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Assessing Villagers' Perception of NGO Effectiveness in Community Development: A Case Study in [Blantyre District-Ta Kapeni and Machinjiri]

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Abstract

This study examined the perception of villagers in rural Malawi regarding the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in community development and it highlights the importance of considering villagers' perceptions in evaluating NGO effectiveness and implications for sustainable community development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often operate in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts, implementing projects ranging from healthcare and education to infrastructure development and environmental sustainability. This study showed that 60.8% of the respondents agreed that NGOs are promoting development in their respective areas and majority of these are from TA Machinjiri while 25.5% strongly agree and majority of these are from TA Kapeni. 3.9% were neutral and 9.8% were disagreeing that NGOs were promoting development in their communities. The majority of villagers demonstrated awareness of NGOs operating in their communities, with approximately 80% reporting direct or indirect engagement with these organizations. Villagers perceived NGOs to have a positive impact on various aspects of community development, including education, healthcare, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities. Villagers highlighted several challenges and concerns, including issues related to sustainability, dependency, cultural sensitivity, and power dynamics. The study revealed a strong preference among villagers for collaborative approaches, emphasizing the importance of partnerships between NGOs, local government bodies, and community members. The study provides valuable insights into villagers' perceptions of NGO effectiveness in community development, and villagers generally acknowledge the positive impact of NGOs. However, addressing concerns related to trust, sustainability, and collaboration is essential for enhancing their effectiveness and ensuring long-term development outcomes. Beyond NGOs, engaging other stakeholders is essential to ensure the effectiveness of community development efforts.

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1.0 Introduction

NGOs often operate in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts, implementing projects ranging from healthcare and education to infrastructure development and environmental sustainability. These projects are designed to enhance the well-being of the communities they serve, reflecting a commitment to participatory development and empowerment. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is intricately tied to the perceptions of the very communities they aim to benefit.

Understanding villagers' perspectives on the effectiveness of NGO-led community development projects is critical for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into the alignment between the perceived impact of projects and the actual needs and aspirations of the community. Secondly, such assessments offer a valuable feedback loop for NGOs, enabling them to refine strategies, enhance transparency, and strengthen community engagement. Thirdly, by scrutinizing these perceptions, researchers and practitioners can contribute to the ongoing discourse on best practices in community

development and the role of NGOs in fostering sustainable change.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a critical role in the development of our country since independence, when we set forth on an uncertain path to steer our own development and assert our position in a globalizing world. They continue to bring food straight to the guts of the hungry, potable water to the thirsty and parched, safe delivery to mothers in the most remote areas, and are quite useful to ingeniously direct us to the toilet when successful food security results in the temptation to head to the bush. CONGOMA estimates NGO activity, today, contributes about 10% to gross domestic product (GDP). By many standards, NGOs engage to improve every aspect of our livelihoods.

NGOs have been instrumental in demonstrating to government, particularly policy makers in central and line ministries, on what works. But they have also been valuable in negotiating with development actors on the specific priorities' stakeholders ought to focus on through campaigns and targeted advocacy efforts. This has not been an easy task, as sometimes they have encountered a shrinking space for their mandates. Despite the challenges, a handful of NGOs continue to confirm their indispensable role in advancing humanity in Malawi. We may not be able to measure the obvious impact that the 500+ active NGOs, according to CONGOMA, have made on the people of Malawi across the board, but perhaps their absence would have been more conspicuous in the illusory plight of the masses.

Needless to say, NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs: which, although not quite the same as NGOs, the NGO Act (2000) of Malawi identifies as the overarching framework for NGOs and other Non-State actors) have also sat on a wealth of data, information and knowledge ever since they have enjoyed their documented existence in the country. The clear spontaneous absence of this knowledge in shaping development policy and action, and academic direction on development, is a somewhat disturbing oversight. (<https://www.tiunike.com/post/2017/09/11/the-uncharted-territory-of-ngos-and-development-in-malawi>).

To become more effective, nonprofits and foundations are turning to various sources for advice. Some look to experts who can share knowledge, research, and experience about what works and what does not. Others turn to crowdsourcing to generate ideas and even guide decisions about future directions or funding.

This study also contributes to understanding the relationships between the NGOs effectiveness and quality of life of their beneficiaries. Earlier research profusely contributed to the understanding about NGOs efforts in improving socio economic status of the beneficiaries. Causing a huge void research on NGOs work towards beneficiaries' quality of life, such concerns are addressed in this study.

