

# Rethinking Sustainability for Foreign-Funded Community-Based Projects (CBPS) in Low-Income Countries

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## ABSTRACT

In this research, we set out to reexamine the intractable problem of unsustainability in foreign-funded Community-Based Projects (CBPs) in low-income countries. The study explored the sustainability of foreign-funded CBPs in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province by analysing their funding experiences, practices, strategies, challenges, and developing a CBP sustainability model. A mixed-methods approach was used where the positivist paradigm assessed the opinions of CBP stakeholders, while interpretive phenomenology focused on theory building based on subjective substantiations. We used an explanatory concurrent survey participated by 470 households and 30 stakeholders under the National Association of NGOs (NANGO). Descriptive statistics were used for questionnaire-based data analysis while thematic analysis was used for interview-based data analysis. The study reveals that most CBPs in Masvingo Province receive international funding for development projects, with most focusing on emergencies, human rights, social services, environment, and poverty alleviation. Stakeholders, however, believe that the initiatives are hard to maintain because of the funding cycles' limited nature. The CBPs are enhancing lives by addressing gaps in government service delivery in marginalised communities but they are putting too much focus on financial resources, leading to a myriad of project nightmares when foreign grants do not come. They face numerous challenges including funding dependency amid fluctuating funding sources and conditionalities. Accountability issues are also prevalent as well as cultural challenges arising from misunderstanding local customs. Recommendations for sustainability include exploring alternative funding sources, diversifying income sources and fundraising. Balancing short-term funding with long-term financial stability as well as investing in local capacity-building are also crucial for project endurance and impact sustainability. We also recommend strategic planning with long-term goals as well as adaptive programming to respond to changing community needs. CBP teams must prioritise learning over impressing the donors. This approach fosters ownership, strengthens local institutions and supports long-term sustainability through demonstrable impact.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; foreign funding; community-based projects

## INTRODUCTION

Overseas funded CBPs play a vital role in addressing various social, economic and environmental challenges in communities around the world. In developing countries, these structures are often supported by international donors and foundations, as is the case in Zimbabwe. Exceptions include some Asian CBPs which are significantly bankrolled by the governments that established them with only a privileged few being cleared to receive support from international sources (Wang, 2023). As they strive to improve lives and advocate for marginalised populations, the commonest and worsening predicament among CBPs is lack

of sustainability in their projects, with some scholars blaming the unpredictable priorities of Third World governments (Cohen, 2019; Save the Children, 2022; Enaifoghe, Maramura, Maduku et al., 2020). In rural areas, the sustainability of CBPs has become a pressing concern in recent years, particularly in countries with chronic droughts, economic inequalities and international isolation like Zimbabwe. Various researchers have explored the challenges and criticisms surrounding overseas funding at broad bases mainly focusing on governments, municipalities and large Nong-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These macro-level studies have arguably masked more pressing issues affecting grassroots communities thereby misrepresenting the situation on the ground. This highlights the need for a sustainability model that addresses funding dependency for not only traditional NGOs but the emerging local microstructures as these have often lacked consideration in mainstream literature (AbouAssi, Wang and Huang, 2021; AbouAssi and Tschirhart, 2022).

The current study seeks to reexamine the components of sustainable development by pinning the concept down to even the smallest efforts by micro communities in underdeveloped countries. Literature is awash with high-sounding models designed from extensive studies which failed to address the sustainability issues facing remote rural communities among other hard-to-reach constituencies (John, Roy, Mwangi et al., 2021; Girmay and Dadi, 2019; Philip and Williams, 2019; Gray, 2019). Often the experiences of local communities are superficially represented in existing literature as some of them were conducted by researchers that are remotely placed from the actual underdevelopment hotspots. It has been argued that many developing countries are continually grappling with macroeconomic problems like poverty and diseases not because of clueless governments but rather because of misplaced resources and underestimating the strategic importance of grassroots organisations (Gupta, 2020). A study by Heller, Somerville and Suggs (2019) finds that at many times the resources channelled from government are directed to agencies which do not sufficiently comprehend local problems and hence the proffered solutions often miss the mark.

