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RESEARCH

Non-Government Organisations' Aid Projects: Their Effectiveness and Contribution to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: Findings from Uganda

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: Looking back at the history of the evolution of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and as part of a broader research on Value for Money of NGO aid projects, this research assesses the effectiveness of three concluded projects in Uganda.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH: A cross-sectional survey of targeted households is used to collect data. Using this data, project effectiveness is assessed against the achievement of project objectives and two household poverty thresholds; the US$1.9 a day poverty threshold and ten multidimensional poverty indicators derived from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

FINDINGS: The projects are not effective. Despite there being improvements in performance indicators for all project objectives between baseline and the survey, targets were not always achieved. Considering achieved targets, 50% of the ten objectives were achieved. Using a 75% cut-off point, the NGO aid projects were ineffective.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE: In the wake of renewed efforts to achieve the UN's Agenda 2030, development aid delivery should be guided by evidence of effectiveness of aid channels; NGOs are one of these channels.

KEYWORDS: *Civil Society; Effectiveness of NGO Projects; Development Effectiveness; Multidimensional Poverty; Southern NGOs; Sustainable Development Goals; Value for Money*

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BACKGROUND

In a major chapter in the Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the *2030 Agenda*, Banks (2021) relies heavily on the work of Brass et al. (2018), Aldashev and Navarra (2018), Kareithi and Lund (2012) and Banks and Brockington (2018) to highlight research gaps/blind spots in non-governmental organisations (NGO) literature. Major blind spots include:

- the absence of pre-existing databases that systematically collect NGO project data on incomes and expenditures, hence the existence of a largely qualitative rather than quantitative corpus of research on NGOs;
- the lack of data on how NGO project contribution to development co-operation 'adds up'. Banks (2021) suggests that because of these blind spots, the general awareness and understanding of the contribution of NGOs to development co-operation is vastly limited; and
- that one main unresolved problem is constructing appropriate measures of the performance of NGOs that continues to leave the effectiveness question unanswered.

Similar observations are made in the author's review of 150 NGO project evaluation reports (2010-2019) from the two continents that together absorb half of gross Official Development Aid – Africa and Asia.

Without putting Uganda's development responsibility on NGO projects, or arguing that the State reneges on its development responsibility, it was imperative to highlight the glaring mismatch between the increase in number of NGOs, fairly consistent external financing through NGO aid projects, and Uganda's poverty level. By December 1992, approximately 1,000 NGOs had registered with the NGO Registration Board (NGO Task Force, 1991; Gariyo, 1996). Estimates from the Uganda National NGO Forum (2015) and the NGO Bureau (2019) stand at 10,000, 13,000 and 14,000 NGOs. Between 2007 and 2016, Uganda received aid grants worth US$60,226.6 million (OECD, 2013; 2018), of which 25% (US$15,056.515 million) was disbursed by NGOs. Despite this growth of the NGO sector in Uganda, only 33% of the development goal targets were achieved. Uganda's available Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index estimation (2016 data) shows that 57.2% of the population is multidimensionally poor while an additional 23.6% is vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2023).

It is against this background of aid flows, historical arguments, methodological and information gaps about NGO project effectiveness that the author uses a nuanced approach in this research. The approach uses two lenses of analysing NGO project effectiveness that provide strong triangulation of findings. The author uses income

and multidimensional poverty thresholds to operationalise the inquiry into project effectiveness: the income poverty threshold of US$1.9 a day, and a combination of 10 indicators derived from the SDGs (Alkire and Jahan, 2018).

The second approach operationalises the prescriptive and frequently used OECD evaluation blueprint. This approach assessed effectiveness as the extent to which project objectives were achieved. The linear, narrow and time-bound NGO project logics (input, outputs and outcomes) of each project were the focus of analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Study Population

NGOs

There are 14,207 NGOs in Uganda; however, only 3,810 NGOs have been verified by the National Bureau of NGOs as having valid operational permits at the time the sample was drawn. From this list, NGOs certified by the Quality Assurance Mechanism (QuAM) were purposefully prioritised. The mechanism, provided for in the Uganda NGO Act 2016, is a voluntary self-regulating mechanism that appraises and certifies NGOs against 59 QuAM generally acceptable ethical and operational standards. Of the 176 NGOs certified, only 2 indigenous NGOs and 1 international NGO with advanced certification confirmed participation.

