

Factors Affecting Sustainability of Cocoa Life Project Interventions in Ghana: Views of Beneficiaries in Wassa East District

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Abstract

This study interrogated the factors affecting the sustainability of project interventions implemented in the Wassa East District by World Vision Ghana (WVG) under the Cocoa Life Project in the country. Based on a mixed method research approach, a total of 406 respondents who were farmers, members of village savings and loans associations, gari processors, and soap makers were involved in the study using stratified, simple random, and convenience sampling methods. Structured interviews and focus group discussion guides were the instruments used for data collection. For the quantitative data analysis, frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation and chi-square were used whereas qualitative data obtained was analyzed thematically. The study observed that project interventions implemented in the District by WVG were generally sustainable. Factors such as local ownership, commitment of community members, teamwork, and supportive relationship between WVG team and community members aided the sustainability of the interventions. Despite the flexibility in the delivery of the project interventions, community members who benefited from the interventions had some concerns about the Project. Concerns were particularly raised with respect to the level of participation, the nature of communication, and the level of accountability and transparency which characterized the Project. We recommend that World Vision Ghana, Mondelez International, and Cocoa Life Division team up with local authorities and community members to come out with clear measures to: increase local participation, improve communication, and enhance transparency and accountability throughout the delivery of Cocoa Life Project interventions in the country.

Keywords: *Beneficiaries, communication, participation, project interventions, sustainability*

Introduction

Sustainability is one of the most critical issues in project interventions, even though much of the literature available on it remains theoretical, with little guidance on how to sustain project interventions and project outcomes (Moore et al., 2017). On their part, Aarons et al. (2011) believe that project sustainability occurs when interventions provided lead to

behavior changes in the lives of the beneficiaries. Thus, behavior change is essential for the sustainability of projects. According to Doyle et al. (2013), any project that fails to ensure a change in behavior cannot be said to be sustainable. Beyond behavior change, Buchanan et al. (2005) state that sustainability refers to the situation where an intervention is provided over a period of time which continues to offer more benefits to the beneficiaries. This means that the duration of projects and the continued benefits accrued from the projects are crucial to project sustainability (Chambers et al., 2017).

Indicators such as project continuity and adaptation of practices from the projects are vital in project sustainability (Fleischer et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Stirman et al., 2011). In their review of 209 articles on sustainability, Moore et al. (2017) identified five indicators of project sustainability including time, continuous delivery, behavior change, evolution/adaptation, and continued benefits. Beyond the indicators of project sustainability, and other factors which influence the sustainability of project interventions. One key factor is effective participation (Admassu et al., 2002; Odoom et al., 2021a). Fowler, as cited in Nalubiri (2010), contends that in pursuing project sustainability, the level of local participation is critical. Increased participation helps to ensure joint control of project interventions among the different stakeholders.

Local ownership also affects project sustainability. Local ownership refers to the process of possessing, accessing, influencing, and having the right to use projects or initiatives collectively as a community. Donais et al., as cited in Nalubiri (2010) submit that local ownership enables local actors to control, implement and manage the process of political, social, and economic projects. Other factors which influence project sustainability are power and empowerment (Michael, 2004), local people's initiatives and knowledge (Friedmann, 1992; Nalubiri, 2010), and transparency and accountability (Silvius & Schipper, 2014). Power provides a conducive environment through which development actors such as NGOs can be innovative, take risks, be willing to experiment, invest heavily in research, and spend more time working with communities (Donais, 2009; Michael, 2004). Besides, building on local people's initiatives and knowledge enables development actors to play a facilitative and supportive role in project delivery (Friedmann, 1992). Sustainability is key to development actors. At the organizational level, Khan and Hare, as cited in Adam et al. (2015), assert that project sustainability in the NGO sector depends on issues such as sound institutional structures, adequate funds, and a good working culture.

Transparency and accountability are also important factors that affect the sustainability of projects. Transparency refers to the avoidance of a black-box methodology and disclosure of the policies, decisions, activities, and subsequent environmental and societal impacts. It also entails a clear, precise, and complete portrayal of policies, decisions, activities, and their overall impacts (Hemphill, 2013). Transparency and accountability allow project stakeholders to evaluate any issues which may arise and be responsible for the decisions they take. This contributes to adherence to sustainable practices (Silvius & Schipper, 2014). Nalubiri (2010) argues that coordination among stakeholders is indispensable for the sustainability of projects. Stakeholders of projects need to properly coordinate to sustain the project interventions they deliver.