In Zimbabwe, the government instituted the Department of Social Services to superintend NGOs but the attendant Private and Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act has been focusing on large organisations often sidelining community-based small teams. For example, the PVO Act required that NGOs be audited regularly both internally and externally to prevent misuse of funds but this audit requirement left out many other organisations simply because they never registered as PVOs (Peledi, 2019). As a result, even when the government organises national programmes such as emergency interventions and development schemes where the non-profit sector may collaborate, those not bearing PVO certificates are often denied priority amid fears of fund misappropriation and misgovernance. Considering these other players, this study focused on Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) in general to come up with more comprehensive facts about the situation of CBPs because a narrow focus on NGOs had the technical limitations just explained above.

Most development projects in the Third World are experiencing persistent sustainability problems resulting in donor fatigue and loss of public confidence (Peledi, 2019). This research intended to tackle the question of how to restore the funding drive among overseas donors at the same time putting the communities on the driving seat of development projects. Kusena (2020) observes that international funding agencies are expressing disappointment over the seemingly unachievable ambition of sustainable development in poor countries. At the same time, most intended beneficiaries in various development projects have remained in the vicious cycle of unmitigated poverty and suffering even after considerable project tenures and substantial investments (Peledi, 2019). It has remained unclear whether the problem lies in funding structures or in the communities or some other aspects. This was the major query that motivated the current study, the answer of which may hardly come about without dwelling on the specifics of foreign-aided grassroots projects. This study aimed to rethink sustainability for foreign-funded CBPs in low-income countries by exploring funding experiences, examining funding practices, evaluating sustainability strategies, classifying challenges, and developing a CBP sustainability model to address funding dependency.

The British Association for Project Sustainability – BAPS (2021) offers a typical sustainability model which just scratches the top of the sustainability subject. Like many other models of sustainability, APS focuses on broad sustainable development which tends to generalise sustainability. The figure below is the BAPS Project Sustainability Model showing the components of a project sustainability plan.

