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The involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations activities in Household Poverty reduction in Oyam District, Uganda

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the contribution of NGO activities on poverty reduction in Oyam District-Northern Uganda and recommends strategies for improving wellbeing of people of the region and entirely Uganda as a Country. This was based on account that, Oyam District was estimated with the lowest annual GDP per capita of 223 USD compared to the neighbouring Districts of Apac and Kole with the annual GDP per capita of 228 USD and 230 USD respectively

Methodology: The study used a correlational design with correlational and regression methods of analysis. It was conducted among beneficiaries of selected NGOs comprising a sample of 290 from a population of 860.

Findings: This study reveals a significant and positive contribution of NGO activities to poverty reduction in Oyam District and that NGO activities has a moderate relationship with household poverty level in Oyam District. The results further show that the financial support provided by NGOs significantly contributes to poverty reduction while the food security support provided does not.

Conclusion and recommendations: It is established that NGO activities contribute significantly to poverty reduction in Oyam District. This study recommends that the food security support be backed with the provision of market for the agricultural products of the NGO beneficiaries and in order to create income for them. The study further recommends for the NGO support to agricultural product market search for their beneficiaries as well as forming the beneficiaries in different groups and train them on financial literacy for better management of finances.

Unique contributions to policy and/or practice: This study contributes positively to the understanding of non-state actors and the role they play in reducing poverty among communities that are recovering from decades of civil war in Uganda.

Keywords: *NGOs, poverty reduction, food security, financial support, Oyam*

Introduction

This study brings out the contribution of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) activities in poverty reduction in Oyam district-Northern Uganda. The outbreak of the LRA war, which lasted for around 20 years up to 2006 attracted many NGOs especially in Lango sub-region to offer services related to health, education, livelihoods, and gender and conflict resolution. Studies have revealed that NGO activities are generally effective in improving the

livelihoods of poor communities (Riddell & Robinson, 1995). Despite government poverty reduction interventions like Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) and National Agricultural Advisory Services, northern Uganda is known as one of the poorest regions in the country (Ssewanyana & Kasirye, 2013; UBOS, 2016; UBOS, 2019). There are more than 600 registered NGOs in Uganda, many of which operate in northern Uganda and Lango Sub-region such as; Caritas, World Vision, Action against hunger, food for the hungry, Plan International, and Red Cross ((UNNGOF, 2021). These NGOs actively contribute to poverty reduction through community and humanitarian services like health, education, gender, food security et cetera- yet the level of poverty appears to increase. According to UNICEF (2020), the statistics suggested that poverty in Lango Sub-region stood at 36%, which was far above the national average of 27% .This was consistent with the UBOS report of 2019/2020 that indicated worsening of income poverty level in Lango sub-region from 15% in 2016/17 to 23.4% in 2019/2020 (UBOS report, 2019/2020). This raises concerns on the effectiveness of several livelihood programs implemented by government and non-state actors in the sub-region.

The word poverty originated from Latin word *pauper* meaning poor, having its roots in the word's pau- and pario i.e. "giving birth to nothing" (Westover, 2008). It is estimated that within a single generation from 2026, the earth will be inhabited by nine billion implying that 90% of the extra two billion inhabitants will be born into poverty. The challenge to the current generation is to find ways of changing those likelihoods (Oxfarm Strategic Plan, 2014). Poverty is detrimental development, and should be dealt with seriously. This is why in 2015, the world leaders agreed to take serious steps against extreme poverty, hunger and disease by putting in place anti-poverty goals called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of which eradication of poverty is number one (United Nations, 2017). Poverty reduction requires a multidimensional approach involving several stakeholders, therefore, individual states ought to come up with strategies and resources to achieve them.

NGOs are increasingly recognized by governments everywhere as important players in a country's social, economic, political and intellectual development (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2010). In Uganda, the pronouncement at independence was a declaration of a national fight against ignorance, poverty and diseases; and different strategies have been put in place to fight the above listed problems which is still ongoing. Non-Governmental Organizations are believed to have the capacity to reach people at the lowest level and work closely with the poor in communities, hence being vital in reducing poverty among the absolute poor people (Dicklitch, 1998). They aim at providing voluntary services such as religious, educational, literacy, scientific, social or charitable to the community (Bar, Fafchamps, & Owens, 2005). According to The World Bank (2020) NGOs are defined as "private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development".

