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The Long-Term Sustainability of a Democratic Local Government Culture in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This research investigates the conditions that shape the sustainability of democratic local government culture in Sri Lanka, focusing on participatory governance, political dynamics, socio-economic challenges, and the role of civil society organizations (CSOs). A qualitative approach was used; data collection consisted of 30 semi-structured interviews with elected officials, administrators, representatives of civil society, and citizens. The findings point out that limited citizen engagement, political patronage, weak accountability mechanisms, and resource disparities between urban and rural areas are some of the aspects that systematically hinder the ability of local governance to function effectively. Participatory frameworks and CSOs, in turn, were observed as certain key enablers of democratic practices, whose full potential is hampered by systemic barriers in the form of lack of funding and political interference. Recommendations emphasize the need for institutional reforms, enhanced fiscal autonomy, higher degrees of accountability, and representation through participatory mechanisms. The resolution of these challenges by Sri Lanka creates room for developing a resilient framework in governance and contributes to achieving long-term democratic sustainability at the local levels.

Keywords: Local governance, participatory democracy, accountability, political patronage, Sri Lanka, civil society organizations, fiscal autonomy

1 Introduction

Background

The local government system in Sri Lanka is the third tier of government, with a total number of 335 local authorities divided into municipal councils, urban councils, and pradeshiya sabhas (Weerawansa, 2015). This institution should provide the necessary services at the grass root levels and give participation to the people at the grass root levels. However, the Constitution looses the expression "Local Authorities" to refer to the local government and does not define it as a separate tier of government (Bertone, 1992). The vagueness in this has

provided a lack of autonomy and clarity in the role and responsibilities of the local authorities themselves, who often find themselves at the mercy of support from provincial and central government (Gunawardena, 2018).

Historically, democratic governance at the local level in Sri Lanka is touted as one of the oldest systems in South Asia, tracing its roots back to the Village Councils Ordinance of 1871 (Bandaranayake, 1989). These councils were, therefore, an institutionalized form of governance at the local level for the very first time in history, undertaken to empower active citizens through participatory practices at the level of local self-governance. However, democratic practices at the local level of governance have had to struggle in the face of political patronage and corruption, let alone the total lack of interest from the people, during the last few decades (Gunawardena, 2018). Besides, the women's participation in governance is very low, reflecting continuous disparities at the gender level to deter the path of inclusiveness (Rameez, 2018).

The election of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in 2024 is, therefore, a watershed moment in the political life of Sri Lanka (Oxford Analytica, 2024). The presidency of Marxist leader Dissanayake was a movement away from the traditional elite-a consequence of people's discontent with systemic inefficiencies and corruption (Al Jazeera, 2024). His administration has given priority to economic reforms, anti-corruption, and strengthening democratic institutions in the hope of fostering sustainable democratic culture at the local level (President's Media Division, 2024).

2 Research Problem and Objectives

Inefficiency at systemic and structural levels has long hindered the continuance of democratic practices within the local governance structures of Sri Lanka. Major concerns include entrenched patron-client relationships, insufficient resource allocation, and lack of citizen participation. Political interference compromises the autonomy of local authorities and further weakens their capacity to function effectively. Recent political developments have pointedly raised the need for examining the sustainability of democratic culture in local governance under evolving socio-political conditions.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify factors contributing to the sustainability of a democratic culture in local government.
2. To examine how political and social dynamics influence these factors, particularly in the context of the recent presidential transition.

Significance of the Study

The contribution of the present study feeds into the wide discussion on governance at a knowledge frontier of the intersection of political dynamic processes and sustainable local government; therefore, to policy discourse framed within democratic consolidation, enhanced accountability, and active citizenship on participatory frameworks in decision making. Since the context of Sri Lanka provides an exciting development of such a governance evolution, its lessons also may be informative for similar conditions found within the Global South.

3 Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Governance theories are central to understanding how democratic practices could be sustained at the local level. Participatory democracy theory focuses on the active engagement of citizens in governance processes for inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability in government (Hilmer, 2010). The idea is that, through participatory budgeting and community forums, for example, citizens are given the chance to let their voices be heard with respect to decision-making and resource allocation; this would further build trust in local governance (Pateman, 2012). These principles are highly relevant in the Sri Lankan context, where grassroots participation in politics has traditionally been constrained by historical and structural factors.

