

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON SUSTAINABILITY OF DONOR FUNDED PROJECTS IN SAMBURU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of technical assistance on the sustainability of selected donor funded projects in Samburu County. The guiding hypothesis was to test the influence of technical assistance on sustainability of selected donor funded projects in Samburu County. Both theoretical and empirical literature was collected to facilitate the identification of research gaps. Guided by pragmatism paradigm, the study adopted a mixture of research designs targeting selected donor funded projects in Samburu implemented by various stakeholders including Community Based Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations and donors. The unit of analysis constituted employees in these organizations, opinion leaders, and members of the boards, among others, identified through stratified sampling. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire as the main tool supplemented by interview schedule and document analysis. Data collected was cleaned, coded, refined and analyzed to obtain both descriptive and inferential statistics. Using F-tests, it was accepted that technical assistance had significant influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County. In lieu of this, 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; empowering the stakeholders with project management skills ranging from proposal and grant writing, formulation of project idea, planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Further, the study recommends mentorship that need to be looked at as a component of effective capacity building and networking with other key stakeholders including donors.

Keywords: Technical Assistance, Sustainability, Donor funded projects, Mentoring, Capacity building

INTRODUCTION

Globally, developing countries have continued to benefit from donor-funded projects (DFPs) over the years. These projects have been implemented in various sectors including social sector (health and education), agriculture, community development and infrastructural development (Wood, 2005; Mujabi, Samson, Kasekende & Ntayi, 2015). The projects complement government developmental initiatives in improving the lives of the poor and other vulnerable groups (Delmon, 2011). These projects are considered the backbone of substantial socio-economic empowerment in uplifting many people in developing countries out of dire social and developmental stagnation (Globerson & Zwikael, 2002). They may be funded by a small budget and sometimes set up in a much disorganized structure especially in emergency cases such as draught, famine, disease outbreaks, war, among others (Coppola, 2011). The funding could be provided by bilateral and or multilateral donors to select international organizations who then distribute to implementers at community level (WHO, 2011). Varied mechanisms are applied in their endeavor to enhance the socio-economic status of the populace including expanding the scale of involvement, capacity building of the locals commonly referred to as technical assistance (TA). Others include community empowerment for purpose of effective participation, environmental conservation, socio-political advancement or development and agro-ecological methods (Cornwell 2000; Keese, 2001).

Technical Assistance is considered as both institutional strengthening and enhancing the skills and knowledge of personnel involved in the implementation and the management of technical cooperation services (European Commission, 2008). It involves the capacity development of organizations and individuals; provision of policy or expert advice on projects; strengthening implementation and project execution. Technical assistance dates back to the 19th century when Japan sought after overseas countries for ideas on how best to achieve economic and social development (Action Aid, 2005). It was, however, until the period after

World War II to 1960s, which coincided with the period when many world economies including Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) were emerging from colonialism. Around this time, technical assistance was experienced worldwide. Further, following the socio-economic aftermath of colonialism, the western world decided to show compassion in support of recovery programs by providing technical assistance.

Around this time, there was also a feeling of guilt by European countries for colonialism and the conditions in which they had released countries into independence. The motive was to maintain the grip to pursue capitalistic as opposed to communist ideologies.

It was during this period that most UN agencies especially UNESCO, UNICEF and international aid agencies such as Oxfam and Save the Children appeared as development organizations focused on community developments which in the process bred Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community initiatives like Community Based Organizations (CBOs) {Lelegwe & Okech, 2016}. In the early years, many theorists and donors argued that 'under development' was caused by fundamental 'gaps' in poor countries coupled with a savings gap, in which low domestic savings limited investment; an import gap, in which limited exports prevented poor countries from importing enough to meet their needs; and a capacity gap, in which poor countries lacked the necessary skills and technical knowhow to develop their economies (Action Aid, 2005). As donors provided finance to fill the savings and import gaps, they similarly poured in expatriate experts to fill the capacity gap in terms of project implementation, technical and managerial training (Lopes, 2002; Action Aid, 2005). The donors used their experts to impart knowledge to a population that was assumed to have little prior knowledge or expertise to improve their performance (Morgan, 2002).

There have been fundamental changes over time in thinking within the development community on the role and function of technical assistance, owing largely to the failure of 'blueprint' approaches that lacked local ownership with no lasting change (Morgan, 2002). This has partly been attributed to inadequate capacity of the local community to absorb the resources owing largely to lack of planning and budgeting skills, project management skills in terms of project idea identification and definition, evaluation and implementation as well as grant and proposal writing for future funding. In this regard, donor practices have continued to increase incentives to provide donor-led technical assistance. Overall, technical assistance is perceived as a core element of the development dimension in enhancing human and institutional capacities of beneficiaries to take full advantage of the project in the event the project comes to an end (WHO, 2012). Institutional capacity is an essential condition for maintaining the flow of project benefits in the future which include attention to structure, policy, and staff and community training.

