

Factors Shaping the Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisation Interventions in Muringato Informal Settlement, Nyeri County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of interventions from NGOs in informal settlements is an aspect in development that should be addressed, particularly where there is continued intervention but economic conditions remain desperate. The current study analyzed the determinant factors of effectiveness of NGO interventions in Muringato informal settlement in Nyeri County, Kenya. Three objectives were set to guide the research. They include: analyzing the effectiveness of the selected NGO programmes/services; investigating the role of community participation in the effectiveness of NGO interventions; and analyzing the structural constraining factors of NGO interventions. The case study design was adopted. The sample size for the study involved 30 respondents selected through purposive sampling, with 15 in-depth interviews (7 NGO personnel, 5 community leaders and 3 religious leaders) and one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving 15 community beneficiaries. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and FGDs. Thematic data analysis was conducted using QSR NVivo 11. The research has revealed that the interventions by the NGOs in health, education and livelihood have improved access to the selected services. Nevertheless, success in implementing these interventions has been hampered by constraints resulting from inadequacies in resources, inconsistency in coverage and orientation of the programs to the short-term goals and infrastructure outputs. The involvement of the community members in the selected interventions has been limited to consultations in terms of assessing needs and implementing the program while leaving out the process of designing and making decisions regarding the intervention programs. Some of the structural constraints include poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure among others. The study establishes that the impact of NGO intervention programs in Muringato was influenced by the interaction of the program implementation process, community participation and structural constraints.

Keywords: NGO effectiveness, informal settlements, community participation, structural constraints, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has equally been accompanied by the trend of urbanization, where there has been an increase in the number of people moving into urban areas compared to the past. It is estimated that by the year 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2018). There has been the development of informal settlements in developing countries, where there has been poor living standards such as crowded houses, inadequate sanitation facilities, and insecurity among other issues.

The increasing number of informal settlements has meant that NGOs have increased in their involvement in the provision of social services and community development programs. However, the existence of NGO programs does not necessarily mean sustainable improvement in the condition of the community in question. The success of the community development programs will depend on how responsive the programs are to the needs of the community, whether they are able to utilize their resources effectively, and whether the programs bring about sustainable gains even after the support of the programs is withdrawn from the community. This is because the success of the community development programs depends on how much community participation there is since lack of community participation may make the programs

unresponsive to the community (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Kenya is one of the countries that could serve as an example when discussing the above issues. Urbanization trends in the country have been accompanied by the growth of informal settlements. Moreover, problems related to shortage of houses and poor infrastructure prevail. While the right to adequate housing is provided in Article 43 of the Constitution of Kenya, the problems related to shortage and poor housing conditions remain prevalent in poor urban regions (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). Various attempts have been made by the government to overcome such problems. Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP) is an example of a program introduced to tackle such challenges.

Muringato informal settlement in Nyeri County is an example of such a specific environment. Nevertheless, although there is no doubt regarding the presence of the NGOs involved in community development, it remains to be seen whether the NGOs' intervention corresponds to the needs of local people and leads to the betterment of the situation in the community. Therefore, studying the factors affecting the effectiveness of the intervention becomes crucial. In this context, the current study examines the factors affecting the effectiveness of NGO intervention in Muringato informal settlement in Nyeri County, Kenya.

Background to the Study

The development and sustainability of informal settlements is linked to the presence of a number of factors including economic, social and institutional ones, which include poverty, rural to urban migration, social exclusion, lack of access to affordable shelter and poor urban planning. Where the provision of formal housing and infrastructure is not able to keep up with the growing population, it is likely that poor people will live in places where there is low access to amenities and tenure security. Thus, informal settlements are usually characterized by overcrowded, inadequately housed, poorly provided with sanitation and amenities.

The Sub-Saharan part of Africa has experienced rapid increases in their urban populations due to the shortage of affordable housing facilities in the area. The failure by the formal sector to provide the necessary houses according to the increase in population has caused more informal growth of poorly planned residential areas lacking any infrastructure. Kenya experiences similar housing issues to those found in the Sub-Saharan part of Africa. Although the constitution recognizes the right of the citizen to adequate and affordable housing, several housing issues exist, particularly among the poor urban dwellers (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). There have been several attempts to solve housing problems in slums. Among the initiatives is KENSUP.