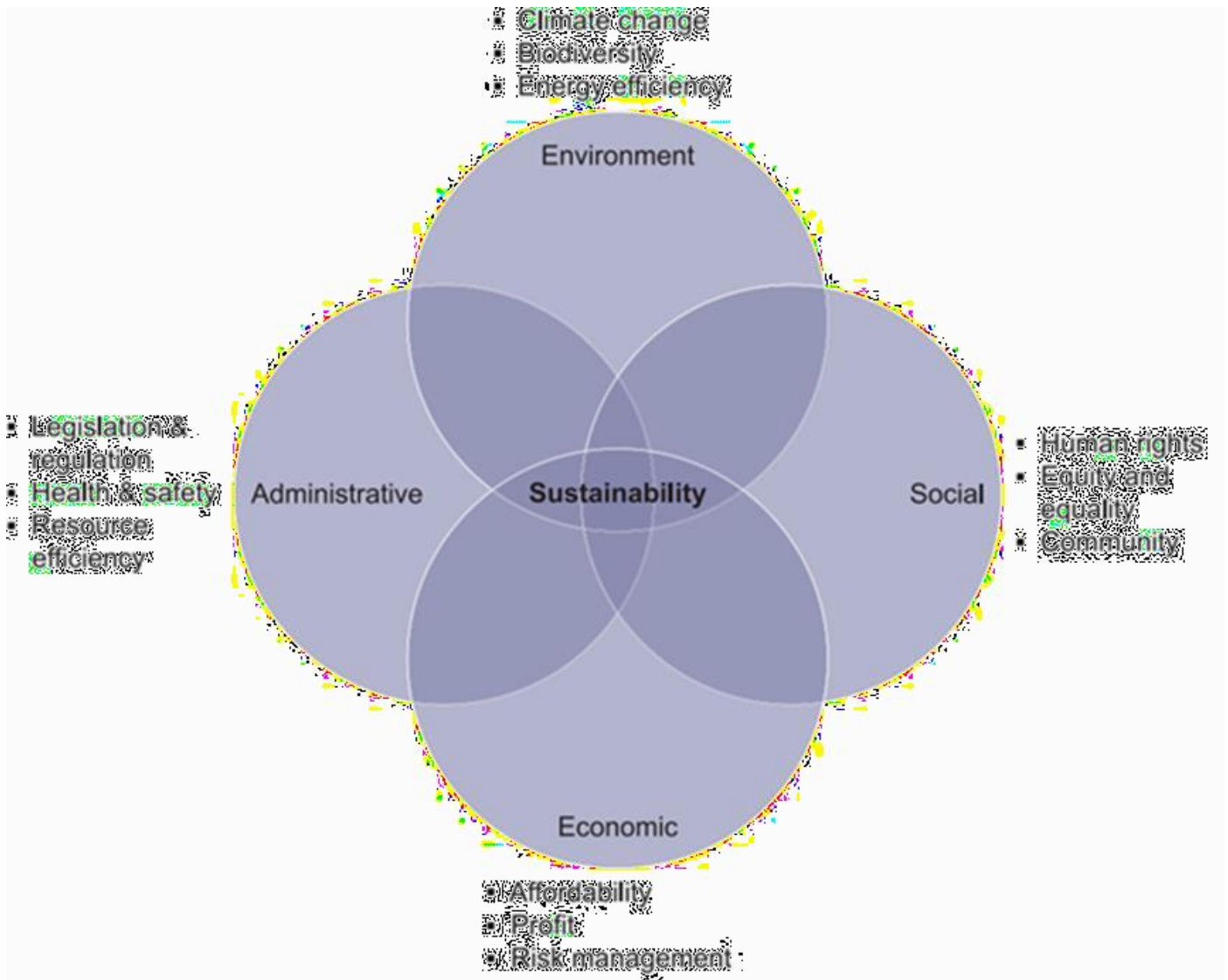


Figure 1: BAPS Project Sustainability Model

The current study focused on only the economic component of the BAPS Model. Since the topic of the study is on sustainability of foreign-funded projects, the researcher chose to zero-in on the economic dimension and avoid overgeneralisation. The object of this focus was to then come out with a refined model which is more detailed but not generalising.

## METHODOLOGY

This study combined both positivism and interpretivism. The positivist paradigm dealt with objective assessment of the predominant opinions of CBP stakeholders and theory testing while on the other hand, interpretive phenomenology focused on theory building based on the stakeholders’ subjective substantiations. This abductive (mixed methods) approach is justified by Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) saying positivism measures the static nature of the quantitative aspects while interpretivism provides the

insights in a dynamic qualitative environment. The researcher chose to engage an exploratory design aimed at understanding a phenomenon and developing an approach of dealing with the phenomenon (Ramlo, 2016; Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich, Stewart, Sunkpho, 2020). This research design was deemed appropriate to rediscover the subtle causes of CBP unsustainability with a view to proposing a refined model. The mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate in this study to ride on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches as well as for the two approaches to cover up each other’s weaknesses (Ramlo, 2016; Cabrera, 2021). The researchers collected both qualitative and quantitative data and analysed them in a single-phase study, a variety of abductive research called concurrent explanatory research (Cabrera, 2021). The research strategy involved administering a structured questionnaire survey on randomly selected community members representing the beneficiaries and then a semi-structured interview survey on purposively selected stakeholders.

The sample size for the questionnaire survey participants was 470 households, randomly selected out of roughly 2000 households who were registered as CBP beneficiaries under the National Association of NGOs (NANGO) at the time. As for the qualitative interview participants, 30 data-rich sources were deliberately targeted among the over 60 NANGO stakeholders for data saturation, in line with the 15 to 30 range stipulated by Campbell, Greenwood and Prior (2020). Also, a sample size between 15 and 30 has been widely used in qualitative PhD studies using interviews. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse questionnaire-based data with the aid of correlation analysis and factor analysis to test reliability as recommended by Murphy (2021). On the other hand, interview-based data was analysed using thematic analysis, a process of classifying (data reduction), scrutinising (data display) and reporting (interpretation) on themes within the collected data (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### Response rates

The results section describes the results you obtained in your research. Include figures and tables as appropriate to illustrate your results. Figures can show data trends or other visual information. Tables are best to use when the exact values are important.

