



Civil Society in a Developmental State: A Longitudinal Case Study of CCOAIB in Rwanda (1987–2025)

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Abstract— This study examines the Conseil de Concertation des Organisations d'Appui aux Initiatives de Base (CCOAIB), a national umbrella civil society organization in Rwanda, tracing its evolution from 1987 to 2025. Employing a qualitative, instrumental case study design based on Robert K. Yin's approach, the study draws on a systematic review of national policy frameworks, institutional reports, and CCOAIB's archival and program documents. Thematic analysis was applied to trace patterns of adaptation, strategic positioning, and impact. Findings show that CCOAIB transitioned from a humanitarian actor to a recognized policy partner by institutionalizing complementary state-civil society relations. Key achievements include training 8,255 smallholder farmers (52% women) in climate-resilient practices, creating 442 green jobs (82% women, 57% youth), establishing 16 farmers' networks, and influencing the national agriculture budget to reach nearly 13% in 2013–14. The organization consulted over 120 NGOs to shape Rwanda's NGO Law No. 058/2024 and implemented participatory Imihigo in 12 districts, engaging 13,482 farmers in policy planning. CCOAIB strengthened 42 CSOs, trained 316 local leaders and 100 Master Farmers, and mobilized over 300 million RWF through a donor roundtable. The findings demonstrate that umbrella CSOs can effectively complement state-led development while maintaining constructive accountability roles within guided civic spaces.

Keywords— Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Rwanda, CCOAIB, State-Society Relations, Umbrella Organizations, Participatory Governance, Policy Advocacy, Capacity Building.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextual Background

Rwanda's post-genocide development trajectory stands as one of the most remarkable examples of national transformation in the 21st century. The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, which claimed over one million lives and devastated the country's social, political, and institutional fabric, marked a profound rupture. In the aftermath, Rwanda embarked on a state-led reconstruction process characterized by strong economic growth, significant poverty reduction, and far-reaching governance reforms. Between 2000 and 2019, average annual economic growth reached 7.2 percent, while poverty declined from 58.9 percent to 38.2 percent between 2000 and 2023 (World Bank, 2023; NISR, 2023).

Central to this recovery has been the deliberate integration of civil society organizations (CSOs) into national development frameworks, positioning them as key partners in rebuilding communities and delivering essential services. Over the last three decades, CSOs have cemented this role, evolving from emergency responders to essential partners in national development. As noted during the 2024 CSO Week, "for three decades, the civil society has been an essential partner in Rwanda's development journey," with over 2,400 local CSOs and more than 170 international NGOs currently operating nationwide.

The Rwanda Civil Society Barometer (RCSB) 2023, a collaborative effort between the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provides a systematic assessment of this landscape. The findings reveal a robust and effective sector, with CSO Impact and Effectiveness scoring the highest at 84.24%, followed by Participation and Inclusiveness at 78.76%, Governance and Values at 73.09%, and the CSO Environment at 73.08%.

Within this broader context, CCOAIB provides a compelling case for understanding the adaptive capacities of Rwandan civil society. Established in 1987 as a coordination platform for twelve grassroots organizations, CCOAIB has evolved across distinct historical phases: from a pre-genocide consultative body, through humanitarian response and post-genocide recovery, to a strategic development partner engaged in advocacy and policy processes. Today, it operates as a national umbrella network of 42 member organizations across all 30 districts of Rwanda.

CCOAIB fulfills four core functions: capacity building, networking, information and documentation, and evidence-based advocacy. As an umbrella organization, it plays a critical intermediary role by linking grassroots communities with national policy processes while strengthening coordination among its member organizations. This position enables CCOAIB to aggregate local priorities, amplify community voices, and contribute to more inclusive development outcomes across governance, livelihoods, agriculture, rural development, youth empowerment, and climate resilience.

1.2 Relevance of the Study

Civil society organizations play a critical yet often under-examined role in shaping governance and inclusive development outcomes in rapidly transforming states. In Rwanda, this role is particularly significant given the country's strong state-led development model and its commitment to long-term strategic frameworks such as Vision 2050, the National Strategy for Transformation (NST2), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article contributes to this discourse by presenting an in-depth case study of CCOAIB, a national umbrella organization that has evolved into a key intermediary actor linking grassroots organizations, citizens, and public institutions.