Decentralization theory places much emphasis on devolving decision-making powers and resources down to the local governments for better responsiveness and efficiency (Hill, 1974). In Sri Lanka, while decentralization has been institutionalized through provincial councils and local authorities, its practice is clearly not free of challenges regarding political interference and capability gaps (Mangrio and Satti, 2024). Research evidence indicates that without fiscal autonomy and adequate institutional support, decentralization often fails in attaining democratic results (Shah, 2004; Daughters and Harper, 2007).

The institutional accountability theory completes the previous frameworks by affording the important role of visible and accountable governance structure towards sustaining democracy (Carrington, DeBuse and Lee, 2008). Effective governance requires clear indices of performance evaluation, periodic independent auditing, or control measures regarding possible corruption of power and other ills within governance. Still, accountability has also been proven very weak in Sri Lanka, largely undermining public trusts in local governance, and most reforms are about bringing greater levels of transparency in service delivery for better responsiveness (Kanchana, 2016; Gamlath, 2020).

Put together, these various theories provide a strong framework from which to analyze the factors that determine how democratic local government culture is or is not sustainable based on the interplay between citizen participation, decentralization, and accountability.

Local Governance in Sri Lanka

Local self-government in Sri Lanka has gone through considerable metamorphosis since the colonial inheritances and post-independence reforms. The institutional beginning of local self-government came with the Village Councils Ordinance in 1871, providing for mechanisms of representation by citizens at the grassroots level (Bandaranayake, 1989). Yet, the post-colonial period towed the seesaw between centralism and decentralization, with political control over democratic empowerment as the prime concern of successive governments (Weerawansa, 2015).

Recent literature, therefore, reflects the ongoing issue of political patronage undermining Sri Lanka's framework for local governance itself, often in the way it compromises efficiency due to decision-making based on purely local needs being sacrificed at the altar of a partisan one (Damayanthi, 2017). Besides, inequities among councils persist across rural and urban lines, increasing these socio-economic inequalities and acting as an obstacle toward inclusive development.

Also, the overlapping jurisdiction between the provincial councils and local authorities has brought inefficiencies and conflicts that reduce effectiveness in the provision of services (Herath, 2009). Clarity in the division of roles and increased coordination between the tiers of governance will go a long way in solving these systemic problems (Samaratunge *et al.*, 2017).

Global Comparisons

Global models of sustainable local governance contribute to various learnings for Sri Lanka. Participatory democracy became entrenched through the gram sabha or village assembly through the 73rd and 74th Amendments in India (Sharma and Nahar, 2022). Active citizen participation at a grassroots level became operational, improving visibility and thus more accountability while gaining ownership for outcomes by citizens themselves (Sanyal and Rao, 2019). Operational disparities and undue influence of local leaders remain significant drawbacks while emphasizing that some contextual adaptation mechanisms are at risk (Goyal, van Noort and Ahrenshop, 2022).

In a similar manner, South Africa's Integrated Development Planning framework provides full ground for the alignment of the objectives of local governance with those of national development (Sowman and Brown, 2006). The IDP process places immense emphasis on multi-stakeholder consultations to ensure that the needs of the marginalized communities come into consideration while planning and making decisions (Haywood *et al.*, 2019). Despite this framework being hailed as inclusive, studies also put forward over-reliance on external funding and capacity constraints on the side of the local authorities, as weaknesses of the framework (Ngqebe, 2017).

These comparative insights emphasize a key message-that governance reforms should be responsive to the local contexts. For Sri Lanka, lessons from both India and South Africa have shown how participatory mechanisms and institutional frameworks can help deepen democratic practices in a manner responsive to socio-economic and political challenges.

Gaps in Literature

Notwithstanding the growing body of research into Sri Lanka's local governance, there remain several significant lacuna. One seriously critical area is how local government systems, especially intersect with contemporary political dynamics in light of the recent presidency of Mr. Anura Kumara Dissanayake. His administration's emphasis on anti-corruption measures and democratic reforms presents a unique opportunity to examine their impact on local governance (President’s Media Division, 2024).

