

Determinants of Sustainability in Community-Based Child Centres: A Case Study of Compassion International-Assisted Child Development Centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the determinants of sustainability for community-based child centers, specifically focusing on Compassion International-supported child development centers (CDCs) in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya. Sustainability remains a significant challenge for community-based programs, with research indicating that nearly 40% of such initiatives discontinue within the first few years following initial funding cessation. Guided by Resource Mobilization Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainability Theory, a descriptive research design was applied. The study targeted 108 individuals, including accountability structure managers and project staff at Ngaamba and Kima CDCs, with a sample size of 85 respondents calculated using Yamane's formula (1967). Data collection involved questionnaires, key informant interviews, and secondary literature sources. In contrast, data analysis employed descriptive statistics for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data, with results presented in tables and visual charts. Findings indicate that funding models, community participation, and program leadership significantly impact the sustainability of CDCs. Recommendations include diversifying funding sources through CDC leadership and enhancing community involvement as primary stakeholders. The study found that the leadership style predominant in the CDCs was identified as transformational, with 63.5% of respondents affirming this characterization. From the findings, 84.7% of respondents confirmed that community members were actively involved in the implementation of child development projects. Furthermore, a significant 72.9% of respondents believed that programme leadership affected sustainability to a "great" or "very great" extent, highlighting the critical role of effective leadership in mobilizing resources and facilitating stakeholder engagement. These insights may aid policymakers and practitioners in improving resource mobilization strategies and fostering sustainable community-based child development initiatives.

Keywords: Sustainability, Community-Based Child centers, Resource Mobilisation

INTRODUCTION

The sustainability of community-based child centers is critical in addressing the persistent vulnerabilities faced by children in marginalized communities. These centers play a vital role in providing education, healthcare, nutrition, and emotional support to children affected by poverty, disease, and societal challenges. However, many such initiatives fail to sustain their impact due to limited resources, poor management, and dependency on donor funding (Gatumi *et al.*, 2022). Investigating sustainability determinants provides insights into how community-based child centres can maintain their impact over time, even in the absence of external funding.

With over 385 million children living in extreme poverty globally and 662 million children considered multidimensionally poor, the need for sustainable child development initiatives is paramount. In Kenya, these vulnerabilities are exacerbated by socio-economic challenges, including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has increased the number of orphans and vulnerable children. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were created to address these issues, but they also face sustainability challenges (Getachew, 2022). While the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to reduce poverty and improve child welfare, many interventions struggle with long-term sustainability. By focusing on Compassion International-Assisted Child Development Centres, this study evaluates practical implementation challenges and offers lessons for scaling sustainable practices in similar settings.

Kilome Sub-County, like other areas in Makueni County, faces persistent challenges such as food insecurity, poor hygiene, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare services. These factors compromise the well-being of children and hinder community development. Understanding the determinants of sustainability in child development centers in this context is crucial for tailoring solutions that address local needs and ensure long-term benefits.

Over 40% of projects fail to meet their original scope and budget, with 64% of projects studied by the Standish Group and 86% by KPMG. In the UK, community-based sustainability transition projects are being considered due to their potential. In the United States, sustainability is linked to non-funding diversification, emphasizing the need for a diverse and reliable long-term funding base to ensure the achievement of community project goals and objectives.

Leadership in project management is crucial to ensuring the success and sustainability of projects. In Africa, most projects remain unsustainable due to low local community stakeholder engagement, insufficient government funding, and inadequate community participation. Project sustainability is essential for addressing the challenges faced by children in developing countries, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and food insecurity (Shifotoka., & Kanyimba *et al.*,2021).

Ngoma and Mayimbo (2017) argue that sustainability in children's community projects requires community participation and inter-sectoral collaboration. Community-based Child Development Centres are a key approach, as they require significant support and influence on development decisions. However, low self-esteem and lack of ownership can jeopardize the projects' sustainability. Ilesanmi and Afolabi (2022) highlight facilitators of sustainability in Africa, such as community ownership and financial leadership, while impediments include a lack of financial leadership and weak donor-community interactions.

In Kenya, studies have highlighted the challenge of sustainability in community-based projects. Maringa and Gitonga (2018) found that resource mobilization, stakeholder engagement, self-income-generating projects, and capacity development influence the sustainability of children's home programs. Langat et al. (2021) argued that beneficiaries should be involved in decision-making to create ownership and sustainability.

