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The Effectiveness of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Public Sector Construction Oversight in Nigeria: Challenges and Strategies for Improvement

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I. Introduction

Public sector construction projects are central to national development, serving as engines for infrastructure expansion, economic growth, and social welfare (Amoah *et al*., 2020). They span critical sectors such as transportation, healthcare, and education, making their successful delivery essential for achieving sustainable development goals (Hassan *et al*., 2023). Investments in transport infrastructure, for instance, not only facilitate trade but also improve access to essential services, thereby enhancing overall quality of life (Oladapo et al., 2021). Despite their importance, such projects in many developing countries—including Nigeria—are often undermined by recurring challenges. Cost overruns, delays, substandard quality, and project abandonment remain common (Khan *et al*., 2021). These problems are frequently attributed to governance failures, corruption, inefficiencies, and weak accountability structures (Aluko *et al*., 2022). Corruption, in particular, inflates costs, compromises quality, and erodes the expected benefits of public investment. The growing complexity of modern projects, driven by technological change and diverse stakeholder demands, further reinforces the need for robust oversight. In this regard, effective oversight becomes indispensable not only for ensuring transparency and accountability but also for safeguarding outcomes and strengthening public trust (Ihuah *et al.,* 2020).

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have emerged as significant oversight actors. As independent, non-governmental entities, they monitor project implementation, promote transparency, and hold government agencies and contractors accountable (Obi & Agwu, 2021). Their contributions extend to policy advocacy, influencing decision-making processes, and shaping broader governance reforms (Burgess & Walia, 2022). Evidence shows that CSO-led interventions—such as expenditure tracking and project monitoring—reduce corruption risks, improve resource allocation, and enhance delivery performance (Agbede & Oloyede, 2023). By engaging communities and amplifying citizen voices, CSOs also strengthen the responsiveness of projects to local needs (Garg & Chatterjee, 2021). Comparative experiences highlight their potential. In Kenya, CSOs play an active role in monitoring large-scale infrastructure projects through participatory evaluation (Mutuku & Mwangi, 2022), while in India, they have been instrumental in improving accountability in rural infrastructure delivery. Nigeria, however, presents a distinct context. Although CSOs have advanced civic participation and transparency, their influence on policy and practice remains limited (Vanguard News, 2023). Barriers such as unstable funding, restrictive registration processes, and shrinking civic space—shaped by state policies and political co-optation—undermine their effectiveness (Daily Post, 2024; Vanguard News, 2023).

Persistent questions therefore remain regarding the extent to which CSOs influence construction project

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outcomes in Nigeria. Their performance depends on organizational capacity, technical expertise, access to information, and the degree of stakeholder support (Musa *et al*., 2022). Yet barriers such as poor data access, weak institutionalized participation, and limited technical resources continue to constrain their credibility (Fox, 2015; Omoleke & Adebayo, 2020). While international models—including open contracting data standards, participatory scorecards, and multi-stakeholder forums—offer promising approaches, their application in Nigeria's construction sector has received little systematic attention. In view of the above, this review highlights a critical gap in understanding the effectiveness of CSOs in public sector construction oversight in Nigeria. Addressing this gap requires examining the factors shaping CSO performance and identifying strategies for strengthening their role. Such an inquiry is not only timely but also essential for tackling Nigeria's enduring governance and accountability challenges in public infrastructure delivery.

II. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks for the Study

This study applies three interrelated theoretical perspectives—governance theory, stakeholder theory, and public accountability theory—to explain the effectiveness of CSOs in public sector construction oversight in Nigeria. Together, these frameworks clarify how CSOs engage with government institutions, contractors, and communities while shaping project outcomes.

Governance theory emphasizes the role of non-state actors in strengthening accountability, transparency, and efficiency in public administration (Hyden et al., 2018). In many developing countries, weak institutions and pervasive corruption undermine infrastructure delivery. In Nigeria's construction sector, governance theory highlights CSOs as watchdogs that monitor projects, demand transparency, and foster community participation, thereby addressing corruption and inefficiency.

Stakeholder theory views CSOs as legitimate representatives of public interests, particularly marginalized groups (Freeman, 2010). Effective construction delivery requires balancing diverse stakeholder needs, including government, contractors, and communities. CSOs amplify citizen voices, bridge communication gaps, and ensure that projects reflect local priorities rather than narrow political interests. In Nigeria, where top-down planning often neglects community concerns, CSOs play a vital role in enhancing inclusiveness and accountability.

Public accountability theory focuses on mechanisms that hold public officials responsible for their actions (Mulgan, 2000). CSOs advance accountability by monitoring implementation, exposing irregularities, and ensuring compliance with standards. This oversight is critical in Nigeria, where corruption and weak institutions frequently cause cost overruns, delays, and project abandonment.

Collectively, these frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation for the study. Governance theory positions CSOs as complements to state institutions, stakeholder theory emphasizes their role in participatory development, and accountability theory highlights their watchdog function. Their integration enables deeper analysis of how CSOs influence project oversight in Nigeria and informs strategies to strengthen their effectiveness. The conceptual frameworks for the study is presented in Figure 1.