Theoretical perspectives

This highlighted on the theory of civil society/NGO (Jensen, M. N. (2006) as the theory that guided this study. Conceptualisation of civil society (CS) varies amongst different scholars in social sciences, with the origin which can be traced to early philosophers such as Cicero, Rousseau, and Kant (Skjoldborg, 2010, Jensen, 2016). They described civil society as a type of state regulated by a social contract approved by individuals in the society. Thus, civil society was just like a state or political society (Jensen, 2016). Civil society therefore became "an

intermediary realm between the family and the State". They are linked to, but represent interactions between the State and the market in a different way. Woldring (1998) also conceptualises civil society as "free associations that exist as intermediate institutions between citizens and the state, and in which citizens can realize their social freedom and equality". He asserts the importance of equal rights for active civic participation in government and other associations, whether political or social greatly influenced by observations of the American society (Woldring, 1998).

In Financial Year 2016/2017, the incidence of poverty in northern Uganda stood at 32.5%, which was the second highest in the country (Poverty Maps of Uganda, 2019). The report further estimated that about 35% of children in the northern region live in households below the national poverty line with Gini coefficient of 0.39 for both entire population and children although it ranged from 0.33 in Dokolo District to 0.65 in Amuru District. The incidence of poverty also varies greatly across the districts in the northern region, ranging from 12.0% in Lira District to 71.7% in Nabilatuk District (Poverty Maps of Uganda, 2019). Similarly, according to Rafa, et al (2017), Oyam District was estimated with the lowest annual GDP per capita of 223 USD compared to the neighbouring Apac and Kole Districts with the annual GDP per capita of 228 USD and 230 USD respectively. This low GDP per capita indicates high poverty level which is associated to poor health, low education and even less life satisfaction.

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 ((UNNGOF, 2021). 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. In the first half of 2021, Uganda's Finance Ministry reported that 28 % of Ugandans were poor, which was equivalent to 18% increase before the pandemic. At least two thirds of Ugandans had lost at least some income due to the Covid-19 crisis (Ssegujja, 2021). In June 2020, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) expected some 4.4 million workers in Uganda's informal sector to fall into extreme poverty. Women, people with disabilities and chronic conditions, youth and the elderly were said to be most at risk. While this projection was made for the entire country, there was no empirical projection in the likelihood of poverty increase in Oyam district. Secondly, the contributions of NGO activities in reducing poverty level in Oyam was still lacking and necessary. The current study therefore promoted a debate on the contribution of NGO activities on poverty reduction in Oyam district.

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 Lango sub-region from 15 percent in 2016/17 to 23.4 percent in 2019/2020. (UBOS report, 2019/2020). Similarly, according to Rafa, et al (2017), Oyam District was estimated with the lowest annual GDP per capita of 223 USD compared to the neighbouring Apac and Kole Districts with the annual GDP per capita of 228 USD and 230 USD respectively. This low GDP per capita indicates high poverty level which is associated to poor health, low education and even less life satisfaction. This raises concerns of the effectiveness of the several livelihood programs implemented by government and non-state actors in these sub-region.

Objective of the study

The general objective was to determine the contribution of NGO activities on poverty reduction in Oyam District, northern Uganda. Four objectives were generated, viz.; (i) to establish the relationship between NGO Activities and poverty reduction in Oyam district. (ii) Explore the contribution of NGO financial support activities in poverty reduction in Oyam district. (iii) To analyse the contribution of NGO food security support activities in poverty reduction in Oyam district. And (iv) to explore the role of community perception in the relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction in Oyam district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in poverty reduction cannot be underestimated. This ranges from global to regional to national. It focuses on the theoretical review (NGOs and poverty), NGOs and poverty reduction through food security and financial support, perceptions of NGOs and poverty reduction among beneficiary communities, and the research gap(s) identified through the literature review, which the current study aims to fill. NGOs are without doubts known to be involved in providing services of various types to the poor. In doing that, they have the ability to fill in the gaps in society through mobilization of resource to provide services for those who need them (Willets, 2002; Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015;
Lewis & Kanji, 2009). In spite of the demanding and complex nature of their activities, engaging in such activities has boosted the recognition of NGOs as capable channels of service delivery. NGOs are known worldwide to be one of the leading forces in combating poverty in the world (Adjei Osei-Wusu, Agyemang, & Afriyie, 2012; Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015). The significant increase of the role of NGOs gained in poverty reduction, is a reflection of their capacities to reach the minority in society, and respond to their needs. NGOs as compared to States/governments are flexible and receptive both in their approaches and implementation, which makes them more relatable, especially when it comes to projects that deal with grassroots.

