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Research paper

A Capacity-Building Intervention Model for Civil Society Organizations: An Applied Assessment of Knowledge, Training Efficacy, and Proposal Development in Local Governance

Gemar G. Perez *, Irene H. Maralit, Jennifer Buenviaje Atienza, Katherine T. Arellano, Jennifer M. Perez, Bendalyn M. Landicho, Gina D. Bonifacio, Camilo C. Alulod, Lorena F. Mendoza, Agnes D. Arellano, Shirlyne M. Guhit

Batangas State University- The National Engineering University
**Corresponding author E-mail: jennifer.perez@g.batstate-u.edu.ph*

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of a structured capacity-building intervention designed to enhance the governance-related competencies of civil society organizations (CSOs) in a local government context. The intervention consisted of modular training on statutory roles, strategic management, project planning, and proposal development, administered to CSO representatives accredited by a municiplaity-level local government unit. A quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-assessment was employed to measure changes in knowledge and applied competencies, complemented by the evaluation of project proposals produced by participants after the training. Results indicated substantial improvements across all competency domains, with post-test scores showing significant gains compared to baseline levels and project proposals demonstrating alignment with local development priorities. The study further introduced a capacity maturation model that explains how foundational knowledge evolves into applied competence and institutional engagement when supported by organizational conditions. Findings highlight the importance of treating CSO capacity-building not as a one-time activity but as a developmental process with measurable outcomes. The model offers a conceptual basis for future empirical testing and provides practical insights for government agencies, academic institutions, and development partners seeking to strengthen participatory governance.

Keywords: *Capacity Building; Civil Society Organizations; Local Governance; Training Intervention.*

1. Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are now widely recognized as indispensable actors in advancing sustainable development, democratization, and responsive governance, particularly in the Global South. Recent work on environmental and development governance shows that CSOs increasingly act as intermediaries between citizens and the state, translating local concerns into policy advocacy, monitoring state performance, and co-producing services with governments and donors in environmental governance [1]. At the same time, global analyses of human capital development and lifelong learning highlight that CSOs are often key partners in extending education, skills training, and community-based programs to hard-to-reach populations, especially where state capacity is constrained in human capital development systems [2]. Empirical studies from South and Southeast Asia similarly underline that CSOs' contributions to participatory local governance, accountability, and social inclusion depend not only on legal recognition but also on their organizational capacity to engage meaningfully in complex policy and planning processes in grassroots governance contexts [3].

However, the ability of CSOs to fulfill these ambitious roles is uneven and frequently undermined by capacity gaps. Sharma's global review of CSOs involved in community-based conservation projects shows that many organizations struggle with weak internal governance, fragmented coordination mechanisms, limited human resources, and inadequate infrastructure, all of which constrain their "institutional climate capacity" [4] to design, implement, and monitor programs systematically. The European Training Foundation likewise notes that, across partner countries, CSOs active in human capital development often lack robust competencies in project design, results-based management, and evaluation, despite being expected to act as co-implementers and watchdogs in skills and education systems [2]. These findings reinforce a core gap: while international and national frameworks increasingly rely on CSOs as strategic governance partners, systematic investments in their technical and organizational capacity remain insufficient and unevenly documented.

Capacity-building interventions are a primary strategy to address these gaps, yet their effectiveness is not always rigorously assessed. Recent evidence from an intervention in Zimbabwe and neighboring countries shows that structured learning, training, and coaching can significantly enhance participants' innovation-related skills and adoption behavior in agricultural innovation systems [5]. Nevertheless,

most empirical studies focus either on thematic outcomes (e.g., sector-specific innovations) or on broad descriptive accounts of "empowered" communities, with relatively few examining how targeted training actually shifts CSOs' capabilities to perform core governance functions such as planning, budgeting, policy engagement, and monitoring and evaluation capacities documented as weak in Southeast Asian CSOs [3], in conservation-focused CSOs [4], and in African agricultural CSOs participating in intervention-based learning [5]. This points to a second gap: a need for more context-specific but methodologically rigorous studies that treat CSO capacity-building as an applied science problem where training design, implementation, and evaluation are systematically studied and iteratively improved.

In the Philippine context, civil society has long been embedded in governance reforms and local development. The 1987 Constitution and the Local Government Code institutionalized CSO participation in local special bodies and development councils, making the Philippines one of the earlier adopters of participatory local governance frameworks [6] and LGU-based CSO participation mechanisms [7]. The Asian Development Bank's most recent civil society brief for the Philippines notes that CSOs are active in a wide range of policy domains and service delivery functions and are formally represented in local development councils, school boards, and health boards across governance sectors [6]. Yet, the same report underscores enduring challenges: fragmented coordination, uneven representation across sectors and localities, and limited capacity of many organizations to move beyond attendance in meetings toward substantive agenda setting, evidence-based advocacy, and monitoring of policy implementation in CSO–LGU interfaces [6]. Although government agencies and development partners have responded to the capacity deficit by producing various practitioner handbooks and detailed guides on CSO engagement [7], [10], these initiatives primarily serve as prescriptive tools. Consequently, systematic, peer-reviewed evaluations of the efficacy of these training components, especially those utilizing methodologically rigorous designs (such as quasi-experimental), remain sparse.

Within this national landscape, subnational and local variations are pronounced. Smaller cities and municipalities, including those in growth corridors outside Metro Manila, often host a diverse array of people's organizations, cooperatives, sectoral associations, and faith-based groups that are accredited as CSOs but vary widely in organizational maturity. Existing policy studies tend to focus on national-level frameworks or on selected case-study provinces in macro-policy perspectives [8], [9], leaving a dearth of empirical work on how CSO capacities are actually built and tested in medium-sized LGUs with emerging development pressures. In many of these localities, CSO representatives are expected to deliberate on complex technical documents such as comprehensive development plans, investment programs, and annual budgets without having received structured training in project planning, prioritization, or basic monitoring and evaluation concepts in LGU planning processes [7], [10]. This represents a fourth gap: the micro-level learning needs and capability trajectories of accredited CSOs in specific LGU contexts remain under-examined, even as they are central to the effectiveness of participatory governance reforms.

The present study is situated at the intersection of these global, national, and local dynamics. It focuses on a capacity-building intervention for accredited CSOs in a Philippine local government unit, co-designed by a higher education institution and the LGU to strengthen CSO competencies in roles such as development planning, project proposal preparation, and participation in local special bodies. Anchored on the emerging empirical literature on CSO participation metrics in governance evaluation studies [8], [9] and on evidence that well-structured training can enhance innovation and decision-making in community-based organizations in learning-based interventions [5], the study treats the training program as an applied scientific intervention. It employs systematic pre- and post-assessments, complemented by qualitative feedback, to examine changes in CSO leaders' knowledge and self-reported capability to engage in local governance processes. By systematically evaluating the intervention's efficacy, this study responds to two critical, interrelated gaps in the literature. First, it addresses the lack of rigorously tested interventions [8] by applying a quasi-experimental design to measure changes in knowledge and applied competency [9], thereby moving beyond descriptive accounts of CSO participation to offer analytical depth, [10]. Second, it provides empirical evidence on how a context-specific, modular training program combining principles of public administration, organizational development, and project planning—can directly strengthen the functional competencies required for CSOs to participate effectively in development planning, budgeting, and policy processes in decentralized governance settings [6]. Ultimately, this research offers a replicable, evidence-based model for enhancing CSO participation in the Global South, generating insights that may inform institutional reforms and future capacity-building strategies.