The article provides empirically grounded evidence on the functioning and impact of an intermediary civil society platform in a post-genocide, high-growth context. Drawing on longitudinal data and programmatic evidence, it documents how CCOAIB has expanded from a coalition of 12 grassroots NGOs into a coordinated network of 42 member organizations operating nationwide. Its interventions across governance, agriculture, climate resilience, and citizen participation demonstrate measurable outcomes, including direct engagement with over 32,000 community members.

Beyond descriptive analysis, the article advances an evidence-based argument regarding the strategic role of CSOs in policy influence and institutional strengthening. It highlights CCOAIB's contributions to increasing the national agriculture budget, its engagement in shaping Rwanda's NGO Law No. 058/2024, and its role in institutionalizing participatory governance mechanisms such as Imihigo performance contracts. These contributions position civil society not as a peripheral actor but as an integral component of policy ecosystems.

1.3 Research Questions

This study addresses the following core research questions:

1. How has CCOAIB successfully navigated the tension between being a government partner and an independent accountability actor within Rwanda's guided civic space?
2. What mechanisms link CCOAIB's evidence-based advocacy to measurable outcomes in national frameworks, and how does its policy influence compare across different sectors?
3. How has CCOAIB's transition from programmatic to project-based financing affected its strategic autonomy, staff retention, and long-term sustainability?
4. Through what mechanisms does CCOAIB's networking and capacity-building function translate into tangible community-level empowerment outcomes?
5. How does CCOAIB's 38-year trajectory compare with umbrella civil society organizations in other developmental states, and what theoretical refinements does this case generate?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Evolution of Civil Society in Rwanda

2.1.1 Civil Society Before the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda

The evolution of civil society organizations in Rwanda dates back to the colonial era, when early associational life took shape predominantly within Christian ecclesiastical structures. The Catholic Church played a formative role from 1956, establishing organizations such as Caritas, which engaged in local social welfare activities. Before 1994, associations, cooperatives, and church-based groups were collectively referred to as civil society organizations. These CSOs existed under the auspices of an authoritarian one-party state. Some progress was observed between 1980 and 1994, when the number of registered CSOs grew to 170, and the first human rights associations were created. Despite this progress, there was no clearly defined legal and regulatory framework, and CSOs were tightly controlled by the state. Moreover, CSOs were heavily dependent on international financial support. Therefore, CSOs' contribution to democratic governance and human rights promotion was almost non-existent.

2.1.2 Civil Society After the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda

The post-genocide period was characterized by an influx of CSOs, dominated mainly by international NGOs. Notably, there was an emergence of dynamic women's groups and associations at national and community levels. As of 2025, there are 2,400 civil society organizations registered and operating in Rwanda, comprising 2,230 national NGOs and 170 international NGOs (RGB, CSO Registry, 2025).

CSOs in Rwanda operate within a clearly defined legal and regulatory framework. The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda guarantees fundamental civil and political liberties, including the right to freedom of association and assembly (Articles 39 and 40). Key laws include Law No. 058/2024 Governing Non-Governmental Organizations, which repeals and consolidates earlier laws into a single framework, and Law No. 72/2018 Determining the Organization and Functioning of Faith-Based Organizations.

2.2 Contribution of Civil Society to Rwanda's Development

2.2.1 Economic Transformation (1995–2025)

From 1995 to 2005, CSOs were central to Rwanda's immediate post-genocide economic recovery, delivering emergency livelihoods, food security, and income-generating activities. Between 2006 and 2017, CSOs transitioned to structured economic development support under EDPRS I and II, with over 60% of registered CSOs implementing income-generation or agricultural productivity programs. In Fiscal Year 2009/10 alone, CSOs injected approximately RWF 254.8 billion into the national development budget (RGB, 2012). From 2018 to 2025, CSOs expanded their economic role towards inclusive, climate-resilient, and green transformation in alignment with NST1 and NST2.

2.2.2 Social Transformation (1995–2025)

From 1995 to 2005, CSOs were instrumental in rebuilding Rwanda's social service delivery systems, delivering essential health care, education, and psychosocial support. Between 2006 and 2017, social transformation became the dominant focus of CSO investment, with expenditures concentrated in health ($\approx 29.7\%$), social protection ($\approx 22.8\%$), education ($\approx 21.1\%$), and agriculture-nutrition linkages ($\approx 15.3\%$) (RCSP, 2020). From 2018 to 2025, CSOs have increasingly emphasized equity, quality, and inclusion, addressing gaps related to gender equality, youth employment, disability inclusion, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

2.2.3 Transformational Governance (1995–2025)

Between 2006 and 2017, CSOs evolved into structured governance actors, actively supporting decentralization, citizen accountability, human rights promotion, and policy dialogue. From 2018 to 2025, governance has become the most robustly measured pillar of CSO activity. According to the Rwanda Civil Society Barometer, CSOs achieved 84.24% effectiveness and impact and 78.76% participation and inclusiveness (RGB, 2023).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrative theoretical framework drawing on Social Capital Theory, Governance Theories, and Dependency Theory.