Another area that has remained underexplored is the role of civil society organizations (CSO) in fostering accountability and participatory governance (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005). On one hand, CSOs have a very important role in the promotion of democratic practices; on the other hand, they face a number of challenges, including resource constraints, political interference, and restrictive regulatory environments-all of which are crucial for their effectiveness to be enhanced (Devotta, 2005; Aliff and Sarjoon, 2010).

There is also a dearth of empirical research with regard to the experiences of women, rural communities, among other marginalised groups, on Sri Lanka's local governance system. This understanding becomes critical in the design of inclusive policies that would address structural inequalities and promote democratic sustainability within the longer run.

4 Research Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative research design is exploratory in nature and utilize semi-structured interviews for elaboration of nuances for maintaining democratic culture in Sri Lanka's system of local governance (Azungah, 2018). Being qualitative by nature makes the appropriateness even greater since complex social phenomenon, like good governance practices, calls for a participatory approach which mostly draws upon the subjective experiences and contextual variables. While quantitative methods focus on measurable variables, qualitative research allows an in-depth look at the participants' perspectives and experiences, hence finding those underlying factors that influence democratic sustainability.

Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection in order to strike a balance between flexibility and focused inquiry (Brinkmann, 2013). This in fact, allowed the researcher to dig deep into very specific themes of governance practices, citizen engagement, and institutional challenges while leaving space for elaboration by the participants with their particular insights. Semi-structured interviews connote efforts on the part of the research to capture voices emanating from the different layers of the local governance landscape of Sri Lanka, such as elected representatives and administrators, civil society representatives, and citizens.

Data Collection

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling has been done for the selection of 30 respondents who possess appropriate knowledge and experience regarding local governance (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). The sampling has been balanced in the compartments by including representatives of major stakeholder groups, including elected officials, administrators of local governments, CSO representatives, and community members so that breadth of governance practices and challenges can be understood from different perspectives. The participants were sampled because of their direct involvement in, or access to, these processes of local governance which could represent precious, place-specific knowledge.

Interview Guide Development

A highly structured interview guide was prepared, with the purpose of eliciting comprehensive responses to three core themes: governance practices, citizen participation, and systemic challenges. The questions were designed to ensure that participants describe their experiences, perceptions, and recommendations. Some examples of the key questions include:

- What mechanisms exist for citizen participation in local governance, and how effective are they?
- How do local political dynamics shape decision-making?
- What are the most significant challenges to local authorities in fostering democratic governance?

The interview guide had to be piloted with two participants to make sure that the responses were relevant and culturally appropriate; it was then revised based on this.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity has been the point of utmost focus from the very stage of data collection itself. For that purpose, objective and procedural elements, as well as possible consequences of this research project, had been clearly and elaborately presented to all the concerned subjects in minute detail. In addition, consent had been provided on a written note prior to conducting the interviews that it would be quite ethical on the part of the subjects in case they decided to withdraw (Barrow, Brannan and Khandhar, 2022). Personal identifiers were anonymized at the time of transcription to ensure confidentiality, while data was securely stored according to laws on data protection, such as the General Data Protection Regulation.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is an approach particularly suited to eliciting and interpreting patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This is done through a systematic process of four key steps:

1. Transcription: The interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to accurately capture the extent of responses from participants.
2. Coding: Transcripts were reviewed and initial codes were assigned to segments of text corresponding to recurring ideas or themes.
3. Categorization: Codes were then grouped into related categories, broad in nature and reflective of overarching themes such as participatory governance, political influence, and institutional challenges.
4. Themes identified: Since the final themes were identified and refined, they therefore provide a coherent framework within which to understand the factors affecting the sustainability of democratic local governance.

Organization and analysis of data were enabled to occur using the NVivo software. The software allowed efficient coding and categorization while enabling an audit trail to be traced, hence enhancing reliability and rigor of analysis (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

Limitations

This has several limitation points: reliance on qualitative data, which doesn't allow generalization of findings to the larger Sri Lankan context; insights drawn will run deep into the experiences of participants chosen and their applicability varies from region to region or governance structure to governance structure. There is also a challenge of possible biases in participant responses. The data collected might have been subject to social desirability bias or reluctance to disclose due to the sensitive nature of the information, despite the assurance of confidentiality and rapport during interviews. These limitations suggest that further research should be done, which could include quantitative methods or comparative analysis to confirm and build upon these findings.

