International Journal of Multidisciplinary Department
Published by: International Journal & Research Global Publisher
ISSN: 3108-2718

Research Article

EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF WITHDRAWAL OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE OPERATIONS OF NGOs: CHARTING A PATHWAY FOR FUTURE LOCAL DONOR ORGANIZATIONS

[1*]DR. ISAH IBRAHIM SALISU Ph.D [2] EDIDIONG IDANG

[1&2] Department of Public Administration Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Article History:
Received: 02 June 2026 | **Accepted:** 10 June 2026 | **Published:** 17 June 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20733075

*** Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.*

Abstract

The withdrawal of international donor organizations from many African countries has generated significant implications for the operational sustainability of local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Historically, international organizations have played central roles in funding technical assistance, humanitarian interventions, governance strengthening, policy influence, and institutional capacity development across Africa. However, changing geopolitical priorities, economic recessions, localization policies, donor fatigue, anti-NGO regulations, and the global transition from aid-based engagement to trade-oriented partnerships have contributed to the gradual reduction of donor presence in several developing regions. This study examines the effects of withdrawal of international organizations on the operations of NGOs and charts a pathway for future local donor organizations in Africa. The findings reveal that the withdrawal of international organizations exposes critical institutional vulnerabilities within local NGOs, including funding collapse, staff layoffs, weak adaptive capacity, reduced service delivery, mission drift, and fragile organizational sustainability. The study concludes that the future sustainability of African NGOs depends on deliberate efforts to decolonize development practice, institutionalize participatory governance, strengthen local philanthropy, and invest in resilient institutional systems. The emergence of African-led philanthropic organizations such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Dangote Foundation, Abdul Samad Rabiu Africa Initiative, African Women's Development Fund, and TrustAfrica presents significant opportunities for redefining development financing within Africa. The study therefore recommends policy reforms that

prioritize participatory grant-making, unrestricted institutional funding, strategic co-creation, and stronger accountability mechanisms for local donor organizations.

Keywords: Sustainability, Local Ownership, Philanthropy, Africa, Donor Withdrawal, Decolonization, NGO Operations

Introduction

The long-term sustainability of nonprofit organizations in Africa remains one of the most critical debates within contemporary development discourse. For decades, international organizations and donor agencies have served as the primary financial and technical backbone of civil society organizations across the continent (African Philanthropy Forum, 2021; Eweje & Wu, 2022). Institutions such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID/FCDO), United Nations agencies, Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Gates Foundation, and several International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) have significantly shaped development programming in Africa through financial assistance, humanitarian interventions, governance reforms, public health initiatives, and institutional strengthening programs.

Historically, the influence of international donor organizations intensified during the Structural Adjustment Programme era of the 1980s and 1990s, when African governments increasingly relied on external financial institutions and donor-supported civil society interventions to cushion the effects of economic liberalization policies (Biekart & Fowler, 2022). Similarly, during major humanitarian crises, post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and HIV/AIDS intervention programs across Sub-Saharan Africa, international donor organizations became central actors in financing and coordinating social interventions (WANEP, 2022). In countries such as Nigeria, donor-funded NGOs became major implementers of development activities in areas including public health, democracy promotion, education, humanitarian relief, counter-insurgency stabilization, and poverty alleviation.

Despite these contributions, the operational architecture of international donor support has generated persistent concerns regarding dependency, donor-driven agendas, weak institutional autonomy, and the sustainability of local NGOs (Mubangizi & Ntale, 2023). The prevailing donor model has historically prioritized short-term project implementation and external accountability mechanisms over long-term investments in institutional resilience, local governance systems, and endogenous development capacity (Bridgespan Group, 2019).

Consequently, many local NGOs remain heavily dependent on foreign funding for survival, thereby exposing them to severe operational instability whenever donor priorities shift.

In recent years, significant geopolitical and economic changes have contributed to the gradual withdrawal or reduction of international donor presence in many African countries. Factors such as global economic recessions, changing foreign policy priorities, localization agendas, security concerns, donor fatigue, anti-NGO regulations, and the transition from aid-based engagement to trade-oriented diplomacy have altered the traditional donor landscape (Kponton, 2021). Examples include the reduction of HIV/AIDS donor programs, the closure or restructuring of USAID-funded initiatives in some developing countries, and declining humanitarian funding in fragile regions.

