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STRUCTURED ADAPTABILITY AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION CAPABILITY: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK, PROCESS IMPROVEMENT, RESILIENCE AND PERFORMANCE IN BOTSWANA'S CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines structured adaptability as a organizational innovation capability linking stakeholder feedback, organisational resilience, and performance in Botswana's civil society organisations (CSOs). The objective is to explain how CSOs balance donor requirements, stakeholder expectations, resource constraints, and mission responsiveness. Using a qualitative interpretivist design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with 24 leaders and board members from 24 CSOs in Gaborone. The findings suggest that organisational capacity and donor dependence shape stakeholder engagement; upward accountability may weaken beneficiary voice; and legitimacy may be preserved when external governance requirements are translated into locally appropriate practices. The study argues that structured adaptability may enable CSOs to convert disruption and stakeholder feedback into redesigned decision-making processes, accountability routines, and board oversight practices. It contributes to organisational innovation scholarship by explaining how feedback-driven governance innovation may strengthen resilience, stakeholder responsiveness, CSO performance, and sustainable mission performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Governance is an important yet often overlooked source of organisational innovation. While innovation is often associated with products, technologies, and services, many organisations improve performance by redesigning how decisions are made, how stakeholders are heard, and how accountability is maintained. This broader understanding is especially important for civil society organisations (CSOs), whose ability to deliver social value depends on governing relationships, managing scarce resources, and remaining responsive under uncertainty. Botswana's CSO sector provides a timely context for examining governance innovation, as organisations must retain legitimacy with donors, regulators, partners, communities, and beneficiaries while operating under persistent capacity and funding constraints.

In this context, organisational innovation is not limited to technological or product innovation. It also includes new

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or significantly improved organisational processes, decision-making routines, coordination mechanisms and stakeholder-management practices that improve organisational performance. For resource-constrained CSOs, stakeholder feedback can therefore represent an important input for process improvement when it is translated into changes in planning, reporting, resource allocation and operational decision-making (OECD/Eurostat, 2018).

Recent literature on nonprofit governance highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement, institutional legitimacy and mission-led stewardship. Stakeholder theory holds that organisations must respond to groups affected by their activities (Freeman, 1984), while institutional theory explains how external expectations shape organisational legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Stewardship theory adds that nonprofit leaders often act from mission commitment rather than narrow self-interest (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). However, these perspectives do not fully explain how resource-constrained CSOs reconcile accountability with adaptability in practice.

This article addresses a central governance tension: CSOs must satisfy formal donor and regulatory expectations while remaining responsive to beneficiaries, communities and changing local conditions. When donor accountability carries stronger organisational consequences than beneficiary accountability, stakeholder voice becomes uneven, mission relevance is placed at risk and governance can drift towards compliance rather than learning (Appe & Pallas, 2018; Ebrahim, 2003; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Governance innovation is therefore needed to structure accountability while preserving context-sensitive responsiveness.

This study conceptualises structured adaptability as a governance innovation capability: the deliberate design of mission-centred rules, stakeholder channels, board oversight routines and leadership discretion that enables CSOs to translate external requirements into locally workable practices. The concept shifts attention away from compliance with prescribed governance models and towards the adaptive redesign of governance systems that strengthen responsiveness, legitimacy, resilience and performance.

From an organisational innovation perspective, structured adaptability is understood in this study as a capability for redesigning organisational processes rather than simply a governance response. It enables CSOs to convert stakeholder information and external requirements into improved accountability routines, planning practices, decision-making processes and board oversight mechanisms. The innovative value therefore lies in how existing organisational processes are modified and used to improve responsiveness, resilience and performance.

The paper explains how CSOs in Botswana design and implement structured adaptability amid donor dependence, resource constraints and institutional plurality. It makes three linked contributions. First, it advances organisational innovation scholarship by showing that governance innovation can be non-technological, feedback-driven and performance-oriented. Second, it extends stakeholder, institutional and stewardship theories through capacity-conditioned salience, contextual translation and accountable stewardship. Third, it demonstrates how stakeholder feedback, governance redesign and organisational resilience combine to strengthen CSO performance and sustainable mission performance.

Although previous research has examined stakeholder engagement, nonprofit governance and organisational resilience, less attention has been given to how stakeholder feedback is converted into concrete organisational process improvements in resource-constrained CSOs. In particular, there is limited understanding of how accountability requirements and stakeholder pressures can become triggers for organisational process innovation rather than merely additional compliance demands. This study addresses this gap by examining structured adaptability as a mechanism linking stakeholder feedback, process redesign, organisational resilience and performance.

The study is guided by the following research **question:** How do civil society organisations in Botswana design and implement structured adaptability to balance formal accountability, stakeholder responsiveness and mission-centred flexibility under conditions of resource constraints, donor dependence and institutional plurality?