- **Social Capital Theory**, as articulated by Robert Putnam (1995) and Michael Woolcock (1998), posits that trust, reciprocity, and dense social networks are foundational resources enabling collective action and community development. This lens is particularly salient in Rwanda, where the 1994 Genocide severely eroded interpersonal trust and associational life. Within this recovery process, umbrella organizations such as CCOAIB play a critical role in reconstituting social capital through bonding (within member NGOs), bridging (across sectors and regions), and linking (between civil society and the state) social capital.
- **Governance Theories** illuminate how CSOs interact with the state, shape accountability mechanisms, and participate in policy dialogue within decentralized governance systems. **Dependency Theory** provides a critical lens for examining the persistent influence of international donors, whose financial and thematic priorities significantly shape organizational agendas and operational autonomy.

From an academic standpoint, civil society has been conceptualized through several theoretical traditions. Tocqueville viewed civil society associations as "schools of democracy," fostering social capital and civic virtues. Gramsci interpreted civil society as part of the superstructure where cultural hegemony is produced and contested. Habermas introduced the concept of the public sphere as a communicative space where citizens deliberate on matters of common concern. Contemporary scholars frame civil society as both an arena (a space for collective action), a set of actors (organizations and movements), and a set of values (such as solidarity, tolerance, and public-spiritedness).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design and Data Sources

This study uses a qualitative, long-term case study approach to understand how CCOAIB has developed between 1987 and 2025 within Rwanda's changing social, political, and development environment. The approach follows the case study method proposed by Robert K. Yin, which is useful for studying complex real-life situations. CCOAIB was selected as a representative umbrella organization for civil society organizations, making it a strong case for examining how such institutions evolve, engage in policy, and remain resilient over time.

Data were collected from a wide range of documents, including national development plans (Vision 2020, Vision 2050, NST1, NST2, and PSTA 4–5), reports from the Rwanda Governance Board, National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, United Nations Development Programme, and the World Bank, as well as CCOAIB's own reports and records. Using different types of sources helped cross-check information and improve the reliability of the findings.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a structured review of documents. Relevant materials were selected based on their importance to the study and their connection to CCOAIB's development over time. These documents were gathered from official sources and organizational records, then arranged in chronological order to track changes from 1987 to 2025. Each document was carefully reviewed to ensure reliability and relevance. Key information was then extracted using a consistent framework based on the study's main themes.

3.3 Analytical Approach

The study used thematic analysis to examine the data. This involved identifying key themes based on both predefined areas, such as capacity building, advocacy, networking, and information sharing, and new themes that emerged from the data, including organizational adaptation, state-civil society relationships, and long-term sustainability. Following Robert K. Yin's approach, the study compared patterns across sources and built explanations to understand how and why changes occurred over time. Information from different sources was cross-checked to improve accuracy.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The study followed standard ethical practices for research using secondary data. Since it relied only on existing documents, it did not pose risks to individuals. Care was taken to use information responsibly, especially when dealing with sensitive institutional data. Only publicly available or authorized documents were included. All sources were accurately reported, and findings were based on verifiable evidence.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Overview of CCOAIB

Since its establishment on March 10, 1987, CCOAIB has grown from a coalition of 12 Rwandan grassroots development organizations into a national umbrella network of 42 active member organizations operating across all 30 districts of Rwanda. Over nearly four decades, CCOAIB has maintained its mandate through four core functions: capacity building, networking, information and documentation, and evidence-based advocacy.

Guided by its vision of civil society organizations capable of fostering inclusive citizen participation for socio-economic development, CCOAIB's mission is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of its members to deliver quality services through evidence-based advocacy, networking, and citizen empowerment. Its strategic objectives include promoting exchange and cooperation among organizations, fulfilling its representational and advocacy mandate, contributing to civil society empowerment, supporting members in developing innovative initiatives, and expanding membership.