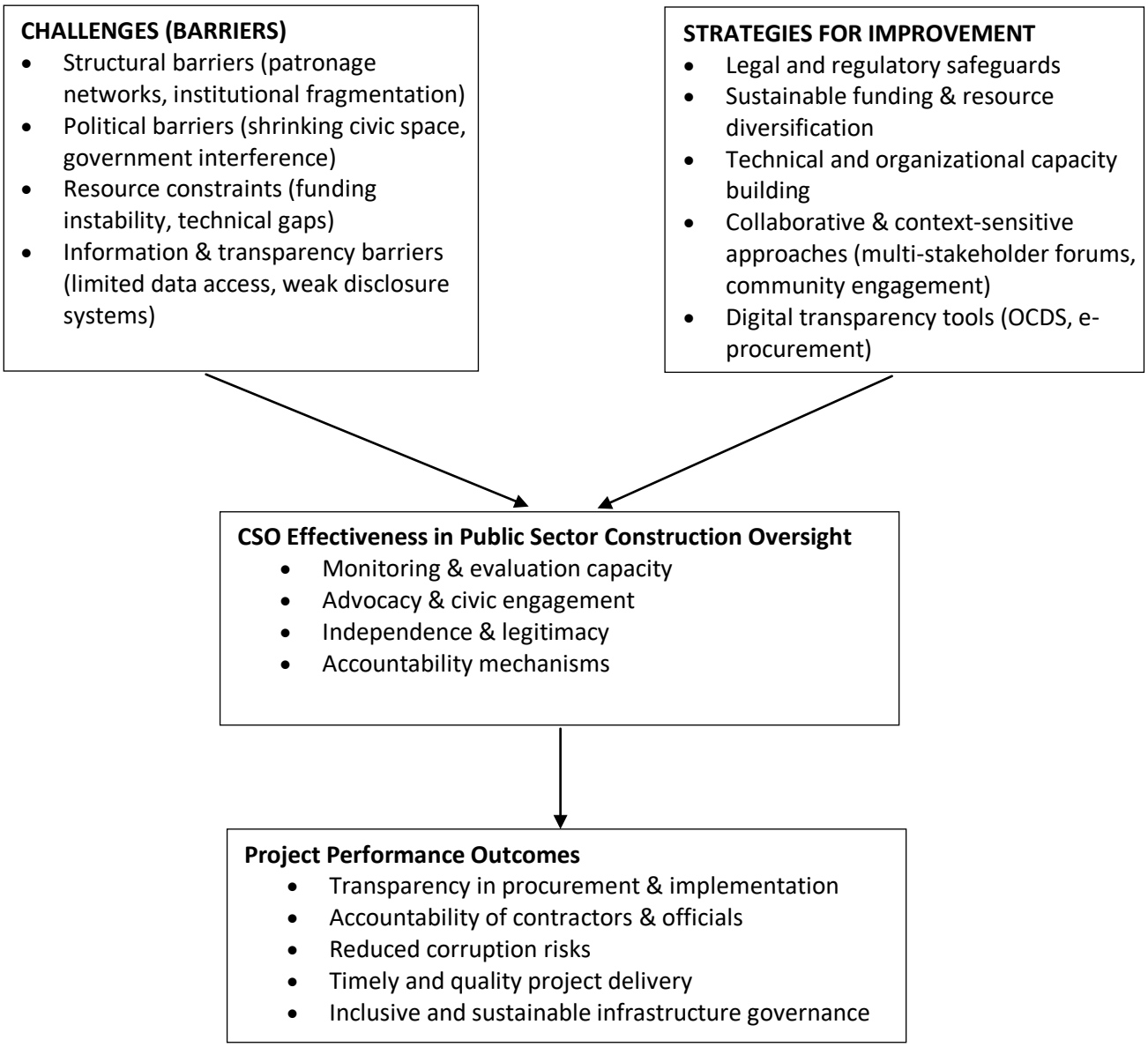

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

a) *Overview of CSOs and Roles in Public Sector Construction Projects*

CSOs are non-governmental, non-profit entities that represent public interests and engage in activities aimed at influencing policy, promoting community development, and addressing socio-economic issues. According to Salamon, Sokolowski, and List (2003), CSOs encompass diverse organizations such as advocacy groups, grassroots movements, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all working independently of the state to advance societal goals.

CSOs vary in form and function depending on their objectives, structure, and scope of operation. Common types include NGOs, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Professional Associations, and Advocacy Groups, with the latter two playing particularly significant roles in public sector construction oversight. Professional associations in Nigeria—such as the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), and the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (QSRBN), —establish standards, regulate professional conduct, and collaborate with government agencies to ensure quality, safety, and sustainability in public infrastructure projects (Anheier, 2014). Advocacy groups, on the other hand, focus on transparency, accountability, and environmental stewardship in construction. For example, BudgIT Nigeria actively monitors public infrastructure projects to track spending, evaluate outcomes, and advocate for policies that prevent corruption while ensuring efficient use of public resources (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

To promote accountability and effective project delivery, CSOs employ a variety of tools and

approaches. These include but not limited to social audits, participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E), independent field inspections, community scorecards, public expenditure tracking (PET), geospatial technologies, citizen report cards, contract monitoring, investigative media reporting, and grievance redress mechanisms. Such mechanisms empower communities, foster inclusive participation, and strengthen oversight processes, ensuring that public sector construction projects deliver value for money while meeting the needs of both policymakers and citizens.

b) Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of CSO Oversight in Construction Project Delivery

Effectiveness is commonly defined as the extent to which an entity achieves its intended goals, assessed not only by task completion but also by the quality and impact of outcomes (Drucker, 2006). In the context of this study, the effectiveness of CSOs refers to their capacity to promote transparency, advocate accountability, enhance stakeholder participation, and monitor compliance in public sector construction projects. The literature suggests that this effectiveness is shaped by a combination of enabling and constraining factors. One critical determinant is organizational capacity. Adequate financial resources, skilled personnel, and institutional infrastructure enhance the ability of CSOs to sustain oversight. Well-resourced organizations are better positioned to employ technical experts, undertake research, and maintain consistent advocacy efforts (Musa *et al*., 2022). Conversely, limited resources weaken their ability to engage meaningfully in project monitoring (Obi & Agwu, 2021). Closely linked to capacity is technical expertise. Knowledge of construction processes, project management, and legal frameworks enables CSOs to evaluate projects rigorously and detect inefficiencies. Continuous professional development through training and knowledge-sharing further strengthens their oversight roles (Afolabi *et al*., 2021; Ajibade *et al*., 2020).