To answer this question, the study pursues three objectives: first, to examine how CSOs in Botswana engage stakeholders and respond to competing accountability demands; second, to analyse how CSOs translate donor, regulatory and institutional requirements into locally appropriate governance practices; and third, to develop a stakeholder-centric governance innovation model that explains how structured adaptability links stakeholder feedback, organisational resilience, CSO performance and mission performance.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on CSO governance, organisational innovation and resilience. Section 3 explains the qualitative methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical findings, while Section 5 develops the stakeholder-centric governance innovation model and theoretical propositions. Sections 6 and 7 outline the practical implications, recommendations, limitations and conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework for CSO Governance

2.1.1 Stakeholder Theory and Nonprofit Contexts

Stakeholder theory explains why organisations must attend to groups that affect, or are affected by, their activities (Freeman, 1984). In CSOs, these groups include beneficiaries, donors, staff, volunteers, partner organisations, regulators and communities. Stakeholder engagement is therefore central to legitimacy, accountability and mission performance. However, recent stakeholder scholarship also shows that meaningful engagement requires more than consultation; stakeholders must have credible avenues to influence decisions (Kujala et al., 2022). This is difficult for resource-constrained CSOs because stakeholder power is uneven and donor accountability often carries stronger consequences than beneficiary voice.

2.1.2 Institutional Theory and Legitimacy in CSOs

Institutional theory explains how organisations respond to external expectations to secure legitimacy and resources (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For CSOs, institutional pressures stem from donors, regulators, professional norms and cultural expectations. These pressures may prompt the adoption of formal governance practices that appear legitimate but are not always suited to local conditions (Appe & Pallas, 2020). The key issue is therefore how CSOs translate external accountability principles into governance practices that remain locally workable, mission-supportive and credible to stakeholders, consistent with strategic responses to institutional pressure (Oliver, 1991).

2.1.3 Stewardship Approaches to Governance

Stewardship theory complements control-oriented governance by emphasising trust, intrinsic motivation and mission commitment (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). This perspective suits CSOs, as leaders often act on social purpose rather than financial incentives. However, stewardship still requires accountability. Boards must support mission-led leadership while ensuring transparency, responsible resource use and stakeholder responsiveness. In this study, accountable stewardship explains how leadership discretion can remain both flexible and answerable.

2.1.4 Synthesising Perspectives

Together, stakeholder, institutional and stewardship theories explain whose claims matter, why some expectations become more powerful and how mission-led leaders exercise judgement under constraint. This article integrates these perspectives through structured adaptability, defined as the capacity to combine formal accountability with context-sensitive discretion. The concept provides the theoretical basis for examining how CSOs translate external requirements, engage stakeholders and preserve mission relevance under resource constraints.

2.2 Organisational Innovation and Process Improvement

The innovation literature increasingly recognises that innovation encompasses new or significantly improved organisational processes, as well as products and technologies. The Oslo Manual defines innovation as implementing new or improved products or processes that differ significantly from previous practices and are put into use within an organisation (OECD/Eurostat, 2018). This broader view matters for CSOs because many social-purpose organisations innovate through governance, accountability, stakeholder coordination, and resource-use practices rather than technological invention.

Organisational innovation changes how organisations structure work, allocate authority, coordinate relationships and learn from their environments. In CSOs, governance innovation reshapes decision-making routines, accountability systems, board practices, stakeholder participation, and the use of feedback in strategic decision-making. Its value lies in strengthening adaptability, responsiveness, legitimacy and performance in mission-driven settings, where organisational mission can play an important role in shaping nonprofit innovation (McDonald, 2007).

A governance innovation perspective is particularly relevant where organisations have limited funding, staffing or technology. In such contexts, innovation often stems from redesigning existing routines: integrating beneficiary voice into board oversight, adapting donor reporting to include learning indicators, creating hybrid consultation structures and using stakeholder feedback to guide budgets and programmes. These are process innovations because they alter how governance work is performed and how organisational knowledge is translated into action (OECD/Eurostat, 2018).

This distinction is important because not every governance adjustment constitutes organisational innovation. Routine adaptation refers to minor compliance responses that help an organisation continue existing practices, such as completing donor templates or holding required meetings without changing how decisions are made. Governance innovation is present only when adaptation results in a new or significantly improved process that differs from previous practice and is brought into organisational use, such as creating feedback-to-action routines, redesigning board oversight around stakeholder evidence or integrating beneficiary input into reporting and resource-allocation decisions.

Structured adaptability bridges the innovation literature and CSO governance theory. It explains how governance innovation occurs when organisations redesign accountability arrangements while retaining flexibility for local interpretation, stakeholder learning and mission-centred judgement. In resource-constrained CSOs, innovation is therefore expressed through adaptive reporting, consultation routines, board review practices, feedback-to-action processes and decision criteria that keep organisations accountable, resilient and performance-oriented.

