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INFLUENCE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT ON SUSTAINABILITY OF SELECTED DONOR FUNDED PROJECTS IN SAMBURU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on the sustainability of selected donor funded projects in the Samburu County. Based on the purpose of the study, a hypothesis was formulated to test the influence of the variables on sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County. Guided by pragmatism paradigm, the study adopted a mixture of research designs targeting selected Donor Funded Projects (DFPs) in Samburu County, Kenya. Data on the unit of analysis was collected using questionnaire as the main tool supplemented by interview schedule and document analysis. The instruments were pilot-tested on a sample that exhibited similar characteristics to check for validity and reliability. Data collected was cleaned, coded, refined and analyzed to obtain inferential statistics. Tests for statistical assumptions showed reflected a near normality with linearity of the variables confirmed. Pearson's Product

Moment Correlation showed that majority of the variables had influence on sustainability of selected donor funded projects. Using F-tests, the hypothesis was accepted that joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment had significant influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County. The study recommended sustained technical assistance towards the project staff and community members aimed at enhancing organizational processes by paying attention to organizational structure, policies and procedures. Concerted efforts should be in place to enhance community participation towards provision of resources, ownership of the projects among others. Adoption of a business model aimed at sustainability was recommended through partnerships to bring on board a range of other applicable skills that may benefit the project in the long-term.

Keywords: Technical Assistance, Community Participation, Socio-Economic Environment, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context of the Problem

Donor funded projects continue to complement governments socio-economic developmental initiatives worldwide aimed at empowering the locals. With budgetary pressures in many industrialized countries, the continued support towards these initiatives by donors is however, in doubt (USAID, 2011). This has in the process attracted continuous debate and dialogue about sustainability of the projects in many recipient countries (Steen, Mogasale, Singh, Das, & Daly, 2006; Kabanda, 2011). A project is sustainable if the beneficiaries are capable of managing the project on their own without the assistance of the funding agency for as long as their problem still exists.

Technical assistance provided by donors in the implementation process to the community and project staff has been identified to impact on the sustainability of the projects (USAID, 2011). Studies also show that the discourse and practice of the projects over a period of time rest on the participation of the local community (AfDB, 2001). Capacity building earmarked towards empowering the locals to initiate, manage and control their own self-development in addition to promotion of good governance is considered important in the sustainability of the projects (AfDB, 2001; DFID, 2002). Identification of relevant stakeholders, sharing information with them, while listening to their views is equally considered key in project sustainability (Wiebe, 2011). Similarly, socioeconomic environment as part of the overall organization environment within which projects are implemented impact on the project both

negatively and positively. For instance, in the management of projects, those responsible need to be attuned to the project environment within which they operate for purposes of sustainability (Wideman, 2001; Matthews & Herbert, 2004).

Sustainability of projects in marginalized communities continues to raise concerns with cases of many beneficiaries becoming more vulnerable and marginalized (GoK, 2009; GoK, 2012; Lelegwe & Okech, 2016). For instance, following the reduction in support by Clinton Foundation, PEPFAR, and Global Fund, many beneficiaries were left more vulnerable. With sustainable strategies, the situation would have however, been contained and the gains expanded to other deserving cases. Studies also show that some donors have had to exit before fully implementing the project activities and later coming back in a different form with majority citing sustainability as a major issue of their discontinuity leaving the intended beneficiaries more vulnerable (Okech &Mukuusi, 2012; Lelegwe & Okech, 2016). Limited studies on sustainability in the county have been undertaken to examine the joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment. Whereas there are cases where efforts have been directed towards enhancing the capacity of employees through mentorship and training in project management, very limited empirical and statistical analysis is documented to examine the impact of the same towards sustainability of donor funded projects.

Although a few like Oino*et al* (2015), Lelegwe & Okech (2016) have attempted to link community participation and project sustainability, they are not only limited in scope but also in methodology. The studies simply document community participation without necessarily examining the significance of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on the sustainability of the projects. There is, therefore, need to empirically investigate how technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment jointly influence sustainability of DFPs in Samburu County. This would give evidence necessary for strategic direction in enhancing sustainability of donor funded projects in the county given that most of the projects are short term in nature despite their significant role at the community level. Similarly, there seems to be a missing link between the concept of community participation and technical assistance by the donors and the formulation and implementation of these projects, since the projects would sometimes show signs of lacking a sustainable nature, which incapacitates the local communities in their fight against poverty.

Against this background, it was necessary to examine factors influencing sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County while focusing on the influence of technical assistance, while at the same time examine the moderating influence of community participation and socio-economic environment on the sustainability of donor funded projects. The purpose of

the study was to investigate the joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on the sustainability of selected donor funded projects in Samburu County.

