

Barriers and Enablers of NGO Sustainability in Developing Contexts: Empirical Evidence from Kenya

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Abstract

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in advancing social development, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where state capacity remains limited. In Kenya, NGOs contribute substantially to service delivery, rights advocacy, and community empowerment. However, concerns over the sustainability of NGO operations have intensified amidst shifting donor priorities, regulatory changes, and evolving socio-economic dynamics. This study undertakes a systematic review of ten peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2014 and 2024, critically examining the barriers and enablers of NGO sustainability within the Kenyan context. Guided by multiple theoretical perspectives, including Resource Dependence Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Institutional Theory, the review synthesizes findings across financial diversification strategies, governance structures, leadership practices, community engagement mechanisms, and regulatory environments. Results reveal that financial diversification, strategic leadership, strong governance, authentic community participation, and adaptive organizational capacity are pivotal in cultivating sustainability. Conversely, overdependence on donor funding, weak internal systems, governance failures, and regulatory ambiguities persist as major threats to long-term viability. The analysis also identifies important research gaps, including limited longitudinal studies, underexplored technological innovations in NGO operations, and uneven attention to power asymmetries within participatory models. Addressing these challenges requires integrated approaches that balance internal capacity development with external stakeholder engagement and regulatory advocacy. This review provides a foundation for both practitioners and scholars seeking to understand and enhance NGO sustainability in Kenya. It calls for strategic reforms at the organizational and sectoral levels to ensure that NGOs continue to deliver transformative outcomes for the communities they serve.

Keywords: *NGO Sustainability, Financial Diversification, Strategic Leadership, Governance and Accountability, Community Engagement, and Regulatory Environment*

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1. Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have long been integral to Kenya's development landscape, addressing gaps in the health, education, agriculture, and human rights sectors. These NGOs have grassroots presence and adaptability that enable them to respond properly to the needs of the community, especially in areas where government services are limited. In the 2022/2023 fiscal year, NGOs invested approximately KSh197.9 billion in various projects across Kenya, marking a KSh12.4 billion increase from the previous year (Star, 2024). These funds were allocated to critical sectors, including health, education, welfare, agriculture, water, and sanitation. Notably, health initiatives received the largest share, with expenditures amounting to KSh36.5 billion, followed by allocations to children's services, disaster relief, and education.

However, despite this substantial investment, some challenges persist. For example, only 2,828 out of 12,000 registered NGOs submitted their annual reports as mandated by law in a report by the Interior Ministry of Kenya (Star, 2024). This raises concerns regarding transparency and accountability within the sector, which has over 10,000 active NGOs, but their actual contribution to the economy remains unclear because of reporting deficiencies (Star, 2024). As a result, such a lack of compliance hinders the ability to evaluate the true impact of NGOs and undermines efforts to coordinate development activities effectively. There is also the challenge of external pressures. The NGO sector faces external pressures, including recent geopolitical shifts, in this case, the suspension of USAID funding, which has disrupted operations, particularly in aid-dependent regions like Kisumu and Nairobi. This funding gap has led to service interruptions in critical health programs, including those targeting HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

The issue of NGO sustainability is not unique to Kenya. Across Africa, sustainability has emerged as a pressing concern, particularly as foreign donors reassess their strategic priorities and shift funding to new regions or modalities (Chanase, 2023). For example, a study by the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2021) noted that in sub-Saharan Africa, over 60% of small to medium-sized NGOs cease operations within their first seven years, primarily because of financial constraints and inadequate organizational structures. Similarly, in countries like Uganda and Ghana, researchers have observed that weak internal governance, donor dependency, and limited local resource mobilization primarily affect the longevity of NGO operations (Gul & Morande, 2023; Cuesta et al., 2021).

On the global front, some best practices can provide tangible lessons. Case in point, in India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) pioneered the integration of social enterprise models to fund operations that blended advocacy with service provision to achieve both financial autonomy and social impact (International Labor Organization, 2024). In South Africa, the Community Work Programme (CWP) has demonstrated how strategic partnerships between NGOs and government entities can create a sustained impact at the grassroots level that ensures there is continuity of services even in the process of funding transitions (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2024). The above are good examples that demonstrate the important role of innovation, financial diversification, and institutional resilience in sustaining NGO operations beyond traditional grant cycles.

In Kenya, efforts to address sustainability challenges have included the emergence of hybrid NGO models that combine traditional nonprofit operations with business ventures, the professionalization of NGO management through targeted leadership development programs, and the push for greater community ownership of interventions. Even so, systemic barriers persist. Donor funding continues to account for over 85% of total NGO revenues, while only a

small fraction of organizations report consistent success in local fundraising or fee-for-service models (NGO Coordination Board, 2023). In response to these challenges, the Kenyan government has set out to operationalize the Public Benefits Organizations (PBO) Act in 2024. This Act aims to provide a more enabling environment for NGOs. Legislative action, such as the implementation of the Act, helps to improve the legal framework that governs NGOs, which then promotes better coordination and accountability. Given these dynamics, understanding the factors contributing to NGOs' sustainability in Kenya is more critical than ever. The following systematic review seeks to identify the barriers hindering NGO sustainability and the enablers that support their continued operation. The study seeks to inform policy decisions and strategic planning for NGOs operating in Kenya's complex development environment by synthesizing empirical evidence from the past decade.

2. Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Literature

The sustainability of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kenya has garnered increasing scholarly attention over the past decade. This focus is driven by the important role NGOs play in supplementing government efforts in sectors, for example, health, education, and social services, especially in underserved regions (Nkosheshe, 2024). However, despite the focus of the NGOs, they suffer certain setbacks that include the dynamism of their operational environment, which is characterized and or affected by fluctuating donor funding, regulatory changes, and evolving community needs that affect their longevity and successes. Research into this phenomenon has led to multiple studies seeking to find out and understand the different factors affecting the sustainability of NGOs. For example, in their study, *Examining the Factors Influencing Sustainability of Non-Governmental Organizations: A Study of Nairobi, Kenya*, Miriti and Karuthi (2020) conducted a study involving 167 employees from 288 NGOs in Nairobi County, revealed that access to donor funds, effective monitoring, and adherence to government policies highly impact NGO sustainability. Their findings underscore the importance of financial accountability and regulatory compliance in facilitating organizational longevity.