Often the government and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are criticized for their poor performances in delivering services particularly in rural areas. However, there has been limited research on the assessment of their relative performances in service delivery as well as on the perceptions of people on the quality of such service delivery. This study hoped to examine the relative performances of NGOs that provide basic services including public health, education, drinking water and sanitation. The findings revealed different satisfaction levels of HHs and Area Development Committees.

1.1 Problem Statement

In the context of community development, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role. However, their effectiveness in addressing challenges and positively impacting livelihoods remains a critical area of inquiry. The research problem centers on exploring the nuanced perspectives of villagers regarding the effectiveness of NGOs in fostering community development. This inquiry sought to uncover the factors that shape villagers' perceptions, the elements they consider indicative of successful NGO interventions, and the challenges or shortcomings they identify. By delving into these aspects, the study aimed at providing valuable insights that can inform and enhance the strategies of NGOs, ensuring that their initiatives align more closely with the needs and expectations of the communities they serve. Understanding how these NGOs are perceived by villagers and their impact on community well-being is essential for informed policy decisions and effective development strategies.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of a study assessing villagers' perception of NGO effectiveness in community development lies in its potential to provide valuable insights that can inform and enhance the impact of NGO interventions. Here are some key points highlighting the significance of such a study:

Improving NGO Strategies, Enhancing Community Engagement, Accountability and Transparency, Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses, Building Trust and Relationships, Research Gap Filling

1.3 General Objective

To explore and understand the perception of villagers regarding the effectiveness of selected NGOs in promoting community development and well-being.

Specific Objectives

This study was informed by the following research objectives

- To evaluate villagers' perception of NGO effectiveness in community development
- To identify factors influencing villagers' opinions on NGO initiatives
- To provide actionable recommendations for NGOs to enhance their impact.

1.4 Research Questions

- How do villagers perceive the effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in contributing to community development?
- What are the factors influencing villagers' opinions on NGO initiatives?
- What are the practical recommendations for NGOs to improve their impact on community development?

2.0 Literature Review

Located in Southern Africa, Malawi is landlocked, sharing its borders with Mozambique, Zambia, and Tanzania. The country's estimated population is 20.41 million (2022) with an annual growth rate of 2.6%.

Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite making significant economic and structural reforms to sustain economic growth. The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, which employs over 80% of the population, and it is vulnerable to external shocks, particularly climatic shocks.

In January 2021, the government launched the Malawi 2063 Vision that aims to transform Malawi into a wealthy, self-reliant, industrialized upper-middle-income country, through a focus on agriculture commercialization, industrialization, and urbanization. The first 10-year implementation plan anchors the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) FY21- FY25.

NGOs' importance in the development domain and a glimpse of their survival across the globe Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) play an important role in promoting and implementing different development programmes (Enyioko, 2012 and Nelson, 2007). They help to open doors for developmental activities in most rural areas (Gurung, Gurung, Karki and Bista, 2011). They have been celebrated by donors for being able to bring fresh solutions to complex and long-standing development problems (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). In practice, many development NGOs perform multiple roles rather than specializing in a single one (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). Hailey (2014) and Lewis and Kanji (2009) summarized their roles into three main sets of activities defined as: implementers (mobilization of resources to provide goods and services to people who need them), catalysts (ability to facilitate change) and partners (work with government and different stakeholders).

The NGO concept became popular in 1945 (Willett, 2002). They take different forms and play different roles in different continents of the globe and have increasingly become important agents of the development process in many developing countries (Atack, 1999). The poor performance of the public sector and the prevalence of weak states in developing countries has led to the rise of NGOs as the only available alternative to promote grassroots development (Mitlin, Hickey, and Bebbington, 2005 and Ulleberg, 2009). Their use is regarded as a more effective and efficient organizational forms of the delivery of public services. Interestingly, they are preferred because are more flexible and adaptive than governments, and are quick to respond to people's needs (Lekorwe and Mpabanga, 2007 and Ulleberg, 2009). The expanding sphere of NGOs has enjoyed great support from first world governments and especially from charity-based aid agencies (Preston, 1996).

2.1 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

The term NGOs states to approximately all organizations created outside governmental bodies, except for political parties and private organizations. The organization must be voluntary and carry out activities legally following the laws in force in a country. NGOs are competently run organisations that aim to contribute to the human suffering reduction and poor countries development (Streten, 1997) through variety techniques including funding projects, helping provide services and building capacity (Baccaro, 2001).