NGO aid project A was a three-year project (2016-2018) worth US$986,543.85 that aimed at economically empowering, rehabilitating and socially reintegrating 1,200 youth prisoners from 41 prisons in Uganda.

NGO aid project B was a seven-year aid project (2012-2018) worth US$36,045,185 that aimed to reduce the vulnerability of critically and moderately vulnerable children and their families (25,000 households and 125,000 individuals) in 35 districts of Uganda.

NGO aid project C was a one-year project (2016-2017) worth US$185,002 that aimed to strengthen climate change adaptation and mitigation in 600 households for sustainable livelihoods in 7 districts in Uganda.

Survey beneficiaries

Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample calculation was used to calculate the sample size as a proportion of the overall number of beneficiaries.

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where:

- S = the sample size required.
- X^2 = the table value for chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)
- N = the population size
- P = the population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 since this would provide maximum sample size)
- d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.1) *Note: The degree of accuracy was calculated at 90% to manage the sample size and the implied high costs.*

Sample size for aid project A (Population: 2,000 Beneficiaries reached)

$$S = \frac{3.841 * 2000 * 0.5\,(1 - 0.5)}{0.1^2(2000 - 1) + 3.841 * 0.5\,(1 - 0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{7{,}682 * 0.25}{(0.01 * 1999) + (3.841 * 0.25)}$$

$$S = \frac{1920.5}{20.95}$$

$$S = 91.6$$

Sample size for aid project B (Population: 34,779 Beneficiaries reached)

$$S = \frac{3.841 * 34{,}779 * 0.5\,(1-0.5)}{0.1^2\,(34{,}779-1) + 3.841 * 0.5\,(1-0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{133{,}586.139 * 0.25}{(0.01 * 34{,}778) + (3.841 * 0.25)}$$

$$S = \frac{33{,}396.5}{348.7}$$

$$S = 95.7$$

Sample size for aid project C (Population: 600 Beneficiaries reached)

$$S = \frac{3.841 * 600 * 0.5\,(1-0.5)}{0.1^2\,(600-1) + 3.841 * 0.5\,(1-0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{2{,}304 * 0.25}{(0.01 * 599) + (3.841 * 0.25)}$$

$$S = \frac{576.15}{5.99}$$

$$S = 96.1$$

Overall research sample size was therefore 284 beneficiary households.

Data Collection and Management

Cross-sectional surveys were used to collect data from a sample of beneficiaries two years after projects had ended. To cater for project uniqueness, three independent structured questionnaires were developed and used. Each questionnaire had two modules; Module I) Collected standard data on social economic demographics of households and poverty levels (income and multi-dimensional household poverty); and Module II collected data on project effectiveness in relation to unique objectives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data for each project were analysed and interpreted separately. Consolidated analysis was then done to reach a position on effectiveness. Three major analysis and interpretation stages were followed despite project differences.

Stage 1

Descriptive statistics were generated from demographic and social-economic data and used to present characteristics of the surveyed beneficiary households.

Stage 2

Using demographic data, household multi-dimensional poverty was analysed using indicator definitions and weights (Table 1). Three calculations were done largely following the guide provided by Alkire and Jahan (2018). These were:

- the poverty incidence (% of households that are poor; i.e., deprived in 33% of the weighted indicators);
- intensity (average share of indicators in which the poor households were deprived); and
- vulnerability (% of households deprived in at least 20-33% of the weighted indicators).