CCOAIB operates through several governance and management bodies, including the supreme organ; Executive Committee; Audit committee; Conflict resolution committee and the Secretariat. Complementing these structures are three thematic clusters: Economic, Social, and Governance.

4.2 Key Programmatic Achievements of CCOAIB (1987–2025)

Following its initial humanitarian response between 1995 and 2000, CCOAIB strategically transitioned toward long-term development programming focused on poverty reduction, democratization, and governance. The organization strengthened its institutional standing by securing legal personality through Ministerial Authorization No. A.M. n° 103/11 on 07/09/2004.

CCOAIB played a pivotal role in shaping Rwanda's civil society landscape by contributing to the creation of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) in 2004, which it chaired for three consecutive terms. The organization also created the Programme d'Observatoire des Elections au Rwanda (POER) during the country's first democratic elections in 2003 and launched the Programme d'Appui de la Société Civile au Processus Gacaca (PAPG) in 2005 to support transitional justice.

CCOAIB contributed substantively to national policy debates, including consultations that informed the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2005 and later participated in decentralization and public administration reforms (2006–2007).

4.2.1 Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

CCOAIB operationalized its mission through targeted initiatives with high governance and development impact:

- Strengthened 46 CSOs and trained 316 local leaders and 100 Master Farmers (52 women, 48 men)
- Empowered 8,255 smallholder farmers (52% women) in climate-resilient practices, reaching over 32,000 community members
- Created 442 green jobs (82% women, 57% youth) in SMEs supporting sustainable energy, agro-ecology, and irrigated cash-crop farming
- Trained 1,200 community leaders and engaged 800 community members in Imihigo planning
- Introduced innovative monitoring tools such as Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) and Pro-Poor Budgeting
- Established 16 farmers' networks, including 11 sector-level, 4 district-level, and 1 national-level
- The CCOAIB capacity-building program for Organizations Supporting Grassroots Initiatives (des Organisations d'Appui aux Initiatives de Base-OAIBs) has helped communities, associations, cooperatives, and local authorities better understand key laws on matrimonial regimes, succession, land, and expropriation for public interest. It also provided OAIBs with training modules and leaflets to support awareness, dissemination, and local ownership of this legal knowledge.
- While implementing its mission and acting as a de facto advisory body, CCOAIB invested in initiating advocacy in the agricultural sector and governance by launching actions to combat poverty and hunger in collaboration with partner coalitions. The Rwandan Civil Society Platform, created through the initiative of CCOAIB, is currently operational and comprises nine member coalitions.

- A total of 133 local NGOs were trained at both national and district levels on Law No. 04/2012 of 17 February 2012 governing the organization and functioning of Rwandan local NGOs. CCOAIB also facilitated consultations at provincial and national levels on the revision of this law by RGB, in which 124 NGOs participated. In this context, a delegation of 65 Rwandan civil society organizations, led by CCOAIB, met with RGB to present a position paper. In addition, 350 cooperative members benefiting from AVEGA, ARDR, FIOM Rwanda, and RWARRI in the Eastern Province were trained on civic participation and sustainable development, focusing on the four themes of EDPRS II.
- Trained **100 Master Farmers** (52 women, 48 men).
- Trained **1,200 community leaders** in social accountability tools (PETS, Pro-Poor Budgeting).
- Trained **60 community agricultural monitors** and **32 InfoDoc focal points** on public budget analysis.
- Trained **133 local NGOs** on NGO law and **38 CCOAIB managers** on advocacy techniques
- Established **agro-ecological demonstration plots** in 4 districts (Nyaruguru, Nyamagabe, Kirehe, Nyagatare).
- Over **200 master farmers** trained via demonstration plots (July–August 2023).
- Developed and disseminated: training manual on food security vulnerability mapping; toolkit of **12 fact sheets** on livestock value chains; illustrated citizen guide on decentralization, NAP, Girinka, Twigire Muhinzi, EDPRS II, NST1, gender mainstreaming, and PSTA4.
- Facilitated inter-member learning visits on agricultural value chains, hotel management, microfinance, and cereal processing.

