

Non-Governmental Organizations and Development Service Provision: A Conceptual and Empirical Review

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Abstract

Globally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are seen as a significant driving force behind delivering development services. There is universal consensus within the development community that development service delivery will be incomplete without the involvement of NGOs. Thus, many NGOs across the globe complement governments' efforts in development service delivery, a situation that has occasioned a rapid rise in both the volume and scale of operations of NGOs. Nonetheless, there is a growing debate regarding the conceptual intentions of NGOs. While some scholars believe that NGOs effectively provide development services, others have suggested that development service delivery does not constitute a critical component of NGOs' agenda. There is also the issue of whether or not the approaches NGOs employ in development services are participatory enough. While some scholars opine that participatory development communication approaches characterize NGOs' development services, others maintain that participation is merely rhetoric value within the NGO sector. These contending views risk an obliteration of the continuing relevance of NGOs in development discourse. This paper seeks to contribute to the debate on the place of NGOs in development services and the approaches NGOs employ in contemporary development practice. The authors posit that NGOs occupy a central place in development service provision but concede that NGO operations in development services are not without challenges. The authors argue further that NGOs' role in development services can better be appreciated based on a thorough understanding of the role of participatory development communication in development service provisions. The paper presents a review of the relevant conceptual and empirical literature on NGOs' activities in development services and concludes by identifying lessons that should engage the attention of key stakeholders.

Keywords: Development, NGO interventions, Participatory Development Communication, Service Provision, Programs

Introduction

Development is about bringing quality changes in the lives of the citizenry. Its outcomes go beyond growth in the traditional economic sense to include all other human well-being aspects (Sen, 2012; Todaro & Smith, 2006). Nations across the globe strive to put in place measures to bring about quality changes in the lives of their citizens. However, it is widely acknowledged that in many developing nations, the state cannot independently provide essential social goods and services that would ensure a progressive poverty reduction and guarantee sustainable

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development (Okorley & Nkrumah, 2012). When the state cannot provide sufficient goods and services or the enabling environment to improve the lives of its citizens, alternative channels of service provision become critical. NGO interventions have constituted one such form of alternative development strategies since the 1980s (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Brass, 2010; Odoom, Yeboah, Opoku & Osei-Wusu, 2018; Odoom, 2021). In this context, the alternative development theory solidifies the apparent relevance of NGOs as frontline agents of development (Odoom, 2021).

NGO activities and services have a long history dating back into the late 1940s, just after World War II (Desai, 2002b; Winter, 2001). NGOs came into the development scene when civil society organizations became increasingly convinced about what they could do to alleviate the suffering of the many people and nations affected by the war. Indeed, World War II left many people in a state of hopelessness, starvation, and destitution globally, with many countries also experiencing a severe economic slowdown as a result of the war. Thus, NGOs around this period had humanitarianism, welfare, and relief service as their central motivation in development service delivery. However, NGOs' activities have outgrown welfare, relief, and humanitarianism over the past few decades (Desai, 2002b, Francis, 2002; Long, 2001; Nelson, 2002). NGOs now provide several services in almost all sectors of society beyond relief and humanitarian considerations due to the increasing recognition of the inability of governments to single-handedly improve the socio-economic conditions of people.

NGOs have and continue to play a vital role in delivering development services. The benevolent role of NGOs for the past three decades served as a means to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich. Consequently, NGOs are generally praised for their strengths as innovative grassroots-driven agents for social change (Banks & Hulme, 2012). NGOs are seen to have the willingness and capacity to pursue participatory and people-centered forms of development and to fill gaps left by states, especially across the developing world, in addressing the myriad of needs of their poorest populations (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Barr, Fafchamps & Trudy, 2005; Odoom, 2021).

Even though global figures are uneasy about coming by owing mainly to the absence of coordinating bodies, Epstein and Gang (2006) observed that, for all Development Assistance

Countries, official development assistance (ODA) to NGOs rose from US\$928 million to US\$1246 million between 1991 and 2002. This figure indicates about 34 percent rise in development assistance to NGOs within this period. Similarly, around this period, international NGOs grew by 19.3 percent. Additionally, there has been a corresponding expansion both in size and the development of thematic areas of NGOs, thus, affirming a growing interest and centrality of NGOs within the alternative development partner coincided with neoliberal tenets (Barr *et al.*, 2005; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Odoom, 2021). In essence, there has been an overwhelming rise in the number of NGOs in the face of the various development challenges manifesting across the globe.

Several factors have contributed to the rising interest in the activities of NGOs around the world. For example, continued donor distrust and frustrations with states fuelled an interest in NGOs as viable and even desirable alternatives. Many people viewed NGOs favorably for their inclusive representation of beneficiaries and their role as innovators of new technologies and participative approaches to working with the poor (Barr *et al.*, 2005; Lewis, 2005; Murray and Overton, 2011). Africa witnessed its NGO boom starting in the 1990s (Hearn, 2007). For example, Kenya experienced a rapid increase in the number of registered NGOs from 400 in 1990 to over 6,000 in 2008 (Brass, 2011). Similarly, in Tanzania, the 41 registered NGOs in 1990 had increased to over 10,000 by 2000 (Hearn, 2007). In places such as Uganda, the public reaction to the NGO phenomenon has been characterized by mixed feelings, including a widespread suspicion that beneath the provision of the public good lie other ulterior motivations (Barr *et al.*, 2005). However, NGOs provide a much-needed helping hand in development services in Ghana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe (Adjei, Agyemang & Afriyie, 2012; Chitongo; 2013; Enyioko, 2012). It indicates that NGOs have played a critical role in the development of communities over the years (Adjei *et al.*, 2012; Banks & Hulme, 2012; Brass, 2010; Chitongo; 2013; Enyioko, 2012; Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009).

The exertion of political influence has been suggested as a strong underlying motivation of NGOs' presence in Africa, mainly driven by a desire to join dominant political patronage networks (Brass, 2012). However, the good governance agenda, which embraces the language of democracy, human rights, and public participation (Murray & Overton, 2011), consolidates NGOs' centrality to national development (Odoom, 2021) in the Global South. As a result, the architecture of aid has evolved beyond growth-focused neoliberalist experiments to a more

meaningful consultation between donors and recipients and increased focus on poverty and the responsibility of nation-states from the onset of the new millennium starting in 2000 (Barr *et al.*, 2005; Murray & Overton, 2011). This paper contributes to the debate around the contribution of NGOs in development service provision through a review of selected literature. The rest of the paper is written in four parts, with the first part focusing on the concept and typology of NGOs. The second part looks at the role of NGOs in contemporary development service provision, while the third part considers the empirical review. The final part concludes the paper based on the emergent issues in the review.