Table 1 Analysis Guide and Definition of Multi-Dimensional Poverty Indicators

Dimension	Indicator and SDG	A household is deprived if…	Weight
1. Health	Nutrition (*SDG 2 Zero Hunger*)	Household is moderately or severely food insecure; using the Household Food Insecurity Access Score (HFIAS)	1/6
	Child Mortality (*SDG 3 Health and Wellbeing*)	Any child has died in the household within the last 5years	1/6
2. Education	Years of education (*SDG4 Quality Education*)	No household member has completed six years of schooling	1/6
	School attendance (*SDG4 Quality Education*)	Any school-aged child not attending school up to the age at which he/she would complete P8	1/6

Dimension	Indicator and SDG	A household is deprived if…	Weight
3. Living standards	Cooking fuel (*SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy*)	The household cooks with dung, wood or charcoal	1/18
	Sanitation (*SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation*)	The household's sanitation facility is not improved (according to SDG guidelines) or it is improved but shared with other households	1/18
	Drinking water (*SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation*)	The household does not have access to safe drinking water (according to SDG guidelines) or safe water is a 30 minute or longer walk from home, round trip	1/18
	Electricity (*SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy*)	The household has no electricity	1/18
	Housing (*SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities*)	One of the three housing materials for roof, walls and floor are inadequate: The floor is of natural materials and/or the roof and/or walls are of natural or rudimentary materials	1/18
	Assets (*SDG 1 No poverty*)	The household does not own more than one of these assets a radio, TV, phone, computer, animal cart bike, motorbike, refrigerator nor a car or truck	1/18

Note:

** Domains and indicators are aligned to a core Sustainable Development Goal in column 2.*

*** The initial measure for nutrition was changed in this research because the measure for Body Mass Index (BMI) required a great number of resources (equipment, experts, time and money) for anthropometric data collection. The research focused on the food environment to appraise households' nutrition levels and used the (HFIAS). A household was deprived if moderately or severely food insecure.*

**** A household was considered to have access to improved sanitation if it had some type of flush toilet or pit latrine, or ventilated improved pit or composting toilet, provided that they are not shared.*

***** A household had access to clean drinking water if the water source was any of the following types: piped water, public tap, borehole or pump, protected well, protected spring or rainwater, and it was within 30 minutes' walk (round trip).*

****** A household was deprived if floor is made of mud/clay/earth, sand or dung; or if dwelling has no roof or walls or if either the roof or walls are constructed using natural materials such as cane, palm/trunks, sod/mud, dirt, grass/reeds, thatch, bamboo, sticks or rudimentary materials such as carton, plastic/ polythene sheeting etc.*

******* Background to indicator weights: The developers of this framework assumed that each domain (Health, Education and Living standards) is a 1/3 (33.3%) of the whole (100%). This 33.3% is therefore divided amongst the indicators in each domain. E.g., in the health and education domains, which have 2 indicators, weight for each indicator would be (1/3)/2 = 1/6. The living standards domain has 6 indicators therefore the weight for each indicator would be 1/3/6 = 1/18. Each indicator in the living standard had a weight of 1/18. These weights were used to analyse household deprivations and generate a poverty index for each household; these were then used to derive poverty status for all surveyed households. Thresholds used; poor (deprived in =>33% of weighted indicators), severely poor (as a proportion of poor- deprived in =>50% of weighted indicators and vulnerable (as a proportion of not poor- deprived in =>20-33% of weighted indicators) (UNDP, 2021).*

Source: Alkire and Jahan (2018) with adjustments explained in the notes

Stage 3

Using quantiles, an aid project was considered effective when ≥75% of set objectives were achieved. This threshold was derived from the author's review of 150 NGO aid project evaluation reports from Africa and Asia and the work of Riddle (2014). NGO aid projects were considered effective if all three aid projects had ≥75% of set objectives achieved.

RESULTS

Social Demographics

Household composition

A total of 288 beneficiary households, with 1,771 members (48% were male and 52% female) were surveyed from the three projects. There was an average of 6 household members and the range was 1-15 people per household. Inquiry into child mortality found that only 16% (n=45) of the households had registered a death of a child in the 5 years before the survey (Table 2).

Table 2 Composition of surveyed households

Households surveyed N=288	Gender	Mean	Median	Range
Total household members (N=1,771)	Male: 854; Female: 917	6.1	6	1-15
Household members >5yrs employed (N=237) / Income	Male: 130; Female: 107	1,886,480 Ugx	900,000	40,000-18,000,000 Ugx
Age of household members in complete years	-	22	18	1-98

Source: Constructed by author

Household members' education levels

Using the data in Table 3, 84% (n=1, 485; 745 Female and 740 Male) had attained some degree of education, while 16% had none; 52% had attained primary education as the highest education level, while only 22% were able to achieve secondary, tertiary and university education.