Table 1: Aggregate response rates

Instrument	Target Sample size	Actual Response	Response Rate
Questionnaires	470	256	54.47%
Interviews	30	23	76.67%

Two districts could not make it to participate in this study due to inaccessible roads. The ones that successfully participated are outlined below.

Table 2: Geographically disaggregated response rates

District	Questionnaire		Interviews	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Masvingo	104	40.6	7	30.4
Chiredzi	39	15.2	4	17.4
Bikita	68	26.6	4	17.4
Gutu	29	11.3	4	17.4
Chivi	16	6.3	4	17.4

<b>Totals</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>
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This study on CBPs concentrated on all those concerned, from administrators to leaders of the beneficiaries. The survey was carried out in areas where the projects were having an impact, proving that the coverage and sampling criteria were satisfied.

### Quantitative results

Table 3: Reliability test

KEY CONSTRUCTS	DIMENSIONS	NUMBER OF ITEMS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
<b>Funding experiences of CBPs implemented in Masvingo Province</b>	Best practices and worst scenarios	9	0.964
<b>Effects of the prevailing funding practices on the sustainability of CBPs</b>	Effects on project activities	9	0.959
	Effects on implementing agencies	6	0.982
	Effects on the community in general	5	0.959
<b>Sustainability strategies employed by different CBPs</b>	Benefits accruing from identified strategies	9	0.957
<b>Challenges encountered in the existing sustainability strategies</b>	Institutional Challenges	4	0.953
	Financial Challenges	3	0.917
	Compliance Challenges	3	0.920
<b>Proposed components towards a CBP sustainability model</b>	Suggested improvements on approaches	9	0.675
<b>Overall Reliability</b>	<b>B1.1 to E1.10</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>0.926</b>

Table 4: Validity test

Correlations		FE	EOS	SS	BP	CE	FC	CC	SM
Funding experiences (FE)	Pearson Correlation	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)								
Effects on sustainability (EOS)	Pearson Correlation	.640**	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000							
Sustainability strategies (SS)	Pearson Correlation	.642**	.593**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000						
Best practices (BP)	Pearson Correlation	.430**	.506**	.436**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000					
Challenges encountered (CE)	Pearson Correlation	.157*	.167**	.082	-.023	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.007	.192	.714				

Financial Challenges (FC)	Pearson Correlation	.094	.112	.117	.037	.611**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.133	.073	.061	.551	.000			
Compliance Challenges (CC)	Pearson Correlation	.203**	.117	.182**	-.026	.600**	.613**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.062	.004	.684	.000	.000		
Sustainability model (SM)	Pearson Correlation	.555**	.453**	.471**	.296**	.015	.092	-.055	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.817	.143	.378	
	N	256	256	256	256	256	256	256	256
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									

Table 5: Descriptive statistics

Sustainable CBP practices	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Funding patterns of CBPs are erratic throughout the sectors	256	3.63	.863	-.682	.583
The performance of CBPs is independent of fluctuating funding patterns	256	3.64	.732	-.663	1.211
Community institutions are committed to the CBPs as a sustainability strategy	256	3.66	.729	-.479	.438
Locals commit and control most of the resources used by the CBPs as a sustainability measure	256	3.67	.659	-.515	.817
The operation of CBPs is encountering more conveniences than inconveniences in this community	256	3.67	.682	-.663	1.304
Implementing agencies are coming up with creative financial solutions to keep the CBPs functional	256	3.69	.623	-.839	1.422
The CBPs are complying with local sensitivities and gatekeeper regulations	256	3.71	.617	-.729	1.413
CBP coordinators organise locals to carry forward unfinished work when funding ends	256	3.69	.623	-.643	1.182
Stakeholders are geared for collaboration to improve the sustainability of the CBPs	256	3.70	.679	-.464	.756
Valid N (listwise)	256				

Table 6: Factor analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.918
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	Df
	3062.629
	36

	Sig.	.000
Based on correlations		

Table 7: Variance analysis

Total Variance Explained				
	Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
		Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Raw	1	3.377	78.007	78.007
	2	.328	7.585	85.592
	3	.254	5.879	91.471

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

When analysing a covariance matrix, the initial eigenvalues are the same across the raw and rescaled solution.