2. Literature Review

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have evolved into key actors in governance systems where decentralization enables non-state entities to share responsibility for development and public accountability, particularly in domains requiring community proximity and social legitimacy [13]. Their expanding presence in education, welfare, and climate governance illustrates how CSOs mobilize local knowledge to articulate community interests and facilitate collective action [14]. However, these roles increasingly demand professionalization as CSOs are now expected to adopt managerial practices influenced by governmental and market logics, such as compliance with performance standards and competition for service delivery contracts [15]. These environmental shifts heighten expectations that CSOs undertake sophisticated coordination, planning, and program-management functions requiring organizational competencies beyond voluntary participation [16].

In the Philippines, institutional frameworks have long embedded CSOs in local governance structures, granting them membership in development councils and sectoral boards under the Local Government Code [7]. Yet despite formal access, their engagement frequently remains procedural rather than substantive, as many CSOs struggle to understand local planning cycles and navigate bureaucratic decision-making processes [8]. Capacity limitations manifest in difficulties transforming community issues into technically sound proposals aligned with public investment priorities [19]. Skills in strategic management—such as articulating organizational mandates and planning multi-year programs—remain uneven, hindering the sustainability of CSO initiatives [17]. More critically, results-based project design competencies are inadequately developed, resulting in submissions lacking measurable objectives, logical frameworks, and financial projections required for LGU funding mechanisms [18]. These deficiencies indicate that the barriers to CSO participation are not a matter of legitimacy but of technical readiness to operate within institutionalized governance systems [20].

Empirical evidence from LGU case studies further substantiates these capacity constraints. Baseline assessments in Panabo City show that CSOs, while formally represented, often lack the information access and technical familiarity to influence policy decisions, reflecting a pattern where participation is symbolic rather than instrumental [18]. In Aringay, La Union, organizations recognize governance opportunities but cite training needs in project planning and monitoring as conditions for meaningful engagement, revealing persistent dependency on LGU facilitation when competencies are weak [19]. Such findings align with broader analyses of Philippine governance arrangements showing that CSO effectiveness hinges not merely on institutional openness but also on their ability to interpret technical plans, budgets, and performance indicators [17]. These dynamics illustrate that participation rights do not automatically translate into influence unless actors possess the knowledge to engage with complex governance tools.

Parallel studies in neighboring contexts reveal congruent patterns. Indonesian CSOs engage actively in advocacy and public education yet remain constrained by limited technical capacity and resource scarcity, preventing them from scaling impact beyond localized activities [12]. Southeast Asian CSOs involved in climate actions exhibit strong organizing abilities but lack robust monitoring frameworks, making it difficult to measure the effects of interventions and justify continued engagement [14]. ASEAN disaster-risk literature also notes a mismatch between rhetoric on "local leadership" and the actual investments required to enable frontline CSOs to manage complex risks, highlighting gaps in governance-oriented skill development [16]. These comparative insights reinforce the argument that CSO participation challenges are systemic rather than country-specific.

Given these recurring deficits, capacity-building has emerged as the primary strategy to equip CSOs with governance-related competencies, yet reviews of existing interventions show that most programs describe activities rather than evaluate outcomes [25]. Research on NGO evaluation capacity confirms that structured training, when paired with follow-up support, improves organizations' ability to collect and use data for decision-making, though shifts in practice depend on readiness and learning culture rather than exposure alone [25]. Multi-year efforts in the Pacific similarly show that enhancing research and monitoring skills requires iterative engagement, as time constraints and resource competition often impede skill application [24]. These findings converge on the premise that capacity-building is a developmental process that must be grounded in needs assessment, modular learning, and context-sensitive reinforcement rather than isolated workshop events [23].

Training evaluation models offer analytical tools to verify whether such interventions generate measurable learning gains. The Kirkpatrick model remains dominant because it assesses outcomes across successive levels—reaction, learning, behavior, and results—making it adaptable to public-sector and non-profit settings where learning must translate into performance [9]. Bibliometric analyses emphasize the model's practical utility and the continuing relevance of its assumptions in contemporary training systems [27]. Validation studies in healthcare education illustrate that well-designed instruments can reliably capture knowledge gains attributable to structured training [28], while qualitative evaluations demonstrate how learning transfer can be documented through participant reflections and observed practice changes [29]. Broader reviews caution, however, that training models often neglect how organizational contexts mediate the sustainability of learning, thus calling for multi-level evaluation approaches that examine effects beyond immediate participant experiences [31]. In workplace learning, research shows that capacity-building must be linked to pre-defined outcomes and systematically assessed to justify investments and demonstrate value creation [30].

Despite these advances, a persistent empirical gap concerns whether CSO capacity-building results in improved project proposals. Philippine literature repeatedly identifies proposal development as a weak link in CSO–LGU collaboration, with organizations able to identify community problems yet unable to articulate objectives, integrate logical frameworks, or prepare viable budgets consistent with governance requirements [7]. Municipal-level research shows that CSOs seldom produce written proposals, limiting their influence in development planning and reducing opportunities to access local funding mechanisms [32]. International initiatives prioritize project-cycle management in training, but few assess whether these competencies manifest in outputs that meet institutional standards [21]. Consequently, proposal-writing capacity remains treated as an assumed outcome rather than a measured construct, leaving a critical gap in both governance and training scholarship.

The literature therefore converges on two unresolved issues: CSOs are increasingly positioned as governance actors yet lack the technical competencies required to fulfill these roles, and capacity-building interventions remain insufficiently evaluated in terms of their impact on actual outputs, particularly project proposals. These gaps justify the present study's contribution, which empirically examines whether a structured, modular capacity-building program improves knowledge and enables CSOs to produce technically sound, LGU-aligned proposals, thereby operationalizing capacity-building as a measurable intervention rather than an aspirational reform.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study was developed to generate empirical evidence on the extent to which a structured capacity-building intervention can enhance the competencies of accredited civil society organizations (CSOs) in performing governance-related functions. Guided by the study's objectives, the methodology integrates systematic procedures for gathering baseline data, implementing the intervention, and assessing participant outcomes using validated measurement tools. Emphasis was placed on capturing both the cognitive dimension of learning, as reflected in knowledge test scores, and the applied dimension, as demonstrated through project proposal outputs aligned with local government planning requirements. The methodological procedures described in this section detail the research design, participants, research instruments, data collection processes, data analysis techniques, and ethical safeguards applied to ensure the rigor, transparency, and integrity of the study.