2.3 Organisational Resilience in Resource-Constrained CSOs

Organisational resilience is the capacity to anticipate disruption, absorb shocks, adapt operations and continue delivering value in uncertain conditions. In the non-profit sector, resilience is particularly important because CSOs often face unstable funding, rising stakeholder expectations, regulatory scrutiny and limited administrative capacity. Resilience scholarship emphasises adaptation, learning and renewal as dynamic organisational capabilities rather than simple crisis recovery (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). For CSOs, resilience therefore depends on governance systems, stakeholder relationships, leadership practices and the ability to reconfigure resources while maintaining mission relevance.

For Botswana's CSOs, resilience is better understood as the capacity to "bounce forward" rather than return to a previous state. Many organisations operate with limited reserves, small staff and donor dependence, making recovery alone insufficient. Resilience occurs when CSOs learn from disruption, adjust governance routines, strengthen stakeholder relationships and redesign accountability practices to remain legitimate, responsive and mission-focused.

Resilience also has a relational dimension. Trust-based relationships with beneficiaries, donors, boards, regulators, staff and community partners provide information, legitimacy and support during periods of disruption. Stakeholder engagement, transparent reporting, board involvement and community consultation therefore serve as resilience resources, helping CSOs detect risks, interpret expectations and mobilise support.

This article treats resilience as both an outcome and a mechanism of governance innovation. It is an outcome because structured adaptability helps CSOs withstand funding shifts, institutional pressures and stakeholder conflict. It is a mechanism because resilient governance systems create feedback loops that enable organisations to learn, adapt and improve. In innovation terms, resilience enables CSOs to move from reactive survival to purposeful renewal through reconfigured routines and locally appropriate accountability practices.

Examples of resilience-driven innovation include redesigning donor reporting to incorporate community feedback, establishing community advisory groups, combining board decisions with local consultation, and sharing staff, training or monitoring tools during funding gaps. These examples show that resilience-driven innovation is often incremental, emerging as CSOs modify routines, relationships and accountability channels to keep programmes relevant amid uncertainty.

In summary, resilience-driven innovation occurs when CSOs treat disruption as a catalyst for governance learning and redesign. Funding gaps, donor requirements, stakeholder conflict and operational constraints can prompt improvements in consultation, reporting, partnership coordination and strategic decision-making. This makes resilience an active innovation capability that supports accountability, legitimacy and mission performance in uncertain conditions.

2.4 Empirical Studies on CSO Governance

Empirical studies on CSO governance highlight three issues relevant to Botswana: stakeholder engagement, governance under resource constraints, and the need to balance accountability with flexibility. Although this literature has expanded, developing-country contexts remain underexamined.

Studies generally link purposeful stakeholder engagement to organisational effectiveness. Wellens and Jegers (2014) found that beneficiary engagement in governance supported mission alignment and programme outcomes, while Viader and Espina (2014) linked stakeholder representation on non-profit boards to organisational legitimacy. These findings suggest that stakeholder voice matters when it is connected to governance decisions rather than treated as symbolic consultation.

Empirical research also shows that stakeholder governance is difficult to implement under constraints. Maier and Meyer (2011) found that NGOs may express commitment to stakeholder engagement while failing to embed it in practice. In South Africa, Iwu et al. (2015) found that NGOs valued stakeholder involvement but often prioritised donors due to resource dependence. These studies highlight the importance of capacity, funding and accountability in shaping engagement practice.

Research in developing-country contexts further highlights tensions between imported governance models and local participatory norms. CSOs often have to reconcile donor reporting requirements, formal board structures and regulatory requirements with community-based consultation. In Botswana, limited empirical work points to the relevance of the kgotla tradition, board capacity and donor-related governance pressures (Lekorwe & Mpabanga, 2007). This suggests the need for context-sensitive governance approaches that preserve accountability while remaining locally legitimate and operationally feasible.

Overall, the literature establishes the importance of stakeholder engagement, institutional legitimacy, stewardship and resilience, but offers limited explanation of how CSOs balance accountability and adaptability in resource-constrained contexts such as Botswana. This study addresses that gap by developing a stakeholder-centric governance innovation model centred on structured adaptability.

This literature establishes the theoretical need for a governance innovation lens but leaves open how such innovation is enacted in everyday CSO practice. The methodology therefore focuses on leaders' and board members' accounts of stakeholder engagement, accountability routines and adaptive decision-making in Botswana's CSO sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Setting

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretivist, theory-building design to examine how civil society organisations (CSOs) in Botswana enact structured adaptability in governance practice. This design was appropriate because the study focused on leaders' and board members' accounts of stakeholder engagement, accountability routines, adaptive decision-making and the interpretation of institutional pressures within specific organisational contexts (Ponterotto, 2005). It also suited the paper's innovation focus by enabling governance redesign, process innovation and organisational-system change to be examined as practice-based phenomena.