Conceptual Review

The Concept and Typology of NGOs

NGOs have come to be accepted as significant actors in the development landscape. NGOs are noted for delivering essential services to people in need and undertaking advocacy and public campaigns for positive social change. Their activities also focus on community improvement, poverty alleviation, capacity building, and community empowerment. NGOs also offer more specialized services, including governance and democracy, human rights, emergency response, cultural preservation, conflict resolution, environmental activism, policy analysis, research, and information provision (Lane, 1995; Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Although NGOs' presence can be felt almost everywhere in the developing world, the challenge of understanding the phenomenon remains a startlingly difficult one. It can be attributable to NGOs' being an extremely diverse group of development actors. NGOs undertake different functions and take different shapes and forms within and across different countries and contexts. Another explanation for the nebulosity of the phenomenon is that 'NGO' as an analytical grouping is complex, often unclear, and difficult to grasp. Although NGOs are regarded in the literature as independent organizations without the control and influence of government or driven by the profit motive, some NGOs are regular recipients of huge funding from government sources. Some NGOs bear striking semblances of highly professionalized private entities also carrying a strong corporate identity (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

The term NGO is widely used to encapsulate a number of organizations. The term is often used interchangeably with other names such as not-for-profit, voluntary, and civil society organizations. Sometimes, these terms reflect the different kinds of NGOs in operation within a given context (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Moyo, 2000). Also, using these terms is a consequence of different cultures and histories through which NGOs emerged. For instance, in places such as the United Kingdom, the term “voluntary organization” or “charity” is often used due to a long tradition of volunteering and voluntary work attributed to Christian values and the development of charity law. Again, in the United States, the term “non-profit organization” is commonly used due to the increasing recognition of the market economy. The usage of the term in the United States is also due to appreciation for the non-commercial and non-profit-making motives of the operations of NGOs (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

In essence, NGOs’ conceptualization may be occasioned by their diverse activities ranging from relief organizations to service provision. For example, Christian Aid, CARE International, Save the Children, environmental conservations groups such as Friends of the Earth, wildlife conservation groups, and self-help groups such as funeral associations, welfare organizations, farmers and fishermen’s associations, among others, are all lumped into the NGO designation (Lane, 1995; Mawdsley, Townsend, Porter & Oakley, 2002; Moyo, 2000). The structure, funding, and value sets also contribute to this mass classification of divergent organizations as NGOs. NGOs may be large or small, formal or informal, bureaucratic or flexible based on their structure. Concerning funding, some NGOs are externally funded, while others depend on locally mobilized resources. Some NGOs may be well resourced and command extensive network capabilities, while others may be poorly resourced. Some NGOs have the resources to engage the services of highly experienced professionals, while others necessarily have to rely on the goodwill of unpaid volunteers and supporters. From the perspective of the value, NGOs are driven by a range of motivations which may be secular or faith-based (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

The influence of NGOs can be traced back to the late 1940s, immediately after the Second World War (Desai, 2002b; Winter, 2001). The evolution of NGOs came when some civil society organizations (CSOs) saw that they could alleviate the suffering of those affected by the war in Europe and other parts of the world and assist countries experiencing an economic slowdown as a result of the war. Scholars such as Long (2001), Desai (2002b), Francis (2002), and Nelson (2002) have argued that the activities of NGOs have grown beyond just welfare provisioning,

especially since the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the developing world, areas where government resources cannot reach due to inadequate revenue and donor support is not forthcoming, assistance from NGOs has been extremely crucial.

NGOs are typically self-governing or voluntary development organizations that focus on improving the lives of poor and vulnerable people or organizations not benefiting directly from government development initiatives (Desai, 2002a; Long, 2002; Vakil, 1997). Their agenda is based on the philosophical orientations that underpin the organization's establishment. In some cases, they work on behalf of a government, even though not operate directly under the control of any government department. In some instances, too, they become de facto providers of essential public goods that governments are either unable or unwilling to provide. Long (2002) identified some of the activities of NGOs, which include service delivery to poor individuals or communities, empowerment support work such as capacity building, technical assistance and funding to communities, advocating for the voiceless and the marginalized, and women's rights.

In some countries, some NGOs are working on behalf of governments in certain development service delivery areas, while others may choose to distance themselves from the state by implementing projects and activities that run parallel to similar interventions by the state (Clark, 2002; Desai, 2002b; Nelson, 2002; Thomas & Allen, 2000). However, some critics (Desai, 2002b; Francis, 2002) have argued that although NGOs are recognized as effective vehicles for delivering public services, the operations of some of the risk further social and political marginalization of beneficiary communities when such activities are deemed to be antithetical to the government's plans and policies. These occasional conflicts notwithstanding, the overarching perception of NGOs is one of voluntary humanitarianism. Through this altruistic lens, NGOs are seen as indispensable non-state actors whose aim is to provide services to improve the conditions of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups or individuals in society.

Despite their contributions to development services, NGOs are not without challenges and misgivings. NGOs are often accused of getting involved in national politics to the detriment of their missions. It is widely contended that Local influential persons mainly lead NGOs with political connections, which often impedes their ability to implement adequate democratic management and decision-making structures (Andreasen, 2001). A clear case in point is what

existed in Egypt a few years ago, where most NGOs were accused of elitism because they were founded by professionals and the educated elite (Myllyla, 2001).

Again, scholars including Korten (1990) and Turner and Hulme (1997) described NGOs' approach to promoting empowerment at the local level as a political activity. The authors further downplayed the situation where NGOs claim they are non-political when they explicitly promote empowerment at the grassroots level, which unavoidably makes them political entities. Besides, Barr, Fafchamps, and Owens (2003) opine that NGOs are not entities whose operations can be welcome in the realm of perfection. Barr et al. (2003) strengthen this position by submitting that some NGOs are opportunistic and remote organizations, contributing very little to development services. Particularly, in Africa, Barr et al. (2003) believe that NGOs' contribution to development services in places such as Uganda leaves much to be desired.

Forming typologies of NGOs

Several views have been expressed by scholars, researchers, and organizations regarding the various ways of developing a typology of NGOs. For instance, Lane (1995) considered the types of NGOs from four main angles. They are welfare and relief, modernization, community development, and institution building NGOs. Relief and welfare NGOs channel their efforts to assist people affected by complex humanitarian emergencies such as drought, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters and conflicts. The remaining three categories have been categorized under the term "Development NGOs". These NGOs mainly help promote and improve people's lives through community and institutional development practices and empowerment and capacity-building programs that enable people to fulfill their development aspirations and attain sustainable livelihoods. One such NGO in Ghana, for example, is World Vision International (Lane, 1995).