Equally important is access to information. Without timely and accurate project documentation, CSOs cannot conduct effective oversight. Scholars highlight the necessity of open data initiatives and stronger transparency laws as essential conditions for accountability (Ibrahim *et al*., 2022). Complementary to this, Akintola and Afolabi (2020) emphasize the importance of reinforcing freedom of information provisions to reduce persistent information blockages. The legal and regulatory environment also emerges as a central factor. Supportive frameworks mandating transparency, participation, and accountability empower CSOs to monitor projects more effectively. Moreover, legal provisions granting CSOs the authority to challenge irregularities in court enhance their credibility and influence (Saidu & Ayodele, 2023; Omotayo, 2021). Stakeholder engagement further shapes oversight effectiveness. Collaborative partnerships with government agencies, contractors, and communities foster trust and improve information flow. However, political resistance and limited cooperation often undermine such interactions (Adeyemi *et al*., 2022; Ogunbanjo & Ajayi, 2021). Effective communication strategies are also vital, as they reduce misunderstandings, align stakeholder interests, and minimize oversight delays (Lingard & Rowlinson, 2018).

Furthermore, broader contextual dimensions—including political stability, financial sustainability, civic engagement, media advocacy, cultural sensitivity, and public awareness—interact to determine CSO effectiveness. These external conditions influence legitimacy, operational freedom, and the capacity to mobilize citizen support (Obi & Agwu, 2021; Adebayo *et al*., 2022; Owolabi *et al.,* 2022; Adeolu *et al*., 2023; Amadi & Odede, 2023). Thus, an enabling environment that strengthens these factors is critical for improving CSO oversight in Nigeria's public construction sector. A summary of these determinants in relation to project delivery is presented in Table 1. The literature indicates that the effectiveness of CSOs is multidimensional, shaped by their internal capacity, the prevailing legal and institutional frameworks, stakeholder relationships, and broader socio-political contexts. Strengthening these factors in combination—rather than in isolation—appears necessary for enhancing accountability and ensuring better outcomes in public construction oversight.

Table 1: Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of CSO Oversight in Construction Project Delivery

Factors	Source
Strengthened Organizational capacity	Musa *et al*. (2022), Obi & Agwu (2021).
Enhanced Technical Expertise	Ajibade *et al*. (2020)
Access to Comprehensive Information	Ibrahim *et al*. (2022; Akintola and Afolabi (2020)
Adoption of Technological Tools and Innovation	Obi & Agwu (2021)
Robust Legal and Regulatory Frameworks	Saidu and Ayodele (2023; Omotayo, (2021).
Fostering Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration	Adeyemi *et al*. (2022)
Conducive Political and Social Environment	Obi & Agwu (2021)
Promotion of Civic Engagement and Public Participation	Adeolu *et al*. (2023)
Leveraging International Partnerships and Networks	Johnson and Brown (2021)
Capacity Building and Continuous Learning	Agbaje *et al*. (2023)
Commitment to Independence and Neutrality	Smith *et al*. (2022)
Effective Communication Strategies	Lingard and Rowlinson (2018)
Cultural Sensitivity and Community Integration	Adebayo et al. (2022)
Financial Sustainability	Amadi and Odede (2023
Transparency and Accountability of CSOs Themselves	Obi and Aluko (2021)
Proactive Risk Management and Contingency Planning	Ngugi *et al*. (2022),
Media Advocacy and Public Awareness	Owolabi *et al*. (2022)

c) *Strategies for Improving the Effectiveness of CSOs' Oversight in Public Sector Construction*

One of the most significant barriers to effective CSO oversight is the absence of an enabling legal and institutional environment. Restrictive laws and ambiguous procurement frameworks continue to undermine transparency and accountability (World Bank, 2020). To address this, reforms granting CSOs legal recognition and operational space have been widely recommended (CIVICUS, 2022; Ojo, 2019). Promoting institutional autonomy is equally important. IDEA (2023) highlights the need for safeguards against political interference, while Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg (2013) argue that independent oversight bodies are essential to shield CSOs from arbitrary state control.

Access to open data has also emerged as a critical enabler of oversight. The Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) provides a framework for real-time tracking of procurement processes, enabling CSOs to detect irregularities and corruption. Evidence from countries such as Ukraine and Colombia demonstrates the potential of OCDS to transform accountability in infrastructure projects (Open Contracting Partnership, 2021). Another major constraint is limited technical capacity. Many CSOs lack the engineering, legal, or financial expertise required to assess complex construction projects (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005). Addressing this gap requires structured capacity-building initiatives, including training programs, secondments into government oversight units, and collaboration with technical professionals (OECD, 2021; AfDB, 2020). Co-production models, where CSOs work directly with experts, can further enhance the credibility and robustness of oversight findings (Fung *et al*., 2007). Financial fragility also undermines CSO independence and sustainability. Diversified funding strategies—including membership dues, donor partnerships, and income-generating activities—are essential for reducing donor dependency and ensuring operational resilience (Tandon, 2008; USAID, 2014; CIVICUS, 2017). Equally, institutionalizing multi-stakeholder collaboration is vital. Evidence from participatory budgeting experiences in Brazil and the Philippines shows that platforms enabling CSOs, government actors, and communities to jointly engage in planning, monitoring, and grievance redress mechanisms foster accountability and citizen trust (Ackerman, 2004; Shah, 2007; UNDP, 2020).

