

Enhancing the Sustainability of Donor-Funded Projects through Resource Mobilization Strategies: Evidence from Catholic Relief Services

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20309957>

Published Date: 20-May-2026

Abstract: The sustainability of donor-funded projects remains a major concern, as many initiatives struggle to maintain operations and impact after donor withdrawal. This challenge is particularly evident in Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Kenya, which implements programs in health, education, and livelihoods largely dependent on external funding. This study examined the effect of resource mobilization strategies on the sustainability of donor-funded projects, focusing on donor diversification, local fundraising strategies, strategic partnerships, and income-generating activities. The study was grounded in Resource Dependence Theory, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and Social Capital Theory. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The target population comprised over 100 CRS Kenya staff and 805 beneficiaries, from which a sample of 277 respondents was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (correlation and multiple regression analysis). Findings revealed that donor diversification, local fundraising strategies, strategic partnerships, and income-generating activities all have a positive and statistically significant effect on the sustainability of donor-funded projects at CRS Kenya. The study concludes that diversification of funding sources reduces overreliance on single donors, local fundraising enhances ownership and accountability, strategic partnerships improve access to resources and expertise, and income-generating activities strengthen long-term financial resilience. The study recommends strengthening partnerships with local businesses through sponsorships and in-kind support, enhancing digital engagement platforms to improve donor and partner communication, promoting transparent and continuous stakeholder engagement, and investing in skills development to support income-generating activities and community self-reliance.

Keywords: Donor diversification; Resource mobilization; Strategic partnerships; Income-generating activities; Sustainability of donor-funded projects.

1. INTRODUCTION

Donor-funded projects remain central to socio-economic development in many low- and middle-income countries where domestic resources are insufficient to support development priorities. These initiatives have contributed significantly to poverty reduction, improved healthcare, enhanced access to education, and progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sachs et al., 2019). In Africa, donor support has been instrumental in addressing persistent challenges such as food insecurity, weak health systems, and inadequate infrastructure. However, despite these contributions, many donor-funded projects fail to sustain their operations and intended benefits after external funding ends due to overreliance on donors and weak resource mobilization mechanisms (Viravaidya & Hayssen, 2001; Moyo, 2009).

Project sustainability refers to the ability of donor-funded initiatives to continue delivering desired outcomes beyond the period of external support. Research shows that sustainability is strengthened through diversified funding sources, effective

governance systems, stakeholder participation, and community ownership (Khieng, 2014). In Kenya, donor-funded projects in sectors such as health, agriculture, education, and governance have improved healthcare access, agricultural productivity, and educational opportunities (Kuria & Wanyoike, 2016). Nevertheless, many projects experience sustainability challenges due to inadequate exit strategies, weak institutional capacity, and limited community ownership after donor withdrawal (Wambua, 2020).

To address these challenges, organizations increasingly rely on resource mobilization strategies to enhance long-term project viability. Resource mobilization involves identifying, acquiring, and effectively utilizing financial and non-financial resources to support organizational goals (Karuga, Mutuku & Sang, 2024). Common strategies include donor diversification, local fundraising, strategic partnerships, stakeholder engagement, and income-generating activities (Collins & James, 2018). Empirical studies indicate that organizations with strong governance structures, transparent financial systems, and diversified funding bases are more likely to achieve sustainability and financial resilience (Chishugi, 2012; Khieng, 2014). However, many local organizations continue to struggle with donor dependency, limited fundraising capacity, and inadequate long-term planning (Batti, 2014).

In Kenya, organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Kenya have implemented donor-funded programs in health, education, agriculture, livelihoods, and humanitarian assistance. Through partnerships with agencies such as USAID and the Global Fund, CRS Kenya has contributed to disease prevention, poverty reduction, educational development, and emergency response interventions (Tata & McNamara, 2018; Amanuel, 2022). Despite these achievements, concerns persist regarding the sustainability of projects once donor funding is withdrawn, largely due to weak resource mobilization efforts and limited institutionalization of sustainability frameworks (Wambua, 2020).

Although previous studies have examined project sustainability and resource mobilization broadly, limited attention has been given to the specific resource mobilization strategies adopted by CRS Kenya and their influence on long-term project sustainability. Existing studies also focus largely on short-term project outcomes with minimal emphasis on community resilience and ownership beyond donor support (Batti, 2014; Collins & James, 2018). This study therefore seeks to examine how resource mobilization strategies enhance sustainability of donor-funded projects at CRS Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored on the growing concern that the sustainability of donor-funded projects depends largely on the effectiveness of resource mobilization strategies adopted by implementing organizations. Sustainability, in this context, refers to the ability of projects to continue delivering intended outcomes beyond the withdrawal of donor support. Existing literature consistently shows that while donor-funded interventions have significantly contributed to socio-economic development in low- and middle-income countries, many of them fail to sustain their gains due to overdependence on external funding and weak resource mobilization systems (Viravaidya & Hayssen, 2001; Moyo, 2009).