The consequences of donor withdrawal have become increasingly visible across the African nonprofit sector. Many NGOs have experienced funding collapse, staff layoffs, reduced service delivery, program discontinuity, weak institutional sustainability, increased competition for limited grants, and loss of technical expertise (Okorley & Nkrumah, 2023). In some cases, organizations have drifted away from their original missions in desperate attempts to secure alternative funding opportunities. These realities expose the fragility of donor-dependent organizational systems and raise fundamental questions regarding the future sustainability of local NGOs in Africa.

However, donor withdrawal has also generated emerging opportunities for the reconfiguration of development governance within Africa. The decline of excessive foreign donor dominance has encouraged conversations around local ownership, domestic resource mobilization, African philanthropy, community accountability, and the strengthening of indigenous development systems (Eweje & Wu, 2022; Muthoka & Mwangi, 2023). Increasingly, local philanthropic organizations and high-net-worth African individuals are becoming significant actors within the development ecosystem. Institutions such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Dangote Foundation, Abdul Samad Rabiu Africa Initiative, African Women's Development Fund, Kenya Community Development Foundation, and TrustAfrica represent emerging models of African-led philanthropy capable of supporting locally grounded development priorities.

This study therefore examines the effects of withdrawal of international organizations on the operations of NGOs and charts a pathway for future local donor organizations in Africa. Specifically, the study interrogates how donor withdrawal influences operational sustainability through three key indicators: Participatory Grant-making Influence (PGI), Institutional Capacity Investment Ratio (ICIR), and Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI). These indicators are used to evaluate the extent to which local ownership, institutional resilience, and collaborative governance can strengthen the future sustainability of African civil society organizations.

The study is situated within Postcolonial Theory, which critiques the unequal power structures embedded within traditional donor-recipient relationships and advocates the redistribution of development authority toward local actors (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Through this lens, the study contributes to contemporary debates on decolonizing development practice and strengthening self-determined African civil society institutions.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

The operational sustainability of local NGOs in Africa remains deeply threatened by excessive dependence on international donor organizations. Although donor agencies have historically played critical roles in supporting governance reforms, humanitarian interventions, public health programs, and institutional development, many local NGOs continue to struggle with weak organizational resilience, inadequate internal systems, and unstable funding structures.

The gradual withdrawal of international organizations from Africa has further exposed these vulnerabilities. Across several countries, reductions in foreign donor funding have resulted in program discontinuity, staff layoffs, weakened service delivery, institutional collapse, and reduced advocacy capacity among NGOs. The inability of many organizations to survive beyond donor-funded project cycles demonstrates the extent to which sustainability challenges are embedded within the current development financing architecture.

Additionally, existing donor models have often marginalized local agency through externally imposed priorities, restrictive funding frameworks, and donor-driven accountability systems. While concepts such as local ownership and participatory development are frequently emphasized within development discourse, genuine transfer of decision-making authority and resource control to local actors remains limited. Consequently, many NGOs continue to operate as implementers of externally designed interventions rather than autonomous institutions capable of independently defining community priorities.

Research Questions

I. Does the emerging withdrawal of international organizations create both a crisis and an opportunity for African civil society?

II. Does it expose the fragility of donor-dependent organizational systems?

III. Does it create space for strengthening local philanthropy, domestic resource mobilization, community-centered governance, and African-led development financing.

1.3 Research Objectives

I. To examine how the withdrawal of international organizations creates both a crisis and an opportunity for African civil society

II. To expose the fragility of donor-dependent organization systems

III. To analyze how the withdrawal of international organizations can strengthen local philanthropy through domestic resource mobilization and community-centered governance.

2.0 Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

2.1 International Organizations

The term International Organizations lacks a universally agreed definition due to its broad application across disciplines. Scholars generally describe International Organizations as formal institutional arrangements that operate across national boundaries to facilitate cooperation among states and non-state actors. Some literature distinguishes between Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) – created by treaties among states (e.g., UN, WTO) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) – private, non-state entities operating globally. A key issue in the literature is definitional ambiguity—some authors include multinational corporations and transnational networks, while others restrict the term to treaty-based entities.

