

MANAGING UNCERTAINTY: ADAPTIVE RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND PROJECT SUCCESS IN NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN KENYA

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Abstract: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in developing countries persist in the difficulty of sustaining operations due to constrained and volatile resource availability. Operating in unpredictable and risk-prone environments further complicates this challenge. This paper explores how project risk management shapes resource mobilization efforts among NGOs. Deducing from the Resource-Based View theory (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), it argues that strong risk identification, risk assessment, and risk mitigation practices enhance organizational credibility, uplift stakeholder confidence, and increase access to long-term funding. Evidence from previous studies (Asawo et al., 2021; Micheni et al., 2025; Mmaitisi, 2020) demonstrates that Managing Uncertainty in Projects serves as a strategic tool for resource mobilization by building donor trust and ensuring project sustainability. This paper proposes a Project Risk Management resource mobilization framework and recommends institutionalizing risk management as part of NGO fundraising and donor-engagement strategies.

Keywords: Uncertainty Management, Adaptive resource mobilization, Project Success.

1. INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in delivering essential services in health, education, and community development. However, their ability to remain operational depends largely on how effectively they mobilize financial, human, and material resources (ICNL, 2022; Micheni et al., 2025). Most NGOs operate in environments characterized by Economical uncertainty, governance challenges, and operational risks (Mmaitisi, 2020). Weak and poorly executed risk management systems often lead to donor withdrawal and a decline in funding (Rafindadi & Olanrewaju, 2019). Alternatively, organizations with robust risk management practices tend to inspire greater donor confidence and attract more resources (Bagh et al., 2017; Benard et al., 2023).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) based in Kenya are crucial drivers of social-economic growth within the country but operate under most active and multifaceted environments within Sub-Saharan Africa (Kiplagat & Kipkoech, 2020). Bachore (2021) observe that NGOs in Kenya operates within an environment categorized by great unpredictability shaped by three main forces namely; political instability, economic and financial changes, environmental and social burdens resulting to absence of predictability and dependability, making it a challenge for these NGOs to mobilize resources. According to Tsuma (2023), the challenging environment that is faced by the NGOs in Kenya with fast changes based on natural and governance systems disrupts project timelines, reallocation of finances and necessity for urgent humanitarian changes that can negatively affect their stability if not foreseen.

Adaptive resource mobilization is vital for project achievement within NGOs in Kenya since it permits these organizations to reply effectively to varying situations and financing backgrounds (Gutheil, 2021). Mahmoud and Karia (2022) observe that NGOs can improve their flexibility and sustainability through diversification of their financing sources, establishing strategic partnerships, seeking support from the community and establishing impact. According to Kurnosenko (2025), successful mobilization of resources includes innovative fundraising policies, capacity enhancement and adaptive administration practices that aligns resources within the project goals, eventually resulting to improved project results.

1.1 Problem Statement

Regardless of the fundamental role played by the NGOs in Kenya's economic and social development, majority of NGOs within the country faces substantial challenges in realizing positive success of their project success owing rigid resource administration frameworks (Gutheil, 2021). Ngiri and Njagi (2022) argue that the traditional model used in mobilizing resources regularly assume an unchanging environment, concentrating on fixed multi-year finances and static staffing strategies. However, when subjected to inherent unpredictability's of the Kenya's setting, the rigidity of these models frequently contributes to failure. The fundamental problem is that uncertainty regularly results to poor alignment of resources, where money, human capital, and materials are sheltered into obsolete project schemes that no longer align the actuality on the ground, resulting in budget overruns, unachieved project milestones and minimized stakeholder confidence.

There is a crucial knowledge gap concerning the way adaptive resource mobilization through capability in flexing, diversifying and reallocation of resources within real-time acts as a moderating aspects linking the environmental uncertainty and project success. Therefore, poor understanding of these adaptive devices can make the NGOs in Kenya remain susceptible to external turbulence, frightening their sustainability impact and the general achievement of their developmental interventions.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 General Objective

To examine the influence of managing uncertainty through adaptive resource mobilization on project success in NGOs.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To analyse the nature and sources of uncertainty affecting NGO projects.
- ii. To assess the adaptive resource mobilization strategies employed by NGOs under conditions of uncertainty.
- iii. To determine the relationship between adaptive resource mobilization and project success in NGOs.