Table 8: Principal component analysis

Rotated Component Matrix- Best Practices	Factor Loading
Funding patterns of CBPs are erratic throughout the sectors	.949
The performance of CBPs is independent of fluctuating funding patterns	.930
Community institutions are committed to the CBPs as a sustainability strategy	.929
Locals commit and control most of the resources used by the CBPs as a sustainability measure	.915
The operation of CBPs is encountering more conveniences than inconveniences in this community	.895
Implementing agencies are coming up with creative financial solutions to keep the CBPs functional	.883
The CBPs are complying with local sensitivities and gatekeeper regulations	.863
CBP coordinators organise locals to carry forward unfinished work when funding ends	.838
Stakeholders are geared for collaboration to improve the sustainability of the CBPs	.808

Descriptive statistics such as mean, skewness, kurtosis and standard deviations were used to analyse the questionnaire results. Distribution around the mean was measured by skewness, central tendency by the mean, variance by standard deviation, and pickiness by kurtosis testing. The study found that respondents highly rated practices of mobilising community members for self-organisation, sharing knowledge and resources, and identifying common interests. The highest mean statistic was 3.71, followed by 3.70 for following government procedures. The third best practice was sourcing resources locally, including making sure that community members perform all the tasks they can reasonably perform. The least ranking was 3.63 for organising around most important problems. The data is indicative of highly compliant CBPs which were taking all the necessary measures for project sustainability.

**Qualitative results**

Table 9: Thematic analysis

Theme	Key findings
<p>Funding experiences of CBPs implemented in Masvingo Province</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All participants said the CBPs receive financial support from international sources to carry out their development projects and initiatives.</li> <li>• The most funded projects are in emergencies, human rights, social services provision, environment and poverty alleviation.</li> <li>• Funding is tied to finite project plans such that once the planned project cycle is ended, the project is plunged into a funding drought until a new plan successfully secures its own separate funding. This makes the projects disjointed in scope and hard to sustain.</li> <li>• Most agencies are making use of consultants in financial management and resource mobilisation to impress donors and secure funding. Sometimes effective financial management is helping maintain transparency but the impact made in the communities is often minimal.</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation experts are hired with a mandate to demonstrate project competency and retain donor support. As a result, these cadres have sometimes faked stories of change to the donors and this has often scandalised many organisations once the funders or the government realise the truth.</li> <li>• Some agencies have initiated systems of donor engagement and networking. For example, Swiss-funded projects meet occasionally at the Swiss Embassy in Harare to share experiences. While this was expected to secure diverse funding sources, the result has sometimes been strict donor intelligence which has seen some agencies being blacklisted.</li> </ul>
<p>Effects of the prevailing funding practices on the sustainability of CBPs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fly-by-night agencies: CBPs typically aim to bring positive change and improve lives as they often fill gaps left by the government in providing essential services to marginalised communities. However, overly focusing on monetary resources has produced some dubious groups who lack a development passion but are solely motivated by money.</li> <li>• Corruption: On one hand the proliferation of fund-based projects has brought expertise, innovation and a passion for change in the communities where they address pressing social and environmental issues among other things. However, increasing pressure over funding opportunities has led to some agencies offering kickbacks to some corrupt elements in the funding organisations to secure grants. This has sometimes led to incompetent teams winning the grants and performing shoddy work.</li> <li>• Portfolio organisations: The scramble for donor funds has also caused the emergency of a new sector in the towns comprising freelance project consultants, some of whom have no fixed abode. Their clients have sometimes been found wanting as a result of cutting corners in fund processing procedures especially when due diligence checks have not been done thoroughly. An example was given of a plantation project that won a grant only to be found to be a portfolio organisation with no land at all on which to do the</li> </ul>