The study was conducted among CSOs based in Gaborone, Botswana, using a cross-sectional design and semi-structured interviews at a single point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The unit of analysis was the CSO governance system, defined as the configuration of board oversight, leadership decision-making, stakeholder engagement, accountability routines and adaptive practices through which organisations respond to governance demands.

Participants were selected through purposive theoretical sampling to capture variation in governance capacity, stakeholder engagement, institutional pressure and mission-centred leadership (Patton, 2022). The sample comprised 24 CSOs across health research, rehabilitation, education, human rights, environmental advocacy, human development, HIV/AIDS services and gender-based violence prevention. The organisations also varied in size, maturity and registration status, enabling comparison across different governance conditions.

The participant group comprised fourteen chief executive officers, four senior executives and six board members, offering both managerial and board-level governance perspectives. Twelve CSOs were registered with BOCONGO, eight with the Registrar of Societies and four with BOCOBONET, enabling governance expectations to be examined across different organisational and institutional settings.

Sample adequacy was assessed using theoretical saturation, a common qualitative criterion for judging whether additional data are likely to yield substantially new insights (Guest et al., 2006). After 24 interviews, recurring patterns were evident across the data, and further interviews were unlikely to yield major new insights into stakeholder engagement, institutional pressure, accountability or structured adaptability.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed accounts of governance practice. The interview guide covered organisational background, governance structures, stakeholder engagement, accountability mechanisms, implementation challenges, and strategies for balancing formal requirements with operational flexibility. Probes explored how participants interpreted conflicting stakeholder demands and adapted to donor, regulatory, and community expectations.

Interviews were conducted in person, lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and were recorded with participants' consent. Data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, with NVivo Version 11 supporting coding, retrieval and cross-case comparison. Coding combined inductive analysis with theoretically informed interpretation, allowing themes to emerge from the data while remaining connected to stakeholder, institutional and stewardship theories.

Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the research purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw. Consent was obtained before interviews were conducted and recorded. Participant identities and organisational identifiers were anonymised, and interview data were handled securely and used solely for this study.

3.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was strengthened using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was supported through detailed interviews, triangulation of executive and board perspectives, and member checking of transcripts and preliminary findings. Transferability was supported through a contextual description of the study setting, participants and organisational characteristics.

Dependability was addressed through an audit trail documenting methodological decisions, coding iterations and theme development. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexivity and transparent documentation of how interpretations were derived from the data. These procedures provided a rigorous basis for developing the stakeholder-centric governance innovation model and for explaining structured adaptability as a governance innovation capability.

4. RESULTS

The results are based on 24 semi-structured interviews with leaders and board members from 24 CSOs. They are organised around four themes: stakeholder engagement and accountability practices, challenges in balancing stakeholder expectations, institutional pressures and contextual translation, and mission relevance and performance.

4.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability Practices

Stakeholder engagement practices varied across Botswana's CSOs. Larger, more formalised organisations used board representation, advisory committees, consultations, feedback surveys, community forums and differentiated reporting channels. Smaller CSOs relied more on informal relationships and ad hoc engagement, often without systematically documenting stakeholder input or providing feedback to communities.

A consistent finding was the dominance of upward accountability to donors over downward accountability to beneficiaries. Donor reporting received greater attention because funding continuity depended on compliance, whereas beneficiary feedback often lacked comparable enforcement power. Some CSOs nevertheless linked community voice to governance decisions through advisory groups and beneficiary-informed planning and reporting channels that compared donor requirements with local needs.

Stakeholder engagement appeared to become a governance innovation when feedback informed planning, reporting, resource allocation and programme oversight. Examples included beneficiary feedback registers reviewed by boards, donor-beneficiary accountability dashboards, escalation pathways for community concerns, post-project learning reviews and advisory structures linked to proposal development. These practices appeared to support programme relevance, service uptake, accountability quality, compliance readiness and mission impact.

4.2 Challenges in Balancing Stakeholder Expectations

Participants reported persistent difficulty in balancing the expectations of donors, beneficiaries, communities, regulators and partner organisations. The problem was not only that stakeholder claims differed, but that they carried unequal organisational consequences. Donor requirements were often prioritised because they affected funding and legitimacy, whereas beneficiary and community expectations were channelled through less formal and less powerful channels.

Resource constraints intensified these tensions. Limited staff, time and funding made it difficult to engage all stakeholders equally, forcing leaders to prioritise between donor compliance and community responsiveness. Cultural, linguistic and power differences added further complexity, as community stakeholders often preferred informal dialogue, whereas donors expected documented meetings, attendance records and formal reports.

These pressures appeared to create demand for governance innovation. CSOs described the need for routines to prioritise feedback, balance donor and beneficiary claims, escalate community concerns and link stakeholder evidence to board decisions. Examples included feedback-prioritisation criteria, donor-beneficiary reporting matrices, board stakeholder reviews and adaptive planning routines. These practices appeared to support faster decision-making, reduce administrative waste, protect funding credibility and strengthen downward accountability.

