the country. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select six (6) CSOs from which primary data was collected. Their selection was based solely on their mission statements, indicating a focus on governance issues.

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires that consisted of closed-ended questions were administered to employees of these selected CSOs in December 2024. The questionnaire was divided into five sections, each of which focused on a particular evaluation criterion. In total, sixty (60) questionnaires were administered, of which ten (10) were given to each CSO. Data collected from participants were subjected to descriptive statistics. This gave the frequencies and the means.

4.4. Evaluation Criteria

(1) Cost-Effectiveness

The utilization of each mechanism involves cost, which can encompass various factors, such as time, resources, effort, and political or social costs. A lower-cost mechanism may be more accessible and effective in engaging a wider population without requiring extensive resources, showing that it is cost-effective.

(2) Appropriateness

The appropriateness implies the relevance and suitability

of a mechanism in addressing the specific needs of the citizens. The mechanism is tailored to meet the specific needs of the diverse population.

(3) Reachability

Reachability refers to the mechanism's ability to effectively engage a diverse range of citizens, especially those who may be marginalised or disenfranchised.

(4) Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the ease of citizen participation, focusing on inclusiveness and minimizing barriers like cost, location, language, technology, and education levels. A mechanism that is accessible enables citizens to participate in governance processes.

(5) Size of Participants

The size of participants denotes the number of individuals capable of actively engaging with a specific mechanism at any moment. This is particularly significant for CSOs, as they frequently seek to involve a broad spectrum of residents to promote democratic engagement and responsibility.

5. Results and Discussion

This section provides the findings obtained from the questionnaires administered to the participant. The questionnaires were constructed based on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The effectiveness of each mechanism was assessed based on accessibility to citizens, cost of suing it, size of participants, appropriateness and reachability. They were considered to be the factors. In addition, a mean of at least 3.00 gives a positive response for that particular factor.

Table 1. Response Rate.

Number of questionnaires	Count	Percentage (%)
Returned	50	83
Unreturned	10	17
Total	60	100

Field data (2024)

Table 1 shows that fifty (50) questionnaires were returned, representing 83% of the questionnaires administered. On the other hand, ten (10) questionnaires were not returned and this represents 17% of the total questionnaires administered. This implies that the response rate was 83%, which was sufficient for data analysis.

Table 2. CSOs facilitate citizens' participation in governance.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
Undecided	-	-
Agree	20	40
Strongly disagree	30	60
Total	50	100

Field data (2024)

Table 2 shows that CSOs facilitate citizens' participation in governance. While 40% of the respondents agreed, 60% of them further strongly agreed to this statement.

Response	Yes	No
Civic education	●	

Field data (2024)

Table 3. Mechanisms used to facilitate citizens' participation in governance.

Response	Yes	No
Dissemination of information	●	
Public consultations and dialogues	●	
Citizen's mobilisation	●	
Trainings, workshops and seminars	●	

Table 3 shows that civil society organizations (CSOs) help people get involved in government by giving them information about how government works, holding meetings for public consultation and dialogue, encouraging people to take part in rallies and protests, and holding trainings, workshops, and seminars to help people learn more about their roles in government.

Table 4. Easily accessible to citizens.

Response	SD	D	U	A	SA
Dissemination of information	-	10%	-	60%	30%
Public consultations and dialogues	30%	20%	10%	40%	-
Citizen's mobilisation	20%	30%	20%	16%	14%
Trainings, workshops and seminars	-	20%	10%	60%	10%
Civic education	30%	20%	20%	30%	-

Field data (2024)

Table 4 shows the accessibility of each mechanism for citizens. According to this table, 10% of the respondents disagreed, 60% of the respondents agreed and 30% of the respondents agreed that dissemination of information is easily accessible to citizens. With regard to public consultation and dialogues, 30% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% of the respondents disagreed, 10% of the respondents were indecisive and 40% of the respondents agreed that it is easily accessible to citizens. Furthermore,

20% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 30% of the respondents disagreed, 20% of the respondents were indecisive, 16% of the respondents agreed and 14% of the respondents strongly agreed that citizen mobilisation is easily accessible to citizens. Moreover, 20% of the respondents disagreed, 10% of the respondents were indecisive, 60% of the respondents agreed and 10% of the respondents strongly agreed that trainings, workshops and seminars are easily accessible to citizens. Regarding civic education, 30%

of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% of the respondents disagreed, the same percentage of respondents

was indecisive and 30% of the respondents agreed that it is easily accessible to citizens.