	<p>plantation work.</p>
<p>Sustainability strategies employed by different CBPs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consortium approach: This is important where the projects have mixed thematic areas where agencies can do division of labour and specialisation. When a project receives huge funding, it may consider sub-granting – that is, becoming a little donor and donate to other smaller projects from the same coffers as a way of shedding responsibilities and workloads.</li> <li>• Contract farming: This is a partnership with businesses which rely on agricultural produce as raw materials, such as bakeries and breweries which rely on wheat and sorghum production respectively. Agricultural CBPs have sometimes explored this strategy to fund their farmers making them resilient to funding fluctuations.</li> <li>• Exchange programmes: Exchange programmes involving beneficiary groups have sometimes achieved sustainability by empowering local communities through skill development. Crosspollination of skills has been noted across several communities with projects run by different agencies. However, there has been a growing risk of some agencies losing staff to other agencies as a result of engagements during the exchanges. Smaller agencies have become like training grounds for more established agencies which absorb the cream of experienced staff in the process.</li> <li>• Social enterprising: Some agencies were leveraging the entrepreneurial spirit of local communities. Some of them successfully created income-generating activities that not only fund their projects but also benefit the local economy. This model showcases the potential for a win-win situation where sustainability is achieved through financial independence.</li> <li>• Corporate social responsibility: Some community groups were reportedly ‘demanding’ partnerships with local businesses. For example, numerous companies were reportedly made to sign agreements to fund community share ownership trusts. This has often encouraged multistakeholder ownership of the ensuing projects as the funding companies typically exert efforts to monitor the projects to avoid scandalisation. By collaborating with established entities in this way, the CBPs tap into existing resources, networks and expertise. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness and impact of their initiatives but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility within the local community.</li> </ul>
<p>Challenges encountered in the existing sustainability strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding dependency and its implications: heavy reliance on external funding. Dependency limits sustainability and impact as funding sources may fluctuate or cease altogether. Donors have been found influencing their recipients’ priorities through conditioned aid.</li> <li>• Accountability and transparency concerns: Some groups often fail to demonstrate how donated funds are utilized. Many are struggling to demonstrate value for money in through impact achieved in the communities. Failure to meet these expectations has often led to ceasing of funding. Fund embezzlement scams have also often undermined public trust.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural and contextual challenges: Overseas funded CBPs often operate in diverse cultural and contextual environments, which can present challenges in implementing programs effectively. Some agencies lack understanding of local customs, values and power dynamics. Others are tempted to copycat the modus operandi followed in other places regardless of local peculiarities. Communities find imposed projects as being disrespectful to locals thereby undermining engagement opportunities. Poor adaptation has sometimes resulted in strained relationships between project implementers and the authorities, with numerous agencies being suspended or banned from operating.</li> <li>• Aggressive competition: reference was made to numerous instances where project agencies were practically at each other’s throat fighting for turf. The competition has seen some organisations thriving on resources originally allocated to some other organisation. Organisations were reportedly snooping and badmouthing one another in front of their donors. This has often been the case in consortia and has practically weakened the consortium approach as a sustainability strategy.</li> </ul>
<p>Proposed components towards a CBP sustainability model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to rethink funding approaches: To address funding dependency, overseas funded CBPs must explore alternative funding approaches. They need to diversify their funding sources. They can also resort to seeking local partnerships as an alternative to foreign donors. They must also be seen engaging in sustainable fundraising activities such as social enterprising – venturing into commercial enterprises of which the profits will fund their non-profit endeavours.</li> <li>• Balancing short-term project funding with long-term financial stability: Agencies must not target only huge grants where competition is rife and opportunities are slim. – small grants are a sober alternative worth pursuing to maintain presence in the absence of big funds. ‘Slow but sure’ projects are crucial for maintaining impact and independence. It boosts assertiveness when negotiating funding contracts in future.</li> <li>• Diversifying income streams: Projects must reduce reliance on a single donor. Expanding the funding streams is vital for project endurance and impact sustainability. Overseas funded CBPs should explore income-generating activities with their beneficiaries to build viable microeconomies. Social enterprising is an in thing – to encourage it, government charges little to no tax on social enterprises. Collaborations with local businesses or government entities is also possible and worth undertaking as these are often predictable sources of small-scale sustainable funding.</li> <li>• Local capacity-building: If the CBP implementers are genuine, they must try to empower their beneficiaries lastingly instead of becoming perpetual fund-seekers on behalf of the community as this will amount to spoon-feeding. They must use the little funding they access to invest in local capacity-building projects and help reduce the culture of free donations which has now consumed the communities. Let them build skills so that external staff quickly give way to local hands. They must invest in essentialization of indigenous knowledge which is readily accessible and easy to propagate for sustainability. For example, comm unities must be</li> </ul>