2.2 Historical Role of International Organizations in NGO Development

International organizations have historically occupied central positions within the development architecture of Africa. Their interventions have ranged from financial support and technical assistance to governance reforms, humanitarian interventions, public health campaigns, and institutional strengthening programs.

Organizations such as USAID, DFID/FCDO, United Nations agencies, Ford Foundation, Gates Foundation, and Open Society Foundations contributed significantly to the expansion of NGO activities across Africa during the post-Cold War era. During the HIV/AIDS crisis, donor-funded interventions financed healthcare infrastructure, awareness campaigns, and community outreach programs in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa. Similarly, humanitarian interventions in conflict-affected regions such as Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Northeastern Nigeria relied heavily on international donor assistance.

International organizations also played substantial roles in governance strengthening, election monitoring, policy reforms, anti-corruption advocacy, women empowerment, and capacity building initiatives. Through grants, technical training, and strategic partnerships, donor organizations helped expand the operational reach of local NGOs across Africa.

However, scholars increasingly argue that while donor support contributed significantly to development interventions, it also institutionalized dependency-oriented systems. The heavy reliance on externally controlled funding structures limited organizational autonomy and encouraged compliance with donor priorities rather than community-defined needs.

2.3 Causes of Withdrawal of International Organizations

The withdrawal or reduction of international donor presence in Africa has been driven by several interconnected factors.

First, geopolitical changes and shifting foreign policy priorities among Western countries have significantly influenced donor engagement patterns. Many donor governments increasingly prioritize domestic economic challenges, migration control, and strategic trade relationships over long-term development assistance.

Second, global economic recessions and financial crises have reduced available development funding. Economic pressures within donor countries have contributed to budget cuts affecting international aid programs.

Third, localization and nationalization policies within the global development sector have encouraged the transfer of responsibilities to local institutions and governments. Increasing criticism of donor dependency has accelerated calls for African ownership of development interventions.

Fourth, security concerns and political instability in some African regions have constrained donor operations. In several conflict-affected areas, security risks have reduced the willingness of international organizations to maintain direct operational presence.

Fifth, there has been a growing transition from aid-based engagement toward trade and investment-oriented partnerships. International actors increasingly emphasize economic diplomacy, private-sector investment, and market-based development approaches.

Finally, anti-NGO regulations and shrinking civic spaces in some countries have created hostile operational environments for international organizations. Increased state restrictions on foreign-funded civil society activities have further contributed to donor withdrawal.

2.4 Effects of Withdrawal of International Organizations on NGOs

The withdrawal of international organizations has produced significant operational consequences for local NGOs.

Operational Effects

The most immediate effect has been funding collapse. Many NGOs heavily dependent on external grants struggle to maintain operations after donor withdrawal. This often results in staff layoffs, reduced service delivery, project discontinuity, and weakened organizational sustainability.

Additionally, donor withdrawal frequently leads to the loss of technical expertise and institutional mentorship previously provided by international organizations. Many NGOs experience administrative decline due to limited access to professional training, strategic planning support, and financial management systems.

The reduction of available grants also intensifies competition among NGOs, often encouraging mission drift as organizations pursue unrelated funding opportunities for survival. Advocacy activities are similarly weakened because organizations prioritize operational survival over long-term policy engagement.

Positive Effects

Despite these challenges, donor withdrawal has also generated positive outcomes. The decline of excessive donor influence encourages local ownership and community accountability. NGOs increasingly explore innovative approaches to domestic resource mobilization, social enterprise development, and local philanthropy.

Furthermore, reduced donor conditionality creates opportunities for context-sensitive programming aligned with community realities rather than externally imposed agendas. Emerging African philanthropic organizations also provide alternative pathways for strengthening locally grounded development financing.