Four major indicators of technical assistance necessary in project sustainability have been singled out by World Health Organization. This include financial assistance (loans and grants), provision of goods/commodities, technical transfer, study tours and fellowship and finally, research funding (WHO, 2012). Technical transfer which is the focus of the study entails provision of funds to obtain managerial or technical expertise required for project execution in both short term and long term in the management of the project before it is handed over to the local community. Under this arrangement, the work is carried out with the in-country of local personnel to transfer technical competence to the recipient for purpose of sustaining provision of the service or good beyond the donor, while at the same time minimize on dependence (WHO, 2012). This according to WHO is in recognition that such projects are complex and require multifaceted management and technical skills. WHO (2012) avers, institutions and management involved in project implementation from the community to the national or international levels need to be empowered. This could be realized through provision of information, skills and resources (human and capital) for smooth running of activities beyond the donor (Weinberg, 2008; Wanjohi, 2010). This is expected to facilitate project sustainability beyond the donor support. It is within this context, that the study sought to examine the influence of technical assistance on the sustainability of donor funded projects in Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASALs) with specific focus on Samburu County, Kenya.

This was attributed to the fact that 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). 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). Whereas in some cases, efforts have been directed towards enhancing the capacity of employees through mentorship and training in project management, very limited empirical and statistical analysis have been undertaken to examine whether the donors continue to provide these towards the recipient. Against this background, it was necessary to examine the influence of technical assistance on the sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County. Key factors of interest included technical assistance in terms of management and leadership, training in technical skills, mentoring and supervision, financial support and organizational processes such as putting in place necessary governance structures and policies and how these influence sustainability of selected DFPs.

METHODOLOGY

The study combined a cross sectional descriptive survey and correlational research design. Application of cross-sectional survey means information is collected from a predetermined population at just one point in time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). As argued by Kothari (2004), surveys are only concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing. This design was deemed 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). Considering that in this study the purpose was to examine the influence of the technical assistance on sustainability, correlational research design was applied. The 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 DFPs in Samburu County including employees, community and activity managers in the donor organization supporting projects in the County. 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 thus comprised of donors directly, Non-Governmental organizations and community based organizations in the county. These institutions were targeted because they considered as being directly involved in project implementation and therefore directly affected by the sustainability of the projects.

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&E managers was informed by the fact that they are the in charge of the project either in terms of policy or implementation of the project activities, therefore they are considered to have all information in terms technical assistance and this may influence 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 in order to increase the efficiency of the study (Kothari, 2009; Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001). To ensure equitable representation, proportional allocation

procedure was adopted with random sampling used to ensure that each element in each stratum had equal probability to be selected for the study. Computer random numbers were generated for each category and respondents assigned these numbers randomly.

Given the nature of the study objective, both primary and secondary were 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 to be used in the study 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 examination of the respondents' understanding of the questions and instructions, and whether the meanings of questions were the same for all respondents. A total of twenty respondents from the target population were used to answer the questionnaire, while an in-depth interview was conducted on a similar number. Documents from one of the organizations were reviewed to check if the themes developed for document analysis are appropriate using test-retest method. 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 for purposes of generating meaningful relationships and interpretation qualitatively. Regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of technical assistance on the sustainability of donor funded projects.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis of Technical Assistance

Technical assistance has been perceived as a core ingredient of the development dimension earmarked towards enhancing human and institutional capacities of beneficiaries to take full advantage of the project in the event the project comes to an end. This includes attention to structure, policies and staff and community training. In the study various aspects of technical training were considered including management and leadership, technical training,

organizational processes (internal systems, governance structures, policies, among others), mentoring and supervision, project management, among others. In this sub-section results of descriptive analysis is of technical assistance and how it influences sustainability of donor funded projects is reported. Table 1 presents the findings on the extent to which the respondents agreed on the influence of various aspects of technical assistance to the sustainability of donor funded projects.

Table 1: Technical Assistance and Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

Technical Assistance variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management and leadership training	4.10	1.07
Technical training	3.75	1.15
Planning and Budgeting	4.13	0.95
Project design	4.21	0.94
Organizational processes	4.10	1.18
Monitoring & evaluation	4.19	1.05
Proposal & grant writing	3.75	1.25
Mentoring	4.13	1.04
Financial management	4.10	1.18
Project implementation	4.25	1.10
Project reporting	4.23	1.10
Composite value	4.47	1.09

Technical assistance had a composite mean score of 4.47 and a standard deviation of 1.09 with respondents agreeing that management and leadership training provided for by the donors was effective towards the sustainability of the projects as reflected in the mean score of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 1.07. On the other hand, technical training had a mean score of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.15. Respondents observed that they were receiving training on project management, report writing, grant and proposal writing from the donors as part of project delivery. In the study, it was found that donors continue to provide capacity building on the technical maintenance of the project, training on disaster management as part of solution towards conflict management. Planning and budgeting had a mean score of 4.13 with a standard deviation of 0.95, while the design of the project assisted by donors had a great effect on the sustainability of the projects with a mean score of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.94. Allowing the local community to participate in the budgeting and planning for purposes of prioritizing their needs was considered important in the sustainability of the projects.

