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Original Article

Fiscal Monitoring and Sustainability of Education Projects in Refugee Camps in Turkana County, Kenya

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Sustainable education projects are crucial for providing lasting solutions to displaced populations in protracted refugee situations. The refugee camps in Turkana County, which host a significant number of school-aged children, depend on the success of education programs. Despite their importance, many projects face challenges such as improper fiscal monitoring, leading to delays and increased costs. However, the role of financial monitoring and control of education projects in emergency contexts remains largely unexplored. This study examines the influence of fiscal monitoring on the sustainability of education projects implemented by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in refugee camps in Turkana County. The study used a descriptive research design and a census approach to data collection. A census of 77 respondents included 7 school principals, 15 education officers/coordinators, 42 board of management (BOM) members, 10 program managers, and 3 county directors of education. Questionnaires and key informant interviews were used to gather information from the participants. The findings indicate that fiscal monitoring significantly influenced the sustainability of education projects, with 52.6% of donors conducting semi-annual project performance reviews and 47.4% of NGOs performing annual audits. These results highlight the necessity of regular audits and performance reviews to promote transparency, accountability, and the sustainability of education projects. The study concludes that rigorous fiscal monitoring is essential for safeguarding educational resources and enhancing the sustainability of education programs. The research suggests enhancing community involvement, building educators' capacity, and creating sustainability exit strategies to ensure long-term success, ultimately supporting lasting solutions for displaced youth.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability in education programs is the ability of projects to continue operating effectively after donors and funders withdraw. For governmental organizations (NGOs), continuous improvement in project performance is crucial for achieving success and sustainability. This aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which focuses on inclusive and equitable education. Key elements such as time, cost, schedule, and stakeholder satisfaction are increasingly important in assessing and managing performance NGOs' program and project sustainability. Education projects can ensure longterm viability and success by focusing on these aspects, even without initial funding sources. A well-executed project attracts more resources and can maintain operations post-donor disengagement, emphasizing the importance of sustainability (Bukhtiarova et al., 2023).

Fiscal monitoring plays a crucial role in ensuring the efficient and effective use of project resources, supporting SDG 17, which highlights partnerships and resource mobilization (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019). Researchers approach fiscal monitoring in various ways. Bukhtiarova et al. (2023) use an integral index to measure financial sustainability, while Wheelen et al. (2023) and Aslanli (2015) consider metrics like valuation and efficiency. This

study evaluates fiscal monitoring through audit frequency and project performance reviews.

Effective fiscal monitoring is essential for the success of educational programs, ensuring projects remain within budget, scope, and timeframe. Monitoring officers develop performance indicators to track progress and identify adjustments. Albert et al. (2017) found that monitoring is most effective when managed by an independent party, preventing bias and ensuring accurate oversight. Carvalho and Rabechini (2017) advocate for timely and regular monitoring to prevent cost overruns and keep projects aligned with plans. Fiscal monitoring and control are vital in avoiding unnecessary expenses and ensuring timely project delivery. This study explores the influence of fiscal monitoring on the sustainability of education programs in refugee camps in Turkana County.

Statement of the Problem

Project failures frequently stem from inadequate financial strategies during the NGO's implementation phase. While a skilled project team is essential, effective financial strategies are critical for successful project execution (Alshammari, 2020). This issue is particularly acute in Kenya's refugee complexes. The Auditor General and researchers have documented numerous project failures in Turkana and Dadaab, often due to underexpenditure and financial mismanagement (Auditor

General, 2020; Wardeh & Marques, 2021). For example, Turkana County failed to utilize \$47 million of its development budget in the 2018-2019 financial year, resulting in stalled projects (Auditor General, 2020).

In Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, over 50% of livelihood projects were incomplete as planned (Lunalo, 2017), with poor financial management as a key factor. The Dadaab refugee complex, home to 253,757 refugees, including many school-aged children, relies heavily on education projects. Yet, poor project performance has led to high dropout rates and inadequate educational infrastructure (UNHCR, 2016; Bellino, 2021). Donor fatigue, exacerbated by financial mismanagement, further compounds these challenges (Catana & Brilha, 2020).

