



Roles of CSOs in Local Democratic Development: A Cambodia Case Study

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Name of Authors:

Jeudy Oeung^{1*}

Affiliation:

¹PhD Student at the Graduate Institute of International Development, Nagoya University, Japan

Corresponding Author

Jeudy Oeung
oeungjeudy@gmail.com

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Abstract: Since the restoration of democracy through UN-supervised elections in 1993, Cambodia has pursued decentralization and governance reforms aimed at strengthening citizen participation and local democracy. In this context, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have played increasingly important role in promoting accountability, civic engagement and democratic governance at the local level. This study examines the roles of CSOs in advancing local democratic development and explores how they have adapted to Cambodia's changing political and civic environment. A review of pertinent literature, field observations and semi-structured interviews with 27 key informants, including government officials, commune council members, CSO representatives, political players, funders and community members, are all used in this qualitative research approach. The findings reveal six main roles of CSOs, namely, capacity building and civic education; human rights and democratic values promotion; monitoring and advocacy; collaboration in local governance and development; facilitation of citizen-government engagement; and advancement of women's political participation and empowerment. The findings show that CSOs have contributed greatly to decentralization reforms, increased public participation and enhanced accountability and transparency to local governance systems. However, their effectiveness is limited by weak organizational capacity, reliance on external donor funding, poor sectoral coordination, restrictive regulatory frameworks, lack of understanding of advocacy functions and shrinking civic space. The study suggests that CSOs remain important actors in Cambodia's local democratic development. To sustain their contribution in a fluid political environment, more organizational resilience, evidence-based advocacy, greater youth participation, diversified funding sources and positive engagement and dialogue with government authorities will be required for the CSOs.

Keywords: Cambodia, Civic Engagement, CSOs, Local Democratic Development, NGO Law

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has consistently stressed their important role in the promotion of democratic governance, decentralization and citizen participation. Decentralization means the transfer of authority, responsibilities and resources from central to local governments, but it is not the automatic lead to deeper democracy or more accountable governance. Without proper oversight and citizen participation, local decision-making processes can be captured by political or economic elites. Within this framework, CSOs are important intermediary actors that enhance more inclusive and responsive local governance by fostering transparency, accountability and citizen participation [1]. International development partners have also acknowledged CSOs as key actors in both service delivery and democratic oversight, supporting initiatives to enhance participatory governance and government accountability [2].

In Cambodia, the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements put an end to decades of conflict and created the foundations for a new political order. In 1993, the United Nations

Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) organised the country's first democratic elections since the conflict and a new Constitution established a constitutional monarchy based on the principle of liberal multi-party democracy. Under the substantial support from major international donors, the country undertook a process of state reconstruction and institutional reform aimed at promoting democratic governance, political stability and socio-economic development.

Cambodia is a parliamentary democracy, holding national elections conducted every five years since 1993. The first decade of democratic transition was marked by coalition governments led by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and royalist FUNCINPEC Party. But since 2008 political power has become increasingly concentrated, with the CPP holding government solely and consolidating its control over the executive and holding government solely and consolidating its control over the executive and legislative branches. The Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) was formed in 2012 as the main opposition party and won 45 percent of parliamentary seats in the 2013 national elections but

was dissolved by the Supreme Court in 2017, enabling the CPP to secure all parliamentary seats in 2018 elections. Consequently, Cambodia is witnessing a so-called shrinking civic and political space, which is aggravated by the existing power monopoly by the ruling party in the country [3]. These political developments have had a significant impact on environment in which CSOs operate and have had significant implications for democratic governance.

Cambodia has undergone remarkable economic and social transformation as well as political changes. According to the 2019 Population Census, the country had around 15.6 million people, of which 51.3 percent were women and 64.2 percent were less than 35 years old [4]. Cambodia's economy grew at an average annual rate of around 7 percent between 2010 and 2019, making it one of the region's fastest growing economies, though growth slowed considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet issues of governance, accountability, political participation and civic space continue to be key concerns in the country's democratic development. The government has suppressed many vocal CSOs and networks by branding them as threats allegedly connected to colour revolution [5].

In this context, CSOs have been key actors in supporting decentralisation reforms, promoting citizen participation and strengthening local governance. Nevertheless, their roles and strategies have adapted to changes in political and civic conditions.