Another important element that helps in sustaining NGO operations is community engagement. In their study regarding the influence of community participation on sustainability of non-profit organizations: *The Case of Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association*, Niki and Awuor (2024) found that active community participation creates or develops ownership and responsibility that can help in deriving sustainability for non-profit organizations. This is a noteworthy finding because it is consistent with the principles of Stakeholder Theory that underscore the importance of involving all stakeholders in decision-making processes. This is also a point that is supported by the element of strategic leadership and planning. As evidenced in the study, *Influence of Strategic Direction on Financial Sustainability of NGOs in Kenya* by Oluoch et al. (2021), it was established that clear strategic planning positively correlates with financial stability. The understanding is then that NGOs must adopt forward-thinking approaches and adaptive strategies to navigate the complex operational landscape. Furthermore, internal organizational capacities, for example, financial planning and resource management, play a huge role. Wanja and Ronald (2024), in their study, *Effect of Financial Planning Strategies on Financial Sustainability of NGOs in Nairobi County, Kenya*, found that there is a need for strong financial planning strategies that can help in achieving financial sustainability. As such, the finding stresses the need for NGOs to develop comprehensive financial frameworks that can help mitigate the risks associated with donor dependency.

However, even with these helpful insights, gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding longitudinal analyses and sector-specific studies. Most existing research provides cross-

sectional perspectives that limit the understanding of the dynamics of sustainability over time. Also, there is a paucity of studies that are focused on the unique challenges faced by NGOs operating in rural versus urban settings, or those working in specific sectors, including, health, education, or environmental conservation. Consequently, the following literature review seeks to examine and synthesize recent empirical findings to provide a better understanding of the barriers and enablers of NGO sustainability in Kenya. It will examine studies conducted over the past five years, identify patterns, highlight gaps, and inform strategies that can be used to improve and or inform the resilience and effectiveness of NGOs operating within the Kenyan context.

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

The sustainability of NGOs encompasses more than financial viability because it is also about determining their capacity to adapt, how they maintain relevance, and how they continue delivering services from time to time. The following theoretical frameworks have been employed to analyze the multifaceted nature of NGO sustainability, particularly in the Kenyan context.

2.1.1 Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory posits that organizations are reliant on external resources for survival, influencing their behavior and strategies (Arvidson & Linde, 2021). For NGOs that have their primary resource as funding, their survival often depends on managing relationships with donors, government agencies, and other benefactors. In the Kenyan NGO sector, this theory is pertinent due to the heavy reliance on donor funding. A study by Miriti and Karithi (2020) found that access to donor funds, effective monitoring, and adherence to government policies can make huge impacts on NGO sustainability. As such, there is a major need for NGOs to develop strategies that mitigate dependency risks, which include diversifying funding sources and improving resource accountability. This means that in Kenya, empirical studies continue to showcase the relevance of RDT. Case in point, Mutua (2023) noted that NGOs that are highly dependent on single donors tend to exhibit greater drift in their mission by adapting projects that do not meet their community needs to those that are preferred by their funders. As such, diversification strategies, including social enterprise activities and local fundraising, can help to reduce resource vulnerability and allow organizations greater autonomy (Richard, 2024). However, RDT's limitation comes from its underestimation of internal agency because it portrays organizations primarily as reactive entities, when in practice, many NGOs actively negotiate, innovate, and reshape their external dependencies.

2.1.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory suggests that organizations must consider the interests of all stakeholders if they are to achieve long-term success. For NGOs, stakeholders can include donors and also beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, partner organizations, and regulators. Understanding this perspective can be useful in understanding sustainability because it helps in balancing multiple, sometimes conflicting, interests. In the context of Kenyan NGOs, their engagement with local communities is crucial. Research by Niki and Awuor (2024) on the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association demonstrated that community participation fosters ownership and responsibility, leading to better sustainability of non-profit organizations. This stresses the importance of inclusive decision-making processes and stakeholder engagement in NGO operations. Moreover, stakeholder theory shows the risk of prioritizing donor expectations at the expense of beneficiary needs, a practice that can lead to diminished local support and project failure. However, operationalizing true stakeholder engagement is resource-intensive, and smaller NGOs tend to struggle to maintain inclusive structures under financial constraints.

2.1.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory examines how organizational structures and practices are influenced by social norms, values, and regulations. This perspective is crucial in contexts like Kenya, where NGOs must navigate evolving regulatory landscapes, societal expectations, and political pressures. Kenyan NGOs operate within a challenging regulatory environment that affects their sustainability. For instance, Wabwire (2022) demonstrated that poor fund management and inadequate capacity building, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to the closure of NGO programs in Kisumu County. This illustrates how institutional pressures and regulatory compliance are critical factors in NGO sustainability. For example, after the enactment of the PBO Act, compliance with reporting standards, financial audits, and registration requirements became non-negotiable for legitimacy. Research by Oketch (2022) shows that NGOs adopting international best practices in transparency and governance were more likely to receive multi-year funding compared to those adhering only minimally to statutory requirements. However, institutional theory is also paradoxical in the identified context because it can lead to excessive conformity that can stifle innovation. This means that NGOs that are overly focused on mimicking donor language or regulatory templates may lose the agility necessary for community-driven programming.

2.1.4 Organizational Capacity and Internal Factors

Organizational capacity, including leadership, technological innovation, and resource mobilization, can help in the realization of NGO sustainability. A study by Kyamutetera and Chemutai (2023) found that management support, employee motivation, and technological adoption positively influence the performance of NGOs in Nairobi City County. Similarly, Okeyo (2023) emphasized that organizational capacity and community involvement are pivotal in sustaining donor-funded healthcare projects in Nairobi County.

2.1.5 Systems Theory

Systems Theory views organizations as open systems that constantly interact with their environment. From this view, sustainability depends on an NGO's ability to process feedback, adapt to environmental changes, and maintain a dynamic balance between inputs, throughputs, and outputs. In the Kenyan context, NGOs have for some time now established strong feedback loops that involve beneficiaries, local partners, and donors, which have helped them to become more resilient to external shocks, including COVID-19 and shifting donor strategies. For example, Mumanthi et al. (2021) found that NGOs with decentralized management structures could adapt programming faster during the pandemic than those with rigid, top-down models. Consequently, systems theory shows the importance of organizational learning and adaptability. Yet, it lacks specificity regarding which external factors, including political, economic, and social, most critically affect sustainability in different settings.

2.2 Empirical Barriers to NGO Sustainability in Kenya

While considerable focus has been placed on the barriers limiting NGO sustainability in Kenya, empirical evidence equally highlights several factors that support and promote long-term viability. These enablers are mostly multifaceted as they are often overlapping and mutually reinforcing. They reflect not just strategic choices made by organizations, but also the environments in which they operate. The following are themes that emerge consistently across recent Kenyan studies, and they provide a roadmap for understanding what allows NGOs to survive and, in some cases, thrive despite major structural and financial challenges.