According to this model, NGOs have assumed great significance in the delivery of services and development programs in slums. Such development interventions may consist of interventions aimed at increasing livelihoods, healthcare services, education, water and sanitation, shelter and community development. Success of such interventions does not only hinge on the delivery of such services, but also on how these programs are designed, delivered and accepted by the communities that will be beneficiaries of the development programs. Participatory development is based on the participation of the communities in identifying priority areas, designing interventions and implementing solutions (Mansuri & Rao, 2012).

However, the mere fact of participation does not mean that any significant effect will be achieved. The process of participation may reinforce existing power structures in which the community does not play any significant role in defining the project agenda and the process of making decisions about the allocation of resources for the projects (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). It is one more aspect to consider when assessing the efficiency of NGOs: the mere presence of participation mechanisms does not mean anything in terms of the community influence.

Muringato Slum in Nyeri County serves as an illustration of such a specific environment where these issues can be examined. The community has already experienced the process of engagement with the developmental organizations for a long period of time, and certain development has taken place as regards the social and community development. Nonetheless, the economic and socio-economic issues persist in this community. It raises questions about the degree to which the local needs have been met by means of these

efforts on the part of NGOs.

This study drew on the researcher's earlier involvement with the Muringato Settlement. The researcher became acquainted with the settlement in the late 1990s through being stationed in a place that is near the settlement, and thereafter becoming involved in the affairs of the settlement in his role as Development Coordinator at Mission Development Organization. It was from the experience of this involvement that the researcher had knowledge of the context of life, interactions, and developmental activities in the settlement. Over a period of three months of participating observation, the researcher noted that socio-economic problems still persisted despite the efforts of development organizations such as USAID projects, United Nations health care services, and Kenya Red Cross initiatives.

In light of this, the study aimed at finding out the determinants of the success of NGO intervention programs in the Muringato slum of Nyeri County, Kenya. Specifically, the study aimed at finding out the success of present-day NGO programs in meeting the demands of the people, the significance of community involvement in ensuring the success of the program, and the structural determinants of NGO intervention programs.

Statement of the Problem

There have been persistent challenges of deprivations in multiple dimensions in the informal settlements, which are poverty, poor housing, poor sanitation, insecure land tenure and lack of access to basic services. NGOs have tried to address some of these challenges by conducting various activities including health care, education, livelihoods, water and sanitation, housing and community development. Although the programs have proved helpful in solving immediate challenges being faced by the communities, the mere presence of interventions by NGOs will not necessarily result in any improvement in the conditions of the community.

The challenge is very relevant when taking into consideration the example of Muringato informal settlement in Nyeri County, where the intervention by non-governmental organizations has taken place as a result of the presence of certain socio-economic challenges for a considerable period of time. At the same time, the socio-economic challenges still exist for families residing in the informal settlement. The existence of community challenges in spite of the NGO intervention creates doubts concerning the efficiency of the programs in addressing community priorities.

Additionally, there are other structural issues which might influence the effectiveness of the NGOs' interventions and are beyond the scope of the projects. Among those issues are poverty, unemployment, insecurity of land tenure, and absence of infrastructure. In other words, such issues might influence the ability of the household to benefit from the intervention and the sustainability of its effect.

Previous literature reviews in this field have looked at NGO interventions, community participation, and informal settlement development. Nonetheless, there has been little empirical research on the relationship between the effectiveness of these interventions, community participation, and structure in terms of small-scale informal settlements such as Muringato. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct context-specific research on how the interventions conducted by NGOs satisfy the needs of the community, the degree of community influence in development projects, and the effect of structure in these projects.

The purpose of the study was therefore to investigate the variables that influence the effectiveness of NGO interventions in the Muringato informal settlement in Nyeri County, Kenya. These variables include, effectiveness of selected NGO interventions and services, impact of community involvement on the effectiveness of interventions and limitations of NGO interventions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three major theories were considered in this research: Modernization Theory, Dependency Theory, and

Participatory Development Theory. Modernization Theory (Rostow, 1960) allowed to explore the issue of NGO involvement in the provision of services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure as a tool for the development of communities' wellbeing. Nevertheless, this theory was criticized for ignoring structural inequities. Dependency Theory provided an opposite view on this issue, showing that reliance on outside resources and donors could unintentionally contribute to dependency of communities instead of addressing poverty-causing issues. Participatory Development Theory (Freire, 1970) became the main theory to measure community participation based on the need for community empowerment in the process of decision-making. Nonetheless, as it is claimed by Cooke & Kothari (2001), participatory approaches can reproduce current power structures and turn into consultations rather than decision-making.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