This study explores the roles of CSOs in promoting local democratic development and their responses to changing political context. It tackles the fundamental question: What roles do CSOs play in fostering local democratic development and how do they operate in changing political and civic contexts?

This study makes three contributions to the literature. First, it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the multiple roles of CSOs in local democratic development. Second, it illustrates that decentralization per se will not deepen democracy, as CSOs act as a vital bridging role in enhancing participation, accountability and state-society relations. Third, it extends understanding of state-civil society relations in a constrained political condition by viewing CSOs as enablers of change whose effectiveness depends on innovation, evidence-based advocacy, youth engagement, organisational sustainability and constructive partnerships with government institutions.

This article is organized into six sections. Section 1 introduces the research problem and research objective. Section 2 review the relevant literature and presents the conceptual framework; Section 3 outlines the research methodology. The main findings are presented in Section 4, followed by a discussion of the results in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 presents the conclusion, policy implications and future research.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

CSOs are dynamic and contextual concepts and differ in different historical and political contexts [6]. Civil society is normally defined as the sphere of voluntary, autonomous and self-organized collective action, independent from the state but working within shared legal and social norms. In this regard, CSOs are the bridges between citizens and the state by articulating public interests and contributing to democratic governance.

CSOs are acknowledged in the literature to be important actors for democratization and good governance. They promote citizen participation, advocate for marginalized groups, monitor government performance and improve accountability, transparency and responsiveness of public institutions [1,7]. In developing countries, CSOs have become important actors particularly where governance problems and poor public services are pervasive [8-10].

Since the 1990s, CSOs in Cambodia have been important players for grassroots democracy, local governance, human rights advocacy and socio-economic development [11,12]. Decentralization reforms have created space for CSOs to improve citizen-state engagement, increase local accountability and promote participatory governance [13]. These studies pointed out the contributions of CSOs to governance and development, specific studies of the roles of CSOs to local democratic development were still limited. They pay less attention to how CSOs function locally and navigate changing political settings.

This study addresses this gap by examining multiple roles of CSOs in local democratic development within Cambodia's Decentralization and Deconcentrating (D&D) reform framework. It conceptualizes CSOs as legally registered non-profit organizations that contribute through six interrelated roles: capacity building and civic education; promotion of human rights and democratic values; monitoring, advocacy, accountability; partnership in local governance development; bridging citizens and government; and advancing women's empowerment and political participation [1,11,14]. The framework sees local democratic development as the strengthening of participation, transparency, accountability and responsiveness at commune level with CSOs as the main actors to strengthen state-society relations and to enable meaningful citizen engagement. Furthermore, the growth of the CSOs has been driven largely by the belief that CSOs can offer comparative advantages over the public sector in delivering development assistance effectively. In Cambodia, NGO disbursements were estimated at 0.9% of GDP in 2019, supporting a wide range of development sectors across the country [15].

The operational definition of CSOs and their legal basis in this study are derived from Article 4 of the NGO Law defining them as "associations or non-governmental organizations, including foundations,

established under the laws of Cambodia by natural persons and/or legal entities for the purpose of providing funds and services in one or more sectors for the public interest, without generating or distributing profits". For the conceptual framework of this study, the terms "CSOs" and "NGOs" are often used interchangeably to refer to non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations that serve the public interest in Cambodia.

Decentralization refers to the transfer of authority, responsibilities and resources from central to lower levels of government through de-concentration, delegation, or devolution. It may take administrative, political, fiscal or economic forms [1]. In the Cambodian context, "local democratic development" is understood as "a system of local governance, in which sub-national administrations exercise the power and functions transferred through decentralization and operate according to the principles of transparency and accountability. This enables citizens and CSOs to engage in local planning and decision-making, such as the formulation of Commune Investment Plans (CIP)." The concept emerged through Cambodia's D&D reforms in 2012, which established elected commune councils and transferred functions, powers, responsibilities and resources to subnational councils to better respond to the local needs (to allow elections of commune councils directly by the people [16,17]. For the purposes of this study, local democratic development refers to the functioning of commune-level governance institutions that promote participation, transparency, accountability and responsiveness in local decision-making.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in September-October 2025 combined with field observations in four communes, key informants, including government officials, political parties, CSO representatives, donors, commune councillors and community members. Using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, 27 semi-structured interviews were conducted at national level and in four selected communes in Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom and Phnom Penh. Interviews were both conducted individually and in group, depending on their relevance to the research questions and the availability of Key Informants (KIs). The communes were chosen based on their significance and relevance to the study, while also taking political sensitivity into account. Interview data were coded and analysed alongside field observations and secondary sources. The selection of these KIs was based primarily on their relevant roles, experiences and perspectives regarding the CSO sector and local democratic development. For security and confidentiality reasons, all KIs were anonymised and identified using assigned code numbers.

