

Democracy from Below: The CDD and Civil Oversight Practices in Nigeria's Political System

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) as a non-state actor performing a civil co-oversight function over the Nigerian government, and its relevance within the context of international relations. CDD is a civil society organization focused on strengthening democracy, governance, and sustainable development. Through policy research, advocacy, anti-corruption campaigns, and election monitoring, CDD seeks to expand public participation and enhance state accountability. From an international relations perspective, CDD's role reflects the involvement of non-state actors in global efforts to promote democracy and public oversight in the fulfillment of civil rights. This study also explores the dynamics of civil participation in Nigeria, which faces serious challenges, particularly in the security sector marked by internal conflict and terrorism. Using a qualitative approach based on literature review and secondary data analysis, this paper aims to assess the effectiveness of CDD as a civil co-oversight mechanism in governance and its implications for domestic stability and regional security. The analysis suggests that while CDD plays a significant role in promoting transparency, political and security constraints within Nigeria continue to limit its impact. These findings open up broader discussions about the contribution of civil society in the international system and how local democratic practices are closely linked to global governance structures.

Keywords: Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Civil Oversight, Nigeria, Non-state Actors

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's democracy has never been unchallenged both in policy debate and scholarship. Nigeria has attempted to have firm democratic institutions since the return to democratic rule in 1999 while coping with endemic problems of electoral rigging, corruption, insecurity, and responsive institutions that are not robust. The 2023 general election was supposed to represent a new chapter in Nigeria's democratic development, but instead, it unveiled most of the same problems that had characterized previous elections, including irregularities, vote suppression, and disputes over results (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025; Abumbe & Owa, 2024). The election also demonstrated the resilience of Nigerian civil society, which refused to back down from monitoring the process and protesting official results. This combination of democratic resilience and institutional frailty highlights the persistent tension between the capability for free, fair, and credible elections and the elite-led political competition.

Several studies have shown that Nigeria's democratic consolidation is weak. The limitations posed by low voter turnout, the prevalence of violence during campaign periods, and the lack of internal party democracy undermine the strengthening of democratic governance (Hassan, 2024; NIU Journal of Social Sciences, 2024; NIU Journal of Humanities, 2024). The question of

interconnection between federal and state institutions is also in question, where political interference and manipulation tend to undermine the independence of electoral organs (Yusuf & Monday, 2024). These problems show that Nigerian democracy continues to exist under difficult circumstances where electoral integrity and institutional accountability are not yet assured.

Nigeria's tension between the norms of democracy and practice makes it the appropriate location to think about the role played by civil society in advocating democratic governance. Nigerian civil society organizations (CSOs) have mobilized citizens, monitored elections, and served as government watchdogs for decades. Their work validates what scholars term the relationship between good governance and civil society, particularly where institutions of the state are politicized or undermined (Phuyel, Poudel, & Acharya, 2024). Such institutions include, among many others, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), which has been highly effective. Since its establishment in 1997, CDD has been busy with activities to promote democratic reforms, transparency, and popular participation.

The value of CDD's input is clearer when set against the broader chronology of Nigeria's political development. Conversely, extremely gallant anti-corruption battles were fought, especially between 2015 and 2023, wherein institutions attempted to ensure accountability processes became more robust (Compendium on Lessons Learned and Best Practices, 2023). On the other hand, foreign powers such as the United States and European Union have also helped in the form of democracy assistance, building capacity, and non-governmental organization assistance (Garba, 2025; Hornát, 2019). Foreign aid provides additional resources, but domestic actors such as CDD are ultimately charged with making democratic reforms enduring because they can redscribe international norms to local contexts and resist political elites when necessary.

Despite a growing body of studies on the Nigerian democratic process, considerable gaps exist. The majority of the studies have focused on election outcomes, voting patterns, or institutional reforms at the state level (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025; Hassan, 2024). Though important, these findings underestimate civil society as a co-servicing mechanism that can complement or even substitute for weak state institutions. Few have systematically explored how organizations such as CDD operate as a form of "democracy from below," with monitoring, promoting citizen participation, and pressuring governments to remain within democratic bounds. This gap is especially relevant in the politics of contemporary West Africa, where increased military coups and democratic backsliding have frayed the legitimacy of democratic governance (Salisu, Folorunsho, & Iwanger, 2024; Terzungwe, Ahmed, & Oluwaseun, 2024).