5 Findings and Discussion

This paper, based on 30 semi-structured interviews, explores the critical factors affecting the sustainability of democratic local government culture in Sri Lanka. These findings are presented under four key themes identified through thematic analysis: participatory governance, political dynamics and accountability, socio-economic challenges, and the role of civil society organizations (CSOs). The discussion contextualizes these findings within the existing socio-political realities of Sri Lanka.

Table 1 - Thematic Analysis Summary

Theme	Description	Supporting Evidence	Illustrative Quotes
Participatory Governance	The degree to which citizens are engaged in decision-making processes at the local level. Challenges include lack of awareness, limited platforms for participation, and underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups.	- Limited public consultations in rural areas (18/30 participants). - Women's representation below 25% quota despite legislative efforts.	*"We are often informed about decisions after they are made. There are no proper consultations with the public, especially in rural areas."* *"Even though we are elected, our voices are often ignored."*
Political Dynamics and Accountability	The influence of political patronage on decision-making, allocation of resources, and institutional accountability. Weak mechanisms for monitoring and financial audits were reported, contributing to public mistrust.	- 22/30 participants highlighted political interference. - Financial audits are conducted inconsistently and lack transparency.	*"Most decisions are dictated by political alliances, not by what is best for the community."* *"There's no follow-up on financial audits, and the public is left in the dark."*
Socio-Economic Challenges	Resource disparities between urban and rural areas, compounded by national economic instability, restrict the ability of local governments to deliver services effectively. Marginalized groups face barriers to participation.	- Urban areas receive disproportionately higher funding. - Rural councils often lack sufficient budgets for infrastructure and services.	*"The funding we receive is insufficient even for basic infrastructure needs."* *"People in our village are too busy trying to survive to participate in governance."*

Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	CSOs play a critical role in addressing gaps in governance, particularly in marginalized communities. However, they face challenges such as political resistance, resource constraints, and dependence on donor agendas.	- 15/30 participants identified CSOs as crucial to democratic practices. - Political interference reported by 8/30 participants.	*"Our work focuses on empowering communities, but local officials often resist when we advocate for transparency."* *"Donor funding is inconsistent and doesn't always align with community needs."*

Participatory Governance

There emerged participatory governance as a key foundation for democratic sustainability. However, a large number of respondents indicated massive gaps that exist in effective citizen engagement at the local level. Though there is a legal mandate on the local authorities to involve communities in decision-making processes, the implementation of participatory mechanisms remains very minimal. According to one of the elected officials,

"In theory, participatory mechanisms exist, but in practice, citizens are rarely consulted, especially in rural areas where engagement is considered a formality rather than a genuine process."

This sentiment was echoed by a community leader, who highlighted the lack of awareness among citizens regarding their rights to participate:

"Most people in our village don't even know that they have a say in how resources are allocated or decisions are made."

The lack of inclusiveness in participatory governance was also strongly underscored-very specific to the underrepresentation of both women and youths. Even as legislative mechanisms on women's representation, like reserving a quota of 25 percent for women representation in local government, as enforced in 2017 (Abeykoon, Liyanage and Dias, 2022), had been done to promote women's presence, participants echoed that the same cultural norms and existing systemic barriers barred meaningful participation for them. An example is shown by a woman representative in the local council who stated,

"Even though we are elected, our opinions are often dismissed during council meetings. Male colleagues dominate the discussions, and we are rarely given leadership roles."

These findings, therefore, rhyme with some of the existing literature, which had highlighted the mismatch between the policy framework and its implementation practices at the local governance level in Sri Lanka (Weerawansa, 2015). At this level, however, the solution cannot be left to the legal reforms alone; the initiatives from the ground levels through creating awareness among the citizens regarding their rights and enhancing capacities of the marginal groups for participation in governance processes play a crucial role as well.

Political Dynamics and Accountability

The impact of political dynamics on local governance was a recurring theme in the interviews. According to a majority of the participants, political patronage is one of the major factors undermining the effectiveness and legitimacy of local government institutions. An administrator in a rural district explained,

"Decisions about funding and project approvals often depend on political allegiances rather than community needs. If a local councilor is aligned with the ruling party, their projects get prioritized, while others are ignored."