Previous research has revealed gaps in methodology, context, and population, with many studies conducted outside emergency contexts in Kenya or focusing on different project types, limiting their applicability (Von Schnurbein & Fritz, 2017; Muluh et al., 2019; Ndombi et al., 2020). This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining how fiscal monitoring affects the sustainability of educational projects in Kenya's refugee camps, thereby enhancing project outcomes and educational opportunities for refugees in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive literature review has identified significant gaps in understanding the influence of fiscal monitoring on the sustainability of education projects in prolonged refugee settings, specifically in Turkana County, Kenya. This study seeks to address these gaps, emphasizing the critical nature of project sustainability to ensure the continuation of education beyond the cessation of donor funding. Aligning with international human rights principles, the right to education for every child, regardless of circumstances, is affirmed. However, NGOs often grapple with challenges such as donor fatigue and

withdrawal. To counter these challenges, strategies like financial monitoring, diversified funding sources, and social finance programs are essential for maintaining operations post-funding (Almagtome et al., 2019).

Carvalho and Rabechini (2017) underscore the importance of robust project management strategies that minimize unnecessary expenditure and bolster NGO success. Aygün et al.'s (2021) and Osman and Bin Ahmad Dahlan's (2019) studies on fiscal measures, including funds for external auditors and cash-based interventions (CBI), agree that CBI empowers communities to manage educational programs in the future. Similarly, Slaughter (2020) advocates a holistic approach, integrating various education projects into sustainable programs to meet learners' needs despite donor withdrawal. Albert et al. (2017) highlight the inefficacy of internally managed financial monitoring, advocating for independent third-party oversight to ensure unbiased error identification. Carvalho and Rabechini (2017) support this, emphasizing timely monitoring to prevent cost increases and maintain donor engagement. While Albert et al.'s study focused on water projects, Carvalho and Rabechini suggest that these principles apply to education projects. The research examines the influence of fiscal monitoring on the sustainability of NGOsimplemented education projects in refugee camps, thus addressing methodological, conceptual, and contextual gaps.

Sazonov et al. (2015)explored financial in Russian tertiary sustainability education, identifying key indices like audits and performance reviews. However, their focus on Russian higher education limits applicability to Kenyan educational projects, which span all levels. Bukhtiarova et al. (2023) assessed financial monitoring in Ukraine's cash transfer projects, identifying vulnerabilities from infrequent monitoring. Although their focus on banking systems limits their relevance to Kenyan education projects, this study explores fiscal monitoring impacts in Kenya's emergency settings.

In Kenya, Biwott et al. (2017) examined the impact of monitoring on Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects, highlighting the role of financial monitoring in tracking activities and expenditures. Despite their reliance on literature review without direct stakeholder engagement, this study addresses the gap by utilizing questionnaires and key informant interviews for comprehensive data collection.

The critical role of financial monitoring in educational project performance is documented. For instance, Bellino and Dryden-Peterson (2019) used interviews and observational study within Kenya's Kakuma camp, emphasizing the necessity of financial monitoring for project success. They identified clear timeframes as essential for managing costs and completing projects effectively. However, they noted that 35% of projects failed due to misaligned activities and misallocated funds, underscoring the need for efficient resource utilization and milestone achievement (Bellino, 2021). To better evaluate financial monitoring practices and their impact, the current study adopts a mixed methods approach, using quantitative and qualitative techniques to address a methodological gap in previous research.

This literature review underscores the critical role of fiscal monitoring in the performance of educational projects. It highlights the necessity for clear financial monitoring processes, independent oversight, and stakeholder engagement to achieve intended goals efficiently and sustainably. This study aims to expand on these findings by offering a detailed analysis of the influence of fiscal monitoring strategies on project sustainability in Kenyan refugee camps in Turkana County, addressing conceptual, contextual, and methodological gaps in existing research.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