4.2.2 Advocacy and Lobbying

CCOAIB actively influenced national policy frameworks through evidence-based engagement:

- Influenced the national agriculture budget to reach nearly 13% in 2013–2014
- Consulted over 120 NGOs to shape Rwanda's NGO Law No. 058/2024
- Conducted over 21 evidence-based studies and policy briefs
- Distributed 32,307 simplified policy documents, including PSTA-4 guides and National Agriculture Policy documents
- Trained 133 local NGOs and 38 CCOAIB managers in advocacy techniques
- Produced 800 manuals on gender-responsive agricultural practices
- CCOAIB has consistently facilitated high-level national policy dialogues bringing together key stakeholders, including government institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB), donor agencies, farmer cooperatives, and civil society organizations. These multi-stakeholder platforms have focused on critical policy areas such as agricultural commercialization, citizens' participation, Small-Scale Irrigation Technology, post-harvest handling, land governance, climate change adaptation, and rural transformation.
- Engaged **over 250 policymakers** at national and district levels on agriculture, climate change, and governance.
- Translated **120 Imihigo booklets** from English to Kinyarwanda for citizen participation in Muhanga, Gatsibo, Karongi.
- Advocated for revision of **National Agricultural Extension Strategy (SNVA)** and promoted “**Twigire Muhinzi**” program.
- Developed policy briefs on irrigation infrastructure management, validated by RAB & REMA with commitments to action.
- Influenced **PSTA5 (2024–2029)** commitments: rehabilitation of 3,000 ha irrigation annually; promotion of cooperative/private-sector management; IWUA capacity building.

4.2.3 Networking and Coordination

CCOAIB strengthened collaboration among civil society actors through:

- Pioneering the creation of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) and serving as first chair for three terms
- Organizing 41 member organizations into five thematic clusters for joint action
- Establishing 46 district-level coalitions linking CSOs, farmers, and government institutions
- Joining international networks such as CIVICUS, ICSW, and REPONGAC
- Stimulated creation of CLADHO (human rights) and PROFEMME-TWESE HAMWE (women's empowerment).
- Organized 42 OAIBs into 5 thematic clusters: Climate Change; Environmental Protection; Food Security & Horticulture; Good Governance; Youth Economic Empowerment (2 clusters).
- Established 46 district-level coalitions, linking 46 CSOs with 8,200+ smallholder farmers and government institutions.
- Formed 16 farmers' networks (11 sector-level, 4 district-level, 1 national).
- Active in Sector Working Groups (SWGs) and Joint Action Development Forum (JADF).
- Joined international networks: CIVICUS, ICSW, REPONGAC.
- Participated in joint advocacy consortium with 7 local NGOs led by Never Again Rwanda (NAR) on NST1 implementation.

4.2.4 Information and Documentation

CCOAIB enhanced citizen access to information through:

- Mobilizing over 300 million RWF through a donor roundtable in 2010
- Distributing 6,500 simplified citizen guides on decentralization
- Producing regular publications including "Gana Heza" and "Interactions"
- Upgrading its M&E database for enhanced communication and tracking
- Used Radio Huguka for community debates and development reporting.
- Produced "Gana Heza" information sheet and "Interactions" electronic bulletin.
- Distributed 8,000 copies of public guide on decentralization.
- Published assessment report on "Gaps, Challenges, Opportunities in Irrigation Infrastructure Management" (Dec 2023).
- Organized live radio talk shows and workshops on 2023–2024 Imihigo finalization.
- Upgraded Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Database for enhanced communication and information sharing.
- Successfully closed EU-funded Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA) Project (36 months, Oct 2020–Oct 2023) with Oxfam Germany, Oxfam UK/Rwanda, DUTERIMBERE ONG, positive results across 2 R-OM exercises, end-line survey, and 2 financial audits.

4.3 Governance, Citizen Participation, and Accountability

CCOAIB implemented participatory Imihigo across 12 districts, empowering citizens to monitor performance contracts and influence local budget priorities. Key achievements include:

- 13,482 farmers (44% women) engaged in public consultations integrated into district Imihigo
- 2,745 youth engaged in policy planning and evaluation processes
- 253 committee members and agronomists trained in social accountability tools
- 55 IWUA (Irrigation Water Users Association) participants benefited from learning visits for sustainable irrigation management.