In the opinion of Cousins (1991), NGOs can be classified into two main categories based on their orientation and level of operation. In terms of orientation, Cousins (1991) considered NGO types based on the kind of activities they undertake. The activities may include human rights, environmental issues, or developmental works. On the other hand, an NGO's level of operation shows the scale at which it works. Some operate at the local, regional, national or international level or a combination of these levels (Vakil, 1997). Also, based on the level of operation,

Cousins (1991) identified the following categories: community-based, city-wide, national and international NGOs. This categorization helps to identify the coverage of an NGO's operations.

Furthermore, based on orientation, Cousins (1991) also identified four types of NGOs: charitable, service, participatory, and empowering. Charitable NGOs' activities are directed towards addressing the needs of the poor. They primarily involve distributing food, clothing, or medicine, provision of housing, transport, and schools. Second, NGOs engage in service orientation focused on the provisions of health, family planning, or education services. Third, participatory NGOs are classified based on the self-help projects they provide to local communities where people are actively involved in planning and implementing projects (Cousins, 1991). The local people participate in the form of contributing cash, tools, land, materials, and labor. Finally, empowering NGOs seek to help poor people better understand the social, political, and economic factors affecting their lives and reinforce their awareness of their capacity to control their lives (Dugle, Akanbang & Salakpi, 2015).

In an effort to reinforce the debate on typologies of NGOs, Willetts (2002) agrees with Cousins (1991) on the classification of operational NGOs. Willetts further explained operational NGOs as organizations that seek to promote small-scale change mainly through projects. Unlike Cousins (1991), Willetts (2002) believed that there are also advocacy NGOs that aim to achieve large-scale change facilitated indirectly through the influence of political systems. Based on Willetts' categorization, it can be said that operational NGOs implement projects while advocacy NGOs are concerned with holding demonstrations or campaigns to defend or promote a specific cause. In support of Willetts (2002), Mostashari (2005) argued that the difference between operational and advocacy NGOs lies between small-scale change achieved directly through projects and large-scale change promoted indirectly through political systems and campaigns.

Other scholars have also categorized NGOs based on several factors and positions. For example, as cited in Paul Dugle *et al.* (2015), Farrington and Lewis have characterized NGOs based on factors such as autonomy, location, and scope of activities. Thus, the degree of autonomy, location, and scope of activities of NGOs are crucial in the determination of NGO categorization. Others have also classified NGOs based on their aims and functions, as in welfare NGOs, development NGOs, service NGOs, environmental NGOs, advocacy NGOs, human rights

NGOs, women's NGOs, and religious NGOs (Gallin, 1999; Tvedt, 1998). From their legal status, NGOs have been put into four categories: unincorporated and voluntary association; trusts, charities and foundations; not-for-profit companies; and entities registered under special NGOs (Dugle *et al.*, 2015; Stillman, 2007).

There are also international and local NGOs. The term "International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO)" refers to NGOs whose operations are funded through bilateral, multilateral, or private-sector donors (Gyamfi, 2010; Helen, Cunt & Sujata, 2005; Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Chuku, as cited in Gyamfi (2010), defines International NGOs as NGOs whose policies and systems are managed and controlled from their various headquarters, often outside the country of operation. International NGOs are also sometimes referred to as Northern NGOs. The term "Local Non-Governmental Organization (LNGO)" refers to local indigenous organizations, including national NGOs, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). These indigenous organizations provide interventions and activities often within the functional categories of advocacy and service delivery (Helen *et al.*, 2005).

Local NGOs are owned, managed, and controlled by the nationals. They are formed based on the initiatives of the local people rather than outside forces or donors. They are formed in response to the myriad of development challenges confronting their country (Turary, 2002). Their primary desire is to identify local needs or concerns and fashion out local solutions to them. They are non-profit making, not affiliated to political parties, and generally concern themselves with working to ensure the development and welfare of communities in their operational zones (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Turary, 2002).

It is believed that a reasonable number of NGOs do not have clear development objectives. It raises doubts about their motivations and capacity in working to address the plights of the people they claim to serve (Kamat, 2002; Mayo, 2000). Table 1 presents some of the categorizations of NGOs by Hudock (1999) and Moyo (2000). Variations in community needs and diversity in NGOs' development agenda also tend to increase the paradoxes of NGOs operating in the world today (Dugle *et al.*, 2015; Turary, 2002). Despite these challenges and the complexity of community needs and priorities, NGOs have and continue to demonstrate the ability to meet the development needs of populations worldwide. In many instances, NGOs work assiduously to fill

the gaps created by governments' inability to deliver development services, especially to the disadvantaged persons in society (Brass, 2011).

Unlike Helen *et al.* (2005), Mayo (2000) and Hudock (1999) distinguish CBOs from southern NGOs. While southern NGOs operate at the national and regional levels, CBOs operate at the grassroots and village levels (Hudock, 1999; Mayo, 2000). Other NGOs focus on rural community development. The preoccupation of these NGOs is promoting the development of rural communities (Ellis, 2000). Other features that inform NGOs' categorization are cost-effectiveness, adaptability to the local environment, innovativeness, and an understanding of the local situation. As a result, government departments and international development institutions often collaborate with NGOs by providing them the resources to deliver development initiatives on their behalf (Desai, 2002b; Thomas & Allen, 2000). This form of trust strengthens the synergy between northern NGOs and southern or community-based NGOs in the execution of development programs and interventions.

Table 1: Typology of NGOs and their areas of operations

| Type of NGO | Origin and area of operation |
|--|---|
| Northern | Mostly from the developed countries; render most of their services in the developing world. |
| Southern | These are NGOs that originate from developing countries. They are often formed through local initiatives, and their operations are at the regional and national levels. They may operate at the grassroots/village level and collaborate with donor nations and northern NGOs to provide interventions. |
| Community-based/Indigenous /Grassroots | They are often promoted by government agencies, faith institutions, or community mobilization groups. They operate at the grassroots and mainly at the village level. |

Sources: Hudock (1999), Moyo (2000)

NGOs constitute an important vehicle through which development intervention policies are implemented at the grassroots level (Farrington et al., 1993). The over-reliance of some governments on NGOs to spend money on their behalf gives such NGOs influence on government policy formulation and implementation. The flexible nature of the policies and

programs of NGOs their ability to work directly with the rural poor and within rural and risky conditions make them preferable to government agencies (Lane, 1995; Long, 2001). However, critics have suggested that NGOs are just gap-filling organizations (Desai, 2002b; Thomas & Allen, 2000) that sometimes operate using non-conventional policies. They often operate in areas where most government departments find it difficult to operate. NGOs would not offer a quick answer to a scale of global poverty or even alleviate it satisfactorily to ensure relative social stability (Pearce, 2000; 2001).

Characteristics of NGOs are also examined from service provision, intermediary, advocacy, and relief perspectives and their corresponding primary activities (Hudock, 1999; Mayo, 2000), as shown in Table 2. In their conclusion, Thomas and Allen (2000) posit that despite the hype about the work of NGOs towards the improvement of the lives of the rural poor and the neglected and marginalized, NGOs can never change the world.

