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The role of Non-Governmental organisations in enhancing household poverty reduction in Uganda: a review of literature

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to discuss the contribution of Non-Governmental Organisations in enhancing poverty reduction among households in Uganda by looking at the relationship between NGO Activities and poverty reduction in Uganda as well as the contribution of NGO activities and poverty reduction in Uganda.

Methodology: The study adopted a literature review of available data on Uganda, the region and other parts of the world regarding the link between Non-governmental organisations and household poverty reduction. The sources consulted include academic manuscripts, journals, peer-reviewed books, policy documents, annual reports as well as statistical papers.

Findings: Results suggest a positive relationship between microfinance and poverty while most studies confirm that microfinance has a potential outcome on reducing poverty. More, results indicate NGOs' support to food security and household poverty reduction as well as complex community perception of NGOs activities in poverty reduction, promotion of education and training, health, environmental conservation, and protection against child abuse.

Conclusion and recommendations: NGOs might be doing a wonderful service to community members in various countries in the name of poverty reduction, not much of their achievements have been documented. It was even more paramount that, Uganda, with many NGOs working along poverty reduction strategies have their achievements studied, documented and widely shared. Thus, the government provides a more conducive working environment for the NGOs to be able to function and operate with less fear from the censorship of state organs; and, an amicable working relationship be forged between government and the NGOs given that the two are partners in community development.

Unique contribution to policy and/or practice: This review on the contribution of NGOs to household poverty reduction is essential to national and local policy makers on facilitating the stakeholders to appreciate the fundamental role played by non-state actors in community transformation.

Keywords: *NGOs, household, poverty reduction, food security, financial assistance*

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1. Introduction

The issue of household poverty is no longer one of those issues that have to be searched from available literature in much of the developing world. This is largely true because, the number of people falling back into poverty is growing every minute and this is likely to worsen unless strategic steps are taken decisively. Before such steps are taken, studies and analyses should be undertaken to delve into the depth of poverty. A recent study revealed that by 1990, approximately 36% of the world (1.9 billion people) lived below the $1.90 per day extreme poverty line and were concentrated in low-income countries. Over 50% lived in East Asia, and another 28% in South Asia (Kharas & Dooley, 2022). Although the absolute number of people living in extreme poverty has been on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa, the incidence of poverty fell marginally, from 54 to 51 per cent between 1981 and 2005, after having risen briefly to 59 per cent in 1996. However, this regional trend disguises large country differences (Kharas & Dooley, 2020). For instance, in 1981, the proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day had varied from a low of 3.6 per cent in Gabon to a high of 89.9 per cent in Swaziland. This pattern persisted into 2005, with the proportion in extreme poverty ranging from a low of 4.8 per cent in Gabon to a high of 86.1 per cent in Liberia (Haider, 2020).

Since the Second World War (World War II), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been seen as playing very important roles in poverty reduction and global development generally. Across the developing world, countries with limited finances, exacerbated by poor governance and corruption, have completely failed to lead the development of their citizens (Banks & Hulme, 2012). It was, therefore, the failure of these state led development approaches throughout the 1970s and 1980s that accelerated the rise in the number of NGOs as a development alternative. This is because most NGOs would offer innovative and people centered approaches to service delivery, advocacy, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment. It is also important to note that most societies today are going through numerous transformations such as urbanization, which has accelerated over years. The transformations have led to high rate of urban growth that unfolded in the context of low performing economies, poor planning and governance, which have created a new aspect of poverty concentrated in informal settlements (slums) in Africa's major cities (Namirimo, 2019).

Until the late 1970s, NGOs were little-recognised in the implementation of development projects or in policy influence. Those few existing were perceived as bit players in service provision, short-term relief, and emergency work. NGOs often create close links with grassroots organizations, and often do the role of linkages between government and community providing technical advice or financial support (Cordeiro & Nyaruwata, 2016). In

Uganda, the growth of the NGOs sector goes back to the 1970's and 1980's, when many NGOs came in to fill the gap left by the collapse of government. The movement was first initiated by faith-based organizations, principally large established churches. This movement was subsequently reinforced by international NGOs, before being relayed by governmental donors

and, more recently, by the Ugandan government itself (Barr, Fafchamps, & Owens, 2003). As a consequence, living in poverty means deficiency of resources necessary to meet one's basic needs. Poverty can be measured in economic terms (income, expenditure or wealth), or using other measures including social and nutritional measures. Poverty can be defined by a fixed value (absolute poverty) or by a value in relation to the rest of the population (relative poverty). Absolute poverty is measured by the minimum amount of money required to meet basic needs, known as a poverty line. The international standard for measuring poverty is the extreme poverty line. This measure of absolute poverty has a threshold equivalent to US$1.90 per person per day (Development Initiative, 2020).