4.4 Climate Resilience and Agriculture

CCOAIB's interventions strengthened adaptive capacity and income opportunities for rural households:

- Demonstration plots in Nyagatare showcased agro-ecological techniques, improving yields and resilience
- 4,965 youth and children engaged in climate awareness and resilience initiatives
- 5,306 farmers received early-warning meteorological information
- Implementation of the EU-funded Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA) Project with Oxfam Germany, Oxfam UK/Rwanda, and DUTERIMBERE
- Agro-ecological demonstration plots improved yields and climate adaptation, with replication by surrounding communities
- Promotion of Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Agriculture: CCOAIB supports member organizations in implementing sustainable agriculture models, agro-ecology, and climate-smart farming techniques targeting smallholder farmers.
- Inclusive Agricultural Planning and Governance: The organization advocates for the participation of civil society in decentralized agricultural planning processes, including community participation in Imihigo planning, Crop Intensification Program (CIP) evaluations, and farmer feedback mechanisms.
- Infrastructure and Equity in Agriculture: Through advocacy and project-based work, CCOAIB supports equitable access to irrigation, land use services, and agro-processing infrastructure for marginalized groups, especially women and youth in rural areas.
- Capacity Building: CCOAIB conducts regular training and institutional strengthening for its members on sustainable agriculture practices, value chain development, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, and access to agricultural finance

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Strategic Positioning and Evolution

- CCOAIB's evolution demonstrates how a national civil society coordinating body operating within a specific developmental state can successfully institutionalize complementary state-society relations. The organization's ability to maintain a dual role as both a government-aligned development partner and a constructive accountability actor within Rwanda's guided civic space is evidenced by its embedded participation in national planning processes and its contributions to frameworks such as PRSP, NST1/2, PSTA5, and the NGO Law.
- The findings indicate that CCOAIB's governance interventions, including Imihigo facilitation and community accountability tools, have contributed to improved local service delivery and strengthened citizen trust, although effectiveness varies across districts due to differences in institutional capacity and coordination.
- Following its initial humanitarian response between 1995 and 2000, CCOAIB transitioned in the mid-2000s toward long-term development programming focused on poverty reduction, democratization, and governance, in line with broader consolidation trends in Rwanda's civil society sector (RGB, 2023a; MINALOC, 2018). Its institutional role was strengthened through legal recognition in 2004, enabling greater participation in policy dialogue, accountability processes, and development planning. CCOAIB further played a central role in shaping the civil society landscape through the creation and leadership of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform, which enhanced coordination and advocacy among CSOs at national level.
- The organization also contributed to key national processes, including electoral observation, transitional justice through poverty reduction strategy development, and decentralization reforms, reinforcing transparency, reconciliation, and inclusive governance. In addition, it invested heavily in capacity building for member organizations on civic participation, employment creation, budgeting, and monitoring of national development strategies, strengthening both internal systems and sector-wide effectiveness.

5.2 Challenges and Sustainability

Several persistent challenges affect CCOAIB and the wider Rwandan civil society sector:

- Heavy reliance on funding from embassies and international development partners renders CSOs vulnerable to fluctuations in international aid
- The shift from programmatic to project-based donor financing has reduced long-term strategic autonomy and weakened institutional memory
- Limited domestic resource mobilization is compounded by low member contributions
- Most support to member organizations remains short-term and project-based, limiting sustained institutional strengthening
- The absence of robust impact-tracking tools reduces visibility of policy influence

5.3 Opportunities

Despite these challenges, several opportunities exist for CCOAIB:

- Enhanced policy participation under Rwanda's evolving regulatory framework
- Improved access to government and donor funding through strengthened governance systems
- Leveraging policy windows through rigorous research and social accountability tools
- Expanding public-private partnerships with agribusinesses and impact investors
- Alignment with Vision 2050, NST2, and PSTA5 positions CCOAIB as a relevant implementation partner

VI. KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Based on CCOAIB's 38-year trajectory, several key lessons emerge for civil society organizations:

- **Strategic institutional strengthening** through continuous investment in governance systems, monitoring and evaluation, communications, and fundraising has been vital for effective program delivery and long-term sustainability.
- **Evidence-based advocacy and policy influence** through research-driven advocacy has strengthened CCOAIB's credibility and influence on national policies.
- **Integrated socioeconomic development approaches** combining governance, agriculture, and climate resilience programs have led to measurable results, including green job creation and increased household incomes.
- **Grassroots networks for citizen-led development** have effectively amplified citizen voices and promoted bottom-up development, ensuring inclusivity and accountability.
- **Adaptive and responsive programming** through flexibility in responding to emerging issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates CCOAIB's adaptive capacity.
- **Transitioning from programmatic to project-based funding** highlights the need for strategic exit plans to maintain expertise, retain qualified staff, and ensure continuity.

