

ARTICLE

Exploring the potential effects of international donor funding on local NGO mission creep in Ghana

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Abstract

This study explored the potential effects of international donor funding on the missions of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ghana. While local NGOs often depend on overseas donor assistance to carry out their missions, such funding modalities can bring forth uncertainties and vulnerabilities, such as funding fluctuations and inconsistencies, shifting priorities, and changing financing methods. These factors raise important questions about whether international donor funding enables local NGOs to accomplish their declared missions or if it compels them to compromise their missions for survival. The paper adopts a resource dependency perspective and draws on primary data collected from local NGO actors to provide valuable insights into how international donor financing may contribute to mission creep among local Ghanaian NGOs. By analysing this dynamic relationship, the study offers a heuristic understanding of the potential adverse effects of international donor funding on local NGO missions in Ghana. The findings shed light on the substantial influence of scarce resources and reliance of local NGOs in Ghana. The study revealed that the pressure to secure funding frequently results in NGOs re-evaluating their original objectives. This not only hampers their ability to tackle particular social problems but also endangers their viability in the long run as they become more dependent on external funding.

KEYWORDS:

Mission Creep; NGOs; International donors; Ghana.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become an essential part of development in developing countries, such as Ghana. Over the past three decades, NGOs have grown significantly in number and influence in Africa (Ingoe & Kelsall, 2005). Ghana faces various development challenges, such as poverty, education gaps, healthcare access, and environmental issues. Espousing varying missions and visions, local NGOs in Ghana have emerged to respond to the socio-economic and political challenges facing the country. However, most of these local NGOs' viability and sustainability depend heavily on international donor funding (Okorley & Nkrumah, 2012). This reliance on international funding presents both opportunities and challenges for local NGOs in Ghana. On one hand, it enables them to implement projects and initiatives that contribute to their missions and address pressing issues such as poverty alleviation and healthcare.

On the other hand, it creates a dependency on external donors, making the sustainability of these organizations uncertain in the long run. There is also a risk that donor expectations and requirements may influence local NGO managers in Ghana to prioritize

their interests over those of the communities they serve. This tendency has been observed in the literature, where hierarchical accountability to donors is prioritized over holistic accountability that includes beneficiaries, leading to NGO mission creep (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2010). As a result, the original mission and objectives of these local NGOs may become diluted or distorted, as they strive to meet the demands and expectations of their funders. This mission creep can manifest in various ways, such as a shift in focus towards projects that align with donor priorities rather than addressing the actual needs of the communities. Consequently, the long-term impact and sustainability of these organizations may be compromised, as they become more dependent on external funding and fail to truly empower and serve the local communities they were established to support.

Mission creep can have both endogenic and exogenic effects on an organization. For local NGOs committed to community development, mission creep poses significant challenges to their effectiveness, sustainability, and credibility. Hawkins (2014) notes that sticking to their missions is crucial for local NGOs to effectively address the complex problems they were created to solve. Additionally, when local NGOs diverge from their primary mission, their programs and initiatives may become less relevant and tailored to the specific needs of the communities they serve. This can lead to reduced effectiveness in achieving their intended outcomes and addressing pressing local challenges. Quite paradoxically, mission creep can also lead to a loss of confidence between an organization and its donors. Donors and funding agencies often support local NGOs based on their specific missions and objectives. When an organization creeps away from its original purpose, donors may lose confidence in its ability to deliver meaningful outcomes, leading to decreased financial support and potential reputational damage. Other endogenic effects of mission creep includes a lack of clarity in organizational goals and strategies, which can hinder effective resource allocation and decision-making. Additionally, it can create confusion among staff members and volunteers, as they may struggle to understand the organization's identity and purpose. Ultimately, mission creep can erode trust and credibility, making it difficult for an organization to garner support and sustain its operations in the long run.

This study explores the potential impact of international donor funding on mission creep in local NGOs in Ghana, given the prevalent resource constraints and adaptive tendencies of these organizations. Primary data from Ghanaian NGOs forms the basis of this research, which is structured in three parts. Part 1 provides an overview of Ghana's NGO landscape, while Part 2 establishes the theoretical framework by defining key concepts like mission creep, and NGOs, and presents a concise literature review. Resource dependence theory is introduced as a lens for understanding how resource limitations influence NGO behavior in Ghana. The survey methodology is also outlined. Part 3 presents survey findings and analysis, elucidating themes related to how international donor funding might influence mission flexibility, strategies, and organizational behaviors of Ghanaian NGOs. The report concludes by summarizing key findings, proposing recommendations for fostering effective donor-NGO partnerships aligned with missions, and suggesting avenues for further research.

1.1 | Background: Ghana as an Illustrative Case Study

Ghana serves as a significant case study for exploring the emergence and potential role of the non-profit sector in developing nations, as highlighted by Salamon et al. (1995).¹ The country's intricate interactions with international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) present a compelling perspective on the complexities inherent in donor-NGO relations. Beyond its diverse donor landscape, Ghana has undergone shifts in aid patterns over time due to changing donor priorities and funding allocations. Notably, the relatively young NGO sector in Ghana has a history of engagement with global actors and agendas (Porter, 2003). According to the Department of Social Welfare, Ghana boasts around 300,000 registered NGOs. These NGOs are active across sectors, promoting social development, human rights, and good governance. In addition to traditional roles in education and health, they have expanded to agriculture, fisheries, rural water supply, environmental conservation, poverty eradication, women's empowerment, minority rights, gender equality, and addressing inequalities. The NGO landscape in Ghana includes grassroots organizations, community-based organizations, religious institutions or faith-based organizations, international relief organizations, professional associations, local craft unions, women's groups, migrant organizations, and faith-based entities (Krawczyk, 2013). This plethora of registered NGOs reflects the growing significance of the sector in tackling diverse social and developmental challenges. The diverse focus areas and funding sources of these organizations underscore the dynamic nature of Ghana's NGO sector, while the presence of international NGOs alongside local ones emphasizes the country's global engagement and commitment to addressing worldwide concerns.