NGO Programmes and Intervention Effectiveness

NGOs are able to address service shortages in informal areas with health, education, and livelihood initiatives. Although such interventions address the immediate problem at hand, their sustainability is limited by their ability to bring about changes in the environment within which they operate. Literature proves that successful interventions in terms of service delivery are often unable to affect socio-economic conditions in a more comprehensive way (Sverdlik et al., 2018). What makes this study unique is the measure of its impact in terms of ability to transform communities.

Community Participation and NGO Effectiveness

Although the importance of community participation is acknowledged as essential to the relevance and ownership of the project, studies have found a mismatch between the theory of participatory development and its implementation. NGOs use consultation processes whereby communities define their own needs and contribute labor, yet they are not involved in planning, budgeting, and decision-making strategies (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). This type of tokenistic participation results in an illusion of ownership but maintains power in NGOs.

Structural Constraints and NGO Interventions

Structural barriers like poverty, unemployment, insecure tenure of land, and lack of infrastructure inherently limited the scope of NGO effectiveness. The structural problems cut across the scope of an NGO, limiting its potential to develop and sustain development initiatives. Dependency Theory shows that until these structural barriers are addressed, NGOs can only provide palliative solutions. This research addresses the important gap in literature through a qualitative understanding of how structural barriers and participation dynamics affect the effectiveness of NGOs in smaller and less studied communities like Muringato.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative case study design was adopted in the research as a way of examining the determinants of the effectiveness of NGO interventions in Muringato informal settlement. It was appropriate to adopt qualitative case study design for this study since it enabled an extensive examination of NGO interventions in their natural environment and the experiences, views and perceptions of the participants on the interventions (Yin, 2018).

The study was done in Muringato informal settlement, where three villages located within Mathari ward, Mweiga sub-county, Nyeri county, Kenya are situated near each other. This area was purposely chosen because of the area's prior exposure to NGO interventions, coupled with the economic difficulties that exist in the area. It was thus an appropriate site for assessing the effectiveness of the programs offered by NGOs.

Purposeful sampling technique was followed for the recruitment of participants who have direct knowledge about NGO development interventions based on the tenets of qualitative research methodology. The total number of participants selected for this study was 30, which was structurally determined. This included 15

semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants (7 from NGOs, 5 from community members, and 3 from religious leaders) and one FGD with 15 community members. The technique of maximum variation was adopted to maintain diversity among the participants with respect to age, gender, socio-economic background, and affiliation.

The data collection techniques used for this study involved intensive semi-structured interviews and the FGD. Triangulation of the methodological techniques was done through the use of the two methods. Both the interview and FGD guides were formulated based on the research objectives and the theoretical framework, but participants were able to bring out new topics of discussion.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis through familiarising the data, generating codes, developing themes and reviewing them and interpreting the data. QSR NVivo 11 software was used to organise, code, retrieve and manage the data in order to identify patterns in relation to program effectiveness, community participation and structural impediments. Credibility was attained through triangulation, member checking and expert review of the instrument. Dependability was obtained through audit trails, while confirmability was attained through documentation of the coding procedure and participants' quotations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Tangaza University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (TU-ISERC) (Ref: TU/ISERC2025/01/00093), while permission to carry out the study was sought from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants before data collection began, and all participation was voluntary. Confidentiality was guaranteed through the use of codes rather than names.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Several major themes on the effectiveness of the interventions done by NGOs in Muringato informal settlement have been identified through thematic analysis. This includes the effectiveness of the intervention programs and services offered by the NGOs, participation of the community and the effectiveness of NGO interventions, and structural constraints and response by the NGOs. The findings show that despite the interventions made by the NGOs having an impact of improving the access to certain services and meeting the needs of the community, their effectiveness has been hampered by certain factors.

Theme 1: Effectiveness of Key NGO Programmes and Services

Based on the findings of this study, positive impacts of NGO intervention programs could be noted with regard to improving access to services such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. The respondents were satisfied with the way that these programs tackled the immediate needs of the community. However, their impact was hindered by lack of resources, inconsistency of services, and an emphasis on outputs instead of transformation. As noted by one NGO representative:

“Resources are insufficient compared to community needs” (NGO-03).