In recent decades, the demand for chocolate has been growing, especially in developing countries. However, the supply of cocoa beans is constrained by a number of technical,

environmental, socio-economic, and political factors. In order to meet the projected requirement of an additional one million metric tons by 2020, players in the cocoa industry were expected to institute measures to ensure increased supply (Mondelez International & Cocoa Life, 2013; Mondelez International, 2013, 2014; Mondelez International Progress Report, 2015). In response to this trend, Mondelez International, the largest producer of chocolate in the world developed the Cocoa Life Program as a development approach. As the industry leader, Mondelez International has recognized the need to help transform the livelihoods of cocoa farmers and their communities to sustain the cocoa industry. Cocoa Life Program mainly focused on the provision of interventions to improve the lives of farmers, communities, and the supply of cocoa (Mondelez International & Cocoa Life, 2013; Mondelez International, 2013; Mondelez International Progress Report, 2015).

To fulfill its vision of promoting development, Mondelez International launched the Cocoa Life Project in 2012 which aimed at investing \$400 million USD by 2022. The Project seeks to directly empower over 200,000 cocoa farmers and about one million community members in six major cocoa-growing nations: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Indonesia, India, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil. It links cocoa farming with community development through the provision of training programs on new farming methods, livelihood interventions, youth empowerment, and community development initiatives to improve the lives of farmers and their communities (Mondelez International, 2013; Mondelez International Progress Report, 2015). Ultimately, the Project seeks to transform key cocoa-growing nations to sustain the chocolate industry for the greater good of the world (Mondelez International, 2014; Mondelez International & Cocoa Life, 2013).

Since the inception of the Cocoa Life Project, World Vision International has been a key implementing partner in beneficiary countries. World Vision International (WVI) is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization which is committed to working with children, families, and communities to address issues such as poverty and injustice. The Organization is inspired by its Christian value of working to improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable populations. It provides various interventions which are context-based mainly in areas such as education, agriculture, economic development, health, and water and sanitation. World Vision also seeks to ensure that governments implement relevant services to enhance the lives of the citizens, especially in rural areas of Africa (Odoom, 2021; WVI, 2017). As part of the Cocoa Life Project in the country, World Vision Ghana (WVG) has implemented diverse interventions in several cocoa-growing communities under its operational zones including the Wassa East District (WED). Thus, WED has been a key beneficiary of the Cocoa Life Project in Ghana with WVG as the sole NGO which delivered the project interventions. In WED, WVG has provided project interventions in over 40 communities in the District. Specifically, WVG provided interventions to increase cocoa productivity and net incomes derived from cocoa production in WED. At the community level, WVG provided business management skills and leadership training to empower women to participate actively in decision-making processes in the communities. The Organization also supported various communities in the District to develop their own action plans to bring about transformation in the communities. These interventions mainly aimed at increasing cocoa yields, improving communities, improving the livelihoods of farmers, empowering the youth, and enhancing environmental sustainability in line with the goal of the Project (Mondelez International, 2014).

Again, WVG provided interventions such as financial literacy, entrepreneurial, and business skills in order to engage in other income generation activities to increase the livelihood options of beneficiaries in WED. The Organization helped community members to acquire supplementary livelihoods in areas such as soap making, gari processing, batik/tie & dye, and petty trade. It also provided skill training on savings, loans, investments, bookkeeping, etc. to enable community members better manage their businesses and increase their access to micro-finance (Odoom et al., 2021a). Though some studies have been done on the Project in WED (Mondelez International, 2014; Mondelez International Progress Report, 2015; Odoom, 2021), none of such studies explored the sustainability of the Cocoa Life Project in the District. There is, therefore, a knowledge gap in terms of the sustainability of the Project in WED. The continuing existence of this gap is problematic because sustainability is a critical issue in the provision of all projects (Chambers et al, 2013; Nalubiri, 2010; Moore et al., 2017) including the Cocoa Life Project. This paper sought to examine the factors affecting the sustainability of Cocoa Life Project interventions implemented by WVG in WED. Specifically, the study focused on the views of beneficiaries on the sustainability of the interventions, and the factors affecting the sustainability of the interventions in the District.

