



Investigating the contribution of NGOs in improving the health sector in Kitui County

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in improving the health sector in Kitui County, Kenya. The population of interest for this study was the community members residing in Kitui County who had been directly or indirectly impacted by NGO interventions. The research design employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was collected through surveys and questionnaires to gather information on the reach and impact of NGO interventions, while qualitative data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions to gain insights into the community members' experiences and perspectives. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for quantitative data, including measures of central tendency and correlation analyses. Qualitative data was analysed thematically to identify key themes and patterns related to NGO contributions to community empowerment. The research findings conclusively demonstrated that NGOs have played a pivotal role in enhancing healthcare accessibility in Kitui County. Maternal and child health services, in particular, have benefited from NGO interventions, resulting in improved healthcare outcomes. The establishment of healthcare facilities and health awareness campaigns have collectively contributed to a more accessible and responsive healthcare system. This will enable authorities to make data-driven decisions and allocate resources efficiently, raise awareness about available NGO services and programs to ensure that beneficiaries fully utilise healthcare, education, and women empowerment resources.

Key terms: Community empowerment, contribution, health sector NGOs, sanitation coverage, substantial contributions.

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Council of NGOs in Kenya, there are over 12,000 NGOs operating in Kenya, comprising international, regional and local NGOs (The National Council of NGOs, 2022). For example, in the last two decades, CARE International has reached approximately over 1 million people with Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) activities that targeted people in water-scarce areas, displaced populations and areas of low sanitation coverage. CARE International has contributed enormously to the country's efforts to improve access to safe water, which now stands at 51 per cent nationally, modest sanitation and good hygiene practices (CARE International, 2022). Additionally, in partnership with WFP, CARE distributes up to 700 Metric Tons of food to 46,641 households in the refugee camp at Dadaab, Kenya. This is aimed at making sure the refugees have the most basic food items that, include Rice, Yellow Spilt Peas, Vegetable oil and super cereals, while through empowerment programs, the refugees are able to supplement or add on the basic items distributed (CARE International, 2022). Moreover, AMREF Health Africa implemented the “Afya Mtoto” project in Kenya, which focused on improving maternal and child health outcomes. The project aimed to strengthen healthcare systems, provide quality reproductive and maternal health services, promote child health interventions, and enhance community awareness and engagement in maternal and child health issues. It also included training health workers and empowering communities to demand and access quality healthcare services (AMREF website, 2019). The Kenya Red Cross Society operates in Kenya, providing humanitarian assistance, disaster response, and community empowerment initiatives (Kenya Red Cross Society website, 2021).

The contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to community empowerment was a topic of great significance (Nikkah & Redzuan, 2017). While NGOs played a crucial role in community development, there was a need to understand their specific contributions and the impact they had on the well-being and empowerment of the local population. Despite the presence of NGOs in Kitui County, there was a research gap regarding their effectiveness and the extent to which they contributed to community empowerment. The problem at hand revolved around

the lack of comprehensive research on the specific contributions and outcomes of NGOs in community empowerment within Kitui County. While there was anecdotal evidence and localised studies on the activities of certain NGOs, a comprehensive analysis of the overall impact and effectiveness of NGOs in empowering the local community was lacking. Understanding the contributions of NGOs in community empowerment was essential for designing targeted interventions, policy frameworks, and resource allocation to maximise their impact. By addressing this research gap, we gained insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges faced by NGOs in Kitui County, ultimately leading to improved strategies for community empowerment and sustainable development. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in improving the health sector in Kitui County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Contribution of NGOs to Improving the Health Sector

NGOs play a crucial role in improving the health sector in Kitui County through their diverse initiatives and programs. NGOs often establish and operate healthcare facilities, clinics, and mobile health units in underserved areas of Kitui County. These facilities provide essential healthcare services, including preventive care, primary healthcare, maternal and child health services, immunisations, and treatment for common diseases. NGOs conduct training programs for healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, and community health workers, to enhance their skills and knowledge. These capacity-building initiatives contribute to the overall improvement of healthcare service delivery by ensuring that healthcare professionals are equipped with up-to-date medical practices and expertise.

NGOs implement health education and awareness programs targeting communities in Kitui County. These programs focus on promoting healthy behaviours, disease prevention, family planning, sanitation, hygiene practices, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS awareness. By increasing knowledge and awareness, NGOs empower individuals to make informed

decisions about their well-being and health. Additionally, NGOs actively participate in disease control and prevention initiatives in Kitui County. They collaborate with government agencies and international organisations to implement vaccination campaigns, disease surveillance programs, and interventions targeting communicable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and neglected tropical diseases. NGOs have made substantial contributions to improving healthcare access, delivery, and outcomes in different regions. For instance, a study by Shiferaw et al. (2015) assessed the impact of NGOs on healthcare delivery in Ethiopia. They found that NGOs' interventions, including capacity building, infrastructure development, and community health programs, improved access to healthcare services, reduced mortality rates, and increased health awareness and behaviours in the targeted communities.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The Contribution of NGOs to Improving the Health Sector in Kitui County

NGOs have established healthcare facilities, conducted health awareness campaigns, and provided medical supplies to underserved areas in Kitui County. Survey data indicated an increase in healthcare access for community members due to NGO interventions. Maternal and child health services have particularly benefited. Focus group discussions highlighted that NGOs have improved healthcare awareness and encouraged preventive health practices among residents. The table below shows that 68 per cent of community participants said that they now have improved access to healthcare services in their communities as a result of NGO interventions. Moreover, 82 per cent of staff respondents mentioned that their NGOs are actively involved in healthcare-related projects, including the establishment of healthcare facilities and health awareness campaigns. In addition, maternal and child health services (91%) were particularly accessible through NGO initiatives.

Table 1: The Contribution of NGOs in Improving the Health Sector

	Percentage	Participants
Staff in NGOs operating in the health sector	82(%)	41
Staff in NGOs working on Children's protection and women empowerment	91(%)	91
Community members	68(%)	134

The findings indicated that NGOs have made significant strides in enhancing healthcare accessibility and promoting health awareness within Kitui County. These findings resonated with the broader impact of NGOs on healthcare in underserved regions. NGOs in Kitui County have successfully addressed gaps in healthcare infrastructure, raised awareness, and improved healthcare practices, thereby contributing to the empowerment of the community through improved health.

The findings indicated that NGOs have played a vital role in enhancing healthcare accessibility in Kitui County. The emphasis on child health and maternal

services underscored the impact of NGOs in addressing critical healthcare needs within the community, aligning with their mission to improve community health.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: The research findings conclusively demonstrated that NGOs have played a pivotal role in enhancing healthcare accessibility in Kitui County. Maternal and child health services, in particular, have benefited from NGO interventions, resulting in improved healthcare outcomes. The establishment of healthcare facilities and health awareness campaigns

have collectively contributed to a more accessible and responsive healthcare system.

Recommendations: Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to assess the impact of NGO interventions continually. This will enable authorities

to make data-driven decisions and allocate resources efficiently. Raise awareness about available NGO services and programs to ensure that beneficiaries fully utilise healthcare, education, and women empowerment resources.

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