Stromquist (2002) identifies three main functions for NGOs, such as providing services, providing educational services and defending public policy. Baccaro (2001) shows how certain NGOs can promote the organisation and empowerment of the poor, especially women, through training for group members and awareness raising and other social services. According to Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988), empowerment is the ability of an individual to gain control socially, politically, economically and psychologically through access to information, knowledge and skills, making decisions and individual self-efficacy, community participation, and perceived control.

Over the long period, NGOs seek to promote sustainable community development through activities that promote capacity building and empowerment. Langran (2002) described capacity building as enabling NGOs to support community development. NGOs are often created to increase people's capabilities. NGOs are also commended for promoting community autonomy and empowerment through support to community groups and through participatory processes (Korten, 1990).

2.2 The Relationship between NGOs and Community Development

It can be concluded that NGOs play an important role in encouraging sustainable community development which emphasizes a balance between environmental problems and development purposes, and at the same time enhances local social relations. Sustainable communities meet the economic needs of their people, enhance and protect the environment, and encourage more humanitarian communities.

According to William (1991), the Following Six Can be identified as Important Roles of NGOs towards Community Development

1. Development and operation of infrastructure;
2. Supporting innovation, demonstration and pilot projects;
3. Facilitating communication (NGOs can facilitate communication upward from people to the government and downward from the government to the people);
4. Technical assistance and training;
5. Research, monitoring and evaluation;
6. Advocacy for and with the poor (NGOs play roles from advocates for the poor to implementers of government programmes).

The functions of NGOs in community development are helping communities develop social, capital and human resources, improving knowledge and skills, encouraging people to participate in activities, and acting as a link between communities and systems. These activities participation will cause them to become stronger, which is the result of community development (Abiddin, 2013). In long term, the result is sustainable community development (Nikkah & Redzuan, 2017).

2.3 NGO Knowledge Milling and some Shortcomings

An important requirement of any NGO project proposal that has been funded by a donor in Malawi, or anywhere, for that matter, is the articulation of a robust monitoring plan that ensures the logical framework under implementation (or experimentation) is seen through. Through the lifetime of the project, data collection instruments are designed and used to compile data on progress in monitoring visits by project managers. In many instances, NGOs have, through such access to information, had the opportunity to possess better data than the District Offices under whose jurisdictions participating communities in NGO projects fall.

Another of the critical requirements is the production of an evaluation report, which condenses all the monitoring information on progress, makes sense of it and assesses the success or shortcomings of the activity from a number of viewpoints, with full cognizance of the context in which the intervention has taken place. Evaluation exercises that are properly planned also involve the collection of fresh data on the project end line and information that is used, through traditional treatment-control scientific methodology, to verify

the impact of activities on populations. Although more than a few of these reports have signaled the unrestrained success on the part of the NGOs ability to deliver on its promises in the funded proposal, some have seen candid conclusions on some key failures.

The common factor, though, and most critical, is how these reports continue to gain dust on the shelves of NGO offices as well as the Ministries' at Capitol Hill. A few years down the line, another NGO walks into the country to implement a similar activity on the same beneficiaries. In the worst cases, you get to see three NGOs concurrently implementing the same livelihoods programs with the same beneficiaries and competing on strategies to engage communities. In an evaluation exercise of a Concern Universal's livelihoods project in Mayani E.P.A. in Dedza District, in the mid-2000s, an evaluation team discovered three NGOs working on improving livelihoods in the same locations. Not only were the targeted populations confused at which NGO certain activities were attributable to but were usually torn between attending World Vision Malawi's meetings that distributed cash for sitting allowances and Concern Universal's meetings that had food as a bait to sit and talk. To a certain extent, this has made collection of the quality data an insurmountable job.

2.4 How effective are NGOs for Civil Society?

There is no doubt that NGO numbers are increasing worldwide and their voices within the civil society become stronger as they represent a variety of global issues. It is at our peril if we deny or under-utilize their existence. Their nimbleness in civil society makes them a boon for beneficiaries or a bane for governments or competing businesses. Working in concert with governments and businesses, NGOs, we believe, will continue to be an effective member of civil society. Their voices indicate their breadth, power, and a demand to be full participants within civil society. We can understand that their increasing influence may grate alongside governments, IGOs and the business community. Yet, we do not support the view that NGOs should automatically get an immediate, unearned seat at the "big boys" table. Updated and uniformed accountability standards need to be created before there is full acceptance. The imagery of NGOs sitting at the undisciplined "kids" Thanksgiving table comes to mind.