Although NGOs have done a tremendous job in serving various communities with scope for positive relationships between government and NGOs for those working towards mutual goals in service and welfare provision, those working openly in advocacy and human rights tend to be viewed with suspicion and open hostility especially when challenging the *status quo* (Banks & Hulme, 2012). In some countries, such as Uganda, the NGO sector is viewed with mixed feelings, including rampant suspicion that the public good is not the primary motivation fueling NGOs (Bar, Fafchamps, & Owens, 2005). Political influences have been suggested as a strong influence on NGOs in Africa, with NGOs joining the patronage networks of political leaders (Brass, 2012). For example, the government of Uganda sometimes back closed offices and froze bank accounts of an NGO, Action Aid International with suspicion of involvement in political activities (Larok, 2017), and in 2021 after the general election, the government of Uganda also ordered for the closure of the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) operations in the country with the suspicion of aiding opposition political parties (The Citizen, 2021). Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, in the 20th century conceptualised civil society as having different functions and dimensions although part of the superstructure, together with the State. The core pattern of civil society being a 'ruled-governed society' can be traced amongst all these early modern conceptualisations, (Kaldol, 2003).

The World Bank Report states that the global extreme poverty was at 9.2% as of 2017, equivalent to 689 million people living on less than US$1.9 a day, although at higher poverty lines, 24.1% of the world population would live on less than US$3.2 a day (World Bank, 2020). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia (SA) accounted for more than 80% of the world's poverty rate (World Bank, 2016). SSA has about 350 million people living on less than US$1.90 a day, mainly countries like Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Zambia and Madagascar hence not a surprise to find out that the top ten poorest countries of the world are in SSA (Chen, Datt, & Ravallion, 1994). Accordingly, the UNDP (2014) revealed that poverty levels have declined further in Uganda from 24.5 in 2009/10 to 19.7 in 20012/13. The significant decline in overall inequality from 0.426 in 2009/10 to 0.395 also suggests that socio-economic interventions are beginning to yield some positive results. The share of Ugandan population living below national poverty line fell from 31.1% in 2006 to 19.7% in 2013 (UBOS, 2013). Also, on a good note, the share of population living on less than US$1.90 per day dropped from 53.2% in 2006 to 34.6% in 2013, one of the fastest declines in

SubSaharan Africa (World Bank, 2016). However, Uganda remains among the poorest nations in the world despite reducing its poverty rate. While the proportion of people defined as 'poor' has fallen, the proportion of people who live above the poverty line but remain vulnerable to falling below it has increased (The World Bank, 2016).

1.1 Problem statement

According to UNNGOF (2021), there are more than 600 registered NGOs in Uganda, many of which operate in northern Uganda and Lango Sub-region. These among others includes; Caritas, World Vision, Action against hunger, food for the hungry, CUAM, Plan International, Red Cross, Gloford Uganda, AYINET, These NGOs actively contribute to poverty reduction through community and humanitarian services like health, education, gender, food security etc. Despite their tremendous contribution to poverty reduction in Uganda, the level of poverty appears to increase. Notwithstanding, poverty in northern Uganda and Lango seem to be increasing especially among the rural households. According to UNICEF (2020), the statistics showed that poverty in Lango stood at 36% and 69% in Acholi subregions, which is far above the national average of 27% and Kampala of 10%. This was also consistent with the UBOS report of 2019/2020 that indicated worsening of the income poverty level in parts of Uganda from 15% in 2016/17 to 23.4% in 2019/2020. (UBOS report, 2019/2020). Similarly, Rafa, et al (2017) estimated districts in northern Uganda with the lowest annual GDP per capita of 223 USD compared to the neighbouring other Districts with the annual average GDP per capita of 229 USD. This low GDP per capita shows a high level of poverty, which is associated to poor health, low education and even less life satisfaction. While this issue raises concerns on the effectiveness of the several livelihood programs implemented by government and non-state actors in the country, limited studies have been conducted on Uganda regarding this problem. Thus, the objective of this study is to determine the contribution of NGO activities in poverty reduction so as to ascertain strategies for improving wellbeing among the people of Uganda. Consequently, four research questions were answered: (i) what is the relationship between NGO Activities and poverty reduction in Uganda? (ii) What is the contribution of NGO activities and poverty reduction in Uganda?