¹Referenced in Krawczyk (2013, p. 101)

1.2 | Neoliberal economic reforms and NGO trajectory

Ghana's role as a "star pupil" in neoliberal economic reforms during the 1980s and 1990s reflects wider dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa. The country was among 70 developing nations subject to 566 stabilization and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) between 1980 and 1993 (Kingston, 2011). These policies diminished the size and authority of the state in favor of the private sector and solidified market fundamentalism (Stiglitz, 2002; Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Kingston, 2011). The implementation of SAPs led to a social service delivery deficit in most African countries, creating an opportunity for NGOs to address the resulting gap (Dicklitch, 1998; Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Kingstone, 2011). Consequently, Ghanaian NGOs gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s as alternatives to perceived state failures and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Despite the "reinstated" role of the state, a focus on pro-poor sustainable livelihood approaches, coupled with an emphasis on civil society's role in promoting good governance, further expanded the significance of both international and local NGOs in Ghana (Porter, 2003; Krawczyk, 2013).

1.3 | Challenges and funding dynamics

With a diverse array of NGOs and a vast network, the competition for donor funding is fierce, often resulting in NGOs complying with donor preferences and models (Porter, 2003). Reports and assessments by USAID on Ghana concur that most local NGOs struggle to subsist without external funding across various sectors of the economy (USAID, 2021). Foreign donations and assistance from bilateral and multilateral partners constitute over 70% of local NGOs' funding sources (Arhin et al., 2015). However, as international donor funding declines, Ghana's previously abundant funding opportunities and largesse from its democratic transition and consolidation era are waning (Arhin et al., 2018). The attainment of lower middle-income status led to reduced aid levels, with net Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) inflows declining from 6.1% of GDP in 2009 to 2.8% in 2013 (Government of Ghana, 2015). Bilateral donors and the International Development Assistance (IDA) have similarly curtailed aid packages as Ghana graduated to Low Middle Income Country (LMIC) status (Moss & Majerowicz, 2012). Despite fluctuations in funding and donor support, the number of NGOs in Ghana continues to grow, reflecting the sector's resilience in the face of changing circumstances. While donors may have adjusted their priorities, Ghana's NGO sector remains vibrant and active.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Defining an NGO is not a straightforward task, and it involves complexities beyond what one may assume. NGOs are difficult to describe, according to Lewis and Kanji (2009), because they operate between states and markets and take various organizational forms. As a result, several definitions based on a variety of parameters have emerged. Several researchers have sought to characterize them by examining aspects such as their operations (Mostashari, 2005; Willets, 2002), orientation (Cousins, 1991), geographical location (Cunt & Sunjata, 2005), scope and degree of autonomy (Farrington & Lewis; 1993, Paul, 2002), focus and functions (Gallin, 1999; Tvedt, 1998), and legal status (Stillman, 2007).² These typologies overlap and do not contradict one another. For this study, I adopt Holloway (2001) definition of NGOs, which he defines as a group of organizations distinct from government institutions and business organizations, with the distinct feature of being formed to complement, supplement, and offer alternatives to government development efforts. The term local is used as a prefix to refer to homegrown or indigenous professionally organized voluntary organizations with their origin, registration status, and governance structure in Ghana. They are owned and operated by Ghanaians, and they do not include INGOs, which are locally registered in Ghana.

The mission of an organization sets the *raison d'être* of the organization. It is the reason for the existence of that organization. The mission of an organization does not only spell out what the organization exists to do but how it does it. While mission creep is not unique to the non-profit sector, NGOs may be even more prone to mission drift than for-profit corporations since they are frequently held accountable by multiple constituencies with potentially conflicting interests (Kim, 2005). Mission creep is a term used to describe the gradual expansion or stretching of an organization's original mandate, often resulting in activities that surpass the initial goals and scope of the organization's mission. White (2007, p.548) makes a wedge between mission drift and mission creep. Mission drift is a situation in which an organization "gradually and mindlessly" gravitates away to a point where it can no longer perform its original function, while "mission creep" signifies a more "deliberate, sneaky, and nefarious form

²In (Dugle, Akanbang, & Salakpi, 2015)

of devolutionary change, unintentional and randomized” . This can lead to a loss of focus and resources, as well as potential negative consequences for the organization’s reputation and effectiveness.

Even though missions are not exclusive to the nonprofit sector, they are one of the ‘must have’ aspects of an NGO. Often used in tandem with a mission is a ‘statement’. Almost every legally registered NGO has a mission statement, which is a concise and clear description of an organization’s purpose, including the primary objectives for which it was created and the values that guide its actions. The mission statement can be defined in its broadest sense to include values statements; corporate creeds; philosophy; goals etc. which were viewed as important in forming a company’s identity and presenting its purpose and direction to its stakeholders (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997, p. 59). This statement serves as the foundation for strategic decision-making and helps to keep an organization focused on what it deems vital. Crafting a well-articulated mission statement is crucial in reflecting the organization’s main motivations, priorities, and goals. Furthermore, a well-written mission statement can also positively impact an organization’s performance and profitability (2016). For NGOs that are not profit-oriented, having a mission statement is critical for identity building and branding and a testament to its credibility (Pearce & David, 1987). The fact that a mission is directly tied to an organization’s legitimacy is quite relevant and even more crucial for NGOs. Dart (2004, p. 41) emphasizes legitimacy and legitimization by stakeholders as factors of organizational performance rather than efficiency and effectiveness in attaining organizational goals. He promotes the idea that the existence of NGOs can be better explained by their need for legitimacy. It is also important to emphasize that NGOs are founded with a mission to meet a social need that their founders feel they can fill (Rhodes & Keogan, 2005, p. 128). For (Ghanaian) NGOs that claim to draw their mandate from their constituencies, creeping from what an organization sets out to accomplish as enshrined in its mission can give rise to heightened concern or even distrust among stakeholders (Gooding, 2012, p.19).