	<p>trained to utilize local resources to produce essential tradable goods like livestock feeds thereby promoting sustainable home industry. This approach fosters ownership, strengthens local institutions and ensures that positive change continues even after the agency's presence diminishes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic planning: A sustainability model for overseas funded CBPs should include long-term strategic planning that goes beyond immediate project cycles. They must clarify their visions, goals and milestones while considering funding diversification and capacity-building initiatives. Presently the projects state their visions and goals in vain because they hardly run continuous programmes beyond 5 years due to sporadic funding patterns. Strategic planning for CBPs must ensure that project owners put genuine efforts to follow their declared roadmaps faithfully regardless of funding.</li> <li>• Adaptive programming: CBPs must adopt adaptive programming that responds to the changing needs of their served communities. Project contexts are not simple and static but complex and evolving. Monitoring and evaluation must prioritise learning instead of impressing donors. It is a project that needs evidence and not the donor. Getting used to evidence-based intervention may of course increase donor confidence but more importantly supports long-term sustainability through demonstrable impact.</li> </ul>
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## DISCUSSION

### Funding experiences of CBPs implemented in Masvingo Province

The beneficiaries indicated in the questionnaires that most CBPs were satisfactory in as far as sustainability measures are concerned. In concurrence, two of the interviewed stakeholders (barely 9%) said most CBPs were reliably receiving international funding for development projects, with the majority in emergencies, human rights, social services, environment and poverty alleviation. However, 78% of them found the funding cycles to be too finite, making projects disjointed and hard to sustain. This disjointed nature of fund-dependent projects was enunciated earlier by Enaifoghe et al., (2020) who underscored the need for alternative sources of the funds instead of relying on foreigners. Ten people out of 23 blamed the use of consultants for financial management and resource mobilisation, saying this led to minimal impact in some communities, a position supported by Peledi (2019) and Kusena (2020). They also said monitoring and evaluation experts were forging success stories thereby scandalising organisations and jeopardising the projects. In the contrary, Peledi (2019) believes that monitoring and evaluation teams must control the organisation and guard against forged reports. On a positive note, there were 5 stakeholders who appreciated some CBP agencies for initiating donor engagement systems, but 2 of these had reservations about strict donor intelligence and blacklisting of some CBPs.

### Effects of the prevailing funding practices on the sustainability of CBPs

Some 44% of the beneficiaries who answered the questionnaire and 30% of the interviewed stakeholders were in agreement that local CBPs were improving lives by filling government gaps in marginalised communities. In the same purview, Peledi (2019) had declared the role of non-state actors as being to complement government efforts. However, 12 stakeholders representing 52% of the interviewees criticised the CBPs for their overemphasis on monetary resources which has led to some dubious groups invading the non-profits sector motivated by greed. There were also 4 who pointed to corruption in funding organisations leading to poor work due to incompetent teams winning grants. Yet conventional knowledge has it that the non-profit sector is the safe have of public projects as it is less infested with malpractices (Girmay and Dadi,

2019; Philip and Williams, 2019; Gray, 2019). It was explained by one of the stakeholders that the scramble for donor funds created a new sector of freelance project consultants, some with no fixed abode, who may take shortcuts in fund processing procedures resulting in clients and communities being left wanting.

### **Sustainability strategies employed by different CBPs**

Fifty percent of the beneficiaries held positive opinions about local funding networks of CBPs, a position supported by 16% of the stakeholders who said some CBPs used the consortium approach for division of labour and specialisation in projects with mixed thematic areas. AbouAssi et al. (2021) had also made a similar conclusion by observing the growing integration among civil society organisations. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), notably contract farming with businesses relying on agricultural produce such as bakeries and breweries, were also mentioned by 6 stakeholders. Four interviewees also mentioned about exchange programmes being also used to empower local communities through skills development; but two of them said there was a risk of some agencies losing staff due to the search for greener pastures. Contrarily, AbouAssi et al. (2021) believes that the voluntary sector is motivated more by passion rather than salaries or other monetary incentives. Some agencies were found to be leveraging the local entrepreneurial spirit to create income-generating activities that benefit the local economy, a finding that supported the questionnaire trends about social enterprising. Another funding strategy reported by 3 stakeholders was corporate social responsibility involving partnerships with local businesses similar to the PPPs mentioned above. This strategy was described as encouraging multistakeholder ownership and fostering a sense of community-wide responsibility. The degree to which these approaches enhance the effectiveness and impact of CBP initiatives was found to be a fifty-fifty deal among the stakeholders with some being sceptic and others positive, confirming the position that civil society was a mixed bag of flourishing and struggling initiatives.