Depending whom/where you ask (the UN's Department of Public Information, or the NGO section of the UN's Economic and Social Council, the number of NGOs are in the mid- 20,000 or up to 40,000 or more. Because other UN departments (e.g. UN Department of Public Information and IGOs) also confer NGO status the numbers have increased to almost 500,000 worldwide primarily based in the United States, India, Russia and Europe. Of course, this includes all levels of status described earlier-consultative, special and roster.

Some NGOs are so small or rural that they appear as a blimp on the NGO global landscape.

I would recommend the UN currently declare, with appropriate advanced notice, a 6-to 12-month moratorium on NGO conferrals at this time. It is true that each organization may have a need and mission different from the next, but there are many that have complementary goals that could have been formed under one name. [However, non-profit status- 501 © 3 tax status may preclude that.] Stemming the tide of conferred NGO status would be "revolutionary" in current civil society. Yet, this may offer United Nations personnel breathing space to gain a better handle and time to

conduct earlier than a four-year review of NGOs. Perhaps the UN does not see its role as one of monitoring but rather as a continual dispenser-wit/tout-consequence of NGO titles. I think this is the UN's Achilles heel regarding NGOs. I see the cachet of NGO status dwindling if there is little or unealized substance accompanying the status. Civil society is in need now more than ever for the nimbleness (in advocacy and programmatic aid) of NGOs both as intermediaries and community based groups (CBOs). It is the quality of complementary alliances that civil society needs, not a plethora of organizations content with a status that may carry no real clout.

A limitation of NGO status and a more rigorous review would provide the United Nations an enormous opportunity to affect civil society with stronger advocates and funders for the voiceless who are not heard by governments or the private sector. I would not suggest that the UN begin charging fees for the NGO application process, since the status may become an elitist or economic conferral. If it did, I believe there would be an uproar by smaller NGOs about perceived lack of fairness to those who can ill afford payment.] However, should the UN continue at the same pace of granting NGO status, it will need to divert funds from other areas to hire more personnel to conduct earlier and more rigorous performance reviews. As of last June the UN listed online a "disassociation" of 239 NGOs from its roster. Per the UN, disassociation may be interpreted as no longer in existence, joined with another organization, or disassociating from a consensus fur ratification. For example, Iran was the only country in 2007 that disassociated itself from the UN Assembly ratification condemning the denial of the Holocaust. Small or community-based groups will need to consider joining with like-minded local or regional groups to gain NGO status. Such a process would offer equal status to groups within an UN News Centre <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=2135S&Cr=holocaust&Cr1>

(Accessed August 12, 2009). Alliance and offer equal standing with larger, international NGOs. There are many poor, smaller non-profits that currently do not have the means for access to the UN, and I think these groups would benefit from such alliances.

2.5 Can NGOs Become More Effective?

Definitely. NGOs need to have and adhere to timely performance reviews by the UN. The current but modest NGO application highlights for consultative UN and IGO status include a minimum two-year legal existence prior to application, use of a democratic working process, and promise of a review of NGO status every four years. Not good enough. NGOs can be more objective when there is-a set of goals of the NGO's mission that relates to the IGO or government, action plans to reach those goals, and a timetable to achieve those goals (even if the timetable extends into multi-years).

In addition, the NGO application and follow-up review process can help streamline ways like-minded NGOs can work together-as human rights, environment, healthcare groups or by geographical locations-sub-Saharan, eastern or western Europe, Middle East, Latin America, etc. The increasing number of NGOs worldwide may ineffectively bloat civil society if NGOs do not form alliances among themselves to advance their causes. It is especially important for grassroots organizations to form alliances locally, regionally and, perhaps, trans-nationally. Of course, international NGOs (such as Oxfam, Greenpeace, and

Catholic Relief Services) will have a jump on the smaller groups since their internal operations were initially created to work in various regions and countries. There should also be transparency in the review process with updates at the UN website of compliance by NGOs of the UN's mission and accountability guidelines.

