



university of
 groningen

Sustaining educational development

Exploring factors to sustain small-scale education projects in
rural areas in Uganda

Vera Linn Harthoorn

S5422477

Youth 0-21 Society and Policy

Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences

University of Groningen

Supervisor & Primary Assessor: Dr. C.J. van der Linden

Second Assessor: Dr. R. Mombarg

16-07-2023

Word count: 11.030

Preface

“Education is neither Eastern nor Western. Education is education and it's the right of every human being.”

Malala Yousafzai, Noble Peace Prize Winner

For as long as I can remember, I have felt the need to contribute to the realization of equal educational opportunities for all. As soon as I graduated from the teachers' college for primary education, I started working with children from different backgrounds and all corners of the world. In addition to teaching in Dutch schools, I also work in rural areas in Uganda to make a humble contribution to creating access to quality education for some of the most vulnerable children and their communities. Blessed with the opportunity to keep learning, I started the Master Youth, Society and Policy to gain more knowledge and skills. The thesis *‘Sustaining educational development. Exploring factors to sustain small-scale education projects in rural areas in Uganda’* is the result of this Master.

The thesis was supervised by Josje van der Linden. I am grateful for her support, inspiring conversations, critical feedback and pleasant collaboration. In addition, I would like to thank the Ugandan experts for their openness, trust and collaboration during this research. And finally, thanks to my family and friends for their encouragement and support. A special thanks goes to my late mom, for her unconditional trust and encouragement to start the Master’s program and do the work I love most.

Vera Linn Harthoorn

Groningen, July 16, 2023

Abstract

Following the growing international conviction that sustainable development begins with education, the United Nations set a goal to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, despite commitments at multiple levels and different approaches to carry out development cooperation during the past decades, disparities and exclusion in education still occur. Especially Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Uganda, face severe challenges related to access to and quality of education. Even successful education programs often break down when external funding ends.

To inform organizations that try to contribute to the improvement of this situation, this explorative multiple-case study aimed to identify promoting factors to achieve sustainable small-scale education projects in rural areas in Uganda. Four education projects carried out by three experienced NGOs were examined to identify these promoting factors. Therefore, a document review and multiple semi-structured interviews with five experts were conducted. This resulted in the identification of twelve promoting factors.

It is recommended to take all these factors into account and to benefit from the strength of small-scale projects in delivering tailor-made programs, to achieve small-scale project sustainability. However, the concept of sustainability might be too complex to take away all risks of unsustainability. Especially in the pursuit of reaching the most vulnerable children and their communities, it might be necessary to take these risks. Only after providing educational opportunities for these children, cooperation towards achieving quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all can succeed.

Keywords: sustainable development, education projects, development cooperation, rural areas

Samenvatting

Vanuit de groeiende internationale overtuiging dat duurzame ontwikkeling begint met onderwijs, streven de Verenigde Naties naar gelijke toegang tot kwaliteitsvol onderwijs en het bevorderen van levenslang leren voor iedereen. Ondanks inspanningen op meerdere niveaus en het inzetten van diverse vormen van ontwikkelingssamenwerking gedurende de afgelopen decennia, komen ongelijkheid en uitsluiting binnen het onderwijs nog steeds voor. Vooral landen in Sub-Sahara Afrika, waaronder Oeganda, staan voor uitdagingen op het gebied van toegang tot onderwijs en de kwaliteit van onderwijs. Bovendien houden zelfs succesvolle onderwijsprogramma's vaak geen stand wanneer externe financiering stopt.

Om organisaties die zich inzetten voor de verbetering van deze situatie te informeren, wordt er binnen deze verkennende, meervoudige casestudy onderzoek gedaan naar factoren die de duurzame ontwikkeling van kleinschalige onderwijsprojecten in plattelandsgebieden in Oeganda bevorderen. Vier onderwijsprojecten, uitgevoerd door drie ervaren Ngo's, werden onderzocht door middel van een literatuuronderzoek en interviews met vijf experts. Dit resulteerde in de identificatie van twaalf bevorderende factoren.

Het verdient aanbeveling om met al deze factoren rekening te houden en de kracht van kleinschalige projecten te benutten door op maat gemaakte programma's te leveren ter bevordering van de duurzaamheid. Het bereiken van duurzaamheid hangt echter met zo veel factoren samen, dat het onmogelijk is om alle risico's op projectbeëindiging weg te nemen. Vooral in het streven om de meest kwetsbare kinderen kwalitatief onderwijs te bieden, kan het nodig zijn om risico's te nemen. Want alleen als ook deze kinderen onderwijskansen krijgen, heeft het doel om iedereen gelijke toegang tot kwaliteitsvol onderwijs en levenslang leren mogelijkheden te bieden, kans van slagen.

