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The Impact of Donor Aided Projects through Non-Governmental Organisations on the Social and Economic Welfare of the Rural Poor: A Case Study of Kabarole Research & Resource Centre

This study set out to assess the impact of donor-aided projects through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on the social and economic welfare of the rural poor in the Rwenzori sub-region of Uganda. This was a case study research based on an indigenous organisation, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre, located and operating in the Rwenzori sub-region of Uganda. The choice to study this organisation was based on the fact that, compared with other organisations in the region, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre had the longest work-related donor relations of over 10 years and implementing a variety of donor aided projects across the region. This research set out to ask the following questions: what is the nature, and origin of projects being implemented by Kabarole Research and Resource Centre in the region? What is the impact of donor aided projects through Kabarole Research and Resource Centre on the social and economic wellbeing of the grassroots communities in the region? How sustainable are the donor aided projects implemented by Kabarole Research and Resource Centre in the region? Is it possible for KRC (also other NGO projects) projects to be implemented without donor aid? What constraints have grass roots NGOs like Kabarole Research and Resource Centre encountered during the implementation of donor-aided projects? To answer the questions above, a number of qualitative methods and techniques were used to collect and analyse data. Among other techniques that were used included; focus group discussions with project beneficiaries; observation of projects, activities and individual project participants; Key Informant Interviews with different categories of respondents depending on their roles and level of involvement in the implementation of projects but also their experience in the implementation of donor aided programmes. These discussions were guided by different interview schedules with respective respondents. Random and snowball sampling methods were used to choose the respondents as well as groups that participated in the study. This research found an interesting array of evidence indicating that by and large, some social and economic welfare effects had accrued to their project beneficiaries although to a very minimal extent. 1) The study established that on average, 5 out of 15 project beneficiaries had been economically and socially impacted upon by the donor-funded projects. 2) The larger proportion (10 out of 15) of project beneficiaries continued to struggle to realise economic and social effects mainly due to the structural approach favoured by both the NGO and the donors. 3) Largely, more social and economic effects occurred at the non-primary target level, that is NGO workers, and the private sector. 4) A significant proportion of community members had been pushed to the periphery of the „very poor“ including those that had been targeted by the projects. This was due to: imposition of project ideas by the donors through the local counterpart NGO, failure to critically assess the local contexts on the part of the NGO and the donors, and limited individual capabilities among the targeted active poor to fully participate and benefit from projects that were given to them. 5) These donor-aided projects accelerated the donor dependency syndrome and a consumption mentality among their beneficiaries. 6) Finally, most of the projects were unlikely to be sustained, as they were purely dependent and tagged to the NGO and the donors and not to their beneficiaries or government. This research among others recommends that local NGOs need to disengage and sort out donors that could support organically generated projects/programmes and

these programmes should be able to strengthen local entrepreneurship capacity and economic tenacity.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organisations, Donor aids, Rural poor, Social and economic welfare