2.2.1 Strategic Leadership and Internal Governance

An NGO's capacity to weather financial, regulatory, and social disruptions is closely linked to its leadership. Strategic leaders are those able to anticipate change, guide adaptation, and

maintain organizational focus through uncertain terrain (Schaefer et al., 2022). According to Aidah et al. (2023), strategic leadership in Kenya's advocacy sector showed a significant influence on financial sustainability through improved planning, foresight, and stakeholder engagement. Their study of 44 NGOs concluded that organizations with clear strategic direction and high levels of leadership accountability were better at mobilizing resources and adjusting to donor volatility. Similarly, Oluoch et al. (2021) established that NGOs that had invested in mission clarity and transparent governance frameworks had better resilience when experiencing the downward realities of a reduction of funding. The study revealed that organizations that maintained stakeholder trust were able to retain institutional knowledge despite staff turnover. Leadership stability, particularly at the executive and board levels, also played a major role. This meant that when leaders are from within the communities they served, NGOs tended to enjoy stronger legitimacy and donor confidence, both essential for operational continuity. As a result, it is vital to note that governance does not simply refer to legal compliance or formal structures. In practice, it includes consistent internal communication, ethical leadership, and a willingness to learn from failure. These seemingly soft elements are rarely measured directly but are frequently referenced in qualitative studies as reasons for long-term NGO survival (Okeyo, 2023).

2.2.2 Community Ownership and Participatory Models

Sustainability tends to be strongest where communities feel that an NGO's work is their own. Participatory development models, including those where communities are not just beneficiaries but co-designers and evaluators of programs, have been shown to support long-term continuity. Niki and Awuor (2024), studying the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, found that organizations with embedded community structures had significantly higher project retention rates and longer-term program visibility. Their data indicated that community involvement reduced project redundancy, increased local fundraising, and improved monitoring accuracy. These findings are consistent with a growing body of literature showing that community-rooted accountability mechanisms, including public budget audits, rotating volunteer councils, or co-managed field sites, can strengthen program design and also insulate organizations from political shifts. For example, Jacob and Moi (2024) demonstrated that in Makueni County, water projects that included community members in procurement oversight had fewer maintenance issues and greater user satisfaction. However, it must be pointed out that participation does not automatically mean empowerment. Without transparency and equity in decision-making, participatory processes can become extractive. For example, some NGOs in Nairobi have been found to practice "projected participation", which means engaging communities during baseline studies but excluding them during implementation (Machuma et al., 2024). Sustainable models require that communities be involved in shaping interventions and providing them with access to information and power throughout the lifecycle of the project.

2.2.3 Organizational Capacity and Staff Development

A recurrent theme in studies from both urban and rural Kenyan NGOs is the importance of internal technical and administrative capacity. This includes not only the number of staff but also the skills, experience, and continuity of key personnel. Wanja and Ronald (2024) argue that successful NGOs invest in structured staff development, including mentorship and succession planning, to retain institutional memory and improve delivery consistency. The Nairobi County NGO capacity audit (2023) further revealed that professional training in grant writing, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was strongly associated with sustained program implementation, especially in donor-dependent sectors such as

HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. In particular, the ability to collect and report impact data allowed NGOs to maintain credibility with funders and to adjust interventions proactively. Interestingly, NGOs with decentralized staffing structures, case in point, where field offices were semi-autonomous and empowered to make contextual decisions were found to be more adaptable during COVID-19 lockdowns (Oluoch et al., 2021). Staff flexibility and local decision-making can hugely reduce project downtime and community disengagement, especially in counties like Kisumu and Kilifi.

2.2.4 Financial Diversification and Adaptive Revenue Strategies

Perhaps the most cited enabler of sustainability in the Kenyan context is financial diversification. Overdependence on a single donor or grant stream remains a common risk factor, and NGOs that have moved beyond this model appear to be more stable. Mutua (2024), in a survey of 60 local NGOs in Nairobi, found that those with at least three income streams, including donor grants, service fees, and local fundraising, had higher annual survival rates and better staff retention. Some organizations have turned to social enterprise models, leveraging their expertise to offer consultancy, training, or community-based products. The Kenya Red Cross Society, for instance, has integrated commercial activities to support humanitarian work, including ambulance services, hospitality facilities, and training centers. A study by Musambaki (2023) showed that their funding structure found a strong correlation between income generation and financial resilience, particularly during funding gaps. Others have explored diaspora contributions, corporate partnerships, or micro-finance initiatives that embed sustainability within the target community itself. However, while financial diversification provides clear advantages, it also comes with administrative complexity. Gatua (2018) and Ndibaru & Ongwae (2023) warn that without proper financial planning and oversight, multiple revenue sources can lead to internal inefficiencies or even compliance issues with tax authorities or donor contracts.

5.4.5 Legal and Policy Environment

The policy environment in which NGOs operate in Kenya has historically been a source of both opportunity and constraint. The operationalization of the PBO Act in 2024 marked a turning point in NGO regulation. This is because it provided clearer registration processes, simplified reporting requirements, and formal recognition of NGO contributions to national development. Before this, NGOs often operated under ambiguous legal expectations, which created inconsistencies in licensing, taxation, and inter-agency collaboration. According to the NGO Coordination Board's (2023) report, the implementation of the PBO Act increased voluntary compliance by over 20% in its first year, particularly among smaller community-based organizations. More importantly, policy clarity has allowed NGOs to build stronger partnerships with county governments. In Turkana and Nyeri, integrated health programs have benefited from co-funding and joint staffing arrangements with devolved departments, improving efficiency and legitimacy (Jacob & Moi, 2024). These collaborations have also helped NGOs avoid duplication of services and align with government priorities, which are efforts that can be viewed as a key strategy for long-term relevance. Yet, challenges persist. Advocacy-based NGOs still report intimidation and bureaucratic slowdowns when their agendas conflict with local political interests (Kenya Human Rights Council, 2017). This unevenness stresses that while the policy framework is improving, its implementation varies across regions and sectors.

To this extent, the enablers identified above are not isolated variables. They intersect in dynamic and context-dependent ways. A strategically led NGO with community involvement and solid financial planning may still struggle if faced with repressive local politics. Likewise,

a well-funded organization may falter if it lacks internal cohesion or neglects stakeholder voice. Consequently, what is clear is that sustainability cannot be built on funding alone. Instead, it emerges from a challenging reality that includes a mix of foresight, trust, adaptability, and legitimacy, which are all rooted in the organization's structure and the community's engagement with it.

2.3 Empirical Enablers of NGO Sustainability in Kenya

The sustainability of NGOs in Kenya is influenced by a confluence of factors that seek to improve their resilience and effectiveness. Recent empirical studies have identified key enablers, including strategic leadership, community engagement, organizational capacity, financial diversification, and supportive policy environments, as critical determinants for the success of NGOs in Kenya, as discussed below.