Trefwoorden: duurzame ontwikkeling, onderwijs projecten, ontwikkelingssamenwerking, plattelandsgebieden

Table of contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	5
Introduction	6
Theoretical Background	8
Effectiveness of development cooperation.....	8
Sustainability as a multidimensional concept.....	10
Sustaining educational development.....	11
The education system in Uganda.....	15
Methods	17
Sub-questions I and II.....	17
Sub-question III.....	19
The researcher.....	20
Results	21
Education projects in rural areas of Uganda.....	21
Project sustainability: promoting and hindering factors.....	24
Feasible advice for small-scale education projects.....	33
Conclusion	35
Discussion	38
References	39
Appendices	45
Appendix A. Informed consent.....	45
Appendix B. Interview guide for expert interviews.....	46
Appendix C. Codebook expert interviews.....	51
Appendix D. Interview guide for follow-up interviews.....	53
Appendix E. Codebook follow-up interviews.....	54

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CCT	Center Coordination Tutors
CMC	Center Management Committee
CPTC	Core Primary Teacher Colleges
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PDM	Parish Development Models
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMC	School Management Committee
UPE	Universal Primary Education
VHT	Village Health Teams

Introduction

Following the growing international conviction that sustainable development begins with education, the United Nations set a goal to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (United Nations, n.d. a). According to the United Nations (2022a), cooperation and global partnership between all countries is crucial to achieve this goal. However, despite commitments at multiple levels and different approaches to carry out development cooperation during the past decades, development interventions do not always achieve their expected outcomes (e.g. Hashimoto et al., 2010).

Although access to primary education in many developing countries improved, disparities and exclusion still occur and further education is still not available for many people (United Nations, 2022a; Yoshida & Van der Walt, 2018). Recent progress reports (United Nations, 2022b) show for example that especially the Sub-Saharan African countries are far away from achieving primary school completion for all, while making limited or no progress. In addition, improved access to education did not automatically lead to improved quality of education. Besides, what does ‘quality education’ mean? Even though the United Nations (n.d. a) describe quality education as education that leads to ‘relevant and effective learning outcomes’, a lack of agreement about the meaning of ‘relevant’ and ‘effective’ challenges the determination of indicators to measure progress and achievement (Yoshida & Van der Walt, 2018). Harper-Shipman (2020) states that defining what ‘quality education’ constitutes should not be the product of another culture’s conception. Breidlid (2020) and Higgs (2012) take this one step further by criticizing Africa’s neo-colonial education systems, as they believe that the focus on Western-oriented epistemology and knowledge-making tends to ignore crucial traditional and local knowledge, leading to irrelevant education.

Besides difficulties to achieve expected outcomes of development interventions, history shows that a lack of institutionalization and local capacity development can cause the breakdown of initially successful programs when external funding ends or staff leave (Harvey & Hurworth, 2006). Therefore, as Benavot et al. (2016) state, new approaches are crucial to achieve quality education and learning opportunities for all, and stakeholders at every level should act on them, from the local communities to the global society.

To improve the effectiveness of development cooperation, four effectiveness principles that form ‘the foundation’ of collaboration were identified during the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan (OECD, 2011). These include ownership, a focus on results, partnerships for development and transparency & accountability. The underlying

idea of these principles responds to the criticism of the earlier-mentioned Eurocentric development discourse as explained by Breidlid (2020) and Higgs (2012) and calls for a ‘shift in power’ from northern donors to recipient countries (OECD, 2009). To achieve effective development, recipient countries have to determine their own development priorities and strategies, and those who provide support, financial or substantial, should do this accordingly. But what does such development cooperation look like in practice?

Despite interventions at both national and local levels, Uganda, a country in Sub-Saharan Africa, still faces severe challenges related to access to and quality of education. This results for example in a low primary school completion rate of 41%, with significant differences between pupils in rural (36%) and urban (61%) areas (UNICEF, 2022). Stichting Kabira, a relatively new and small NGO, is one of the organizations that tries to contribute to the improvement of this situation. In cooperation with the project beneficiaries and local stakeholders, Stichting Kabira runs small-scale projects that focus on providing quality education for all in rural areas in Central and West Uganda. The ‘ultimate goal’ is to fully hand over successful and sustainable education projects to the local communities and their governments. However, there is no blueprint explaining how to achieve project sustainability. In fact, history shows that transferring knowledge, ideas and in this case education projects from one country to another, or even from one community to another is ineffective as it ignores the importance of adaptation to specific contexts and development strategies (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). But some organizations already have experience in setting up sustainable education projects. To identify factors that promote the sustainability of education projects, it is important to learn from the experiences of these organizations (Brixi et al., 2015). This requires insight into their education projects and the factors that promote and hinder the sustainability of these projects. These insights can be adapted to specific contexts to eventually identify factors that promote the sustainable development of small-scale education projects like those of Stichting Kabira. Therefore, this study aims to identify promoting factors to achieve sustainable small-scale education projects in rural areas in Uganda. This leads to the following research question: ‘Which factors promote the sustainability of small-scale education projects in rural areas in Uganda?’ To answer this research question, the following sub-questions will be examined: 1) Which existing education projects contribute to the sustainable development of education in rural areas in Uganda? 2) What are the factors that promote and hinder the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda according to professionals? 3) How can these factors translate into feasible advice for small-scale education projects like the projects of Stichting Kabira?