Woldring (1998) conceptualises civil society or NGOs as “free associations that exist as intermediate institutions between citizens and the state, and in which citizens can realize their social freedom and equality”. Similarly, Salih (2002: 1-7) noted that in sub-Saharan Africa, NGOs played a critical role in addressing persistent rural, agricultural and environmental crises, drought, humanitarian assistance, governance and economic issues. There are distinct roles for NGOs that are highlighted, both as service providers and advocates for the poor. The service provider–advocate divide differentiates between the pursuit of ‘Big-D’ and ‘little-d’

development (Bebbington et al 2008; Hulme 2008). 'Big-D' development sees 'Development' as a project-based and intentional activity, in which tangible project outputs have little intention to make foundational changes that challenge society's institutional arrangements. It is commonly viewed that NGOs provide more effective targeted aid, given their closer proximity to the poor, and that their operations should not be subject to distortions by commercial or political interests (Koch et al 2009). Alongside their participatory roots, the ability of NGOs to be innovative and experimental are said to underlie the secrets of NGO effectiveness (Drabek 1987).

The idea of poverty reduction naturally attracts all kinds of angels both in NGOs, government departments and international financial institutions but their assistance are frustrated by many obstacles. These include the narrow and static way in which economists define the poor; the remoteness of the poor, their social invisibility and elusiveness to most forms of targeting; and the absence of political will to engage in poverty-reduction policies. (Toye, J. (2007). According to Barder, O. M. (2009), the idea of poverty reduction as an overarching objective is not confined to a single Country. Indeed, it predates the creation of DFID: in 1995. Jim Wolfensohn made poverty reduction the overarching objective of the World Bank. Other organizations, including the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have also identified poverty reduction as their overarching goal. 11 Other countries have also defined poverty reduction to be the objective of their development cooperation efforts. For example, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development says, the overarching objective of Financial Cooperation is to reduce poverty and improve living standards. Organisations with explicit aid allocation models, such as the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development, claim to be allocating their aid broadly to have the largest impact on poverty reduction. They both use a one-dimensional measure of poverty reduction (GDP per capita) and use models based on the Collier-Dollar analysis to derive a poverty efficient allocation of aid across countries (Barder, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design, population and sample determination

The study used correlational research designs. A correlational research design is where the researcher investigates relationships between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them (Bhandari, 2021). A correlation reflects the strength and/or direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. Correlational research is ideal for gathering data quickly from natural settings, which helps you generalize your findings to real-life situations in an externally valid way. The study used a correlational design to establish the relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction in Oyam district. The population in this study included the NGO beneficiaries at household level, who were estimated at 800 from 1000 as in a report by United Nations Education Fund (UNICEF, 2018). The study considered the beneficiaries in order to collect the correct experiences of the beneficiaries in regard to NGO support activities. The researchers used purposive sampling to select the NGOs that have poverty reduction as one of their intervention areas in Oyam district. Proportional allocation was adopted to determine the number of beneficiaries attached to each NGO. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table was used to determine a sample of 290 from the target population of 860. Also, both simple random sampling and purposive sample were adopted.

Data Collection

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A Questionnaire was used with the view of describing human behaviour (Ponto, 2015). The questions were closed ended to collect quantitative data faster. Interviews were used to collect broad information on NGO activities and poverty reduction, such information that could not be collected using the questionnaire (Kothari, 2004).

2.2 Data Quality Control

Both validity and reliability tests were conducted so as to increase transparency, and bias in research (Singh, 2014). This was taken care of by use of content validity, where the questionnaires developed were given to five expert judges to mark questions according to their relevance to the study constructs. Later on, a content validity index (CVI) was computed and a trusted rule of thumb was adhered to (Haradhan (2017). This therefore means that the items used in the instrument were valid and adequate for conclusion and generalization. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to determine the repeatability of study constructs in the questionnaire. According to Singh (2014), the Cronbach Alpha score should be at least 0.70, which indicates the consistency of the questionnaire's components and, as a result, the stability required if the test is repeated. For the final data collection, the final instrument was tweaked.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha		
Variables		**Cronbach's Alpha Based Standardized Items**	**No. of Items**
Perception	0.833	0.831	9
NGO Activities	0.832	0.832	11
Poverty Reduction	0.624	0.625	15

Source: Field data

Table 1 above shows that the instrument used in this study was reliable to study NGO activities and poverty reduction in Oyam District. This implies that the instrument items are internally stable and can be used for generalizability and conclusion. If the same instrument were to be used on a population with similar characteristics, the results are likely to be similar. While the reliability coefficient for items on poverty reduction was below 0.70, it is acceptable (Nunally, 1967).

2.3 Data analysis and presentation

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics including percentages and counts were used to describe and summarize data on NGO activities, which were conceptualized in terms of financial support and food security support; community perception, and poverty reduction assessment. Poverty reduction

level was conceptualized in terms of household assets, food security, and education of children. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the NGO activities and the poverty reduction. In addition, multiple regression was used to determine the effect of NGO activities and poverty reduction. The qualitative data from the interviews was analysed by editing manually while noting the key words that keeps appearing each time, categorising the data into concepts/themes, connecting the data to show how one concept influences another, and then corroborating by evaluating alternative explanations.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Response rate

The study targeted 290 sample units though only 227 responded, which translated in a response rate of 78.3%. This response rate was adequate for conclusion and generalization of the findings to NGO activities in Oyam district. The 21.7% did not participate on the basis of non-contact due to limited time or refusal of the chosen respondents to participate due to undisclosed reason.

