

Effect of Community Participation on Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects in Chukudum, Budi County

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Abstract

South Sudan is one of the main recipients of donor funds to implement development and humanitarian projects aimed at alleviating poverty. However, the sustainability of project's net benefits is continuously lacking despite billions of monies donated for projects throughout the country. This study investigated the effects of community participation on the sustainability of donor-funded projects in South Sudan using a case of Chukudum, Budi County. The study used a descriptive research design. The target population was 300 people with a sample size of 75 persons. Stratified random and purposive sampling techniques were used. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The study findings indicated that community participation had a positive and significant relationship with the sustainability of donor-supported projects in South Sudan. The study concluded that the sustainability of donor-funded projects is influenced by community participation. The community needs to participate in the project from the initiation to the end to ensure sustainability. A community should also engage in decisions to enhance ownership and sustainability of projects. Policy should be created to advance community project ownership and the community should be encouraged to participate and serve with locally available resources.

Keywords: *Community participation, sustainability of donor-funded projects, Chukudum*

1.0 Introduction

There has been a growing concern over the sustainability of donor-supported programmes and projects world over by the donor agencies, as well as the implementing partners (Muluh, Kimengsi & Azibo, 2019; Bigdon & Korf, 2004). The sustainability of project benefits is an important concept in sustainable development works by bilateral and multi-lateral donor agencies and corporations. Sustainability has been integrated into development and humanitarian works at multiple levels ranging from local, national, and regional to international levels (Agarwal & Kalmár, 2016). Donors fund development projects to improve the socio-economic and psychosocial well-being of the beneficiaries (Kopinak, 2013) and they (donors) require that the projects they fund, be as effective and sustainable as possible both during and after phasing out their support.

Donors desire to see the impacts of their interventions stay or last longer and go far beyond the project period, with the possibility of adoption and replication. It has been argued that project benefits were not sustainable and predominantly collapsed just after the end of donor support.

Silungwe (2020) citing Ceptureanu et al. (2018) explained that it is a great challenge to ensure the sustainability of the project benefits when its support has been terminated.

Community participation guarantees local community ownership of the project and resource endowments in that the local community gives out their resources to inform of local capacities and resources for the benefit of the projects. It is argued to boost the sense of (*project*) ownership (Harvey & Reed, 2007). The community-based Psycho-Social Support (CPBS) approach demands that development practitioners embrace community participation by putting people at the center of all development projects. It entails working with them in all interventions that affect their lives, from the earliest stages of the development process all through to the last stage. Community participation ensures the continuity of project benefits because the beneficiaries were locally involved and their capacities built on.

1.1 Research Problem

South Sudan is one of the main recipients of donor funds to implement development and humanitarian projects aimed at alleviating poverty and the sufferings of people, to improve their socio-economic and psycho-social well-being (Kopinak, 2013). A huge amount of money is been used up in local initiatives of the community, which failed to maintain a continuous flow of net- benefits to the target groups (Oino et al., 2015). This has made communities rely on donor funding without any mechanism to maintain the flow of net benefits beyond the timelines. The sustainability of the project's net benefits is continuously lacking however billions of monies have been donated for projects throughout the country.

Donors and implementing partners were stranded because they did not understand why the projects, they funded were not sustainable, and why the project benefits were not extended for a long time after the end of project support. It should be understood that there was scanty or no literature or research that has been done to understand the sustainability of benefits of donor-supported projects in Chukudum, Budi County. This research investigated the effects of community participation on the sustainability of donor-funded projects in Chukudum, Budi County in South Sudan.

1.2 Research Objective

To determine the effects of community participation on the sustainability of donor-funded projects in Chukudum, Budi County.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The stakeholder theory of organizational management and business ethics was laid forward by Edward Freeman in 1984 to describe and address the morals and values of managing an organization and how to meet the needs of all with vested interests in an organization. Lakshmi Goyal (2020) argued that, while Shareholder theory emphasizes wealth maximization of the stakeholders, and is full of moral hazards, externalities, and monopoly power, Freeman's (Stakeholder) theory came to rectify weaknesses of shareholder theory, by emphasizing the importance of managing multiples stakeholders as a continuous task of balancing various stakeholders' objectives and relationships.

