Civil Society and Inclusive Policies in Indonesia

June 2025

Indonesia has a vibrant civil society with many networks advocating for vulnerable people, more data-driven planning, and policies that support marginalised communities. However, despite a generally high level of trust between civil society organisations (CSO networks) and local governments, collaboration remains limited, often tokenistic. SKALA has been working to bridge this gap by facilitating policy engagement, building capacity of CSO networks through access to critical data, and providing learning tools for improved inclusive planning, budgeting and spending.

To assess level of trust between GEDSI-focused CSO networks and provincial government actors, SKALA conducted a Confidence Survey, in collaboration with Bappenas and SMERU Research Institute as research implementer, in six of its ten partner provinces.[1] In each province, five GEDSI CSO networks (women's, disability, and elderly organisations) were selected based on consultations with SKALA and partner programs like INKLUSI. These five organisations represented various GEDSI issues, with three key respondents (director, secretary, and board) per organisation. For government respondents, the survey included three officials from relevant agencies with direct interactions with GEDSI representatives. A mixed-methods approach was used to look at two areas: how strong CSO network are internally and how well they connect with government and other networks. The study explored both informal trust-based systems and formal participation mechanisms, using a mix of

Markus Ipun, A farmer from the Dayak Bulusu tribe, prepares to head to his field in Bunau Village, Sekatak, North Kalimantan, in mid-March 2025. (Photo: SKALA)

---

[1] Two survey tools were used: (i) to measure trust from GEDSI CSO networks representatives, and (ii) to assess trust of provincial government actors towards GEDSI CSO networks. The survey design was adapted from the OECD trust survey, evaluating trust in government based on criteria like responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness, and fairness. Additionally, the GEDSI CSO networks instrument gauged satisfaction with government services and their experiences interacting with the provincial government.
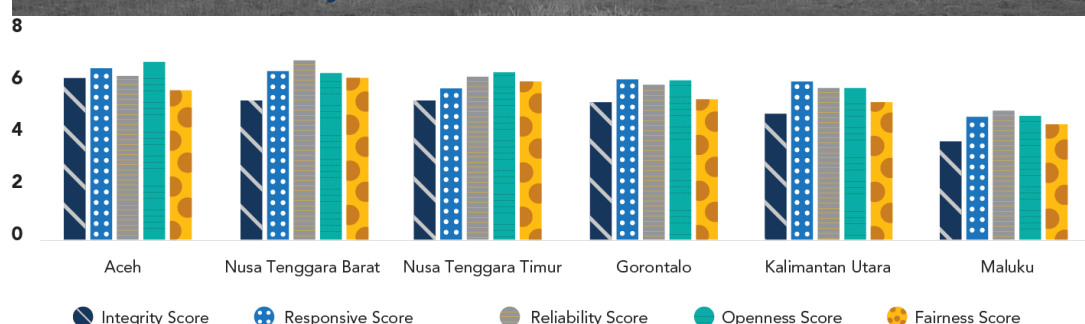
interviews, focus groups, desk reviews, and surveys. This approach helped build a clear picture of the structural and relationship factors that shape trust and confidence between CSO networks and government surveys.

The Confidence Survey shows clear differences in how CSO networks trust and engage with local governments. CSO networks in Aceh have the highest trust levels, with strong scores[2] in Integrity (6.01), Responsiveness (6.33), and Openness (6.6). West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) follows closely, with local CSO networks scoring their local governments as high in Reliability (6.66) and Responsiveness (6.24). East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Gorontalo show moderate but stable confidence, while Maluku has the lowest trust levels—Integrity at (3.64), with low scores in Openness (4.61) and Fairness (4.29). While Responsiveness and Reliability scores are relatively strong across SKALA's partner provinces, Fairness and Openness remain areas that need improvement, particularly in Maluku and North Kalimantan (Kaltara). The stark difference between Aceh's high trust level and Maluku's low trust level highlights the need for ongoing efforts in transparency, fairness, and engagement..

Kupang Regent Office Building
(Photo: SKALA)

Figure 1. CSO networks Representative Confidence Survey, SKALA GEDSI Baseline Study

Legend: Integrity Score, Responsive Score, Reliability Score, Openness Score, Fairness Score — for Aceh, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Gorontalo, Kalimantan Utara, Maluku

[2] The conceptual design of the survey was adapted from the OECD Trust Survey, which measures trust in government based on several aspects: integrity, responsiveness, openness, reliability, and fairness. Integrity: Trust in officials to prevent corruption and protect vulnerable communities.
Responsiveness: The government's responsiveness to complaints and changes to discriminatory policies. Reliability: Confidence in the government's handling of disasters, complaints, and protection of vulnerable groups. Openness and Participation: Access to data, public documents, consultations, and forums for vulnerable groups. Fairness: Prioritisation of vulnerable communities in the selection of programs and allocation of resources.

Civil society organisations face a series of challenges in their efforts to networks for more inclusive basic services. The Confidence Survey highlighted five main areas which need to be addressed.

First, a lack of clear guidelines at the subnational level limits meaningful CSO networks participation in government planning and budgeting. While local governments recognise CSO networks' role in GEDSI advocacy, the latter are often relegated to advisory positions without concrete follow-up. SKALA is addressing this by partnering with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) to develop national guidelines for participatory planning.