Donor Funded Projects in Samburu

A significant portion of the county's population estimated at over 80 percent is however, youthful coupled with high population growth rate, scaling up of the early childhood development (ECD)centers, primary and secondary schools (improve literacy level) as well as construction of health facilities and employment of teachers and health workers is inevitable. The county's population density is 413.2 lightly higher than the national population density of 401.1 per square kilometer (KNBS, 2012; CRA, 2012; SRA, 2013; GoK, 2015). The county has three sub counties (constituencies) divided into fifteen (15) electoral wards.It is estimated that 80 percent of the population belongs to the Samburu ethnic community, while the remaining 20 percent is shared by Turkana, Kikuyu, Meru, Somali, among others (CRECO, 2012). Christianity is the main religion in the county with Samburu language, which is close to the Masaai dialect being the main language. The Swahili language is also used especially, among the younger people (CRECO, 2012).

The primary economic activity in the county is nomadic pastoralism with some minimal agricultural farming with some prospects of mineral wealth (CRA, 2012). In the county, livestock production contributes 85 percent of income in pastoral livelihood zones and 60 percent in agro pastoral zones. Residents have adopted various coping mechanisms including borrowing from friends, sharing food, reduction in number of meals, and buying food on credit with a coping strategy index of 23.4 (LRA, 2013). Other sources of livelihoods include charcoal burning, overstocking and crop cultivation in the catchment areas and wetlands. These activities have over the years contributed greatly to the destruction of the environment, which in the process has partly accounted for ethnic conflicts and border clashes.

The County is classified as one of the poorest counties with a poverty rate of 73.5 percent higher than the national poverty rate of 45.9 percent. Wage earning population in the county is estimated at a paltry 3,700 representing 1.5 percent of the county's population (CRESCO, 2012; GoK, 2015). Health status in the county remains sub-optimal level with less than 50% of the population accessing healthcare. Health indicators remain poor with HIV/AIDS, pneumonia, diarrhea and gunshots, and poor housing considered as the leading cause of mortality on one hand and respiratory tract infection (RTI), malaria, diarrheal, and pneumonia considered the leading causes of morbidity on the other hand.

Life expectancy remains low at about 50/1,000, while maternal mortality rate is estimated at about 50 deaths per 1,000. Under-five mortality rate is estimated at 56 deaths per 1000 live births with infant mortality rate estimated at 50 per 1000 live births, while neonatal mortality rate is estimated at 31/1000 births (GoK, 2012; World Bank, 2012; GoK, 2015; SCHS&IP, 2016). Nutrition remains a big challenge in the county with the prevalence of stunting being 20.8%, wasting is 8.2 percent, while underweight is at 17.2 percent. Although these indicators show improvements, they fall far below the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the country average (GoK, 2015). The county's disabled person's percentage is lower than the national disability population estimated at 3.46 percent with 1 percent having visual disability, 0.84 percent hearing, 0.5 percent speech, 1.17 percent physical/self-care, and 0.31 percent have mental disability (KNBS, 2009). To fast track improvements in these indicators, many donor projects have been initiated in the county.

On education sector, the school dropout rate stands at 45 percent for boys, 50 percent for girls and 25 percent in pre-school with low transition rate from early childhood development (ECD) to primary to secondary, majorly attributed to poverty, insecurity and cultural practices. Enrolment levels in the county exhibit gender disparities with girls' enrolment lower than boys by 17 percent. Majority of the population estimated at about 63.6 percent have primary education, 6.5 percent secondary education, while only 28.9 percent can read and write ranking the county at 43 out of the 47 counties (CRA, 2011; LRA, 2013). Early girl child marriages and pregnancies as a result of culture and tradition is common in the county with boys involved in the provision of security against cattle rustling which in a way affects their ability to pursue education. Against these statistics, donors have initiated various projects aimed at improving access to education and literacy levels.

In terms of water, the main water sources are boreholes, water pans, springs and small dams, which are seasonal in nature (SRA, 2013). Trekking distance to water sources is about 0.5 – 8 kilometers, however in pastoral zones the distance is estimated at between 10 and 20 Kilometers. Water fetching waiting time in the county is less than five minutes in agro pastoral zones and around thirty minutes to three hours in pastoral zones. The cost of water per 20 litre can is estimated at between 2-5 shillings with consumption in pastoral areas estimated at 5-8 litres per person per day, while in agro pastoral areas it is estimated at between 10-15 litres per person per day (SRA, 2013). This situation has from time to time contributed towards conflicts among neighboring communities. It is also estimated that only 33.6 percent of county population has access to safe water as compared to 54.1 percent of the national population, while only 26.5 percent of the population have managed to improve their sanitation (KNBS, 2009; CRA, 2011; SRA, 2013).