1.2 Methods and materials

The study adopted a literature review of available data on Uganda, the region and other parts of the world regarding the link between Non-governmental organisations and household poverty reduction. The sources consulted include academic manuscripts, journals, peerreviewed books, policy documents, annual reports as well as statistical papers. A thematic approach was applied to disaggregate the information along selected and emerging themes majorly on two issues, namely Unpackaging the idea of NGOs as well as NGO Activities and Poverty reduction

2. Unpackaging the idea of NGOs

2.1 Defining the term NGOs

The definition of what constitutes an NGO vary a lot, and, there is no shared definition in existence. NGOs are an extremely diverse group of organizations that take different shapes and forms within and across different countries (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Lang, 2013). However, Sohel, Uddin, and Kulsum (2007) defined NGOs as "a legally constituted organization created by natural or legal persons that operates independently from any government and a term usually used by governments to refer to entities that have no government status". Shared characteristics of NGOs have been constructively summarized as "not related to government; not for profit; voluntary; and pursue activities for the common good instead of just for their members", all taking the form of either service provision or advocacy of public policy (Lang, 2013).

NGOs emerged and increased since World War II, despite the previous long formation of voluntary groups for survival, commercial, spiritual, cultural and other purposes (Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World, 2008). The United Nations in 1945 was the first to use the term "NGO" when it made a distinction in its charter between the participation of intergovernmental agencies and non-government associated groups (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Lang, 2013). In recent times, when one would hear or think about voluntary actions, the first concept that comes to one's mind would be NGOs. A number of studies have shown that based on the ideas of world institutions, NGOs are classified third sector; with the first and second sectors being government and profit businesses respectively (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). This third sector comprises of several organizations whose social functions are categorized between the government and market. NGOs can be found at several levels, although their overall effort is to pursue the interests of the poor. This makes sense because it's not about their level of operation that matters but rather their levels of impact in the lives of the poor.

2.2 NGOs and their operation/work

It is important to note that the profiles of NGOs have improved over the years, and they are recognised as important development actors at local, regional and international levels. They have, therefore, gained notable prominence in the provision of public goods and developmental assistance (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). This upsurge in recognition is partly attributed to their ability to fill the gaps in service delivery as well as their tendency and drive in pursuing transformative agendas and equal relationships, through their people centred approaches (Holmen & Jirstrom, 2009; Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015; McGuire, 2013). Furthermore, the NGOs are assumed to have gained recognition in the economic and political world as important actors in international political economy, based on projections of significant increases in numbers, membership, activities and financial resources. This growth has been stimulated by globalization, as international policy coordination propelled political activity at the international level (Hudson, 2000; McGuire, 2013). Despite a general drive behind their work, NGOs have experienced some transformations since its inception; and most scholars have categorised their activities as service delivery, advocacy, and developmental oriented work (Stuart-Hill, Richard, Bevan, Jo, & David, 2005; McGuire, 2013). These category of activities have been discussed in details in the coming paragraphs.

The advocacy element of NGO activities is as well very popular, as several of them have been seen to take the leading role in enforcing and demanding for change in various ways. The advocacy roles have been classified by various authors as catalysts; campaigning; political and having civil society functions (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015; Willets, 2002; Holmen & Jirstrom, 2009; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Hudson, 2000). According to Lewis and Kanji (2009), the catalytic nature of NGOs is evident in their ability to bring about positive transformation by facilitating agendas and contributing to improved thinking and action amongst individuals, groups, local communities or other stakeholders in developments such as government, businesses or donors. In relation to democracy, several authors have highlighted the role of NGOs in influencing democracy; playing an active role as advocates in building and maintaining democracy in many countries both in the North and South; For example, Bolivia and Brazil (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015); South Africa; Sudan; Congo (Lewis & Paul , 2006).