3.1. Research design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test–post-test design to examine the effectiveness of a capacity-building program for accredited CSO representatives in a Philippine local government unit. The intervention consisted of three training modules on (a) roles of CSOs and local governance mandates, (b) strategic and project management, and (c) project proposal development. To evaluate its effects, participants completed a knowledge test before and after the training, and their performance was further assessed through the quality ratings of project proposals developed at the end of the program. Because participants were selected from an existing pool of accredited CSOs and were not randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, the study is classified as quasi-experimental rather than a true experiment. The design nonetheless allows for rigorous within-subject comparison of pre- and post-training outcomes using paired-samples t-tests and structured performance rubrics.

3.2. Research locale and participants

The study was conducted in a city local government unit (LGU) in the Province of Batangas, where civil society organizations (CSOs) are formally accredited and serve as members of Local Special Bodies and the Local Development Council. Based on the LGU's accreditation registry, 30 CSOs were eligible for participation and were invited to take part in the capacity-building program. Each organization was requested to send two official representatives—the President, who commonly represents the organization in Sanggunian and council meetings, and the Treasurer, who is expected to possess familiarity with financial transactions relevant to project planning and fund management. Of the 30 invited organizations, 19 CSOs fully completed the intervention, including attendance in training sessions and submission of required outputs. This resulted in 38 individual respondents for the pre-test and post-test knowledge assessments, as both representatives

were evaluated separately. However, for the project proposal development component, outputs were submitted per CSO, yielding 19 evaluated proposals. The difference in sample units—individuals for the knowledge tests and organizations for the proposal outputs—reflects the structure of the intervention, where knowledge acquisition was measured at the individual level, while application of learning was assessed at the organizational level through collective project proposal preparation.
Non-completion of the intervention by the remaining CSOs was attributed to scheduling conflicts, internal organizational priorities, and intermittent participation, as reported during coordination follow-ups. To maintain the integrity of the quasi-experimental design, only those respondents who completed both the pre-test and post-test were included in the statistical analysis.

3.3. The capacity-building intervention

The intervention consisted of a three-module training program co-developed by the higher education institution and the LGU's local governance office. Each module was anchored on competencies required by CSOs in executing statutory responsibilities under national policy frameworks:

Table 1: Components and Learning Outcomes of the CSO Capacity-Building Modules

Module	Core Competency Area	Learning Outputs
Module 1	Role of Civil Society Organization in LGU Code	Identify the role of CSO according to LGU Code
Module 2	Strategic Management	Understanding organizational mandates and LGU planning cycles
Module 3	Project Management	Identification of problems, activity planning, and resource allocation
Module 4	Project Proposal Development	Draft a full project proposal, including objectives, budget, and risk assessment

The program adopted a lecture–workshop learning model supplemented by guided activities, mentoring sessions, and peer evaluation exercises. The culminating activity required each CSO to produce a complete project proposal, which served as the practical application of acquired competencies.

3.4. Research instruments

A researcher-developed instrument was employed to measure the knowledge and competencies of CSO representatives before and after the capacity-building intervention. The instrument consisted of a 30-item multiple-choice knowledge test that covered the key content areas addressed in the training modules—strategic management, project management, and project proposal development. To ensure appropriate cognitive spread and discrimination, the test items were divided into three levels of difficulty based on established test-construction principles: easy (15 items), average (9 items), and difficult (6 items), allowing for an even distribution of item complexity across the construct being measured. All items were constructed based on the module objectives, LGU planning requirements, and competency standards expected of CSOs in local governance functions. To ensure validity, the instrument underwent expert review by three specialists in public administration, instructional design, and CSO engagement, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and alignment of each item with the intended learning outcomes. The instrument was further refined through item analysis during pilot testing, which resulted in the revision or removal of items with poor difficulty and discrimination indices. The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed using the Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), which is specifically recommended for dichotomously scored multiple-choice tests that measure a single construct; thus, it was appropriate for the structure of the instrument used in this study. The obtained KR-20 coefficient equals to 0.845 which exceeded the acceptable reliability threshold, indicating that the test demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across the three difficulty levels. In addition to the test, a structured evaluation rubric was utilized to assess the project proposals produced by participants in the culminating activity. The rubric evaluated proposals based on clarity of objectives, feasibility of activities, alignment with organizational mandates and LGU priorities, and identification of risks, assumptions, and monitoring mechanisms. Proposal scoring was independently conducted by two trained assessors to minimize bias and ensure consistency of judgments. Together, the knowledge test and project evaluation rubric provided a comprehensive measure of participants' learning gains and the practical application of acquired competencies, making it possible to determine the effectiveness of the intervention not only in terms of conceptual understanding but also through tangible program outputs.
Each multiple-choice item in the knowledge test was scored dichotomously, with one point assigned for every correct answer and zero for incorrect responses, yielding a maximum score of 30. The total score was converted into a transmuted percentage by dividing the total correct responses by total number of items multiplied by 50 plus 50 [percent = (correct response/ total number of items) x 50 +50]. This score is interpreted using the institution's competency classification scale, where 96–100% = Very High, 86–95% = High, 75–85% = Satisfactory, 66–74% = Low, and 65% and below = Very Low. This scoring system enabled the categorization of participants' baseline and post-intervention knowledge levels. For the project proposals, the rubric employed a 5-point rating scale per indicator, with higher ratings reflecting greater clarity, feasibility, alignment with organizational and LGU priorities, and adequacy of risk identification.

3.5. Data analysis

The quantitative data generated from the pre-test and post-test knowledge assessments were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics—such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were computed to determine respondents' baseline competencies and to summarize performance after the training intervention. Inferential analysis was conducted using a paired sample t-test to determine whether the observed differences in participants' scores before and after the intervention were statistically significant. Proposal evaluation scores were analyzed through weighted scoring based on a predefined rubric assessing clarity of objectives, feasibility of activities, alignment with organizational goals and LGU priorities, and consideration of risks and assumptions. Qualitative data—specifically, participants' open-ended feedback—were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring insights regarding module relevance, usability, and challenges encountered during the training. Together, these analytic procedures enabled a holistic evaluation of both knowledge gains and the practical application of competencies acquired through the intervention.

3.6. Ethical considerations

This study adhered to established ethical protocols governing research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, who were briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and their rights,

including voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses were coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout analysis and reporting. Participation in the training intervention posed minimal risk, as activities involved knowledge-sharing, workshops, and proposal development aligned with the participants' existing organizational functions. All data were securely stored and accessible only to the researchers. Findings were presented in aggregate form to prevent individual attribution. The ethical safeguards employed ensured that the study upheld standards of respect, autonomy, and protection of participants' privacy and welfare.

4. Results and Discussions

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study based on the sequence of research objectives, integrating both quantitative and qualitative evidence generated from the intervention. The results are organized to show the participants' baseline knowledge, the effects of the capacity-building program on their competencies, and the quality of outputs produced after the training. Quantitative data from the pretest and posttest assessments are used to determine the extent of knowledge gains, while qualitative insights from participant feedback contextualize these changes and illuminate the factors that facilitated or hindered learning transfer. By combining statistical results with interpretive explanations, the discussions that follow provide a comprehensive account of how the intervention influenced the CSO representatives' readiness to perform governance-related functions. Each subsection begins with the presentation of empirical results and is followed by an analysis that situates the findings within existing literature and the broader context of CSO participation in local governance.