Development aid is another significant source to find a plethora of NGO groups that unwittingly left to unchecked status review may cause irreparable damage to civil society. Of course development aid NGOs work in tandem with governments and businesses. In her recent book, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (March 2009), economist Dambisa Moyo aptly offers another way NGOs may become more effective, especially with African state actors. As a recent 2009 guest of the Charlie Rose show on American public television, Dr. Moyo, a native Zambian and former Goldman Sachs and World Bank economist argues that aside from emergency/humanitarian aid to Africa, Western aid to Africa has perpetuated poverty if not worsened it. Whereas Marshall Plan aid was largely targeted towards physical infrastructure, aid to Africa permeates virtually every aspect of the economy. In *Dead Aid*, Moyo comes out with guns blazing against the aid industry-calling it not just ineffective, but "malignant." Despite more than \$1 trillion in development aid given to Africa in the past 50 years, she argues that aid has failed to deliver sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction and has actually made the continent worse off. To remedy this, Moyo presents a road map for Africa to wean itself of aid over the next five years and offers a menu of alternative means of financing development.

Moyo opens her case by writing, "Between 1970 and 1998, when aid flows to Africa were at their peak, poverty in Africa rose from 11 percent to a staggering 66 percent." Today, Africa is the only continent where life expectancy is less than age 60. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the poorest region in the world, where literacy, health, and other social indicators have plummeted since the 1970s.

In most poor countries today, aid is in the civil service... political institutions... in the military... healthcare and education... infrastructure, aid is endemic. The more it infiltrates, the more it erodes, the greater the culture of aid dependency. Moyo calls for a halt of foreign development aid in general within the next five years. (Emergency relief is excluded.) Because they can count on aid as a significant factor of their economies, sub-Saharan African countries become dependent, and dependence blunts entrepreneurship. Such dependency stifles investment, fosters disenfranchisement and underwrites historically corrupt regimes without penalty. The governments become "beholden" Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2009. p.37 to foreign donors and not accountable to its people. So, well-meaning western entities of civil society-IGOs and NGOs-need to re-evaluate their mission of African foreign aid.

The old adage of teaching a man to fish is relevant here. Her sentiment is not new, but it is the first time such an indictment comes from an African citizen. An immediate moratorium of granting NGO status must occur now in order that the UN truly assess the current NGO-status glut and revise its formulaic in granting more NGO status. Because of their size, funding base and access to a variety of resources and internal checks and balances, some NGO intermediaries such as Amnesty, Oxfam, and Greenpeace are very effective. Many

smaller community-based organizations are not as effective for an inordinate number of reasons-small membership, lack of funds, stymied internally by its government, lack of access to physical resources, Jack of internal checks and balances, etc.

NGOs have known the importance of their need to assess their performance. Yet, there have been serious inadequacies in former attempts to assess. Why? Inadequacies arise from problems in how NGOs must present themselves to their various publics/stakeholders for public support, funding and provision of service. Various stakeholders use the NGO for different purposes. So, international NGOs with stakeholders (donors) from the Global North need to complement their funding and Edwards, Michael and David Hulme, eds. *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post-Cold War*, Kumarian Press. Inc.1996. P 61.

Pulling us through a quick history of aid, Moyo covers the many ways its intent and structure have been influenced by world events. She systematically challenges assumptions about the efficacy of the Marshall Plan, International Development Association graduates, and "conditionalities" that require adherence to prescribed economic policies. "By thwarting accountability mechanisms, encouraging rent-seeking behavior, siphoning away talent, and removing pressures reform inefficient policies and institutions," aid guarantees that social capital remains weak and countries poor. And Moyo's list of aid's sins goes on—including the crowding out of domestic exports and raising the stakes for conflict.

So what does Moyo propose we do? In her own version of shock therapy, she asks, "What if, one by one, African countries each received a phone call, telling them that in exactly five years the aid taps would be shut off-permanently?" The shock would force them to create a new economic plan that phases in alternative financing mechanisms as aid is phased out, she argues. These new financing mechanisms should include increased trade (particularly among African nations and with emerging markets like China, India, and Brazil), foreign direct investment, entrance into international capital markets, and increased domestic savings through remittances and microfinance. The end goal is to phase reliance on aid down to 5 percent or less within five years.

Sound impossible? Moyo doesn't think so. Implementing this plan will be "dead easy," she claims, but will require political will. This political will, Moyo argues, must be rallied by Western activists, for they are the only ones with the ability and the incentive to drive change. "It is, after all, their money being poured down the drain." She is not the first to call for a move away from aid dependency-although she may be the fiercest.