Theoretically, the study is grounded in Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), and Social Capital Theory. RDT posits that organizations depend on external resources for survival and must strategically manage interdependencies by diversifying funding sources and forming partnerships to reduce vulnerability (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, its limitation lies in its strong emphasis on external dependence while underplaying internal organizational capacity and innovation.

The SLF complements this perspective by emphasizing that sustainability is influenced by the interaction of various livelihood assets, including financial, human, social, physical, and natural capital. These assets, when effectively mobilized, strengthen resilience and long-term sustainability of development interventions. Nevertheless, SLF has been criticized for oversimplifying complex development realities and inadequately addressing power relations and structural inequalities that shape access to resources (Natarajan et al., 2022).

Social Capital Theory further strengthens the conceptual foundation by emphasizing the role of trust, networks, and relationships in facilitating resource mobilization. Strong bonding, bridging, and linking social capital enhance collaboration, improve access to resources, and strengthen organizational legitimacy (Kreuter & Lezin, 2002; Hauberer, 2011). However, the theory has been critiqued for assuming equal access to networks while ignoring exclusionary dynamics and power imbalances that may limit resource distribution.

Empirical literature broadly supports the argument that resource mobilization strategies significantly influence sustainability outcomes. Studies on donor diversification consistently show that organizations with multiple funding sources are more financially stable and resilient compared to those dependent on a single donor (Achieng, 2016; Muriithi, 2020). Similarly,

evidence from Kenya and other developing contexts indicates that diversified funding improves service delivery and organizational adaptability, although it may also introduce administrative complexity and increased accountability demands (Nato & Gaiku, 2022).

Local fundraising strategies have also been identified as important in reducing donor dependency and strengthening sustainability. Evidence suggests that community contributions, membership fees, and locally driven fundraising initiatives enhance ownership and continuity of projects (Mwangi, 2021; Rwehumbiza & Donat, 2017). However, these strategies are often constrained by low income levels, limited fundraising capacity, and weak institutional systems. Effective fundraising is therefore closely linked to transparency, donor relations, and organizational capacity development (Love, 2018; Saka, 2015).

Strategic partnerships further contribute to sustainability by enabling organizations to leverage complementary resources, expertise, and networks. Studies show that partnerships between NGOs, governments, and private sector actors enhance resource mobilization, improve technical capacity, and strengthen community engagement (Otundo, 2024; Karanja, 2021). Globally, successful partnerships are characterized by shared objectives, trust, and accountability mechanisms, although coordination challenges and power imbalances can undermine their effectiveness (Nielsen & Neergaard, 2018).

Income-generating activities (IGAs) also play a critical role in enhancing financial sustainability by reducing reliance on donor funding. Evidence indicates that NGOs and community-based organizations engaging in IGAs such as agribusiness, microfinance, and social enterprises are better positioned to sustain operations after donor exit (Busienei, 2017; Omondi, 2022). These activities promote financial independence, community ownership, and resilience, although they are often limited by inadequate entrepreneurial skills, weak market access, and insufficient capital (Mulusa et al., 2021).

Overall, the literature suggests that sustainability is not driven by a single factor but by a combination of resource mobilization strategies that interact to enhance financial stability, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement. However, most existing studies focus on general NGO contexts and emphasize short-term financial outcomes, with limited attention to integrated strategy effects and long-term sustainability dynamics within specific implementing organizations.

In the Kenyan context, particularly within organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, donor-funded projects have played a major role in improving health, education, livelihoods, and humanitarian outcomes. Despite these achievements, sustainability challenges persist, especially after donor exit, largely due to weak resource mobilization systems and limited institutionalization of sustainability mechanisms. What remains insufficiently explored is how specific resource mobilization strategies interact to influence long-term sustainability outcomes within CRS Kenya projects.

This study therefore addresses this gap by examining how resource mobilization strategies including donor diversification, local fundraising, strategic partnerships, and income-generating activities collectively enhance the sustainability of donor-funded projects in CRS Kenya.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (CONCISE JOURNAL SUMMARY)

This study adopted a **descriptive cross-sectional survey design** to examine the relationship between resource mobilization strategies and sustainability of donor-funded projects. The design was appropriate as it allowed collection and analysis of data at a single point in time without manipulation of variables (Zikmund, 2003; Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The study was conducted within the Catholic Relief Services, targeting 905 respondents (100 staff and 805 beneficiaries). A sample of 277 respondents was selected using stratified sampling followed by simple random sampling to ensure proportional representation across groups (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008).