Secondary data were drawn from books, journal articles, policy documents, reports produced by CSOs, government and academic institutions. To capture future perspectives, the study incorporated foresight-oriented questions on the transformative roles and sustainability of CSOs in Cambodia, complemented by the literature review from a few selected Asian countries.

The study has several limitations. Its geographical coverage was limited to only four selected areas at commune level and national level and it focused only on active and registered NGOs working in local democratic government, human rights, gender and development. This scope should be understood in the context of over 6,600 registered CSOs exist in Cambodia. Despite these limitations, the research strictly adhered to ethical standards, including informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality of participant data, particularly taking into account of the topic political sensitivity.

Key Findings

The findings from the data collection and analysis reveal three emerged themes related to institutional, legal and policy framework implementation; evolution of general CSO roles and their specific roles in the local democratic development. These themes are presented and discussed in the following subsections.

Institutional, Legal and Policy Framework

The government of Cambodia has officially recognised CSOs as development partners and has consistently stressed the need for government and CSOs to work together in governance and development. This rapid growth of the sector since the 1990s is a reflection of the belief that CSOs can complement public institutions, increase development effectiveness and improve governance outcomes. Through legal and policy frameworks, D&D reforms and dialogue mechanisms such as Government-CSO Partnership Forums have provided CSOs with opportunities to engage with state institutions at both national and local levels.

Therefore, the CSOs' participation and contribution in the process of amendment of the NGO Law is significant for the Government and mutually benefit for the Government and CSOs to create favorable and enabling environment for CSO operations and fulfilling their roles in the local democratic development. Moreover, the proliferation of the CSOs is assessed to be largely due to the belief that they can offer advantages over the public sector in aid effectiveness. The NGO disbursement was estimated to be around 0.9% of GDP in 2019 and the fund was used to support various sectors of development in Cambodia".

The rights of citizens to establish associations and CSOs are guaranteed by the Cambodian Constitution and the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental

Organizations (LANGO or "NGO Law") adopted in 2015 recognizes the role of CSOs in promoting public interests and cooperating with public authorities. Additionally, D&D reforms and policy initiatives such as the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development and the Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) [17], promote citizen participation, consultation, accountability and transparency in local governance. Together, these frameworks provide the institutional space for CSOs to participate in local governance through capacity building, civic engagement, development planning and accountability initiatives.

Evolution of General Roles of CSOs

The findings demonstrate the evolving and critical roles that CSOs have played in Cambodia's democratisation process since the 1993-UN sponsored elections. In the immediate post-conflict period 1990s, CSOs and NGOs primarily filled critical gaps left by limited state capacity. They provided humanitarian assistance, supported basic services in health, education and livelihood and began introducing civic education at the community level. As one national NGO respondent noted, CSOs complemented the state efforts, particularly in the areas where government capacity is limited, playing role as service providers, advocates and bridges between the authorities and communities.

Over the following two decades, these roles and deepened. By the mid-2000s, many organizations had moved beyond pure service delivery toward rights-based approaches. They trained citizens on laws, democratic principles and human rights, supported women's political participation, facilitated community engagement with commune councils and helped establish and strengthen Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). At the provincial level, CSOs participated in meetings, support local governance. In this period, in particular, CSOs were widely regarded as important contributors to grassroots democratization and citizen engagement.

A significant shift, however, occurred around 2013 national elections and intensification after 2017 when the supreme court took legal action to dissolve the main opposition party, the CNRP, following a government request that alleged its involvement in color revolution activities [18]. This development, coupled with the enactment of the NGO Law in 2015, which marked a turning point in state-civil society relations. Consequently, trust between the state and independent NGOs eroded, particularly with respect to human rights and advocacy organizations.