The situational analysis shows that the county's population is disadvantaged economically, socially and environmentally. The indicators result in negative economic and social consequences including household's descent into poverty, food insecurity in rural households and absorption of substantial financial resources (Muyanga, Jayne & Burke, 2013; 2013; Haacker, 2015). The marginalization has in the process continued to attract donors to initiate projects in agriculture, health, education as well as environment conservation and conflict management. These projects are implemented both on the budget and off-budget, with on-budget projects implemented through the government budgetary mechanisms, while off-budget implemented directly or through NGOs and CBOs.The importance of external financing, however, continues to dwindle raising sustainability concerns of these projects, which may further marginalize the residents. Given poverty levels and the living conditions in the county, if policy debate and dialogue is not sustained, poor households who are unfortunately the majority, are likely to continue suffering from catastrophic spending, which in the process may worsen the economic, social and environmental indicators. The study was thus deemed to inform the process from an informed perspective.

Technical assistance provided by donors in the implementation process to the community and project staff has been identified to impact on the sustainability of the projects (USAID, 2011). Studies also show that the discourse and practice of the projects over a period of time rest on the participation of the local community (AfDB, 2001). Capacity building earmarked towards empowering the locals to initiate, manage and control their own self-development in addition to promotion of good governance is important (AfDB, 2001; DFID, 2002; World Bank, 2002). Identification of relevant stakeholders, sharing information with them, while listening to their views is considered key in project sustainability (Wiebe, 2011). The socioeconomic environment as part of the overall organization environment within which projects are implemented impact on the project both negatively and positively. For instance, in the management of projects, those responsible need to be attuned to the project environment within which they operate for purposes of sustainability (Wideman, 2001; Matthews & Herbert, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

The study combined a cross sectional descriptive survey and Correlational research design. The use of the two designs was suitable because the study used both descriptive and inferential analysis of data. Application of cross-sectional survey means information is collected from a predetermined population at just one point in time (Fraenkel&Wallen, 2008). Kothari (2004) argued that surveys are only concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that

are held, processes that are on-going, and that effects are evident or trends that are developing. This design is the most appropriate for this study because of its ability to elicit a diverse range of information. It also has the ability to minimize bias and maximize reliability. Correlational research design, on the other hand allows the use of inferential statistics for measurement of two or more variables to determine the extent to which they are related or influence each other (Fraenkel&Wallen, 2008). Therefore, a combination of the two research designs enabled the researcher to conduct both descriptive and inferential analysis effectively.

The unit of analysis in the study constituted stakeholders in donor funded projects including employees, community and activity managers in the donor organization in Samburu County, Kenya. In the County, whereas some projects are implemented directly under government ministries and agencies, others work under the donors directly, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). The target population comprised of donors directly, Non-Governmental organizations and community based organizations in the county. These institutions were targeted because of their direct involvement in project implementation and expected to be familiar with project sustainability.

Data was sought from program/project director/manager/administrators, monitoring and evaluation officers/managers, and chairpersons and secretaries/treasurers in the NGOs and CBOs, respectively. The choice of project directors/managers/administrators/M&Emanagers was informed by the fact that they are the in charge of the project either in terms of policy or implementation of project activities and therefore considered to have all information in terms technical assistance and how this influences sustainability of the projects. Finally, the chairpersons and the secretaries/treasurers are key office bearers in the management of the CBOs and the respective activities. They are thus expected to be the focal point in terms of information relating to technical assistance and sustainability of the CBO. Stratified random sampling was used to identify the respondents in order to ensure that the target population was appropriately represented in the sample(Kothari, 2009; Kotrlik& Higgins, 2001). To ensure equitable representation, proportional allocation procedure was adopted.

Given the nature of the study objectives, both primary and secondary data that were qualitative and quantitative in nature was collected by adopting pragmatism approach where various instruments were used. The combination of different tools in the study was guided by the need for obtaining valid and objective data aimed at maximizing the appropriateness and/or utility of the instruments and significance enhancement to maximize researchers' interpretations of data (Onwuegbuzie& Leech, 2006). Similarly, this was informed by the fact that both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in an effort to realize the study objectives. In the

study, three key tools were used with primary data collected by use of questionnaire and interview guide, while secondary data was collected by use of document analysis.