Data were collected using structured questionnaires containing both closed- and open-ended questions. A pilot test involving 10 respondents from a similar NGO was conducted to refine the instrument. Validity was ensured through expert review and factor analysis, while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.715$), indicating acceptable internal consistency (Ursachi et al., 2015). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used alongside inferential statistics, including correlation and multiple regression analysis, to test relationships between donor diversification, local fundraising strategies, strategic partnerships, and income-generating activities on project sustainability. The study model was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

where Y represents sustainability and X_1 – X_4 represent the independent variables.

Ethical standards were observed through informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and proper citation of all sources.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics Results

4.1.1 Donor Diversification

Table 4.1: Donor Diversification

Statements	M	St.Dev
The organization has a sufficient number of donors to support its operations	4.36	0.643
The types of donors we engage with include diverse sectors (e.g., individuals, institutions, corporations).	4.04	1.067
CRS Kenya effectively utilizes various funding mechanisms, such as grants and contracts	3.97	1.148
The organization ensures no over-reliance on a single donor	4.24	0.772
Donor diversification enhances the organization’s financial stability	3.51	1.256
Engagement with a wide range of donors aligns with the mission of CRS Kenya.	3.65	1.349
Aggregate score	3.96	1.039

The findings indicate that donor diversification is generally perceived positively in CRS Kenya, with an overall mean of 3.96. This suggests that respondents agree that diversified funding enhances organizational resilience by reducing dependency on single donors and broadening funding sources. The high agreement on donor sufficiency (mean = 4.36) and avoidance of over-reliance (mean = 4.24) shows strong institutional confidence in diversified funding structures.

However, perceptions are less uniform regarding the extent to which diversification directly improves financial stability (mean = 3.51). This implies that while diversification is valued, it is not viewed as sufficient on its own to guarantee sustainability. The relatively moderate score on mission alignment (mean = 3.65) also suggests partial concerns regarding alignment between donor priorities and organizational goals. Overall, the findings imply that donor diversification enhances resilience but must be complemented by strong financial systems, capacity building, and alignment mechanisms to fully support sustainability.

4.1.2 Local Fundraising Strategies

Table 4.2: Local Fundraising Strategies

Statements	M	St.Dev
CRS Kenya engages a sufficient number of local donors	3.99	1.010
Local fundraising events are effective in mobilizing resources	3.67	1.329
The organization benefits from recurring donations from local donors	4.66	0.339
Community members actively support local fundraising initiatives.	4.47	0.528
Local fundraising efforts contribute significantly to project sustainability	4.08	0.899
CRS Kenya successfully leverages local networks for fundraising	4.49	0.507
Aggregate score	4.23	0.769

The results show a strong consensus that local fundraising strategies significantly enhance sustainability at CRS Kenya (overall mean = 4.23). High levels of agreement on recurring donations (mean = 4.66) and community participation (mean = 4.47) indicate strong local ownership and trust in fundraising initiatives.

The findings suggest that predictable local funding sources are increasingly important in reducing dependency on external donors. Although fundraising events are considered effective (mean = 3.67), variation in responses indicates inconsistencies in outcomes, likely due to capacity limitations. Overall, local fundraising is confirmed as a key sustainability pillar, strengthened by community engagement, trust, and network utilization, but requiring continuous capacity building and improved fundraising systems.

4.1.3 Strategic Partnerships

Table 4.3: Strategic Partnerships

Statements	M	St.Dev
CRS Kenya’s partnerships align with its goals and values	4.32	0.678
Strategic partnerships offer mutual benefits to all parties involved	4.28	0.719
The organization maintains a strong and reliable partner network	4.56	0.439
Partnerships have contributed to the successful implementation of projects	4.09	1.909
CRS Kenya engages in partnerships that enhance project sustainability	4.49	0.507
CRS Kenya’s partnerships foster innovation and knowledge sharing	4.47	0.528
Aggregate score	4.37	0.797

Strategic partnerships are widely perceived as highly effective in enhancing sustainability (mean = 4.37). Respondents strongly agree that partnerships contribute to resource mobilization, innovation, and project implementation. The high mean for partner network strength (4.56) indicates well-established collaborative structures.

The findings further show that partnerships improve sustainability through shared resources and knowledge exchange. However, the relatively high variability in responses regarding project implementation (St.Dev = 1.909) suggests inconsistencies in partnership performance, likely due to coordination or alignment challenges. Overall, strategic partnerships emerge as a critical sustainability driver, although their effectiveness depends on governance, alignment of goals, and strong coordination mechanisms.

4.1.4 Income Generating Activities

Table 4.4: Income Generating Activities

Statements	M	St.Dev
CRS Kenya has effective income-generating strategies in place.	3.94	1.059
The organization maintains a diversified income base from its activities	4.28	0.725
Income-generating activities provide significant financial support for projects	3.74	1.260
CRS Kenya offers products or services that generate sustainable income	3.90	1.096
Income-generating activities align with the organization’s mission	3.76	1.240
The revenue from these activities is reinvested into projects to enhance sustainability.	3.94	1.056
Aggregate score	3.93	1.073

The findings show that income-generating activities moderately enhance sustainability (mean = 3.93). Respondents agree that IGAs contribute to income diversification and reinvestment into projects, thereby reducing donor dependency.