Table 3 Education level of household members

Education level	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No Formal Education	114	13	172	19	286	16
Pre-primary Education	98	11	95	10	193	11
Primary Education	440	52	475	52	915	52
Secondary Education	168	20	154	17	322	18
Tertiary Education	28	3	18	2	46	3
University Education	6	1	3	0	9	1
Total	854	100	917	100	1771	100

Source: Constructed by author

Household nutrition status

Table 4 summarises the data that were affirmative (yes) for the often response option to all nine questions in the three HFIAS domains. The analysis focused on the frequency of the often response to describe frequency-in-occurrence of a particular food access situation in the households one month before the survey.

- Domain 1: 57% of the households experienced anxiety and uncertainty about household food supply;
- Domain 2: 62% of the households experienced incidences of insufficient food quality;
- Domain 3: 29% of the households experienced incidences of insufficient food intake.

The overall average HFIAS score was 2.37. Keeping in mind that response options to questions in the HFIAS were never, sometimes and often; this score means that, on average, households experienced the nine-food insecurity-related conditions sometimes or often in the one month before the survey.

Table 4 Household nutrition status

HFIAS Domains and questions	Yes		No		Total responses	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Domain 1: Expressed anxiety and uncertainty about the household food supply *Qn 1: In the 1 month before March 2020, did you worry that your household would not have enough food? - *Where response yes = often*	164	57	124	43	288	100
Domain 2: Expressed insufficient quality (including variety and preferences of the type of food) *Qn 2: In the 1 month before March 2020, were you or anyone in your household unable to eat the kinds of food you preferred because of lack of resources? - *Where response yes = often* *Qn 3: In the 1 month did you or any household member have to eat limited variety of food due to lack of resources? - *Where response yes = often* *Qn 4: In the 1 month before March 2020, did you or anyone in your household have to eat some foods that you really did not want to eat because of lack of resources to obtain other types of food? - *Where response was = often*	534	62	330	38	864	100
Domain 3: Insufficient food intake *Qn 5: In the 1 month before March 2020, did you or any household member have to eat a smaller meal than you felt you needed because there was not enough food? - *Where response was = often* *Qn 6: In the 1 month before March 2020, did you or any household member have to eat fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food? - *Where response was = often* *Qn 7: In the 1 month before March 2020 was there ever no food to eat of any kind in your household because of lack of resources to get food? - *Where response was = often* *Qn 8: In the 1 month before March 2020 did you or any household member go to bed hungry because there was not enough food? - *Where response was = often* *Qn 9: In the 1 month before March 2020 did you or any household member go a whole day and night without eating anything because there was not enough food? - *Where response was = often*	424	29	1,016	71	1,440	100

Source: Constructed by author

Type of housing material for roof, floor and walls

Household data show that 74% used iron sheets for the roof and 26% had used thatch. For the floor construction, 33% of the households used mud and wattle, 27% rammed earth, 15% cement screed, and 22% dung to make the floor.

Household energy

A total of 47% (n=136) of households had electricity in their homes (10% (n=30) grid and 37% (n=106) solar). Figure 1 shows the responses when probed for the sources of lighting used in the household.

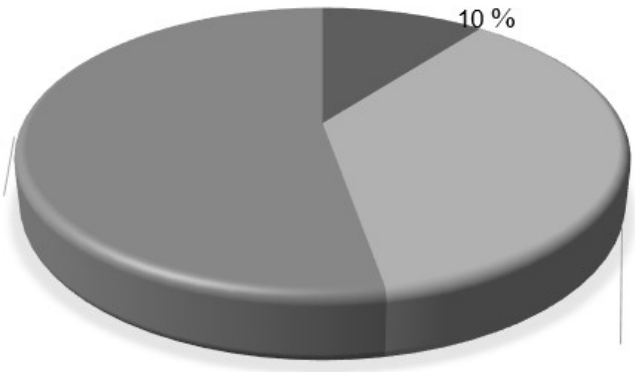

Figure 1 Electricity in Surveyed Households

Source: Constructed by authors

Household water source

Table 5 shows that at all households had access to water; 32% from pubic boreholes, 25% public taps, 14% protected and unprotected wells/springs. The same table also shows that 49% (n=142) of the households took more than 30 minutes (round trip) to access drinking water, while 51% (n=146) took less.