Table 5. *Least costly to use.*

Response	SD	D	U	A	SA
Dissemination of information	-	-	-	40%	60%
Public consultations and dialogues	20%	-	20%	60%	-
Citizen's mobilisation	20%	30%	10%	40%	-
Trainings, workshops and seminars	10%	50%	-	30%	10%
Civic education	40%	20%	-	40%	-

Field data (2024)

Table 5 shows that 40% of the respondents agreed and 60% of the respondents strongly agreed that dissemination of information is the mechanism that is least costly to use. With regard to public consultation and dialogues, 20% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% of the respondents were indecisive and 60% of the respondents agreed that it is least costly to use. Furthermore, 20% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 30% disagreed, 10% were indecisive, and 40%

agreed that citizen mobilization was the least costly to use. Moreover, 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 50% of the respondents disagreed, 30% of the respondents agreed and 10% of the respondents strongly agreed that trainings, workshops and seminars are least costly to use. Regarding civic education, 40% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% of the respondents disagreed and 40% of the respondents agreed that it is least costly to use.

Table 6. *Largest participation of citizens.*

Response	SD	D	U	A	SA
Dissemination of information	30%	10%	-	60%	-
Public consultations and dialogues	36%	14%	-	32%	18%
Citizen's mobilisation	-	28%	24%	36%	12%
Trainings, workshops and seminars	10%	20%	-	40%	30%
Civic education	50%	20%	-	30%	-

Field data (2024)

Table 7. *Most appropriate for facilitating citizens' participation.*

Response	SD	D	U	A	SA
Dissemination of information	-	-	-	12%	88%
Public consultations and dialogues	-	-	-	40%	60%
Citizen's mobilisation	-	-	-	70%	30%
Trainings, workshops and seminars	-	-	-	84%	16%
Civic education	-	-	-	92%	8%

Field data (2024)

Table 6 shows that 30% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 10% disagreed, and 60% agreed that dissemination facilitates the largest citizen participation. With regard to public consultation and dialogues, 36% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 14% of the respondents disagreed, 32% of the respondents agreed and 18% of the respondents strongly agreed that it facilitates the largest participation of citizens. Furthermore, 28% of the respondents disagreed, 24% were indecisive, 36% agreed, and 12% strongly agreed that citizen mobilization facilitates the largest participation among citizens. Moreover, 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% of the respondents disagreed, 40% of the respondents agreed and 30% of the respondents strongly agreed that trainings, workshops and seminars facilitate the largest participation of citizens. Regarding civic education, 50% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% of the respondents dis-

agreed and 30% of the respondents agreed that it encourages the largest participation of citizens.

Table 7 shows that 12% of the respondents agreed and 88% of the respondents agreed that dissemination of information is most appropriate for facilitating citizens' participation in governance. With regard to public consultation and dialogues, 40% of the respondents agreed, and 60% of the respondents strongly agreed. Furthermore, 70% of the respondents agreed and 30% of them strongly agreed that citizen mobilisation is most appropriate for facilitating citizens' participation in governance. Moreover, 84% of the respondents agreed, and 16% of the respondents strongly agreed that trainings, workshops and seminars are most appropriate for facilitating citizens' participation. Regarding civic education, 92% of the respondents agreed and 8% of the respondents strongly agreed.

Table 8. Mass audience.

Response	SD	D	U	A	SA
Dissemination of information	-	-	-	96%	4%
Public consultations and dialogues	-	-	-	76%	24%
Citizen's mobilisation	-	-	-	28%	72%
Trainings, workshops and seminars	20%	30%	-	50%	-
Civic education	-	-	10%	76%	14%

Field data (2024)

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics.