However, the moderate ratings on financial contribution (3.74) and mission alignment (3.76) suggest implementation challenges, including limited market integration and potential misalignment with organizational objectives. Despite these limitations, IGAs remain an important supplementary sustainability strategy, particularly when integrated with strong institutional capacity and clear strategic direction.

4.1.5 Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

Table 4.5: Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

Statements	M	St.Dev
CRS Kenya ensures the financial sustainability of its projects	3.16	1.84
Institutional sustainability measures are in place to support ongoing operations	4.48	0.635
Projects are aligned with relevant policy and legal frameworks	3.07	1.930
Beneficiaries are involved in ensuring project sustainability	3.07	1.329
The organization invests in capacity-building to sustain projects long-term	3.40	1.600
Sustainability considerations are integrated into the project design phase	3.46	1.540
Aggregate score	3.44	1.479

The overall findings indicate moderate sustainability levels (mean = 3.44), suggesting that CRS Kenya has made progress in institutional strengthening but still faces notable challenges in financial sustainability, policy alignment, and beneficiary involvement.

Institutional sustainability received the highest rating (mean = 4.48), showing strong internal systems, while financial sustainability (3.16) and beneficiary involvement (3.07) remain weak. This indicates that sustainability is driven more by organizational structures than by community ownership or financial independence. Overall, the findings highlight the need for stronger integration of community participation, diversified financing, and improved policy alignment to ensure long-term project viability.

4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4.6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.896	0.803	0.781	0.527

The model shows a strong explanatory power, with an adjusted R² of 0.781, indicating that 78.1% of variation in sustainability of donor-funded projects is explained by donor diversification, local fundraising strategies, strategic partnerships, and income-generating activities. The remaining 21.9% is explained by other external or unmeasured factors.

Table 4.7: Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	310.598	4	77.649	93.209	0.004
Residual	216.596	260	0.833062		
Total	527.194	264			

The ANOVA results confirm that the model is statistically significant ($p = 0.004 < 0.05$), indicating that the independent variables jointly have a significant effect on sustainability of donor-funded projects.

Table 4.8: Coefficient Analysis

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.597	0.251		2.378	0.002
Donor diversification	0.708	0.306	0.264	2.314	0.003
Local fundraising strategies	0.776	0.298	0.278	2.604	0.003
Strategic partnerships	0.802	0.227	0.306	3.533	0.001
Income generating activities	0.793	0.311	0.299	2.549	0.002

The regression results show that all four variables significantly and positively influence sustainability. Strategic partnerships ($\beta = 0.306$) have the strongest effect, followed by income-generating activities ($\beta = 0.299$), local fundraising strategies ($\beta = 0.278$), and donor diversification ($\beta = 0.264$). This implies that sustainability in CRS Kenya is most strongly driven by collaboration mechanisms and alternative resource mobilization strategies rather than donor diversification alone.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that donor diversification enhances the sustainability of donor-funded projects by reducing overdependence on single funding sources and improving organizational resilience. It also broadens access to varied expertise and resources, strengthening project adaptability and long-term continuity.

Local community engagement in funding is found to be critical in fostering ownership, accountability, and commitment to project outcomes. This involvement enhances resource mobilization and strengthens community responsibility, thereby improving sustainability.

Strategic partnerships are also concluded to be essential in enhancing sustainability through improved access to resources, technical expertise, and networks. Such collaborations promote innovation, strengthen coordination, and improve project effectiveness.

Finally, income-generating activities contribute to sustainability by reducing donor dependency and promoting self-reliance. These activities support skills development, entrepreneurship, and reinvestment of locally generated resources, thereby strengthening long-term project viability.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening engagement with local businesses through sponsorships, partnerships, and in-kind support to enhance resource mobilization. Organizations should also deepen community participation in fundraising and project ownership through awareness creation and sharing of impact stories.

Digital platforms should be leveraged to expand donor engagement, improve communication, and mobilize wider support. Continuous community education and sensitization should be undertaken to strengthen understanding of organizational goals and encourage participation.

In addition, strategic partnerships should be reinforced through regular communication, joint problem-solving, and trust-building mechanisms. Capacity building for partners should be prioritized to enhance collaboration effectiveness and sustainability outcomes.

Finally, income-generating activities should be strengthened through skills training, entrepreneurial development, and market linkages. Early community involvement in project design is recommended to ensure alignment with local needs, while partnerships with private sector actors should be expanded to improve access to markets and resources.

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