2.5 Emergence and Future of Local Donor Organizations

The decline of traditional donor dominance has accelerated the emergence of African-led philanthropic organizations and domestic funding mechanisms. Institutions such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Dangote Foundation, Abdul Samad Rabiu Africa Initiative, African Women's Development Fund, TrustAfrica, and Kenya Community Development Foundation increasingly represent important sources of local development financing within Africa (African Philanthropy Forum, 2021).

African philanthropy differs significantly from traditional Western aid models because it is often rooted in indigenous values such as Ubuntu, communal solidarity, Harambee, and collective responsibility (Eweje & Wu, 2022; Muthoka & Mwangi, 2023). Local philanthropic organizations tend to demonstrate stronger contextual understanding of community realities and may be more willing to support culturally relevant and locally defined interventions.

However, the sustainability of local donor organizations also faces significant challenges, including governance concerns, political influence, limited funding scale, weak accountability systems, and insufficient institutional structures. While local philanthropy presents substantial opportunities for reducing dependency on external donors, its long-term effectiveness depends on transparency, institutional professionalism, and regulatory accountability.

3.0 Empirical Review

3.1 Participatory Grant-making and Sustainability of NGOs in Africa

Kaba (2021) examined participatory grant-making as a mechanism for redistributing power within philanthropy and strengthening community-centered development practice. The study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design involving philanthropic initiatives in the United States that implemented participatory grant-making models. Data were collected through interviews, institutional documents, and participant observations. The findings revealed that participatory grant-making increased community legitimacy, improved funding alignment with grassroots priorities, and strengthened organizational responsiveness. However, institutional resistance from traditional donor boards and concerns over control remained major challenges. The study concluded that participatory grant-making is essential for dismantling paternalistic donor structures and promoting community ownership within development practice. This study is relevant because it provides empirical justification for Participatory Grant-making Influence (PGI) as a critical determinant of NGO sustainability.

Mubangizi and Ntale (2023) investigated the concept of local ownership within African development interventions using comparative qualitative case studies across East and Southern Africa. The study found that local ownership often exists only rhetorically because international donors continue to dominate financial and strategic decision-making processes. The findings revealed that projects characterized by substantive local ownership demonstrated stronger sustainability outcomes than projects driven by external donor agendas. The study concluded that local ownership must involve genuine authority over resources, strategy, and institutional governance. This study is directly relevant because it strengthens the conceptual foundation for operational sustainability and community-centered governance within NGOs.

Biekart and Fowler (2022) critically analyzed the politics of ownership within North-South development partnerships. Using longitudinal qualitative analysis, the study found that international donors frequently maintain control through financial mechanisms, reporting frameworks, and technical expertise requirements. These practices create what the authors describe as "illusory ownership," where local organizations implement externally designed agendas without genuine autonomy. The study concluded that ownership within development practice is fundamentally political and cannot be achieved without deliberate redistribution of power. This study is significant because it provides the political economy foundation for understanding Participatory Grant-making Influence (PGI) and Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI).

3.2. Institutional Capacity Funding and NGO Sustainability

The Bridgespan Group (2019) examined the effects of underfunding nonprofit institutional systems through a mixed-methods study involving nonprofit financial analysis, surveys, and interviews. The study identified the "nonprofit starvation cycle," where organizations are denied adequate overhead funding and therefore struggle to invest in governance systems, staffing, technology, and institutional infrastructure. The findings revealed that organizations receiving unrestricted institutional support demonstrated stronger resilience and program effectiveness. The study concluded that long-term sustainability depends heavily on institutional capacity investment rather than project-specific financing alone. This study provides direct empirical support for the Institutional Capacity Investment Ratio (ICIR).

Okorley and Nkrumah (2023) developed a three-pillar framework for nonprofit sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa using mixed-methods research involving NGOs in Ghana. The findings identified financial viability, operational effectiveness, and community embeddedness as critical pillars of sustainability. Organizations demonstrating balanced strength across these pillars showed higher resilience and long-term effectiveness. The study concluded that nonprofit sustainability requires holistic institutional development rather than narrow financial survival strategies. This study is highly relevant because it strengthens the operational understanding of sustainability within African NGOs.