When it comes to development, NGOs often undertake long term developmental goals/projects. They contribute to development projects by adapting to local contexts through involving local stakeholders; private enterprises; acting as gatekeepers of government in developmental activities by enforcing accountability and efficiency; and contributing real content of concepts through concrete action (Ulleberg, 2009). Through the developmental activities of NGOs, the lives of the poor are improved. It has been evident that there is a link between poverty and development. This is in the sense that, it is through devotion to achieve development which leads to poverty reduction (Iniamagha, 2015). For example, poverty related issues such as lack of education, lack of access to basic needs etc., are all tackled under developmental projects, and consequent results of tackling these issues is a reduction in poverty.

2.3 NGO activities and poverty reduction

Poverty is defined as the inability to cover the person's most basic needs (Amartya, 1982). In most cases, some people are poor while others are not, because poverty has several dimensions that should be simultaneously addressed, if a solution is to be found. In a book entitled According to Balkenhol (2007), poverty is "the lack of material means to ensure biological subsistence as determined by the research of nutritionists. The definition relates poverty to a "function of the living standard", which brings in view the general standard of living in a given country and/or society. Given the current study, these definitions suggest that the poorest of the poor are those most vulnerable to fluctuations in income and the various other risks of life. The World Bank reports that the global extreme poverty was at 9.2% as of 2017, equivalent to 689 million people living on less than US$1.9 a day (World Bank, 2020). In Uganda, the share of Ugandan population living below national poverty line fell from 31.1% in 2006 to 19.7% in 2013 UBOS, 2013). While the proportion of people defined as 'poor' has fallen, the proportion of people who live above the poverty line but remain vulnerable to falling

below it has increased (The World Bank, 2016). Uganda remains among the poorest nations in the world despite reducing its poverty rate.

NGOs have different approaches to poverty reduction. Some of the approaches can be at macro and micro level/supply-side and demand-side approaches (Suharko, 2007); participatory, people centred rights-based approaches (Banks & Hulme, 2012); assets-based approach (Sparr & Moser, 2007). These approaches entail pro-poor growth, microfinance, asset accumulation, basic service provision, and advocacy strategies that define the direct and indirect operations of NGOs in their efforts to reduce poverty. NGOs have been seen to impact on poverty in various African countries. In Somalia, (Abdulkadir , 2019) finds a positive relationship between the livelihood improvement and poverty reduction, food security and poverty reduction, and finally between financial support and poverty. In Nigeria, Olutayo and Oluwafemi (2017) reveal that projects run by NGOs lead to poverty reduction in the areas of economy and empowerment, security facilities and services, and infrastructure provision.

2.4 NGOs' financial support to household poverty reduction

Financial support refers to the provision of financial services to the disadvantaged people with low income, lack of access to banking and other bank related services like loan probably if they lack security for a loan. Serving unprivileged population suffering from multiplicity of problems such as exclusion, poverty, lack of opportunities is a motto of most microfinance service providers (Mohamed, 2010). Financial support is, therefore, regarded as a powerful tool to fight against poverty and underdevelopment; with the fundamental essence to provide financial services to the poor population at the time of their need, at their own place and convenient condition (Kabeer, 2005). Also, scholars who view microfinance services as tools to poverty reduction and women empowerment normally give a number of reasons why micro finance programs should focus on the women. Firstly, women are the poorest of the poor; evidenced by the Human Development report (2014) where more than 1.3 billion people in the world live on less than $1 per day, 70% are women. Furthermore, women in developing countries, mainly in rural areas lack access to banks and other financial institutions. Although both men and women are poor, the latter are poorer than the former due to the patriarchal social structure like denial of basic human rights, social, economic, educational opportunities that force them to live in subordination (Mayoux, 2007).