4.1. Prior knowledge levels of CSO representatives across competency

Table 2 reveals that CSO representatives began the intervention with limited knowledge across all four governance competency domains, as evidenced by the concentration of responses in the Low and Very Low classifications. In the domain of Roles of CSOs in the Local Government Code, 21 respondents (55.26%) were classified as Low and 14 respondents (36.84%) as Very Low, with only 3 respondents (7.89%) attaining a Moderate rating and none achieving High or Very High levels. The situation was more severe in Strategic Management and Administration, where 19 respondents (50.00%) fell into the Very Low category and 17 respondents (44.74%) into Low, leaving only 2 respondents (5.26%) at Moderate. This indicates minimal understanding of organizational mandates, planning cycles, and strategic decision frameworks.

Table 2: Prior Knowledge Level of CSO Participants by Competency Domain

Domain	Very High		High		Moderate		Low		Very Low		Dominant Level
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Roles of CSOs in the Local Government Code	-	-	-	-	3	7.89%	21	55.26%	14	36.84%	Low
Strategic Management and Administration	-	-	-	-	2	5.26%	17	44.74%	19	50.00%	Very Low
Project Management	-	-	-	-	11	28.95%	19	50.00%	8	21.05%	Low
Project Proposal Development	-	-	-	-	9	23.68%	18	47.37%	11	28.95%	Low

Similarly, in Project Management, half of the cohort—19 respondents (50.00%)—were rated Low, 11 respondents (28.95%) reached Moderate, and 8 respondents (21.05%) were classified as Very Low, suggesting partial but insufficient grasp of task sequencing, resource allocation, and implementation logic. For Project Proposal Development, 18 respondents (47.37%) were categorized as Low, 11 respondents (28.95%) as Very Low, and 9 respondents (23.68%) as Moderate. These figures demonstrate that proposal formulation—arguably the most technical of the four domains—posed substantial challenges, with no respondent exhibiting High or Very High competence in any domain prior to the intervention.

These results corroborate national assessments indicating that CSOs commonly participate in local development councils yet lack the planning and analytical competencies needed to influence decision-making [8]. Pasamonte's analysis similarly shows that CSO engagement in planning, budgeting, and monitoring remains tentative because representatives do not feel confident handling technical documents and financial instruments [9]. The dominance of Very Low and Low ratings in Strategic Management and Proposal Development in this study reflects these trends, signalling that the respondents were not equipped to perform governance roles beyond attendance or consultative participation.

The distribution pattern also matches documented challenges in CSO–LGU coordination, where organizations are reported to have limited understanding of planning cycles and weak competencies in results-based project design and monitoring [10]. The presence of 18 respondents (47.37%) in the Low and 11 respondents (28.95%) in the Very Low categories for Proposal Development mirrors findings from Panabo City, where CSOs were unable to produce technically sound proposals despite recognized participation rights [11]. Comparable results from Southeast Asian reviews further emphasize that while CSOs possess community legitimacy, they often lack the institutional and technical resources necessary to design structured development interventions [12]. The quantified pattern in Table 2 thus provides concrete empirical evidence of a capacity gap that has been conceptually noted but less frequently measured in Philippine LGU contexts [12].

When aggregated, the frequencies and percentages justify classifying the cohort's overall readiness level as Low. Although 9 respondents (23.68%) in Proposal Development and 11 respondents (28.95%) in Project Management achieved Moderate scores, these are overshadowed by the larger proportion of respondents situated at Low and Very Low levels across domains. This supports policy assertions that CSOs require structured capacity-building programs to perform their governance functions rather than merely occupy mandated institutional spaces [13]. Governance studies similarly attribute disparities in local performance to variations in technical capacity among participating actors, reinforcing the argument that competence—not presence—dictates the quality of public engagement [17].

From an applied science perspective, the implications are threefold. First, the results demonstrate that formal inclusion does not equate to functional participation; technical competence must be deliberately cultivated. Second, the concentration of respondents in the lower classifications establishes a strong, data-driven rationale for implementing modular capacity-building interventions tailored to governance tasks rather than generic training. Third, by quantifying baseline knowledge deficiencies, the study operationalizes CSO capacity not as an abstract expectation but as a measurable construct that can inform targeted intervention design, consistent with capacity-building best practices that emphasize diagnostic assessment and post-training evaluation [16].

4.2. Post-training knowledge levels of CSO representatives across competency

After the training–workshop, the knowledge profile of CSO representatives shifted markedly toward the upper categories in all four domains (Table 3). In terms of Roles of CSOs in the Local Government Code, a combined 73.69% of respondents were classified as Very High (31.58%) or High (42.11%), with only 5.26% remaining at the Low level and none at Very Low. This pattern contrasts sharply with the pre-test, where a majority had been clustered in the Low and Very Low categories. The finding suggests that the module on legal mandates and participatory mechanisms effectively addressed previous gaps in basic statutory understanding, enabling CSO representatives to more clearly identify their rights, functions, and expected roles in local special bodies and development councils.

Table 3: Post-Training Knowledge Level of CSO Participants by Competency Domain

Domain	Very High		High		Moderate		Low		Very Low		Dominant Level
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Roles of CSOs in the Local Government Code	12	31.58%	16	42.11%	8	21.05%	2	5.26%	-	-	High
Strategic Management and Administration	5	13.16%	19	50.00%	10	26.3%	3	7.893%	1	2.63%	High
Project Management	8	21.05%	16	42.11%	11	28.95%	2	5.26%	8	21.05%	High
Project Proposal Development	13	34.21%	14	36.84%	8	21.05%	3	7.89%	11	28.95%	High

A similarly positive trend is evident in Strategic Management and Administration. Post-test results show that 13.16% of participants reached a Very High level and 50.00% reached High, while 26.32% were at Moderate. Only four respondents remained in the Low and Very Low categories combined. This indicates that the training on organizational mission, vision alignment, and basic strategic tools (such as SWOT and problem-tree analysis) succeeded in moving most CSO leaders beyond minimal familiarity toward a more confident, structured understanding of strategic management concepts. These gains are consistent with the argument that targeted capacity-building, when anchored on real organizational challenges, can significantly enhance CSOs' ability to plan and position themselves within complex governance environments [20].

In Project Management, more than 63% of participants achieved Very High or High knowledge levels (21.05% and 42.11%, respectively), while 28.95% were classified as Moderate. A small proportion remained at Low (5.26%), and 21.05% still fell under Very Low, indicating that although the majority benefitted substantially from the training, project-cycle concepts and tools may require continued reinforcement for a subset of participants. International evidence shows that project management is often one of the most pressing capacity-strengthening needs among local CSOs; a global survey of civil society organisations conducted by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy identified project and resource management as top priority areas for further training across all regions [20]. The residual group in the Very Low category in this domain suggests that similar structural and educational challenges persist among some CSOs in the studied LGU.