3.2 Background characteristics

Variable List	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	184	81.1
	Male	43	18.9
	Sub-total	*227*	*100*
Age of respondents	18 – 34	101	44.5
	35 – 49	98	43.2
	50 and above	28	12.3
	Sub-total	*227*	*100*
Marital status	Single	27	11.9
	Married	161	70.9
	Others	39	17.2
	Sub-total	*227*	*100*
Highest level of education	Above secondary	38	16.7
	Secondary	54	23.8
	Primary and below	135	59.5
	Sub-total	*227*	*100*

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 2 shows that 81.1% of the participants were female while only 18.9% were the male. The dominance of women in this study resonates with national statistics, which show that Uganda has more of the female population (51.7%) than the male population (48.3%) as reported by (UBOS, 2019). Notwithstanding, this study was dominated by the female because most of the NGO activities tends to focus on female due to their vulnerability than male counterparts (Adolfsson & Moss, 2021; Human Rights Careers, 2020). Also, 45% of the participants were men and women of the age (18–34) years and constituted the majority. The participants of 50 years and above were only 12.3%. The study was dominated by the youth possibly because age 18-34 is the age bracket that are more prone to vulnerability of unemployment and poverty. The statistics coincide with a report by UBOS (2016), which shows that Uganda's population is largely young. Further, 70.9% of the participants were married and were the majority. Among the 17.2% who indicated the 'others' option, majority were widows. The study was dominated by the married because it focused on household level

where poverty manifest itself highly and tends to be the central focus of many NGOs. To sum it, 59.5% did not study beyond primary level and were the majority. This coincides with UBOS (2016), which showed that among the population that had never been to school, 20.5% were female and 16.1% were male. Only 16.7% had studied beyond secondary level. Majority were less educated possibly because these are either always the target NGO activity beneficiaries because of their vulnerability or their low level of education does not expose them to more survival opportunities other than getting their way to some of these NGO projects that does not require educational qualification to benefit.

Community perception on NGO activities

Regarding the extent to which they perceive NGOs in their community. Their responses were anchored on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree to (5) = strongly agree. To ease interpretation and presentation, the researcher aggregated 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' and presented them as 'disagreement'. Similarly, the researcher aggregated 'agree' and 'strongly agree' and presented them as 'agreement'. The following table summarizes the findings.

Table 3. Community perceptions on NGO activities

Constructs	Mean	Std.
1. NGOs have provided us with grants and trainings in order to enhance our capacity.	3.96	.938
2. The effect of their projects is fully appreciable in the places in which they are located	3.76	1.042
3. The work NGOs do is of great importance	3.85	.893
4. Overall, the community are happy with NGOs work and believes that they are contributing to the society in many ways e.g. serving orphans, creation of jobs amongst others	3.84	.974
5. The NGOs operating in this community are trustworthy	3.76	.910
6. The projects they undertake are sustainable and are of great benefit to those they are meant to help	3.85	1.089
7. NGOs have developed programmes that aid development in our community?	3.79	1.003
8. NGOs creates awareness of their activities and operation	3.62	1.080
9. NGO personnel do not misappropriate part of the money and material allocated to the projects	3.50	1.090
Average	**3.77**	**1.002**

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 3 reveals that 80.6% of the participants agreed that NGOs provide them with grants and training in order to enhance their capacity and were the majority. This was also supported by the high mean score (mean = 3.96; Std. = .938). This was followed by 80.2% of the participants who agreed that the projects run by NGOs are indeed appreciable by the communities. From the lower extreme however, only 60.4% of the participants agreed that NGO personnel do not misappropriate part of the money and materials allocated to the projects. Similarly, 68.7% of the participants agreed that NGOs create awareness of their activities and operations. These percentages were also supported by the least mean scores (mean = 3.50; Std. = 1.090) and (mean = 3.62; Std. = 1.080). These statistics provide some evidence that besides providing grants and training, communities appreciate the projects provided by NGOs because

they tend to trust their level of transparency and accountability coupled with its penetration that tends to reach the grassroots compared to government projects with poor accountability mechanism and lack of service for humanity by the government employees.