The novelty of this research lies in placing CDD not just as a civil society actor but as an operational instrument of civic oversight in Nigeria's political system. The approach is informed by Larry Diamond's understanding of civil oversight as involving non-state actors in exercising power accountability as well as ensuring accountability and Michael Barnett's constructivist approach, which elucidates political practices being guided by norms and identities. Weaving these two together, the study provides more insight into how CDD makes democratic ideals a reality in Nigeria despite institutional vulnerabilities' continuity. The analysis also identifies how CDD's interventions are related to sub-regional dynamics, especially the interventions of ECOWAS in deepening democracy and confronting issues of security (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2024; Moses, 2024).

The overarching argument here is that CDD is a critical practice of bottom-up democratic accountability in Nigeria. While formal institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) remain important, they have neither the independence nor capacity to entirely ensure credible elections. CDD fills part of this shortcoming by observing elections, conducting research, developing the capacity of journalists, and advocating for reforms. Its interventions not only improve electoral integrity but also create a culture of accountability that transcends elections to issues such as anti-corruption and governance reforms. In this context, CDD's work demonstrates how civil society can complement democratic consolidation when state institutions are not adequately strong.

The goal of this article is therefore two-pronged. In the first instance, it aims to analyze the extent to which CDD serves as a co-watchdog institution in Nigeria's democratic order with specific focus on its activities throughout the 2023 general election. In the second instance, it aims to situate such analysis within the broader West African regional framework, where ECOWAS and other regional-level institutions are faced with increasing pressures to address governance, security, and democratic consolidation issues. By doing so, the study offers regional and local accounts of how bottom-up promotion of democracy is possible even in situations where there have long been barriers.

Last but not least, the discussion contributes to general discourses on democracy promotion, civil society-government relations, and democratic consolidation prospects in West Africa. The paper not only emphasizes the importance of studying formal institutions but also the observation of the innovative solutions non-state actors such as CDD have developed. In this way, the paper seeks to contribute to research and offer policy lessons to policymakers, donors, and activists who want to deepen democracy in Nigeria and in the wider region.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis techniques to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) as a civil society actor in overseeing governance in Nigeria. A qualitative research approach was utilized as it generates contextual and interpretive data on social occurrences through observation and analysis of non-numeric data such as texts, documents, and narratives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). This approach focuses on studying meanings, conceptions, and dynamics underpinning CDD's action within Nigeria's complex political and security framework. Descriptive analysis, however, is utilized to present systematically and objectively the outlining the tendencies, patterns, and traits of the information collected, thereby forming a comprehensive record without engaging in hypothesis testing or inferences (Babbie, 2020).

The research is solely reliant on secondary data, meaning information that has already been collected and classified for other uses by other people (Johnston, 2017). The secondary data were selected for application because it allows for the study of extensive amounts of material for a given duration without losing research resources effectiveness. The currency and applicability of the information are ensured by limiting the analysis to the 2019–2024 time frame. The sources used for data include some text papers such as scholarly works, official publications of civil society organizations, reports from international institutions, and credible

media reports, all which collectively provide an entire picture of the research subject. The focus laid on CDD as the main case study is based on the consideration that this institution is among the strongest and most enduring Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in advancing democracy and accountability in Nigeria. However, this study has some shortcomings. First, reliance on secondary data limits access to the most recent information or perspectives that may not yet have been published. Second, focusing solely on CDD does not fully represent the diverse spectrum of civil society movements in Nigeria. Third, the highly dynamic political and security context in Nigeria may affect the generalizability of the research findings within the examined period.