A study conducted in Ethiopia found a positive relationship between financial support and poverty reduction (Dahie, 2019). However, the author went ahead and made recommendations that for poverty reduction programs to experience greater success, especially in increasing their scale of impact and incorporating vulnerable groups, NGOs should adopt a more integrative approach that instead of the current focus on service delivery complements this with a greater emphasis on policy and advocacy. Another study in Nigeria revealed that NGOs contributed immensely to rural development in the areas of health, education, economic and job creation (Ogaboh, Akpanudoedehe, & Ocheni, 2014). The study however

recommended that NGOs in Nigeria should incorporate their activities with that of government to avoid duplication of functions. NGOs were also advised to adopt participatory approach to encourage active rural involvement in development projects –all the recommendations above are also applicable in Uganda. Besides, Hussain, Mahmood, and Scott (2018) explored the impact of financial exclusion on financial and human poverty amongst women in Pakistan. The findings suggest that persistent financial exclusion, gender discrimination and conservative religious values adversely impact women's empowerment. There is an inverse correlation between the size of microcredit and women's financial poverty, which is not the case for human poverty. Larger families experienced higher rates of poverty reduction than smaller families. The exploration was not based on the involvement of NGOs in Pakistan.

In his study, Seng (2018) analysed the effects of microcredit offered by microfinance institutions on household poverty in terms of household food consumption. The results suggest that households, whether extremely poor, relatively poor or non-poor, which take out microcredit, get worse off in terms of household food consumption per capita. The study was conducted in Cambodia and does not link poverty level to NGO activities. According to Awojobi, O. (2011). Financial services support reduces poverty through accelerated employment rate, improved average productivity of labour and increased real wages. In some countries where the programme of financial services support has been implemented, financial services has successfully opened economic opportunities, improving the socioeconomic conditions of the poor. Example of such countries with success story include: Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippine, India, Uganda, etc. The impact of financial support services could be measured directly using variation in income, employment, and consumption on a sustained basis.

Kumari, Azam, and Khalidah (2019) presents the review of empirical studies that have been conducted to identify the impact of microfinance or financial support services on reducing poverty in the world and Sri Lanka. The review shows a positive relationship between microfinance and poverty while most studies confirm that microfinance has a potential outcome on reducing poverty. While this study shows a relationship between microfinance services and poverty, it lacks the contextual aspects of Uganda since it was related to Sri Lanka.

2.5 NGOs' support to food security and household poverty reduction

Poverty and hunger remain the biggest development challenges of our time. Food security and under nutrition remain problems throughout the less developed parts of the world (HLPE, 2017), despite the conclusion that 'All developing regions except Sub-Saharan Africa reached the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty between 1990 and 2015' (UN, 2010). After all, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) remains the world's most food-insecure region, with almost one-fourth of people over 230 million being undernourished (FAO et al., 2019). While poverty and hunger are clearly inextricably linked (Watts and Bohle, 1993), they are two distinct concepts with distinct alleviation measures. This implies that food security is an important factor contributing to the socio-economic stabilization and development of any

country like Uganda. Although the Government of Uganda has made a tremendous effort in improving food security through distribution of farm inputs like seeds and seedlings, livestock, food insecurity is still a major problem mainly because of poverty, which makes economic access not possible. Various development strategies aimed at eliminating poverty are now combining the micro-credit as one of the key sectors in their programs (Dahie, 2019).

Studies have suggested that access to food is a basic need for human beings; although many poor people do not have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food (McMichael, 2009). There are several factors related with the condition of food insecurity such as loss of job, lower level of education and employment, lack of access to land, singleparent families, unstable income level and having a poor family head. All these factors lead to the condition of poverty and the fundamental outcome is inadequate access to food (FAO, 2008). Empirical studies also provide convincing evidence that microcredit has had positive impacts on three important sectors of national development –alleviation of poverty, empowerment of women and food security (Sharmin, 2014). Even then, in the context of agricultural development, both issues have very distinct target groups based on the role that farming plays in individual and household income portfolios (Dorward et al., 2009; Gatzweiler and Braun, 2016; Tittonell et al., 2010) and these different groups require different types of technical and policy interventions. Nevertheless, there has been a persistent paradigm in the development debate on SSA that sees the agricultural productivity of smallholders as the key to achieving these goals of alleviating poverty and ensuring food security simultaneously. The latest iteration of this debate is still evolving around the idea of sustainable intensification (Godfray and Garnett, 2014).