In response, the roles of CSOs in local democratic development became more constrained. Open advocacy and confrontational approaches reduced and replaced with softer form of engagement and dialogue with local authorities, evidence-based rather mobilizational advocacy and stronger emphasis on service delivery. As

one provincial NGO leader explained, after 2017 her organization prioritized professionalism and dialogue through provincial forums, noting that this approach provided greater space than that available to human rights NGOs.

Causes of these changes were multi-layered. Political polarization and the government's perception of NGOs as alliance or supporters of the opposition parties, which reduced the government's tolerance for independent civic activism. Legal instruments such as NGO Law is enforced with increased compliance and creating avenue for control. Looking ahead, the finding suggested that CSOs should continue to play meaningful roles as they likely remain important development actors as intermediaries or low-profile facilitators, but their space is constrained in the changing context.

Roles of CSOs in Local Democratic Development

The findings suggest that CSOs have played important and multifaceted roles in fostering local democratic development in Cambodia, in addition to their wider contributions to social and economic development. The study's data analysis has identified six interconnected roles of CSOs in local democratic development.

Capacity Builders and Educators

Almost all respondents stressed the key roles of CSOs in strengthening the capacities of commune councilors, community-based organizations and citizens. Through training, public forums, study visits, civic education and awareness campaigns, the CSOs have improved understanding of rights and responsibilities of citizens, local governance, decentralization reform efforts and the ISAF approach in Cambodia. This role is in line with Cambodia's decentralization reform effort and ISAF approach in Cambodia, which have both contributed to strengthening good governance and democratic development at the local level. CSOs have also assisted local authorities in sharing practical skills on facilitation, conflict resolution, citizen engagement, complaint handling and participatory planning. The respondents said these efforts have helped to increase transparency, access to information and citizen participation in local decision-making, including raising public awareness of commune budgets and development plans.

The significance of this role was reflected in the views of elected councilors from both ruling and opposition parties as they emphasize that: "The CSOs/NGOs have played important roles in contributing to effective implementation of programs by the government, including the D&D reform. They have provided capacity building to the community people to raise the understanding about their rights, including the right to participate in public affairs and to the commune councilors regarding social accountability, before and after the commune elections. The CSOs have monitored

the elections, published reports on electoral processes and conducted advocacy for changing the relevant laws to create civic and political space aiming to improve the democratic development in Cambodia.

Promoters of Human Rights and Democracy

Since the restoration of democracy in the 1990s, CSOs have played a central role in promoting human rights, democratic values and active citizenship [19]. Organizations such as ADHOC, LICADHO, CCHR, COMFREL and NICFEC have conducted training, dialogue, public forums and community engagement activities to educate citizens on civil and political rights and encouraged participation in local governance and elections. The case study shows that CSOs have empowered communities to raise concerns to local authorities through peaceful and institutional channels in three out of the four studied communes. However, respondents also highlighted growing challenges resulting from shrinking civic and political space, increased restrictions on advocacy activities and concerns regarding freedom of expression and association. These developments have made the promotion of democratic participation increasingly difficult.

Monitor and Advocate

The study's findings also showed that CSOs play a key role as watchdogs monitoring local governance, public service delivery, elections and the performance of elected officials. Their monitoring and advocacy work contributes to greater accountability, transparency and citizen participation. National CSO networks are also active advocates for improved laws and policies impacting the rights of citizens and civic participation. COMFREL and others like it are constantly monitoring governance and electoral processes. Respondents noted that advocacy ranges from constructive policy dialogue and evidence-based recommendations to public statements on governance and democratic issues. Despite increasing constraints, CSOs continue to play a crucial role in encouraging social accountability and democratic governance, especially citizens' political participation and the electoral process, at national and local levels. CSOs mobilized and jointly advocated for amendment to the NGO Law in order to promote a more enabling civic space for CSOs to engage with the government. Interestingly, following six years of consultations with the government, the Ministry of Interior, CSOs proposed amendments to 14 article provisions that were perceived as constraining registration and operation of CSOs [20].