Recent advances in technology further expand the toolkit for effective oversight. Mobile auditing apps, blockchain systems, and GIS platforms enhance real-time monitoring, reduce information asymmetries, and allow CSOs to provide more evidence-based assessments (OECD, 2020; OpenGov Africa, 2022; Bertot *et al*., 2010). In parallel, media partnerships and the strategic use of digital platforms enable CSOs to amplify findings, mobilize citizens, and sustain public pressure for accountability (McGee & Gaventa, 2010; Transparency International, 2020). Additionally, local

legitimacy and adaptive learning are critical for long-term impact. Embedding oversight processes within cultural contexts—through the use of indigenous languages, local facilitators, and respect for community norms—helps build trust and inclusivity (UN-Habitat, 2018; Wong, 2020). Moreover, continuous peer learning and networking with global actors such as Transparency International and ANSA facilitate knowledge transfer, innovation, and policy influence (INTRAC, 2019; Tandon, 2008). From this perspective, these strategies underscore that improving CSO effectiveness in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach—anchored in legal reform, organizational resilience, technological innovation, and community legitimacy. Strengthening CSO oversight is not only about increasing capacity but also about embedding oversight in systems that are transparent, participatory, and resistant to political capture.

III. Research Methodology

This study examined the determinants of CSOs` effectiveness in overseeing public sector construction projects in Nigeria and explored strategies to enhance their role. A survey research design was adopted, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather empirical data from stakeholders engaged in CSO oversight of public construction. The adoption of a survey design is consistent with established practices for similar governance and accountability studies (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016). The questionnaire was developed based on constructs identified in the literature and insights from a pilot study. A pre-test was conducted to highlight potential challenges respondents might face, thereby ensuring clarity and usability of the instrument (Fellows & Liu, 2015). This refinement process improved internal validity by addressing ambiguities and enhancing reliability (Saunders *et al*., 2009). Ten research scholars were invited to review the draft instrument, and eight provided detailed feedback. These individuals were experts in construction management, infrastructure delivery, and governance. Their contributions were instrumental in improving the precision of items and aligning the language with both academic and policy standards before the instrument's final deployment.

The empirical investigation was conducted in Lagos State and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). Lagos was chosen to represent state-level governance dynamics, while Abuja provided insights into federal-level oversight. Both locations host a high concentration of national and international CSOs, as well as accountability institutions, offering a robust context for comparative analysis. A non-probability sampling strategy was adopted, combining purposive and cluster sampling. Respondents included three main categories: CSO staff involved in project monitoring and advocacy; Government officials from agencies such as the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); and Project beneficiaries, including members of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). This combination ensured perspectives from grassroots organizations, national NGOs, oversight agencies, and professional associations (engineers, architects, and quantity surveyors), thereby capturing a comprehensive picture of CSO oversight. Purposive sampling was employed to identify 92 CSO staff, 134 government officials, and 79 project beneficiaries, all of whom were subsequently included in the study. This approach was necessary due to the absence of official registers of CSOs and beneficiaries in the study areas, which made it difficult to define the population precisely. By targeting respondents directly involved in oversight activities, the technique enhanced the relevance and credibility of the data collected. Moreover, purposive sampling is widely recognized in governance and oversight research as appropriate where populations are hard to enumerate or official sampling frames are lacking. Its application in this study ensured that the perspectives gathered were context-specific and directly aligned with the research questions.

The questionnaire was administered both in person and electronically. It comprised three sections: Section A: Demographic and professional characteristics of respondents; Section B: Seventeen challenges to CSO oversight effectiveness, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Does not influence, 5 = Strongly influences); and Section C: Twenty-one strategies for addressing the challenges, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High). Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding 0.873 for the challenge items and 0.798 for the strategy items, both of which indicate acceptable reliability (Famiyeh *et al*., 2017). A total of 305 questionnaires were distributed, with 189 returned and 173 retained after data cleaning, representing a 57% response rate, which is considered adequate for statistical analysis in governance and construction studies. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the study sample. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, particularly mean score ranking, were used to assess the relative importance of factors. The mean score (MS) was computed as:

$$MS = \Sigma(RPi \times Ri)/n \quad (1)$$

where: MS = Mean Score, RPi= Rating point i (range from 1-5), Ri= response to rating point, i) and n = total responses = summation of Ri from1-5. Following Kazaz *et al*. (2008), factors with a baseline MS ≥ 3.40 were considered significant. To test agreement across

stakeholder groups, the Kruskal–Wallis rank test—a non-parametric alternative to one-way ANOVA—was employed (Yap & Lock, 2017).

IV. Results and Discussion Results

The results from the analysis of the data collected and discussion of the findings for this study are presented in this section. They cover an overview of respondents' characteristics, an assessment of the factors influencing the effectiveness of CSO oversight, and an evaluation of respondents' level of agreement on these factors using the Kruskal–Wallis (H) test. The section also presents strategies for improving the effectiveness of CSO oversight in public sector construction projects. Detailed findings from these analyses are discussed in the subsections that follow.

a) *Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Respondents*

The demographic and professional characteristics of respondents are summarized in Table 2, covering classification, qualifications, years of experience in CSO oversight activities, and location. The data show that government officials were more represented than other groups, reflecting their control over systems, processes, and information flows in public sector construction, while CSOs and beneficiaries remain peripheral due to institutional and political constraints. Educational attainment was high, with 60% of respondents holding at least a first degree (HND/B.Sc./B.Tech.), and 40% holding postgraduate qualifications, including 29% with Master's degrees and 11% with PhDs. These levels of education suggest that respondents were sufficiently knowledgeable about the issues examined in the study. Experience levels were also significant: only 8% had less than five years of experience in CSO oversight activities, while 92% had more than five years, and 80% reported over 10 years of involvement. In terms of location, 61% of respondents were based in Lagos, compared to 39% in Abuja. This distribution reflects the broader civic presence and higher volume of project activity in Lagos, compared with the more centralized and limited oversight participation in Abuja. Collectively, these attributes provide a strong basis for considering the data a credible reflection of perspectives on the challenges and strategies for strengthening CSO oversight effectiveness in public sector construction.