Moyo has only proven correlation, not causation, and although we can't be sure how her prescriptions would hold up in the face of a global recession, she challenges us to think before we act. Moyo expands the boundaries of the development conversation-one that has become both more vibrant and more nuanced in recent months. Those of us rethinking aid can all agree that the time has come for deeper and more direct involvement of Africans in setting their own development course. As the African proverb goes: "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second-best time is now." Let us not waste any more time. Africa's moment, and our moment, is now.

2.6 Research GAP

While there is existing literature on the impact and activities of NGOs in community development, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the nuanced factors that influence villagers' perceptions of NGO effectiveness. Specifically, there is limited research that explores the interplay of cultural, social, and contextual factors shaping how villagers interpret and assess the impact of NGO initiatives on their communities.

Addressing this research gap can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in villagers' perceptions of NGO effectiveness in community development, ultimately providing valuable insights for NGOs, policymakers, and researchers working in the field.

3.0 Research Methodology

Methodology employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to capture a comprehensive understanding of villagers' perceptions the study was done in done in rural areas surrounding Blantyre, Malawi, with a focus on villages directly impacted by NGO-led community development projects. Blantyre Rural refers to the rural areas surrounding Blantyre, which is the second-largest city in Malawi. Blantyre is a significant urban centre in the country, and its rural surroundings play a crucial role in supporting the city's population.

3.1 Research Design

We adopted a pragmatist research philosophy, acknowledging the need for a balanced approach that combines positivist and interpretive elements. This allows for the quantification of villagers' perceptions while capturing rich qualitative insights. There are many research methodologies that tend to adopt or be based on a pragmatist research philosophy. These include: Mixed-methodology, Q-methodology, Generic qualitative inquiry

Mixed methods research is a procedure that enables the collecting, analyzing and integrating of data from both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem. The data from both types of studies should be combined or linked embedding to provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone could provide.

3.2 Population of the Study

Villagers residing in the selected rural areas who have direct experience with or are beneficiaries of NGO-led community development projects.

3.3 Data collection Tools

Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling.

Strata:

- Demographic strata (age, gender, socio-economic status).
- Villages with varying degrees of NGO project involvement.

$$\text{Unlimited population: } n = \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2}$$

$$\text{Finite population: } n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2 N}}$$

Where

z is the z score

ϵ is the margin of error

N is the population size

\hat{p} is the population proportion

Assuming

- Confidence level: 95%
- Margin of error: 5%
- Estimated proportion with positive perceptions: 50% (for maximum variability)
- Population size: 356,900 villagers

Using a sample size calculator, the required sample size would be approximately 384 villagers but because of limited resources and time purposive sampling was employed.

Purposive Sampling: Participants were selected based on certain criteria (e.g., those who have interacted with NGOs, community leaders). This method allows targeted insights. 51 Households were purposively sampled from villages within each subdivision and a household questionnaire administered to them and each subdivision had almost 25 households. Sample size was limited because of availability of funds to conduct the research but in case it will be externally sample size will be increased. 2 ADCS, AND 2 VDCs

Data Collection Sources

- Surveys/Questionnaire
- In-depth Interviews
- Focus Group Discussions
- Document Analysis
- Secondary Data Sources
- Key Informant Interviews

3.4 Data Analysis Tools

Survey responses were summarised using descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, frequency distribution). This was done using SPSS. Data processing and analysis was done centrally by the Principle Investigator. The data processing and analysis entailed the following steps: downloading data from the Compare application and performing exploratory analysis to check for accuracy, completeness, relevance and consistency of the critical data elements; converting the downloaded data from Excel to the standard SPSS format file; performing data cleaning using a set of SPSS manipulation commands to ensure that data were aligned to the data analysis plan. Descriptive analysis entailed computing frequency distributions; means and cross tabulations with chi square statistics. Graphs in the evaluation report are also used to visually present summary results. The univariate analysis utilized cross-tabulations to determine the relationships between variables.

Key Interview transcripts and focus group discussions were analysed using Insight7 to identify recurring themes related to NGO effectiveness. Insight7 is the easiest way to analyse interviews. Insight7 automatically analyzes collections of interviews in video, audio, or text for accurate insights that power high-quality decisions.