Materials and Methods

The study relied on the mixed methods research approach. The target population for the study was drawn from all the farmers who belonged to the Cocoa Farmers' Cooperative Societies (CFCs), members of the village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), members of gari processors' groups (GPGs), and the soap makers in the beneficiary communities. The researchers focused on the members of CFCs, GPGs, VSLAs, and soap makers because they were the key groups WVG worked with throughout the delivery of many of the Cocoa Life Project interventions in the WED. The study used stratified, simple random, and convenience sampling methods to select respondents. There were 456 farmers who were active members of CFCs in the District. Many of the active members were the executives of the CFCs who had the mandate to ensure the sustainability of the societies in the larger interest of the communities. Using Yamane's (1967) sample size formula, at a margin of error (0.05), 213 were selected out of the 456 beneficiary farmers in the communities through a simple random sampling method (lottery approach).

Again, WVG formed VSLAs in selected communities such as Kwabaa, Nyankonakpoe, Apatebi, Esumankrom, Nkapiem, and Amposaso. Other communities are Awawam, Aboaboso, Anto, Domama, Sekyere Nyamebekyere, and Nyamendaye. Members of these VSLAs also benefited from the Project interventions such as training on business skills, financial literacy, and supplementary livelihood programs. There was a total of 120 active members of VSLAs in the beneficiary communities. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size distribution table, with a population of 120 at a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error, 92 beneficiaries of VSLAs were selected for the study through a simple random sampling method (lottery approach).

World Vision Ghana equally provided training on petty trading, business skills, financial literacy, etc. to the members of GPGs in WED. The members were also trained in modern methods of gari production. Communities that had recognized GPGs included Anto, Aboboaso, Nkapiem, Ebukurom Junction, Esumankurom, Sekyere Nyamebekyere, Amankesease, Kwabaa, and Nyankponpke. In all, there were 75 gari processors who

constituted active and well-organized groups in the communities. Based on Yamane's (1967) formula, 63 beneficiaries of GPGs were selected for this study through a simple random sampling technique (lottery approach).

Besides, the researchers included beneficiaries who were engaged in soap making. Community members who were into soap making also received interventions provided under the Cocoa Life Project. However, soap makers did not have recognized associations with a clearly defined leadership structure in the district. Furthermore, though many community members were trained in soap making as a supplementary livelihood, a few of the beneficiaries were using the knowledge gained to expand their livelihood options. Thus, the researchers used a convenience sampling method to select 38 soap makers in communities including Kwaaba, Esumankrom, Nkapiem, Domama, and Aboboaso. The convenience sampling method helps researchers to select subjects based on their accessibility, availability, and proximity to the researcher (Babbie, cited in Gyamfi, 2014; Sarantakos, 2005). In all, 406 respondents made up of 213 farmers, 92 members of VSLAs, 63 gari processors, and 38 soap makers were involved in the study, with a response rate of 84.2 percent for the quantitative data.

The study used a structured interview and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) guide for data collection. A structured interview also called a standardized interview, interview schedule, or researcher-administered survey (Ashfaq, 2016) was used to gather data from the selected beneficiaries. The survey ensured that all respondents were asked the same questions which all were closed-ended. The first part of the survey ascertained the general views of the respondents on whether or not the project interventions were sustainable using a five Likert scale (5=Very Sustainable, 4=Moderately Sustainable, 3=Neutral, 2=Moderately Unsustainable, and 1=Very Unsustainable). Again, respondents were asked to rate the sustainability of project interventions based on key indicators of sustainability using a scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Moderately Agree, 3= Undecided, 2= Moderately Disagree, and 1= Strongly Disagree. The last part of the survey examined the factors which affect the sustainability of Cocoa Life Project interventions implemented by WVG based on a scale: 5=Very Strongly Agree, 4= Strongly Agree, 3=Moderately Agree, 2=Lowly Agree, and 1=Very Lowly Agree. Also, FGD was organized for selected project beneficiaries. Two FGDs were organized for beneficiaries in Daboase and Ekutuase Area Councils. Communities located within these two area councils mostly benefited from the Project. Each FGD was made up of eight members selected from across the various beneficiaries of the Project. The issues in the survey informed the development of the FGD guide. The instruments were pilot tested in the Fantekwa District, which is the only district, apart from WED, where WVG first implemented the Project. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, and chi-square were used to analyze the quantitative data whilst qualitative data obtained through the FGDs were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The themes generated include change in behavior, skill training, teamwork, supportive relationship, good working culture, and communication. Other themes are local ownership, empowerment of beneficiaries, the commitment of local people, level of participation, transparency, and accountability.