Identifying mission creep is often not straightforward. While it may occur in visible ways when an organization formally changes its mission, strategy, or objectives, it may also occur through less visible changes to working practices or the nature and quality of the services the organization provides (Cornforth, Hayes, & Vangen, 2014). For example, an NGO may start off with a clear mission to provide education services to underprivileged children. However, over time, the organization may gradually shift its focus towards other areas, such as healthcare or environmental conservation. This subtle shift in priorities can be a form of mission creep, as it deviates from the original purpose of the organization.

The existing literature on external pressures such as donor funding and its impact on non-profit organizations’ missions presents a multifaceted perspective, encompassing both positive and negative outcomes. This review synthesizes key findings from various studies, offering valuable insights into the complex relationship between external factors such as funding and potential mission creep within the non-profit sector. Existing studies examine the negative impacts of donor funding, external factors induced mission creep, strategies and challenges in donor-dependent environments, donor influence, and mission alignment.

Focusing on the negative impacts of donor funding, Edwards (1996) contends that a heavy reliance on funding can compromise NGO performance, distort accountability mechanisms, and weaken legitimacy. Parks (2008) extends this argument by highlighting how fluctuations in donor funding can lead to crises of legitimacy and diminishing advocacy effectiveness. Fafchamps (2006) adds nuance by suggesting that international funding may crowd out local charitable contributions but mainly due to selection factors. Fafchamps (2009) emphasizes the role of network effects in securing grants from international donors. Overall, these studies underscore the dual nature of donor funding, where it offers crucial resources but can also exert negative pressures on missions and operations.

In his seminal paper “Diversity for Non-profits: Mission Drift or Mission Fulfilment?” Hawkins(2014) delves into the intricate responsibilities that non-profits bear. He contends that these organizations must effectively advance their objectives while conscientiously managing donated resources. The paper navigates the quandary confronted by nonprofit leaders when pressured to pursue diversity initiatives aimed at rectifying social equity, potentially conflicting with their fundamental mission objectives. He presents a conceptual framework that harmonizes structured charitable goals with mitigating the adverse consequences of identity hierarchies. This interdisciplinary framework draws from the realms of non-profit management, organizational behavior, social justice, and diversity studies. While the study imparts valuable insights into assisting nonprofits in steering diversity and mission alignment, its limitation becomes evident in its conceptual nature, lacking empirical validation. While He examines the challenge of diversity initiatives on mission alignment, this study focuses on the intricate interplay between international donor funding and local NGO mission drift in the Ghanaian context. This gap arises from the need to understand how external funding sources, particularly from international donors, influence local NGOs’ core missions. By identifying the potential for mission creep due to international donor funding, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of how NGOs

can strategically manage these relationships while maintaining their original missions intact. This empirical investigation provides context-specific insights that can guide both local NGOs and international donors in their collaborations, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of development efforts in Ghana.

Mawdsley (2012) in discussing aid patterns and sustainability highlights how changes in aid patterns have significant implications for the sustainability of non-profit organizations. As global development priorities shift, funding for specific sectors or issues may increase or decrease, leading organizations to adapt their agendas to match donor interests. This can create a challenge for non-profits as they try to balance their original mission and values with the need to secure funding. To maintain financial stability, non-profit organizations may be compelled to align their strategies and goals with the funding preferences of donors. This can sometimes result in a departure from their initial mission and values, potentially compromising their long-term sustainability.

Additionally, the reliance on donor funding can make non-profits vulnerable to fluctuations in aid patterns, making it imperative for them to continuously adapt and diversify their funding sources to ensure their survival and continued impact. However, the challenge with this is it does not highlight, that aligning strategies with donor preferences can also enhance non-profit organizations' ability to meet their mission and achieve their goals, as it allows them to secure necessary funding and support. Moreover, actively diversifying funding sources can help non-profits mitigate the risks associated with fluctuations in aid patterns and ensure their long-term sustainability.

Bennett and Savani (2011) conducted an empirical study addressing government-induced mission drift among British non-profit organizations. They used in-depth case studies of three charities to explore how government contracts might lead non-profits away from their original missions. The study found that mission drift occurs when external funders influence a charity's priorities, causing significant deviation from its original mission. The charities actively sought control over state-funded activities, acknowledging mission drift as inherent. However, the study has limitations. Its focus on only three charities limits generalizability to the entire sector. The negative consequences of mission drift and ethical implications were not explored. Despite these limitations, their research highlights the need for further investigation into the consequences and ethics of mission drift due to government contracts. A broader examination of diverse non-profits would address this gap and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sector-wide impact.