The findings that NGOs provide some trainings that enhance the capacity of the communities, one key informant reiterates:

> "*It has always been said that knowledge is power. Truly speaking, knowledge is power. Before World Vision came to our community, most of women were less concerned about their personal rights and health. Women did not know that men do not have to treat them as their property. But through training and sensitization, we have many women advocates and many are now informed…Thanks to World Vision*"

From the excerpt, this study therefore observed that community members that have been part of NGO project interventions had better livelihood outcomes than their contemporaries that did not. This is in agreement with previous findings of other studies such as (Adjei Osei-Wusu, Agyemang, & Afriyie, 2012; Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015) that consider NGOs worldwide to be one of the leading forces in combating poverty in the world. These reports provide that NGOs have gained significantly in poverty reduction, have reached the minority in society, and respond to their needs. Certainly, NGOs alone may not do much without the support of the other stakeholders in governance. Another key informant observes:

> "*There was a wrong mentality in our people before World Vision launched her programs in our community. I had lost focus of their own responsibilities in my home. I would wait for government to do for me everything…do not be surprised that up to now, many children in the nearby government aided primary schools do not eat at school because they are 'Museveni's children' who must literally provide their lunch…But when World Vision came to our community, I can now afford lunch for my children*"

It was observed that the more people receive training of whatsoever sort, the more empowered they become. Generally, an educated person is an empowered person. While government can provide formal education through schools, NGOs can provide informal education to adults, which improves people's capacity. This is consistent with (Brophy, 2020) who alludes that many non-government organizations supports education in Africa. They include Save the Children, and OXFAM. While 78.4% considered the work of NGOs to be of great importance, the researcher did not find any significant difference in the number of participants who agreed on the trustworthiness of NGOs and the helpfulness of the projects to the people they intend to help (74.0%). This is possibly because the impact of any project is dependent on to what extent can the project implementer stick to the plan and budget to meet the intended objective(s), something the project beneficiaries/respondents were trying to align their argument to. This view relating to trustworthiness of NGO personnel resonates with one key informant:

> "*I am sorry to mention but those people who work with NGOs are crafty. I know of one NGO, which takes care of children. The funders send mattresses and clothes to these helpless children but the mattresses were placed on market and sold! The children did not benefit and continued sleeping poorly*".

Given the above excerpt, it is suggested that, targeted beneficiaries of different NGO activities would indeed benefit but sometimes miss out on the benefits. This makes the community to misperceive the role of NGOs in their communities. This misrepresentation of NGOs by NGO personnel is very wrong and must stop.

NGO Activities

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt about NGOs activities in their community. The researcher used two dimensions to conceptualize NGO activities that is financial support and food security support. Their responses were anchored on a five pointer scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree to (5) = strongly agree. To ease interpretation and presentation, the researcher aggregated 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' and presented them as 'disagreement'. Similarly, the researcher aggregated 'agree' and 'strongly agree' and presented them as 'agreement' as summarised on table 4 below.

Table 4: NGO Activities

Constructs	Disagreement	Not sure	Agreement
Financial Support			
1. The NGOs in my area provide soft loans	6.1	5.7	88.1
2. I am currently borrowing from this saving group	5.2	7	87.6
3. The interest rates charged by our saving group are favourable	7.9	7.9	84.1
4. I have alternative sources of credit.	14.1	13.7	72.2
5. I am a member of some saving group organized by NGOs	17.2	12.3	70.5
6. Our saving group has trained me in financial literacy	18.0	11.9	70.1
Average	**11.4**	**9.8**	**78.8**
Food security Support			
1. I have ever received relief food from NGOs when I was in need	6.1	5.7	88.1
2. I have ever been trained on good agricultural practices and post-harvest handling by an NGO	7.9	7.9	84.1
3. Some NGO has ever constructed for me food stores like silos, bins, warehouse etc.	11.9	9.7	78.5
4. I have ever been trained on good post-harvest handling by an NGO	14.1	13.7	72.2
5. I have ever been provided with agricultural inputs e.g. seeds, fertilizers, etc. by an NGO	18.0	11.9	70.1
Average	**12.0**	**9.8**	**78.7**

Source: Field data, 2022

Measuring NGO activities from the perspective of financial support, 88.1% agreed that NGOs in their area provide soft loans, 87.6% agreed that they are currently borrowing from their saving group, and 84.1% agreed that the interest rates charged in their saving groups were favourable. From the lowest extreme however, 70.1% agreed their saving group has trained them in financial literacy and 70.5% agreed that they were members of some saving group organized by NGOs. The statistics provide some evidence that besides providing soft loans, NGOs have helped members to join saving groups. Overall, 78.8% were in agreement with all the claims the researcher raised on financial support. This suggests that NGOs have been supportive to communities in terms of financial support. The findings are consistent with one key informant:

> "*…since the old days, the Luo had the idea of "wang tic, awak, akiba" in acholi and Lango was so strong during emergencies. We pooled resources in form of food, labour and money to mitigate funeral expenses. This collaboration provided mutual assistance in voluntary arrangements which have since died. Now I depend on NGO support, which is very bad…*"

From the excerpt, it is revealed the plight of the Acholi and Lango who can no longer survive on their own than depending on NGO support.