4.3 Institutional Pressures and Contextual Translation

CSOs operated under overlapping institutional pressures from donors, regulators, professional standards and local cultural expectations. Regulatory requirements were often perceived as vague or inconsistently enforced, whereas donor requirements were more immediate because they affected funding continuity. Professional standards and donor templates also encouraged formal governance structures that did not always align with local organisational capacity.

CSOs responded through contextual translation rather than simple compliance. They upheld the accountability principles underpinning donor and regulatory requirements while adapting their approach to local capacity, mission priorities and stakeholder expectations. Examples included simplified reporting templates, adapted committee structures and hybrid consultation forums that combined formal governance expectations with community-based dialogue.

Institutional fit appeared to matter as much as institutional conformity. Contextual translation appeared to reduce compliance overload, preserve service focus and strengthen legitimacy among external and local stakeholders. The results suggest that selective adaptation, creative compliance and hybrid governance can be understood as non-technological governance innovations.

4.4 Mission Relevance and Performance

Participants identified three main mechanisms for sustaining mission relevance under external pressure: values-based leadership, strategic planning and explicit decision criteria. These mechanisms helped CSOs assess whether donor, regulatory or partner demands advanced the mission, could be adapted, or risked diverting attention from core beneficiaries.

Values and planning underpinned mission-centred judgement. Boards and senior managers used mission statements, strategic priorities and stakeholder needs to assess external expectations. Decision criteria helped leaders determine which activities to accept, adapt or decline, particularly when funding opportunities did not fully align with organisational purpose.

These findings provide the empirical basis for the stakeholder-centric governance innovation model. They suggest that structured adaptability may operate when CSOs convert stakeholder feedback, accountability pressures and resource constraints into redesigned governance routines that support legitimacy, resilience and mission-centred performance.

5. DISCUSSION

Drawing on evidence from 24 interviews across 24 CSOs, the discussion interprets structured adaptability as a governance innovation capability. The results suggest that CSO governance in Botswana depends on balancing formal accountability with local responsiveness. Rather than treating accountability and flexibility as opposing demands, effective governance may require structured discretion, contextual translation and stakeholder feedback as sources of organisational learning. This extends stakeholder, institutional and stewardship perspectives by suggesting how these logics combine under resource constraints.

The findings clarify the potential innovative significance of stakeholder feedback. Feedback may become innovative when it changes governance routines rather than remaining symbolic consultation. Beneficiary registers, donor-beneficiary reporting matrices, board stakeholder reviews and adaptive planning routines illustrate how CSOs may translate stakeholder evidence into new accountability and decision-making practices. Governance innovation is therefore presented as non-technological, process-based and closely linked to organisational performance.

The results also suggest that resilience can be understood as a governance capability, not merely a crisis response. CSOs appeared more resilient when disruption prompted learning, revised accountability routines and stronger stakeholder relationships. This aligns with resilience scholarship that views adaptation, learning and renewal as dynamic organisational capabilities, while suggesting how resilience may be produced through governance redesign in resource-constrained CSOs.

5.1 Stakeholder-Centric Organisational Innovation Model

Building on the results, the stakeholder-centric governance innovation model explains how CSOs translate plural accountability pressures into locally legitimate and mission-relevant practices. The model is centred on structured adaptability, integrating accountability, contextual flexibility, stakeholder feedback, and mission-centred judgement in contexts of donor dependence, institutional plurality, resource constraints, and stakeholder inequality.

Empirically, the model draws on repeated cross-case patterns across the 24 interviews rather than a single organisational example. Participants described recurring governance problems—uneven stakeholder influence, donor-driven accountability pressures, limited administrative capacity and the need to protect mission relevance—and also reported practical responses such as beneficiary feedback registers, donor-beneficiary reporting matrices, adapted committee structures, board stakeholder reviews and mission-based decision criteria. These recurring practices provide empirical support for the model by suggesting how structured adaptability may operate as a pattern of governance redesign across different CSO types, sizes and registration settings.

From an innovation perspective, structured adaptability helps explain how governance constraints may translate into practical innovation outputs. Donor pressure, resource scarcity, stakeholder conflict and institutional ambiguity may trigger redesigned accountability routines, stakeholder feedback systems, board oversight practices and locally legitimate decision-making processes. This aligns with the innovation literature, which recognises new or improved organisational processes as innovation (OECD/Eurostat, 2018), and with resilience scholarship, which frames adaptation, learning and renewal as dynamic organisational capabilities under uncertainty (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Structured adaptability may therefore move CSOs beyond reactive compliance by integrating resilience, stakeholder engagement and accountability into governance innovations that support legitimacy, responsiveness and mission-centred performance.