Recently, argument have been pointing to two main topics. First, the well-recognized fact that smallholder farmers in SSA are a very heterogeneous group, with different resources and capabilities (Glover et al., 2019; Tittonell et al., 2010), incentives and aspirations (Dorward et al., 2009; Mausch et al., 2018) and that farm-level technologies need to be designed accordingly if farmers are expected to adopt them. And secondly, that farm-level technologies that are effective for improving food security are not necessarily as effective in reducing poverty or vice versa (Dorward et al., 2004; Harris, 2019; Lalani et al., 2017; Renkow and Byerlee, 2010). The two groups of farming households those that have limited incentives and resources and those with the potential and incentives to effectively invest in increased production should be treated as separate groups. The first needs interventions that help to achieve food security and increase resilience while the second needs help to maximize economic growth. As such as, given the dominance of the first group across SSA, the question many countries' policies should address is the one that favour investment into small-scale agriculture that places heavy emphasis on farmers as 'agents of change'. Policymakers, agricultural researchers and practitioners should recognize the need to separate food-security and economic-growth challenges.

Most of the food crops in SSA are produced by approximately 33 million smallholding farms (AGRA, 2016) and to increase domestic food security it has been argued that it is

necessary to close those farms' yield gaps, which are the differences between the actual yields farmers are achieving and the yields they could achieve if they were to adopt better agricultural inputs and technologies. Thus, the argument of focusing on closing the yield gap most often through intensification of the smallholding agricultural sector in SSA, is built on the fact that it is underperforming and that the majority of the agricultural produce is grown by smallholders living below the official poverty line (Dercon and Gollin, 2014; Toenniessen et al., 2008). Further, because a number of the people living on less than US$1.90 a day are in rural areas and depend to a greater or lesser extent on agriculture for their livelihoods (World Bank, 2016), it is assumed that beyond increasing domestic food security, a transition from subsistence to commercial farming via higher agricultural productivity will lead to higher labour demand both on farms and in the processing sector.

Relatedly, the argument that agricultural productivity among smallholders is the key to achieving both poverty alleviation as well as ensuring food security, depends on the ability of smallholders to adopt farm-level technologies that seek to increase agri-productivity and agriproduction. The productivity domain has occasioned an obsession with farm-level technologies that maximize yields (AGRA, 2016; Renkow and Byerlee, 2010), assuming that increases in yield will be sufficient to make these technologies attractive to farmers (Harris, 2019). To date, a number of commentators are propagating what is called smart farming; nonetheless, the technologies contained in this domain that both increase yields and reduce the ecological footprint of production are knowledge intensive (Godfray et al., 2010), require farmers to not only acquire new skill sets and understanding, but are also often very labour intensive in their implementation (Glover et al., 2019). For smallholders to be willing to invest the time and effort into changing the way they do things and to adopt these technologies requires a sufficiently large incentive. On the contrary, the poor economic incentives for households with small farms to adopt an agricultural intervention can be easily demonstrated. A study by Harris and Orr (2014) focussed on analysing crop-improvement technologies available for rain fed agriculture in the selected drylands. Their study confirmed that many effective technologies were available for these systems, which, if adopted appropriately, would allow smallholders to increase production and net profit by up to 4 times, albeit from small base values.

A number of agricultural practitioners and decision makers find it indisputable that any improvement to smallholders' productivity, whether it is marginal or not, is better than no improvement at all (although additional yield with additional costs will have consequences for profitability and net incomes). Especially for food security, an additional meal per day makes a huge difference to hungry households. It is also indisputable that in the reality of scarce resources, on the farmer's side as well as on the government and donor sides, agricultural practitioners have the mandate to ensure that farm-level interventions are designed based on a clear diagnostic of the problem at hand. We have noted that the diagnostic should not rely only on technical aspects alone but also needs to consider the realities of smallholders' households. In spite of everything, Tittonell et al., (2010) first introduced the economic concept of resource

endowment into the discussion of smallholders' adoption of farm-level technologies. Their seminal work demonstrated that the economic potential of farms cannot only be predicted based on available area or suitability of the agro ecological context but that there are huge differences between individual farming households themselves in terms of their capability to benefit from field-level technologies that are aimed at increasing farm productivity.