Table 5 Source of Household Drinking Water

Water Source	0-30 mins	31-60 mins	61-90 mins	=>120mins	Total	%
Piped water into dwelling	7	0	0	0	7	2
Public taps	32	14	18	8	72	25
Public borehole	58	23	6	6	93	32
Protected well/spring	19	7	8	5	39	14

Water Source	0-30 mins	31-60 mins	61-90 mins	=>120mins	Total	%
Unprotected well/spring	7	14	11	9	41	14
Rain water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	23	4	6	3	36	13
Total	146	62	49	31	288	100

Source: Constructed by author

Household Poverty

Multidimensional poverty

Table 6 summarises the multidimensional poverty characteristics of all 288 households. A total of 45% (n=130) were multi-dimensionally poor (deprived in=>33% of the weighted indicators). Of these, 53% (n=69) were severely poor (deprived in at least 50% of the weighted indicators), and 34% (n=53) were vulnerable to falling into multi-dimensional poverty (deprived in at least 20-33% of the weighted indicators).

Table 6 Multi-dimensional Poverty Levels in all Surveyed Households

Dimension	Indicator and SDG	A household is deprived if…	H/Hs
1. Health	Nutrition (*SDG 2 Zero Hunger*)	Household is moderately or severely food insecure; Using the Food environment (Household Food Insecurity Access Score (HFIAS)	177 (61%)
	Child Mortality (*SDG 3 Health and Wellbeing*)	Any child has died in the household within the last 5 years	45% (16%)
2. Education	Years of education (*SDG4 Quality Education*)	No household member has completed six years of schooling	92 (31%)
	School attendance (*SDG4 Quality Education*)	Any school-aged child not attending school up to the age at which he/she would complete P8	33 (11%)
3. Living standards	Cooking fuel (*SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy*)	The household cooks with dung, wood or charcoal	288 (100%)
	Sanitation (*SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation*)	The household's sanitation facility is not improved (according to SDG guidelines) or it is improved but shared with other households.	31 (11%)
	Drinking water (*SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation*)	The household does not have access to safe drinking water (according to SDG guidelines) or safe water is a 30 minute or longer walk from home, round trip.	142 (49%)
	Electricity (*SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy*)	The household has no electricity	152 (53%)
	Housing (*SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities*)	One of the three housing materials for roof, walls and floor are inadequate: The floor is of natural materials and/o the roof and/ or walls are of natural or rudimentary materials	238 (82%)
	Assets (*SDG 1 No poverty*)	The household does not own more than one of these assets a radio, TV, phone, computer, animal cart bike, motorbike, refrigerator nor a car or truck	7 (3%)

Source: Constructed by author

Income poverty

Figure 2 shows that 95% of all households were living on less than US$1.9 a day pre-intervention and there was a 6% reduction in the proportion of households living on less than US$1.9 a day post-intervention. At the time of the survey, 89% were living on less than US$1.9 a day and were therefore poor by the income poverty measure.

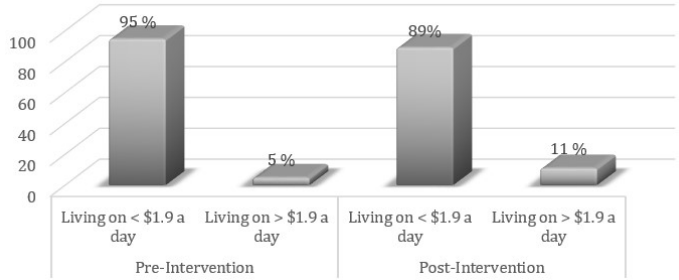

Figure 2 Pre- and Post-Intervention Income Poverty Levels

Source: Constructed by authors

Cross-referencing household income and multidimensional poverty

Figure 3 cross-references income and multidimensional poverty data in the surveyed households. A total of 41% (n=118) of households were poor by both income poverty measure (US$1.9 a day) and the multidimensional indicators.