The model contributes to stakeholder, institutional and stewardship theories. It extends stakeholder theory through capacity-conditioned salience by suggesting that stakeholder influence depends not only on legitimacy, urgency and power but also on organisational capacity and donor dependence. It extends institutional theory through contextual translation by indicating how CSOs may retain external accountability principles while adapting governance forms to local realities. It extends stewardship theory through accountable stewardship by explaining how mission-led discretion may become more effective when supported by board oversight, stakeholder accountability and transparent decision criteria.

The model is organised around seven principles that translate structured adaptability into practical governance design. These principles link leadership judgement, board oversight and nonprofit management to stakeholder feedback, governance redesign, organisational resilience, CSO performance and mission performance.

1. **Contextual appropriateness:** Governance structures may be adapted to Botswana's cultural norms, regulatory requirements and resource constraints where such adaptation preserves accountability and mission relevance.
2. **Balanced accountability:** Governance arrangements may help balance upward accountability to donors and regulators with downward accountability to beneficiaries and communities when both forms of accountability are made visible in decision-making.
3. **Meaningful stakeholder engagement:** Stakeholder processes may create opportunities for diverse groups to influence mission-relevant decisions where participation is linked to governance routines and organisational learning.
4. **Mission primacy:** Governance processes may help CSOs assess external demands against organisational mission, stakeholder needs and available resources.
5. **Adaptive accountability:** Governance arrangements can provide accountability guidance while allowing context-sensitive responses to emerging needs and unexpected challenges.

6. **Resource sensitivity:** Governance approaches may reflect organisational capacity and use stakeholder feedback to guide how limited resources are adapted or redirected.
7. **Resilience orientation:** Governance systems may support CSOs in anticipating disruption, learning from changing conditions and sustaining mission performance through stakeholder engagement, feedback loops and collaborative adaptation.

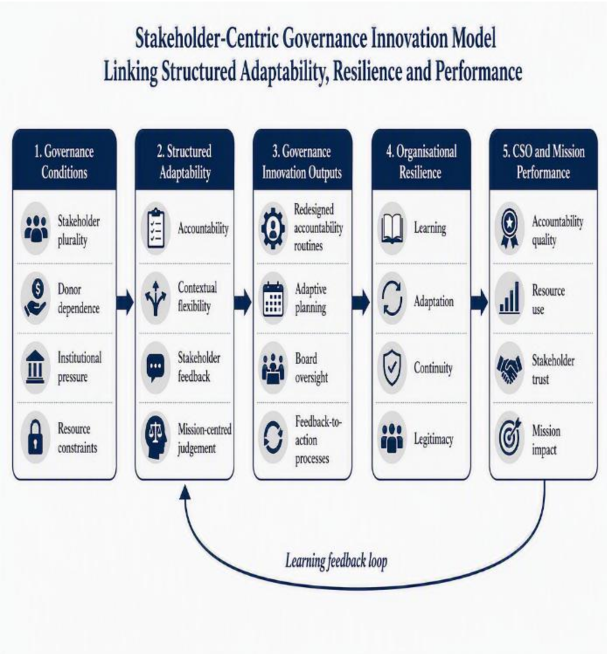

Figure 1. Stakeholder-Centric Governance Innovation Model Linking Structured Adaptability, Resilience and Performance

Figure 1 presents the model as an innovation pathway. Governance conditions—stakeholder plurality, donor dependence, institutional pressure and resource constraints—create the need for structured adaptability. Through this mechanism, CSOs may translate stakeholder feedback into governance innovation by redesigning accountability routines, adopting adaptive planning, strengthening board oversight and implementing feedback-to-action processes. These innovations may strengthen organisational resilience through learning, adaptation, continuity and legitimacy, and may support CSO and mission performance through enhanced accountability quality, resource use, stakeholder trust and mission impact. This performance link aligns with non-profit governance research suggesting that accountability arrangements, board practices, and stakeholder relationships shape organisational effectiveness (Brown, 2005). The learning feedback loop suggests how performance outcomes may generate new stakeholder insights that sustain governance innovation over time.

5.2 Theoretical Propositions

The nine propositions suggest how structured adaptability may enable capacity-conditioned salience, support contextual translation, strengthen accountable stewardship, and convert stakeholder feedback into governance innovation linked to resilience and performance.