Table 2: Respondents` Characteristics

Category	Classification	N	%
Classification	CSO staff	38	22
	Government officials	86	50
	Project beneficiaries	49	28
Qualification	HND/B.Sc./B.Tech.	103	60
	MSc	51	29
	PhD	19	11
Experience in CSO`s oversight activities	1–5 years	13	8
	5–10 years	21	12
	10–15 years	63	36
	16–20 years	44	25
	Above 20	32	19
Location	Lagos	105	61
	Abuja	68	39

b) *Ranking of Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of CSO Oversight in Project Delivery*

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of seventeen (17) key factors that influence the effectiveness of CSO oversight in project delivery. The analysis was conducted using the formula in Equation (1). The results of the Mean Score (MS), rank, and remarks for each factor are shown in Table 3. Among CSO staff, the five most highly ranked factors with their respective MS are: Financial Instability and Unsustainable Funding Models (4.69), Limited Access to Timely and Reliable Information (4.52), Challenges in Maintaining Organizational Independence and Political Neutrality (4.45), Restrictive Legal and Regulatory Frameworks (4.38), and Weak Institutional and Organizational Capacity (4.31). For government officials, the top five are: Unfavorable Political and Socio-Institutional Environment (4.57), Restrictive Legal and Regulatory Frameworks (4.54), Fragmented Stakeholder Engagement and Weak Collaborative Mechanisms (4.42), Weak Internal Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms within CSOs (4.40), and Limited Use of

Media Advocacy and Public Awareness Campaigns (4.37). Among project beneficiaries, the leading factors are: Limited Access to Timely and Reliable Information (4.83), Low Levels of Civic Engagement and Public Participation (4.79), Lack of Cultural Sensitivity and Inadequate Community Integration (4.74), Limited Use of Media Advocacy and Public Awareness Campaigns (4.64), and Fragmented Stakeholder Engagement and Weak Collaborative Mechanisms (4.52).

A critical comparison (Table 3) reveals that the highest-ranked factors by each group are: Financial Instability and Unsustainable Funding Models for CSO staff (4.69), Unfavorable Political and Socio-Institutional Environment for government officials (4.57), and Limited Access to Timely and Reliable Information for project beneficiaries (4.83). Conversely, the lowest-ranked factor among government officials is Inadequate Adoption of Technological Tools and Innovative Solutions (2.73), while both CSO staff and project beneficiaries ranked Limited Access to International Networks and Strategic Partnerships lowest (MS = 2.97 and 2.77, respectively).

In the combined ranking across all three groups, the top five factors are: Limited Access to Timely and Reliable Information (4.36), Fragmented Stakeholder Engagement and Weak Collaborative Mechanisms (4.19), Unfavorable Political and Socio-Institutional Environment (4.17), Limited Use of Media Advocacy and Public Awareness Campaigns (4.13), and Low Levels of Civic Engagement and Public Participation (4.08). The five least ranked factors are: Lack of Cultural Sensitivity and Inadequate Community Integration (3.55), Poor Risk Management and Absence of Contingency Planning (3.54), Inconsistent Capacity Building and Limited Opportunities for Continuous Learning (3.33), Inadequate Adoption of Technological Tools and Innovative Solutions (3.32), and Limited Access to International Networks and Strategic Partnerships (2.85).

Limited access to timely and reliable information remains the most significant constraint, reflecting entrenched information asymmetry. Without contract documents, bills of quantities (BOQs), progress reports, or updated project records, CSOs are unable to detect irregularities, validate community claims, or advance evidence-based demands. This finding aligns with global scholarship that identifies information as a precondition for accountability (Kosack & Fung, 2014; Bauhr & Grimes, 2014). In Nigeria, however, the problem is not only technical but also political. Patronage networks in Lagos often restrict procurement data, while federal interference in Abuja hinders the disclosure of sensitive contracts. By contrast, Kenya's adoption of open contracting data standards has improved transparency (Mutuku & Mwangi, 2022), leaving Nigerian CSOs still struggling for basic access. Fragmentation further undermines oversight, as consultations remain ad hoc, coordination weak, and multi-stakeholder fora poorly institutionalized. This reflects broader evidence that weak collaboration erodes accountability (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Fox, 2015). In Nigeria, CSO efforts are fragmented and uncoordinated: urban-based organizations in Lagos are often elite-focused and disconnected from grassroots voices, while overlapping mandates in Abuja compound institutional incoherence. Comparatively, India's grassroots mobilization helps mitigate fragmentation (Narayan & Choudhury, 2020), while structured oversight platforms are common in developed contexts.

The wider political environment also constrains CSO effectiveness. Corruption, interference, and weak rule of law expose civic actors to co-optation, retaliation, and political capture. Unlike Kenya and India, where bureaucratic hurdles dominate, Nigerian CSOs often prioritize survival and autonomy. This reflects Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg's (2016) observation that state resistance and patronage politics undermine civic oversight in fragile democracies. Similarly, Omoleke and Adebayo (2020) note that entrenched interests routinely marginalize civic actors in Nigeria's procurement processes. Equally important is the underutilization of media advocacy and weak civic engagement. Low public trust in media, fear of backlash, and widespread apathy limit CSOs' ability to amplify accountability demands. This weakens legitimacy compared with India's grassroots campaigns or the digital advocacy strategies common in developed democracies. McGee and Edwards (2021) highlight the transformative role of media in building public demand for accountability, while Gaventa (2020) shows how civic awareness campaigns shift power toward grassroots actors.