The analytical framework of this study is constructed through a synthesis of Michael Barnett's theoretical perspective on constructivism and Larry Diamond's concept of civil society's role in democratic consolidation. In *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*, Barnett emphasizes the role of non-state actors as norm entrepreneurs who actively shape and diffuse norms in global governance through claims of expert authority and moral authority (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). This perspective views CDD not merely as a government watchdog but as an agent engaged in constructing governance norms by translating global principles such as transparency, accountability, and public participation into the Nigerian local context. Meanwhile, Diamond (2008), in *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World*, asserts that civil society is a fundamental pillar of democratic consolidation through the function of civil oversight as a mechanism to limit state power, prevent abuse of authority, and strengthen public participation (Diamond, 2008). From Diamond's perspective, CDD operates as a watchdog that performs practical functions such as election monitoring, anti-corruption campaigns, and civic education. The synthesis of these two perspectives provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for analyzing the role of CDD in Nigeria not only as a domestic monitoring entity but also as a normative change agent contributing to governance transformation at both national and global levels.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Nigeria's Political and Security Context

Nigeria, as the largest democracy in Africa with a population of more than 200 million, practices a multiparty presidential system that has been in place since the end of military rule in 1999. However, two decades of democratic transition are still confronted with significant structural fragilities in governance and political institutions (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2016). This challenging political and security context creates a complex and decisive environment for the operationalization of civil oversight functions carried out by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). The most fundamental challenge that continues to erode state legitimacy and hinder democratic consolidation is systemic and endemic bureaucratic corruption. Widespread corruption across various sectors of government not only drains vital national resources but also fundamentally undermines public trust in state institutions and fuels widespread social discontent (Suberu, 2020). The 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International ranked Nigeria 150th out of 180 countries, a score that reflects the poor accountability of the public sector.

Furthermore, Nigeria continues to be afflicted by ethnic and religious conflicts rooted in competition over natural resources, structural economic inequality, and regional development gaps. These conflicts often manifest in recurring communal violence, for instance between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt, which deepens social fragmentation and diverts attention from the national development agenda (International Crisis Group, 2022). This identity polarization is frequently exploited by political elites for electoral gain, further complicating efforts at reconciliation and national integration. On top of these governance challenges, the threat of terrorism from armed groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) poses the most severe test to Nigeria's security capacity and regional stability. These terrorist groups not only cause severe humanitarian crises in the Northeast, displacing millions of people internally, but also represent a direct threat to the overall stability of West Africa (Onapajo, 2020). Their activities generate a security dilemma that is often used by the government to restrict civic space and impose repressive security policies, which in turn can marginalize the role of civil society organizations such as CDD in governance processes.

Thus, Nigeria's political and security context—marked by democratic fragility, systemic corruption, fragmented identity-based conflicts, and ongoing terrorist threats—creates a highly challenging environment for democracy and human rights. Yet, it is precisely in this context that the role of civil oversight becomes most crucial and necessary to promote transparency, accountability, and ultimately sustainable national stability.

b. CDD as Civil Oversight in Global and Nigeria

In the Nigerian environment, which is marked by democratic weakness and multidimensional governance challenges, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) has a double strategic role: as internal governance watchdog and as normative power in the global democratic community. CDD's activities not only represent the practice of civil oversight in the local Nigerian context, as conceptualized by Diamond (2008), but also reflect the processes of constructing and diffusing transnational democratic norms, as explained by Barnett (2004). Policy Research & Advocacy serves as the main foundation that builds CDD's legitimacy and technical capacity. Through rigorous, evidence-based policy research, CDD produces specialized knowledge (expert authority) that underpins effective policy advocacy. Their comprehensive reports on critical issues such as systemic corruption, security sector reform, and electoral processes function not only as tools to expose governance malpractice but, more importantly, as instruments for constructing norms and standards on how accountable and transparent governance should operate within the Nigerian context (CDD West Africa, 2022). By publishing solid empirical findings, CDD influences public discourse and policy agendas, while also creating both moral and technical pressure on state actors to pursue reform.

In the process of Election Monitoring, CDD functions as a guardian of the purity of democratic processes in an autonomous and impartial manner. Its comprehensive election monitoring with effective methodology and use of advanced technology not only detects and documents the spectrum of fraud and electoral malpractices but also creates a strong shield against potential manipulation by political elites. The visibility of free and independent election observers from CDD triggers sensitization and alertness among electoral bodies and political

parties. By extension, this intervention directly improves democratic institutions by increasing the public's faith in the electoral process and reducing the threat of post-election violence (CDD West Africa, 2023). CDD's Anti-Corruption Campaigns transform global anti-corruption norms into concrete and contextual local action. Through mass public campaigns, capacity-building for anti-corruption activists, and systematic advocacy for budget transparency, CDD not only establishes moral authority in the eyes of society but also reinforces civil control mechanisms over the use of public resources. These campaigns have succeeded in raising public awareness of the impact of corruption on development and welfare while also building broad coalitions that push for government accountability from the local to the national level.