Theoretical Background

Effectiveness of development cooperation

A development intervention is only worth sustaining if it proved to be effective (Shediach-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). However, history shows that development programs repeatedly failed to achieve structural improvements (Hashimoto et al., 2010; Hasselskog, 2020). To improve the effectiveness of development cooperation, four effectiveness principles that form ‘the foundation’ of collaboration were identified (OECD, 2011). The first principle is *ownership of development priorities by developing countries*. The principle stems from the idea that “partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs” (OECD, 2011, p3). This means that countries receiving resources determine their own development priorities and strategies, while donors provide resources consistent with these priorities. The principle ownership thus rejects the idea that international actors or Northern donor organizations influence the national development policies of recipient countries (Ziai, 2016). Although the principle received renewed attention in the 2000s, the idea of so-called ‘developing countries’ setting out their own ‘route to development’ was not new in the development discourse. It was already described in the Person Report in 1970 as “no country has the right to intervene in another's policy-making” (The UNESCO Courier, p.10). However, the renewed attention led to increased monitoring of progress. On one hand, progress reports show significant progress as receiving country governments strengthen their national development plans (OECD/UNDP, 2019). On the other hand, the same progress report states that “development partners’ alignment to partner country priorities and country-owned results frameworks is declining” since 2016 (p. 14). These findings may be well summarized by a poster in a Kenyan office that states “Donors want government in the driver’s seat, but donors want to hold on to the roadmap” (cited from Harper-Shipman, 2020, introduction). Critics state that even though both donors and recipient countries keep following the ownership principle and progress reports describe increased levels of country ownership, donors still exercise a strong influence on recipient countries’ national policies and the use of development resources (e.g. Hasselskog, 2022). Even though recipient countries should determine their own definition of and route to development, donors decide whether or not a development strategy is worth supporting or meets their stated conditions (Dornan, 2017; Ziai, 2016). This leads to negotiations and the agreement of policy stipulations through dialogue (Hasselskog, 2022). In practice this might even mean the

adherence to donors' conceptions of what constitutes 'effective development' to gain support (Ziai, 2016), as illustrated by an African minister of finance when he said: "We give them what they want before they start lecturing us" (cited from Ziai, 2016, p. 97). Harper-Shipman (2020) adds that this positions recipient governments to be responsible and accountable for donors' priorities and favored policies.

The second principle, a *focus on results*, strongly interacts with the ownership principle. The focus on results stems from the idea that the investments and efforts made "must have a lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, on sustainable development, and on enhancing developing countries' capacities, aligned with the priorities and policies set out by developing countries themselves" (OECD, 2011, p. 3). However, as mentioned before, the alignment of development projects to recipient country objectives, results indicators, national statistics and monitoring systems is declining (OECD/UNDP, 2019). Although some donors increasingly succeed to align their project objectives to the plans and strategies of recipient countries, this is not the case for many others. When translating this to the field of education, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4) which aims to achieve quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, is used more and more as a joint framework for results. However, the earlier mentioned lack of agreement about the meaning of 'relevant and effective learning outcomes' keeps popping up. It already appeared in 1970 when the Pearsons Report stated that "many more children are in school, but the education they are receiving is often irrelevant to their surroundings and their country's needs" (The UNESCO Courier, p. 10). And it still is a topic of conversation as Breidlid (2020) calls for the inclusion of local knowledge instead of blindly following the Western paradigm to achieve SDG4. As is becoming clear now, when development projects are not well aligned with national objectives and results indicators, a focus on results does not always achieve effectiveness.

The third principle strives for *inclusive development partnerships* whereby values like openness, trust, mutual respect and learning form the foundation of effective cooperation. (OECD, 2011). To achieve development goals, various stakeholders must cooperate to fulfill diverse and complementary roles and responsibilities. The fourth effectiveness principle *Transparency and accountability to each other*, builds on this and states that "mutual accountability and accountability to the intended beneficiaries of our cooperation ... is critical to delivering results. Transparent practices form the basis for enhanced accountability" (OECD, 2011, p. 3). Accountability is a complex multi-level concept, that refers in the basics to being answerable and reliable and taking responsibility (Antoninis et

al., 2017). In the field of education, Antoninis et al. (2017) describe accountability as an obligation of governments and all other stakeholders to report on the realization of their responsibilities. Since the success level of education projects depends on multiple stakeholders that often fulfill shared responsibilities, all key actors in education must be held accountable. However, in the absence of an enabling environment or in case the stakeholders are not capable enough to meet their responsibilities, accountability may not be feasible. Besides, a lack of adequate information and resources will affect accountability (Antonius et al., 2017).

The four principles described above are expected to improve the effectiveness of development cooperation and associated interventions. However, the effective implementation of development interventions does not guarantee sustainability (Goodman & Steckler, 1989).