According to Gibson (2000), Stakeholder theory stresses that companies and corporations ought to bear in mind the interests of those affected by or those who affect the activities of the corporations when deciding to reach organizational goals. Stakeholder theory holds that organizations and corporations ought to create values for all stakeholders, not just shareholders, and that in doing so, the organization achieves true, lasting success. Great companies last longer

since they succeed in securing stakeholder interests and bringing them into line in the same direction (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder theory examines the relations involving an organization and others within and outside the environment (Agle et al., 2007). Filippone (2012) echoed that, Stakeholder theory examines the effects of interactions between the organization and its activities in its surroundings.

Stakeholders were all those who needed to be considered in achieving the project goal and whose participation and support were critical to project management (Munsaka, 2013). Stakeholders can influence the projects either positively or negatively. From the project management view, stakeholder theory means bearing in mind the needs of all groups with vested interests in a specific organization or corporation. Anyone who is affected by the decisions or impacted by the project intervention, positively or negatively, should be managed by bringing their vested interests into play, by ensuring their full participation in project management.

Freeman (1994) maintained that stakeholder theory holds mainly that, companies and corporations that govern and deal with stakeholder relations successfully would last for a long time and perform healthier than those that conduct their relationship ineffectively. Therefore, this study adopted stakeholder theory to help demonstrate how participation and management of stakeholders affect the continuous flow of project benefits of donor-supported projects implemented by NGOs in Chukudum, Budi County in South Sudan.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Sustainability of Donor Project Benefits

A study was carried out by Chiliza, Laing, Feeley, and Borba (2021) on how the PEPFAR program was sustainable after the end of funding periods in South Africa. The research employed varied approaches to assess the sustainability of donor-supported programs. The research evaluated Sixty-one health center facilities operated by PEPFAR-supported NGOs from 2007 to 2012, by comparing retention in care from (2007 – 2012), with post the PEPFAR (2013 – 2015) period. The study used qualitative data to assess how these were operationalized at a health facility and NGO level. It was concluded that sustainability demands collaborative donor collaboration with skillful indigenous organizations with robust executive leadership throughout the program lifecycle (Chiliza et al., 2021).

A study was conducted by Kholongo, Lambert, Kaunda, Katengeza, and Malunga (2020) on the fundamental aspects that affect the sustainability of Community Based Advocacy Groups (CBAGs) after the phase-out of funding. The study investigated the sustainability of CBAGs, taking a case of advocacy groups initiated and supported by Dan Church Aid (DCA) in Malawi. Specifically, the study identified key factors that influence the continued operation of CBAGs after years of donor cessation. The study combined both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to gather data from May to June 2020. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics; logit regression and critical content analysis. The research recommended the need to encourage supporting organizations to develop exit strategies which would help to concretize the phasing out plan for supporting the CBAGs.

2.2.2 Community Participation and Donor-funded Project Benefits

A study was carried out by Cheluget (2020) on the Sustainability of projects supported by donor funds in public Hospitals in Kenya using a Case of HIV/AIDs Projects at Referral Hospitals. The study evaluated the fundamental issues that influence the sustenance of projects in public hospitals in Kenya, funded by donors. The research concentrated on field data

gathered using the questionnaire. It was found that funding and interest group engagement substantially affected the sustainability of the benefits of projects (Cheluget, 2020). The study ignored the effects of CP, internal financial controls, project performance practices, and government support on the sustainability of benefits of projects since conditions and circumstances in Kenya were not the same as those of South Sudan.

A study by Lungo Lungo et al. (2019) was carried out on the determinants of project sustainability in Zambia, to examine the determinants of project sustainability after the end of the funding period. The study employed a descriptive study design to carry out the study. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used. The research adopted questionnaires and interview guides to conduct the study. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to analyze the data and results converged during interpretation. The findings revealed that the poor CP in governance leads to sustenance catastrophe. The research, however, looked at the governance, income distribution, and educational levels among the community participating in projects in Zambia. However, it is important to note that conditions and circumstances in Zambia were never the same as those in South Sudan. Besides, Zambia is a stable country, with a changed attitude and views toward modern economies as opposed to Chukudum, South Sudan.