Assistance provided for by donors in terms of organizational processes had a mean score of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 1.18, with monitoring and evaluation scoring a mean score of 4.19 with a standard deviation of 1.05. The importance of organizational processes, monitoring and evaluation were considered by the respondents as core in the project cycle starting from the initiation stage. They averred that by donors putting in place necessary processes including organization structure, systems, policies and procedures, financial and project reporting as well as monitoring the project process, continuity of the projects is guaranteed. The results also show that the assistance received from the donor in enhancing capacity towards project proposal & grant writing moderately affected sustainability of the project with a mean score of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.25. Mentoring on the other hand had a strong effect on the sustainability of the project with a mean score of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 1.04. This was triangulated by the in-depth interviews where respondents noted that besides funding, they also continued to receive various support from the donors such as technical backstopping; guidelines on project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In many donor funded projects, mentoring is considered critical with the donors backstopping the project through technical advisory which is part of mentoring (Ndege, 2003). Financial management support had a great effect on sustainability with a mean score of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 1.18, while project implementation assistance had a mean score of 4.25 and standard deviation of 1.10. Finally, donor assistance with project reporting had a mean score of 4.23 with a standard deviation of 1.10 implying that this variable had a great effect on the sustainability of the donor funded projects.

The results also show that the implementation of donor funded projects in the County is characterized by technical assistance in terms of mentoring, technical support in the implementation process as well as project reporting. This is because phasing out a project need to carefully-considered to ensure long-term sustainability of a programme or project so that the community may be able to ensure the continuity (Heldgaar, 2008; Oswald & Ruedin, 2012). This therefore requires support in the implementation, mentoring as well as financial management training (SDC, 2010; Straussman, 2001).

Regression Analysis

Before undertaking regression analysis to examine the significance of technical assistance on sustainability of donor funded projects in Sumburu County, a few statistical tests were conducted. These included multicollinearity, correlation analysis, linearity, normality, among others. Tables 2 and 3 provide the multicollinearity Correlational analysis, respectively.

Table 2: Multicollinearity Analysis of Technical Assistance

		Technical training of personnel	Organizational Processes	Training in Project management	Training in project planning and budgeting	Mentoring in project management
Technical training of personnel	Pearson Correlation	1	.363**	.290*	.272	.412**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.039	.051	.002
Organizational Processes	Pearson Correlation	.363**	1	.366**	.539**	.334*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		.008	.000	.016
Training in Project Reporting	Pearson Correlation	.290*	.366**	1	.519**	.535**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.008		.000	.000
Training in project planning and budgeting	Pearson Correlation	.272	.539**	.519**	1	.478**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.000	.000		.000
Mentoring in project mgt	Pearson Correlation	.412**	.334*	.535**	.478**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.016	.000	.000	

**Correlation is significant at 0.00 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Evidence adduced in the table show that there was no evidence of multicollinearity given that none of the relationships between the technical assistance variables was strong ($r < 0.7$). Initial training in leadership and management as well as training in financial management exhibited some multicollinearity and therefore removed from the table. It is also important to note that financial management as well as leadership and management are part of organizational processes as well as project management. Overall, the relationship between sustainability and various aspects of technical assistance including mentoring, organizational processes, capacity building monitoring and evaluation, among others, was strong, positive and statistically

significant [$r=.522$, $n=125$, $p=.000<.05$]. This therefore implied that technical assistance provided by donors in the process of project implementation, positively influenced sustainability of the projects. Table 3, provides a summary of the correlation between technical assistance and sustainability.

Table 3: Correlation between Sustainability and Technical Assistance

		Sustainability	Technical Assistance
Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	1	.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	125	125
Technical Assistance	Pearson Correlation	.522**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	125	125

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

The regression Analysis aimed at testing the hypothesis that technical assistance influence sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County. The model that was used to test the hypothesis was of the form:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where: y = Composite of sustainability of DFPs; β_0 = Constant; β_1 = Beta coefficient; X_1 = Composite for Technical Assistance; E = Error term.

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 4 with technical assistance as the independent variable and sustainability of donor funded projects as dependent variable.