Sustainability as a multidimensional concept

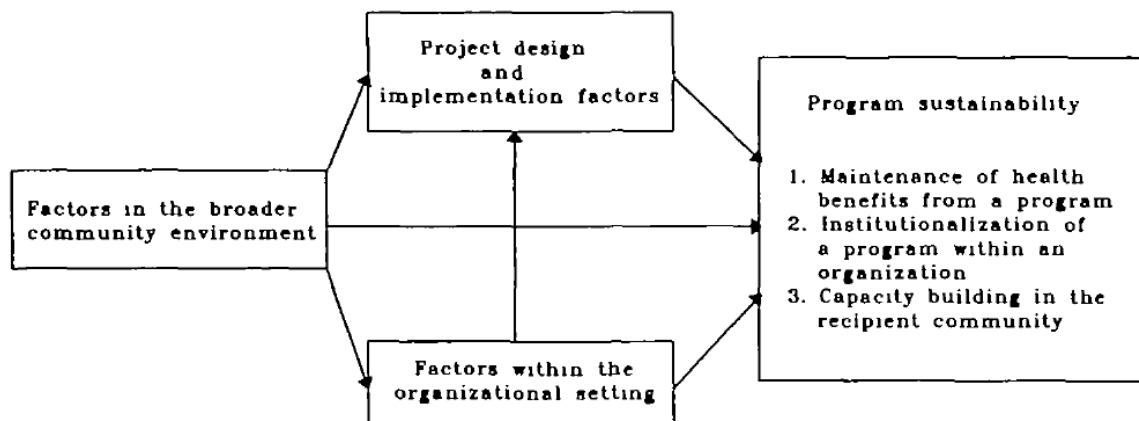
When reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that the concept sustainability can be seen from multiple perspectives. Although the sustainability of projects refers to the continuity of the project in some way (Harvey & Hurworth, 2006), different criteria for project sustainability can be found. Shediak-Rizkallah and Bone (1998) identify three indicators of the sustainability of projects. First of all, the focus can be on the continuity of the project benefits to the participants. This corresponds with the view of Wiley (2007), who states that sustainability refers to the ongoing ability to achieve project goals. When translating this to education projects, this means for example the continuous ability to provide quality education. Secondly, sustainability can concentrate on the level of institutionalization within a society or organization, which affects the ability to continue the project after external funding has ended (Carroll et al., 2019). In the field of education, projects can be incorporated into the work of district education departments to guarantee ongoing basic funding and professional support. Lastly, project sustainability can refer to local capacity development to enable project maintenance at the community level. For education projects, this pertains for example educating local community members to become skilled teachers. “Sustainability thus appears to be a multidimensional concept of the continuation process and the term encompasses a diversity of forms that this process may take” (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998, p. 92). But how can these rather broad indicators translate into practical factors that have the potential to contribute to the sustainability of education projects?

Sustaining educational development

Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) developed a framework to conceptualize program sustainability as presented in Figure 1. Even though the framework was published already 25 years ago and initially designed to plan for the sustainability of community-based health programs, it is still frequently cited in research and used in policy documents including documents from the World Health Organization (ADB/WHO, 2013) and World Bank (Nakajima, 2021). Besides, it builds on the three aforementioned indicators of sustainability and relates to the effectiveness principles in multiple ways. Therefore, this framework is expected to provide a solid base for this research.

Figure 1

A Framework for conceptualizing program sustainability



Note: Taken from Planning for the sustainability of community-based health programs: conceptual frameworks and future directions for research, practice and policy by M. C. Shediac-Rizkallah & L. R. Bone, 1998, *Health Education Research*, 13(1), p. 99, Copyright 1998, Oxford University Press.

To understand under which conditions a project is likely to achieve long-term sustainability, the framework identifies three groups of factors, namely:

- 1) Project design and implementation factors
- 2) Factors within the organizational setting
- 3) Factors in the broader community environment

The eleven factors deriving from these three groups can serve as guidelines when planning for sustainability. The groups and associated factors will be linked to the field of education and described in the following section.

Project design and implementation factors

The first group of factors contains six guidelines that refer to the available resources and the implementation activities that define the way these resources are used.

Project negotiation process

This process relates to the principles *ownership*, *a focus on results* and *partnerships for development*, whereby project goals, targets, strategies and time frames are developed in cooperation with the project beneficiaries and other stakeholders involved, to make sure they align with the local needs and the national development priorities (Ferrero & Zepeda, 2019; OECD, 2011). Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone (1998) add that it is important that projects are monitored and adapted if necessary.

Project effectiveness

It is only worth institutionalizing the project if it proved to be effective (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Transparency and accountability among all key actors help to ensure that development initiatives are carried out efficiently and effectively to achieve the desired results (OECD/UNDP, 2019). Sharing publicly available information about monitoring and evaluation results from the start of the project is hereby essential (Hashimoto et al., 2010).