Henderson & Lambert (2017) focused on mid-size charities within the UK, aiming to understand the ramifications of grant dependency on the preservation of their social missions. Their research illuminated a key finding: Even when heavily reliant on external funding, charities can successfully sustain their social missions. However, a noteworthy caveat emerged—there exists a potential for mission drift if the equilibrium between funding and mission priorities becomes disrupted. A crucial aspect highlighted by the study is the impact of funders on the accounting systems of these charities. This underscores the significant role that external funding sources play not only in shaping the financial dynamics but also in influencing how charities track, allocate, and report their resources. The study's implications extend to the broader nonprofit landscape, emphasizing the intricate balance required between financial sustainability and steadfast mission adherence.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize a limitation within the study. While it offers valuable insights specific to mid-size charities in the UK, the findings may not be universally applicable to various types of nonprofit organizations or different geographical contexts. The dynamics of grant dependency and mission integrity can vary based on factors such as the size of the organization, the nature of its programs, and the socio-economic conditions of the region. In the context of this study, their findings provide a valuable parallel. Their research reinforces the importance of maintaining a delicate equilibrium between external funding and mission fidelity. It serves as a reminder of the need to scrutinize how funding sources might influence not only financial aspects but also the alignment of activities with the core mission. By building upon their insights and considering the unique dynamics of international donor funding in Ghana, this study has the potential to deepen our understanding of how these interactions play out in a distinct context, offering guidance for NGOs navigating the complexities of external funding while safeguarding their intended missions.

Gooding (2012) employed a systematic procedure and content analysis to investigate mission creep causation in nonprofit organizations. The study drew insights from contingency, resource dependency, population ecology, and institutional theories to identify meaningful explanations and support or refute the notion of discouraging mission creep. While the study provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding mission creep, its applicability to the unique context of international donor funding in Ghana might require additional exploration and considerations specific to the interplay between donors, local NGOs, and the broader socio-political landscape.

Bullock (2022) delved into mission drift and the effectiveness of resource dependence theory (RDT) in an internally resource-constrained environment. The research aimed to understand how funding sources affect mission drift, the role of management

practices in managing drift, and the impact of organizational stigma on relationships within resource-constrained environments. The study hypothesized that non-profits receiving funding from commercial revenue and government sources were more likely to experience mission drift, and the application of RDT-based management practices and organizational stigma would influence these relationships. The study may not fully capture the complexities introduced by international donor funding, which often comes with specific expectations, conditions, and potentially unique challenges related to mission alignment. As a result, the findings of the study might not fully address the nuanced interactions between local NGOs and international donors that this research aims to explore. While the study provides valuable insights into mission drift and resource dependence theory, its context and focus on different funding sources might not perfectly align with the intricacies of international donor funding, potentially requiring additional research and considerations that are specific to this study.

Ebrahim (2003) observation of the “NGO Scramble” phenomenon in Ghana, along with similar findings from studies in Kenya, underscores the intense competition among local NGOs for limited donor funding. This competition exerts significant pressure on organizations to align with donor preferences, potentially diverting them from their core. Similarly, Mohan (2002) points out that local NGOs face a challenging balancing act. On one hand, they must uphold their values and missions to retain their legitimacy and credibility with constituencies and local communities. On the other hand, they also need to meet the demands of donors to secure funding for their projects and operations. This dual pressure can strain the ability of non-profits to stay true to their original missions. Hayman (2016) and Arhin (2016) delve into the complex issue of donor interference in nonprofit agendas. These studies highlight how donors often bring their priorities and expectations, exerting influence over nonprofit activities and direction. This influence can lead to mission drift, as organizations may shift away from their original goals to align with donor interests, potentially compromising their integrity and effectiveness. Fowler (2000) examination of NGOs beyond aid dependence, however, stresses the importance of diversifying funding sources to reduce reliance on donors. This strategy is seen as vital for preserving organizational missions and autonomy.

Finally, Weisbrod (2004) cautions against nonprofit engagement in unrelated business activities due to their potential for mission drift. However, this perspective falls short in considering commercial ventures as just one of several routes to mission drift. This limitation prompts the exploration of additional factors contributing to mission drift, particularly when examining the impact of international donor funding on local NGO missions in Ghana. Even without commercial activities, NGOs’ core missions remain vulnerable, especially in diverse environments like Ghana. Furthermore, the conclusion reached emphasizes that mission creep has multiple sources, making the exclusion of minor factors insufficient.

In the context of this study, these insights underscore a critical aspect. The dynamics of donor influence and competition for resources play a significant role in how local NGOs navigate international donor funding. Acknowledging these dynamics is crucial for understanding the potential challenges and complexities that contribute to mission drift within the Ghanaian nonprofit sector. This nuanced understanding is essential for local NGOs and donors alike as they collaborate in the pursuit of sustainable development goals in Ghana.

2.1 | Theoretical underpinning

Theoretically, a substantial amount of scientific literature has been devoted to explaining why mission creep continues or occurs in nonprofit domains. The resource dependence view and the contingency view are the two most well-known perspectives on the subject, with the former being the more prevalent of the two. A third point of view, known as the environmental or institutional point of view, has also been proposed. The contingency view posits that organizations are often forced to undertake changes to survive in times of environmental turbulence (Foster & Meinhard, 2002, p.28). These pressures or stressors may include increased competition, funding cuts, situational analysis, government policy, etc. In essence, this pressure originates externally in an institutional environment, which ultimately affects survival (ibid, p. 29). These changes may sometimes coerce organizations to expand or alter their missions. After doing a thorough review of the literature, Froelich (1999) concludes that the diversity of financing sources is an important aspect in strategy decisions that determine the paths nonprofit organizations take to either protect or grow their purpose.

When considering the issue of mission creep from an environmental perspective, it is crucial to examine the latest institutional theory in this field. According to Frumkin & Galaskiewicz (2004), nonprofit organizations are deeply intertwined with wider cultural and political environments, which has become a key focus of institutional theory. The theory’s central tenet is that established principles and practices within an institutional setting influence organizational behavior; as ideas and practices within a sector gain acceptance and legitimacy, they institutionalize and take on a rule-like status (Cornforth, Hayes, & Vangen, 2014). The first is the technological and economic criteria imposed by the organization’s market or fictional market. The second type is

social and cultural expectations, which demand that organizations operate or function in specific ways. The new organizational institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a; Scott et al., 1994) is useful in attempting to comprehend the cultural and social impacts on organizations. A central idea of institutional theory is that various ideas and practices gain legitimacy and become the accepted or taken-for-granted way of thinking and doing things within organizational fields, defined as the network of organizations and actors that collaborate to produce similar products or services, which shape organizational behavior. As ideas and behaviors become institutionalized, they acquire a “rule-like status in social thought and action” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991;p.9).³ As a result, organizations are influenced not only by the requirement to be efficient and effective (as emphasized in economic theories), but also by ‘culture aspects’ of the environment, which are ‘taken for granted ideas and generally held conventions that serve as templates for organizing’ (ibid. pp. 26-27). Organizations employ these institutionalized practices to obtain credibility.