Sanyal and Rao (2022) conceptualized nonprofit resilience using grounded theory analysis involving nonprofit organizations that survived major crises across multiple countries. The study identified strategic adaptability, financial agility, internal cohesion, and community embeddedness as major determinants of resilience. The study concluded that resilient organizations intentionally cultivate adaptive systems capable of responding to shocks and uncertainty. This study enriches the present study's understanding of operational sustainability as a dynamic institutional capability.

3.3 Strategic Co-Creation and Future of NGO Sustainability

Guijt and Mistry (2022) explored the relationship between knowledge production and power within development partnerships using participatory action research. The findings revealed that co-creation becomes effective only when local knowledge systems are treated equally with external technical expertise. The study concluded that co-creation is fundamentally political because it involves negotiation over knowledge ownership, legitimacy, and decision-making authority. This study provides theoretical and empirical support for Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI).

Eweje and Wu (2022) examined African philanthropy as a distinct development paradigm rooted in indigenous systems of giving and community accountability. Through systematic literature review and thematic analysis, the study found that African philanthropy emphasizes agency, collective responsibility, and locally grounded development priorities. The study concluded that African philanthropy represents a viable alternative to dependency-oriented donor systems. This study is significant because it provides conceptual understanding of African-led donor systems within the present study.

Madinah and Ndegwa (2023) investigated co-ownership within African NGO partnerships using case studies from Kenya and Uganda. The findings revealed that NGOs practicing collaborative strategy development demonstrated stronger contextual relevance, organizational legitimacy, and long-term sustainability. The study concluded that strategic co-ownership improves institutional resilience because communities and local actors become active participants in shaping organizational direction. This study directly supports the relevance of Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI) within the sustainability framework.

Center for Effective Philanthropy (2023) examined the impact of unrestricted funding on nonprofit organizations through large-scale surveys involving nonprofit leaders. The findings showed that general operating support improved financial stability, staff morale, organizational planning, and strategic flexibility. The study concluded that unrestricted funding represents one of the most effective approaches for strengthening nonprofit sustainability. This study reinforces the importance of Institutional Capacity Investment Ratio (ICIR).

4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three major theoretical perspectives: Resource Dependence Theory, Community-Centered Development Theory, and Postcolonial Theory. These theories collectively provide comprehensive explanations for the operational sustainability challenges facing NGOs following the withdrawal of international donor organizations.

4.1.1 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial Theory was introduced by Said (1978) and further developed by Spivak (1988). The theory critiques the persistence of colonial power structures within contemporary global systems, including development practice and international philanthropy. It argues that many development relationships reproduce historical inequalities by privileging Western knowledge systems while marginalizing indigenous voices and local agency.

Within the context of this study, Postcolonial Theory provides the most comprehensive framework for understanding the unequal power dynamics embedded within donor-recipient relationships. International donor organizations frequently define development priorities, establish accountability standards, control financial resources, and determine acceptable knowledge systems within NGO operations.

This theory explains why local ownership often remains symbolic rather than substantive. It further justifies the need for Participatory Grant-making Influence (PGI), Institutional Capacity Investment Ratio (ICIR), and Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI) as mechanisms for redistributing power, strengthening local agency, and decolonizing development governance.

4.1.2 Relevance of Postcolonial Theory to the Study

Postcolonial Theory is the most suitable framework for this study because it directly addresses the core issues of dependency, power imbalance, epistemic domination, and externally controlled development structures within African civil society. While Resource Dependence Theory explains the mechanics of donor dependency and Community-Centered Development Theory emphasizes local participation, Postcolonial Theory provides the broader critical lens for understanding why dependency persists within global development systems.

The theory therefore strengthens the analytical depth of the study by framing sustainability not merely as an administrative concern, but as a broader struggle for institutional autonomy, epistemic justice, and community-centered development within Africa.

4.2 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach using content analysis as the primary method of investigation. The study relied mainly on secondary sources of data, including scholarly journal articles, policy reports, donor publications, institutional reports, books, and internet-based academic resources relevant to NGO sustainability, donor withdrawal, African philanthropy, and development governance.

The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to critically analyze complex institutional relationships, donor practices, sustainability challenges, and emerging philanthropic models within Africa. Content analysis enabled the researcher to systematically examine patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships within the reviewed literature.