The most pronounced improvements—but also the most residual difficulty—appear in Project Proposal Development. After the intervention, 34.21% of respondents reached a Very High level and 36.84% were at High, while 21.05% attained Moderate knowledge. Nonetheless, 7.89% remained at Low and 28.95% at Very Low. This dual pattern implies that while many CSO representatives were able to grasp and apply key elements of proposal writing—such as articulating problem statements, defining objectives, specifying activities, and preparing basic budgets—others continued to struggle with the technical and analytical demands of designing fundable, LGU-aligned project proposals. The persistence of a sizeable Very Low group in this domain is consistent with international findings that proposal development and results-based project design are among the most complex competencies for community-based organizations to master [33]. It also underscores the need for follow-up coaching or mentoring to consolidate skills beyond an initial training cycle.

Taken together, the post-test results represent a substantial upward shift from the pre-training baseline, where Low and Very Low categories dominated all four domains. The dominance of High and Very High levels in the post-test suggests that context-specific, modular training can rapidly address foundational knowledge deficits when learning activities are explicitly tied to participants' actual governance roles. This pattern aligns with a mixed-methods study on CSOs in Bukidnon, where Pasamonte reports that training and support mechanisms are crucial if CSOs are to progress from "lukewarm" engagement toward more substantive involvement in planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes [9]. In that study, CSO engagement in local governance was generally moderate, with monitoring and evaluation as the weakest functional area; the present results suggest that targeted training can help move CSOs beyond such moderate, compliance-driven engagement toward more technically informed participation.

The findings are also consistent with practitioner and policy documents that call for structured, empirically evaluated capacity-building programs for CSOs engaged in local governance. A recent CSO–LGU coordination guide produced in the Philippines emphasizes that leadership training, advocacy workshops, and project-management support are critical for improving CSO–LGU collaboration and social accountability, particularly in decentralized settings [10]. The results provide quantitative evidence that such capacity-building investments can translate into measurable gains in knowledge within a short intervention period, especially when training content is co-designed with local institutions and directly linked to statutory roles and planning processes.

Internationally, studies similarly underscore that capacity-building initiatives, when context-specific and participatory, can significantly enhance CSO capabilities. Weber and colleagues, using action research with civil society organizations in multiple countries, demonstrate that co-designed training and iterative feedback processes lead to tangible improvements in organizational practices and strategic clarity [33]. Rusfiana and Kurniasih, analysing Indonesian CSOs' efforts to promote social and political change, argue that training in strategic planning, advocacy, and financial management is essential to sustain influence and navigate complex political environments [34]. The pattern observed in our post-test—where most respondents moved into High or Very High categories in strategic and proposal-related domains—mirrors these conclusions, indicating that well-structured capacity-building can play a decisive role in enhancing CSO effectiveness.

Regional evidence also supports the link between training and improved CSO performance. The Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Asia notes that in several countries, improvements in CSO organizational capacity in 2021 were associated with increased access to technical training and management support, even amidst pandemic constraints [35]. At the same time, the Index reports that capacity-building services still do not fully meet CSOs' needs, especially among smaller organizations [35]. This tension is reflected in our data: while the majority of participants achieved high knowledge levels, a minority remained in the lower categories, particularly in project management and proposal development. This suggests that one-off interventions, however effective, should be complemented by sustained capacity-development pathways and differentiated support for CSOs starting from a weaker baseline.

From a governance perspective, the observed knowledge gains have important implications. First, they validate the assumption underlying many Philippines participatory governance commitments—that training and support can equip CSOs to act as more credible partners in local development councils and special bodies. National initiatives under the Open Government Partnership explicitly state that providing training and support to local CSOs can empower them to actively engage, contribute, and advocate in local decision-making processes [36].

The post-test profile in this study illustrates how such commitments can be operationalized at the LGU level through carefully designed training programs with measurable learning outcomes.

Finally, the mixed post-test picture in the more technically demanding domains suggests that capacity-building should be viewed as an iterative process rather than a one-time event. International reviews of CSO institutional capacity note that deep-seated structural constraints—such as staff turnover, resource limitations, and competing demands—often require repeated cycles of training, mentoring, and organizational support to achieve lasting change [20]. In this context, the present intervention can be seen as an important first step: it succeeds in raising the knowledge levels of most participants to High or Very High, while also identifying those areas and subgroups that may need more intensive or sustained support in future program cycles.

4.3. Empirical evidence of learning gains through statistical evaluation

The paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant increase in the knowledge levels of CSO representatives following the capacity-building intervention, confirming that the program produced measurable learning gains rather than random fluctuations in performance. The pre-test mean score of 62.39 increased to 83.63 in the post-test, representing an improvement of more than 21 percentage points in the participants' overall knowledge. The computed t-value of -21.55, which exceeds the critical value of 2.03 at a 0.05 significance level, and a p-value of < .001, provide robust evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between pre- and post-training scores. This indicates that the training program had a highly significant effect on participant knowledge, supporting claims that structured instructional interventions can effectively strengthen organizational competencies within civil society settings [5].

Table 4: Paired Samples t-Test Results on CSO Knowledge Improvement

Statistic	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	62.39	83.63
Variance	39.11	40.83
Observations	38	38
t-Statistic	-21.55	
p-value	<.001	
t Critical (two-tail)	2.03	
Decision	Reject H_0	
Interpretation	Highly Significant	

These findings provide empirical confirmation for assertions that CSO performance improves when learning environments are purposefully designed around governance functions, rather than generic leadership or community development orientations [22]. The magnitude of the gain suggests not only recall of information but integration of concepts relevant to LGU planning, statutory mandates, and proposal development—competencies frequently identified as weak in Philippine governance assessments [8]. In this context, the statistically significant improvement demonstrates that knowledge gaps identified in earlier studies are not structural inevitabilities but can be systematically addressed through targeted pedagogical strategies [17].

The significance of these results is especially relevant given longstanding critiques that CSO participation in development councils has often been perfunctory or compliance-driven, rooted in policy requirements rather than in technical readiness to influence decision-making [9]. The data here challenge that narrative by demonstrating that, when provided with carefully sequenced training inputs, CSOs can acquire the foundational knowledge required for substantive engagement. This aligns with broader international findings that capacity-building initiatives improve organizational performance, particularly when they combine technical content, adult-learning methodologies, and practical application tasks [24].

Moreover, the rejection of the null hypothesis offers quantitative support for positioning CSOs as emerging governance partners rather than peripheral actors—a theme increasingly reflected in contemporary discourses on civil society's evolving institutional role [1]. The highly significant statistical outcome also resonates with calls for evidence-based evaluation of training interventions, particularly within governance and development studies where anecdotal accounts have historically outweighed empirical validation [31]. The present results move beyond descriptive claims by demonstrating that capacity-building interventions can produce verifiable cognitive gains in a short period, highlighting their value as a strategic mechanism for strengthening local democratic processes.

The notable improvement between the pre-test and post-test reinforces the proposition that governance-related competencies are teachable, not innate, and can therefore be intentionally cultivated to support more meaningful participation in planning and budgeting arenas where CSOs have formal roles [7]. The statistical evidence thus not only validates the effectiveness of the intervention but also underscores the policy implication that investing in structured, iterative capacity-building is essential if participatory governance mechanisms are to function as designed and not remain symbolic commitments [21].