Partners in Local Governance and Development

CSOs increasingly work as development partners with government institutions at both national and sub-national levels. Mechanisms such as the Government-CSO Partnership Forum and the Implementation of Social

Accountability Framework (ISAF) have enabled opportunities for collaboration in local planning, service delivery and community engagement. The Cambodia case study revealed that CSOs provide a platform for communities to express priorities in relation to health, education, water, sanitation, environmental protection and governance, but this remains limited. World Bank assessments [21], of ISAF also found that CSO involvement has led to greater transparency, information disclosure and citizen participation at the commune level. Nevertheless, some advocacy and human rights NGOs remain concerned that existing dialogue mechanisms have not yet adequately addressed issues relating to civic space and operational restrictions.

Connectors and Bridge Builders

A key finding is that CSOs acted as intermediaries between citizens and government institutions. They facilitated communication of citizens' concerns and priorities to local authorities and build trust and cooperation between both sides through community meetings, dialogues, consultations and facilitation. Examples from the case study showed that CSOs regularly connect vulnerable groups, including women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and victims of human rights violations, with commune councils and relevant service providers. Respondents widely viewed this bridging role as critical for strengthening participatory governance and improving state-civil society relations.

Catalysts for Women's Empowerment and Political Participation

CSOs have also played an important role in promoting gender equality and women's leadership. Working alongside government institutions, they provided training, awareness-raising, advocacy and leadership development programs that encouraged women's participation in community leadership, local governance and political processes. Although women's representation in politics has increased gradually over the past two decades, respondents acknowledged that progress remains slow due largely to gender norms and structural barriers. CSOs such as GADC, SILAKA, Banteay Srey, COMFREL and CPWP have continued to advocate for greater opportunities and representation for women in decision-making processes. Across the case study, CSOs were found to have contributed to women's empowerment through collaboration with Commune Committees for Women and Children as well as broader community initiatives. In sum, while no single organisation performs all six identified roles simultaneously, many CSOs combine several functions depending on their mandates and resources. Together, these roles reinforce one another and contribute significantly to citizen participation, accountability, transparency and democratic governance at the local

level and they choose any of these roles that fit best with their respective mandates, resources and operational space.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that although not all CSOs perform all six roles simultaneously, many undertake multiple interrelated roles in promoting local democratic development, despite constraints and challenges they face. This reflects their mandate, organizational priorities and efforts to maximize impact regardless of reducing donor funding and resources. For example, human rights organisations such as ADHOC, LICADHO, COMFREL and CCHR often combine the role of capacity builders, human rights promoters, monitors and advocates and catalysts for women's empowerment and political participation. By contrast, organisations such as GADC, Banteay Srey and SILAKA, whose mandates focus on gender equality and women's empowerment and rights, primarily serve as capacity builders, advocates and catalysts for women's empowerment. The case studies further demonstrate that CSO selectively adopt roles that align with their mandates and available resources primarily. Therefore, strategic prioritisation is essential, as attempting to perform all roles simultaneously may reduce effectiveness.

As highlighted in the key findings above, CSOs perform diverse roles in the local democratic development; however, they also encounter a range of challenges that necessitate proactive strategies and transformative approaches. These approaches can enable the CSOs to timely adapt to evolving socio-economic and political contexts and sustain their contributions to local democratic development, as elaborated in the following subsections.

Challenges Faced by NGOs

Despite their contributions, in practice, CSOs face several internal and external challenges that limit their effectiveness. Internally, many organisations struggle with limited institutional capacity to meet the digital revolution, dependence on donor funding, weak coordination and competition for resources. Some respondents also noted that strategic communication and advocacy skills are required to operate effectively within Cambodia's changing political environment. Externally, respondents cited restrictive interpretations of the legal and policy framework, particularly LANGO, as constraints on advocacy and human rights work. Limited understanding among some local authorities of the legitimate role of CSOs could also hinder cooperation. Moreover, many interviewees identified a shrinking civic and political space since 2017 as a major cause affecting citizen participation, advocacy efforts and broader democratic engagement.