At the level of Civic Education & Participation, CDD consistently strengthens civil society capacity, particularly among marginalized groups such as youth and women, to participate effectively in political and governance processes. The civic education programs it develops not only increase technical knowledge of constitutional rights and obligations but also construct a democratic civic identity that is active and critical. By empowering ordinary citizens to engage in public decision-making, CDD reinforces the social foundation of Nigeria's democracy and creates a more informed and demanding constituency for government accountability. From the perspective of international relations, CDD is a nodal point of transnational networks of governance. Its strategic engagement with international organizations such as Transparency International, UNDP, and ECOWAS facilitates cross-fertilization of norms, professional advice, and best practices in democratization and anti-corruption. This position enables CDD to act as a powerful "translator," interpreting international standards into Nigeria's domestic reality and inserting Nigeria's voice and experience into the global conversation on governance and democracy. In both roles, CDD makes contributions not just to Nigeria's consolidation of democracy but also to the reinforcement of global governance architecture.

c. CDD as Civil Oversight Mechanism

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) as a mechanism of civil oversight in Nigeria is best described by Michael Barnett's constructivist approach and Larry Diamond's theory of civil oversight. Barnett's constructivism captures the way in which civil society organizations (CSOs) are norm entrepreneurs that reshape political identities and legitimate practices through intensified engagement and information exchange (Phuyel et al., 2024). This theoretical framework reveals the reality that CDD's monitoring exercises extend beyond observation to actually redefining presumptions about governmental accountability and transparency in Nigeria's democratic leadership.

Diamond's theory of civil oversight fortifies this constructivist analysis by formulating the institutional mechanisms whereby democratic leadership can be influenced by civil society actors. According to this perspective, strong civil oversight means independent fact-finding, persistent participation in policy-making, and the capacity to mobilize public opinion against authoritarian or oligarchic inclinations (Ogunleye et al., 2024). The constructivist-civil oversight synthesis argues that institutions like CDD operate in a space that includes normative change and institutional pressure that combine to produce possibilities for deepening democracy.

CDD's autonomous reporting to foster government transparency aligns with a basic civic role enabled by constructivist theory and evidence in Nigeria's political landscape. Autonomous reports by the organization play different roles in the democratic landscape as information agents bridging key gaps left by opaque government processes (Phuyel et al., 2024). Such reports generate evidence that can be traced to substantiate advocacy work, legal petitions, and the formation of coalitions, hence facilitating follow-up action which can initiate investigations or policy amendment.

In accordance with the constructivist perspective, CDD's independent reporting activities constitute norm-setting efforts that gradually reshape expectations about tolerable levels of government secrecy. Reporting outcomes raises the political cost of secrecy by mobilizing public media and applying reputational pressures to governmental elites (Ogunleye et al., 2024). This makes evident how civilian oversight is capable of altering the normative context even where formalized control mechanisms are still faulty.

CDD's success in its transparency-improving work is best seen in sectors with high risks for corruption, such as Nigeria's extractive industry. Contemporary research into anti-corruption policy in Nigeria's oil industry explains that civil society reporting now plays a central role to ensuring public oversight and citizen engagement in revenue transparency initiatives (Ogunleye et al., 2024). All the same, media access and openness of institutions are still important to framing the impact of these initiatives to transparency, highlighting the contextual nature of the effectiveness of civil oversight.

Nigeria's politics has been characterized by what scholars have termed "transactional politics," complete with pervasive political spending, patron-clientele organizations, and what Miller (2024) describes as a "contractocracy" that sustains elite rents even during fiscal crises. Within this structural framework, CDD's watchdog function is particularly significant in that it documents irregular contracting, political budget allocations, and elite networks sustaining oligarchic bases of power.

The constructivist lens exposes how CDD's watchdog activities delegitimize oligarchic practice through habitual visibility and civic education. The naming and shaming of tainted functionaries and the highlighting of elite capture trends prompt the organization to try to alter popular conceptions of what political conduct is acceptable (Miller, 2024). The norm-entrepreneurial function is significant in cases where the formal institutions of accountability are compromised or rendered inoperable.