The study employed the PQRS method of analysis consisting of Preview, Question, Read, and Summarize techniques as proposed by Cohen. This method facilitated systematic examination and comparison of scholarly arguments across the reviewed literature.

The analysis focused specifically on themes relating to donor dependency, local ownership, participatory grant-making, institutional capacity development, strategic co-creation, African philanthropy, and operational sustainability of NGOs. Attention was given to how donor withdrawal affects organizational resilience, community legitimacy, institutional governance, and long-term sustainability within African civil society organizations.

The study is qualitative in nature and interpretive in orientation. Therefore, findings are based on thematic synthesis and critical analysis of existing scholarly evidence rather than statistical generalization.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that the withdrawal of international organizations has fundamentally altered the operational landscape of NGOs in Africa. Historically, international donor organizations played central roles in financing development interventions, strengthening institutional systems, supporting humanitarian operations, and expanding civic engagement across the continent. However, the gradual reduction of donor presence has exposed the structural fragility of many NGOs whose operational existence depended heavily on externally controlled funding systems.

The literature reviewed consistently reveals that donor withdrawal produces multidimensional operational consequences, including funding collapse, staff layoffs, weakened service delivery, loss of technical expertise, reduced advocacy capacity, and fragile organizational sustainability. These realities confirm that many NGOs in Africa remain trapped within dependency-oriented development structures characterized by restricted project funding, donor-driven accountability systems, and externally imposed strategic priorities.

The findings further reveal that the sustainability crisis within African NGOs extends beyond financial limitations alone. The withdrawal of international organizations exposes weak adaptive capacity among many local NGOs, particularly in their inability to independently respond to economic shocks, shifting donor priorities, and emerging social challenges. This finding aligns with Resource Dependence Theory, which explains how excessive reliance on external resources undermines institutional autonomy and organizational resilience.

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that donor withdrawal exposes fragile institutional structures within many NGOs. Existing governance systems, administrative procedures, financial management mechanisms, and strategic planning capacities often remain underdeveloped because donor models historically prioritized short-term project implementation over long-term institutional investment. Consequently, organizations struggle to maintain continuity once donor funding declines.

The findings also reveal that donor withdrawal exposes limited community legitimacy among some NGOs. In several cases, communities perceive NGOs as extensions of external donor agendas rather than authentic representatives of grassroots interests. This weakens trust, accountability, and community ownership of development interventions.

However, the findings equally demonstrate that donor withdrawal has generated important opportunities for transforming development governance within Africa. The decline of excessive donor dominance encourages stronger local ownership, innovation in domestic resource mobilization, and the growth of African philanthropy. Emerging local donor organizations increasingly provide alternatives capable of supporting context-sensitive and community-rooted interventions.

Participatory Grant-making Influence (PGI) emerged as a critical factor for strengthening sustainability because it redistributes decision-making authority toward local actors and communities. Organizations that practice participatory grant-making demonstrate stronger legitimacy, improved responsiveness to local needs, and greater adaptive capacity.

Similarly, the Institutional Capacity Investment Ratio (ICIR) emerged as an essential determinant of organizational resilience. The findings confirm that NGOs receiving unrestricted and long-term institutional support are better positioned to maintain governance systems, retain skilled staff, strengthen financial management structures, and sustain operations during periods of donor transition.

The findings also establish that Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI) strengthens organizational legitimacy and sustainability by ensuring that local communities actively participate in designing, implementing, and evaluating development interventions. Strategies developed collaboratively with communities are more context-sensitive, politically sustainable, and socially accepted.

Postcolonial Theory provides the most comprehensive explanation for these findings. The traditional donor-recipient relationship reflects enduring colonial power dynamics in which the Global North continues to define development priorities, validate knowledge systems, and control financial resources. The reluctance of donor organizations to transfer grant-making authority, the dominance of Northern-defined indicators of success, and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems reinforce dependency and what scholars describe as “illusory ownership.”