Results and Discussion

The study first sought to establish whether the Project interventions were sustainable or not. More than half of the respondents (55.8%) believed that the interventions were moderately sustainable. This implies that beneficiaries were generally convinced that the Project

interventions in WED were sustainable. Despite the concerns about the Project including the low inputs participants made into its planning, the FGDs with some beneficiaries showed that the interventions were sustainable in the communities. This was due to the importance community members accorded to the project interventions. However, at Daboase Area, it was revealed that some of the interventions including sanitation practices, soap-making skill training, and animal rearing were not sustainable. Among others, beneficiaries ascribed the poor sustainability of these interventions to “inadequate start-up capital, failure of WVG and Cocoa Life to provide support, and unavailability of the market”. Similar views were expressed during the FGDs at Ekutuase. In spite of the concerns from beneficiaries, it can be stated that the project interventions were generally sustainable. This result disagrees with Zakaria (2011) who found that NGOs are unable to sustain their development interventions.

Secondly, the study explored the views of respondents on the sustainability of the interventions based on key indicators of sustainability. The indicators were: the duration of project interventions, the adaptation of practices obtained from the Project, continuous delivery of interventions, behavior change among the beneficiaries, and continuous derivation of benefits from the Project (Moore et al., 2017). A little more than half (51.3%) of the respondents stated that the duration of the Project was adequate (Table 1). The results from the qualitative data showed that specific interventions were provided over a period of time. In the FGDs, all the beneficiaries expected the duration for some of the interventions to be extended so as to achieve the desired goal. For instance, in the Daboase Council, beneficiaries agreed that “*The duration for animal rearing, and saving and loan training programs were too short.*” On their part, beneficiaries of the Daboase Council added that “*a little more time should have been given to the training on new methods of gari processing and soap making*”. Yet, it was agreed that the duration was fairly ok.

Table 1: Key indicators of project sustainability

Indicator	A		U		D	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
The duration for implementation was adequate	187	51.3	28	8.2	127	40.2
Adaptation of practices obtained from the Project	244	71.4	23	6.6	75	22.0
WVG continues to deliver interventions to the communities	-	-	8	2.0	335	98.0
Behavior change among the beneficiaries	218	63.7	34	10	90	26.3
Continuous deriving of benefits from the Project	224	65.5	10	2.9	108	31.6

Key: A- Agree U- Undecided D- Disagree

Also, in the Ekutuase Council, beneficiaries said, “*Although the duration was generally ok, it was not enough for some of the interventions.*” In short, although beneficiaries admitted that the duration was generally ok, it was found that the duration was short for some of the interventions. These findings generally uphold the position held by Stirman et al. (2012), and Schneider and Libercier, as cited in Mammah (2006) that the duration within which project interventions are delivered contributes to the sustainability of the project. Nonetheless, Schneider and Libercier conceded that projects cannot continue in perpetuity. This means that beneficiaries need to get to the stage of self-reliance which enables them to pursue their current activities and to effectively cope with changing circumstances (Schneider & Libercier, cited in Mammah, 2006).