Table 2: Characteristics of NGOs and their performance

| Characteristic of NGOs | Activities |
|------------------------|---|
| Service Providers | They provide training services, capacity building, consultancy, research, etc., at the community level; engage in service delivery for the needy, such as refugees, flood victims, etc. |
| Intermediary | They liaise with funding agencies and assist grassroots organizations in securing funds and other assistance for development activities. |
| Advocacy | They advocate for the underprivileged, disadvantaged, widows, street children, etc. |
| Relief | They provide relief supplies to communities or countries affected by floods, earthquakes, famine, disease outbreaks, etc. They also offer technical assistance on fundraising strategies, proposal writing, etc., to local organizations to make them self-reliant. |

Source: Hudock (1999), Moyo (2000)

This conclusion raises questions on the views many people have about the activities and impacts of NGOs as development partners.

The Role of NGOs in Contemporary Development Service Provision: Key Issues and Approaches

NGOs currently play diverse roles within the global contemporary development community. NGOs' roles in the current development framework have been grouped mainly into service delivery, catalysis, and partnership (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). These three leading roles inform the approaches NGOs employ in undertaking development services. Although these roles are distinct, one particular NGO can engage in thematic areas and activities that cut across these individual dichotomies. A clear case is that an NGO may carry out service delivery to build trust in a local community, which will, in turn, create a platform for community advocacy or campaign. Also, an NGO may form a partnership with a corporation to advance its aims of campaigning for ethical and socially responsible business (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Service delivery by NGOs, especially in developing countries, is important because many people face a wide range of development services coupled with essential basic services being unavailable or of poor quality (Carroll, 1992; Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

NGO service provision has seen a speedy growth due to the decreasing role of governments as direct service providers within the neoliberal agenda (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). The incentive for an NGO to actively provide services varies. For instance, sometimes, NGOs provide services to meet previously unmet needs, while in other instances, they are contracted by state agencies or donors to undertake the delivery of services that hitherto had been the direct responsibility of the government. Indeed, not all NGOs are directly providing services to local communities. For example, some NGOs aim to tackle poverty indirectly by providing other forms of services such as building the technical capacity of other NGOs, government agencies, or the private sector or carrying out commissioned action research (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Some donors have argued for a more substantial role for NGOs in service delivery work because they are believed to possess a set of distinctive organizational capacities and comparative advantages, such as flexibility, commitment, and cost-effectiveness. However, in practice, the diversity in the NGOs community means that such generalizations are often difficult to sustain (Zakaria, 2011). While some NGOs have proven to be effective service providers (Chitongo, 2013; Enyioko, 2012; Odoom, 2021) in specific sectors and contexts, others have been found

wanting in their performance. NGO service provision is often associated with problems of quality control, low sustainability, poor coordination, etc. (Robinson & White, 1997). Increasing the role of NGOs in development services also raises several concerns ranging from the quality of services and the impact of their interventions on beneficiaries (Lewis, 2005; Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, conservative governments in the United States, Britain, and many other countries afterward reduced the role of government in direct service provision along with the privatization of the public sector (Hulme & Edwards, 1997). It has not only led to ethical benefits but also financial gains. Since NGOs promote and rely significantly on volunteerism, their approaches can be more cost-effective than the approaches used by the government. Increased government funding channeled through NGOs for the last two decades may not be the only explanation for exponential growth in the number of NGOs, but it has undoubtedly contributed to such manifestation, especially in the advanced economies. The Global Water Initiative (GWI), for example, is an NGO that seeks to support the sustainable and equitable delivery of potable water to vulnerable rural communities in the Upper West Region in Ghana. They have invested heavily in Ghana in collaboration with other foundations and NGOs in the country in the area of water and sanitation (Hulme & Edwards, 1997; Sarfo, 2013).

Another area of significant NGO commitment in Ghana is economic empowerment through microfinance initiatives. NGOs are non-formal providers of microcredit loans to address poverty and hunger (Adjei & Arun, 2009). Sinapi Aba Trust (SAT), for example, is one of the most prominent NGOs providing such microfinance services in Ghana by giving opportunities for enterprise development and income generation to economically disadvantaged groups in the country. Services offered by SAT include loans, savings deposits, client welfare (insurance) schemes, and non-financial services, including entrepreneurial skills, with women constituting about 92 percent of the organization's client base. However, these services do not always reach the target people in society (Adjei & Arun, 2009; Egyir, 2013; Sono, 2013). Besides, through its economic development and agricultural interventions, WVG improves people's livelihoods through access to credit, markets, technology, and information. The Organization also provides people with microcredit training and skill development (Egyir, 2013; WVG, 2017).

An important factor in NGOs' service delivery role is participation. While scholars (Bessette, 2000; Cousins, 1991) believe that NGOs generally adopt participatory approaches in delivering their development services, Streeten (1997) and Dempsey (2009) maintain that participation does not characterize NGOs' development services. Streeten (1997) adds that participation is, at best, a slogan and not a thought-out strategy within the NGO sector. Dempsey (2009) argues that no actual democratic value such as participation manifests within the NGO sector. As cited in Odoom et al. (2018), Lugar extends the discussion by submitting that some NGOs' practices generally limit the participation of community members during the delivery of development services. Such NGOs only talk about participation in terms of informing community members to provide cheap manual labor to support the delivery of development services (Lugar, cited in Odoom *et al.*, 2018). Behera (2006) states that the rhetoric of participation in the NGO sector is because of the influences from the international headquarters of NGOs and other organizations.

In essence, though service delivery is generally critical on the agenda of NGOs, there are concerns regarding the nature of participatory approaches that inform the delivery of development services. According to Bessette (2000), NGOs are better placed to use participatory approaches in undertaking their development services. A critical element of meaningful participation is participatory communication, which is at the heart of effective development communication. Bessette (2000) argues that participatory communication should be embedded in NGO operations. Bessette (2000) adds that participatory communication is a viable communication strategy NGOs need to rely on in their development services. Bessette (2000), therefore, calls for the need to support NGOs to pursue and reinforce participatory development practices within the local communities they operate in. Bessette (2000) further explains the importance of participatory communication by arguing that training should be organized for NGO workers in participatory development communication to prepare NGOs to develop and implement participatory approaches appropriately during the delivery of development services. Servaes, as cited by Odoom *et al.* (2021), argues that development communication practice is only effective when it considers the interests, needs, and capacities of all stakeholders concerned. In effect, NGOs can complement awareness creation, advocacy, and behavior change communication which they commonly use when undertaking development services with

participatory communication, scholarly communication, and social mobilization strategies to achieve their set goals (Dzisah, 2019; Odoom, 2021).