Project duration

Some indications in research show that a funding period of three years to set up new projects is too short to achieve institutionalization. Therefore a duration of minimal five years is recommended (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Although the aforementioned authors advise identifying a time frame, it should be flexible and adaptive to fit the learning process to achieve local capacity development (Ferrero & Zepeda, 2019; Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

Project financing

Both health programs, as well as education programs, often receive national funding through government support, which is necessary to eventually achieve 'free' primary and secondary education for everyone as SDG4 targets (United Nations, n.d. a). However, practice shows that insufficient government resources to sustain a project lead to increased reliance on funding from the community (Kabay, 2021). To understand more about financial sustainability, Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone (1998) describe the concepts supply side and demand side. As donors provide external resources, they represent the supply side of sustainability. On the demand side of sustainability, the ability and willingness of project beneficiaries to pay for, in this case education, matters. High external funds might hinder

sustainability when a project needs a periodic income that exceeds the locally available resources. Therefore, it is recommended to strive for gradual financial independence from donors, for example by progressive integration of periodic costs into governmental budgets at various levels (Bossert, 1990). In addition, careful planning by stakeholders for eventual cutbacks in funding, the ability to identify costs and set realistic fees, seeking alternative sources of funding and the diversification of services is recommended (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

Project type

For this factor, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) distinguish between preventive and curative care projects, which does not seem relevant in the field of education. However, since the authors mention that projects are most likely to be sustained when they receive support from the national budget, there might be a link with the Ugandan education sector. Even though one of the targets of SDG4 focuses on access to quality early childhood education (United Nations, n.d. a) and multiple studies ratify the importance of participation in pre-primary education (e.g. Brunette et al., 2017), it does not receive any financial support from the government, unlike primary and secondary education.

Training

Research shows that a training component (both professional and paraprofessional) in development projects increases the chance of sustainability (Bossert, 1990; Ogunjimi et al., 2009).

Factors within the organizational setting

The second group of factors contains three guidelines that refer to organizational and political structures and processes that can hinder or support the sustainability of development projects.

Institutional strength

This factor relates to the strength of the organization or institution that is implementing the project. According to Bossert (1990), institutions that are integrated, have strong leadership and clear goals that align with the project goals and work with skilled personnel are likely to sustain projects. In the field of education, a project that is implemented in a government school might be more likely to be sustained compared to projects implemented in non-formal schools. This is because the government school provides a strong organizational base with

already existing supportive structures and stable resources (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

Integration with existing programs/services

This factor builds on the previous factor as it stems from the idea that projects are more likely to be sustained when they integrate within existing systems (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998), e.g. the various education departments that jointly represent the national education system.

Program champions/leadership

The process of project institutionalization is mainly politically oriented whereby it is crucial to create a cooperative attitude among multiple stakeholders for the continuation of a program (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Multiple studies endorse the use of so-called ‘project champions’ to achieve this cooperative attitude. “The champion often enthusiastically advocates for the needs of the program, particularly to help secure resources for its continuation” (Schreier, 2005, p. 339). A champion can therefore help to make sure the program is adopted in the first place and later prevents it from being discontinued (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

Factors in the broader community environment

“A program does not operate in a vacuum. The relationship of the program with the larger ‘environment’ must be considered” (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998, p.103). The third group of factors contains two guidelines that refer to the political and economic environment in which a project operates and the involvement of local community members.

Socioeconomic and political considerations

This factor builds on the factor *project financing*. To sustain a project, minimal levels of national economic resources are necessary (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). However, in several African countries, budgetary resources are so limited that not all geographic regions can be provided with basic governmental services (Bossert, 1990). Besides, institutionalized corruption endangers the sustainability of development projects, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Harnois & Gagnon, 2022). As described before, insufficient national funding leads to the financial contribution of community members to sustain a project (Kabay, 2021). Given the limited availability of local resources, project sustainability is even more endangered in poor, disadvantaged communities. Although the considerations within this guideline are

extremely complex, it once again confirms the importance of transparency and accountability. Therefore, Winters (2014) recommends precise targeting of aid recipients, for example in single regions instead of nationwide projects, as research findings show that it leads to quality accountability.

Community participation

According to Antoninis et al. (2017), multiple stakeholders have to cooperate to fulfill their shared responsibilities to achieve successful educational projects. Therefore, community involvement is recommended for achieving project sustainability (Ogunjimi et al., 2009), as it promotes a sense of ownership of the project and enhances overall community competence and capacity (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

The education system in Uganda

As mentioned before, it is important to adapt education projects to specific contexts and development strategies before implementation to increase the chances of program sustainability (e.g. Mansuri & Rao, 2013). To understand the necessity of implementation and sustenance of education projects in Uganda, a brief description of the population and the factors that influence and define Ugandan education follows.

Uganda is a country in East Africa with an estimated population of 48,6 million people (UNFPA Uganda, n.d). With nearly 50% of the population in the ages of 19 and below, Uganda is one of the youngest countries in the world. Among these youngsters, almost nine out of ten stay in rural areas (UNFPA Uganda, n.d). The Ugandan education system still resembles the British system. It officially starts for children at the age of 6 with seven years of primary school. Children can enroll in government schools, private schools or community schools, the latter also known as non-formal schools (Uwezo, 2019). Primary school is followed by secondary school or technical or vocational education. After completing upper secondary school, students can enroll in tertiary education. Despite its globally recognized importance, early childhood education is not yet included in public basic education (Kabay, 2021).