Again, most (71.4%) of the respondents believed that practices obtained from the Cocoa Life Project interventions had been adopted by the beneficiaries. The results from the FGDs did not differ markedly from those of the interview schedule. Beneficiaries from Ekutuase Council specified that *“Many farmers have adopted the modern farming practices they obtained through the Cocoa Life Project of WVG.”* Many beneficiaries still use the knowledge and skill obtained from the training on savings, alternative livelihoods, and financial literacy among others. Beneficiaries at the Daboase Area Council shared the observations by Ekutuase Council. They stated further, *“We still use the knowledge we obtained from the Project in farming and gari processing.* Participants from Daboase reiterated: *“We still use the knowledge we gained from the financial literacy training and the community development planning. Our saving culture is better now because we are still using what WVG taught us as part of the Project.”* However, beneficiaries admitted that those who obtained skill training in soap making generally had difficulty in putting into practice the knowledge they acquired due to the increasing cost of production. It was further revealed that beneficiaries overly depended on farming which affected the time they spent on other income-generation activities they had learned, coupled with the low support from WVG. As beneficiaries from Ekutuase Area confirmed, *“They asked us to buy hencoop and they would give us chickens to rear. But they have not even bothered to find out whether or not we have bought them.”* It is therefore clear from both the structured interview and FGDs that, though the beneficiaries had some challenges. Nonetheless, They adopted the practices they learned from the Project. The results agree with Moore et al. (2017) who maintained that adaptation of practices from project interventions is a crucial indicator of project sustainability.

Moreso, almost all (98%) of the respondents stated that WVG had stopped providing interventions. Further inquiries done by the researchers confirmed that WVG was not providing any more interventions in the district. Further checks by the researchers showed that the organization had left the district for another district about a year earlier before this study was even conducted. All the beneficiaries for the FGDs stated that WVG was not providing any interventions again and that they had left the district. However, beneficiaries admitted that WVG informed them of their departure ahead of time. Besides, most (63.7%) of the respondents indicated that there was a change in their behavior because of the Project. The group discussions with the beneficiaries from Daboase Council revealed that *“Many of the farmers, gari processors, and those involved in savings and loans have all witnessed a positive change in behavior which they attributed to the Project.”* On their part, beneficiaries from Ekutuase indicated that *“There has been a great change in our farming methods and the way we go about our soap making and gari processing ever since the Project was implemented. After training on the use of pesticides and fertilizer, we now know how to use pesticides and fertilizer. We also now plant shade trees to protect our cocoa farms.”* Clearly, the Project has ensured the adoption of new farming methods including the use of pesticides, fertilizer, and planting of shade trees. However, the members admitted that some of the old behaviors are still prevalent. For instance, despite the public education on health care, some people were using mosquito nets donated to them to fence their backyard gardens whilst they continued to battle cases of malaria. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that there was a change in behaviors among beneficiaries. This revelation is consistent with Buchanan et al. (2005), and Chambers et al. (2013) who observed that a change in behavior among project beneficiaries shows that the project is sustainable. The

finding on the use of pesticides and planting of shade trees to protect our cocoa farms converge with Mondelez International (2022) which reported that the Cocoa Life Project has helped to ensure the proper use of pesticides and planting of shade trees by farmers.

Moreover, the majority (65.5%) of the respondents were still deriving benefits from the Project although WVG had left the district. The FGDs largely confirmed that community members still derive benefits from the interventions. For example, beneficiaries remarked, *“Skill training on modern farming practices, modern gari processing, and savings and loans are areas we continue to derive most benefits after the delivery of the Project.”* Beneficiaries also mentioned that *“Business skill development, educational facilities, sanitation practices, and water projects”* are vital areas where they still derive benefits even after the end of the interventions. Clearly, community members were still benefiting from the interventions, and this explains the extent of the sustainability of the Project. The results are similar to earlier studies (Doyle et al., 2013; Mancini & Marek, 2004; Stetler et al., 2007) which found that deriving unending benefits from a project shows how sustainable the project is sustainable.

A further analysis using a chi-square test at the 95% confidence level and at the 0.05 margin of error was conducted (Table 2). A significant relationship existed between the Project and the sustainability indicators such as adequacy of time for implementation of the project, presence of adaptation of practices, continued delivery of project interventions, behavior change, and continued deriving of more benefits from the Project with all of them recording a p-value of 0.000.