However, the watchdog role faces enormous structural impediments in the political economy of Nigeria. Miller's (2024) analysis of the 2020 oil shocks reveals the recuperative nature of transactional political systems and their capacity to maintain elite linkages through alternative funding systems even as they are uncovered by civil society agents. This finding suggests that while CDD's watchdog efforts can create reputational costs for oligarchic action, their power to produce systemic change is limited unless supplemented with complementary institutional reforms. The effectiveness of the watchdog function is heightened by the sophistication of contemporary corruption networks, which have a tendency to operate through legal but ethically questionable channels. CDD's ability to expose such practices requires ongoing investigative capacity and technological expertise, resources which might be curtailed by the operational issues identified below.

CDD's role in public policy debate is a critical part of civil oversight that occupies middle ground between independent monitoring and institutional capability. The external engagement of the organization with external government agency and institutional actors is through diverse means, from policy draft technical comment to participation in sectoral initiatives for transparency as well as coalition with reformist actors of government (Ogunleye et al., 2024). This interaction role rings true with constructivist theory's emphasis on the iterative nature of norm change. By ensuring sustained interaction with policy consultations and multi-stakeholder platforms, CDD inscribes the culture of transparency into national institutions by aligning them with international norms and monitoring expectations (Phuyel et al., 2024). CDD technical reports inform legislative oversight and policy-making, particularly in the areas of revenue transparency and management of extracts.

The policy dialogue function is particularly important in the Nigerian case, in which civil society stakeholders can serve as middlemen between international donors and domestic institutions. CDD's engagement with global transparency initiatives presents the promises of mobilizing external pressure for domestic reform purposes and building capacity for long-term oversight activities (Ogunleye et al., 2024). This dual engagement policy aligns with Diamond's conception of civil oversight as a multi-level process with action occurring both domestically and internationally. Nevertheless, even policy influence success hinges on government transparency and oversight institution independence. Recent analysis reports policy influence by CSOs as still being extremely varied by sector and government level with access to high-level policymaking remaining exceptional and institutional power imbalances still deep-seated (Phuyel et al., 2024).

Despite its key oversight functions, CDD suffers from systematic operational limitations that undermine its effectiveness and sustainability. These are indicative of broader patterns among Nigeria's civil society actors in the nation's increasingly restrictive civic space, including scarce resources, political intimidation, and restricted entry to sensitive ministries of government. Financial vulnerability is a central constraint on the oversight ability of CDD, constraining the organization's ability to pursue persistent investigations, guarantee staff protection, and maintain long-term campaign efforts (Ogunleye et al., 2024). Dependent on external funding exposes the organization to donor agendas and funding cycles, potentially compromising the organization's autonomy and stability. This shortage is especially concerning considering the technical capabilities necessary for effective monitoring in sophisticated industries like extractive governance and security policy.

Perhaps the most severe operational constraint for CDD is restricted access to Nigeria's security sector, which remains tightly closed to civilian monitoring despite its central role in government and significant budgetary allocations. It stymies transparency in vital areas of elite power and decision-making, thereby rendering it challenging to seek overall accountability (Mappisabbi, 2024).

The scarcity of security information is a reflection of broader drifts towards institutional opacity that characterize Nigeria's rule regime. As much as CDD has been at the vanguard of security sector monitoring via innovative approaches like open-source research and budget tracking, the inherent opacity in the sector limits the organization from maximizing its oversight role.

Analysis of CDD as a civilian oversight mechanism captures both the possibilities and the limitations of civilian society-led accountability within Nigeria's democratic experience. Constructively, the activities of the organization reach norm change and the incremental reconstitution of expectations surrounding government openness and accountability. However, such norm change is incomplete and is met with ongoing resistance from entrenched interests and structural impediments.