NGOs' second key role in development practice is serving as a catalyst. A catalyst is an agent that causes change. From the agent standpoint, NGOs aim to bring about change through advocacy and seeking influence and innovative ways to find new solutions to development problems (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As cited in Lewis and Kanji (2009), Jenkins defines advocacy as any attempt that seeks to influence the decisions of any institutional elite in the collective interest of society. Lindenberg and Bryant (2001) assert that advocacy work involves going beyond implementing programs to help those in need to take up and defend the causes of others and to speak out to the public on another's behalf. Here, NGOs employ an advocacy communication approach to target leadership and the powers that be to take actions to support program objectives. Leadership includes political, business, and social leaders at national and local levels. NGOs seek to inform and motivate leaders through advocacy communication to create a supportive environment for their programs (Mostashari, 2005; Willetts, 2002). Effective advocacy communication requires changing policies, allocating resources, speaking out on critical issues, and initiating public discussion (Odoom, 2020; Servaes, 2000). Lindenberg and Bryant explained further that in the performance of duties by NGOs, advocacy focuses on clearly speaking up for policy change and action that will address the core causes of development and relief problems confronting society.

Many development NGOs play the role of 'policy entrepreneurs' seeking to influence policymaking in innovative ways to support development objectives (Najam, 1999). Najam conceptualizes the policy process as one involving agenda setting, policy development, and policy implementation. Agenda setting occurs when the issues and priorities for action are agreed upon by stakeholders, whereas policy development concerns the choices among possible alternatives and the options that are made. Finally, at the level of policy implementation, specific actions are undertaken to translate policies into practice. Najam believes that NGOs are adept at influencing decisions and events within the policy formulation processes at any of these stages. Undoubtedly, NGO advocacy is not limited to influencing government and donor policies; increasingly, it is also concerned about influencing the private sector (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). Advocacy by development NGOs may entail the use of routine political channels or more confrontational acts of protests and demonstrations. It may also involve organized meetings,

public hearings, legal action, petitions, public statements, organizing seminars, monitoring, etc. (Park, 2002). An example of an NGO which uses advocacy communication is Survival International, an international NGO based in the United Kingdom that supported the Basarwa in Botswana in their resistance to protect their right to the Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve (Lekorwe & Mpabanga, 2007). Also, the Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation, together with Water Aid, used advocacy communication to facilitate the creation of a national water policy for the country (Lane, 2005). Thus, advocacy communication has been a vital approach NGOs resort in their operations. In effect, advocacy communication has become a vital approach NGOs use in contemporary development practice. However, Edwards (1993) points out that the results of NGO advocacy communication can be very disappointing. It is attributable mainly to factors such as the lack of a clear strategy, a failure to build strong alliances, an inability to develop alternative measures, and the dilemmas that often characterize NGO-donor relationships.

Another example of the NGO catalyst role is that of innovation. An ability to innovate is often claimed as a special quality, or even as an area of competitive advantage of NGOs over other institutions concerned with development, especially government agencies (Bebbington *et al.*, cited in Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Though not all NGOs are into innovations, the idea that NGOs contribute new approaches to poverty reduction is not in doubt. In support of this position, Clark (1991) found evidence that NGOs' staff considerably experiment, adapt, and try new approaches to problem-solving in communities. NGOs also encourage individuals to develop their ideas, experiment and take risks to address their own needs. It is argued that NGO capacities to innovate are outcomes of the quality of the relationships that an NGO can construct (Biggs & Chambers, cited in Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Non-governmental organizations also perform the critical function of the watchdogs to monitor organizations in order to evaluate which ones honestly abide by their policies (Najam, 1999). NGOs play this role through whistle-blower networks to unearth the failure and shortcomings of institutions that may not be abiding by either the commitment to implementation or poor execution of policies. The watchdog role may also involve an environmental scanning of the policy horizon for events and activities that have the potential to obstruct future policy

formulation and implementation. Lodge and Wilson (2006) contend that NGOs act as powerful watchdogs even though they lack formal mandate or legal backing. In essence, NGOs tend to act as watchdogs of the state by ensuring that state actors work to fulfill public interests.

A critical aspect of contemporary development policy is the creation of partnerships aimed at engendering the efficient use of scarce resources, increasing institutional sustainability, and improving the quality of an NGO's interactions with stakeholders and actors in the development context. A partnership is generally defined as a relationship based on mutually defined sets of links between two or more agencies within a development project or program. It often involves the division of roles and responsibilities, sharing risks, and pursuing joint objectives (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). It is also seen as an arrangement that draws together the resources of specified partners to create capacity and act based on a defined set of goals (Kamando, 2014). Clear roles help to ensure effective partnerships (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Some NGOs enter into organizational relationships to gain access to external resources that are conditionally based on partnerships. Others may enter into partnerships without careful consideration of the broader implications. For instance, new roles for NGO staff may have to be created to actualize the demands of the partnership realistically. Management systems may also be required to monitor the progress of new activities within the partnership (Farrington & Bebbington, cited in Lewis & Kanji, 2009). For example, in a study of partnerships within an aquaculture project in Bangladesh, Lewis, as cited in Lewis & Kanji (2009), found that the supposed partnerships defined in the project documents occurred between NGOs and government agencies primarily to gain access to external resources. Indeed, the partnership was not based on any kind of complementarity or functional arrangements. Although there may be a consensus among the partners in such scenarios, the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities can often create conflicts (Lewis, 2005; Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Partners may also incur additional costs such as new lines of communications, logistical burdens, new responsibilities for individual staff, and the need to share information with other agencies (Concern's Partnership Policy Document, 2007).

Additionally, NGOs need to reconsider their communication approaches to achieve their missions seriously. In support of this position, Dzisah (2019) contends that a time has come for NGOs to look for appropriate communication strategies to generate adequate resources to

undertake development services. Dzisah (2019) adds that communication approaches such as awareness creation, behavior change communication, and social mobilization can adequately be used by NGOs for mobilizing resources for development services. The importance of behavior change communication and awareness creation to NGOs' development services has also been established by Odoom (2021).

Empirical Review

This section reviews relevant studies on NGOs' development service delivery. It generally looks at the research aims, the methodological issues, and key findings of these empirical studies. We begin this review of the literature with the assessment of Islam (2015) on the contributions of NGOs to community development in Bangladesh in a qualitative research approach using a multi-method data collection procedure. The findings showed that NGOs play crucial roles in community development and encourage community participation in development processes. In this regard, again, in Bangladesh, Kabeer *et al.* (2008) found that Nijera Kori (NK), a Bangladesh-based NGO, offered development services aimed primarily at improving the livelihoods of communities. Another study conducted by Desai (2005) revealed that NGO interventions play a critical role in empowering women, men, and households to meet their basic needs. Other roles and functions of NGOs, including counseling and support service, awareness-raising and advocacy, legal aid, and microfinance services, help build community empowerment (Desai, 2005).