Furthermore, a religious leader highlighted the temporary nature of this relief, stating:

“Support is temporary while poverty continues” (RL-01).

Therefore, while direct services addressed specific requirements, the wider influence on the community was limited.

Theme 2: Community Participation and NGO Effectiveness

The findings demonstrated that there was a gap between the participatory method and its implementation. The participation process was essentially consultative; while the people of the community were actively

involved in need assessment and implementation processes, their influence in terms of planning and budgeting was very limited. One community member said: “They ask us what problems we have... after that they return to us with their plan ready” (CI-05). Another participant emphasized the lack of community agency in core decisions:

“We participate... however, decision-making takes place somewhere else” (FGD-03).

Because the community had no decision-making authority, their engagement was confined to the process of implementing projects rather than strategically influencing them, thus limiting their sustainability and ownership.

Theme 3: Structural Constraints and NGO Responses

The study revealed that extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of security of tenure, and inadequate infrastructure were the main structural constraints on the way to NGO intervention. Such system-level constraints determined households’ capacity to participate in development interventions. As one of the community members pointed out:

“Most families here struggle to put food on the table, and jobs are almost non-existent” (CI-08). An NGO representative acknowledged how these structural challenges overwhelmed their operational capacity:

“We try to address health and water issues, but the needs are too many, and our resources cannot reach everyone” (NGO-02).

As a result, NGOs provided immediate project outputs, but the magnitude of the structural constraints prevented meaningful, long-term socio-economic improvements.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to the findings, it is evident that there are some positive impacts of the role played by NGOs in Muringato informal settlement particularly in initiatives aimed at addressing health, education, and economic issues. However, the limitation of such interventions in the community is the issue of inadequate resources, lack of full coverage, and attention to short-term results only. From the above discussion, it can be argued that the role of NGOs in a community cannot be seen as a factor contributing to positive change in the community. This means that in order to achieve positive results from such initiatives, certain aspects need to be addressed.

Additionally, it was pointed out that there is a gap between the theory and practice of the Participatory Development Theory. Even though the people participating in the research were involved in identifying needs and implementing activities, their effect on the planning and decision-making process was inadequate. In other words, participation was consultative rather than decision-making. This statement is further backed up by the critical review of the participatory development approach, which notes that although consultation may take place with the community, decision-making powers have not been transferred to the community (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). The findings suggest that participation of communities can occur at the implementation stage but not at the priority-setting stage. For the Participatory Development Theory, it can be regarded as a disadvantage, because meaningful participation means involvement in decision-making processes of interventions.

The study results are also supportive of the applicability of Dependency Theory in assessing the relations of NGOs with communities. Given the dependence of the project on outside assistance, and absence of any community involvement in planning and resource allocation, one can conclude that the development projects will remain dependent on certain institutional and financial forces, operating outside the community. This does not imply that all interventions of NGOs necessarily result in dependency or are inefficient. However, it reveals limitations of how much communities can control development projects. Coexistence of tangible benefits coming from the project and socio-economic problems is an indication of the limitations in meeting certain needs under existing conditions.

The role of structural factors was particularly important in analyzing the constraints in achieving the desired effect from the NGO interventions. Issues like poverty, unemployment, absence of property rights and infrastructure affected the capacity of the initiatives to have an effect on the state of the community. It is not just an issue of organizational capacity of the individual organizations, but one that cannot be addressed by individual projects. Therefore, the results confirm the structural criticisms of the Dependency Theory, particularly the idea that underdevelopment results from structural factors. For Muringato, the NGO initiatives were capable of addressing the specific needs of the community, but they could not address the structural factors which were out of their control.

Moreover, the results have highlighted that institutional pressure could impact the ways in which effectiveness of NGOs could be evaluated. In cases where the focus is laid on tangible outcomes or products that should be delivered within a set timeframe, such as training a specific number of people or building certain infrastructure facilities, there will be no concern about the more conceptual evaluation indicators of development, such as community-based decision making, ownership and capacity building to ensure sustainability of the intervention even after the withdrawal of external support.