Testing of the research instruments on a pilot sample was done. This process allowed for the examination of respondents' understanding of the questions and instructions, and whether the meanings of questions were the same for all respondents. Data generated was first edited to detect errors and omissions, while documents were read through to determine the data which ones would be chunked into smaller meaningful parts. Similarly, coding was done by developing a code book where numerals were assigned to ensure that data is put into a limited number of categories or classes.

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the direction and strength of the variables and to determine the amount of correlation between them. Given the large volume of data collected, classification was done to reduce the data into homogeneous groups to enable the researcher to get meaningful relationships and interpretation qualitatively. Regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of technical assistance, community participation and socioeconomic environment on the sustainability of donor funded projects in the study area.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Correlation Analysis

Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, a correlation analysis was done to explore the direction of the relationships between independent variable and dependent variable. This was determined by checking the sign (positive or negative) value before the (r) value. The strength of these relationships was considered by looking at the correlation value (r) with a value of zero (0) indicating no relationship at all and One (1.0) a perfect positive correlation. Finally a value of –1.0 indicates a perfect negative correlation. The judgment rule on the strength of the correlation was guided by the guidelines suggested by Cohen (1988). The guidelines were applied irrespective of the sign of the r value given that sign refers only to the direction and not necessarily the strength of the relationship. Given the variable measurement, Pearson Product Moment Correlation were determined at a 95% level of confidence, meaning that the sample proportion (p) was less than or equal to 0.05.

Table 1 provides the correlation between Sustainability as the dependent variable with technical assistance, community participation and socioeconomic environment as the independent variables.

Table 1: Correlation between Technical Assistance, Community Participation, Socio-Economic Environment

		Sustainability	Technical Assistance	Community participation	Socioeconomic environment
Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	*1*			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	*.000*			
	N	*125*			
Technical assistance	Pearson Correlation	*.522***	*1*		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	*.000*			
	N	*125*	*125*		
Community Participation	Pearson Correlation	*.488***	*.529***	*1*	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	*.000*	*.000*		
	N	*125*	*125*	*125*	
Socioeconomic Environment	Pearson Correlation	*.110*	*.176*	*-.096*	*1*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	*.442***	*.415***	*.505***	
	N	*125*	*125*	*124*	*125*

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

Correlation between sustainability as the dependent variable, technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment as independent variables was varied. The relationship between sustainability and technical assistance was strong positive and statistically significant [r = 0.522; n = 125; p=.0000<.05]. This implied that technical assistance in terms of mentoring, organizational processes and capacity building had positive effect on sustainability of donor funded projects in the County. The correlation between sustainability and community participation was moderate, positive and statistically significant [r=.488, n=125, p=.000<.05]. On the other hand, whereas the relationship between sustainability and socio-economic environment was moderate and positive, this relationship was however statistically insignificant [r=.422, n=124 p=.110 >.05].

Regression Analysis

In order to examine the joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County,

multiple regression analysis was conducted. Sustainability was the dependent variable, while technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment were treated as independent variables. The multiple regression equation used to estimate the joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on sustainability of donor funded project was:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$ where

Y = Composite for sustainability of DFPs

β_0= Constant

β_4= Beta coefficients

X_1= Composite for Technical Assistance

X_3 = Composite for Socio-economic environment

X_2 = Composite for Community Participation

ε = error term

Table 2: Regression Results for Technical Assistance, Community Participation and Socio-economic Environment on Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.784[a]	.534	.497	.39180	.540	17.916	3	121	.000

a. Predictors: Community Participation , Socio-economic, Technical Assistance

b. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Donor Funded projects

The strength of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on the sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County was 0.784, while coefficient of determination was 0.5340 with Sig F Change p<.000 of 17.916. This implied that 53.4% of sustainability of donor funded projects in the county was explained by the joint influence of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment. The remaining 41.6% of the variations in the sustainability of donor funded projects was influenced by other factors besides the composite of the three. The results as shown in Table 4.19 show a statistically significant relationship between technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment and sustainability of donor funded projects with F=7.916, p value<0.000. Overall, model was statistically significant at 95% level of significance. The significance was also tested using ANOVA tests with results summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: ANOVA on Technical Assistance, Community Participation and Socio-economic

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.645	3	1.215	7.916	.000[b]
	Residual	7.061	121	.154		
	Total	**10.707**	**124**			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of DFPs

b. Predictors: Community Participation, Socio-economic, Technical Assistance

As shown in Table 2, the three variables had a statistical significant influence on the sustainability of DFPs. The values of each item representing indicators of each independent variable of the study were aggregated to get a composite mean. The new variable was used to run multicolinearity diagnosis with the resulting VIF and tolerance values ranging between 1.088 - 1.498, and 0.919 - 0.868, respectively. The low values of VIF indicate absence of multicolinearity between technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment. Table 4 provides a summary of the regression coefficients of technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients of Technical Assistance, Community Participation and Socio-economic Environment on Sustainability