Additionally, a similar study was conducted in the Central Region of Uganda to study the relevance of NGOs concerning the health, education, and agriculture sectors (Nalere, Yago & Oriel, 2015). In this case study, 87 respondents were selected using a stratified sampling technique. Using a triangulated method involving questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and interviews, key informants and documentary review were used to gather data. The researcher used the probit regression model for analysis (Nalere *et al.*, 2015). The study showed that NGOs contributed to improvements in the health, education, agriculture, and rural industry sectors in the development of the rural areas of Uganda.

Omofonmwan and Odia (2009) examined some of the community interventions of NGOs in Nigeria using purposive sampling, interviews, and observations. The authors found that NGOs in Nigeria provide development interventions in essential areas such as environment, health and sanitation sensitization and awareness, and advocacy for child rights. Similarly, a study conducted by Brass (2010) sought to examine service provision in education, healthcare, agriculture, and water by internationally-funded NGOs in Kenya. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, with in-depth interviews, case studies, and other information the researcher gathered during the researcher's fieldwork in Kenya. The quantitative aspect of the study included a survey of 500 secondary school students, while semi-structured interviews involved a sample of governmental and non-governmental services providers, government officials, and ordinary Kenyans. Brass (2010) found that healthcare, education, and agriculture interventions were central to the social contract between the Kenyan state and its citizens.

A study conducted in Nigeria by Enyioko (2012) to investigate the impact of NGOs on sustainable agriculture and awareness creation in rural areas involved a sample size of 180 participants selected randomly from beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, and employees of development agencies. Basic statistical tools such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyze data. The study revealed that NGOs are very effective in sustainable rural development activities in education, health, agriculture, energy, environment and waste management, empowerment, and poverty alleviation. Matsvai (2018) also evaluated the impact of various NGO interventions on communities in Zimbabwe using primary data and descriptive statistical analysis. His results showed that NGOs play a critical role in agriculture productivity and growth in income, improved sustainability of livelihoods, and general rural development. In a similar study in Zimbabwe, Chitongo (2013) conducted a study on the impact of the development interventions implemented by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) on beneficiaries. It was observed that CRS's programs improved productivity in livestock farming and water and sanitation in the country.

Nalubiri (2010) has explored how local NGOs and community groups act towards sustaining NGO social interventions at the community level. Using an exploratory design, Nalubiri sought to investigate why it is so difficult to sustain benefits that accrue from NGO's work. The study found that local participation, empowerment, ownership, multiple benefits, and coordination among development actors positively affect the sustainability of NGO development

interventions. Hedayat and Ma'rof (2017) have also examined the contribution of NGOs towards sustainable community development. Their study focused on NGOs' roles, functions, and programs, such as microfinance, capacity building, and self-reliance. Hedayat and Ma'rof found that NGOs' interventions improve the economic well-being of communities through job creation and income generation. It leads to economic empowerment for sustainable community development.

Muchtar (2017) studied the influence of international development interventions on women's perception of empowerment using Oxfam's *Restoring Coastal Livelihoods Project* (2010-2015) in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, as a case study. The project promoted gender equality through group economic empowerment. The researcher adopted the qualitative approach using an ethnographic design. Interviews, observation, and documentary reviews were used as instruments for data collection. Thematic analysis was used for the study. The study found that women beneficiaries perceived empowerment mostly based on their experiences with the project. The study found that the degree of empowerment depended on the nature of activities and the general understanding of gender relations.

Quaicoo (2006) conducted a study to examine World Vision Ghana's (WVG) contributions to the development of basic education in the Twifo Hemang-Lower Denkyira District in the Central Region of Ghana. The study involved 469 respondents using a mixed-method that included a survey using questionnaires, interviews, FGDs, and observation as the instruments for data collection. The study found that although WVG had contributed to improvement in educational facilities, community members believed it could have done far better than performed in terms of providing development services. Another study was conducted by Dangah (2012) on the role of ProNet, an NGO based in Northern Ghana, in providing water and sanitation for the people of the Nadowli District. The study used primary and secondary data and involved 189 respondents from five communities. The respondents were chosen using simple random and purposive sampling techniques with structured interviews and focus group discussion as data collection instruments. The study found that ProNet activities in education, water, and sanitation significantly improved the communities.

Sarfo (2013) examined the impact of Plan International's educational projects on the quality of education in the Awutu-Senya District of Ghana using a qualitative research approach. The semi-structured interviews and FGDs were used to get the perspectives of officials of the NGO and 23 members of the beneficiary communities, including school children, parents, and teachers. The study found that most of the children in Plan Ghana's assisted communities had experienced improvements in the quality of their educational experience, especially in the area of the learning environment and service delivery. However, problems like high expectations from the NGO and apathy from some community members became manifest in this study.

In the context of sustainability of development interventions, however, the contribution of NGOs has been met with mixed reactions. For example, in their study of NGOs' roles in sustainable community development in Vietnam, Hibbard and Tang (2004) concluded that sustainable rural development is process-oriented and requires extensive community participation that relies on networking to share resources and knowledge, and expertise. Contrary to the Hibbard and Tang (2004) findings, Zakaria (2011) observed that many of the development services undertaken by NGOs in places such as Savelugu-Nanton District in northern Ghana often are unsustainable. Zakaria's study used a survey design and purposive and quota sampling methods with questionnaires, FGDs, and observation guides as data collection instruments. It was concluded that NGOs in the district did not exhibit enough commitment to ensuring their interventions' sustainability.

Adjei *et al.* (2012) studied the impact of NGO-led interventions in the Tain District of Ghana using a mixed-method approach. The research involved 198 respondents using the purposive sampling technique, beneficiaries of four main NGOs: Plan Ghana, ActionAid Ghana, Rural Action Alliance Program, and Social Development and Improvement Agency. Adjei *et al.* found that although the NGOs were involved in providing social services for the rural communities, they had invested much of their funding into livelihood programs to increase productivity and household income. The authors concluded that the role of NGOs in the development service provisions is indisputable. Furthermore, Sono (2013) examined the effects of ADRA's development interventions on the livelihood of farmers in the Yilo Krobo area in the Eastern Region of Ghana using a mixed-method approach. This study relied on purposive and simple random sampling techniques to select 150 respondents using a cross-sectional design, while interviews and questionnaires were used for data collection. The study found that ADRA's

intervention contributed positively to an increase in farm sizes, rising mango output, higher incomes, and improved livelihoods of most farmers.