To increase the quality and equity of education, the Ugandan government introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program in 1996 (Sekiwu, 2020). By providing free universal access to basic education, primary school enrollment rose significantly from 2.2 million primary school students in 1996 to 8.3 million pupils in 2022 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2022). However, many children face difficulties with progressing through school

and absenteeism and drop-out rates are relatively high (Uwezo, 2019). Uwezo (2019) shows that the vast majority of Ugandan children struggle to master basic literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, there are still children who do not have access to education simply because there is no school within their reach.

Methods

This qualitative study with an explorative character (Babbie, 2021) adopted a multiple-case study methodology and aims to better understand which factors promote the sustainability of small-scale education projects in rural areas of Uganda. By carrying out a multiple-case study, detailed and in-depth data could be collected from comparative cases using multiple sources of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This enabled the recommended ‘learning from other organizations’ that already have successful and unsuccessful experiences with sustaining education projects in rural areas in Uganda (Brixii et al., 2015).

Sub-questions I and II

The following describes the methods that were used to answer sub-questions I and II.

Participants

“To maximize the utility of information from small samples, cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). Informed by the professional network of the researcher, four education projects carried out by three NGOs that draw upon a lot of experience with the implementation of projects in rural areas in Uganda were identified through critical case sampling (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Even though the explorative character of this study resulted in the inclusion of a limited amount of projects, obtaining information from different projects strengthened “the precision, validity, stability and trustworthiness of the findings” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 33). The NGOs that implement these projects include Child Rights for All, Education for Everyone and Aid to Improve. For privacy reasons, the names of the NGOs and their projects are pseudonymized. To gain insight into these projects and to identify promoting and obstructive factors, a document review and multiple in-depth interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) were conducted. By using purposive sampling of convenience (Flick, 2018), five experts by experience were identified within the professional network of the researcher. These experts represent diverse perspectives that were or still are involved in the four examined education projects. These include:

1. Project managers of the four education projects
2. Education experts within the examined NGOs, namely a technical advisor and consultant on teacher training and an ECCD specialist

3. Members of the education management at local-government level, namely a district education officer and a school inspector.

Given the fact that some experts changed jobs after two of the projects ended, multiple experts represent different perspectives. Upon accepting to participate in the interviews, the experts provided several documents to obtain better insight into the education projects and to prepare for the interviews. These documents included:

1. Approved project proposals that contained detailed descriptions of the projects
2. Midterm and endline evaluations of the projects of Child Rights for All
3. Guidelines on roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in program implementation to achieve project sustainability

By collecting data from multiple sources and different perspectives, the researcher aimed to obtain detailed and in-depth data. However, the online character of the study hindered the inclusion of one of the main perspectives: the project beneficiaries.

Procedure, instruments and analysis

Before conducting the interviews, written or oral informed consent from each expert was obtained (see Appendix A). Based on the research questions, the theoretical background of this study and the information derived from the document reviews, an interview guide was formulated (see Appendix B). Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the interview guide contained some basic questions to initiate the discussion and a list of questions with topics that could be explored but did not necessarily have to be discussed, depending on the view and ideas of the experts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The online interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 50 – 80 minutes each. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and interview memos were written. All participants indicated that they would be available for a member check or a follow-up interview if necessary. For privacy reasons, the names of the experts are pseudonymized throughout this study.

To answer sub-question I, a combination of the document review and additional information from the interviews was used to obtain information for a first overview of the examined projects. The different components of this overview are based on Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone's framework for conceptualizing program sustainability (1998) that was presented in the theoretical background of this study. These components and the first overview will be presented and discussed in detail in the result section of this study.

To answer sub-question II, the data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, by moving back and forth between text fragments and abstract categories, between description and interpretation and between inductive and deductive coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The step-by-step process as described by the aforementioned authors was hereby followed. First, the interviews were transcribed and initial ideas and comments were noted down. Thereafter, the researcher assigned initial codes to text fragments, followed by analytical inductive coding to identify categories, in this research also known as recurring promoting factors to achieve project sustainability. The within-case analyses were followed by a cross-case analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To increase the reliability of the final categories, a second assessor reviewed the coding process. This did not result in significant changes, but rather in small adjustments concerning the identification of meaningful text fragments. After identifying preliminary findings, so-called member checks with two interviewees were done to find out if the interpretation of the researcher was correct and unbiased or needed adjustments to better capture the promoting factors (Maxwell, 2012). The member checks did not result in any adaptation and were rather a confirmation of the importance of the identified factors. Finally, compelling text fragments that serve as examples were identified and a diagram was developed to visualize how the different factors interact. An overview of the identified factors is presented in Appendix C and will be discussed in detail in the results section of this study.

Sub-question III

To adapt the factors identified in the cross-case analysis for sub-question II to the specific context of small-scale education projects such as the projects of Stichting Kabira, two of the interviewed experts with experience in both small- as well as large-scale education projects and knowhow about education projects of Stichting Kabira were asked to give their opinion on this topic in a follow-up interview. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and guided by a short interview guide included in Appendix D. The online interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the feedback was compared and analyzed using a similar process as described above. The outcomes of these analyzes are presented in Appendix E and discussed in detail in the results section of this study.