Obulemire (2021) investigated institutional determinants and their impact on the sustainability of early childhood development (ECD) projects in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study found a correlation between project leaders' expertise, training, and capacity to gather resources for the project. Wachira (2020) found a correlation between beneficiary involvement and project sustainability. This study aimed to generate evidence-based information on the determinants of sustainability among community-based child centers in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya. The centers have been at the forefront of helping vulnerable children by providing them with basic needs and rights. The County of Makueni County has demonstrated commitment to children's welfare and education, with budgetary allocation to support the ECDE programme, infrastructural development, and scholarship support. This research aligns with the SDGs, particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), and Goal 4 (Quality Education), which emphasize sustainable and inclusive development for vulnerable populations. The study will contribute to broader global knowledge on designing and implementing sustainable community-based programs.

By focusing on the determinants of sustainability in community-based child centers, this study will provide critical insights into creating resilient systems that continue to support vulnerable children effectively, ensuring lasting impact in Makueni County and beyond.

Problem Statement

The sustainability of community-based programs is a pressing concern for non-profit organizations, especially those supporting child welfare. Studies, including those by the Project Management Institute (2017) and

Ceptureanu et al. (2018), indicate that approximately 40% of such programs fail within the first few years if initial funding is withdrawn, resulting in unmet community needs. Local studies like Maringa(2018) and Obulemire (2021) show that many child rehabilitation programs struggle with sustainability once donor support ends, notably affecting early childhood development projects. This challenge is significant in Kenya, where statistics from KNBS and UNICEF (2017) reveal that 9.5 million children face severe deprivation in essential needs, highlighting the importance of sustainable community-based programs to support not only the children but also their families and the broader community.

Sustaining child welfare projects is crucial to advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from poverty alleviation (Goal 1) to promoting health, education, and safety for children (Goals 3, 4, 16.2). Research by Obulemire (2021), Wachira (2020), and Maringa and Gitonga (2018) has underscored the need for strategic actions to ensure the continuation of benefits post-donor involvement. However, no studies have focused specifically on the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted Child Development Centres (CDCs) in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County. The variables studied in prior research also differ, creating a gap in understanding the unique sustainability determinants for these CDCs. This study, therefore, aims to explore these factors to contribute insights into sustaining community-based child centers for long-term child and community welfare.

Objectives of the study

This study examined the determinants of sustainability among community-based child centers, with a focus on Ngaamba and Kima, Compassion International-assisted child development centers in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya.

Research questions

1. To what extent do funding models influence the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County.
2. How does community participation contribute to the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County.
3. In what ways does programme leadership impact the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County.
4. What contributions do other community stakeholders make toward the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County.

Significance of the study

This study addresses the challenge of sustainability in community-based child development centres, particularly those in Kenya, which often struggle to survive once initial funding ends. Many programmes fail early on, leading to unfulfilled objectives and negative impacts on children and communities. The study aims to investigate the dynamics between funding and sustainability, focusing on centres supported by Compassion International in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County. By generating evidence-based findings, the study will offer practical insights for stakeholders.

Policymakers at the county and national levels could use these findings to strengthen child development initiatives and explore supportive strategies. For centre leaders and Compassion International, the results may guide improvements in resource mobilization, community involvement, and programme implementation, helping to enhance programme longevity. The community itself will benefit by learning ways to support and sustain these beneficial programmes. Additionally, the study fills knowledge gaps and can serve as a resource for researchers, potentially encouraging further investigation into sustainable child development initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability is a concept that integrates economic, environmental, and social aspects into an organization's operations. It is applied in project management to explain project sustainability. Community-based

development programs are rapidly expanding mechanisms for channelling development aid, aiming to increase sustainability by scaling up poverty reduction efforts, making development more inclusive, empowering poor people, building social capital, and supplementing public sector activities. These programs are mostly delivered through Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and cater to the needs of society.

A similar study done in Kenya by Aluomba (2020) pointed out that beneficiaries' participation in design, planning, implementation, tracking, and evaluation makes donor-funded CBO projects more likely to last. To sum up, managers' efforts to get funds, build people's skills, and get recipients involved do, in fact, make sure that donor-funded CBO projects last. The study suggested that community members should be more involved in planning and building projects to make the donor-funded community-based projects in the sub-county last longer.