Finally, limited access to international networks and partnerships ranked lowest among the identified barriers. While global coalitions can provide technical expertise and protective leverage, their impact in Nigeria is muted by severe domestic political and institutional obstacles. East African CSOs more effectively leverage donor coalitions (Keck & Sikkink, 1998), but Nigerian actors view such support as secondary. Chandler and Hyden (2019) caution, however, that external resources must be rooted in local legitimacy to avoid perceptions of interference. The findings highlighted suggest that CSO oversight in Nigeria is constrained less by technical capacity gaps than by structural and political barriers. While information access and coordination mechanisms are necessary, they are insufficient without broader reforms that address entrenched patronage, institutional fragmentation, and weak civic legitimacy. Strengthening oversight thus requires not only technical transparency tools but also deeper political and institutional transformation.

c) *Ranking of Strategies for improving the Effectiveness of CSOs' Oversight*

Considering that CSOs in Nigeria face significant environmental and institutional constraints that limit their oversight role, this section analyzes the strategic responses tailored to these challenges, supported by real-world initiatives and scholarly findings. This literature-informed approach provides a roadmap for strengthening CSO oversight in public construction projects in Nigeria. The strategies are presented under three distinct sub-sections: foundational strategies, enabling and operational strategies, and collaborative and adaptive strategies. The study underscores the interdependence among these three tiers of strategies, noting that foundational reforms create the conditions for effective deployment of operational tools, which in turn must be embedded within collaborative, community-driven structures. Thus, only by aligning foundational, operational, and ranking of adaptive strategies can CSOs meaningfully contribute to transparency, accountability, and inclusive infrastructure governance.

d) *Ranking of Foundational Strategies for Improving Effectiveness of CSO Oversight*

This study defines foundational strategies as structural and governance reforms that create an enabling environment for CSOs to function effectively. Five key variables were identified and ranked by respondents. The top priority was "strengthening institutional autonomy and safeguards against political interference" (MS = 4.85), followed by "advocacy for enforceable legal protections and CSO inclusion in procurement processes" (MS = 4.74). The third ranked factor was "diversification of funding sources and adoption of income-generating initiatives" (MS = 4.26), while "implementation of CSO codes of conduct and ethics charters" ranked fourth. The lowest-ranked factor was "promotion of trust-building measures between CSOs and government institutions" (MS = 4.06).

The findings suggest that sustainable and high-impact CSO oversight depends on institutional safeguards, legal frameworks, financial resilience, ethical legitimacy, and relational trust. Institutional autonomy and protections against political interference are particularly important, as they shield CSOs from capture, co-optation, or retaliation that could undermine their watchdog role. In parallel, legal protections and formal inclusion in procurement processes create rights and mechanisms through which CSOs can access project data, participate in hearings, and escalate concerns. These provisions translate civic voice into actionable oversight.

Financial resilience further reinforces independence. Funding diversification and income-generating activities reduce reliance on a narrow pool of donors or government subventions, thereby ensuring organizational continuity. Ethical conduct, guided by sector-wide codes of practice, also strengthens legitimacy and alignment with societal expectations (Macdonald *et al*., 2014). Without legal scaffolding and financial stability, however, CSOs risk losing both impartiality and operational capacity, particularly in volatile political contexts.

Relational trust adds another layer of effectiveness. Mechanisms such as regular dialogue, shared monitoring protocols, and joint problem-solving reduce adversarial dynamics and increase the likelihood that oversight findings lead to corrective action. These results align with established literature. Organizational independence is widely recognized as a precondition for effective oversight (Fox, 2015; Grindle, 2011), while legal personality and operational space are essential for credible monitoring (McGee & Edwards, 2016). Furthermore, rights to information, participation, and redress enhance citizen oversight capacity (Joshi & Houtzager, 2019). In procurement processes, transparency clauses and contract disclosure facilitate evidence-based monitoring and reduce corruption, while repeated dialogue increases opportunities for collaborative solutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Findings from this study extend theory by demonstrating that in highly politicized contexts such as Nigeria, institutional autonomy and safeguards against political interference are viewed as more foundational to CSO oversight effectiveness than technical capacity or grassroots mobilization, which are emphasized in Kenya and India. This indicates the need to adapt existing oversight frameworks to account for political capture risks as a primary constraint on civic accountability. The prioritization of funding diversification and income-generating initiatives further shows that Nigerian CSOs perceive financial resilience not only as an operational necessity but also as a strategic governance mechanism to protect independence.

From a practical standpoint, this underscores the importance of self-financing models in volatile donor and political environments where impartial oversight must be sustained despite external pressures. Unlike comparative cases where trust-building with government actors is central to oversight success, Nigerian CSOs rank it as a lower priority. This challenges the universality of collaborative governance models (Ansell & Gash, 2008) and suggests that in contexts marked by entrenched political interference, structural protections and autonomy outweigh relational trust as enablers of effective oversight.

Table 3: Foundational Strategies of CSOs in Public Sector Construction Oversight

Strategic Response	Mean	Rank	Rmks
Strengthening of institutional autonomy and safeguards against political interference	4.85	1	VHS
Advocacy for enforceable legal protections and CSO inclusion in procurement processes	4.74	2	VHS
Diversification of funding sources and adoption of income-generating initiatives	4.26	3	VHS
Implementation of CSO codes of conduct and ethics charters	4.18	4	VHS
Promotion of trust-building measures between CSOs and government institutions	4.06	5	VHS

VHS= Very High Significance; HS= high Significance; MS= Moderate Significance; Rmks= Remarks.

e) *Ranking of Enabling and Operational Strategies for improving effectiveness of CSO oversight*

Results in Table 5 reveal that the mid-level strategies—enabling and operational approaches—comprise six key factors. These strategies emphasize capacity, technology, and process innovations that empower CSOs to carry out oversight functions effectively once foundational issues are secured. The highest-ranked factor is the adoption of Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS) and digital procurement platforms (MS = 4.89). This was followed by enhancement of technical capacity through training, secondments, and expert collaboration (MS = 4.69) and strengthening of organizational development systems and performance-based management (MS = 4.69). The lowest-ranked factor, establishment of independent Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) units within CSOs (MS = 3.86), should not be viewed as unimportant but rather as an indication that stakeholders perceive M&E to be most effective when embedded within broader organizational and technical ecosystems rather than as an isolated unit.