The researcher

The fact that the researcher is actively involved in the projects of Stichting Kabira as a board member and therefore knows some of the participants personally, called for researcher reflexivity throughout the entire research (Olmos-Vega, 2022). Besides, because Stichting Kabira operates in the same area, the researcher had some prior knowledge about the context in which the projects of Child Rights for All were conducted. This helped to understand the case studies in detail, but possibly also increased the risk of researcher subjectivity. The second assessor who reviewed the coding process and the earlier-mentioned member checks were used to validate the accuracy of the interpretations (Olmos-Vega, 2022).

Results

Education projects in rural areas of Uganda

To identify factors that promote the sustainability of small-scale education projects in rural areas, this research focuses on one of the rural districts in Uganda: Nakasongola.

Nakasongola is a sparsely populated district in a cattle corridor in Central Uganda, where 86% of the population lives in rural areas (Nakasongola District Local Government, 2020). While almost a quarter of the total population follows education in a primary school, the high drop-out and absenteeism rates suggest that not all school-aged children go to school yet (Kabay, 2021; S. Amuria, personal communication, 28 May, 2023). The district counts 144 government-aided primary schools and 135 private schools, most of them non-formal community schools. The schools are scattered all over the district and 60% of the learners move over 6 kilometers to the nearest primary school (Nakasongola District Local Government, 2020). To improve access to and quality of education, several civil society organizations and NGOs have supported the education sector with education projects. Four of these education projects are selected for this study. A combination of document reviews and additional information from the interviews provide a first overview of these projects as presented in Table 1.

In line with Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone's framework for conceptualizing program sustainability (1998), multiple criteria to create this first overview were identified. The first criterion in the overview is the project goal, as the factor *project negotiation process* indicates, among other things, the importance of alignment to national development priorities. Thereafter, the project location and duration are included in the overview considering the factors *project duration* and *socioeconomic and political considerations*. The *project type* and *the level of institutional strength* are represented in the criterion target group. And finally, the criteria project beneficiaries and stakeholders are included as the factors *project negotiation process and community participation* highlight the importance of cooperation with project beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Table 1*A brief overview of the included projects*

Organization & Name of the project	Project goal	Location of the project	Duration of the project	Target group	Project beneficiaries	Stakeholders
Child Rights for All Early Childhood Care and Development program	Establishment of ECCD centers that provide opportunities for socio-emotional, cognitive and linguistic development and learning to young children.	Nakasongola & Karamoja	4 years in Nakasongola and 5 years in Karamoja 2015-2019/20	23 ECCD Centers in both areas. All centers were attached to non-formal community schools	Children 0-6 years, Parents, ECD caregivers, Community members, CMCs, Local leaders, Teacher trainers, VHTs	- Child Rights For All - Different departments of the (local) government - The project beneficiaries - Other civil society organizations
Child Rights for All Integrated right to education and participatory programs	Access of learners to schools, improved learning outcomes and community participation toward educating the children	Nakasongola, Nakaseke and Luwero	8 years 2012-2018	24 non-formal community schools	Children 6-18 years, Parents, ECD caregivers, Community members, SMCs, PTAs, Local leaders, Teacher trainers	- Child Rights For All - Different departments of the (local) government - The project beneficiaries - Other civil society organizations
Education for Everyone Digital Assessments for continuous education quality improvement	Empower schools with skills and knowledge for self-assessment to generate a process of continuous education quality improvement	Luwero, Nakaseke, Nakasongola, Apac, Kwanja	18 months 2022-2023	200 Government Primary Schools	Students, Teachers, Headteachers/ Deputies, SMCs, PTAs, District, Inspectors of schools, CCTs, CPTCs	- Education for Everyone - Education departments of the (local) government - Education institutions - The project beneficiaries - Other civil society organizations
Aid to Improve Integrated Child and Youth Development	Improved learning outcomes for all and improved access to school for vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS	50 districts in North West, West Central, Capital, East Central and South West	5 years 2020-2025	5.789 Government Primary Schools	Students, Teachers, Headteachers/Deputies, SMCs, PTAs, Community members and Local leaders	- Aid to Improve - Different departments of the (local) government - Education institutions - The project beneficiaries - Other civil society organizations

Note. The names of the organizations and their projects are pseudonymized. As the projects of *Child Rights For All* and *Aid to Improve* provide projects with an integrated approach with different sub-goals, this explorative case study focuses on the education-related goals.

By directly or indirectly aiming at improved access to and quality of ECCD and basic education, all projects aligned their goals to the national development priorities. While both programs of Child Rights for All ended some years ago, the projects of Education for Everyone and Aid to Improve started more recently and are still running. In addition, Table 1 shows that Child Rights for All worked in non-formal community schools, whereas the other two organizations implement their programs in government schools. And even though there is a lot of overlap between the different projects when it comes to project beneficiaries and stakeholders, some variations can be noticed. The project of Education for Everyone focuses solely on education-related goals, beneficiaries and stakeholders, while the other projects follow a more holistic approach and cooperate with other departments of the (local) government as well, e.g. the Ministry of Health.