2.3.1 Strategic Leadership and Governance

Strategic leadership is pivotal in steering NGOs towards financial sustainability. A study by Aidah et al. (2023) examined the influence of strategic leadership on the financial sustainability of NGOs in Kenya's advocacy sector. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.678$; $p \leq 0.05$) between strategic leadership and financial sustainability, underscoring the role of visionary leadership in resource mobilization, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive strategy formulation. Further, Oluoch et al. (2021) reiterated that a strategic direction that brings together clear mission and vision statements can hugely influence the financial sustainability of NGOs. Their research highlighted that organizations with well-defined strategic directions are better positioned to navigate financial challenges and align their operations with long-term goals.

2.3.2 Community Engagement and Participation

Engaging local communities in the planning and implementation of projects can create a sense of ownership and accountability, which are prerequisites for sustainability. Niki and Awuor (2024) investigated the influence of community participation on the sustainability of non-profit organizations, focusing on the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association. Their study demonstrated that community participation has a positive and significant impact ($\beta = 0.438$; $p < 0.05$) on organizational sustainability, stressing the importance of involving communities in decision-making processes. Similarly, Jacob and Moi (2024) examined public participation's influence on the sustainability of water projects in Makueni County. Their findings indicated that community involvement in project monitoring and evaluation improves the sustainability of donor-funded initiatives.

2.3.3 Organizational Capacity and Human Resource Development

Building internal organizational capacity, particularly in human resource management, is essential for NGO sustainability. A study conducted by Okeyo (2023) evaluated how organizational capacity affects the sustainability of donor-funded healthcare projects in Nairobi County. The research found that factors such as staff competence, effective leadership, and robust internal systems significantly contribute to the sustainability of these projects. Moreover, Kamau et al. (2024) showed that international NGOs in Kenya need to improve their management capabilities, including strategic planning and innovation, to improve performance and sustainability.

2.3.4 Financial Diversification and Resource Mobilization

Diversifying funding sources reduces dependency on single donors and enhances financial stability. Mutua (2024) investigated factors affecting the financial sustainability of local NGOs

in Nairobi County. The study stressed the importance of developing multiple income streams, including social enterprises and local fundraising initiatives, to mitigate the risks associated with donor fatigue and funding volatility. Also, a study by the Kenya Red Cross Society concluded that funding diversification positively and significantly affects financial performance ($\beta = 0.558$; $p = 0.000$), suggesting that NGOs should implement funding diversification strategies to improve financial sustainability (Jacinta & Gaiku, 2022).

2.3.5 Supportive Policy and Regulatory Environment

A conducive policy environment facilitates NGO operations and sustainability. The operational environment and constraints for NGOs in Kenya have been explored, stressing the need for streamlined registration processes, transparent regulatory frameworks, and government support in capacity-building efforts. This kind of environment facilitates NGOs to focus on their core missions without undue bureaucratic hindrances. Besides, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) Policy & Sustainability Report (2023) underscores the importance of policy support in promoting sustainability practices among organizations, including NGOs

2.4 Empirical Studies on NGO Sustainability in Kenya

Over the past decade, a growing body of empirical research has sought to unravel the different factors that influence the sustainability of NGOs in Kenya. These studies have used diverse methodologies and theoretical frameworks to present varied understandings of the operational, financial, and strategic dimensions that underpin NGO longevity and effectiveness in the Kenyan context.

2.4.1 Strategic Leadership and Organizational Performance

Empirical research has consistently identified strategic leadership as a crucial factor that affects the resilience of NGOs. A national-level study by Aidah et al. (2023) demonstrated that NGOs exhibiting clear strategic vision, adaptable leadership styles, and proactive stakeholder engagement strategies achieved above-average financial stability compared to organizations with reactive or fragmented leadership models. Organizations led by executives with strong foresight and community-rooted leadership practices were better positioned to secure funding and maintain program continuity during periods of uncertainty. Kamau et al. (2024), investigating international NGOs operating in Kenya, further reinforced these findings. They stressed that talent development, strategic alliances, and leadership continuity were decisive in cultivating organizational performance and mitigating funding risks. Specifically, organizations that invested in nurturing second-tier leadership, instead of centralizing decision-making at the executive level, exhibited higher adaptability when confronted with changes in donor funding. In comparative studies published in the South African context, Shabalala (2025) suggested similar patterns, which were that NGOs with distributed leadership systems and board stability demonstrated greater programmatic resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, this demonstrates the cross-contextual relevance of strategic leadership investments.

2.4.2 Financial Diversification and Resource Mobilization

The issue of funding is a recurring theme in multiple studies. Inyanza et al. (2023) noted that NGOs dependent on single-source grants faced higher closure risks within five years of grant termination compared to those employing diversified fundraising strategies. Diversification strategies documented include fee-for-service models, social enterprises, and community-driven micro-donations. Even so, successful implementation varies based on organizational size and sector. A sectoral analysis by Ndibaru & Ongwae (2023) on Kenyan health-focused NGOs revealed that diversified income portfolios not only stabilized operational budgets but

also enhanced bargaining power with external donors. Organizations engaging in resource mobilization through corporate partnerships, diaspora philanthropy, and crowdfunding platforms demonstrated higher continuity of core programs, even in periods when external funding was declining or was affected. Nevertheless, the transition towards diversified financing is uneven. Smaller NGOs, particularly in rural counties, often lack the technical capacity to navigate complex revenue models, a pattern mirrored in Uganda and Tanzania (Kago, 2023). This disparity points to the need for ecosystem-wide capacity-building initiatives rather than reliance on organizational innovation alone.

2.4.3 Governance, Accountability, and Regulatory Compliance

Strong governance mechanisms tend to correlate strongly with the survival rates of NGOs in Kenya. While examining the governance structures among 150 NGOs in Nairobi, Wabwire (2023) found that organizations with independent and actively engaged boards, transparent reporting systems, and clear operational guidelines were twice as likely to sustain multi-year funding relationships compared to those lacking such structures. Moreover, the formalization of governance practices has been further bolstered by Kenya's Public Benefit Organizations (PBO) Act, operationalized in 2022. The NGO Coordination Board's Annual Report (2023) observed a 27% increase in compliance filings and financial audits among registered NGOs within the first year of the Act's enforcement. This means that compliance helped ensure legal recognition and also improved the confidence of donors, which is also a similar trend observed in Ghana following the NGO Regulation Act (2019). However, McDonough & Rodriguez (2020) caution that governance continues to be a major and ongoing challenge for community-based organizations and smaller NGOs, many of which perceive regulatory compliance as burdensome because of limited administrative capacity.