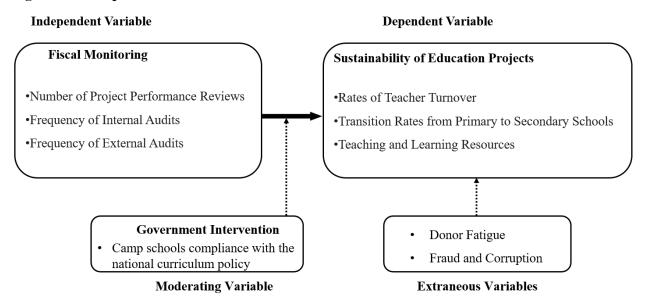
Jensen and Meckling's agency theory illustrates the relationship between the agent and the principal, focusing on service delivery, guidance, and correctional activities (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). In this framework, the principal (donor) expects the agent (partner) to act without requiring costly corrections, emphasizing trust and honesty in operations (Mitnick, 2015). Mitnick (2015) used the agency theory in public administration. The agency theory is widely supported, with scholars like Binnendijk (2019) and Panda and Leepsa (2017) highlighting the importance of independent board members in mitigating agency-principal conflicts and reducing financial costs. They explore the theory's application in family business, social entrepreneurship, and strategic management.

The agency theory is directly relevant to this study's focus on the influence of financial monitoring on project sustainability. It underscores the importance of establishing checks and balances, like frequent project performance reviews and audits, to ensure funds are used effectively. This aligns with the study's objective, as it advises donors to implement verification processes with educational agencies to achieve project goals as outlined in the partnership agreements.

However, the theory has limitations. It often assumes rational behaviour and perfect information, which may not align with the complexities of real-world scenarios. Furthermore, its focus on financial costs may overlook other significant factors, such as social impact or long-term sustainability. Despite these critiques, agency theory provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics between donors and implementing partners in educational projects.

The conceptual framework below indicates how fiscal monitoring, as the independent variable, influences the sustainability of education projects.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



The researcher measured fiscal monitoring using the number of project performance reviews and the frequency of internal and external audits. In this study, fiscal monitoring is hypothesized to influence the sustainability of education projects, measured by indicators such as teacher turnover rates, transition rates from primary to secondary schools, and the availability of teaching and learning resources.

Compliance with national curriculum policies by camp schools is the moderating variable, potentially influencing the strength of the relationship between fiscal monitoring and project sustainability. This compliance could enhance the impact of fiscal monitoring on the sustainability of education projects, as confirmed by Baum et al.'s (2018) studies on the comparative analysis of policies regulating private schools across twenty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The study also acknowledges extraneous variables, such as donor fatigue, fraud, and corruption, which could affect the observed relationship. To prevent extraneous variables from confounding the results, the researchers utilized qualitative measures, a comprehensive census approach, and data triangulation. Qualitative measures involved key

informant interviews with program managers and county directors of education to gather insights into the influence of donor fatigue and potential corruption, providing context to the quantitative findings. The researcher cross-verified data from multiple sources, such as project reports and independent evaluations, to ensure results are not skewed by extraneous factors. Lastly, the census approach ensured a diverse target group accounting for different exposure levels to the extraneous variables, aiding in accurately generalizing the findings.

The findings from project reports and independent evaluations showed that fiscal monitoring, through regular project reviews and audits, was widely viewed as essential for the sustainability of education projects in refugee camps. Semi-annual project performance reviews by donors were the most common (52.6%), while only 3.5% occurred quarterly. Annual internal audits were reported by nearly half of the NGOs, although 14% never conducted audits. These trends were attributed to logistical and cost constraints.

Respondents strongly agreed that project performance reviews and audits fostered efficient resource use, reduced fraud, and promoted

transparency. Notably, 85.7% strongly agreed that frequent reviews aided timely implementation, and 59.4% felt external audits promoted sustainability. Key informant interviews with Program Managers and Directors of Education reinforced these findings, highlighting that monitoring and control of funds help prevent fraud and ensure resources reach intended beneficiaries. Interviewees emphasized that strong fiscal oversight builds trust with donors, increasing the likelihood of continued funding.

Project reports and independent evaluations supported these perspectives, showing that projects with regular audits and reviews were more likely to meet objectives and achieve sustainability. Triangulating data from interviews, questionnaires, and reports confirms that robust fiscal monitoring is critical in sustaining education projects, echoing findings from prior research (Bellino, 2021; Binnendijk, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to capture and report the current state of the phenomenon under investigation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data using percentages, means, and standard deviation, while verbatim responses from key informant interviews were analyzed qualitatively. This design was appropriate as it facilitated the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to describe the influence of fiscal monitoring and control on the sustainability of education projects.