Table 2: Relationship between indicators of sustainability and the project

Indicator	Test Value	Df	Sig. (2-sided)
Time for implementation of project was adequate	45.222 ^a	4	0.000
Presence of adaptation of practices	158.117 ^a	4	0.000
There was continued delivery of project interventions	156.684 ^a	2	0.000
There has been behavior change among beneficiaries	148.205 ^a	4	0.000
Continued deriving of benefits from the Project	128.029 ^a	4	0.000

(Statistic is significant at 0.05): df = degree of freedom

Having determined the relationship between the Project and the sustainability indicators, the researchers examined the factors affecting the sustainability of the project interventions (Table 3). Factors such as teamwork, supportive relationship, working culture, communication, and adequate participation were examined. Others are local ownership, transparency, accountability, empowerment, local people’s commitment, and coordination.

Teamwork and support from officers of WVG

Respondents agreed that teamwork (M=4.01, SD=0.91) and supportive relationship (M=4.18, SD=0.52) WVG provided in the course of the intervention contributed to the sustainability of the Project interventions as found in Table 3. In essence, teamwork and supportive relationship positively affected how sustainable the interventions have been. Also, the results from the FGDs at Ekutuase Area Council indicated that *“WVG put in place a team and supports in charge of the Project. In fact, WVG appointed some officers who handled issues on their Cocoa Life Project. They worked as a team.”* Moreover, in the Daboase Council, beneficiaries agreed that there was teamwork but also indicated that WVG could have done more to support them, especially, in the area of animal rearing through proper engagement.

It can be said that there was teamwork and supportive relationship which positively affected the sustainability of the Project.

Working culture of personnel of WVG in charge of the interventions

Table 3 further shows that the working culture of officers from WVG in charge of the Project was good, and this helped to sustain the interventions (M=3.14, SD=1.22). On their part, the FGDs revealed that personnel from WVG demonstrated a good working culture. Participants from Ekutuase contended, *“The personnel from WVG showed commitment in the course of the Project. They were time conscious.”* It was added that the attitude of some beneficiaries towards time was problematic. However, participants from Daboase Council admitted, *“Not all the Officers of WVG cooperated with us. Some of them were not patient to explain issues to us. Not all of us are literate, so they have to be patient with us and explain things better to us.”* In Ekutuase, the FGDs noted, *“We all wanted to learn the new methods of farming and soap making but the speed at which some of the methods were explained to us did not help us.”* From the two approaches, even though there was a good working culture from WVG personnel, there was more to be done to make the Project very meaningful to the people. This finding supports that of Adam et al. (2015) who revealed that good working culture exhibited by NGOs promotes the sustainability of project interventions.

Table 3: Views of respondents on the factors affecting the sustainability of the Project

Factor	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Commitment from local people towards the Project	5	1	4.21	0.54
Supportive relationship between WVG team and beneficiaries	5	1	4.18	0.52
Local ownership of the interventions	5	1	4.09	0.86
Empowerment of local people throughout the interventions	5	1	4.05	0.92
Teamwork for the delivery of the interventions	5	1	4.01	0.91
Flexibility in the Project interventions	5	1	3.37	1.25
Clear communication between the beneficiaries and WVG	5	1	3.34	1.09
Effective coordination between WVG personnel and beneficiaries	5	1	3.33	1.08
Good working culture of WVG personnel who led the Project	5	1	3.14	1.22
Adequacy of participation by project beneficiaries	5	1	2.09	1.22
Accountability throughout the delivery of the Project	5	1	2.06	1.24
Transparency in the implementation of the Project	5	1	2.00	1.21

Communication between project beneficiaries and personnel of WVG

Respondents considered communication between them and personnel of WVG as moderately clear (M=3.34, SD=1.09). The FGDs also revealed that there was communication between project beneficiaries and personnel from WVG. Participants from Ekutuase contended, *“The personnel from WVG communicated to beneficiaries in the course of the interventions.”* It was added that beneficiaries were occasionally given information relating to the various interventions under the Project. Supporting this view, participants from Daboase Council stated that communication was fairly good during the implementation stage of the various interventions. However, participants from both councils admitted that

communication at the planning, design, and evaluation stages of the interventions was poor. As beneficiaries, they were yet to receive reliable platforms for them to communicate the challenges they faced in each of the interventions. Participants equally added that ensuring the sustainability of the interventions requires a very high level of communication among all stakeholders. By implication, communication during the delivery of the Project was not the best. It was largely one-way directional and monologic, with project beneficiaries having very little input into the planning and evaluation of the interventions.