2.4.4 Community Engagement and Participatory Approaches

The sustainability of NGO initiatives is intimately tied to the depth and authenticity of community engagement. The longitudinal study by Niki and Awuor (2024) focusing on wildlife conservancies in Kenya illustrated that participatory governance models. This participatory model is where community members are incorporated into board structures and decision-making processes, which is a process that leads to better program endurance and environmental stewardship outcomes. Similarly, research conducted in Nairobi's Korogocho slum by Ndungu and Karugu (2019) established that donor-funded projects incorporating community-driven needs assessments and participatory monitoring frameworks recorded 30% higher post-donor survival rates compared to top-down initiatives. As such, this means that community involvement helps in strengthening social license and also reduces dependency cycles because beneficiaries develop a sense of ownership over interventions. Consequently, participation is not uniformly empowering. Studies warn of something they refer to as elite capture, where community engagement mechanisms are dominated by local power brokers, thereby marginalizing intended beneficiaries (Musgrave & Sam, 2016). Therefore, these findings underscore the need for NGOs to design participatory processes with built-in accountability safeguards for their long-term success.

2.4.5 Capacity Building and Human Resource Development

Another cornerstone of NGO sustainability is investing in human capital. Wanja and Ronald (2024), assessing over 80 NGOs across Nairobi and Rift Valley regions, noted that organizations providing structured professional development, succession planning, and decentralized decision-making structures demonstrated much higher resilience during funding transitions. Moreover, a 2023 Nairobi County NGO audit reported that organizations

prioritizing continuous grant writing, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and digital literacy training were more successful in retaining strategic staff and securing new funding streams (Nairobi City County, 2023). The impact of investing in capacity mirrors findings from other Kenyan studies, where leadership development pipelines and knowledge management systems are critical differentiators between surviving and failing NGOs (Kithuva & Mogote, 2024). Even so, these studies show that capital investments remain underfunded in many Kenyan NGOs, particularly among grassroots organizations that rely heavily on volunteerism and lack dedicated training budgets.

2.4.6 Persistent Challenges and Gaps for Future Research

Despite documented successes, persistent barriers threaten the sustainability of many NGOs in Kenya. Chief among these are financial precarity, regulatory unpredictability, leadership turnover, and community disengagement. Also, the uneven adoption of technological innovations, for example, digital fundraising platforms and data-driven impact assessment, creates a widening gap between urban, internationally connected NGOs and rural-based, resource-constrained organizations. There is also a notable dearth of longitudinal studies examining the evolution of NGO sustainability strategies over time. Most existing research captures cross-sectional snapshots, limiting understanding of how organizations adapt through multiple funding and policy cycles. Furthermore, few studies systematically integrate multiple theoretical perspectives, for example, combining Resource Dependence Theory with Systems Thinking to build comprehensive models of NGO resilience. Therefore, addressing these gaps could be a major advance in both scholarship and practice, supporting a new generation of Kenyan NGOs that are not only reactive survivors but strategic architects of their longevity.

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks Informing NGO Sustainability in Kenya

Understanding the sustainability of NGOs in Kenya requires a mixed theoretical approach. Several frameworks have been instrumental in analyzing the complex interplay of internal and external factors that influence NGO longevity and effectiveness. This section examines key theoretical models that have been applied to the Kenyan context, providing a lens through which empirical findings can be interpreted and strategic decisions informed.

2.5.1 Resource Dependence Theory (RDT)

Resource Dependence Theory posits that organizations are not self-sufficient and must obtain resources from their external environment to survive. In the Kenyan NGO sector, RDT has been pivotal in understanding how reliance on donor funding impacts organizational autonomy and sustainability. Studies have highlighted that over-dependence on specific funding sources can lead to vulnerability, as shifts in donor priorities may jeopardize ongoing projects. Diversification of income streams, including local fundraising and income-generating activities, has been recommended to mitigate such risks.

2.5.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of all parties affected by organizational activities, advocating for inclusive decision-making processes. In Kenya, NGOs that actively engage beneficiaries, donors, government entities, and community members in their operations tend to exhibit higher levels of trust and program relevance. Such inclusive approaches have been linked to improved project outcomes and enhanced sustainability, as they foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

2.5.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory examines how organizational structures and practices are influenced by the norms, values, and rules of the institutional environment. Kenyan NGOs operate within a regulatory framework that includes the Public Benefits Organizations Act, which sets standards for accountability and transparency. Compliance with such regulations not only ensures legal operation but also enhances credibility with donors and the public, thereby supporting sustainability.

2.5.4 Dynamic Capabilities Framework

The Dynamic Capabilities Framework focuses on an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments. For NGOs in Kenya, this means adapting to shifts in donor landscapes, political climates, and community needs. Organizations that invest in continuous learning, innovation, and strategic partnerships are better positioned to navigate uncertainties and maintain operational effectiveness.

2.5.5 Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to organizational management; instead, optimal strategies depend on specific situational factors. In the diverse Kenyan context, NGOs must tailor their governance structures, funding models, and program designs to align with local socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and stakeholder expectations. Flexibility and contextual awareness are thus critical for achieving sustainability.

2.6 Synthesis and Research Gaps

The review of existing literature has shown a growing but still uneven body of evidence concerning the sustainability of NGOs operating in the Kenyan context. Across various thematic areas, from governance and financial resilience to community engagement and institutional frameworks, scholars have provided valuable information and findings on the mechanisms and conditions that influence whether NGOs survive, adapt, or collapse. However, the existing literature remains fragmented, with several areas insufficiently explored or underrepresented. A consistent theme emerging from the review is the importance of strategic leadership, diversified funding, and deep community engagement in promoting long-term sustainability. Organizations that incorporate participatory models, maintain financial flexibility, and invest in leadership development tend to demonstrate greater resilience. Equally, studies have shown that an enabling legal and policy environment, especially in the wake of the Public Benefit Organizations Act, is positively correlated with operational stability.

However, despite these findings, there are several notable gaps in the literature, including the following. The first gap is limited longitudinal evidence. This is because most of the reviewed studies rely on cross-sectional data, capturing snapshots of NGO operations instead of longitudinal shifts. As a result, there is limited understanding of how sustainability strategies evolve, or how external shocks, including political changes, pandemics, or funding withdrawals, affect organizations in the medium to long term. The second gap is the underrepresentation of rural and small-scale NGOs. Available research tends to focus heavily on Nairobi-based or internationally affiliated NGOs. There is far less coverage of smaller, rural, or faith-based organizations, despite their prevalence and often critical community roles. These groups may face unique sustainability challenges that are not well captured by models based on larger or urban-based entities. The other gap is the gender and inclusivity gaps. Few studies examine the intersection of gender, leadership, and sustainability. For instance, there is little

analysis of how women-led NGOs navigate funding environments, or how gender dynamics within staff and community structures affect organizational resilience.