Based on the different livelihood strategies, more or less households can be projected to become more inclined than others to invest time and effort into learning a new technology and to actually adopt it as part of their farm management. What is needed is a portfolio of farmlevel interventions for smallholders that are mindful of the differences between households (Mausch et al., 2017). Besides, agricultural households that are stressed to make ends meet ('hanging in') need access to, and understanding of, farm interventions that ensure the longterm productivity and fertility of their land without overburdening their limited resources. Interventions need to be aimed at raising their potential and decreasing their risks without drawing on already scarce labour and cash resources or requiring unrealistic behaviour changes. These interventions do not need to be game changers that substantially increase people's incomes and have a significant impact on rural poverty alleviation but they do need to ensure sustainable, and if possible increasing, food supplies for the producing households themselves. These households need access to affordable agricultural inputs, such as seeds, high-performing varieties and fertilizers. However, based on their very limited resources, this group will likely rely on subsidies or other forms of support to be able to afford those supports (Duflo et al., 2011).

Agricultural households that have both the resource endowment and the incentive to invest in their farming operations and to increase their productivity are more likely to take up new technologies that go beyond improved agricultural inputs and aim for long-term transformational change. They also need innovative models of economic and social cooperation to lower their transaction costs and be competitive in local and globalized food and agricultural markets. Farming households that are 'stepping out' but are not selling their land need to be nudged to keep their land productive; targeted policies that lower transaction costs within land rental markets are essential (Jayne et al., 2014; Kimura et al., 2011). On the contrary, for both national and global food supply, it is of greater significance to significantly raise overall food production. Managing SSA's emerging food security crisis requires a 335% increase in cereal production over the next 40 years to meet the projected population and per capita food demand (Dzanku et al., 2015). Given that the African Agriculture Status report emphasizes that the root cause of food insecurity is the limited adoption of more productive and diversified agricultural technologies (AGRA, 2016).

Studies appear to suggest provision of funding to agri-households. For instance, in a study on the present status of poverty, food insecurity and coping strategies adopted by marginal farm households during food crisis in Bangladesh, (Mohiuddin, Islam, & Uddin, 2016) show that provision of funds for alternative income generating activities, introducing food bank, and

membership under safety net food Programme and appropriate actions from NGOs can help locals in ensuring food security. The results imply urgency of government and non-government organizations in securing food situation. In addition, effective water management is proving to be a *sine-quo-non* in the positive direction. Ali, Rahut, and Mottaleb (2018) evaluated water-management practices and their impact on food security in Pakistan. Basing on 950 farmers, the results indicate that households with improved water management practices were likely to have improved household income, improved food security and reduced poverty levels. The authors present the importance of NGOs in raising the awareness of households on water management systems and food security.

2.6 Community perception of NGOs activities

One of the obtained studies used a case study design to investigate the contributions of NGOs to poverty reduction in Uganda (Niringiyimana, 2014). The results suggested that NGOs do promote education and training, health, environmental conservation, and protection against child abuse. However, NGOs are less capable of reducing poverty than has been theorized and idiosyncratically propagated, because they come with pre-planned agendas with strings attached, under the camouflage of poverty reduction. A study conducted in Ghana on statelocal NGOs by (Porter, 2003) shows that NGOs do not encourage positive developmental trajectories and associated livelihood improvements at the grass-roots. Each sector carries a baggage of suspicion and resentment of the other which has often been fueled by donor interventions. These two studies show that NGOs are still lacking in contributing to poverty reduction in developing countries.

Saleem and Donaldson (2016) investigated the myriad approaches used to reduce poverty on a national scale. Basing on 15 economies, industrialisation, rural development, social welfare and petroleum-generated employment were the major approaches to reducing poverty. In addition, the study examined the implications each approach in poverty reduction. This study shows that NGO activities is least among the policy approaches to reducing poverty level. Also, Nadim and Nurlukman (2017) analyzed the real effect of women empowerment on poverty reduction and made recommendation for developing the situation. The study shows that women empowerment is one of the most discussing issues in the present world yet women remain among the poorest categories of the population. The study recommends the input of both government and non-government organizations in alleviating poverty. The study however, does not outline the kind of NGO activities that can help in reducing poverty among women.Forkuor and Agyemang (2018) examined the activities of urban non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in fighting poverty in Ghana. Results from the study showed that urban NGOs provide social intervention and livelihood empowerment programs to the extremely poor. Women and the youth were the main beneficiaries of the poverty reduction programs of the NGOs. However, the efforts of the NGOs in reducing poverty are short-term because the targeted beneficiaries are not involved in the choice, design, and implementation of the poverty reduction programs. Secondly, there was a weak collaboration between the NGOs and the government in the fight against poverty.