The prominence of OCDS and digital procurement platforms underscores the growing recognition that real-time access to open, machine-readable procurement data is transformative for CSO oversight in Nigeria. By exposing contract pipelines, BOQs, award notices, and execution updates, these platforms reduce information asymmetries, enhance transparency, and lower monitoring costs. In turn, CSOs are better positioned to detect irregularities at earlier stages and to press for corrective action. This reflects a technology-driven accountability model well suited to Lagos and Abuja, where the scale and complexity of high-value construction projects demand digital oversight mechanisms.

However, the findings also suggest that data access alone is insufficient. Technical expertise is required to interpret procurement records, validate BOQs, and assess construction quality. In response, Nigerian CSOs are prioritizing targeted capacity-building initiatives, including specialized training, secondments into government technical units, and collaborations with engineers, procurement specialists, and forensic auditors. This trend distinguishes Nigeria from other contexts. Whereas audits in Kenya are more community-driven, and oversight in India is dominated by grassroots social audits, Nigerian CSOs are actively self-provisioning technical expertise to compensate for weak institutional oversight.

Building on this, the strengthening of organizational development (OD) systems has further enabled CSOs to expand monitoring activities, manage risks, and deliver consistent results. This marks a shift from ad hoc activism toward more professionalized oversight practices. Although independent M&E units were ranked lowest, their gradual emergence indicates a nascent professionalization trend. These units are designed to produce independently validated evidence, thereby enhancing CSOs' credibility with government agencies, the media, and international partners.

These findings align with broader global scholarship. Open contracting reforms are widely recognized for reducing corruption risks by lowering information asymmetries (Kosack & Fung, 2014; Open Contracting Partnership, 2021), but their effectiveness depends on whether actors can process and utilize the data (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014). Likewise, McGee and Gaventa (2019) argue that CSOs require institutional robustness to translate transparency into accountability, while Fox (2015) highlights the importance of the "accountability sandwich" model, in which civil society oversight is reinforced by strong organizational systems. The Nigerian case contributes to this literature by showing how urban CSOs in Lagos and Abuja combine digital transparency tools, technical capacity-building, and organizational resilience as compensatory mechanisms within weak and politically contested governance environments. This integrated approach appears less pronounced in both other developing contexts and in more established oversight systems.

Table 5: Enabling and Operational Strategies of CSOs in Public Sector Construction Oversight

Strategic Response	Mean	Rank	Rmks
Adoption of Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS) and digital procurement platforms	4.89	1	VHS
Enhancement of technical capacity through training, secondments, and expert collaboration	4.75	2	VHS
Strengthening of organizational development systems and performance-based management	4.67	3	VHS
Deployment of performance audit frameworks and public disclosure mechanisms	4.32	4	VHS
Adoption of digital tools such as GIS, mobile apps, blockchain, and real-time dashboards	4.11	5	VHS
Development of structured communication strategies and multilingual public feedback mechanisms	3.80	6	VHS
Establishment of independent Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) units within CSOs	3.84	7	VHS

VHS= Very High Significance; HS= high Significance; MS= Moderate Significance; Rmks= Remarks.

f) Ranking of Collaborative and Adaptive Strategies for Improving Effectiveness of CSO Oversight

Collaborative and adaptive strategies are lower-level but foundational mechanisms that emphasize community integration, adaptability, and trust-building, primarily for sustaining CSO impact in public sector construction oversight. Within this category, the highest-ranked strategy was the institutionalization of multi-stakeholder forums and participatory project review mechanisms (MS = 4.78). The second-ranked strategy was the use of community scorecards, citizen report cards, and town hall forums (MS = 4.65), followed by engagement of local personnel and alignment with community cultural norms (MS = 4.52), and the development of localized oversight frameworks adapted to regional realities (MS = 4.39). By contrast, the least-ranked factor was engagement in global watchdog alliances and international advocacy coalitions (MS = 3.43).

Effective oversight in Nigeria requires strategies that are both collaborative and adaptive. Collaboration brings together CSOs, government, and communities, while adaptability allows for flexibility in volatile environments. This represents a shift from reactive oversight toward proactive governance practices that emphasize participation, transparency, and context-sensitive engagement. A notable insight in the Nigerian context is the central role of multi-stakeholder for a (MSFs). When institutionalized and connected to decision-making processes, MSFs facilitate earlier problem detection and structured evidence exchange, thereby reducing adversarial relationships. Equally important is the hiring and empowerment of local personnel—such as community liaisons, local engineers, and paralegals—and aligning oversight processes with cultural norms. These measures enhance trust, reduce resistance, and help CSOs in Lagos and Abuja navigate entrenched patronage systems and perceptions of external interference. Compared with Kenya and India, where national CSOs often dominate oversight without deep local embedding, Nigeria demonstrates a stronger reliance on localized strategies.

Building on this, the findings highlight the importance of context-sensitive oversight frameworks tailored to Nigeria's dual urban dynamic. Lagos requires oversight approaches that address urban heterogeneity and rapid infrastructure growth, while Abuja demands diplomatic strategies to accommodate its proximity to federal power. This combination of megacity and political capital dynamics makes the Nigerian case distinctive. Unlike Kenya, where CSOs often focus on rural roads and water projects, or India, where rural infrastructure remains central, Nigerian CSOs are innovating with urban-specific frameworks that balance technical oversight with culturally adaptive community engagement.