This system of patronage is extended to encompass the recruitment and promotion of local government officials, a process that, according to many participants, appears rarely to consider meritocracy as opposed to political loyalty. As one representative of civil society noted,

"The recruitment process is highly politicized. Qualified candidates are frequently sidelined, and positions are given to those with connections, which affects the quality of service delivery."

Accountability mechanisms remained formally in existence but were described during the research phase as weakly and inconsistently applied. For instance, audits to public finances in particular seldom were performed, and if really done, have not been placed in the Public Domain. As expressed by a local councilor's saying,

"We submit our financial reports, but there is no follow-up, and the public is not informed about how funds are used."

This lack of transparency has helped foster general mistrust in local authorities, with citizens viewing them as corrupt and unresponsive.

These findings point to broader critiques of governance in Sri Lanka where weak institutional accountability has been identified as one of the more critical barriers toward democratic sustainability. Strengthening oversight mechanisms-including the formation of independent audit committees and citizen monitoring groups-are potential mitigants which could restore the lost public confidence in local governance.

Socio-Economic Challenges

The most significant barrier to sustainable local governance was found to be economic constraints. Members from all categories reported chronic underfunding of local authorities, especially in rural areas. A councilor in a largely rural district observed that,

"We don't have enough funds to address basic infrastructure needs, let alone invest in community development projects. Most of our budget is spent on salaries and operational costs."

This sentiment was echoed by a provincial administrator, who noted that central government allocations often fail to account for the unique needs of different regions:

"Urban councils receive higher allocations because they generate more revenue, but rural councils struggle to meet even the most basic demands."

These gaps between urban and rural areas are made worse by national economic instability, which has minimized the government's ability to devolve sufficient funds to local authorities. In Sri Lanka, for instance, national economic turmoil-as characterized by increased inflation and devaluation of the currency-has badly reduced the actual buying value of local governments. One participant observed that,

"Even when funds are allocated, the rising cost of materials and services means that we can only complete a fraction of the planned projects."

Aside from financial barriers, socio-economic inequalities were noted to badly affect citizen participation by the respondents. Among other things, the struggle for survival in low-income communities often crowds out participation in governance processes. A community leader commented,

"People in our village are too busy trying to make ends meet. They don't have the time or energy to attend meetings or voice their concerns."

The findings also raise a call for fiscal reforms that would empower local authorities with increased financial autonomy and an equitable share of resources. In addition, targeted interventions will be needed to overcome the socio-economic obstacles impeding active citizens, especially among marginalized groups.

Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

They identified CSOs as key actors who should fill the gap in the work that local governments have failed to execute, mainly on issues like community development and advocacy of vulnerable groups. The participants were upbeat about CSOs' capabilities of mobilizing resources for projects to undertake activities with immediate benefits for the community. One delegate representing one of the lead CSOs observed,

"Our work focuses on empowering communities to advocate for their rights and hold local authorities accountable. Without our efforts, many issues would go unaddressed."

But at the same time, CSOs also confront huge challenges that really hamper their effectiveness. Many spoke about political interference-that when the CSO activity was perceived to be too critical of the government policy or policy direction, there would often be a pushback against them. As one CSO leader explained,

"We were organizing a public forum on transparency, but local officials tried to block it, claiming that we were spreading anti-government propaganda."

Resource constraints also became a shared concern. Most CSOs depend on donor funding, which is usually erratic and attached to certain agendas. A participant remarked that,

"We often have to prioritize projects based on donor preferences rather than community needs, which can limit our impact."

This observation underlines two different roles by the CSOs, such as facilitator and challenger towards democratic governance. A strong partnership with local authorities alongside independence might also raise the chances of contribution in democratic sustainability.

6 Discussion

The findings of the present study suggest that sustaining democratic local government culture relates to the multidimensional landscape of challenges and opportunities. Participatory governance and the role of CSOs have been assessed as strengths, though political patronage, weak mechanisms for accountability, and disparity in resources hinder the functionality.

These findings are also consistent with the literature, which has long underlined the need for institutional reforms that will help solve some of the persistent structural inefficiencies and enhance the levels of citizen participation (Weerawansa, 2015; Mangrio and Satti, 2024). At the same time, the study indicates a set of unique contextual factors that have been exacerbating these existing challenges-such as the recent socio-economic consequences of Sri Lanka's economic crisis.