1.2.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the key sources of uncertainty in NGO projects?
- ii. Which adaptive resource mobilization strategies do NGOs use in response to uncertainty?
- iii. How do adaptive resource mobilization strategies influence project success indicators such as effectiveness, timeliness, and sustainability?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Resource Based View Theory

This study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991, 1995), which holds that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by developing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. In the context of NGOs, effective Project Risk Management can be considered a unique organizational capability that enhances credibility, operational stability, and reputation intangible resources that are critical for securing donor funding. The Resource-Based View (RBV) pioneered by Wernerfelt (1984) and refined by Barney (1991), posits that the source of an organization's sustained competitive advantage lies within its internal environment rather than its external market position. According to this framework, an organization is a bundle of resources and capabilities. To provide a competitive edge, these resources must meet the VRIO criteria: they must be Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and supported by the Organization.

While RBV was originally conceptualized for firm profitability, its application to NGOs shifts the focus from market share to mission sustainability. In a crowded humanitarian landscape, NGOs compete for finite donor resources. Therefore, competitive advantage in this paper is defined as the ability to attract long-term funding and maintain stakeholder trust more effectively than peer organizations. Project Risk Management (PRM) is not merely as a compliance exercise, but as a sophisticated organizational capability. PRM involves the systematic identification, assessment, and mitigation of uncertainties that could derail project objectives. When an NGO moves beyond ad-hoc problem solving and embeds PRM into its DNA, it creates a resource that is: valuable (protects project outcomes and ensures the efficient use of donor funds), rare (many NGOs lack the technical infrastructure or cultural maturity to manage risk proactively and inimitable (a culture of risk-awareness and the institutional memory of past mitigations are socially complex and difficult for competitors to replicate overnight).

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Liu et al., 2009) complements this view by emphasizing the need for organizations to continually adapt to environmental changes. By integrating Project Risk Management into resource mobilization strategies, NGOs can anticipate risks, respond effectively to disruptions, and build trust with donors, thereby ensuring a steady flow of resources. The integration of Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Liu et al., 2009) adds more to the Resource-Based View: that simply possessing valuable resources is insufficient if the environment changes. For an NGO, having a good reputation is not enough if a sudden global pandemic or a local political coup renders their current operational model obsolete. The synthesis of the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory provides a robust framework for understanding NGO sustainability in an increasingly volatile global landscape. While RBV highlights the necessity of developing (PRM) as a foundational, valuable, and inimitable organizational resource, Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how this resource must be orchestrated to meet shifting donor expectations and field realities.

Empirical Review

Uncertainty in NGOs Projects

Singh, Martins and Tefera (2022) examined the Nonprofit organisational resilience: proposing a conceptual adaptive capacity structure. A perusal of pertinent literature was carried out to recognize the adaptive capabilities of NPOs. A total of 137 peer-reviewed articles were recognised through electronic databases consisting of EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Academic Search Complete. A thematic examination of the literature evaluated resulted in 15 adaptive capacity themes that guaranteed the projected conceptual framework. The study found that Nonprofit organisational flexibility could be realised through development of unified adaptive capacities acknowledged in the wider categories that included culture, leadership and human capital, tactical management; and tactical development and reformation.

Arvidson and Linde (2021) examined the control and autonomy: resource dependence relations and non-profit organizations. The research was grounded on interviews and participant observations within NPOs and their financiers for a period of time. The study reported from four diverse financing-relations namely; contract-led, social investment, gift-financed and civil society–public collaboration. The examination illustrated the value in revealing the diverse discretionary limits connected to external control and how control could lead to a sparring partner within organization's struggling for autonomy.

Risk management involves the systematic identification, assessment, and mitigation of potential threats to project success (Kariuki, 2022; Omire & Mangana, 2025). Research in Kenya (Wabomba, 2015; James & Jackline, 2023) and Uganda (Benard et al., 2023; Kinene & Musiimenta, 2024) confirms that strong Project Risk Management practices reduce financial losses, improve operational efficiency, and enhance organizational performance. In the NGO sector, Project Risk Management is increasingly viewed as essential for accountability and transparency, two factors critical to maintaining donor trust (Rafindadi & Olanrewaju, 2019).

Most NGOs operate in environments characterized by Economical uncertainty, governance challenges, and operational risks (Mmaiti, 2020). Weak and poorly executed risk management systems often lead to donor withdrawal and a decline in funding (Rafindadi & Olanrewaju, 2019). Alternatively, organizations with robust risk management practices tend to inspire greater donor confidence and attract more resources (Bagh et al., 2017; Benard et al., 2023). Early detection of potential financial, operational, and reputational risks increases donor trust (Wenk, 2010; Okeyo, 2020).

Adaptive Resource Mobilization Strategies

Resource mobilization refers to the process of acquiring financial, human, and material resources necessary for program implementation (ICNL, 2022). NGOs use diverse strategies such as forming partnerships, engaging donors, and generating income through social enterprises (Mechai Viravaidya & Hayssen, 2020). However, Mmaitisi (2020) notes that NGOs in Kenya face stiff competition for donor funding, governance-related challenges, and persistent trust deficits, which limit their fundraising potential. Resource mobilization literature in NGOs emphasizes the need to diversify funding sources, shifting from dependence on single donors towards combinations of grants, corporate partnerships, community fundraising, social enterprise, and in-kind support. Successful NGOs segment donor markets, align proposals with donor priorities, and invest in fundraising capacity, including staff training in proposal writing and relationship management.