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

NGOs are considered critical actors and stakeholders in the international development landscape globally today. They play a crucial role in humanitarian action, the sustenance of

democracy and good governance, the protection of human rights, and poverty reduction. Though other scholars see their activities and functions as mainly neo-liberal, uncoordinated, and imperialistic. In a Study on the role of non-governmental organizations in the development of Nigeria by Eze, Robert Martin 2023, the paper found that lack of effective and efficient collaboration, lack of transparency and accountability, and NGOs not embarking on projects that need to address the critical development challenges confronting most of their beneficiaries, among others, are some of the challenges facing NGOs' contribution to development in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommended effective and efficient collaboration between NGOs and government agencies at all tiers, transparency, and proper accountability in the execution of their projects and programs, as well as embarking on development projects that will address the critical needs of the beneficiaries as pathways to addressing.

Demographic Data

A total of 51 respondents participated in the survey. A majority of respondents (43) were Females (84.3%). Both TAs had more females than male respondents. There were 26 respondents in TA Kapeni representing 50.9% of the total sampled and 25 respondents in TA Machinjiri representing 49.1%.

The size of a household determines, to a large extent, the demand for goods and services in the household. The larger the household, the more strain is exerted on available resources. The average household size in Malawi, as noted by the 2018 population census results¹, is 4.4 persons. The household survey found an average household size of 4.5 persons in TA Kapeni and Machinjiri which is similar to the average household size in Malawi. The smallest Household size was 1 individual and the biggest had 9 occupants.

Ngo Effectiveness in Promoting Development

This study showed that 60.8% respondents agreed that NGOs are promoting development in their respective areas and according to figure 1 majority of whom are from TA Machinjiri while 25.5% strongly agree and majority of these are from TA Kapeni. 3.9% were neutral and 9.8% were disagreeing that NGOs were promoting development in their communities. This means that majority of the people in Blantyre rural think that NGOs are having an effect in promoting development of the district.

NGOs Successfully Implementing Community Development Projects

When asked if NGOs are successfully implementing community projects 11.8% of all the respondents strongly agreed and all these were from TA Kapeni and 56.9% agreed. 17.6% of the respondents were neutral, 7.8% disagreed and 5.9% strongly disagreed. The findings illustrate that NGOs in the district are for the most part efficient in implanting projects in the respective jurisdictions in Blantyre district.

NGOs Involve Community Members in Decision Making

The survey found that 15.7% of the respondents said that they strongly agree that NGOs involve them in making decisions, 33.3% agree, 13.7% were neutral, 33.3% disagreed and 3.9% strongly disagreed. These findings show that there is still a long way to go in terms of taking beneficiary on board, consulting them and getting their insights in terms of planning and how projects are implemented to achieve long lasting impact.

NGOs Positively Impacting Livelihoods of Communities

- 25.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that NGOs are positively impacting their livelihoods, 49% agree, 11.8% agree, 9.8% disagree and 3.9% strongly disagree.
- This shows that over 70% of the beneficiaries of projects really think that their lives are changing for the better as a result of NGO intervention.

Activities that are Most Effective

Majority of the respondents said that there are activities they found to be effective are food handout distributions like Maize distributions, Climate-smart Enhanced Public Works Program (CSEPWP) activities which is offering them employment, social cash transfer which is helping the labour constrained households and school feeding programs which helps their children as they end up eating less when they come back from school or at times when they don't have food at all atleast they know that the child has eaten something from school.

Challenges or Areas Where NGOs can Improve Their Effectiveness

- Lack of sustainability of different projects is the challenge and the solution is that when coming to help us they need to provide assistance for a long time.
- Not all people are able to be assisted by some organization due to lack of resources. Solution to the problem could be to assist people when they have enough resources which can reach a lot of people as possible.
- Lack of transparency in beneficiary selection.
- NGOs to continue giving them food throughout the year
- One acre fund to reduce interest
- Money received is not enough from Forest
- They do not make visits and do not provide the people with the aid they promised
- Increase money for public works
- People were not involved in decision making
- Public works timely payment, reconsider amount being paid
- Delay in payments (3-4 months delay)
- They should approach the community appropriately
- They should do these more often that is in assistance of the community since there is hunger out here
- Marys Meals, should try to plant more trees as possible since the programme rely on firewood
- Red Cross-less people are getting services. They should try reaching out more people.
- Beneficiary selection is the most challenging areas which needs to be improved.