This guideline will require local governments to create and enforce policies that formalize CSO networks participation. By actively facilitating engagement, SKALA has supported local CSO networks to contribute to over 30 subnational planning processes, simultaneously deepening their involvement in decision-making. Going forward, knowledge-sharing among provinces can highlight best practices in productively engaging civil society. Also through mentorship programs, regions with established CSO networks engagement can support those still developing their frameworks. Strengthening local regulations will help secure a lasting role for CSO networks in shaping policies and service delivery.

Second, CSO networks struggle to develop credible, evidence-based policy recommendations due to limited access to reliable data. SKALA's collaborating ministries are working to ensure policy-relevant disaggregated data is consistently available through provincial data portals. Accessibility to data portals has also been improved for visually impaired users in NTB, Aceh, and Kaltara.

Enhancing CSO networks ability through partnership is to use data effectively in advocacy is another important element that requires support. Involvement of CSO networks representatives are being encouraged to develop policy briefs that present data-driven recommendations to government stakeholders. Going forward, support is needed to expand CSO networks' access to reliable data for effective advocacy. Also, training in data collection and impact assessments will enable CSO networks to go beyond advocacy and contribute to monitoring service delivery and policy outcomes.

(Photo: SKALA)

June 2025
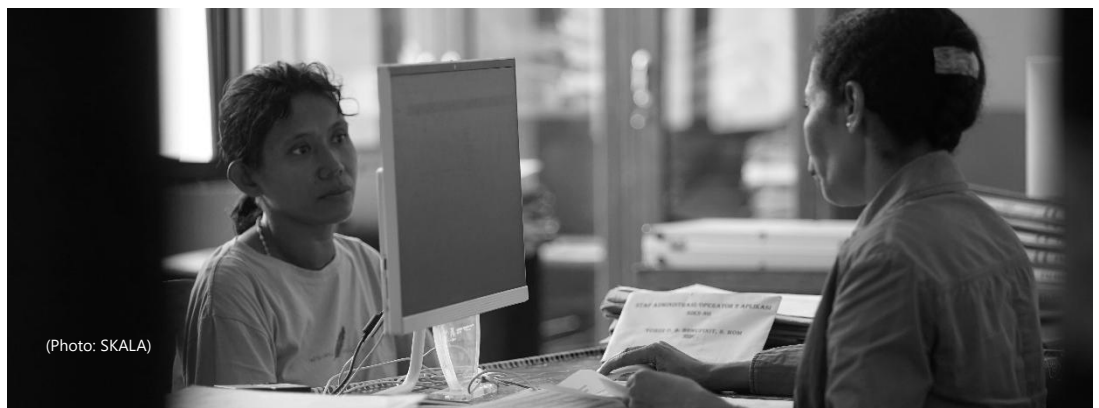
Third, while CSO networks are active in advocacy, many lack the capacity to track policy implementation and long-term impact. In high-trust regions like NTT and NTB, CSO networks have influenced inclusive policies, such as the Regional Action Plan for People with Disabilities, but these efforts often stop at policy formulation without structured monitoring of implementation.

In Aceh and Maluku, advocacy is frequently linked to religious organisations and thematic frameworks, but weak monitoring structures limit effectiveness. For example, Aceh has a Regional Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming, but its impact remains unclear with inadequate oversight. Similarly, in Maluku there is strong advocacy against gender-based violence (GBV) and for child protection, but logistical and funding challenges get in the way of follow-through.

In Kaltara and Gorontalo, there is an opportunity to integrate monitoring tools from the outset, but limited institutional capacity and resources persist. Going forward, developing provincial monitoring frameworks that include civil society and align with government systems can ensure policies are continuously assessed. Establishing collaborative oversight mechanisms between CSO networks, local governments, and independent institutions will create structured review processes that support long-term improvements.

Fourth, CSO networks have limited capacity to engage in formal government budgeting processes. Many focus on advocacy but struggle to translate priorities into budgeted action plans that align with regional fiscal frameworks. In NTT, some CSO networks have successfully influenced budget allocations for disability-inclusive policies, but most lack the technical skills to develop budget proposals that fit within local financing structures. Maluku has also made progress in gender indices and violence prevention programs, but these initiatives could be more sustainable if CSO networks were equipped to engage in structured budget negotiations. Going forward, training in budget analysis and proposal development can help CSO networks advocate for public spending aligned with their goals.

Structured collaboration and formal consultation processes between CSO networks, local planning offices, and sectoral agencies can also bridge the gap between advocacy and fiscal planning.

(Photo: SKALA)

Fifth, weak coordination among CSO networks reduces their collective impact on policymaking and policy implementation. Revitalisation of existing networks is

helping CSO networks to present a unified voice in policy discussions. Technical support has also served to strengthen the legal foundations of CSO networks consultation forums and broaden their representation.

In Maluku, SKALA's support has helped revitalise the CSO networks forum, adding 19 disability-focused organisations and ensuring their input shapes government policies. Progress has been mixed in other provinces, where existing regulations sometimes restrict broader CSO networks participation in consultation forums. Going forward, encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships, including government-CSO networks funding arrangements, can help sustain high-quality essential public services. Stronger collaboration between CSO networks and frontline service providers—such as health centres, schools, and child protection agencies—can also create stronger links between advocacy and on-the-ground service delivery.

Ultimately, ensuring a meaningful role for CSO networks in governance requires clear policies, better access to data, and stronger collaboration with government institutions. When CSO networks are equipped with the right tools, resources, and legal frameworks, they can drive impactful change and help to create and implement policies that are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to community needs. By continuing to build these capacities in CSO networks, SKALA seeks to contribute to a more participatory, representative and accountable governance system in Indonesia.

(Photo: SKALA)