4.4. Evaluation of project proposals developed by CSO representatives

The evaluation of project proposals developed by CSO representatives after the capacity-building program demonstrates differentiated levels of mastery across key domains of project design. The weakest performance appeared in the clarity of objectives, where nearly half of the proposals (47.37%) were rated Poor and an additional 15.79% Very Poor, with none reaching Excellent. This confirms observations in Philippine governance research that while CSOs are deeply embedded in community realities, they often lack the technical language and structuring logic required to transform issues into measurable development targets [8]. A similar pattern has been reported in Bangladesh, where CSOs were found to possess strong community presence but struggled to articulate problem–objective alignment in project documents, reducing their influence in participatory decision-making [3]. These parallels suggest that objective formulation is not merely a localized weakness but a recurring developmental constraint among CSOs operating in emerging governance systems.

Table 5: Evaluation of Project Proposals Developed by CSO Representatives

Criteria	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Very Poor	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Clarity of Objectives	-	-	2	10.53	5	26.32	9	47.37	3	15.79
Feasibility of Activities	10	52.63	4	21.05	2	10.53	3	15.79	-	-
Alignment with Organizational Goals	19	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Consideration of Potential Risk and Challenges	5	26.32	5	26.32	7	36.84	2	10.53	-	-

In contrast, the feasibility of activities revealed considerable competency gains, with 52.63% of proposals rated Excellent. This indicates that training inputs related to activity planning, task sequencing, and resource allocation successfully equipped participants with operational tools for implementation—a trend consistent with evidence that structured coaching can significantly improve the execution capacity of organizations involved in innovation-driven agricultural interventions in Southern Africa [5]. The strong performance in feasibility also aligns with findings from the Pacific, where targeted organizational development inputs helped NGOs transition from informal planning practices to more systematized project execution frameworks [24]. These similarities suggest that once CSOs are exposed to structured methodologies, feasibility-related competencies are among the quickest to develop regardless of regional context.

The highest performance was observed in alignment with organizational goals, where all proposals received an Excellent rating. This is notable because international reviews frequently criticize CSOs for failing to integrate mission identity into externally funded development proposals, leading to mandate drift and fragmented advocacy [15]. In this case, the intervention reversed that trend, implying that grounding training in statutory mandates and organizational identity—as recommended in Philippine guidelines on CSO engagement [7]—can offset common global weaknesses in mission coherence. This finding positions the participating CSOs ahead of counterparts in other developing contexts, where organizational alignment remains an aspirational rather than demonstrated competency.

The capacity to account for risks and challenges produced more intermediate results, with most proposals rated Fair (36.84%) and only a quarter achieving Excellent (26.32%). Comparable gaps have been identified in CSOs engaged in climate and disaster governance in ASEAN countries, where organizations exhibit participation willingness but struggle with the analytical frameworks needed to anticipate uncertainty and mitigation scenarios [16]. International studies similarly observe that NGOs' institutional resilience frequently lags behind their programmatic ambition, requiring iterative learning cycles and technical accompaniment to institutionalize risk management practices [26]. This suggests that risk literacy is a higher-order competence that requires not only knowledge acquisition but repeated engagement with contextualized planning challenges, making it less susceptible to short-term interventions.

Taken together, the results reveal a developmental trajectory common to CSOs across diverse governance contexts: competencies tied to operational feasibility and organizational identity improve rapidly with structured training, while analytical dimensions such as objective formulation and risk mitigation require longer-term, scaffolded instruction. The Philippine experience presented here thus mirrors global patterns wherein CSOs transition from compliance-oriented engagement toward substantive participation only when supported by sequenced capacity-building initiatives [17]. At the same time, the comparatively superior performance in organizational alignment distinguishes the studied CSOs from regional peers, indicating that interventions anchored on statutory mandates and organizational identity may accelerate capacity gains more effectively than generic governance training. The findings affirm that capacity-building functions not as an optional support system but as an enabling condition for participatory governance—capable of transforming CSOs from symbolic participants into technically competent actors in local development systems [21].

4.6. Profile of the project proposal developed

Table 6 presents the thematic and structural characteristics of the 19 project proposals produced by participating CSOs after the capacity-building intervention. The proposals vary in scope, time frame, and estimated costs, reflecting organizational priorities, perceived community needs, and operational capacities.

Table 6: Profile of Project Proposals Developed in terms of Scope, Time Frame, and Cost Estimates

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Project Scope		
Livelihood Program	8	42.11
Community Development	5	26.32
Health and Social Services	4	21.05
Education and Youth Development	2	10.53
Total	19	100
Project Time Frame		
Less than 1 Year	12	63.16
1 to 2 Years	3	15.79
Undetermined	3	15.79
More than 2 Years	1	5.26
Total	19	100
Project Cost Estimates		
Less than $1,694.00	5	26.32
$1,694.02–$2,541.00	12	63.16
$2,541.02–$3,388.00	1	5.26
More than $3,388.00	1	5.26
Total	19	100

Exchange Rate: US$1.00 = PHP59.03.

A plurality of proposals (42.11%) focused on livelihood programs, followed by community development (26.32%), health and social services (21.05%), and education and youth development (10.53%). The strong emphasis on livelihood assistance mirrors the continuing role of CSOs in addressing socioeconomic vulnerability in local communities, where income insecurity and limited market access remain pressing challenges for grassroots households, particularly in decentralized governance settings [6]. Such prioritization suggests that CSOs perceive livelihood support as both feasible and relevant to their constituencies, enabling them to generate tangible community gains within manageable project scopes.

This pattern is not unique to the Philippines. In Indonesia, CSOs frequently pursue livelihood and cooperative-based interventions as vehicles for community empowerment, particularly in rural areas where state support is limited, demonstrating a similar logic of addressing economic precarity through small-scale enterprise development [34]. In Bangladesh, local CSOs emphasize livelihood programs as a primary entry point for community participation, indicating that economic empowerment is often the most straightforward mechanism for building organizational legitimacy and stakeholder trust [3].

The smaller share of proposals in education and youth development suggests either limited technical capacity to design human-capital interventions or competing organizational priorities. Yet, the presence of such proposals indicates that some CSOs are beginning to diversify into longer-term developmental sectors, a pattern observed in emerging civil-society ecosystems in Southeast Asia, where CSOs progressively move from welfare-oriented initiatives toward education, governance, and policy roles [11].

Most proposals were designed for implementation periods of less than one year (63.16%), with only one project extending beyond two years. Short-term durations align with observed constraints in CSO organizational stability, financial continuity, and donor dependence—factors known to restrict long-term planning capacities among community-based groups [9]. Shorter timeframes also reflect the annual budget cycle of LGUs, which requires project outputs to be visible within a fiscal year to justify appropriations and renewal of CSO participation [7].

A similar pattern exists in other developing governance contexts. Many Southeast Asian CSOs adopt short-term projects due to funding precarity and fragmented donor landscapes, leading organizations to prioritize immediate, measurable results over multi-year investments that require stable institutional support [15]. In Nepal, community organizations structure interventions around short project cycles for the same reason—limited financial predictability constrains their ability to conceptualize multi-year programs even when long-term needs are evident [35].