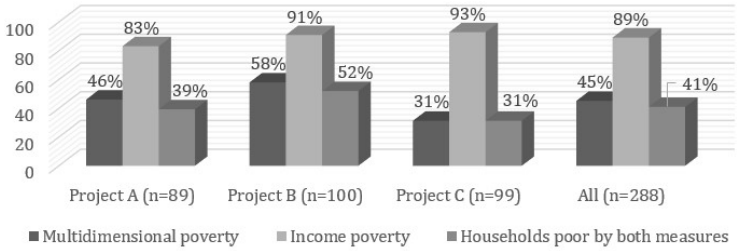

Figure 3 Household income (US$1.9) and multidimensional poverty at the time of the survey

Source: Constructed by authors

Achievement of Set Project Objectives by the Three Projects

Table 7 summarises the effectiveness of all three projects. When only performance indicators for which targets were achieved were considered, Projects A, B and C achieved 75%, 25% and 50% of objectives, respectively. Using 75% as a cut-off point for achievement, NGO aid projects were not effective, at least not two years after they ended.

Table 7 Achievement of Project Objectives

	Findings	Status	Research conclusion
Objectives Project A (Effective)			
1. To develop entrepreneurship and life skills of youth ex-prisoners *1.1 Performance indicator:* Number of targeted youth ex-prisoners with sustainable access to economic opportunities in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions at the end of the project (Baseline 0%; Target: 50% of targeted youth)	57%	Achieved	Achieved Project **achieved 75%** of set objectives
2. To improve targeted ex-prisoner's reintegration into communities *2.1 Performance indicator:* Number of targeted youth ex-prisoners permanently settled in a community at the end of the project (Baseline 0%; Target: 80% of targeted youth)	89%	Achieved	
3. To provide ex-prisoners with start-up kits to launch small businesses *3.1 Performance indicator:* Number of new micro-businesses established in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions by targeted ex-prisoners at the end of the project (Baseline 0%; Target: 50% of participating youth)	51%	Achieved	
4. To establish learning and mentorship mechanisms to accompany ex-prisoners in the development and implementation of small businesses *4.1 Performance indicator:* Number of trained ex-prisoners who feel sufficiently supported in socio-economic re-integration (Baseline: 0%; Target: 85% of targeted beneficiaries)	14%	Not achieved	
Objectives Project B (Not effective)			
1. To improve the social-economic status (social-economic skills base and household financial resources) of vulnerable children's households		Not Achieved	Not Achieved Project **only achieved 25%** of set objectives
1.1 Performance indicator: % of targeted youth trained in apprentices gainfully employed or having a business (Baseline 0%; Target 70%)	60%		
1.2. Performance indicator: % of targeted youth in households with marketing skills (Baseline 0%; target 80% of targeted youth)	17%		
1.3 Performance indicator: 1.3 % of households with increased incomes (Baseline 0%; Target 75%)	80%		
1.4 Performance indicator: % of targeted households able to save in Village Savings groups (Baseline 17%; Project Target 60%)	93%		

	Findings	Status	Research conclusion
2. Improve food security and nutrition status of vulnerable children and their household members *2.1 Performance indicator:* Beneficiary households rarely experience the nine-food insecurity related conditions measured in the Household Food Insecurity Access scale; (Baseline: Was not taken; Target; Overall Average HFIA score is 1)	Average HFIA 2.3	Not Achieved	Not Achieved Project **only achieved 25%** of set objectives
3. Increase access to protection and legal services for vulnerable children and their household members	100%	Achieved	
3.1 Performance Indicator: Vulnerable children households that know the different types of child abuse (Baseline: 30% of the target group could name one or more types of child abuse: Target: 70% of target group able to name one or more types of child abuse by the end of project)			
3.2 Performance Indicator: % of vulnerable children households who know where to access child protection and legal redress in their area (Baseline: 20% of vulnerable children households know one or more accurate places they could access child protection and legal redress in their area: Target; 60%)	69%		
4. To increase the capacity of vulnerable households to access critical services *4.1 Performance Indicator:* % of households trained in life and parent skills to increase capacity to identify and access critical services (Baseline 20%: target 85%)	55%	Not achieved	
Objectives Project C (Not effective)			
1. Vulnerable communities are empowered to implement sustainable climate change adaption and mitigation strategies for improved livelihoods			Not Achieved Project **only achieved 50%** of set objectives
1.1 Performance Indicator: % of targeted smallholder farmers aware of climate change causes and effects in their local environments and beyond. (Baseline 15 %; Target 70%)	92%	Achieved	
1.2 Performance Indicator: 1.2 % of targeted households are aware of sustainable land management practices (Baseline 5%; Target 50%)	100%		
1.3 Performance Indicator: % targeted households are practicing the climate change adaptation technologies for improved production (Baseline 10 %: Project target 80%)	97%		
2. Adaptation of appropriate climate change and mitigation policies by government and other development actors *2.1 Performance Indicator:* Government and other development actors adapt appropriate climate change and mitigation policies	No policy adapted	Not achieved	