Odoom (2021) investigated the contributions of World Vision Ghana to community development in rural Ghana. The study focused on the Cocoa Life Project interventions implemented by World Vision Ghana in the Wassa East District. The study population consisted of mostly farmers, gari processors, soap makers, and members of village savings and loans associations from beneficiary communities were considered in a sequential-dependence mixed-method research approach. 406 sample size was chosen for the study using the stratified, simple random and convenience sampling methods, with interview schedule and focus group discussion guide as the instruments for data collection. For quantitative analysis, means and standard deviation were used, whereas the qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The study found that WVG's interventions under the Cocoa Life Project were highly relevant to education, business development, financial literacy, microcredit facilities, agriculture, and livelihood diversification within beneficiary communities. Besides, awareness creation and behavior change communication were some of the strategies WVG relied upon to promote community development in beneficiary communities. Although the interventions helped to promote behavior change, there were concerns regarding the overall change in behavior within the communities. Odoom (2021) concluded that for NGOs to have a fuller understanding of the development problems of communities they operate in, they should pay attention to appropriate development communication strategies and approaches in their operations.

Key Insights and Gaps in the Selected Literature

NGOs are important stakeholders in terms of development service provisions. Their services help to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable people in many parts of the developing world, including Ghana. NGOs are credited for their advocacy and public campaign efforts to bring about positive social transformation. NGO activities, among others, also help to ensure community improvement, poverty alleviation, capacity building, community empowerment, good governance, and environmental activism (Lane, 1995; Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As an umbrella terminology, NGO generally encompasses numerous types of organizations with a multiplicity of interests, orientation, and functional foci. NGO is also often used interchangeably

with terms such as not-for-profit, voluntary organizations, charity organizations, and civil society organizations (CSOs). These different terms used to describe NGOs reflect the different forms of NGOs operating in a given setting (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Moyo, 2000). Again, these different terms result from the different cultures and histories that have underpinned the emergence of NGOs. NGOs predominantly operate without the influence and dictates of the state. They are not-for-profit entities that provide voluntary, charity, and altruistic services to improve the vulnerable, marginalized, and less privileged lives.

In the context of constructing a typology for NGOs, it is evident from the literature review that no unified consensus exists amongst scholars and researchers, owing mainly to the vastly divergent positions from which NGOs are theorized and conceptualized. For instance, Lane (1995) sees the types of NGOs in terms of welfare and relief, modernization, community development, and institution building; Cousins (1991) and Willetts (2002) categorize NGOs based on their orientation, level of operation, and advocacy; while others classify NGOs based on autonomy, location, and scope of activities (Gyamfi, 2010; Helen, Cunt and Sujata, 2005; Farrington, Lewis, and Paul, cited in Dugle *et al.*, 2015; Turary, 2002), and their legal status (Dugle *et al.*, 2015; Stillman, 2007). While Cousins (1991) and Willetts (2002) appear silent on the difference between operational and advocacy NGOs, Mostashari (2005) maintains that the distinction between operational and advocacy NGOs manifests mainly in the choice between small-scale change and large-scale change. Despite the differences in typologies, these authors generally agree that the over-arching aim of NGOs is to improve the lives of their constituents. Kamat (2002) and Mayo (2000) acknowledge that NGOs need to have clearly defined development objectives in order to make their activities and motivations relevant to the very people they wish to serve. Also, it should be pointed out that improving people's lives can only be done effectively through a conscious understanding of the philosophical orientations underpinning the work of every NGO. These orientations form the foundational basis for the approaches used to typify NGOs. Indeed, a clear typology of NGO is useful since it helps to appropriately delineate the limits from the objectives and intentions of NGO operations.

Moreover, it is evident from the review that the role of NGOs in contemporary development practice can be categorized mainly into three: service delivery, catalyst, and partnership (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). NGOs deliver services in many parts of the world where people lack access to several vital basic services or where such services are of poor quality, which is often the case in

many areas (Carroll, 1992; Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As catalysts, NGOs bring about change through advocacy, policies, and any other forms of influence they wield. Besides, NGOs' role as catalysts in development services is manifested in how they innovate and creatively apply modern techniques and strategies to solve development problems (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Finally, NGOs form a partnership with a plethora of organizations in order to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

The empirical review of the literature in this paper reveals that several studies have been conducted on NGO activities and services in the development arena using different research approaches and with varying results. Using a mixed-method research approach, Islam (2015) found that NGOs play a crucial role in community development and participation in Bangladesh. The findings of Islam (2015) are in line with Omofonmwan and Odia (2009), who observed, through qualitative research, that NGOs provide several community development interventions in Nigeria. Specifically, Omofonmwan and Odia (2009) found that NGOs in Nigeria provide community development services in essential areas, including environment, health; sanitation awareness creation; and promotion of child's rights law. Similarly, a study conducted by Nalere *et al.* (2015) in Uganda revealed that NGOs' services are relevant in health, education, agriculture, and improving the industry. In a mixed-method study in Ghana, Quaicoo (2006) also found that NGO activities are critical to developing education in the Central Region of the country.

The gaps in the studies conducted by Islam (2015) and Nalere *et al.* (2015) potentially present challenges to a better understanding of the methodological logic that informed their studies. However, unlike Omofonmwan and Odia (2009), it is difficult to grasp the specific mixed methods design adopted in the study conducted by Islam (2015). Thus, the apparent gap in Islam's (2015) study seems to be the lack of clarity in choosing the research design adopted in the research. Again, the deficiency in the study conducted by Nalere *et al.* (2015) in Uganda lies in the over-reliance on only quantitative tools for data analysis, given the mixed method nature of the research. The use of only quantitative analytical tools in the study is problematic simply because mixed methods studies are characterized by analytical techniques that suit both

quantitative and qualitative research. Thus, it is unacceptable for researchers to undertake mixed methods studies when they intend to do only quantitative analysis.

Quaicoo's (2006) study, which was conducted in Ghana, has an inherent conceptual weakness. Importantly, Quaicoo's (2006) study failed to critically explore other aspects of development vital to the operations of NGOs. The failure to interrogate other aspects of development undertaken by NGOs hinders a broader approach to bridging the gap in theory and practice in respect of the activities of NGOs in the development sector. Another flaw in Quaicoo's (2006) study manifests in his apparent failure to clearly explain the specific mixed-method research design employed for the research. In short, there are theoretical, conceptual, and methodological inadequacies in Quaicoo's (2006) study. Nevertheless, the studies by Quaicoo (2006), Omofonmwan and Odia (2009), Islam (2015), and Nalere *et al.* (2015) corroborate the position that NGOs play a crucial role in development services.

On the issue of sustainability of development interventions, a study by Enyioko (2012) in Nigeria showed that NGOs promote sustainable agriculture and awareness creation in rural areas of the country. The study further found that NGOs effectively promote sustainable rural development activities in several sectors of the economy, including education, health, agriculture, energy, environment and waste, and community empowerment and poverty alleviation. Using an exploratory design, Nalubiri (2010) also found that local participation, empowerment, ownership, multiple benefits, and coordination, among others, positively affect the sustainability of NGO development interventions. Furthermore, Hedayat and Ma'rof (2017) established that NGOs ensure sustainable community development through job creation and income generation, whereas in Vietnam, Hibbard and Tang (2004) found that NGOs promote sustainable rural development.