Aung (2022) focused on how the communities feel about Community Based Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Centers. This study focused on what the community-based Early Childhood Care and Development Centers in Myanmar. This study concluded that communities should more actively participate to improve and facilitate other ECCD services for children. It also concluded that stakeholders should be informed of current policies and working conditions by local authorities. Moreover, communities should support teachers to attend ECCD-related teacher-training programs and they should gain accreditation by working with donors and educational institutions.

A separate study in Malawi by Munthali *et al.*, (2014) concluded that Communities provide structures, support for caregivers, food, utensils, labour, and play materials for the children in Early Childhood Centres in most communities. Sustainability depends on the continuation of its implementation strategy, including financing, and ensuring beneficiaries remain empowered for the long term. Factors affecting project sustainability include community ownership, leadership, funding, participation, and leadership skills.

In Ethiopia Miller *et al.*, (2021) concluded that Community-based organizations often rely on donor funding for their operations, but this can lead to insufficient funding, increasing project costs, and premature collapse. To ensure the continued execution of their projects, organizations must explore alternative funding sources and maintain strong relationships with donors. Diversification approaches and strategic financial planning can improve financial sustainability, but there is less correlation between financial sources and sustainability. Involving local communities in decision-making is crucial for project success, as it improves accountability and understanding of stakeholder roles. Research has shown that community participation is the cornerstone of community-based development initiatives, leading to better-designed projects, better-targeted benefits, cost-effectiveness, and equitable distribution of benefits.

Research indicates that community participation is crucial for project sustainability. Studies have shown that NGOs often rely too much on donor resources, neglecting the potential of local communities. In Nyeri, Kenya, community participation in resource mobilization significantly impacts the sustainability of community water projects. In Nakuru County, Kenya, water and sanitation projects have a positive impact on community participation. Leadership plays a crucial role in community development, involving tactical knowledge, networking, and identifying local talent. Project managers' soft leadership skills, such as communication, team building, delegation, and problem-solving, are critical for project success and sustainability. In Taita Taveta County, Kenya, project funding and leaders' project management skills have a positive relationship with project sustainability.

Masinde and Muteshi (2020) studied the factors influencing the sustainability of donor-funded youth projects in Kakamega County, Kenya, focusing on leadership capabilities and youth participation. The study found that leadership capabilities and youth participation significantly affected the sustainability of these projects. Mary (2018) found a positive correlation between project performance and leadership in Compassion International projects in Kitui County. Stakeholder involvement is crucial for project sustainability, and effective management of stakeholders and partnerships is essential. Olukotun (2017) highlighted the importance of community involvement in planning and budgeting, while Gatumi *et al.* (2022) found that stakeholder engagement positively related the sustainability of food security projects in Kenya's arid lands. However, existing literature on sustainability determinants has been limited, leaving a knowledge gap that this study aims to fill.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design, which is ideal for human research as it provides an accurate representation of individuals, events, or situations. The study utilized descriptive research design. Descriptive research seeks to offer a precise representation of individuals, events, or situations. Descriptive survey research design is one of the best for human research. It allows for the collection of accurate current data to test hypotheses or answer questions to conclude the study. Descriptive study is concerned with finding out what, where, and how of a phenomenon (Kothari and Garg, 2020). This design helps to depict the present state of phenomena and the relationships between variables. The study employed surveys for quantitative data and interviews for qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis. This approach effectively described the determinants of sustainability in community-based child centers.

Population and Sample

The target population is defined as a group of real or hypothetical individuals, events, or objects that an investigator studies to draw conclusions (Majid, 2018). For this study, the target population included Ngaamba and Kima Child Development Centres, supported by Compassion International in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County. The unit of analysis was the Compassion International-assisted child development centers/programme. This population comprised 108 committee members, including 60 community members linked to the CDCs and 48 staff members (2 of whom were managers). This group was suitable for the study as they included decision-makers, stakeholders, and staff involved in the day-to-day operations of the child development centres, providing reliable information for the study. Qualitative in-depth interviews complemented data collected from the questionnaires. The qualitative data was analyzed and classified into themes based on the research objectives.

The study used the Yamane (1967) formula to calculate the sample size, which, for a 95% confidence level and $p = 0.05$, this resulted in a sample size of 85.