From the perspective of food security support, 88.1% have ever received some food relief from NGOs during the time of need and 84.1% have ever received training on good agricultural practices and post-harvesting handling from NGOs. From the lowest extreme, only 70.1% agreed to have ever received agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers from an NGO. The statistics provide some evidence that besides getting physical food relief, NGOs have been supportive to communities by providing them with good agricultural practices and post-harvest handling. Overall, NGO activities are pronounced in both financial support and food security support as observes by one key informant:

> "*…before the LRA war, people were very active in growing their own food and ensuring some reservoirs for the famine times. But when we came from camps where they had been used to relief aid, they became lazy to produce food enough for their families. You cannot tell me that it requires a muzungu to teach you how to store food for your family…* "

This juxtaposes that the indigenous community that used to fend for themselves in plenty and scarcity was eroded with the LRA war that lasted for close to two decades. It will require some extra effort from government and NGOs to restore people to a self-sustaining mind beyond looking for some form of aid. Even in the face of aid, people continue to struggle to survive because aid will never be enough.

Poverty reduction

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt about poverty reduction in their community. The researcher used three dimensions to conceptualize poverty reduction that is household assets, food security and education of children. Table 5 summarizes the findings.

Table 5: Poverty reduction

Constructs	Disagreement	Not sure	Agreement
Household Assets			
1. My family has some assets (land, buildings and cattle)	3.5	9.7	86.8
2. My family has some alternative sources of income	6.1	7.5	86.3
3. My family has some source of household income	3.5	10.1	86.3
4. I stay close to markets where I earn some daily income	5.7	9.3	85.0
5. Cultivating crops alongside livestock keeping improves family welfare	11.9	8.8	79.3
Average	**6.1**	**9.1**	**84.7**
Food security			
1. My family enjoys an improved food diet	20.7	7	72.2
2. My family is self-sufficient in terms of food production	20.2	8.4	71.4
3. My family has enough food	23.4	7.5	69.1

4. My family sometimes sell surplus food to earn some income	27.3	11	61.7
5. My family stopped relying on food aid	23.8	15.4	60.8
Average	**23.1**	**9.9**	**67.0**
Education of children			
1. My child is able to interact with other children.	11	11	78
2. My children attend a public school	17.6	11.9	70.4
3. My children attend a private school	21.2	11	67.9
4. My children receive the school materials they need	25.1	8.8	66.1
5. My child is able to read.	30.4	15.4	54.2
Average	**16.5**	**10.1**	**73.4**

Source: *Field data, 2022*

Measuring poverty reduction from the size of household assets, participants agreed to having some assets (land, building and cattle) (86.8%), have alternative sources of income (86.3%), have some source of household income (86.3%) and have access to some markets where they earn some daily income (85.0%). The statistics indicate a positive position in as far as household assets are concerned. This is possibly because through financial and food security support by the NGOs, the beneficiaries are able to have opportunity to income that can support them improve on their standard of living through acquiring household's property. Concerning food security, 72.2% enjoy improved food diet and 71.4% produce enough food for their homesteads. From the lower end, 60.8% stopped relying on food aid. Some of the participants stopped relying on food aid possibly because through the different trainings on good agricultural practices and the provision of agricultural inputs to them by the NGOs, they have been able to produce enough for both consumption and sales. The statistics indicate that besides enjoying an improved diet, people in Oyam produce enough food for their homesteads. The

possibility of producing enough food is because of good agricultural practices coupled with availability of land. Regarding education of children, 78.0% of the participants agreed that their children can ably interact with other children and 70.4% of the participants agreed that their children attend public school. The percentage of the participants whose children attend public school suggests that, government should motivate teachers to allow them deliver to their expectation. From the lowest extreme, 54.2% of the participants agreed that their children are able to read.

Correlation tests

This study used correlation analysis to test for the relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction. Correlation measures the degree of the strength between two numerical variables.

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Table 6: Correlations

		1	2	3	4
Financial Support -**1**	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
Food Security Support-**2**	Pearson Correlation	.890(**)	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
Perception on NGO Activities -**3**	Pearson Correlation	.972(**)	.972(**)	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
Poverty Reduction-**4**	Pearson Correlation	.464(**)	.430(**)	.460(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

** *Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction (r = .460; p-value <.05) is moderate. The statistics suggest that a variation in NGO activities is associated to a moderate variation in poverty level. The relationship between financial support and poverty reduction (r=.464; p-value<.05) is moderate. The statistics suggest that a variation in financial support as provided by NGOs in Oyam is associated to a moderate variation in poverty level. The relationship between food security support and poverty reduction (r = .430; p-value <.05) is moderate. This suggests that a variation in the food security support provided by NGOs in Oyam is associated to a moderate variation in poverty level. The significant relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction disagrees with (Niringiyimana, 2014) who found that 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. Nevertheless, NGOs promote education and training, health, environmental conservation, and protection against child abuse. In Oyam, World Vision, JSI/RHITES-N, Lango, Caritas Lira Diocese have been influential in training on education, health, and protection against child abuse.