Contrary to the findings of Enyioko (2012), Nalubiri (2010), Hedayat and Ma'rof (2017), and Hibbard and Tang (2004), a study in Savelugu-Nantong District of Ghana by Zakaria (2011) revealed that NGOs' development activities are not sustainable. There is no consensus in the literature concerning the kind of attention NGOs give to sustainable development practices. However, despite the importance of Hibbard and Tang's (2004) findings, it should be pointed out that their study could not adequately unearth the essential issues that confront the sustainability of such development services provided by NGOs. It is a conceptual weakness that needs to be

addressed through further studies. Beyond the conceptual inadequacies, it can be seen from the empirical review that while Enyioko (2012) provided a clear methodological framework informing the study, a similar conclusion cannot be advanced in support of the studies conducted by Nalubiri (2010) and Hedayat and Ma'rof (2017). For instance, the kind of analytical tools that informed Nalubiri's (2010) study is not clear.

Similarly, the gaps in Zakaria's (2011) qualitative study include that the questionnaire was used without any sufficient justifications. Questionnaires are purely employed for quantitative studies. Thus, using a questionnaire in a qualitative study puts the methodology adopted by Zakaria (2011) into question. Despite these conceptual and methodological weaknesses, the review has demonstrated that NGOs play a key role in the area of sustainable development.

Additionally, the studies by both Adjei *et al.* (2012) and Sono (2013) in Ghana showed that NGOs provide interventions to improve people's livelihood. However, unlike Adjei *et al.*, Sono (2013) failed to provide a methodological framework that was scientifically rigorous enough for the study. Specifically, Sono (2013) failed to indicate the tools for analyzing the qualitative data. Qualitative aspects of mixed methods studies help to offer additional perspectives to complement the quantitative aspects of the research. Thus, a clear identification of the qualitative tools used helps the reader to have a deeper understanding of the findings from multiple perspectives. Based on Odoom's (2021) study, it is apparent that NGOs are active agents of community development. However, it is inherent in Odoom's (2021) study that NGOs still have work to do to understand their constituents' diverse development problems. NGOs are to rethink their approaches and strategies in defining the development needs of people. For NGOs to have an adequate understanding of communities' development problems, they serve Odoom (2021) calls for them to employ appropriate and well-planned development communication strategies and approaches. Notwithstanding the importance of his findings, Odoom's study failed to explore the views of other stakeholders, such as officials of WVG who took part in the delivery of the project. Indeed, the inclusion of other stakeholders in the study could have widened and possibly improved the perspectives of the issues examined in his study.

Again, although participatory development approaches are critical to NGOs' development services (Bessette, 2000), there are concerns about the level of participation within the NGO

sector (Dempsey, 2009; Long, 2001). More efforts need to be put in place by NGOs to make participatory approaches relevant to the delivery of their development services. Bessette (2000) argues that participatory communication approaches should be the heartbeat of NGOs' communication strategies for development. However, Bessette (2000) submits that NGOs need to be supported to pursue and incorporate participatory development practices in delivering development services. For instance, capacity building for NGO workers in participatory development communication will crucially prepare NGOs to develop and implement participatory development communication approaches to deliver development services (Bessette, 2000). NGOs are also advised to look for other approaches and communication strategies appropriate for development service provisions. Also, apart from advocacy communication, NGOs can employ awareness creation, behavior change communication, and social mobilization as strategies when undertaking development services (Dzisah, 2019; Odoom, 2021). Again, due to the dwindling funds from both local and international sponsors, NGOs are to use very useful communication approaches to mobilize funds and other resources to undertake development activities (Dzisah, 2019).

Despite the contributions of NGOs to development services, there are concerns about the operations of NGOs. It is recognized that the control of local influential persons and educated elites who mostly have political connections pose a danger to democratic management and decision-making structures (Andreasen, 2001; Myllyla, 2001). Again, the opportunistic nature of NGOs tends to hinder their capacity to deliver development services (Barr et al., 2003). NGOs have been appreciated more than the public sector regarding development service provisions despite the concerns associated with their operations. Mohan (2002) strengthens this position by asserting that given donors' market philosophy; it makes more sense to have inefficient NGOs than to have inefficient states.

Conclusions

This paper reviewed concepts, themes, and previous studies related to the role of NGOs in development service provisions and the approaches NGOs adopt. The paper has established that NGOs remain indispensable in the development discourse due to the increasing inability of the state to provide adequate development services to the citizenry single-handedly. Again, the paper tried to locate the place of NGOs in society within the context of the global recognition of

people's dissatisfaction with other development approaches. NGOs are entities whose operations are not under the manipulation and control of the state. NGOs are essentially not for profit-making, and so are their activities and services. Attempts at providing services based on voluntarism, altruism, relief, welfare, and humanitarianism have become the mainstay and underpinning motivations for NGO operations. Also, there are varying terminologies used to describe NGOs due to the diverse philosophies, cultures, and histories associated with the emergence of NGOs. Though NGOs contribute substantially to the delivery of vital development services, the foci, functions, approaches, and the means they use may differ due to the vastly multifaceted nature of development. These differences tend to inform the varying conceptualizations and typologies of NGOs. It is noteworthy that various factors, including areas of operation, functions, service provision, intermediary, and advocacy, influence NGO typology, and classification. Besides, NGOs' development services are predominantly in essential areas such as education, agriculture, health, water and sanitation, and employment creation.

NGOs also provide microfinance, financial literacy, livelihood diversification, and governance services. Despite the contribution of NGOs in development service provision, there is a lack of consensus on the issue of NGOs' commitment to the sustainability of their interventions. More so, the infiltration of local influential persons and educated elites with political connections coupled with the opportunistic nature of some NGOs constitutes a major threat to the overall effectiveness of NGOs in development service provisions. Further, there are concerns with regard to the nature of participatory approaches NGOs employ in the provision of development services. It is not surprising because participatory development communication has not received adequate attention within the NGO sector.

Moreover, there are theoretical, conceptual, and methodological gaps in the literature concerning NGOs' activities and strategies. As a recommendation, NGOs are encouraged to pay increased attention to communication approaches such as participatory communication, scholarly communication, social mobilization and awareness creation, advocacy, and behavior change communication. Besides, NGOs are called upon to deeply reflect on how they can use communication approaches and strategies as vital tools for achieving their set goals. Effective use of relevant communication approaches and strategies by NGOs can help them mobilize

enough resources for development services. Finally, more studies need to be conducted from different perspectives using appropriate methodologies to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the NGO sector. It is only through such means that the continuing relevance of NGOs in development services can be firmly established.

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