Data Collection Methods

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through a questionnaire and an interview guide. The primary data was collected through questionnaires and Key informant interviews, and secondary data from literature sources. The questionnaire targeted community members linked to the Child Development Centres (CDCs) and staff from these centers in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County. It was semi-structured, featuring both closed and open-ended questions, with closed questions using nominal scales and Likert scale questions. The questionnaire was chosen for its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, ease of administration, and ability to collect standardized data, making it simple to analyze (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

Data Analysis

After data collection, the information from questionnaires was edited, coded, and entered into SPSS Version 21 for analysis. The data was processed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation), and presented in frequency and percentage tables. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews was organized into themes and analyzed through content analysis, with findings presented narratively alongside the quantitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to multiple ethical protocols to ensure participants could make informed decisions about their involvement. The researcher explained the study's objectives before obtaining consent. Permissions were obtained from relevant institutions and NACOSTI, and approval from the ethics board was secured due to the involvement of children's centers. Letters were sent to institutions and respondents requesting permission to collect data.

Confidentiality was maintained by asking respondents to omit personal information and ensuring the data was only used for the study. Participation was voluntary, with the researcher clarifying the study's goals and allowing participants to choose whether to participate without any pressure or consequences. The findings were shared with stakeholders for informed decision-making on project implementation.

RESULTS

The research gathered both primary and secondary data using a questionnaire and an interview guide from committee members, who comprised project managers, staff of the child development centers, and community members linked to the CDC in the two Child Development Centres in Kilome Sub County, Makueni County. Also looked at were previous studies on the subject matter. The data analyzed was presented in tables, bar charts, and pie charts.

The study concluded its findings in summary as follows;

Table 1: Community Participation and Sustainability of Child Development Centres

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The community is highly aware of the Compassion International-assisted child development projects in the area.	85	4.02	0.913
There is involvement of the community in mobilization of children to enrol in the child development centres.	85	3.99	0.824
There is sensitization of community members on the existence and objectives of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in the area.	85	3.94	0.730
The community supports the Compassion International-assisted child development projects in the area.	85	3.88	0.931
Average		3.96	0.849

The results in Table 1 presented the respondents' perception of some of the sustainability aspects of the Compassion International-assisted Child Development Centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya. The data was captured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. The results were interpreted using mean scores and standard deviation. A mean score of 1-2.5 means that the respondents disagreed; a mean score of 2.6-3.5 means the respondents were neutral (neither disagreed nor agreed), while 3.6-5.0 means the respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 2: Sustainability of the Project

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is increased enrolment of children in development centres in the area.	85	3.53	1.097
The community feels that the Compassion International-assisted child development centres/programmes are beneficial to them.	85	4.18	0.789
There is improvement in welfare of children and community at large as a result of the child development programmes in the area.	85	4.19	0.893
The child development centres/programmes have effectively responded to needs of vulnerable children in the area.	85	4.16	0.871
Average		4.02	0.913

On the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted Child Development Centres, the respondents agreed that there was an improvement in the welfare of children and the community at large as a result of the child development programmes in the area (mean score = 4.19). The respondents also agreed the community felt that the Compassion International-assisted child development centres/programmes were beneficial to them (mean score = 4.18) and agreed that the child development centres/programmes had effectively responded to the needs of vulnerable children in the area (mean score = 4.16). The respondents were, however, neutral on

whether there was increased enrolment of children in development centres in the area, as shown by a mean score of 3.53 on the Likert scale.

In addition to this the respondents suggested improving the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County by obtaining more funds, involving national and county governments in educational assistance, mobilizing resources, opening more development centers, forming a "willing alumni" club, empowering caregivers and youths in entrepreneurship, securing more financial support from donors, and empowering families through business skills. Data was analyzed through content analysis. The qualitative data was analyzed and classified into themes based on the research objectives. The findings were then presented in a narrative format, together with the quantitative data.

Table 3: Funding Models and Sustainability of Child Development Centres

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There are always funds available to cater for the needs in the Child Development Centres.	85	3.79	0.977
The sources of funds that finance the child development centres are adequate to cater for their needs.	85	3.46	0.995
There is consistent and adequate funding that ensures the smooth running of operations in the Child Development Centres.	85	3.72	0.959
There is timely disbursement of funds required to cater for the needs in the centre.	85	3.79	1.196
Average		3.69	1.032

The results in Table 3 reveal that funds were consistently available to meet the needs of the Child Development Centres, with timely disbursement observed, as reflected by a mean score of 3.79. This indicates a general consensus among respondents regarding the reliability of the funding, which is critical for the operational sustainability of the centres. The standard deviation of 0.977 points to a moderate level of agreement, suggesting that while most respondents share this view, there is some variation in individual perceptions. The strong agreement on the adequacy and timely allocation of funds highlights the effectiveness of Compassion International's funding model in addressing immediate operational requirements. These findings align with those of Kyalimpa et al. (2017), who emphasized the role of leadership competencies in ensuring sustainable funding for local NGOs, further underscoring the importance of effective management and strategic funding approaches for long-term success.