Factors	A	B	C	D	E
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Easily accessible to citizens	4.1	2.6	2.7	3.6	2.5
Least costly to use	4.6	3.2	2.7	2.8	2.0
Largest participation of citizens	2.9	2.8	3.3	3.6	2.1
Most appropriate	4.9	4.6	4.3	4.2	4.1
Mass audience	4.1	4.2	4.7	2.8	4.0
	4.1	3.5	3.5	3.4	2.9

Field data (2023)

Table 8 shows 96% of the respondents agreed and 4% of the respondents agreed that dissemination of information targets a mass audience. With regard to public consultations and dialogues, 76% of the respondents agreed, and 24% strongly

agreed. Furthermore, 28% of the respondents agreed, and 72% strongly agreed that citizen mobilization targets a mass audience. Moreover, 20% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 30% disagreed, and 50% agreed that training, workshops, and

seminars target a mass audience. Regarding civic education, 10% of respondents were indecisive, 76% of the respondents agreed and 14% of the respondents strongly agreed.

Based on the assessed factors, Table 9 presents the means for each mechanism. From the table, A represents dissemination of information, B represents public consultation and dialogues, C represents citizens mobilisation, D represents trainings, workshops and seminars, and E represents civic education.

Responses to each factor were based on a five-point Likert scale. The decision that at least a mean of 3.00 shows a positive response for that factor was based on the calculation:

$$1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 = 15 / 5 = 3$$

The high mean (4.1) for dissemination of information indicates that citizens have easy access to information through digital platforms and media, facilitating active participation in issues, policies, and public services. The score of 3.6 indicates accessibility to training, workshops, and seminars, but may require more effort due to in-person attendance, time commitments, or specific resources. The other mechanisms have means lower than 3.00, suggesting barriers to citizen participation because they may be more complex, requiring special knowledge and long-term commitment.

Mechanism A is perceived as the least costly and most efficient for engaging citizens in governance activities, involving low-resource strategies like community meetings or online platforms. Mechanism B, with a mean of 3.2, is slightly more costly but still relatively efficient, possibly due to logistical needs or trained facilitators. On the other hand, mechanisms C, D, and E are viewed as costly by participants, requiring significant planning, resources, and external experts. These formal processes may limit their capacity to engage diverse citizens, especially in resource-poor settings.

Citizen mobilization, training, workshops, and seminars are inclusive, flexible, and scalable, catering to larger audiences through group interactions, community outreach programs, and structured participation opportunities. The Disseminating Information, Public Consultation and Dialogue, and Civic Education mechanisms struggle to effectively engage large audiences due to accessibility issues or lack of effective strategies. Public consultations may be held in specific locations and times, limiting the number of attendees. Traditional means of disseminating information may not reach a wide audience.

The study reveals that all mechanisms-information dissemination, public consultation, citizen mobilization, trainings, workshops, and civic education-are suitable for facilitating citizen participation in Sierra Leone's governance processes. By disseminating information, CSOs effectively inform citizens about government activities, policies, and laws, particularly in Sierra Leone, through initiatives like radio broadcasts, social media updates, and printed materials. Public consultation is a fundamental aspect of democratic gov-

ernance, enabling citizens to express their opinions. A high mean for citizen mobilisation indicates that this mechanism is appropriate since it encourages the collective participation of citizens. The high mean for civic education indicates its significance in empowering citizens to participate in governance activities and form informed opinions about political processes.

The study reveals that public consultation, citizen mobilization, and civic education can engage large groups of people. The 2.8 mean score for training, workshops, and seminars suggests they do not effectively target a mass audience, potentially excluding large portions of the population. Trainings and workshops often require physical presence, specific time commitments, and registration processes. Additionally, trainings and workshops often target a specific group of participants who may already be knowledgeable or involved in governance-related issues.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the mechanisms used by CSOs to facilitate citizens' participation in governance include the dissemination of information, public consultation and dialogues, citizen mobilization, training, workshops and seminars, and civic education.