Quantitative techniques involved data collection from a census of 77 respondents, enabling the study to obtain statistically valid results that could be generalized to the wider community in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei settlement in Turkana County. The study gathered numerical data on various metrics, including project performance reviews, audit frequencies, teacher turnover rates, student transition rates from primary to secondary education, estimates of teaching and learning

resources, and the number of education projects undertaken.

Key informant interviews were conducted with Program Managers and Directors of Education to ask probing questions and seek clarifications on the influence of fiscal monitoring on project sustainability. Questionnaires were administered to school Principals, Education Officers or Coordinators, and BOM members to gather additional perspectives.

All responses from interviews and questionnaires were handled with strict confidentiality. Data were anonymized and securely stored, accessible only to the research team. Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Refugee Services, and a research permit was granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and the University of Nairobi's faculty of business and management sciences. Informed consent was sought from all participants before data collection, ensuring that participation was voluntary. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

The main limitation was potential response bias, as some participants might have withheld information due to the sensitive nature of fiscal monitoring. Despite these limitations, efforts were made to create a trusting environment. As such, the researchers clarified the purpose of the study to encourage honest and accurate responses.

RESULTS

In the study, fiscal monitoring was measured based on project performance reviews by donors, internal and external audits by NGOs, and how they foster the sustainability of education projects. The study asked the respondents about how often donors conduct project reviews, and the response is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of Project Performance Reviews by Donors

Frequency of reviews	Frequency	Percentage
Quarterly	2	3.5
Semi-annually	30	52.6
Annually	11	19.3
Never	10	17.5
Irregularly	4	7.0
Total	57	100

The results in Table 1 show that 52.6% of donors conduct project performance reviews twice per year, while 7.0% have no regular timeframes. However, 17.5% of the donors did not conduct the project performance reviews. Only 3.5% of the donors performed a project review of projects every quarter. These results could be interpreted to mean that every donor follows their performance review schedules based on their project monitoring plans and project partnership agreements (PPAs) with

their implementing partners. However, Carvalho and Rabechini (2017) hold the view that there is a need for a timely and regular review and monitoring of project activities to assess their level of agreement with the scheduled activities.

The study asked the respondents about how often they conduct internal audits in their organizations. The responses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of Internal Audits by Organizations

Frequency of	Frequency	Percentage		
Organizational audits		J		
Quarterly	4	7.0		
Semi-annually	6	10.5		
Annually	27	47.4		
Never	8	14.0		
Irregularly	12	21.1		
Total	57	100		

An analysis of the frequency of internal audits by NGOs showed that 47.4% of the organizations conduct annual audits, followed by irregular audits at 21.1%. These findings are probably due to the costs that come with conducting audits and other logistical challenges that NGOs encounter while trying to achieve this. The NGOs that never audited their projects were 14.0%. This therefore shows that there is a need for all NGOs to frequently audit their projects if they want to enhance the sustainability of education programs. These findings concur with

what Bellino (2021) reports on frequent monitoring and auditing as effective tools for ensuring that the resources are utilized well and that the target population benefits from each activity to realize project milestones and sustainability.

To examine the influence of fiscal monitoring on project sustainability, respondents were further asked to rate their agreement with the statements summarized in Table 3 below.

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Table 3: Responses on Fiscal Monitoring

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Project performance reviews by donors are essential in the implementation of the education programs			2(3.5)	33(57.9)	22(38.6)	4.35	0.551
Effective monitoring reduces cases of fraud in the implementation of education programs.			7(12.3)	37(64.9)	13(22.8)	4.11	0.558
There is a need for regular project performance reviews by donors to foster efficient and effective use of project resources.				35(50.0)	35(50.0)	4.50	0.504
Lack of internal auditing undermines the transparency of project resource utilization.			1(1.8)	37(64.9)	19(33.3)	4.32	0.506
Donors are likely to continue funding the NGOs that conduct regular internal auditing of their projects	3(4.3)	4(5.7)	8(11.4)	35(50.0)	20(28.6)	3.93	1.012
There have been effective monitoring and control measures in the implementation of education programs	2(3.5)	9(15.8)	6(10.5)	21(36.8)	19(33.3)	3.81	1.172
Frequent project performance reviews aid in the timely implementation of education programs				10(14.3)	60(85.7)	4.86	0.352
External audits of NGOs have promoted the sustainability of education programs in the refugee camps Aggregate Mean and Standar	1(1.4)	4 (5.8)	2(2.9) 29 0.696	21(30.4)	42(59.4)	4.41	0.913

The descriptive analysis on fiscal monitoring of education projects revealed that 57.9% of the respondents agreed that project performance reviews were essential in implementing education projects [M=4.35, SD=0.551]. It was further agreed by 64.9% of the respondents that effective monitoring and control reduce fraud during the implementation of education projects. Therefore, a lack of internal auditing by the NGOs is believed to undermine transparency [M=4.32, SD=0.506].