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.563	.418		6.128	.000		
	Socio-economic	.039	.062	.080	0.642	.004	.919	1.088
	Technical Assistance	.254	.109	.341	2.328	.024	.868	1.498
	Community Participation	.164	.075	.315	2.173	.035	.883	1.465

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

The tolerance value as an indicator of how much of variability of the specified independent variable was not explained by the other independent variables in the model was very high indicating absence of multicolinearity. In terms of regression analysis, Table 4.21 shows all the composite variables namely technical assistance [β=.254, p<.024], community participation [β=.164, p<.035]and socio-economic environment [β=.039; p>.0.04] were statistically significant. As postulated, technical assistance, community participation and socioeconomic environment

have a joint influence on sustainability of selected donor funded projects in Samburu County therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

CONCLUSION

In donor funded projects, sustainability aims at leaving a legacy of functional institutions that will be self-sustaining once the project comes to an end and that the community would still continue realizing the benefits. Sustainability of donor funded projects is realized through various steps that include promotion of ownership of project activities, supporting the capability of existing institutions, and securing successful transfer of decision-making to low administrative levels (Elhaut, 2007). Building sufficient follow up through mentoring and capacity building of key institutions staff including the community, while taking cognizant of the environment is important. Donor funded project is sustainable when it is able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial and technical assistance from an external donor is terminated while involving the community and taking into consideration the environment which the project is implemented. Alternatively, a project is sustainable if the beneficiaries are capable of managing the project on their own without the assistance of outside development partners for as long as their problem still exists once provided with necessary technical assistance.

The study established the strength of the correlation between technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment on the sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County, with a high level of coefficient of determination that was significant [0.000]. This implied that sustainability of donor funded projects was jointly influenced by technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment. Donor funded projects are aimed at empowering communities economically and where possible sustain the provision of the project activities beyond the funding. This in the process ensures continued flow of streams of benefit beyond the donor. To this end, donors not only put in place necessary structures but also enhance the skills of the community through relevant capacity building programs in project management such as proposal and grant writing, basic technical skills, monitoring and evaluation, planning and budgeting, among others. This is expected to impact positively on the community's socio-economic status which positively influences the sustainability of donor funded projects.

The study also revealed a statistically significant relationship between technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment and sustainability of donor funded projects with a p-value of 0.000.The significance was also confirmed using ANOVA tests at p-value of 0.00<0.05. This implied that technical assistance, community

participation and socio-economic environment were jointly statistically significant. It was inferred that technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment have a joint influence on sustainability of donor funded project in Samburu County thereby validating the hypothesis that technical assistance, community participation and socio-economic environment have a joint influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in the county. This therefore implies that technical assistance in terms of mentoring, capacity building and the establishment of organization processes together active community participation and the socioeconomic environment within which the project were implemented influenced sustainability of donor funded projects in the county.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The long-term economic viability of project results is dependent on a favourable socio-economic economic environment. Policy makers and technical advisors need to partner in ensuring that there is institutional capacity of implementing agencies through provision of regulations, rules and norms that will secure supportive socio-economic environment devoid of politics, supported by social harmony and cultural tolerance. Technical advisors need to ensure there is technical transfer through capacity building initiatives through trainings in project management skills such as proposal and grant writing, project design, planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Others include enhancing organizational processes like establishing internal systems, structure, and work culture that promote strong leadership and positive organizational image, while cultivating a relationship with the community that supports the projects.

Efforts should be put towards setting up necessary organizational structures, policies and procedures and reporting mechanisms all aimed at sustainability of the funded projects. Additionally, mentorship needs to be considered as a component for effective capacity building especially on site programs are encouraged since this have been found to work better. Facilitation in the formation of partnerships with other institutions should be embraced. This is because such ensure that these projects are driven by a business model and have mitigation strategies for sustainability. Partners also bring on board a range of other applicable skills that may benefit the project in the long -term. Technical advisors must ensure that specific sector departments come on board during project implementation to provide the necessary post implementation support for projects. Initiatives aimed at creating revolving funds should be embraced as an innovative way through which projects could become independent as opposed to continuous reliant on the donors. This is also expected to offer a counter performance strategy because beneficiaries must perform and not just accept it as donor funding where there is little consequence when the project fails. Building on existing community assets and

knowledge, the donors can promote positive community attitudes towards collaboration and collective decision-making, as well as support social cohesion by strengthening relationships between internal and external organizations.

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