A number of NGOs appear to be helping various households especially with various poverty reduction strategies. Despite their efforts, various households have still remained poor. This could be due to low uptake of technologies/strategies availed to them or indifferences in the approaches used by various NGOs. For instance, a study conducted in Tanzania by the Foundation for Civil Society Organizations, an institution that aims to support CSOs by providing them with grants and trainings in order to enhance their capacity found that 81% of the community believed that CSOs have been beneficial to them (Jivani, 2010). This finding made the authors to assume that the results are a potential proxy for impact i.e. if the community perceives the NGOs work as beneficial; the probability that NGOs are actually benefitting the country is high. Another study conducted in Ghana on the beneficiaries of various interventions from NGOs concluded that, from the beneficiaries' perspectives, the interventions of the NGOs had led to improved socio-economic status of their households (Osei-Wusu, Agyemang, & Afriyie, 2012). The effectiveness of the livelihood development strategies of the NGOs are underpinned by their ability to study, locate within and adapt to their project environment; although the strategies were found to be less participatory in the design processes.

A similar study conducted by Gisaor (2021) on the impact of Non-Government organizations (NGOs) on poverty reduction in Makurdi local government area of Benue State. The results show that the respondents confirm benefits in terms of increased income, use of good transportation means, good accommodation, feeding and sleeping materials. Notwithstanding the benefits, respondents are never aware of the confronting challenges facing the NGOs in their area. Such challenges include finance to execute all their programmes as well as disburse to beneficiaries as loans and grants. Given the current study, NGO activities are not spread throughout the district of Oyam, which makes their impact on poverty to be pockets of beneficiaries.

From the analyses, it can be noted that community perceptions of NGOs vary according to region and context. In reporting of the reception of NGOs following the earthquake of 2005 in Pakistan, Bliss and Larsen (2006) and Wilder (2008) indicate a relatively positive view of NGOs on the part of local communities. Although such positive perceptions proved unsustainable (Bano, 2008; Wilder, 2008), with widespread criticism emerging on a number of fronts (Kahlon, 2015), the significant growth of international NGOs and their established strategic partnerships with global financial institutions makes them main service providers and key players in the development sector across the globe (Kamat, 2002). While a considerable amount of research on the structural factors affecting NGO roles has been published, little can be found about their acceptance in, and the perception among, the communities they claim to serve. Of the research on how communities perceive NGOs, Bano's (2008) countrywide survey revealed a very negative image, with NGOs often perceived as solely dependent on foreign development aid and lacking in public legitimacy. In line with a studies in Pakistan on the perception, role, and effectiveness of NGOs (Bano, 2008), the Delphi panel developed consensus that people view NGO workers with a sense of distrust and cynicism, a view reported in the development literature (Bano, 2008; Bradley, 2006; Ismael et al., 2011; Jad, 2007).

3. Conclusion

NGOs might be doing a wonderful service to community members in various countries in the name of poverty reduction, not much of their achievements have been documented. It was even more paramount that, Uganda, with many NGOs working along poverty reduction strategies have their achievements studied, documented and widely shared. This clearly then showed that there was a literature gap in terms of empirical and evidence based literatures on the roles of NGOs in poverty reduction in Uganda and particularly Oyam District in northern Uganda which the study provided relevant information and knowledge in terms of NGO activities' contribution to poverty reduction.

Recommendations

This review on the link between the activities of NGOs and poverty reduction has unearthed several issues which have left gaps for governments and other stakeholders besides the NGOs. It is therefore encouraged that:

a) The government provides a more conducive working environment for the NGOs to be able to function and operate with less fear from the censorship of state organs.
b) An amicable working relationship be forged between government and the NGOs given that the two are partners in community development.
c) Joint planning of key NGO activities and government ministries or local government is key in ensuring transparency and accountability on either side.

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