The issue of CDD reflects broader tensions within Nigeria's democratic consolidation, where there is institutionalized democratic formality and networks of power in the form of informal patron-clientism. While civil oversight institutions like CDD may provide spaces for democratic contestation and public engagement, their capability to produce systemic change depends on broader institutional reform and political will to deepen democracy.

d. Implications for Peace and Security

Since its establishment, CDD has functioned as a space for democratic dialogue and a center for public policy research. One of CDD's most important contributions is providing a democratic arena that strengthens state legitimacy through research, advocacy, and election monitoring activities for the sustainability of democracy and development in West Africa (Center for Democracy & Development, n.d.). Theoretically, state legitimacy rests on citizens' perceptions that political processes are fair and representative, and that the government is aware of the need to build state capacity to manage competing interests while remaining responsive to public needs (GSDRC, 2016). In Nigeria, post-reform dynamics show that the quality of elections and freedom of expression significantly affect citizens' trust. The latest Afrobarometer survey (Afrobarometer, 2025) highlights the sensitivity of Nigerian public opinion to the performance of democracy, indicating that the Nigerian government must take further steps to improve information quality, enhance citizen oversight, and directly contribute to citizens' acceptance of the state's authority. In other words, the Nigerian government needs to expand democratic space not merely as a normative goal, but as a practical instrument to strengthen legitimacy itself (Afrobarometer, 2025).

In creating democratic space in Nigeria, CDD's role is crucial because legitimacy does not derive only from formal election results but also from public perceptions of fair, accountable, and responsive processes. When CDD exposes procedural problems, fraud, or corrupt practices and proposes evidence-based reforms, it helps reconstruct public perceptions of institutional capacity to function democratically. In this way, CDD contributes to strengthening the long-term quality of the country's democratic processes (Angalapu et al., 2021). CDD reports that analyze elections and recommend reforms show how field-based evidence is used to press for institutional improvement (Angalapu et al., 2021).

However, while CDD plays its role as a civil society organization in the democratic sector, civic engagement in Nigeria still faces socio-economic barriers that make civil oversight less effective or highly limited (Nigerian Civil Service News, 2024). The legacy of military rule is a dominant factor here, as Nigeria experienced a prolonged period of military regimes from 1966 to 1999, during which the military became the dominant political actor, playing a major role in domestic affairs where civilians should also have had influence. This legacy created a culture of secrecy in the security sector and weakened public trust in government, as military-led regimes at that time brought about economic collapse, political repression, and

systematic human rights violations (Olaoluwa, 2024). Although democratic transition has lasted more than two decades, civil-military relations in Nigeria remain fragile due to persistent issues such as inflation and high unemployment, which make citizens increasingly apathetic (Emegwa, 2023).

Another limitation in strengthening democracy in Nigeria, stemming from the legacy of military dominance, is the weakness of civil and parliamentary oversight of the security sector. Strengthening Nigerian democracy requires stronger civil oversight of security institutions. According to Santosa in (Riskiyono, 2015), civil oversight, whether through parliament or civil society organizations, is an essential prerequisite for ensuring social welfare and represents the implementation of good governance principles, which include participation, accountability, and transparency. In Nigeria, this weakness is closely linked to the long history of military rule, the limited capacity of civilian institutions, and the resistance of security actors to transparency. Ultimately, this situation constrains the role of civilians in building democratic and inclusive security governance (Okoi & Iwara, 2021).

The weakness of civil oversight carries serious consequences for state legitimacy. First, weak accountability creates space for impunity. Human rights violations committed by security forces, for example in counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram, are rarely prosecuted (Ayandehi, 2025). Second, the lack of budget transparency makes the large defense budget prone to misuse, with billions of dollars in some cases “disappearing” without audit trails, exacerbated by limited technical expertise, inadequate resources, and political protection shielding elites from scrutiny (Kuwali, 2023). Third, security policies tend to focus solely on militaristic approaches, while civilian dimensions such as reconciliation, economic development, and education receive little attention. As a result, civil society loses the space to contribute to building sustainable security (Ayandehi, 2025). Thus, although organizations like CDD can provide research-based inputs on security sector governance, the limitations of civil oversight mean their impact remains constrained. The effectiveness of Nigeria’s security sector can only be enhanced if civil oversight is strengthened, both through parliament and civil society monitoring mechanisms. This is crucial, because Nigeria’s legitimacy is important not only for its citizens but also for the stability of West Africa.