Another gap is the weak integration of mixed methods. This is because while qualitative insights are rich in many reports, there is a limited blending of qualitative and quantitative approaches in a systematic way. Mixed-methods studies could provide more comprehensive views by combining narrative depth with measurable outcomes, especially when evaluating the impact of community engagement or policy change on sustainability. There is also the issue of minimal focus on digital transformation and innovation. This is because the role of technology in NGO sustainability remains underexplored. In an era where digital platforms increasingly shape outreach, data collection, fundraising, and reporting, it is surprising that few empirical studies examine how digital innovation is supporting or hindering NGO sustainability in Kenya.

As a result, the literature synthesis underscores the richness of the existing literature while making clear that significant blind spots remain. These gaps limit the generalizability of current findings and also obscure potential strategies that may benefit under-researched segments of the NGO sector. A systematic review of Kenyan studies, as undertaken in this project, aims to bring cohesion to this fragmented field and to lay a stronger foundation for evidence-based strategies and future research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a systematic review methodology to synthesize empirical literature on the sustainability of NGOs in Kenya. The systematic review approach was selected to ensure a comprehensive, transparent, and replicable synthesis of existing studies, thereby minimizing bias and enhancing the reliability of findings. The review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which provide a 27-item checklist and a flow diagram to facilitate transparent reporting of systematic reviews (Sohrabi et al., 2021).

3.2 Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established a priori to guide the selection of studies. The inclusion criteria were as follows. It was based on empirical studies, which included qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods that focused on NGO sustainability within the Kenyan context. The next criterion was studies published between January 2014 and December 2024 to capture contemporary trends and developments. The next criterion was peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, dissertations, and credible organizational reports. The next criterion was studies published in English. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria were theoretical papers lacking empirical data. Another exclusion criterion was studies that were not focused on Kenya or did not have a clear emphasis on NGO sustainability. The other exclusion criterion was non-English publications.

3.3 Information Sources and Search Strategy

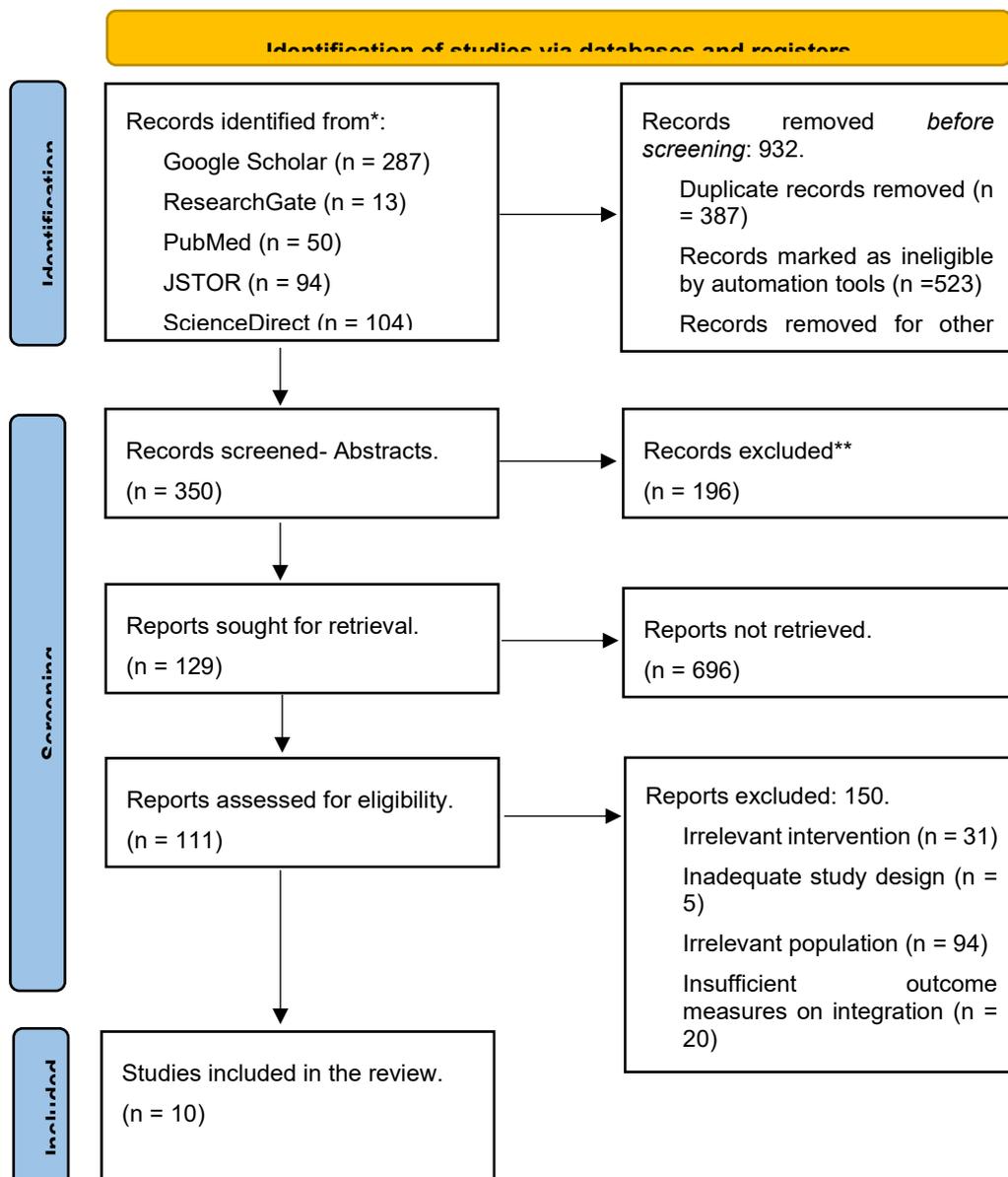
A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple electronic databases and platforms, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PubMed, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. The search strategy combined keywords and Boolean operators to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies. The primary search terms included: "NGO sustainability" AND "Kenya" "Non-governmental organizations" AND "financial sustainability" AND "Kenya" "Donor funding" AND "NGO performance" AND "Kenya" "Community engagement" AND "NGO resilience"

AND "Kenya" "Institutional theory" AND "NGO Kenya" The search was supplemented by manual screening of reference lists from relevant articles to identify additional pertinent studies.