Some of the policy recommendations that arise from these findings are accountability mechanisms, fiscal autonomy for local authorities, and the capacity of CSOs to advocate for democratic practices. Additionally, targeted initiatives are needed to empower marginalized groups, including women and people of low income, to participate in governance processes.

The study further underscores the importance of aligning the local governance reform agenda with that of national priorities, particularly on anti-corruption and democratic renewal at this juncture of the current administration. With an integrated approach to these issues, Sri Lanka would be in a position to move toward more inclusiveness and sustainability of democratic culture at the local level.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

It is this research that has brought into perspective the interplay of factors in affecting the sustainability of a democratic local government culture in Sri Lanka. Participatory governance, one of the cornerstones of such a culture, can only be meaningfully practiced when there is real participation by the citizens. However, a lack of awareness, underrepresentation, and lack of appropriate consultation mechanisms remain some of the formidable barriers towards genuine participation. This study underlines the need for inclusivity and making available accessible platforms for citizens to exercise their rights to contribute toward decision-making.

Political dynamics and accountability mechanisms remain one of the major deterrents to proper local governance. In addition, there is a prevailing patronage system that undermines meritocracy and shifts the focal points of governance from community needs to political interest. The institutionalized accountability mechanisms are inconsistently applied and generally result in a lack of confidence by citizens in them. All these call for strong oversight frameworks that assure transparency, fairness, and public confidence in local authorities.

Other underlying issues of economic disparities between the urban and rural councils further aggravate the plight of local governments. The fact that rural councils have limited resources signifies an acute need to offer equal funding, coupled with fiscal autonomy (Gunawardena, 2018). Furthermore, economic instabilities in general in Sri Lanka enhance the mentioned issue and therefore tie the hands of local governments in their roles of long-term development investment and key service delivery. Marginalized communities, burdened by socio-economic hardships, face additional barriers to participation, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to bridge these gaps.

These are the CSOs that were identified to enhance democratic practices, especially in areas where local governments do not reach. In addition to that, they face a number of constraints that limit their effectiveness in terms of resource, political, and regulatory challenges. Stronger capacity and independence in CSOs can go a long way in ensuring their complementarity to initiatives on local governance, especially in the aspect of empowering marginalized groups and promoting transparency.

Based on these findings, some recommendations are put forward with a view to help overcome the identified challenges for the sustainability of a democratic local government culture in Sri Lanka. In this regard, there is an emergent need for strengthening participatory mechanisms by adequately disseminating information among citizens regarding their rights and the essence of involvement in governance processes (Pateman, 2012; Rameez, 2018). Educational campaigns, spearheaded by government and non-governmental organizations, will prepare and capacitate citizens for active involvement in decision-making at the local level. In addition, the establishment of formalized consultation mechanisms, such as citizen forums and participatory budgeting, can provide structured opportunities for community involvement.

The second involves the establishment of strong accountability frameworks that minimize the role that political patronage plays in making governance transparent (Kanchana, 2016). Accountability through independent audit committees and oversight groups needs to be institutionalized to monitor financial management and decision-making processes. The requirements for publishing annual reports by local authorities detailing allocations, expenditures, and project outcomes would also enhance transparency.

Thirdly, fiscal reforms must be made to remove the injustices in the sharing formula and give more financial autonomy to local governments. Rather than generating revenue, an allocation formula based on needs will ensure that enough resources are provided for the rural areas to address their peculiar challenges. Furthermore, capacity-building programs need to be undertaken for officials of local governments to build their capacity in resource management and effective service delivery.

Finally, deeper partnerships in local governments with CSOs would further enhance effectiveness in the broader sense. Facilitation of the CSOs through simplified regulatory frameworks and predictable funding mechanisms will better enable them to engage in active advocacy, capacity-building, and service delivery. These can also be used to hold local governments accountable and keep community needs paramount.

In sum, such challenges require an approach that embeds policy reforms, capacity building, and citizen empowerment on many fronts. By harnessing inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability, Sri Lanka can build an enduring framework for local governance, which will give the democratic culture of the country a strong, long-term perspective. These are initiatives that would be outlined at the framework of national priorities, but tailored to fit the needs in local contexts that have the ability to transform governance practices and deepen democracy at the grassroots level in Sri Lanka.

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