Focus Group Discussions (ADC, VDC)

NGO Communication and Information Sharing

The first insight was that there are gaps in the information shared by NGOs, as they often say one thing and do another, and do not call for quarterly meetings as agreed. The other challenge they sighted was NGOs sometimes leave the community without informing them, leading to a lack of continuity and trust. The irregularity and gaps in information sharing by NGOs lead to community members not being on the same page regarding NGO activities. Some NGOs do not inform the community before starting their projects, leading to a lack of awareness and preparedness among community members. Lastly, Community members are not adequately informed about the services provided by NGOs, leading to a

lack of awareness about available support. Community members know how to make complaints and feel their grievances are heard and addressed, as seen with the World Bank climate-smart project.

Community Involvement and Decision-Making

- Community members feel that their feedback is not adequately considered by some NGOs, leading to a sense of being unheard and unvalued.
- Community members are involved in decision-making at the TA level but often feel that their priorities are not fully considered by NGOs.
- Community members are not consulted about their needs before receiving support from NGOs, leading to potential misalignment of aid with actual needs.
- Community members are not involved in the decision-making process, especially in beneficiary selection for programs like climate smart and social cash transfer.

Beneficiary Selection and Assistance Delivery

- The assistance provided by NGOs is sometimes inconsistent, with promised support not being fully delivered, leading to community dissatisfaction.
- The selection process for assistance leaves many community members feeling excluded, as it is based on a system that may not accurately reflect current needs.
- NGOs sometimes make decisions without consulting local leaders, leading to the selection of beneficiaries who may not be the most in need.
- The assistance provided by NGOs is often insufficient and does not reach the neediest Individuals in the Community.

Key Informant Interviews

Community Engagement and Communication

Community participation in maintenance activities is minimal, leading to poor quality contributions and delays in project progress. NGOs often consult community members through ADCs, but there's a need to ensure that messages are effectively communicated down to the VDCs. There are instances where local councilors are unaware of NGO activities in their areas, leading to gaps in awareness and potential political interference.

NGO Coordination and Collaboration

The Director of Planning and Development reiterated that NGOs are advised to present their projects at DEC meetings and technical working groups, and to seek approval at the ADC level to create community awareness. NGOs should comply with reporting requirements and present their projects to the full council for transparency and accountability. The country coordinator for Classrooms for Malawi said effective coordination between NGOs, councilors, and MPs is crucial for the perceived value and impact of NGO activities.

Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation Faced By NGOs

NGO representative said that financial constraints prevent NGOs from reaching all requested schools/activities, leading to a focus on a limited number of schools to maximize impact. The devaluation and high cost of living are making it difficult for donors to meet their conditions, leading to insufficient funds and limited outreach to schools.

Monitoring and Compliance Challenges

Technical working groups are used to ensure NGOs provide quarterly reports and present to the DEC when exiting, but some NGOs fail to comply. In her own words the DPD also said there is a challenge in assessing the impact of NGOs, particularly for software projects, as the investment and outcomes are often unclear. Building classrooms for learners studying outside significantly improves their learning conditions and increases requests for similar projects in other schools. "If learners are learning outside and you build a classroom that situation immediately changes and actually we are overwhelmed because we receive many requests like I am here in Chiradzulu and the challenges are prevalent in almost all schools."

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the perception of villagers regarding the effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in community development in rural Malawi. The findings indicate that while NGOs have made significant contributions to community development, there are areas that require improvement. Villagers perceive NGOs as effective in providing basic services, such as healthcare and education, but less effective in promoting economic empowerment and sustainability.

The study provides valuable insights into villagers' perceptions of NGO effectiveness in community development. While villagers generally acknowledge the positive impact of NGOs, addressing concerns related to trust, sustainability, and collaboration is essential for enhancing their effectiveness and ensuring long-term development outcomes. By incorporating community feedback and fostering meaningful partnerships, NGOs can better align their interventions with local needs and aspirations, thereby contributing to more sustainable and inclusive development processes.

Recommendations

- Strengthen mechanisms for transparency and accountability to enhance trust and credibility.
- Implement participatory approaches that empower communities and foster local ownership of development initiatives.
- Foster partnerships and collaboration between NGOs, government agencies, and community stakeholders to maximize impact and sustainability.
- Conduct regular evaluations and solicit feedback from villagers to continuously improve NGO interventions and responsiveness to community needs.

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