Scholars typically utilize the resource dependence theory (RDT) to explain organizational behavior when organizations get critical resources from their surroundings to implement programs and services. One of the key concepts of RDT is that organizations are somewhat dependent on their surroundings. This theory proposes that organizational actions are not just the result of internal processes, decisions, or mission objectives, but also influence their resource environments, which include capital, labor, equipment, and raw materials (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). These resources include items like money, machinery, supplies, and labor. The degree to which an organization is dependent on other actors will determine how much influence they have on the organization and how much power they have. The criticality of the resource to the organization, the amount of control the resource supplier has over its use, and whether there are other sources of the resource or if the provider has a monopoly are the three factors that determine the degree of reliance. Social enterprises, especially local NGOs, are particularly vulnerable to resource reliance since they depend on donor resources or a small number of revenue streams (Carroll & Stater, 2010). Local NGOs in Ghana often face resource constraints, including financial limitations and limited access to funding. To mitigate these challenges and ensure organizational survival, NGOs may resort to mission creep by diversifying their activities to attract more donors or funding sources. As they seek new resources, they may take on projects that are not directly aligned with their primary mission but are perceived as more likely to attract funding.

Furthermore, RDT holds that dependency on a dominant donor for critical resources such as funding can result in mission creep (Jones, 2007), as these NGOs have to find ways and means of ‘fitting’ into the agenda of the supplier of critical resources – donors, even if this compromises their mission. Additionally, an asymmetrical relationship is created because of the supply of critical resources. Local NGOs in Ghana heavily depend on external donors for funding and support. Donors may have their own agendas and priorities, and they may impose conditions on the funding they provide. To secure funding or maintain relationships with donors, local NGOs might engage in mission creep by aligning their activities with donor interests, even if these activities deviate from their original mission.

RDT also highlights the concept of institutional isomorphism, where organizations mimic the practices and strategies of other successful organizations in their field to gain legitimacy and resources. If local NGOs observe that certain types of projects or initiatives receive more funding or recognition, they may adopt similar activities, leading to mission creep. As already hinted, in the competitive funding environment that is Ghana, local NGOs feel the pressure to expand their activities to demonstrate growth and success. Mission creep can be a strategic response to remain competitive in securing funding and partnerships with other stakeholders. Additionally, the uncertain nature of resource availability can also drive mission creep. Local NGOs may fear sudden decreases in funding or the loss of a key donor, leading them to take on additional projects to ensure a more stable resource base. Mission creep can also be linked to the pursuit of organizational legitimacy. Local NGOs may believe that expanding their activities will enhance their reputation, credibility, and influence, making them more attractive to donors and other stakeholders.

To sum up, RDT provides valuable insights into why local NGOs in Ghana may experience mission creep. The theory emphasizes the critical role of resource dependencies, donor relationships, and competitive pressures in shaping the strategic decisions of NGOs. As these organizations seek to secure resources for their operations, they may be compelled to expand their activities, leading to mission creep away from their original mandates.

³Cited in (Cornforth, Hayes, & Vangen, 2014, p. 7)

3 | DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out from April to July 2023. Employing a convenience sampling technique, the study methodology was chosen for several reasons. The decision to utilize this technique stemmed from the absence of a reliable centralized dataset, the requirement to identify study subjects with specific attributes, and the imperative of securing participant willingness for engagement. While acknowledging the inherent bias associated with convenience random sampling, it should be noted that the unavailability of a credible centralized database suitable for random sampling, coupled with the sensitive nature of the study, necessitated the comprehensive inclusion of diverse categories of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operational in Ghana, encompassing a range of thematic orientations. The study targeted personnel occupying senior, middle, and junior roles within local NGOs, and specifically focused on individuals boasting a minimum of two years of experience within this domain. Respondents were drawn from various regions across Ghana, constituting a wide spectrum of civil society organizations (CSOs), encompassing 9 community-based Organizations (CBOs), 1 Faith-based organization, 2 foundations or charities, 1 Media entity, 36 NGOs, 1 Think tank, and 1 youth-based or women-led organization. In total, the survey attracted the participation of fifty-one (51) NGOs, all of whom completed the survey process. The survey instrument predominantly adopted a closed-ended format, interspersed with select open-ended inquiries. This approach encompassed screening questions for precise participant targeting, the gathering of biographical information, and inquiries about aspects such as NGO reliance on foreign funding and overarching missions. Notably, data aggregation, refinement, and analysis transpired through the utilization of Kobo Collect. Data was analysed using statistical software embedded in Kobo Collect and Excel, allowing for the identification of trends and patterns within the dataset. This analysis provided valuable insights into the relationships between variables, enabling a deeper understanding of the factors influencing NGOs' reliance on foreign funding and the effectiveness of their overarching missions. Additionally, qualitative data from the open-ended inquiries was analysed using thematic analysis, providing rich and nuanced insights into participants' perspectives and experiences.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Profile of organizations

The study encompassed a sample of 51 organizations, comprising 11 entities operating at the metropolitan, municipal, and district levels, of which 26 organizations have nationwide coverage, and 14 with regional coverage. Respondents' experience levels varied, with 30% reporting experiences between 21-25 years, while only 4% had experience below 5 years. Among the participants, 30 individuals, constituting 60% of the sample, held senior managerial positions, while 26% were co-founders, and the remaining participants occupied mid and junior-level staff roles. All organizations included in the study are legally registered entities in Ghana, and their missions encompass a diverse range of themes, spanning both narrow and crosscutting focus areas. The study design sought to encompass a representative cross-section of organizations operating in the country's non-profit sector.