While pragmatic, this emphasis on short-term interventions may inhibit transformative change. Governance and development scholars caution that short planning horizons can limit sustainability, institutional learning, and systemic impact, particularly when addressing sectoral issues such as youth employability, social inequality, or public health [25]. The results in this study suggest that CSOs require continued mentoring in long-term program design to transition from reactive service delivery toward strategic development partnership roles.

In terms of financial scope, 63.16% of proposals fell within the US$1,694.02–$2,541.00 range, while only 10.52% exceeded US$2,541. These modest cost projections are consistent with the lean operational structures of most community-based CSOs, which often face resource mobilization challenges and limited grant management capacities [4]. The relatively conservative budgeting also reflects risk-avoidance tendencies among CSOs lacking long-term experience in financial stewardship and project scaling.

This pattern resonates with findings from the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Asia, where limited financial independence and constrained budget sizes remain defining attributes of grassroots CSOs, resulting in project proposals that prioritize feasibility over ambition [35]. Likewise, capacity-development literature notes that CSOs commonly operate at scales matching their absorptive capacity—small budgets are perceived as more manageable, transparent, and less vulnerable to audit sanctions [10].

International comparisons further illuminate this finding. CSOs in Africa, despite growing advocacy roles, similarly propose modest-budget projects due to funding insecurity and an overreliance on external grants, which restrict organizational autonomy and limit the scale of interventions [32]. The alignment of your result with these global patterns underscores a structural issue: CSO project ambition is not driven solely by community need but tempered by institutional capacity and perceived financial risk.

The proposals indicate a pragmatic orientation: CSOs prioritize livelihood support, short implementation cycles, and modest budgets. This profile reflects a careful calibration of community demand, resource constraints, and organizational capability. While such pragmatism supports feasibility and minimizes administrative risk, it may prevent CSOs from evolving into actors that shape long-term development agendas.

The findings therefore strengthen the relevance of the intervention. To enable CSOs to progress from participatory presence to developmental influence, capacity-building programs must not only transfer technical knowledge but also foster competencies in strategic forecasting, multi-year planning, and resource mobilization—skills repeatedly identified as deficient among grassroots CSOs across governance systems [20].

4.7. Developed capacity-building intervention model framework for civil service organizations

The findings of this study revealed a clear developmental progression among CSO representatives—from initially limited governance-related knowledge to measurable improvements in post-training assessments and demonstrated capacity to design project proposals aligned with LGU priorities. This trajectory reflects global observations that CSOs require not only legal space but also capacity to translate participation mandates into action [6], reinforcing the need for structured competency pathways rather than one-off training events [20]. These empirical results informed the formulation of the CSO Capacity Maturation Model presented in Figure 1, which explains how capacity-building interventions shift CSOs from basic understanding toward institutionalized participation in governance.

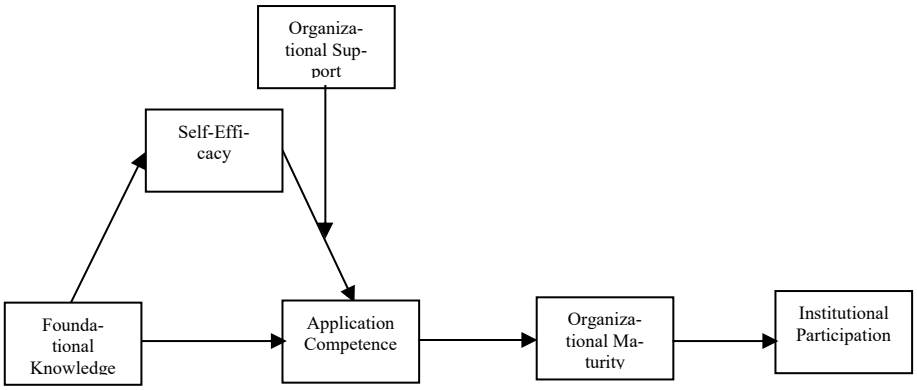

Fig. 1: CSO Capacity Maturation Model.

The model begins with Foundational Knowledge, which refers to the CSO representatives' comprehension of statutory mandates, governance frameworks, and planning logic. Foundational knowledge functions as the entry point of the capacity development continuum because CSOs often struggle with limited awareness of their roles in governance, a pattern documented in the Philippines [9] and other Southeast Asian contexts where CSO engagement is present but poorly understood [11]. In this study, low pre-test scores confirmed that without adequate knowledge, CSOs cannot meaningfully engage in planning and decision-making processes [7]. The significant post-test improvements demonstrate that structured instructional design can raise baseline competencies and address long-standing information asymmetries between CSOs and government actors [10].

From foundational knowledge, the pathway advances to Self-Efficacy, conceptualized as confidence in one's capacity to perform governance tasks. Training research consistently identifies self-efficacy as a critical mechanism through which knowledge becomes actionable, because individuals are more likely to apply newly learned concepts when they believe they can do so effectively [27]. In line with this assertion, participants in this study expressed increased readiness to articulate proposals and participate in planning discussions once they

understood legal mandates and practical processes—indicating that knowledge catalyzed motivational readiness. In the model, self-efficacy serves as the mediator that transforms cognitive awareness into behavioral intention.

However, the translation of readiness into performance depends partly on contextual conditions, represented by the Organizational Support Environment. This construct moderates the extent to which self-efficacy results in competent performance by influencing whether individuals have the time, resources, and institutional mandate to apply what they learned. Studies of civil society capacity in humanitarian and development settings report that organizations with stronger internal support systems generate better training-to-practice outcomes than those constrained by limited mentoring or unclear governance structures [20]. The persistence of lower competencies among some CSO representatives in this study—despite increased confidence—supports the moderating role of organizational support, confirming that capacity does not develop solely at the individual level but must be embedded in institutional arrangements [26].

Once self-efficacy is enacted within supportive environments, the model progresses to Applied Competence, which refers to the ability to produce tangible outputs—such as proposals—that meet technical standards and align with local development priorities. This aligns with literature noting that capacity-building must culminate in demonstrated behaviors, not merely improved attitudes or knowledge profiles [25]. In this study, the developed proposals provide evidence that participants were capable of transferring training content to real governance tasks, although variance in proposal quality suggests that competence remains uneven and may require iterative reinforcement [10].

Sustained performance over time fosters Organizational Maturity, defined as the establishment of routines, systems, and decision practices that enable the CSO to function consistently independent of external facilitation. This stage reflects a shift from individual learning to institutional capability—a transition observed in CSOs that evolve from project recipients to autonomous development actors with planning and evaluation capacity [24]. Organizational maturity is essential because governance participation requires not only competent individuals but institutions capable of absorbing knowledge, retaining learning, and engaging continuously in policy processes [35].

The culmination of the model is Institutionalized Participation, characterized by stable, evidence-based, and meaningful involvement of CSOs in governance mechanisms such as the Local Development Council, budget deliberations, and monitoring bodies. Institutionalized participation moves CSOs beyond symbolic presence to substantive influence, addressing concerns that many CSO engagements remain tokenistic without underlying capacity to contribute to agenda-setting or policy scrutiny [8]. By situating institutional participation as the apex of a developmental continuum, the model reframes participatory governance not as a statutory entitlement but as a capacity-dependent achievement.