From this perspective, the adoption of PGI, ICIR, and SCCI represents more than administrative reform. These indicators constitute deliberate mechanisms for decolonizing development governance, redistributing power, strengthening local ownership, and restoring agency to African civil society organizations.

The findings further reveal that the emergence of African philanthropic institutions presents significant opportunities for reshaping the future of development financing within Africa.

However, local donor organizations must avoid reproducing the same centralized and exclusionary structures previously associated with traditional donor systems. Sustainable African philanthropy therefore requires strong accountability systems, participatory governance mechanisms, institutional transparency, and community-centered development frameworks.

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the withdrawal of international organizations has exposed deep structural weaknesses within the operational systems of many local NGOs in Africa. While international donor organizations historically contributed significantly to humanitarian interventions, governance reforms, institutional development, and public health initiatives, the prevailing donor architecture simultaneously institutionalized dependency-oriented organizational systems that undermined long-term sustainability.

The findings demonstrate that donor withdrawal generates serious operational consequences, including funding collapse, staff layoffs, program discontinuity, reduced service delivery, weak institutional resilience, and diminished advocacy capacity. These challenges reveal the extent to which many NGOs remain dependent on externally controlled financial and strategic systems.

However, the study also establishes that donor withdrawal creates opportunities for redefining development governance within Africa. The emergence of African philanthropy, community accountability, local ownership, and domestic resource mobilization presents important pathways for strengthening sustainable civil society institutions.

The study further concludes that Participatory Grant-making Influence (PGI), Institutional Capacity Investment Ratio (ICIR), and Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI) are essential indicators for strengthening the operational sustainability of local NGOs. These indicators collectively promote power redistribution, institutional resilience, community legitimacy, and locally grounded development governance.

Viewed through Postcolonial Theory, the study confirms that genuine sustainability within African civil society requires deliberate efforts to dismantle dependency-oriented donor structures and redistribute development authority toward local communities and institutions. Sustainable development cannot be externally imposed. It must emerge through locally owned, community-centered, and institutionally resilient systems capable of independently shaping Africa's development future.

Ultimately, the future sustainability of NGOs in Africa depends on strengthening African-led philanthropy, institutionalizing participatory governance, investing in long-term organizational capacity, and fostering accountable partnerships rooted in local realities rather than externally imposed development frameworks.

5.2 Recommendations

i. In maximizing the opportunities from the withdrawal of donor organizations, local donor organizations should develop strong accountability mechanisms, participatory governance structures, and transparent funding systems to avoid reproducing dependency-oriented and centralized donor practices. Institutional sustainability frameworks should prioritize community legitimacy and ethical development practice.

ii. NGOs and donor organizations should adopt Strategic Co-Creation Index (SCCI) principles by ensuring that communities actively participate in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development interventions. This will strengthen community trust, contextual relevance, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

iii. African governments and private-sector actors should create enabling environments for local philanthropy through tax incentives, regulatory reforms, and public-private partnerships. Emerging African donor organizations should be supported to strengthen transparency, accountability, and institutional professionalism.

References

1. African Philanthropy Forum. (2021). *The state of philanthropy in Africa*. https://africanphilanthropyforum.org/app/uploads/2021/09/APF-Report-The-State-of-Philanthropy-in-Africa-2021.pdf

2. Biekart, K., & Fowler, A. (2022). The politics of ownership in North-South development partnerships. *Third World Quarterly, 43*(1), 36-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1999632

3. Bridgespan Group. (2019). *The nonprofit starvation cycle: How underfunding overhead threatens sustainability*. https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/the-nonprofit-starvation-cycle

4. Center for Effective Philanthropy. (2023). *The value of general operating support*. https://cep.org/report/the-value-of-general-operating-support/

5. Ejiogu, A., & Nwankwo, C. (2022). Brain drain and organizational sustainability in the Nigerian non-profit sector: A funding paradox. *Journal of African Civil Society Research, 5*(1), 22-41. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jacsr/article/view/225401

6. Eweje, G., & Wu, M. (2022). Conceptualizing African philanthropy: From aid to agency. *Journal of African Business, 23*(4), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2022.2077912

7. Eyben, R. (2013). *Uncovering the politics of evidence and results*. https://bigpushforward.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/The-politics-of-evidence-Eyben-2013.pdf