Adaptive strategies in uncertain contexts include flexible budgeting, decentralized decision-making, rapid reallocation of funds, and leveraging local partnerships to access complementary resources. Case work on adaptable NGO projects finds that flexibility, responsiveness, and inclusiveness such as involving local stakeholders in decisions and having budgets that can shift across budget lines enhance the ability to handle shocks and maintain operations. In addition, participatory resource allocation, where communities and frontline staff help prioritize spending, has been associated with higher project relevance and NGOs use diverse strategies such as forming partnerships, engaging donors, and generating income through social enterprises (Mechai Viravaidya & Hayssen, 2020). However, Mmaitisi (2020) notes that NGOs in Kenya face stiff competition for donor funding, governance-related challenges, and persistent trust deficits, which limit their fundraising potential.

Studies in Kenya (Wabomba, 2015; James & Dr. Jackline, 2023) and Uganda (Benard et al., 2023; Kinene & Musiimenta, 2024) have shown that effective Project Risk Management positively correlates with organizational performance by reducing operational disruptions and financial losses sustainability.

Adaptive Resource Mobilization and Project Success

Recent studies highlight a clear link between Project Risk Management and resource mobilization. Asawo et al. (2021) showed that capacity building in risk and financial management improved resource mobilization in irrigation projects, while Micheni et al (2025) found that health-sector projects with established Project Risk Management systems achieved greater financial sustainability. By protecting project outcomes and demonstrating accountability, Project Risk Management signals to donors that an NGO can manage funds responsibly (Bagh et al., 2017; Nair et al., 2014). Empirical evidence from non-profit settings suggests that effective resource allocation and management positively correlate with project success, including higher rates of goal achievement, improved transparency, and stronger sustainability. Surveys and longitudinal studies of non-profit organizations show that projects with structured budgeting, clear forecasting, and defined allocation processes report significantly higher success rates than those without such systems.

Kenyan NGOs that adopted strategic risk management measures during the COVID-19 pandemic reported increased donor support due to improved organizational credibility (Barasa, 2022; Munyao & Maina, 2023). Thus, Project Risk Management is not only a defensive tool but a strategic asset for mobilizing resources.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a desk review methodology, involving a systematic analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles to examine uncertainty, adaptive resource mobilization, and project success in NGOs. Relevant studies published from 2018 onwards were identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar, and institutional repositories, with emphasis on empirical research and African contexts. Articles were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria focusing on relevance, methodological rigor, and alignment with the study objectives. The selected literature was analysed thematically to identify sources of uncertainty, adaptive resource mobilization practices, and their relationship with project success. Findings from the reviewed studies were synthesized to draw conclusions, identify empirical gaps, and develop evidence-based recommendations for strengthening NGO project performance under uncertainty

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The reviewed literature so far indicates that NGOs operate in increasingly uncertain environments driven by volatile funding, policy shifts, and contextual shocks, which significantly affect project planning and performance. NGOs that develop adaptive resource mobilization capabilities such as diversified funding portfolios, flexible budgeting, decentralized decision-making, and participatory allocation appear better positioned to sustain projects and achieve intended outcomes.

The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that Managing Uncertainty significantly contributes to resource mobilization in NGOs. By strengthening risk management systems, organizations can improve accountability, increase donor confidence, and secure long-term funding for sustainable operations.

Evidence from non-profit and project resilience studies suggests a positive relationship between effective resource allocation and project success, but there remains a conceptual and empirical gap in explicitly linking adaptive resource mobilization under uncertainty to project success in NGOs. Addressing this gap offers an opportunity to refine theory on dynamic capabilities and project resilience while generating actionable guidance for NGOs seeking to improve project outcomes in challenging contexts

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the management of unforeseen circumstances within the Kenya's NGO industry is not just around having enough cash but additionally possessing a diverse array of resources. Adaptive resource mobilization is a strategic cushion that guards project results from the unavoidable variations of the resident political and environmental setting.

The study recommends that diversification ought to comprise a blend of international donations, locally generated revenue, and non-financial community resources. The regulatory monitoring is indispensable to forestall political influences before they impact the suitability of financing. Agreements of flexible financing should be discussed with donors to permit for quick reallocation through climate-linked disasters. The investment in local labor force could offer stronger resilient and economical response instrument than depending on just global expertise.

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