Source: Constructed by author

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Each approach used to assess project effectiveness independently showed that NGO aid projects have little to show regarding the achievement of specific objectives and their contribution to poverty reduction in targeted households, at least two years after project closure. This triangulation of findings can potentially rest arguments based on philosophical differences regarding methodology and consequently draw more attention and action to this finding.

The Functional Approach to NGO Project Evaluation and its Limitations

For the last three decades, research and practice have used what this research terms, a functional approach to study NGO effectiveness (Kaijabwango, 2020; Brass et al., 2018). Highly influenced by the globally accepted OECD evaluation blueprint (measure of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, appropriateness, sustainability and coherence), this functional approach only analyses the linear, narrow and time-bound NGO project logics (input, outputs and outcomes) to evaluate NGO projects. Riddell (2014) studied NGO evaluations commissioned by different funding organisations and observed that success or effectiveness is judged on whether aid projects achieve their immediate output. Similar observations were made by Tendler (1982) in her review of 75 NGO aid project evaluations and the author's review of 150 project evaluations from Africa and Asia in 2022. By focusing on immediate objectives, the functional approach lends itself to the narrow and linear NGO project design; however, this only serves to provide accountability for project aid in the short run. Research and evaluation approaches should therefore acknowledge and make use of the findings in the decades of research that critique NGO contributions that go beyond this formalistic approach to identify NGO projects' niche.

The NGO Aid Project 'Straightjacket' and the Agenda 2030 Misfit

The shift from the focus on viewing poverty as an income related concept to the Millennium Development Goals and finally the Sustainable Development Goals suggests a paradigm shift in the way poverty is defined, planned for and inevitably measured. This shift relegates any tunnel-visioned project approach to being inappropriate. The reason for this is that the international aid system considers under-development to be a 'deficit' in capital, knowledge, and technology; a deficit that can be reversed by the transfer of resources from richer to poorer economies through discrete packages of resources and activities labelled 'projects'. It is this linear time-

bound project 'straitjacket' in which NGO projects are expected to operate. This linear assumption is a misfit to the 'thinking' and motivation inherent in the SDG. The shift from a singular measure to eight then seventeen goals acknowledges that poverty is multidimensional and hence planning and measuring it must take a similar turn.

CONCLUSIONS

While there were some positive effects on those they targeted, when these effects were compared to the project targets (agreed to by NGO and funder), targets were, more often than not, not achieved: NGO aid projects were ineffective.

NGO aid projects had negligible effect on poverty in targeted households. While there was a reduction in the number of households living on less than US$1.9 a day after receiving support from the projects (from 95% (273) to 89% (257)), more than half were living below the poverty line: 45% of households were multi-dimensionally poor and of these, 51% were severely poor. A total of 34% were vulnerable to falling into multi-dimensional poverty, and 41% of all households were poor by both the income poverty measure and weighted multidimensional indicators.

The 'project' framework in which the projects were implemented does not match up to the poverty reduction expectations inherent in the Sustainable Development Goals. This means that this project straightjacket is not an effective means through which aid can be delivered to beneficiaries. By focusing on narrow immediate objectives, the project approach lends itself to the narrow and linear development intervention design that only serves to provide accountability for project aid in the short run. While this research does not regard short-term achievements as unimportant, it concludes that without a critical analysis of the real long-term results from these projects, research and evaluation will sustain the exaggeration of NGO aid projects' contribution to poverty reduction.

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