3.4 Study Selection

All retrieved records were imported into reference management software to facilitate screening and removal of duplicates. The selection process involved two stages. The first stage was the screening of the title and abstract. Here, the researcher screened the titles and abstracts of all retrieved articles against the inclusion criteria. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a second reviewer. The second stage was reviewing the full texts. Here, articles that met the initial screening criteria underwent full-text review to confirm eligibility. Reasons for exclusion at this stage were documented. The study selection process was documented using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, detailing the number of records identified, screened, included, and excluded, along with reasons for exclusions as seen below.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flowchart – Identification of Studies



3.5 Data Extraction and Management

A standardized data extraction form was developed in Excel to systematically collect relevant information from each included study. The extracted data involved the following. The first thing was the bibliographic details that included the Author(s) year of publication, title, and source. The second was the characteristics of the study, including the research design, sample size, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. This was followed by contextual information that was about the geographic focus within Kenya, the type of NGO, and the thematic focus areas. This was followed by the key findings that included the main results connected to factors influencing the sustainability of the NGOs. Another set of data was the theoretical frameworks that determined any conceptual models or theories applied. As a result, data extraction was conducted independently by two reviewers to ensure accuracy and consistency. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus.

3.6 Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists, tailored to the specific study designs (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods). The appraisal focused on aspects, for example, clarity of research aims, appropriateness of methodology, rigor of data analysis, and relevance of findings. Studies were not excluded based on quality assessment scores. However, the appraisal informed the interpretation of findings and the weighting of evidence in the synthesis.

3.7 Data Synthesis

Given the heterogeneity of study designs and outcomes, a thematic synthesis approach was employed to integrate findings across studies. The synthesis involved the following. The first area was the coding of the extracted data. This involved identifying and labeling key concepts and patterns related to NGO sustainability. The next area was the development of descriptive themes that involved grouping codes into broader categories reflecting recurring themes. The next area was the generation of analytical themes, which involved interpreting the descriptive themes to provide deeper insights into the factors influencing NGO sustainability in Kenya. As such, the approach facilitated the identification of commonalities and divergences across studies that provided a better understanding of the challenging issues affecting the sustainability of NGOs.

4. Results and Discussion

This systematic review critically examined ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024, each investigating different dimensions of NGO sustainability in Kenya. The analysis revealed a variety of interconnected factors influencing organizational resilience, including financial diversification, governance structures, strategic leadership, organizational capacity, community engagement, and regulatory environment dynamics. While findings across the studies converge around certain critical enablers, notable gaps and divergences also emerged, pointing to difficult and evolving challenges.

4.1 Financial Planning and Diversification

The reviewed studies consistently affirm that financial diversification remains a central pillar of NGO sustainability. Njilu and Njilu (2020) and Wanja and Ronald (2023) highlight that NGOs depending on narrow donor bases are acutely vulnerable to external funding shocks. Organizations that successfully implemented multi-source fundraising strategies, integrating fee-for-service models and corporate partnerships, demonstrated greater operational continuity.

Similar observations were made by Musyoki (2016), whose case study on water-sector NGOs revealed the role of strategic alliances in expanding financial bases. However, the capacity to diversify funding streams was unevenly distributed. Smaller NGOs, particularly community-based organizations, often lacked the technical expertise or institutional reputation necessary to attract alternative resources. This finding mirrors broader African trends where organizational size and institutional maturity condition access to diversified funding (Kawiti and Okello, 2023).

4.2 Governance, Accountability, and Institutional Structures

Strong governance frameworks emerged as another critical determinant of sustainability. Wabwire (2022) established a strong positive correlation between board effectiveness, transparency measures, and financial resilience among Kisumu-based NGOs. Similarly, Kawiti and Namada (2022) established that organizations with a clear articulation of purpose and adherence to governance best practices outperformed less structured counterparts. However, governance challenges persist, particularly regarding board functionality and succession planning. Several studies (Okeyo, 2023; Njilu and Njilu, 2020) noted that governance breakdowns, for example, dormant boards or politicized leadership appointments, contributed majorly to organizational instability. These findings stress a structural gap, which is that while governance frameworks exist, their consistent implementation and enforcement remain uneven.

4.3 Strategic Leadership and Adaptability

Leadership quality was repeatedly identified as a powerful enabler of organizational survival. Oluoch et al. (2021) demonstrated that strategic leadership is characterized by visionary planning, talent management, and agility, which are forces that improve financial sustainability, especially when supported by enabling regulatory environments. Aidah et al. (2023) similarly emphasized that leadership foresight is critical in navigating fluctuating donor landscapes and shifting policy environments. Even so, a notable leadership gap persists in many NGOs, especially regarding leadership continuity and middle-management capacity development. This underinvestment weakens organizational adaptability, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a pattern echoed in the study by Kariuki (2023).

4.4 Organizational Capacity and Internal Appraisal

The importance of organizational capacity, including internal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, was underscored across the studies. Okeyo (2023) found that healthcare NGOs with robust internal appraisal mechanisms were better able to sustain donor-funded programs beyond initial grant cycles. Similarly, Koskei (2016) emphasized that NGOs investing in project monitoring and staff development achieved higher sustainability outcomes in community peace projects. Despite widespread recognition of capacity-building imperatives, resource allocation toward internal systems remains low among many NGOs. Several organizations prioritize program delivery over administrative strengthening, leaving them ill-equipped to demonstrate impact to donors or pivot during operational shocks.

4.5 Community Engagement and Participatory Models

Active and meaningful community participation emerged as a crucial driver of project and organizational sustainability. Studies by Koskei (2016) and Niki and Awuor (2024) revealed that projects embedded with community decision-making frameworks recorded higher success and longevity rates. Beneficiary ownership cultivated by participatory approaches can help improve project relevance and also insulate initiatives against shocks caused by donor

withdrawal. However, several challenges were noted, including cases of elite capture and exclusion of marginalized voices in community structures (Niki and Awuor, 2024). Therefore, while participation is widely championed, the quality and inclusiveness of participatory mechanisms require more deliberate attention.

4.6 Regulatory Environment and External Constraints

The role of the regulatory environment in shaping NGO sustainability was recognized but unevenly analyzed across the studies. Oluoch et al. (2021) found that regulatory predictability enhances strategic leadership effectiveness, while Mwangi, Mogute, and Yugi (2023) highlighted challenges related to institutional reporting and capacity constraints. Although the Public Benefit Organizations Act sought to streamline operations, compliance costs and bureaucratic ambiguities continue to pose hurdles, particularly for smaller organizations. This regulatory uncertainty mirrors challenges faced by NGOs in Uganda and Tanzania, suggesting a broader East African trend that requires more systematic engagement between civil society and state actors.