Dissemination of Information

Disseminating information is cost-effective and accessible, but it can be passive, with citizens receiving information through media channels, public announcements, or online platforms. Additionally, the mechanism, despite reaching a large audience, does not actively involve citizens in governance decisions, as they merely consume the information. As per the public participation theory, genuine participation extends beyond information access and involves active participation in decision-making. Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Participation also highlights that while providing information is crucial, it falls short in empowering citizens to influence decisions.

Public consultation and dialogues

Public consultations and dialogues aim to enable citizens to provide feedback and participate in discussions, but their scope may be limited if not well structured. Consultations offer interactive participation but pose accessibility challenges, potentially exclusion of marginalized communities or working individuals due to physical meetings or specific hours. Participation theory prioritizes consultations and dialogues over information dissemination for feedback and influence in decision-making, while inclusive governance emphasizes accessibility for all citizens, especially the disenfranchised.

Citizens' mobilisation

Citizen mobilization is the process of involving large groups of people in collective actions, like protests, petitions, or campaigns. The mechanism, despite its mass audience participation, necessitates significant resources like event funding, transportation, and logistics and is not easily accessible due to the need for citizen motivation and coordination. However, it is crucial for participatory democracy, involving

citizens from various social and economic classes.

Training, workshops and seminars

Training, workshops, and seminars can significantly enhance citizens' decision-making skills, policy analysis, and governance processes. These programs allow for greater participation in a focused environment but are more selective, targeting specific groups like activists, community leaders, and civil servants already involved in governance.

Civic education

Civic education is vital in cultivating an informed citizenry capable of actively participating in governance. The mass audience is often not easily accessible due to the need for formal education systems or expensive resources like printed materials, workshops, or media campaigns. Civic education, often a formalized approach, may not effectively engage citizens who are not part of formal education systems or are disconnected from political processes.

6. Conclusion

This study was undertaken to assess the various mechanisms used by CSOs to facilitate citizens' participation in governance and also determine the most effective ones. This study assessed five mechanisms. Participants agreed that CSOs use all of these mechanisms to facilitate citizens' participation in governance. Dissemination of information to facilitate citizens' participation in governance is the most effective mechanism used by CSOs. This is seconded by public consultation and dialogues and also citizens' mobilisation. Trainings, workshops and seminars, unlike civic education, are also effective in facilitating citizens' participation in governance.

7. Recommendations

The study suggests that CSOs should use digital platforms and community-based information dissemination to reach a wider audience at a lower cost. Partnering with local radio stations or WhatsApp groups can improve accessibility to governance-related information, especially in rural areas. CSOs should focus on interactive, context-specific civic education strategies to engage citizens in governance. This could include community workshops, role-playing exercises, and simulations of local government meetings. Regular evaluation of these initiatives can adapt content and delivery methods for greater impact. CSOs can engage citizens in governance through digital tools like WhatsApp, Facebook groups, and mobile apps, particularly for youth, and through regular online surveys or webinars. CSOs should train community leaders to lead local governance discussions, utilizing peer-to-peer education to reduce costs and broaden outreach. CSOs should regularly assess their participation mechanisms through monitoring and evaluation (M&E), using surveys or focus group discussions to measure engagement levels and

gather feedback for future improvements.

8. Limitations to the Study and Future Research

The study's scope is restricted to Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, and its findings may not be applicable to rural areas. Additionally, the study's small sample of CSOs, consisting of ten organizations, limits its understanding of diverse mechanisms and potential selection bias. The study, which was mostly about Freetown, Sierra Leone, suggests that similar research in both urban and rural areas, as well as in West Africa after a war, could help us understand how CSOs work in different situations. A longitudinal study on citizen participation in CSO mechanisms can provide insights into their sustainability and long-term effects, examining changes in political climates and governance structures. Future research should explore how digital tools, such as social media, can enhance citizen engagement, particularly in low-income countries, and examine digital literacy and accessibility.

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
PPP	Public Private Partnership

Acknowledgments

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Author Contributions

Shekou Ansumana Nuni is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Statement of Ethical Approval

The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals/humans' subjects by any of the authors.

Statement of Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from selected CSOs.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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