The findings demonstrated that CSOs have become important actors in Cambodia's local democratic

development. Through their roles as educators, promoters of democratic values, advocates, partners, bridge builders and catalysts for women's participation, they have contributed to active citizen engagement, local accountability, transparency and implementation of the decentralization reforms. As respondent noted: "Some of our activities were closely monitored by local authorities, especially after the dissolution of the main opposition, the CNRP. Human rights NGOs perceived discriminatory treatment from authorities, who often viewed us as aligned with or supportive of opposition parties. Consequently, workshop and outreach activities faced restrictions, including requirements for prior approval. On certain occasions, local police attended our events to monitor the proceeding, without our consent."

The findings further supported broader literature arguing that decentralization alone does not automatically deepen democracy. Rather, CSOs function as key intermediaries that connect citizens and local authorities, strengthen accountability mechanisms and enhance state-society relations. But organizational constraints, donor dependence, restrictive regulatory practices and a shrinking civic space continue to curtail their impact. Political events, especially the 2017 dissolution of the opposition CNRP and the ruling party's power consolidation, have made it harder for CSO to conduct work on governance and democracy issues.

Overall, the study found that while individual organizations may perform different functions in society might be carried out by different organizations, due to their respective mandates and resources, they are still important contributors to local democratic development in Cambodia.

Transformative Roles and Sustainability of CSOs

The operating environment for CSOs is also changing as Cambodia moves towards upper-middle-income status in 2050 and prepares to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2029 with rapid digital transformation. Economic growth, changing donor priorities and technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges to the sector. Three major trends identified by the analysis shaping the future of civil society in Cambodia are: ongoing political constraints, restricted democratic space and declining Official Development Assistance (ODA). Within this changing context, respondents anticipated that the CSO sector may become smaller yet more professional, strategic, innovative and adaptive, necessitating a departure from traditional approaches. However, CSOs engaged in human rights, governance and democracy work are likely to face greater challenges than those focused on development-related areas.

While the core functions of CSOs are likely to remain relevant, their approaches will need to evolve as well to respond to these changing circumstances. Future

priorities may include innovative civic education, digital engagement, youth leadership development, evidence-based advocacy and increased collaboration and dialogue with government institutions. In this context, CSOs may increasingly serve as 'enablers of change', empowering citizens to participate more meaningfully in governance and development processes and helping to bridge the gap between the communities and decision-makers.

Therefore, there are likely three transformative roles emerged as particularly important. First, CSOs should strengthen adaptive and technology-driven civic education and capacity development. Second, they should expand dialogue and evidence-based advocacy grounded in research and policy analysis. Third, they should focus on youth empowerment, understanding the role of young people in shaping the democratic development in the future.

The long-term sustainability of CSOs will depend on diversified funding, stronger institutional capacity, improved strategic planning and increased collaboration with government institutions and development partners (donors). Greater coordination among CSOs and targeted capacity-development support can further strengthen organisation resilience and long-term impact.

In summary, although Cambodia's political and development context continues to evolve, CSOs are expected to remain important actors in promoting democratic governance, citizen participation and sustainable development. Their future effectiveness will depend on their ability to innovate, build constructive partnerships, empower youth and adapt to the changing political environment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that CSOs have been central to local democratic development in Cambodia, strengthening citizen participation, social accountability, transparency and state-society relations. Their contributions can be grouped into six key roles: civic educators, promoters of democratic values, monitors and advocates, governance partners, citizen-government intermediaries and champions of women's empowerment and political participation. The results also indicate that decentralization by itself does not enhance local democracy. CSOs are important intermediaries in promoting citizen engagement, accountability and inclusive development. CSOs continue to play a key role in local governance especially in rural areas despite political space, organizational capacity, donor dependency and democratic space. In the future, their effectiveness will depend on stronger digital and civic education, evidence-based advocacy, youth engagement, organizational sustainability and collaboration with the government to navigate changing political, economic, social and technological contexts. This study contributes to the literature by moving beyond the traditional view of CSOs as simply watchdogs or advocates. It identifies six

interrelated roles that CSOs play in local democratic development and demonstrate how these roles evolve under the changing political conditions. As for policy implications, the findings suggest strengthening state-civil society collaboration, youth civic engagement, institutional capacity and an enabling environment for CSO participation. Future research should explore how CSOs can continue to promote local democracy in a changing political environment.

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