In comparative perspective, while research from Kenya emphasizes CSO-led monitoring of large-scale infrastructure projects (Mutuku & Mwangi, 2022), and studies from India highlight village-level accountability mechanisms such as scorecards and social audits, the Nigerian case underscores the novelty of integrating urban oversight with culturally grounded strategies in politically sensitive settings. This blend of urban orientation and localized engagement extends existing theory by showing how oversight effectiveness depends on embedding strategies within specific governance contexts.

In this regard, the Nigerian experience also diverges from patterns observed in developed countries. In OECD contexts, CSOs generally operate within robust institutional frameworks where access to procurement data and organizational autonomy are more secure. By contrast, Nigerian CSOs must rely on localized, trust-based, and adaptive approaches to counter weak institutional protections, political interference, and limited procurement transparency (Akintola *et al*., 2020; World Bank, 2020). The novelty of this contribution lies in demonstrating that sustained oversight impact in Lagos and Abuja depends less on international advocacy models and more on community-driven, context-specific innovations.

Table 6: Collaborative and Adaptive Strategies of CSOs in Public Sector Construction Oversight

Strategic Response	Mean	Rank	Rmks
Institutionalization of multi-stakeholder forums and participatory project review mechanisms	4.78	1	VHS
Utilization of community scorecards, citizen report cards, and town hall forums	4.65	2	VHS
Engagement of local personnel and alignment with community cultural norms	4.52	3	VHS
Development of localized oversight frameworks adapted to regional realities	4.39	4	VHS
Establishment of risk registers and adaptive response mechanisms for volatile environments	4.21	5	VHS
Integration of Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) principles in oversight activities	4.03	6	VHS
Facilitation of peer learning, modular training, and exchange programs	3.68	7	VHS
Collaboration with investigative media and strategic use of social media platforms	3.54	8	VHS
Engagement in global watchdog alliances and international advocacy coalitions	3.43	9	VHS

VHS= Very High Significance; HS= high Significance; MS= Moderate Significance; Rmks = Remarks.

g) Tests of Agreement among the Respondent Groups

The study examined whether CSO staff, government officials, and project beneficiaries share similar perceptions of the factors influencing the effectiveness of CSO oversight in construction project delivery. Testing this agreement was necessary to determine whether the identified factors could be generalized across stakeholder groups, thereby providing a sound basis for recommendations and further research. The Kruskal–Wallis test was employed for this purpose. The Kruskal–Wallis (H) test is a non-parametric statistical method used when the assumptions for parametric tests are not met (Pallant, 2007). Specifically, while parametric tests require interval or ratio-level data, the non-parametric alternative is more appropriate when this condition is not satisfied (Pallant, 2007). These criteria were met by the dataset, justifying the use of the Kruskal–Wallis test. The rule for decision-making states that if the p-value > 0.05, the null hypothesis is retained, whereas if p-value ≤ 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. As presented in Table 7, the calculated chi-square (K) value of 0.417 was below the critical value of 5.991. Similarly, the p-value of 0.139, being greater than 0.05, further confirmed the absence of significant differences in perception among the three respondent categories. These results indicate that CSO staff, government officials, and project beneficiaries broadly share similar views on the systemic barriers constraining CSO oversight. Such barriers include entrenched patronage networks, institutional fragmentation, and limited transparency. The consistency across stakeholder groups suggests that these challenges are widely experienced regardless of institutional affiliation.

V. Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that the effectiveness of CSOs in public sector construction oversight in Nigeria is shaped by systemic constraints, structural weaknesses, and contextual realities. Limited access to information remains a central barrier, with political interference and weak disclosure mechanisms restricting evidence-based monitoring. This challenge is compounded by fragmented stakeholder engagement

and poor coordination, which undermine collaboration among CSOs, government, and communities, thereby reducing accountability in project delivery. The broader political and socio-institutional environment further complicates oversight. Entrenched corruption, co-optation, and weak rule of law make CSO oversight more precarious in Nigeria than in comparative contexts such as Kenya and India, where grassroots mobilization has been more effective. Additionally, limited use of media advocacy and weak civic engagement diminish CSOs' legitimacy and restrict public demand for accountability. While international linkages offer potential support, they remain underutilized due to domestic political and institutional barriers. These realities highlight the need for a context-specific oversight framework tailored to Nigeria's governance environment.

VI. Recommendations

To strengthen CSO oversight, several strategies are recommended. First, stronger legal and regulatory safeguards are required to guarantee CSOs' rights to access procurement data, participate in oversight processes, and challenge irregularities through judicial mechanisms. Complementing this, reforms that expand access to digital procurement information—such as adopting OCDS—would promote real-time transparency and accountability. Second, addressing financial fragility is critical. Diversifying income streams and broadening donor support would reduce reliance on volatile funding sources and enhance independence. Building technical and organizational capacity through training, professional secondments, and partnerships with engineers and auditors would also improve the depth and quality of oversight. Third, relational strategies must be strengthened. Establishing multi-stakeholder forums can foster trust and facilitate collaboration between CSOs, government agencies, contractors, and communities. Localized and culturally adaptive approaches, aligned with community norms, would further strengthen legitimacy and reduce resistance. Scaling up media advocacy and civic mobilization is also essential for amplifying CSOs' findings, increasing citizen demand for accountability, and reinforcing vertical checks on government performance.

VII. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Like any study, this research is not without limitations. The use of a non-probability sampling technique, while suitable for capturing targeted perspectives, limits the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, data collection was restricted to Lagos and Abuja, which may not fully capture regional dynamics across Nigeria. Future studies could address these limitations by adopting probability-based sampling to improve representativeness, expanding coverage to other states for broader insights, and employing mixed-methods approaches to complement quantitative data with qualitative perspectives.

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