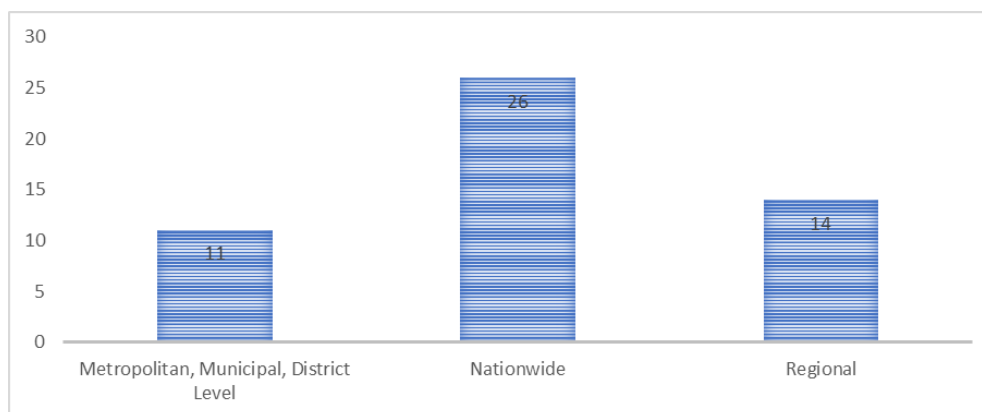


FIGURE 1 Geographical distribution of organizations

Mission Orientation and Funding Dynamics

*It is the lifeblood of CSOs in Ghana*⁴

The presented findings indicate that all surveyed NGOs in Ghana have adhered to statutory law by being legally registered. Among these NGOs, 58% have adopted a cross-cutting approach, encompassing multiple sectors or themes, while 42% have opted for a more focused mission targeting specific issues. The cross-cutting NGOs operate across various sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and women empowerment, demonstrating the sector's dynamic nature in addressing a wide array of social, economic, and environmental challenges. Conversely, the NGOs with narrow focus concentrate on specific issues like child rights, environmental conservation, or poverty alleviation. A cursory examination of these missions is reminiscent of studies conducted by Makuwira (2018) in Kenya, where he found a notable number of NGOs with vague, ambiguous, and essentially empty phrases in their mission statements, such as 'poverty reduction,' 'make poverty history,' 'promote development,' and 'facilitate development.' Dugle et al". (2015) suggest that in the case of local NGOs in Ghana, this supposedly multi-sectoral approach being adopted by local NGOs is a necessary mechanism to enable them to access diverse sources of funding. The survey revealed an overwhelming 78% of respondents indicated that their missions significantly influence funding pursuits. This pragmatic approach, as evidenced by the amorphous nature of their mission statements, elicits legitimate concerns regarding the genuine dedication of these organizations to their stated missions or whether they are primarily driven by the pursuit of funding opportunities. It also hints at a broader issue of organizations' inadequacy in grasping the root causes of the challenges they seek to address. Consequently, there is a risk of implementing ineffective or misguided interventions when the underlying factors contributing to poverty, development challenges, or social issues are not comprehensively understood. From a Resource Dependency perspective, this is an illustration of how NGOs' strategic behaviour in mission orientation and funding pursuit can be influenced by their need to secure external resources. The diversity of mission orientations and the pragmatic approach to mission statements observed in Ghana's NGOs can be seen as adaptive strategies to manage their resource dependency and ensure their sustainability in a complex funding environment.

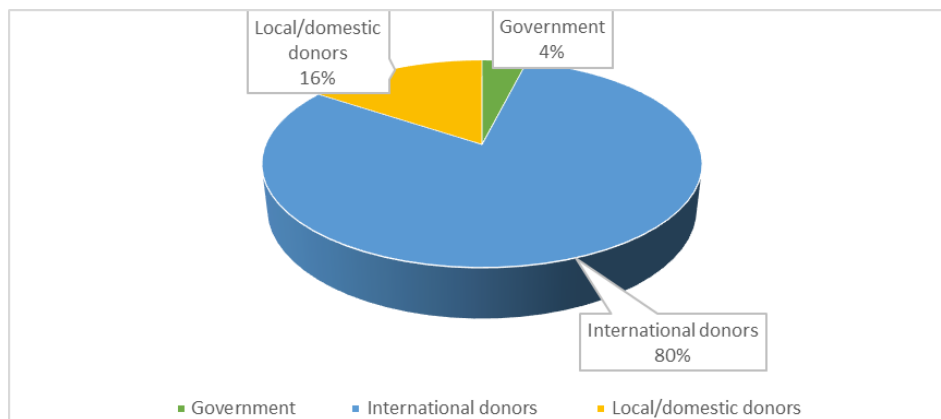


FIGURE 2 Sources of Organisational Funding

DEPENDENCY PATTERNS AND EMERGING ISSUES

Additionally, the study reveals that a significant proportion of the surveyed NGOs heavily rely on international donor support for funding, with 80% of the organizations indicating such dependence. In contrast, only 16% rely on contributions from local donors, and a mere 4% rely on funding from the government. The overwhelming majority of the local NGOs, constituting 88%, consider international donor funding to be critical for the achievement of their missions. These findings are consistent with existing literature in the field of development, which commonly attests to the heavy reliance of NGOs in developing countries on

⁴Direct quote of one respondent referring to international donor funding

international sources of funding. It is noteworthy that 60% of the surveyed organizations expressed confidence in carrying out their missions independently without the assistance of overseas donors for the next five years. However, this apparent optimism is tempered by the fact that most of these organizations still predominantly depend on funds obtained from donors, leading to the accumulation of reserves rather than the diversification of resources. As far as mission drift is concerned, it is a potential risk for organizations that heavily rely on donor funding. Without a diverse range of funding sources, these organizations may be forced to adapt their missions or activities to align with donor priorities. This can undermine their original objectives and compromise their ability to address the needs of their target populations effectively.