3.0 Methodology

The study used a descriptive research design. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches were applied. The study was anchored on stakeholder, stewardship, and contingency theories. The target population was 300 people with a sample size of 75 persons. Stratified random and purposive sampling techniques were used. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyze the data.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study determined to establish the effect of and the degree to which community participation in donor-funded projects influences the sustenance of donor-supported projects.

4.1.1 Involvement of beneficiaries in the project Implemented

It was important to find out whether the beneficiaries were involved in any of the projects implemented by the NGOs. That was because community or beneficiary participation and involvement in the implementation of the donor-supported projects enhances ownership and sustainability of donor-funded projects after the withdrawal of donor support to the project.

Table 1: Involvement of project beneficiaries

Response Status	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	52	71.23
No	21	28.77
Total	73	100.00

From the table above, 52 respondents representing 71.23% indicated that they are part of the project implemented by NGOs in the area where they live. While 28.77% indicated that they were not part of any project being implemented in their village or Boma.

4.1.2 Beneficiary Involvement in the decision-making process

The study sought to determine if beneficiaries have ever been involved in deciding on the project, they were engaged in. This was because beneficiary involvement in the decision-

making process ensures that beneficiaries own the projects, which consequently leads to the sustainability of the project benefits.

Table 2: Beneficiary involvement in decision making process

Response Status	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	47.95
No	38	52.05
Total	73	100.00

As shown above, 52.05% of the respondents revealed that they were not involved in the decision-making process of the project they are engaged in, while 47.95% of respondents indicated that they were part of the decision-making process in the project they were part of. These results agree with the findings of Ngeno (2020) who found that many employees are not involved in decision-making in many NGOs. The findings however contradict the findings of Smith (2019) who found that most employees in NGOs perform a critical role in decision-making in the organization.

4.1.3 Community participation in a project lifecycle

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement that community CP in the project lifecycle of donor-supported projects leads to the effectiveness and sustainability of project benefits of donor projects.

Table 3: Community participation in a project lifecycle

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	54.79
Agree	23	31.51
Neutral	3	4.11
Disagree	3	4.11
Strongly Disagree	4	5.48
Total	73	100

As shown in the table above, 54.79% of the respondents strongly agreed that CP in project lifecycles of donor-funded projects leads to the effectiveness and sustainability of project benefits. While 31.51% of the respondents agreed that community participation in project lifecycles leads to the effectiveness and sustainability of project benefits. Those who were neutral and disagreed with this were represented by 4.11% and 4.11% respectively. Only 5.48% strongly disagreed. The findings therefore show that CP in the project lifecycle of donor-funded projects is perceived to affect the sustainability of donor-supported projects in Chukudum, Budi County, Eastern Equatoria State; South Sudan. The findings agree with Kuria and Wanyoike (2016) who found that the involvement and participation of all interested parties in all project cycles will promote ownership, accountability, and sustenance of project benefits when funding is stopped. It can therefore be concluded that there is a positive relationship between CP and the sustainability of project benefits.

4.1.4 Community participation and project ownership and continuation

The study requested the study participants to reveal their level of agreement that community involvement and engagement (participation) fosters project ownership and continuation of project benefits after the end of project support, continuation of project benefits determines the success of the projects.

Table 4: Project ownership and continuation

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	34	46.58
Agree	30	41.10
Neutral	5	6.85
Disagree	1	1.37
Strongly Disagree	3	4.11
Total	73	100

From the study findings as indicated in the table above, 46.58% of the respondents strongly agreed that community involvement and engagement (participation) fosters project ownership and continuation of project benefits after the end of project support. Meanwhile, 41.10% of the respondents agreed. 6.85% were neutral and 37% of the respondents disagreed. Of these respondents, 4.11% indicated strong disagreement. The findings therefore indicated that community involvement and engagement (participation) of the project beneficiaries fosters project ownership and continuation of project benefits after the end of project support. This indicates that there is a strong link between community participation and engagement in donor-funded projects and the sustainability of project benefits after the withdrawal of donor support. These result findings agree with Cheluget (2020) who found that funding and interest group engagement substantially affected the sustainability of benefits of projects (Cheluget, 2020). The findings also agree with Lungo *et al.* (2019) who revealed that poor Community Participation in governance leads to sustenance catastrophe.