Nigeria is not only important for its own people but also for the stability of the West African region (ECOWAS). This is because Nigeria has the largest GDP in the region, significant military strength, and a population exceeding that of all its neighbors combined, making Nigeria’s stability directly influential on regional security (International Crisis Group, 2024). In the context of ECOWAS, which is currently facing challenges from waves of coups, the rise of populist militarism, and escalating jihadism, instability in Nigeria could accelerate the deterioration of the regional situation (Egbejule, 2025). Moreover, news reports indicate that ECOWAS is being tested by external geopolitical pressures and increasing armed violence, which may erode its ability to respond effectively to crises (ISPI, 2024). Given these complexities, if Nigeria is unwilling or unable to play its role in the region, ECOWAS risks losing one of its main pillars of support (International Crisis Group, 2024).

e. Broader Relevance in International Relations

In International Relations studies, it is often emphasized that the state is the primary actor. However, current global developments show that non-state actors also play a very important

role. Non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and even local communities can influence global governance through research, advocacy, and the building of international networks (Uvere Ph.D & J. Ph.D, 2025). The Centre for Democracy and Development is a concrete example of a non-state actor that works on evidence-based research, policy advocacy, capacity building, and field programs for conflict prevention and democratic governance (National Intelligence Council, 2023). CDD publishes regional security analyses, disinformation studies, and empowerment programs for vulnerable groups in activities that position it as both a norm entrepreneur and an independent data provider used by policymakers, donors, and academics (National Intelligence Council, 2023). In other words, CDD acts as a bridge between society and government institutions. This demonstrates how non-state actors are able to influence global agendas, even without possessing the formal authority of states (National Intelligence Council, 2023).

Nigeria is one of the countries frequently discussed in relation to democracy and security in West Africa. The conflict in the Northeast caused by Boko Haram, as well as unrest in the Niger Delta, illustrates that without inclusive governance, regional stability is difficult to achieve (International Crisis Group, 2023). In this context, inclusive governance becomes the key to achieving sustainable peace. Inclusive governance means involving civil society, women's groups, youth, and traditional institutions in decision-making (OECD Development, 2020). In Nigeria, CDD's programs in collaboration with women's organizations in conflict-affected areas serve as a concrete example. These programs not only give voice to marginalized groups but also strengthen state legitimacy through social justice (Imam et al., 2020). Thus, Nigeria's experience shows that inclusive governance is not merely a concept but an essential factor in creating sustainable peace. When communities feel included, they are more likely to support the state and reject violence (OECD Development, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The study of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) shows how civil society can play a meaningful role in strengthening democracy in Nigeria, even when formal institutions remain weak. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has faced recurring problems such as corruption, electoral malpractice, and insecurity. These challenges continue to undermine trust in state institutions. Within this fragile context, CDD stands out as an actor that pushes for accountability by monitoring elections, conducting anti-corruption campaigns, and promoting civic education. Through these activities, CDD has created space for citizens to participate more actively in political life and demand higher standards of governance.

Theoretically, combining Michael Barnett's constructivism and Larry Diamond's idea of civil oversight helps explain CDD's role more clearly. Barnett reminds us that organizations like CDD are norm entrepreneurs that translate global values of transparency and accountability into the local Nigerian setting. Diamond, meanwhile, emphasizes how civil society acts as a watchdog by exposing malpractice, shaping public debate, and mobilizing citizen pressure. Taken together, these perspectives show how CDD is not just reacting to political realities but also shaping them by redefining what democracy should look like in Nigeria.

The evidence also shows, however, that CDD's impact is limited by structural obstacles. Financial dependence on external donors, political intimidation, and restricted access to sensitive areas such as the security sector constrain its effectiveness. Nigeria's entrenched

"transactional politics," where elites maintain power through patronage networks, makes systemic change difficult. These factors mean that while CDD can raise awareness and impose reputational costs on elites, broader reforms and stronger institutions are still required for deeper democratic consolidation.

Beyond Nigeria, CDD's work matters for the West African region as a whole. Nigeria's political stability directly affects ECOWAS and the wider regional order, especially at a time when military coups and extremist violence are increasing. By engaging with international organizations, CDD not only strengthens Nigeria's democratic practice but also contributes to global governance by connecting local experiences to international debates.

In conclusion, CDD demonstrates that democracy can be advanced from below through persistent civic action, even in difficult environments. While the obstacles remain significant, CDD's activities highlight the importance of civil oversight in building transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. For Nigeria and West Africa, strengthening civil society is not just a domestic concern but also a regional and international necessity for peace and stability.

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