1. **Proposition 1: *Structured adaptability* and governance effectiveness.** CSOs may be better positioned to sustain effective governance when formal accountability mechanisms are combined with leadership discretion that supports context-sensitive responses to stakeholder and institutional demands.
2. **Proposition 2: *Capacity-conditioned salience*.** In resource-constrained nonprofit organisations, stakeholder influence is likely shaped not only by legitimacy, urgency, and power, but also by organisational capacity and dependence on external funding.
3. **Proposition 3: Unequal accountability consequences.** Downward accountability to beneficiaries may be more difficult to sustain when upward accountability to donors carries more immediate organisational consequences for funding, legitimacy and survival.
4. **Proposition 4: Contextual translation.** CSOs may be more likely to preserve legitimacy and mission relevance when they translate external accountability principles into locally appropriate governance practices rather than adopting external templates unchanged.
5. **Proposition 5: Feedback-driven governance innovation.** CSOs may be more likely to develop adaptive and legitimate governance systems when stakeholder feedback is systematically converted into revised decisions, accountability routines and board oversight practices.
6. **Proposition 6: Governance innovation and CSO performance.** Feedback-driven governance innovation may contribute to CSO performance where revised routines strengthen organisational resilience, accountability quality, stakeholder responsiveness and mission-centred resource use.
7. **Proposition 7: Governance innovation and mission performance.** Governance innovation may support mission performance where feedback-driven routines reduce mission drift, align resources with beneficiary needs and translate stakeholder learning into mission-relevant decisions.
8. **Proposition 8: Accountable stewardship.** Mission-led leadership may strengthen nonprofit governance when board oversight creates structured spaces for discretion, enabling leaders to exercise judgement while

remaining answerable to stakeholders and organisational purpose.

9. **Proposition 9: Hybrid governance and local legitimacy.** CSOs may be better positioned to balance donor expectations, community voice and mission responsiveness when formal governance mechanisms are combined with locally legitimate consultative practices.

Collectively, the propositions present nonprofit governance as an adaptive process that structures discretion, balances plural accountability and builds legitimacy under constraint. They show how stakeholder voice, contextual translation, mission-centred judgement and feedback-driven innovation generate organisational resilience, CSO performance and mission performance. The next section consolidates these contributions.

5.3 Summary of Key Theoretical Contributions

In summary, the article introduces structured adaptability as a governance innovation capability that explains how CSOs convert resource constraints, donor dependence, stakeholder plurality and institutional pressure into redesigned accountability routines, feedback systems, board oversight practices and adaptive decisions. It extends stakeholder theory through capacity-conditioned salience, institutional theory through contextual translation and stewardship theory through accountable stewardship. It also frames CSO governance innovation as a non-technological, feedback-driven process that links stakeholder learning to organisational resilience, CSO performance and mission performance.

The theoretical model and propositions have implications for how CSO leaders, boards, donors, policymakers and capacity-building organisations support adaptive governance in practice. The following section translates the model into practical guidance for strengthening accountability, stakeholder responsiveness, resilience and mission performance.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The stakeholder-centric governance innovation model offers practical guidance for strengthening CSO governance under resource constraints and institutional plurality. Its central implication is that structured adaptability should be used as a practical innovation pathway, not as a fixed compliance model. Through this approach, CSOs can convert stakeholder feedback into governance redesign, build organisational resilience, and improve both organisational and mission performance.

6.1 Implications for CSO Leaders and Boards

CSO leaders and boards should make stakeholder-centric governance innovation more deliberate and proportionate. Smaller organisations can start with low-cost consultation, reflection meetings and simple feedback logs, while larger CSOs can formalise advisory committees, board-level stakeholder representation and accountability reporting. In all cases, stakeholder engagement should inform mission-relevant decisions rather than impose a procedural burden.

6.2 Implications for Donors, Development Partners and Policymakers

Donors, development partners and policymakers should support accountability arrangements that are enabling, proportionate and contextually grounded. Donors should preserve transparency and responsible resource use while allowing CSOs to adapt reporting, consultation and oversight mechanisms to Botswana's institutional and cultural context. Policymakers should clarify minimum governance expectations and recognise local consultative traditions that strengthen legitimacy, participation and mission responsiveness.

6.3 Implications for Capacity Building and Sector Learning

Capacity-building organisations and CSO networks should provide practical tools that embed structured adaptability in everyday governance routines. Locally relevant training, templates and peer-learning platforms can help CSOs develop stakeholder maps, accountability matrices, mission-alignment tools, board review routines and beneficiary feedback systems. Such support can strengthen governance capacity without compromising responsiveness.

6.4 Implications for Performance and Resilience

The main performance implication is that stakeholder feedback should be treated as a continuous management resource. When feedback informs programme design, budgeting, reporting, partnership management and board oversight, stakeholder engagement becomes a performance system that improves service relevance, the quality of accountability, resource use, legitimacy and organisational learning. The resilience implication is that disruption should be used as a trigger for learning and redesign. Funding delays, service interruptions and stakeholder conflict can prompt CSOs to review reporting routines, adapt partnerships, strengthen consultation and refine programme priorities.

Overall, structured adaptability offers a practical pathway to turning governance pressures into stakeholder learning, governance innovation, organisational resilience, CSO performance and mission performance.