4.1.5 Linkage of project beneficiary to services providers

The study asked the participants to indicate their level of agreement that with community participation and involvement in donor-funded projects, project beneficiaries are linked to the service providers hence ensuring that the project benefits are sustained. The responses are indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Linkage of project beneficiaries to service providers

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	30	41.10
Agree	30	41.10
Neutral	6	8.22
Disagree	5	6.85
Strongly Disagree	2	2.74
Total	73	100

As indicated in the table above, 41.10% of respondents strongly agreed that with community participation and involvement in donor-funded projects, the project beneficiaries are linked to service providers hence ensuring the sustainability of project benefits of donor-supported projects after the end of project support. Further 41.10% of the respondents agreed, while 8.22% remained neutral while the respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed, were represented by 6.85% and 2.74% respectively. It is shown from the study that there is a strong positive relationship between linking beneficiaries to service providers and the sustainability of project benefits.

4.1.6 Participation enhances ownership and sustainability

The study wanted to determine the level of agreement of respondents that participation of the project community in development project implementation leads to ownership, which enhances the continuity of donor-supported projects' benefits because participation of the project community in development project implementation leads to ownership boosts the sustainability of the project benefits.

Table 6: Project Ownership and Sustainability

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	33	45.21
Agree	22	30.14
Neutral	11	15.07
Disagree	5	6.85
Strongly Disagree	2	2.74
Total	73	100

From the study findings as indicated Table 6 above, 45.21% of the respondents strongly agreed that participation of the project community in development project implementation leads to ownership, which enhances the sustainability of donor-funded projects, and involvement 30.14% of the respondents agreed. 15.07% were neutral, while those who strongly disagreed and disagreed were represented by 2.74% and 6.85% respectively. The findings therefore show that the participation of the project community in development project implementation leads to ownership of the projects, which consequently leads to the continuity of donor-supported projects' benefits in Chukudum, Budi County of South Sudan.

4.1.7 Involvement and participation in project activities

The study sought to understand the level of agreement of respondents that community participation in project activities (planning meetings, project inception, project launch, validation works, and monitoring and evaluation) enhances the window for ownership and sustainability of project benefits because community participation and engagement in project activities is very critical for community ownership and sustainability of those projects funded by the donors.

Table 7: Involvement and participation in project activities

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	38	52.05
Agree	23	31.51
Neutral	6	8.22
Disagree	2	2.74
Strongly Disagree	4	5.48
Total	73	100

The respondents indicated by 52.05% strongly agreed that community attendance in project activities (planning meetings, project inception, project launch, validation works, and monitoring and evaluation) enhances the window for ownership and sustainability of project benefits, with 31.51% in agreement with the same. While 8.22% remained neutral on this, 5.48% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 2.74% of the respondents disagreed. The findings therefore shows that community participation in project activities (planning meeting,

project inception, project launch, validation works, and monitoring and evaluation) enhances the window for ownership and continuity of donor-supported projects after the end of external supports in Chukudum, Budi County of South Sudan.

4.1.8 Use of locally available resources and capacities

The respondents were asked to show their level of agreement that using community locally available resources and capacities of the project beneficiaries strengthens the capacity of the beneficiary community to maintain the projects especially when donors withdraw their support to the projects because, when local capacities and resources are not used, there is great harm done to the community.

Table 8: Use of local resources and capacities

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	38	52.05
Agree	26	35.62
Neutral	4	5.48
Disagree	3	4.11
Strongly Disagree	2	2.74
Total	73	100

The results indicated that 52.05% of the respondents strongly agreed that using community locally available resources and capacities of the project beneficiaries strengthens the capacities of the beneficiary community to maintain the projects especially when donors withdraw their support to the projects. 35.62% of respondents agreed that using community locally available resources and capacities of the project beneficiaries strengthens the capacity of the beneficiaries to continue with the projects especially when donors withdraw their support to the projects. While 5.48% were neutral, 4.11% disagreed with this view and 2.74% strongly disagreed. The findings thus show that using the available community resources and capacities strengthens the abilities of beneficiaries to maintain projects after the withdrawal of donor support.