Criticality of Donor funding toward mission accomplishment and emerging issues



FIGURE 3 Criticality of Donor Funding in Achieving Missions

The findings from the survey indicate that many of the local NGOs place significant emphasis on the role of international donor funding in facilitating the fulfillment of their mandates to their constituencies. Testimonials from respondents underscore the importance of donor funds and their positive impact on the organizations' ability to address various developmental issues. For instance, respondents cited instances where donor funding facilitated poverty reduction efforts through the establishment of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities and capacity-building training in the Upper West Region. Others acknowledged the substantial influence of international donors on the objectives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), as donor funding is often pivotal for the achievement of their set objectives. Respondents also recognized that international donor financing not only provides crucial financial support to CSOs but also empowers them to align their activities with national development priorities and collaborate effectively with government agencies. However, the study also reveals several misgivings expressed by some local NGOs regarding their reliance on international donor support. Concerns revolve around the alignment of priorities, potential influence on decision-making, and the overall direction of local NGOs.

- International donor funding (IDF) is what keeps CSOs surviving. However, the selection criteria are often biased and rigorous with slim chances of one getting selected. Additionally, receiving IDF most of the time forces CSOs to kowtow to the needs of their donors instead of their communities.
- I have come to believe that donor funding somehow concentrates on their interests rather than on the interests of beneficiaries. They predetermine what, who, and how the funding should be used therefore, for CSOs in Ghana to attract funding, they keep adjusting their missions to align with donor demands, continuously shifting priorities, become donor-dependent and do not have sustainable funding sources or opportunities.
- It has a great impact because sometimes it may influence CSOs to work in the interest of the international donor instead of focusing on their set objectives.
- It does have a great influence on project prioritization, defining impact, and defining the scope of projects.
- The amount of funds can limit the project scope and content.

There is a recognized risk of power imbalances emerging, wherein donor agendas may overshadow the needs and aspirations of the local communities being served, leading to a disconnect between intended impact and actual outcomes on the ground. This influence can create a situation where donor agendas take precedence over the organization's original mission and the voices

of the local communities they serve. To attract a wider range of donors and funding sources, NGOs may broaden their mission statements, making them less specific and more adaptable. While this flexibility can be beneficial, it can also lead to mission creep as the organization's core identity becomes less defined. Donors often have specific requirements, reporting mechanisms, and expectations for the NGOs they fund. To maintain this funding, NGOs may find themselves making decisions based on donor demands rather than community needs or their mission. This influence can result in projects that are more in line with donor preferences than the genuine needs of the local population.

Donor-Induced Mission Change



FIGURE 4 Donor-influenced Mission Re-evaluation

The study reveals that a considerable number of respondents (35 out of 50) indicated that their missions have undergone at least one change or review since their establishment. The primary reasons cited for these mission changes were strategic evaluations and planning, which are regular practices in Ghana's NGO landscape. However, a noteworthy observation emerges from the finding that half of the respondents altered their missions either to align with international donor funding or to explore international funding opportunities. This evidence indicates that financial considerations and access to resources significantly influence the revision of local NGO missions. These findings underscore the intricate and multifaceted nature of mission changes among NGOs in Ghana. While strategic evaluations and planning are recognized as crucial factors driving mission adaptations, the influence of international funding and opportunities cannot be overlooked. This prompts essential inquiries concerning the extent to which local NGOs can maintain their autonomy and uphold their distinct objectives in the face of external pressures. Seen from a resource dependency perspective, is the tension between maintaining organizational autonomy and succumbing to external pressures for resources. In the case of Ghanaian NGOs, the findings suggest that while many organizations alter their missions to align with international donor funding, this adaptation may not necessarily be rooted in a scientific analysis of local conditions and context, compromising the effectiveness and sustainability of their programs. Instead of focusing on their original objectives and the specific needs of the communities they serve, these NGOs may prioritize donor demands and funding opportunities. As a result, the local context and unique challenges faced by the communities are often overlooked, leading to ineffective interventions that fail to address the root causes of the problems. This compromises the impact and long-term success of the NGOs' initiatives, ultimately hindering the development and progress they aim to achieve.

- In this era of dwindling funds, most CSOs don't hesitate to review their objectives for the sake of our sustainability.

It is noteworthy to underscore that achieving a delicate balance between financial considerations and the fundamental mission and values of the organization becomes paramount in ensuring the sustainability and efficacy of these NGOs. Strategic mission changes driven by financial motivations must align with the core principles and developmental goals of the organization. Navigating these complexities requires careful deliberation, strong organizational governance, and a steadfast commitment to the organization's mission. By acknowledging and addressing the interplay of financial factors and strategic planning in shaping mission changes, local NGOs in Ghana can make informed decisions that bolster their autonomy, uphold their original vision,

and better serve their constituencies. Moreover, it highlights the importance of fostering transparent and accountable practices within the NGO sector to safeguard against potential mission creep and to ensure that the objectives pursued align genuinely with the needs and aspirations of the local communities they aim to assist.