The findings are evident that the NGO activities in Muringato had neither been completely ineffective nor revolutionary. There were some achievements made even though there were limitations of effectiveness due to inadequate coverage and resources, consultations but not participation by the community, and socio-economic structures surrounding the community. It is evident that the effectiveness of NGOs can be assessed through the combination of several theories. The theory of modernisation is significant in explaining how the availability of infrastructure and services has an impact on change in living standards. The Participatory Development Theory is critical in understanding how the influence of communities is significant in the development process.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings show that the interventions carried out by the NGOs have indeed made some significant contribution towards meeting the basic requirements of the community within the informal settlement of Muringato through the programs provided in the sectors of health, education, and livelihood. However, it should be noted that the effects of these interventions have been compromised due to limited resources available and the temporary nature of the programs.

Another important conclusion from this research is that the effectiveness of the interventions made by the NGOs depends largely on the extent of community participation within the process. While the community members have actively participated in the needs assessment phase and implementation phase, their participation in the planning and decision-making phases has been very little. Therefore, the participation has been more in terms of consultation and not participatory development as per the theory. The concept of true participation is that of having community members make decisions about priorities, budgets, and implementation plans.

Additionally, it becomes clear from the study that there were significant structural constraints which made it difficult for the NGO interventions to be effective. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, land insecurity and lack of infrastructure were the constraints in making the interventions of NGOs more effective. Structural constraints are larger in scale compared to those of any individual NGO intervention.

Normally, from this research study, it can be seen that the success of the NGO interventions in Muringato depended on the relationship between implementation of programmes, participation of the community, and the socio-economic structures. Despite experiencing some benefits, the success of such interventions remained hampered due to lack of influence from the community in the decision-making process and due to socio-economic structures that need to be addressed. Sustainable development of the community will, therefore, depend on increasing influence from the community in planning and allocation of resources, and also collaboration between NGOs, governments, and community members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations based on the results of the study are provided below to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of NGOs' activities in Muringato informal settlement.

Strengthening Community Participation in Decision-Making

NGOs must work on increasing participation by the community beyond the consultation and implementation stage where the community is enabled to participate in the process of planning, prioritizing activities, budgeting and decision-making. Apart from engaging with the existing structures within the community such as the local leaders, there must also be the involvement of other members of the community living in the settlement in order to prevent decision-making by few individuals. Therefore, the representatives of the community should be involved throughout the project cycle right from the prioritization to implementation and evaluation.

Improving Programme Responsiveness and Coverage

The NGOs need to have proper mechanisms in place whereby they assess the needs of the community periodically such that the priority of the program remains relevant in view of the evolving dynamics of the settlement. Interventions should be developed on the basis of the needs identified rather than the budgetary or pre-set programs of the NGOs. In case the budget is limited, a set of criteria should be established by the NGOs which would help them decide the areas where they would like to intervene.

Promoting Flexible and Sustainable Funding Approaches

The NGOs and the development partners must foster a financing structure that allows for flexibility and adaptation based on locally decided needs but ensures proper accountability at the same time. Flexibility in the financing structure will allow for any changes to be made in the program as needed in light of changes in the community environment and therefore require changes to the program. It is important to pay more attention to capacity building, local ownership, and sustainability than to the quantifiable and short-term outputs.

Addressing Structural Constraints Through Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The collaboration among NGOs, the government structures at the county and national level, communities and all other players in development is necessary in order for them to overcome structural challenges which might affect the achievement of individual interventions strategies. Some of these structural challenges include issues such as insecure land rights, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and poverty, which are above the scope of individual NGOs. The collaborations in this case should aim at integrating the individual projects of NGOs with government policy and services especially in areas such as livelihood, infrastructure, housing, and land.

Strengthening Programme Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have to be developed by the NGOs to measure their effectiveness beyond the outputs of the projects. This is because the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have to incorporate measures of the extent to which there is community participation, beneficiaries' perspective on the interventions, sustainability of benefits, community ownership of the interventions, and the extent to which the problems of the community are addressed by the interventions. Community members also have to be involved in the monitoring and evaluation process.

Future Research

Future research needs to address the problem of NGO effectiveness concerning the various informal settlements using comparative and mixed methods approaches. Comparative research may help to understand the importance of variation with respect to the various attributes of informal settlements,

intervention programs, community participation in intervention programs, institution building, and funding in order to make the intervention program effective. Future research also needs to address the problem of importance of community participation in ensuring the sustainability of NGO intervention programs.

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