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Per objective 1, the study evaluated the impact of funding models on the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub County, Makueni County. The majority of respondents reported that international donors, local donors, and community members were the main sources of funding. Other sources included Complementary Intervention (CIV), caregivers/parents' contributions, harambees, income-generating activities, and the County Government of Makueni. The study found a generally positive perception among respondents regarding the availability and timely disbursement of funds, with the highest mean score of 3.79. However, a neutral stance regarding the adequacy of funding sources raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of the centres. The majority of respondents (81.2%) indicated that funding models have a "great" or "very great" extent of influence, emphasizing the importance of effective management and funding strategies for the sustainability of local NGOs.

Furthermore, the study analysed the impact of community participation on the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County. 84.7% of respondents confirmed active community involvement in project implementation, highlighting the importance of decision-making, resource mobilization, and infrastructural support. 61.2% acknowledged a "great" or "very great" extent of community involvement, emphasizing its role in ensuring the operational viability of CDCs. Community members were highly aware of the projects, participated in mobilizing children to enroll, and

supported the centers. Overall, community participation significantly influenced the sustainability of these centers.

Thirdly the study analysed the impact of programme leadership on the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub County, Makueni County. The results showed that transformational leadership style was the predominant, fostering collaboration, effective communication, and stakeholder involvement. A significant 72.9% of respondents believed that programme leadership significantly affected sustainability. The top leadership shared and communicated program goals, involved stakeholders, and effectively mobilized resources. They also had the skills to manage child development programs and facilitate collective efforts to achieve shared objectives. Overall, the study concluded that programme leadership significantly influenced the sustainability of these centres.

The study assessed the influence of other stakeholders on the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County. The study found mixed perceptions of their support, with respondents acknowledging the presence of government entities and NGOs but expressing disagreements about the adequacy of support from both the national and county governments. The overall perception of the sustainability of the projects was positive, with mean scores ranging from 4.16 to 4.19. Stakeholders involved in the project included the National and County government, local administration, church and community leaders, NGOs, and community health volunteers/social workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study suggests that the leadership of Compassion International-assisted Child Development Centres in Kilome Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya, should seek more funding sources to ensure the sustainability of their projects. The top leadership should employ resource mobilization strategies to avoid overreliance on international donors. Community members should be involved in decision-making and ownership of the project, leading to better design, targeted benefits, and sustainability. The National and County Governments should provide greater support, such as bursaries, land, teaching staff, and other incentives, to ensure the programs achieve their intended goals. Future studies should investigate resource mobilization strategies and best practices employed by the leadership to create more funding sources and ensure the sustainability of these child development projects.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that funding models significantly impact the sustainability of Compassion International-assisted child development centres. This study advances academic discourse by bridging theoretical insights and practical applications, offering a comprehensive understanding of sustainability determinants in community-based child centres. It sets a precedent for future research on how localized, child-focused programs can achieve lasting impact in resource-constrained environments. The centres primarily rely on international donors, but they also source funds from local donors, community members, the County Government of Makueni, caregivers/parents' contributions, Complementary Intervention (CIV), and income-generating activities. Consistent disbursement of funds ensures smooth operations and enhances the program's sustainability. This research offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, development practitioners, and NGOs. These insights can inform guidelines and best practices for designing, implementing, and scaling sustainable child-focused programs. Additionally the study emphasizes the role of adaptive and resilient strategies in addressing the dynamic socio-economic challenges in developing contexts. Community participation is crucial, as community members are key stakeholders in the implementation of projects and participate in various activities. The study also highlights the leadership style of Compassion International, which blends transformational, democratic, team, and facilitative styles. These leaders facilitate the sharing and communication of program goals, mobilize resources, and collective efforts to achieve shared objectives. Other stakeholders, such as the National and County Governments, local administration, church and community leaders, NGOs, Community Health volunteers/Social workers, and suppliers, also support the centres, providing additional resources, social support services, mentorship, life skills, and knowledge sharing.

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