### **Challenges encountered in the existing sustainability strategies**

Only 28% of the questionnaires acknowledged that local CBPs were facing a myriad of challenges affecting their sustainability. Some 83% (19) interviewees picked that the commonest such challenge was that of funding dependency, to which numerous scholars attest (John et al., 2021; Gupta, 2020; Somerville and Suggs; 2019; Girmay and Dadi, 2019). This was blamed for limiting sustainability and impact due to fluctuating funding sources and the negative influence of strings attached to donor aid. Twelve interviewees (52%) also mentioned accountability and transparency concerns where some groups failed to demonstrate value for money and faced embezzlement scams. Cultural and contextual challenges were also noted (by 8 stakeholders) among agencies that lack understanding of local customs and values in their work as previously concluded by Peledi (2019). Three stakeholders also said aggressive competition among project agencies was weakening the consortium approach as a sustainability strategy (Save the Children, 2022; Wang, 2023), leading to strained relationships and potential infighting (AbouAssi and Tschirhart, 2022; Enaifoghe et al., 2020).

### **Proposed components towards a CBP sustainability model**

The interviewed stakeholders suggested that overseas funded CBPs must explore alternative funding approaches, diversify sources and engage in sustainable fundraising activities like social enterprising. They also said balancing short-term project funding with long-term financial stability is crucial for maintaining impact and independence. These stakeholders found the need for diversifying income streams as earlier suggested by Cohen (2019) who said that this is essential for project endurance and impact sustainability. CBPs were also encouraged to invest in local capacity-building projects, empowering beneficiaries and reducing the culture of free donations. Strategic planning was also found to be a critical sustainability component in keeping with Wang (2023) and the stakeholders said it should include long-term goals and milestones. They also called on project owners to follow their declared roadmaps faithfully regardless of whether there is funding or not. The interviewees appealed for adaptive programming to respond to the

changing needs of the served communities. They also urged CBP agencies to prioritise learning over the need to impress donors. According to them, this approach fosters ownership, strengthens local institutions and ensures positive change continues even beyond the agency’s presence. They also vouched for adaptive programming to increase donor confidence and, reiterating Cohen (2019), to support long-term sustainability through demonstrable impact.

## CONCLUSION

CBPs in Masvingo Province have been found vulnerable to finite funding cycles, which have led to minimal impact in most communities. Some agencies have used consultants for financial management and resource mobilisation, but this has led to scandals and jeopardy. Corruption in funding organisations has also led to poor work and a new sector of bogus project consultants whose specialism is responding to calls-for-proposals. Sustainability strategies employed by CBPs include consortium approaches, public-private partnerships, exchange programs, social enterprising and corporate social responsibility. Challenges encountered include funding dependency, accountability concerns, cultural and contextual challenges as well as aggressive competition among project agencies. Stakeholders suggest exploring alternative funding approaches, diversifying sources, engaging in sustainable fundraising activities, balancing short-term funding with long-term financial stability, diversifying income streams, investing in local capacity-building projects, strategic planning, adaptive programming and prioritising learning over donor gratification.

## FROM TRADITIONAL TO SUSTAINABLE CBP FUNDING: THE MODEL

Traditional strategies	Confluence strategies	Sustainable strategies
Finite funding cycles		Local funding
Consultants-based programming		Diversified sources
Calls for proposals		Fundraising
Consortium grants		Mixed fund sizes
Public-private partnerships		Capacity building
Social enterprising		Strategic planning
Exchange programmes		Culture of learning

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