The CSO Capacity Maturation Model advances existing discussions on civil society and governance capacity by addressing conceptual gaps left unresolved in prevailing frameworks that emphasize participation without detailing the progression of competencies that enable it. Traditional models of CSO engagement describe capacity in terms of organizational resources, leadership, and participation mechanisms, yet they typically treat capacity as a static trait rather than a developmental trajectory, and they seldom explain how individual learning translates into organizational practice. Governance capacity frameworks likewise focus on institutional readiness and systemic enablers but understate the micro-level pathways through which CSOs acquire, internalize, and apply governance skills. In contrast, the CSO Capacity Maturation Model specifies a sequential process—beginning with foundational knowledge, evolving into self-efficacy and applied competence, and culminating in organizational maturity and institutionalized participation—thereby offering a dynamic, layered explanation of how capacity develops over time. This explicit linkage of cognitive learning, behavioral activation, and institutional embedding differentiates the model from existing frameworks by conceptualizing capacity-building not merely as exposure to training but as a structured transformation anchored on measurable changes in knowledge, confidence, and output quality. As such, it positions CSO capacity not as an assumed prerequisite for participation but as an empirically traceable progression that explains when, why, and under what conditions CSOs become capable of fulfilling governance mandates.

The CSO Capacity Maturation Model is applicable to LGUs seeking to strengthen participatory governance, to CSOs aiming to transform from passive attendees to strategic actors, to higher education institutions designing extension programs, and to development partners assessing capacity-building investments. The model provides a scaffold for diagnosing where a CSO stands along the capacity pathway, what interventions are necessary, and what institutional adjustments are needed to sustain participation. It offers a foundation for future empirical testing using structural equation modeling, enabling researchers to validate relationships between knowledge, motivation, organizational context, and participatory outcomes.

In essence, the model asserts that CSO capacity is neither spontaneous nor linear; it is a maturation process wherein knowledge ignites confidence, confidence becomes competence, competence evolves into organizational practice, and organizational practice culminates in governance influence. By capturing this sequence, the model transforms the study's findings from a one-time training result into a theory-driven framework that explains how CSOs grow into their governance roles and why institutional support determines the speed and depth of that transformation.

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrated that a systematically designed capacity-building intervention can transform the functional readiness of civil society organizations from nominal participation toward technically grounded engagement in local governance. What distinguishes the present work from previous capacity-development efforts is not merely the provision of training, but the empirical validation of how learning moves across cognitive, behavioral, and institutional dimensions. The significant improvement in CSO representatives' post-test performance and their ability to generate technically sound, LGU-aligned project proposals constitute concrete evidence that capacity, when approached as a structured developmental trajectory rather than an isolated event, can be engineered, measured, and improved.

The principal contribution of the study lies in the formulation of the CSO Capacity Maturation Model, which advances the understanding of CSO development by theorizing capacity as a sequenced pathway linking foundational knowledge, self-efficacy, applied competence, organizational maturity, and institutionalized participation. This theoretical articulation provides a missing bridge between statutory expectations of CSO participation and the internal competencies required to fulfill those mandates. By situating organizational support as a moderating condition that determines whether individual learning translates into sustained competence, the model introduces a critical explanatory mechanism that previous descriptive accounts have overlooked.

The results further establish that knowledge acquisition alone is insufficient to elevate CSO performance; what enables transformation is the interaction between trained confidence and institutional environments that allow such confidence to be exercised. The varying levels of proposal quality—despite uniform training exposure—underscore that capacity building must be viewed not as a singular transaction but as an evolving ecosystem requiring reinforcement, mentorship, and governance structures that reward application. This insight offers a practical blueprint for LGUs and development partners seeking to move beyond compliance-oriented inclusion toward meaningful shared governance.

The novelty of this research is its operationalization of CSO capacity as a measurable construct with observable outputs, validated through pre–post assessment and performance artifacts. This departs from conventional studies that describe CSO engagement qualitatively or normatively but seldom quantify the developmental effects of training. Moreover, by embedding proposal development as both a learning output and an evaluative instrument, the study anchors capacity-building results in real governance practice, thereby reducing the gap between classroom competence and institutional responsibility.

Taken together, the findings establish that participatory governance is not merely a procedural requirement but a capacity-dependent phenomenon. CSOs cannot act as credible development partners until they possess the knowledge, confidence, competencies, and institutional mechanisms to do so. The model proposed here offers a testable framework for future empirical work, presenting opportunities for structural equation modeling, longitudinal follow-ups, and comparative analyses across localities and regions.

In conclusion, this study positions CSO capacity-building not as an administrative add-on but as an applied scientific intervention capable of producing measurable governance impacts. By demonstrating how targeted learning interventions can reshape participation trajectories, it provides both a conceptual lens and a practical template for strengthening civic engagement infrastructures in local governments—one that is scalable, evidence-based, and ready for further theoretical refinement.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this assessment point to several pathways for enhancing the impact and sustainability of CSO capacity-building efforts. While the intervention successfully elevated participants' knowledge and proposal development competencies, the study was limited to a single training cycle and did not extend to observing how proposals are implemented in real governance contexts. Future work may benefit from exploring follow-up mechanisms that observe the transition from proposal submission to actual execution, allowing researchers and practitioners to understand how training-induced competencies evolve once confronted with operational realities, budget negotiations, and administrative processes.

The number of participating CSOs also presents an area for reflection. Although the analysis yielded meaningful insights, only 19 organizations completed the entire intervention, which may not fully capture the diversity of CSO capacities across the LGU. Expanding participation in subsequent cycles or inviting representatives from varied organizational profiles could generate comparative perspectives and uncover distinct learning trajectories.

The results further indicate that while many participants demonstrated substantial gains, others continued to experience difficulty in complex domains such as project proposal development. This variation suggests opportunities for differentiated learning pathways—such as coaching sessions, peer learning exchanges, or extended practice activities—that offer more space for reflection and application. Tailored support may help stabilize individual improvements and encourage the internalization of newly acquired skills at the organizational level.

Addressing the editor's comment on future directions, tracing what happens to the proposals after the training presents a promising avenue for inquiry. Documenting whether proposed initiatives proceed to approval, funding, and implementation could provide a clearer view of how learning translates into governance outcomes. This line of inquiry may also reveal enabling conditions and contextual barriers that influence the long-term value of capacity-building investments.

The study's experience with attendance and scheduling likewise opens possibilities for rethinking delivery modalities. Integrating digital or blended learning components could create more flexible access to learning materials, reduce time-related constraints, and allow participants to revisit modules at their own pace. Digital platforms may also enable cross-LGU collaboration, fostering shared learning environments where CSOs can co-develop solutions and benchmark their competencies with peers.

Taken together, these directions offer opportunities to extend the gains observed in this study and deepen understanding of how CSO capacity matures over time. By moving beyond isolated training events toward more iterative and context-responsive approaches, future initiatives may help cultivate a more resilient and engaged civil society presence in local governance.

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