4.7 Emerging Gaps and Future Directions

Several critical gaps emerged across the reviewed literature. Firstly, few studies adopted longitudinal designs capable of tracking NGO performance and sustainability strategies over time. The current cross-sectional orientation limits insights into organizational adaptation trajectories. Secondly, while financial and governance factors are well-documented, less empirical attention has been given to the role of technological integration, knowledge management, and dynamic capabilities development in sustaining NGOs. Lastly, while community participation is widely advocated, required studies interrogating power asymmetries within participatory models remain scant. Future research should therefore prioritize mixed-methods and longitudinal studies, integrate organizational theory with contextual political economy analyses, and critically examine emergent sustainability enablers such as digital transformation and indigenous philanthropy.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review set out to critically examine the barriers and enablers of NGO sustainability in Kenya, synthesizing empirical evidence from ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024. The findings underscore that NGO sustainability in the Kenyan context is not determined by a single factor but emerges through the dynamic interplay of internal capacities, leadership qualities, financial strategies, governance mechanisms, stakeholder relationships, and external regulatory conditions. Financial diversification and strategic resource mobilization emerged as central enablers of sustainability. Organizations that moved beyond traditional donor dependency, integrating income-generating activities and corporate partnerships, demonstrated higher resilience in the face of funding volatility. However, achieving such diversification remains uneven, with smaller NGOs disproportionately constrained by deficits in their capacities. Governance structures and leadership practices were also identified as critical determinants of organizational continuity. Effective boards, strategic leadership development, and consistent internal accountability mechanisms enhanced financial performance, stakeholder trust, and programmatic success. Conversely, governance failures, leadership turnover, and poorly articulated missions contributed to organizational fragility, particularly in community-based organizations operating without strong institutional scaffolding. Organizational capacity, especially the development of internal monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems, played a significant role in sustaining operations beyond initial funding cycles. Nonetheless, many NGOs continue to

prioritize short-term project delivery over longer-term capacity strengthening, limiting their ability to adapt to shifting funding landscapes and policy environments. Community engagement practices were shown to reinforce project sustainability by fostering local ownership and relevance. Participatory models, when authentically implemented, strengthened social license and insulated initiatives from donor volatility. However, challenges related to inclusivity and elite capture within participatory mechanisms require more careful design and monitoring. Finally, the regulatory environment remains a double-edged sword. While the formalization of the NGO sector through instruments such as the Public Benefit Organizations Act has improved transparency and accountability, bureaucratic delays, inconsistent enforcement, and compliance burdens continue to pose operational challenges, particularly for smaller organizations with limited administrative resources. Overall, the synthesis of empirical findings points to a critical need for integrated sustainability strategies that balance financial diversification, robust governance, leadership adaptability, community-driven approaches, and strategic regulatory engagement. Furthermore, gaps in the existing literature, particularly the lack of longitudinal and mixed-methods studies, highlight important directions for future research. As a result, sustainability is not merely about organizational survival, it is about maintaining the capacity to deliver meaningful, transformative outcomes in the communities NGOs serve. Ensuring the longevity and relevance of NGOs in Kenya will require not only internal reforms but also systemic shifts in how development actors, governments, donors, and communities conceptualize and support the resilience of NGOs.

6. Recommendations

Based on the critical analysis of empirical studies on NGO sustainability in Kenya, several targeted recommendations emerge. These proposals aim to strengthen the resilience, adaptability, and long-term viability of NGOs operating within complex and often volatile environments.

6.1 Strengthen Financial Diversification and Resource Mobilization

NGOs should prioritize the development of diversified funding portfolios to reduce dependency on single donor sources. This requires strategic investment in alternative revenue streams such as social enterprises, fee-for-service initiatives, and corporate sector partnerships. Organizations should also build internal fundraising capacity by training staff in grant writing, crowdfunding strategies, and digital fundraising platforms, which have become increasingly relevant in a post-pandemic world. Local resource mobilization, particularly tapping into diaspora philanthropy and community-driven micro-donations, should be scaled as complementary strategies to external donor funding.

6.2 Deepen Governance Reforms and Board Functionality

NGOs must institute strong governance frameworks that emphasize transparency, accountability, and active board engagement to improve credibility and strategic direction. Regular board evaluations, capacity-building programs for board members, and clear separation of governance and management functions are critical. NGOs should also implement succession planning at both executive and board levels to ensure leadership continuity. Establishing governance charters that define roles, responsibilities, and ethical standards can further solidify organizational integrity and stakeholder trust.

6.3 Invest in Leadership Development and Organizational Adaptability

Strategic leadership must be cultivated across all organizational levels, not just at the executive tier. NGOs should prioritize leadership development programs that build adaptive, transformative, and ethical leadership capacities. For example, initiatives, including

mentorship schemes, leadership exchange programs, and continuous professional development opportunities, can nurture future leaders capable of navigating complex development landscapes. Moreover, creating or developing a culture of innovation and adaptive learning will enable NGOs to respond effectively to environmental changes and crises.

6.4 Prioritize Organizational Capacity Building

NGOs must allocate resources towards strengthening internal systems, particularly in monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning. Building strong internal capacities enables organizations to demonstrate impact credibly, a critical factor in maintaining donor confidence and achieving strategic goals. Investment in digital infrastructure, knowledge management systems, and staff training should be prioritized to ensure organizations are equipped to scale operations, adapt programming, and measure outcomes effectively.

6.5 Enhance Authentic Community Engagement

NGOs must move beyond tokenistic participation toward genuine community ownership of programs to achieve sustainable impact. Participatory needs assessments, community advisory boards, and co-creation models should become standard practice. Additionally, organizations must be deliberate in ensuring inclusivity within participatory processes, actively engaging marginalized and underrepresented groups. Developing participatory monitoring and evaluation frameworks will also allow communities to play active roles in assessing project outcomes and shaping future programming.

6.6 Engage Proactively with Regulatory Frameworks

Rather than viewing regulation solely as a compliance burden, NGOs should engage regulatory frameworks strategically. This includes participating in policy dialogues, advocating for reforms that create enabling environments, and collaborating with regulatory bodies to streamline compliance processes. Building strong relationships with government agencies at both national and county levels can facilitate smoother registration, reporting, and operational approvals. Joint platforms for civil society–state engagement can also contribute to a more stable and predictable operating environment.

6.7 Advanced Research and Knowledge Sharing

There is a pressing need for NGOs, academia, and policy think tanks to collaborate in generating longitudinal, context-sensitive research on sustainability pathways. NGOs should partner with research institutions to document and disseminate case studies, lessons learned, and innovative models. Establishing sector-wide learning hubs or knowledge repositories could enable peer-to-peer learning, drive innovation, and amplify Indigenous sustainability strategies often overlooked by global best-practice models.

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