Local ownership of the interventions

Project beneficiaries indicated that the local people were allowed to own the project right from the onset (M=4.09, SD=0.86). During the FGDs with selected beneficiaries, it was revealed that there was local ownership of the interventions. It was noted further that WVG informed beneficiaries that the Project was for them so they should take advantage of the interventions. In the words of participants from Ekutuase, *"We were told to own the Project right from the start of the implementation."* Also, at Daboase it was confirmed that *"WVG and Cocoa Life constantly advised us to own and commit more to the Project. They said they are here because of us, so we should see the Project as our own."* However, participants from both councils admitted that their input and expertise did not have much influence on the Project. Nevertheless, local ownership generally contributed to the sustainability of the projects, and this finding confirms studies by Junne and Verkoren (2005), and Nalubiri, (2010) on the importance of local ownership in project sustainability.

Empowerment of local people

To further promote the sustainability of the Project, respondents were empowered (M=4.05, SD=0.92) by the interventions. Also, the group discussions showed that the interventions led to the empowerment of the beneficiaries. At Daboase Council, beneficiaries conceded that the Project had empowered them in many ways. They remarked that *"Interventions on farming and gari processing have empowered us financially."* At the same Council (Daboase), it was observed that *"The Project also helped us to diversify our sources of income, and this has empowered us financially."* Similarly, beneficiaries from Ekutuase Council intimated that *"All the training programs on business skills, community planning, water and sanitation interventions, financial literacy training, and career opportunities for the youth have empowered us a lot."* Beneficiaries added that as community members were empowered, their level of self-confidence increased. The result on empowerment reinforces previous studies (Baccaro, 2001; Hedayat & Ma'rof, 2010) which found that NGOs help promote local empowerment. The result further validates Nalubiri's (2010) finding that local empowerment positively affects the sustainability of project interventions.

Commitment from the local people

Another factor affecting the sustainability of the Project is the commitment from the local people [M=4.21, SD=0.54] (Table 3). Respondents agreed that there was commitment from the local people during the delivery of the Project and this accounted for the sustainability of the Project. Besides, further group discussions revealed that the commitment shown by the local people is due to the fact that WVG had been in the district for some time, providing a number of projects to the communities. The words of the participants from Ekutuase confirm this finding: *"We have known WVG for a long time in the district. They have provided services to many communities in this District, so we knew they would not disappoint us. We have seen what they have done in many communities in the district."* Again, at Daboase Council, the study noted, *"WVG had worked with many of us before this*

Project. They provided us with assistance in areas such as education, health, agriculture, and water, so we knew they would help to deliver the Cocoa Life Project better.” In effect, there was local commitment towards the Project interventions due to what beneficiaries had learned about WVG in the District. This confirms previous studies (Lewis, 2005; Lewis & Kanji, 2009) which see an increased commitment of local people to contribute to the projects as essential to the sustainability of the projects.

Adequacy of participation in the interventions

In the area of participation, respondents described their overall participation as low ($M=2.09$, $SD=1.22$). The FGDs also confirmed that the level of participation, especially in the planning and evaluation stages of the interventions, was low. Beneficiaries from Ekuase noted, *“We had expected to have more inputs into the planning of the interventions, but this did not occur. We wanted to define our own development goals based on our needs, but our views were not captured in the planning of the Project.”* In addition, beneficiaries at Daboase Council stated that *“We wanted WVG to spend enough time to find out whether the interventions they provided had achieved the goals set but this did not happen. You can’t just assume that everything you give to communities helps to solve their needs and problems. We have to find out.”* Thus, the structured interview and FGDs results showed that there was inadequate participation. It is no wonder that beneficiaries said that they were lowly satisfied, especially, with their participation in planning and evaluating the interventions. This finding confirms that of Mammah (2006) who discovered that participation in NGO interventions by beneficiaries is low in Ghana. Similarly, the result substantiates previous studies (Ahenkan et al., 2013; Odoom et al., 2021b) which observed that participation of citizens in development services and projects is low in Ghana.