8. Global Fund for Community Foundations. (2023). *Shifting the power: Why community philanthropy matters*. https://www.globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/app/uploads/2023/05/GFCF-Shifting-the-Power-2023.pdf

9. Guijt, I., & Mistry, J. (2022). Knowledge, power, and co-creation in development partnerships. *World Development, 151*, 105-117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105117

10. Kaba, M. (2021). Changing the who, not just the how: Participatory grantmaking as a tool for philanthropic justice. https://www.participatorygrantmaking.org/resources/

11. Kponton, B. (2021). Aid effectiveness and the principle of local ownership. *International Development Policy Review.*

12. Madinah, S., & Ndegwa, S. (2023). From partnership to co-ownership: Rethinking strategy development in African NGOs. *Journal of African Transformation, 8*(1), 45-65.

13. Mubangizi, B. C., & Ntale, P. D. (2023). Deconstructing local ownership in the context of sustainable development in Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies, 13*(1), 7-26. https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2023/v13n1a1

14. Muthoka, M., & Mwangi, J. (2023). Indigenous philanthropy and community development in Kenya. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 12*(2), 105-120.

15. Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme. (2019). *Working with local organisations: A guide to co-creation and adaptive management*. https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/working-with-local-organisations-a-guide-to-co-creation-and-adaptive-management

16. Okorley, E. L., & Nkrumah, S. K. (2023). A three-pillar framework for nonprofit sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Voluntas, 34*(1), 44-58. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00487-2

17. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books. https://monoskop.org/images/4/4e/Said_Edward_Orientalism_1979.pdf

18. Sanyal, P., & Rao, A. (2022). Beyond survival: Conceptualizing nonprofit resilience. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *51*(5), 15-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211057410

19. Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press. https://abahlali.org/files/Can_the_subaltern_speak.pdf

20. WANEP. (2022). *Strengthening civil society legitimacy and sustainability in West Africa*. https://wanep.org/wanep/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Policy-Brief-Legitimacy-and-Sustainability-in-West-Africa.pdf

21. African Philanthropy Forum. (2021). *The state of philanthropy in Africa*.

22. Biekart, K., & Fowler, A. (2022). The politics of ownership in North-South development partnerships. *Third World Quarterly, 43*(1), 36-54.

23. Bridgespan Group. (2022). *Breaking the starvation cycle: How funders can help build a stronger nonprofit infrastructure*.

24. Center for Effective Philanthropy. (2023). *The value of general operating support*.

25. Ejiogu, A., & Nwankwo, C. (2022). Brain drain and organizational sustainability in the Nigerian non-profit sector: A funding paradox.

26. Eweje, G., & Wu, M. (2022). Conceptualizing African philanthropy: From aid to agency.

27. Eyben, R. (2013). *Uncovering the politics of evidence and results*.

28. Global Fund for Community Foundations. (2023). *Shifting the power: Why community philanthropy matters*.

29. Guijt, I., & Mistry, J. (2022). Knowledge, power, and co-creation in development partnerships.

30. Kaba, M. (2021). Changing the who, not just the how: Participatory grantmaking as a tool for philanthropic justice.

31. Kponton, B. (2021). Aid effectiveness and the principle of local ownership.

32. Madinah, S., & Ndegwa, S. (2023). From partnership to co-ownership: Rethinking strategy development in African NGOs.

33. Mubangizi, B. C., & Ntale, P. D. (2023). Deconstructing local ownership in the context of sustainable development in Africa.

34. Muthoka, M., & Mwangi, J. (2023). Indigenous philanthropy and community development in Kenya.

35. Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme. (2019). *Working with local organisations: A guide to co-creation and adaptive management*.

36. Okorley, E. L., & Nkrumah, S. K. (2023). A three-pillar framework for nonprofit sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa.

37. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*.

38. Sanyal, P., & Rao, A. (2022). Beyond survival: Conceptualizing nonprofit resilience.

39. Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?

40. West Africa Civil Society Institute (WANEP). (2022). *Strengthening civil society legitimacy and sustainability in West Africa*.