VII. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study's primary contribution to knowledge is its empirical demonstration of how a national civil society coordinating body operating within a specific developmental state can successfully institutionalize a model of complementary state-society relations that enhances both governance and development outcomes. Through longitudinal analysis of CCOAIB (1987–2025), the research provides evidence that such an umbrella organization, by strategically evolving from emergency response to long-term policy engagement, can fulfill core civil society functions—coordination, evidence-based advocacy, and capacity building—to become a legitimized partner in national development.

The findings concretely illustrate that this model, characterized by formalized platforms like the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP), embedded policy consultations, and structured citizen participation (e.g., Imihigo, election observatories), directly correlates with nationally measured improvements in CSO effectiveness, participatory governance, and poverty reduction.

VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Based on the comprehensive findings on CCOAIB's trajectory, several critical areas emerge for future research:

- **Sustainability and Autonomy in Donor-Dependent Ecosystems:** Research should explore innovative models for domestic resource mobilization, the potential for social enterprise and public-private partnerships, and the impact of shifting from programmatic to project-based funding on organizational identity and institutional memory.
- **Digitalization and Evolving Civic Engagement:** Future studies could examine the role of digital tools in social accountability, the risks and opportunities of digital civic space, and how CSOs mediate between digital citizen activism and formal state policy processes.
- **Intergenerational Transition and Peacebuilding Legacies:** Research is needed on how organizations forged in the immediate post-genocide period navigate intergenerational leadership change and adapt reconciliation narratives for younger cohorts.
- **Micro-Level Impact of Macro-Level Coordination:** Future research should employ mixed methods to trace the causal pathways through which national-level policy changes influenced by CSO platforms translate into tangible changes in community-level power dynamics and citizen agency.
- **CSOs in Climate Resilience Governance:** Research could analyze the effectiveness of CSO networks in linking community-based adaptation knowledge with national climate strategies and accessing global climate finance.

IX. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the enduring lessons from CCOAIB's trajectory and the common challenges facing civil society, the following strategic recommendations are proposed:

- **Diversify Funding Sources and Strengthen Financial Resilience:** CSOs should proactively reduce donor dependency by cultivating a diversified resource base, including government contracts, public-private partnerships, and domestic philanthropy. Strengthening own-source revenue generation and enforcing robust member contribution mechanisms are critical.
- **Deepen Institutional and Member Capacity for Long-Term Sustainability:** Organizations must transition from ad hoc, project-based training to intentional, programmatic investment in institutional strengthening in core areas like MEAL, digital transformation, strategic communication, and adaptive management.
- **Enhance Systems for Measuring and Communicating Impact:** CSOs need to develop robust frameworks to systematically track, measure, and communicate the outcomes of their work, particularly in policy advocacy.
- **Strategically Scale Proven Models and Align with Broader Agendas:** CSOs should focus on systematically scaling community-driven interventions that have demonstrated tangible success and maintain strategic alignment with national development plans and global frameworks.
- **Foster Collaborative and Adaptive Partnerships:** Building resilience and influence necessitates active engagement in multi-stakeholder platforms at local, national, and international levels, providing access to resources, knowledge, and broader policy dialogues.
- There is a need for stronger advocacy to develop sustainable financing mechanisms for civil society organizations engaged in development, particularly in the agricultural sector, through long-term programs with flexible policies and procedures. In this context, the Government of Rwanda, through relevant ministries, should consider integrating NGOs especially coalitions and their platforms into national strategic planning processes.

X. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that CCOAIB has effectively maintained a dual institutional role as both a government-aligned development partner and a constructive accountability actor within Rwanda's guided civic space. Its embedded participation in

national planning processes has enabled measurable policy contributions to frameworks such as PRSP, NST1/2, PSTA5, and the NGO Law, primarily through evidence-based consultations and iterative policy engagement.

The organization's governance interventions, including Imihigo facilitation and community accountability tools, have contributed to improved local service delivery and strengthened citizen trust. Capacity-building and networking activities have generated increased social capital and community empowerment. However, the shift toward project-based donor financing has reduced long-term strategic autonomy and weakened institutional memory, while also revealing coordination gaps across thematic and district structures.

Overall, the findings indicate that CCOAIB's model of complementary state-society engagement has produced tangible governance and development outcomes, while also exposing structural sustainability and equity challenges. Over its 38-year trajectory, CCOAIB has transitioned from a localized grassroots initiative into a nationally recognized strategic partner in Rwanda's development landscape, anchored in three core principles: evidence-based advocacy, continuous capacity building, and strong citizen empowerment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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