Transparency and accountability issues in the Project

There was equally a low level of transparency ($M=2.00$, $SD=1.21$) and accountability during the implementation of the Project ($M=2.06$, $SD=1.24$). This shows that beneficiaries had concerns with the level of transparency and accountability WVG showed in the Project. In the FGDs, beneficiaries were not pleased with how issues of transparency and accountability were addressed by WVG. Participants at Ekuase said, *“Officers of WVG did not fully listen to us to know how the interventions were going on and what inputs we as beneficiaries could make to improve the Project.”* Again, participants from Daboase opined, *“We could not even ask how much was being spent on the interventions. They had their own budgets and there was nothing we could do to change any aspect of the budgets.”* According to the beneficiaries, how funds for the Project were being used was not explained to them and they were also not in the position to find out. When beneficiaries were asked why they failed to find out, they said it is the practice in Ghana that even when the state is providing services to the people, issues of transparency and accountability are poorly handled. Although beneficiaries inquired from WVG on issues of accountability and transparency, the responses the Officers provided were not convincing. In effect, transparency and accountability were not properly addressed under the Project. The findings agree with Edward and Hulme’s assertion, as cited in TANGO (2002), and Lewis and Kanji (2009) that accountability is not taken seriously by NGOs. Also, the findings support that of Semezana, as cited in Mushi (2011) lack of accountability is a common feature of NGOs in places such as Tanzania. The rising number of NGOs globally means that development partners, including NGOs themselves, must pay attention to issues of good governance such as accountability and transparency in their projects (Lekorwe, 1999; Rooney, 2011).

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The Cocoa Life Project interventions implemented by WVG in the District are generally sustainable. The duration of the intervention, adaptation of new practices, and behavior change on the part of project beneficiaries contribute to the sustainability of WVG's project interventions. Beneficiaries continue to benefit from the interventions which were implemented in the district about seven years ago. Again, WVG demonstrates teamwork and supportive relationship which help to sustain Cocoa Life Project interventions. Besides, local ownership, empowerment of local people, effective coordination, and flexibility of interventions promote project sustainability. Nonetheless, there are concerns with the level of participation, communication, accountability, and transparency of WVG's interventions under the Project. Even though the interventions are delivered over a period of time in the communities, the duration of some of the interventions is inadequate. To promote the sustainability of the Project, a number of policy measures need to be considered. First, World Vision Ghana should work in partnership with Mondelez International and Cocoa Life Division to extend the duration of the Project interventions in order to ensure that beneficiaries fully realize the expected returns of the interventions. Second, WVG should continue to demonstrate teamwork, good working culture, and supportive relationships in the course of undertaking development services in communities. Third, WVG should liaise with Cocoa Life Division, District Assemblies, and other NGOs to provide development projects and services to empower people, especially those in the rural areas of the country. Fourth, WVG should team up with Mondelez International, Cocoa Life Division, and the project beneficiaries to design clear measures to promote accountability and transparency in the delivery of project interventions. This will enable beneficiaries to demand answers for concerns they may have regarding accountability and transparency in project delivery. Fifth, adequate measures should be put in place by WVG and Cocoa Life Division to promote local participation in the interventions. Sixth, community members should show more commitment to development interventions and programs provided to them. They need to be actively involved in the various activities provided by development partners and stakeholders in the district. Other recommendations to guide policy shift include the fact that WVG needs to team up with local authorities and community leaders to find innovative ways to effectively coordinate the delivery and management of project interventions. This will also help to ensure that local knowledge, expertise, and other resources are fully utilized in the interest of sustainable development. Also, periodic sensitization using local radio stations, information centers, and mobile information vans should be done with the active involvement of community members by WVG and the Cocoa Life Division. Moreover, WVG, Cocoa Life Division and Mondelez International should re-consider the duration for interventions such as training on animal rearing, financial literacy, and modern gari processing. The approach to delivering some of these interventions should be redefined in order to clearly focus on the peculiar needs of beneficiaries. Again, community members are urged to make effective use of the knowledge, practices, and skills obtained from project interventions. Community members are also encouraged to own and commit to project interventions undertaken in their locality since they are the ultimate beneficiaries of these project interventions. Finally, WVG and Cocoa Life Division should team up and institute some award schemes to motivate project beneficiaries who are able to effectively use the knowledge, skills, and practices obtained from project interventions.

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