4.2 Regression Results

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of community participation on the sustainability of donor-supported projects. The results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Regression Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.472	0.649		2.268	0.026
Community Participation	0.431	0.141	0.334	3.066	0.003

Based on the above results, community engagement was seen to have a positive and significant relationship with the sustainability of donor-supported projects in South Sudan ($0.003 < 0.05$). This means that community managers are involved in decision-making, and there were few complaints about the project after it was completed. It was also discovered that community engagement raised project awareness both before and after the project. The project's

completion was well received by the community, giving the impression that the effort was a success. The results also show that community engagement contributes to project effectiveness and sustainability. It states that community engagement creates ownership and ensures the sustainability of projects through their involvement. The findings also demonstrate that the local availability of resources and capabilities strengthens beneficiaries' ability to continue initiatives, particularly when donors remove funding.

4.3 Discussion

From the discussion carried out, participation of the project community in donor donor-funded project informs adaptive response and programming as their participation will render advice on project sensitivity for diverse cultures and changing contexts, which encourages the project to respond appropriately to the community needs. It entices ownership and sustainability and improves transparency and accountability, which create sufficient room for efficiency, effectiveness, and economy on the use of budgetary and financial resources. The study found that CP opens the door for community empowerment which generates avenues for the continuity of the project benefits even after the end of project support. Community ownership of the programs projects and activities guaranteed sustainability in terms of mentorship, sustained capacities to deliver project services; and technical abilities in programs and projects which shall build a sustained motivation for service continuity and delivery, when donors cease project support. CP builds trust and confidence in the project beneficiary community, leading to self-sustainability and resilience; and project benefits tend to be durable and more sustainable. When a community does not participate and get involved in donor-funded projects, it lacks support and ownership as the community sees it as something that is created or imposed on them, away from their needs and priorities. For example, CRS has been creating community access roads worth millions of dollars, which were used as cash for work. The access roads remained used in some areas and not even cattle using it. CDSS walking tractor project suffered major failures because communities were consulted on what modern agricultural tools were their priority and needs. After all, it was not meeting the needs and priorities of the community, due to a lack of involvement and participation in the project lifecycle.

The discussions demonstrated that there should be joint baseline assessments to map out priority needs, problems, priorities, and rights by the organizations and the final target beneficiaries, in a very transparent and accountable manner to the beneficiaries. This should be inclusive engagement of all stakeholders (local leaders, community structures, traditional institutions, government authority, and community influential persons (inclusive coordination and collaboration), and consultation should be given prior importance as any part of the project cycle. The local advisory committee should be encouraged to participate directly or indirectly in the project implementation on behalf of the beneficiary community. There should training and transfer of roles and responsibilities to the local project community and community entry processes have to be clear the community ownership and acceptability of the project and program, and the use of locally available resources and capacities are paramount at a community level to ensure sustained resources for project continuity and sustained motivation for continued service delivery. NGOs implementing donor-funded projects should ensure they strengthen the capacity of the communities to realize their important roles in participating and engaging in the project lifecycles and give their support to ensure sustained motivation for continued service delivery.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that community participation has a positive and significant effect on the sustainability of some funded projects. The study concluded that the decision-making process, involvement of beneficiaries, linkage of project beneficiaries to service providers, and participation in project activities affected the sustainability of donor-funded projects positively.

6.0 Recommendations

Following the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made. The community needs to participate in the project from the initiation to the end, this will help sustain the project for a long time. A community should also engage in decisions because this enhances the ownership and sustainability of projects. Community participation enhances the lifecycles of projects; therefore, community members should participate to encourage the effectiveness and longevity of projects. Policy should be created to advance community project ownership; this will help the project goal to be sustained since the project is for the community and they know how beneficial it is for them. When policy is implemented no organization or agency can just take it away from the community or politicize the project. A community should be encouraged to participate and serve with locally available resources; this will strengthen the beneficiaries to maintain the project especially when donors withdraw.

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