The significant relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction in Oyam disagrees with (Porter, 2003) who investigated NGOs in Ghana and found 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 fuelled by donor interventions. While there are significant relations between NGO activities and poverty reduction, some people in Oyam have turned into idleness for expectations from government and NGO. This idle expectation stifles individual development and economic independence. The findings in Oyam further disagree with Saleem and Donaldson (2016) who investigated the myriad approaches used to reduce poverty on a national

scale. The author shows that NGO activities is least among the policy approaches to reducing poverty level. Except rural development and social welfare, the poverty reduction approaches like industrialisation and petroleum-generated employment do not have application in Oyam. Also, the findings appear to agree with Nadim and Nurlukman (2017) who analyzed the real effect of women empowerment on poverty reduction. The study shows that women empowerment is a strong input to poverty alleviation when rightly implemented by both government and non-government organizations. The findings also agree with Forkuor and Agyemang (2018) who examined the activities of urban non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in fighting poverty in Ghana. 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.

The findings regarding the relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction seem to agree with (Kumari, Azam, & Khalidah, 2019) who identified microfinance services as a powerful tool for reducing poverty. Drawing evidence from Sri Lanka, the review revealed a positive relationship between financial and poverty. However, the review lacked support from NGO activities, which the study in Oyam focused onto.

Regression tests

The study used multiple regression to analyse the effect of NGO activities on poverty reduction in Oyam. Multiple regression measures the effect of a set of predictor variables on a dependent variable. This study used financial support and food security support as the predictors and poverty reduction as the dependent variable. (see table 7)

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.465(a)	.216	.209	.37544

Predictors: (Constant), Food Security Support, Financial Support

Table 7 suggests that NGO activities account for 21.6% of the variations in poverty in Oyam, basing on (R Square = .216). This is a low effect of NGO activities on poverty. This therefore, suggests that besides NGO activities in Oyam, there are other factors that are likely to account for the 78.4% of the variations in poverty level in Oyam. Such factors include; loss of job, lower level of education and employment, lack of access to land, single-parent 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). This is also in addition to non -involvement of the targeted beneficiaries in the choice, design, and implementation of the poverty reduction programs, lack of adequate finance to execute all their programmes as well as disburse to beneficiaries as loans and grants and sometimes low uptake of technologies/strategies availed to them or indifferences in the approaches used by various NGOs.

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Table 8: ANOVA (b)

Model		Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.721	2	4.360	30.934	.000(a)
	Residual	31.574	224	.141		
	Total	40.294	226			

a . Predictors: (Constant), Food Security Support, Financial Support b
. Dependent Variable: Poverty Reduction

From table 8, it is evident from the F-statistic (F = 30.934, Sig. <.05) that NGO activities significantly contribute to poverty reduction. However, the Regression sum of square (8.721), which is less than the Residual sum of squares (31.574) suggests that the contribution of NGO activities is not enough in explaining the variations in the poverty reduction.

Table 9: Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.424	.170		14.244	.000
	Financial Support	.275	.092	.387	2.988	.003
	Food Security Support	.061	.091	.086	.667	.506

A Dependent Variable: Poverty Reduction

While NGO activities account for a low variation in the poverty level in Oyam, the beta coefficients show that a unit variation in the financial support given by NGOs is likely to vary the poverty level in Oyam by 38.7%, basing on (Beta = .387; p-value <.05). Similarly, a unit variation in the food security support provided by NGOs is likely to vary poverty level in Oyam by 8.6%, basing on (Beta = .086; p-value >.05). Therefore, the financial support provided by NGOs in Oyam is more effective in reducing poverty in Oyam than the food security support provided. This is possibly because through financial support services like financial literacy training and the acquisition of soft loans, the NGO beneficiaries are able to be engaged in income generating activities that facilitates self-reliance and financial sustainability that

subsequently impact on their poverty level. A comparison of the significance values shows that the variations in financial support provided by NGOs has a significant effect on the poverty level in Oyam. This is possibly because microfinance support services like financial literacy training, the provision and acquisition of soft loans creates sense of self-reliance and financial sustainability. This is through individual participation and engagement in income generating activities with the knowledge through the support of financial services. On the other hand, the statistics suggest that a variation in the food security support provided by NGOs does not have a significant effect on the poverty level in Oyam. This is possibly because food security support in terms of good agricultural practices and the provision agricultural inputs that may improve on the production without the reliable market is meaningless in the real sense as income to support in the improvement of standard of living will not be there. The findings on the significance of financial support seems to agree with one key informant who remarked:

> "*…a lot of money has flown into this district to lift the wellbeing of the local person. They give them training on business start-up, they give them soft loans at affordable interest rates, and sensitize them on their rights especially the women. In fact those that have received some funds from NGOs are a little better than those that miss out on such opportunities…*" (Kayunga-pseudo name) "*…I haven't become rich the way one might think. I have a house of my own being a single mother. I can buy books and uniform for my children, something that I could not do when the father of my children died…I and my children can eat enough food compared to the days before NGO (Kangulumira pseudo name) came to our village…I am not regretting…*"

From these excerpts, the study observed that, financial support have helped individual beneficiaries of NGO support. Since different beneficiaries can use this financial support differently, the aggregate effect on poverty may not be noticed. The findings in Oyam supports (Addo, 2018) who concludes that NGOs are indeed still significant to poverty reduction in Ghana under an extensive civil society space. In Oyam, the relationship of the State and NGOs is not void of disparities but is amiable, in light of tremendous improvement from tensed relationship in the revolutionary days of NGOs. However, dependence on global funding for survival constrain the resources of NGOs in Oyam. This resource challenge can be overcome by effective diversification of NGOs' resource channels, to support their activities. The findings appear to agree with (Mahadale, Mohamd, Abdirahman, & Abdimalik, 2020) who showed that livelihood has affected the improvement of poverty reduction and decreased in Southern Somalia, leaving 50 percent of the poor people to receive some help from NGOs such as food, housing and shelter. The authors further show that 58 percent of the southern Somalia people get assistance from NGOs to improve their livelihood. Hence NGOs in southern Somalia can continue playing the role of catalyst in the attainment of sustainable economic growth and development provided, also the eradication of poverty, so a warm and dependable relationship is there between the government and NGOs where both are working for the benefit of the people. While the population that receives help from NGOs in Oyam was not established at the time of investigation, the findings from Oyam give some trace that NGOs are contributing to poverty reduction in the area.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between NGO Activities and poverty reduction in Oyam district. The relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction in Oyam was moderate. People from Oyam who have benefited from NGO activities are likely to show a moderate reduction in their poverty level compared to the non-beneficiaries. This is because, through the financial literacy training, the NGO activity beneficiaries are able to develop the saving culture, do basic budgeting as well as getting engaged in to income generating activities with the support of the soft loan they get from their different VSLAs. This facilitates better lives than the non-beneficiaries. The financial support activities provided by NGOs in Oyam have a significant contribution on the level of poverty reduction. People who have received financial support are likely to show significant reductions in their poverty level than those who never received such support. In particular, those who have ever received soft loans and are members of a saving group are likely to show significant strides in poverty reduction. This is because the soft loans provided by NGOs are given at low interest rates. However, NGOs have not achieved much in training their beneficiaries in financial literacy. The food security support provided by NGOs in Oyam district does not have a significant contribution on the level of poverty reduction. Even among the people that have received food security support from NGOs, the reduction in poverty level remains insignificant. While there is evidence that NGOs have provided some food relief support, which is not directly related to poverty reduction, the training provided in post-harvest handing and the agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers have contributed little in reducing poverty among the people of Oyam. While this study statistically observed a moderate relationship between NGO activities and poverty reduction, the relationship was moderate because of the influence of community perception on NGO activities such as; "NGOs gives free things, NGOs does not follow their things" etc., and this does not promote self-accountability. However, when the influence of community perceptions were not controlled, the study concludes that a weak relationship exists between NGO activities and poverty reduction. By implication, community perception significantly influences the relation between NGO activities and poverty reduction in Oyam district.

From a knowledge perspective therefore, this study contributes empirical-based findings that NGO activities are significant in poverty reduction in the face of community perception. Otherwise, NGO activities have little contribution in poverty reduction if community perceptions are ignored. This is on account that, for the successful implementation of any community programme, the community or the beneficiaries' buy in and sense of ownership of any programme either by Government or NGOs is very paramount. In other ward, the degree of success of a programme depends on how the community embrace it.

Recommendations

- This study has established that food security support does not have a significant contribution in poverty reduction in Oyam district.
- This study has established that while NGOs provide some post-harvesting handling training and agricultural inputs, beneficiaries are still poor.
- The study has established that while NGOs have provided financial support in Oyam, little has been realized in training beneficiaries in financial literacy.

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