7. SUMMARY, CONTRIBUTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This final section consolidates the article's summary of findings, empirical and theoretical contributions, practical recommendations, limitations and future research directions. It also draws the article to a close by showing how structured adaptability helps CSOs connect stakeholder feedback, accountability, organisational resilience and performance under conditions of resource constraints and institutional plurality.

7.1 Summary of Findings

The study suggests that Botswana's CSOs balance accountability and flexibility through structured adaptability: the capacity to formalise accountability, preserve mission-centred judgement and adapt governance practices to stakeholder and institutional conditions. This may enable organisations to respond to donor requirements, resource constraints and community expectations while safeguarding mission focus.

The findings also indicate that stakeholder engagement is shaped by organisational size, capacity, and funding dependence. Larger CSOs used more formal engagement systems, while smaller CSOs relied mainly on informal relationships. Across the sample, upward accountability to donors appeared to carry greater consequences than downward accountability to beneficiaries, highlighting the need for governance routines that make stakeholder feedback visible in decision-making.

The study also indicates that CSOs do not merely comply with donor, regulatory and professional pressures. They appear to translate external requirements into locally appropriate governance systems through simplified reporting, adapted board routines, hybrid consultation and mission-based decision criteria. These practices illustrate governance innovation by redesigning accountability and decision-making processes in ways that may strengthen legitimacy, resilience and performance.

7.2 Contributions

The article offers empirical, theoretical and practical contributions. Empirically, it indicates how Botswana's CSOs may use structured adaptability to respond to donor dependence, stakeholder plurality, resource constraints and institutional pressure. Theoretically, it positions structured adaptability as a governance-innovation capability within scholarship on non-profit management, leadership and organisational innovation. Practically, it identifies governance routines that may help CSOs convert stakeholder feedback into accountability improvement, resilience and mission-centred performance.

By extending stakeholder theory through capacity-conditioned salience, institutional theory through contextual translation, and stewardship theory through accountable stewardship, the article offers a way to explain how CSOs may translate governance pressures into locally legitimate and mission-relevant practices. These concepts connect stakeholder feedback, organisational resilience, CSO performance, and mission performance within a single governance innovation model.

7.3 Recommendations

The recommendations translate this model into four priorities. First, CSO leaders and boards should systematise stakeholder-centred governance through stakeholder mapping, proportionate governance systems, mission-based decision criteria and routines for learning from disruption. Second, donors and development partners should preserve accountability while enabling contextual adaptation and supporting governance capacity, stakeholder engagement and organisational learning. Third, policymakers and regulators should clarify minimum standards, apply proportionate regulation and recognise local consultative traditions that may strengthen legitimacy and participation. Fourth, capacity-building organisations and CSO networks should provide locally relevant tools, peer-learning platforms and evidence of governance innovation. Together, these actions may help turn stakeholder feedback into governance innovation that supports resilience, CSO performance and mission performance.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study has limitations that present opportunities for future research. First, the sample was limited to Gaborone-based CSOs; future studies should examine rural and remote organisations, where stakeholder relationships and resource conditions may differ.

Second, the study reflects the perspectives of leaders and board members. Future research should include beneficiaries, donors, government officials and community actors to compare how different stakeholders experience accountability, participation and governance innovation.

Third, the cross-sectional design captures governance practice at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies could examine how structured adaptability develops, how feedback-driven governance innovation evolves, and how these processes influence resilience, CSO performance and mission performance over time.

Future research could also compare CSO governance across African countries and examine how traditional consultative practices can be integrated with contemporary accountability systems. Comparative and longitudinal studies would help to test and refine the model across diverse funding arrangements, stakeholder environments and institutional settings.

7.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, based on evidence from 24 interviews across 24 CSOs, this article suggests that structured adaptability may help CSOs combine accountability, contextual flexibility, stakeholder feedback and mission-centred leadership under conditions of resource constraints, donor dependence and institutional plurality. Capacity-conditioned salience, contextual translation and accountable stewardship offer a way to explain how governance pressures can be converted into locally legitimate and mission-relevant practices. From an innovation perspective, structured adaptability appears to turn disruption, stakeholder pressure and external accountability demands into redesigned routines for decision-making, reporting, board oversight and adaptive planning. These feedback-driven innovations may strengthen organisational resilience and support CSO and mission performance by improving accountability, resource use, mission alignment and stakeholder trust. The article therefore reframes resource-constrained CSOs as potential sites of non-technological governance innovation, showing how adaptive accountability, stakeholder learning and mission-centred redesign can contribute to resilience and performance in social-purpose organisations.

From the perspective of organisational innovation, the findings indicate that structured adaptability can serve as a mechanism for continuous process improvement. Stakeholder feedback and external pressures become innovation inputs when they lead to redesigned decision-making, reporting, planning, accountability and oversight routines. Thus, the contribution of the study extends beyond nonprofit governance by showing how non-technological organisational process innovation can support resilience, resource use and organisational performance in resource-constrained CSOs.

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