Table 4: Regression Results for Technical Assistance and Sustainability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.522 ^a	.261	.266	.40269	.272	16.940	1	124	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Technical Assistance

The model fits the data, with the strength of the correlation between technical assistance and sustainability of donor funded projects reported at 0.522 with coefficient of determination estimated at 0.261 and significant with the F-value of 16.940, p-value of = 0.000 of 16.940 and a model strength of 0.473. This shows that 26.1% of sustainability of donor funded projects was

accounted for by technical assistance provided for by donors towards the projects. This could be in terms of putting in place organizational processes such as necessary internal systems, organization structures, qualified personnel, reporting lines and financial management structures, monitoring and evaluation. Others assistance could include capacity building in terms of management and leadership training, technical training, mentoring as well as monitoring and evaluation skills. The results indicate a statistically significant relationship between sustainability of donor funded projects and technical assistance in Samburu County with F-value of 18.722, $p < .000$). Overall, the regression model was statistically significant implying that provision of technical assistance during the project cycle significantly influences sustainability of selected DFPs in Samburu County

This finding supports World Health Organization (2012) observations where the importance of institutional capacity was reiterated as being critical in maintaining the flow of project benefits in the future by paying attention to structure, policy, and staff training was emphasized. This finding seem to agree with Ndege (2003) who observed that donors need to have continuous monitoring and evaluation programmes and develop long lasting interventions in collaboration with other stakeholders. Ndege (2003) further noted that through continuous capacity building, the community members and project staff will learn to appreciate the project and identify with the project. Tables 5 and 6 provides summary statistic of the ANOVA and coefficient results between technical assistance and sustainability of donor funded projects.

Table 5: ANOVA results of Technical Assistance and Sustainability of selected DFGs

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.036	1	3.036	18.722	.000 ^b
	Residual	8.108	124	.162		
	Total	11.144	125			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects b. Predictors: Technical Assistance

Table 6: Regression results of Coefficients on Technical Assistance and Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.695	.402		6.706	.000		
	Technical Assistance	.389	.090	.522	4.327	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Donor Funded projects

The results in Table 6 show statistically significant regression coefficients for technical assistance and sustainability of donor funded projects estimated at 0.389 with p-value of 0.000. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between technical assistance and sustainability of donor funded projects such that if technical assistance is provided in the process of the project cycle, sustainability of the projects is assured. This is because technical assistance is core in the developmental projects as part of enhancing human and institutional capacities of beneficiaries to take full advantage of the project in the event the project comes to an end. This entails paying attention to structure, policy which entails putting in place necessary organization processes, staff training in terms of leadership and management skills, proposal and grant writing. Others relate to establishment of internal systems, structure, and work culture that promote strong leadership and positive organizational image, foster the belief that people are willing to support products and services they find valuable, and facilitate the development plans for sustainability. As noted in World Bank (2010), enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes is important.

The findings validate Bamberger & Cheema (1990) inferences that lack of adequately trained personnel negatively impact on the sustainability of community-based projects. This could be realized through provision of adequate staff training for effective project delivery as part of capacity building. As reported in Little (1993), institutional and management capacity is a recipe for effective project implementation as it encourages participation and involvement of the community in all the processes of project implementation, which in the process enhance continued delivery of desired outcomes. Empowered people have freedom of choice and action, which in turn enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them (Little, 1993).

CONCLUSION

Given the results, the hypothesis that technical assistance has a significant influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in Samburu County was accepted implying that technical assistance significantly influence sustainability of DFPs in Samburu Country. This could be attributed to the fact that technical assistance provided by donors aims at strengthening the implementation of the project by not only enhancing skills and knowledge of personnel and community involved in the implementation. This also ensures that necessary organizational processes are put in place. Other issues considered by the donors in terms of technical assistance include mentoring of staff as well as provision of policy or expert advice on project management including monitoring and evaluation. This therefore implies that establishing

internal governance systems, structure, and work culture that promote strong leadership and positive organizational image. This will work in fostering belief that people are willing to support products and services they find valuable, and hence facilitate the development plans for sustainability. Financiers of socioeconomic development initiatives have responsibilities when funding development interventions, to enhance the capacity of the implementing staff and the community as part of the technical assistance at the community level (Oswald & Ruedin, 2012). This is necessary to ensure that the work activities and sub-units conform to the management objectives and to supply the information to enable the managerial hierarchy to correct any deviations from set plans (Whitley, 1999). In project management, control is central in not only directing the course of the project, but also managing the limited and scarce resources. Through this, it is possible to sustain the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Going forward, technical advisors in donor projects need to ensure there is technical transfer through capacity building initiatives such as training in project management skills such as proposal and grant writing, project design, planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Others include enhancing organizational processes such as 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. Partnerships with other private institutions are important in order to 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.

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