Donor Funding and Mission Continuity

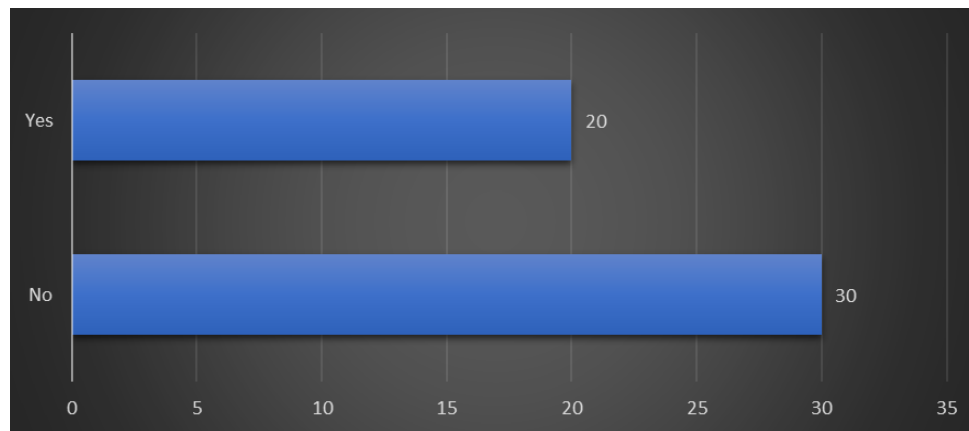


FIGURE 5 The ability of LNGOs to sustain their mission without donor funding in the next five years

Most local NGOs assert their proficiency in achieving short-term objectives, yet underlying uncertainties loom prominently when contemplating sustainability beyond a five-year horizon. This concern is accentuated by a considerable number of NGOs heavily depending on international donor funding to establish financial reserves. A respondent candidly acknowledged this strategy, stating, “...In my organization for instance we build strategic relationships and focus on funding that aligns with our vision and mission.” While NGOs may presently navigate the developmental landscape adeptly, the imperative to ensure mission continuity takes on renewed significance considering this dependence on external funding. It becomes evident that for these organizations, sustaining their core missions necessitates a proactive and deliberate approach to diversify funding streams, cultivate strategic partnerships, and solidify their financial stability. This calculated pursuit not only guards against vulnerabilities stemming from donor fluctuations but also safeguards the enduring impact of these CSOs in catalysing positive change within their respective spheres of influence. However, the seeming lack of motivation and dearth of capacity to embark on domestic resource mobilization means that for a good number of these organizations for the foreseeable future, sustainability is going to hinge on international donor support. In the wake of the uncertainty of donor funding, it remains difficult how local NGOs are going to sustain their missions. In this context, the trajectory of mission continuity for NGOs becomes intricately interwoven with the strategies they adopt to navigate the intricate landscape of funding dynamics and community-centric engagement.

5 | CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis conducted in this study underscores the profound impact of resource scarcity and dependence on the missions of local NGOs operating in the context of Ghana. To navigate the challenging conditions they face, these organizations have adopted a spectrum of adaptive mechanisms. These include strategic realignments of their missions to align with donor funding priorities and pragmatic considerations during strategic review exercises, with funding considerations occupying a central role. Consequently, many local NGOs have formulated mission statements that exhibit greater flexibility, enabling them to pursue funding opportunities more effectively. Nevertheless, it is unequivocal that international donor funding continues to represent the predominant source of financial sustenance for local NGOs, rendering them highly susceptible to resource vulnerabilities. This pronounced reliance on donor funding poses a palpable risk to the integrity of their organizational missions and the long-term viability of their initiatives.

This study underscores the imperative for donors to reassess their funding paradigms concerning local NGOs, to mitigate any potential deleterious effects that might impede these organizations from achieving their objectives fully. Collaborative partnerships between donors and local NGOs, leveraging each other's complementary strengths, stand as a promising avenue for fostering sustainable development and effecting substantial positive change. Furthermore, local NGOs must proactively assume stewardship of their resources and operational strategies to ensure they remain firmly anchored in their mission-driven pursuits. As posited by Kumi (2017), local NGOs in Ghana can respond to external perceptions of mission creep by providing robust justifications for their choices in satisfying donor expectations while maintaining the flow of resources. To this end, local NGOs can strategically diversify their funding sources to bolster their negotiating leverage with donors, thereby facilitating greater alignment of their objectives with the needs of the communities they serve.

Local NGOs should also champion transparency and accountability through the implementation of effective monitoring and evaluation systems. Engagement of beneficiaries in the decision-making process and the establishment of collaborative partnerships with other like-minded NGOs represent additional strategies for ensuring the collective attainment of shared goals. However, it is vital to acknowledge that the successful implementation of these strategies hinges upon the availability of adequate resources and unwavering leadership support. Moreover, local NGOs operating in Ghana must embark on concerted efforts to cultivate trust, both with donors and the local communities they serve, to engender perceptions of mission-oriented and effective operations. Therefore, local NGOs in this context must adopt a proactive stance in addressing the intricate challenge of harmonizing donor expectations with their core missions and values, thereby safeguarding the authenticity of their endeavors.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies could benefit from delving deeper into survey results to gain insight into the various nuances observed. Additionally, the scope of the research could be broadened to make more generalized conclusions. Furthermore, the variety of donors involved provides the opportunity to investigate how the various funding modalities and connections impact the mission creep of Ghanaian NGOs. This would include examining the different types of donors, such as government agencies, international organizations, and individual philanthropists, and analysing how their expectations and priorities may shape the direction and focus of the NGOs. Additionally, exploring the role of networking and partnerships in the success of these organizations could shed light on the importance of collaboration and resource-sharing within the NGO sector. By considering these factors, future research can contribute to a better understanding of the factors that influence the sustainability and effectiveness of Ghanaian NGOs.

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