The analysis also showed that donors are likely to fund NGOs that regularly conduct internal audits, as was agreed by 50.0% of the respondents. The NGOs that implemented effective monitoring and control measures were 36.8%, therefore showing that the majority needed to improve their monitoring and control measures for project sustainability. Frequent project performance reviews enabled the timely implementation of projects as strongly agreed by 85.7%. It is also important to note that 59.4% of the

NGOs agreed that external audits had promoted the sustainability of their projects [M=4.41, SD=0.913].

Further analysis showed that the average mean and standard deviation were 4.29 and 0.696, respectively. This shows that most respondents agreed with the majority of the statements since the mean was at 4.29. It therefore shows that fiscal monitoring is essential in the sustainability of education projects implemented by NGOs in refugee camps in Turkana County. These findings are consistent with those of Bellino and Dryden-Peterson (2019), who reported that monitoring and evaluation foster the success of education projects by promoting transparency and accountability.

DISCUSSIONS

Fiscal monitoring and control are crucial for NGOs to effectively manage project activities and resources. These practices allow NGOs to track progress, make necessary adjustments, and report to stakeholders, ensuring projects meet expected outcomes. Donor agencies conduct their fiscal monitoring to ensure that funded NGOs adhere to project partnership agreements (PPAs), aligning with Binnendijk (2019), who noted that such practices enhance transparency, reduce fraud, and enable timely project implementation.

Thomas et al. (2021) highlight the critical role of fiscal monitoring, illustrating through their study in Rwandan refugee camps that such oversight is essential for sustaining donor-funded projects. Similarly, Muluh et al. (2019) affirm that effective monitoring and control in remote rural areas of Cameroon are vital for addressing challenges and ensuring project success. Insights from key informants stress the importance of monitoring funds to guarantee their proper use. One interviewee noted, "Monitoring and control of funds ensures sound utilization while preventing fraud and embezzlement of money intended for education programs." Another respondent added, "Transparent reporting practices increase accountability and encourage responsible spending

among all stakeholders." A third participant emphasized, "Regular audits not only deter misuse but also build trust within the community regarding educational projects."

These views align with Bellino (2021) and Muluh et al. (2019), who argued that effective monitoring ensures resources are used efficiently, benefiting the target population and achieving project milestones. Similarly, studies by Thomas et al. (2021) highlight that transparency and regular audits strengthen institutional trust, leading to better educational outcomes. These findings highlight the critical role of fiscal monitoring in safeguarding resources and enhancing the overall sustainability and success of education programs in refugee settings. By maintaining rigorous monitoring practices, NGOs can ensure that projects remain transparent, accountable, and impactful. Therefore, interviews kev informants and results questionnaires reinforce the crucial role of financial oversight, echoing the conclusions of previous research.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights that fiscal monitoring influences the sustainability of education projects in refugee camps in Turkana County. Regular audits and frequent performance reviews by donors and implementing partners are essential to enhance transparency, reduce fraud, and ensure timely project implementation. Effective fiscal oversight safeguards educational resources and fosters long-term success, underscoring the need for continuous adaptation to the dynamic needs of projects in refugee settings.

Recommendations

Project implementers across all educational levels should prioritize regular internal and external audits to address lapses in implementation, thereby enhancing transparency, accountability, and sustainability. Donors must conduct semi-annual and annual performance reviews to ensure funds are used according to partnership agreements. NGOs

should facilitate seamless transitions between educational levels, aligning with UNICEF and UNHCR efforts to integrate refugees into national systems. Adopting participatory approaches in project implementation is crucial, ensuring beneficiary communities are actively involved in planning, monitoring, and decision-making. This strategy fosters project acceptability, ownership, empowerment and motivates refugee and host communities to sustain educational initiatives.

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