When studying the documents and talking to different program managers and education experts, a few things stand out. First of all, the two projects of Education for Everyone and Aid to Improve seem to draw upon a wider network of stakeholders in all stages of the project, while Child Rights for All mainly cooperates with other stakeholders during the implementation of the projects. In addition, there seems to be more specific attention to the topic of sustainability within the two ongoing programs compared to the programs of Child Rights for All. Possibly due to the increased attention this theme gets, for example as a result of the introduction of the Sustainable Development Agenda (United Nations, n.d. b). Moreover, the difference between implementation in government schools and non-formal community schools seems essential when it comes to project sustainability and refers to the factor *institutional strength* as described by Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone (1998). While government schools already have existing supportive structures and stable resources, these institutionalizations often lack in non-formal community schools. This difference might be the result of differing project goals. Education for Everyone and Aid to Improve mainly focus on improving the quality of education in already established schools, while Child Rights for All particularly targeted rural areas that did not have access to school yet. Their project goals focused on both access to as well as quality of education. This difference is also seen in the historical perspective on Ugandan education. Since the introduction of UPE in 1996, the national education-related development plans mainly focused on creating and improving access to education, but this focus shifted to improving the quality of education during the past years (Kabay, 2021). However, this does not mean that all children have access to education yet. Therefore, to provide quality basic education for all, the focus should be on both aspects: access and quality (Kabay, 2021; UNESCO,

2015). And even though implementation within already established government schools seems to be a rather ‘safe option’ when it comes to the topic of sustainability, taking risks and implementing projects in non-formal community schools might be necessary to reach the most vulnerable children (C. Okello, personal communication, 28 June, 2023).

Project sustainability: promoting and hindering factors

After obtaining a first overview of the different education projects, promoting and hindering factors for project sustainability were identified and discussed in-depth during multiple interviews and complementary document research. Critical analyses of the interviews and documents resulted in the identification of 12 interacting factors that influence project sustainability, namely *multi-stakeholder involvement, a long-term vision of project sustainability, sensitization on the importance of the education project, adaptation of project goals to local needs, limited issuance of money, a focus on results, continuous monitoring and evaluation, transparency, capacity building, accountability, institutionalization of the project* and an *enabling environment*. A detailed overview of the factors and their sub-factors is included in Appendix C. In the following section, the different promoting factors and the way in which their absence hinders sustainability will be explained using practical examples from the examined projects.

A long-term vision on project sustainability

“For sustainability, it’s from the word go, you start planning for the end as you start” (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May, 2023). To achieve project sustainability, a long-term vision seems crucial. By planning for sustainability from the inception of the project and by confirming these arrangements in so-called sustainability plans, the first crucial steps to achieve project sustainability can be made. However, the absence of an adequate sustainability plan hindered the sustainability of the projects of Child Rights for All, as illustrated by Madam Afiya:

We first started by paying caregivers monthly incentives. That is one of the key areas that is affecting the sustainability of ECCD: the [payment] of caregivers. We realized that in the long run, this was not something sustainable. Because this project comes and ends. And when a project ends after three years, who takes over the [payment] of caregivers? (Personal communication, 1 June, 2023)

Another important aspect of a long-term vision for project sustainability that was mentioned by all interviewees was the need for flexible project duration. Although stakeholders set intentions regarding the duration of the project in the sustainability plan, projects have to last for a minimum of five years, while the total duration depends on project goals, the process of capacity development and the context in which the project is implemented. This finding is supported by Ferrero and Zepeda (2019) and Mansuri and Rao (2013) who recommend to use a flexible timeframe that can be adapted to local needs.

Multi-stakeholder involvement

“A critical component of success of projects is stakeholder involvement. Get it wrong there, then there's no sustainability” (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May, 2023). Multi-stakeholder involvement refers to the involvement of stakeholders on all levels of society and in all stages of the project and is by far the most frequently mentioned promoting factor during the interviews. However, as can be seen in the following quote, there are still multiple examples of project sustainability hindered by a lack of multi-stakeholder involvement.

Quite many projects, legacies, don't live beyond one year after they close. Many of them because the way they are designed is based on their own understanding and view of the whole program. They don't involve people in them. (F. Mukisa, personal communication, 25 May, 2023).

Therefore, multi-stakeholder involvement from the start of the project is crucial. The project of Education for Everyone is a good example of what successful multi-stakeholder involvement looks like, as described by one of their stakeholders:

We are owning it. We are part of it right from the beginning. But Child Rights for All, for them they had their own supervisors and their own payment structure. It was a big project on their part. And the government was coming in at a very small level. (S. Amuria, personal communication, 28 May, 2023).

Both quotes above illustrate that multiple-stakeholder involvement is crucial to achieve ownership and inclusive development partnerships as recommended in the effectiveness principles (OECD, 2011).

Sensitization on the importance of the education project

According to the interviewees, one of the main stakeholders that should be on board to achieve project sustainability are the project beneficiaries, for example parents of the schools

that are part of the project. However, not all communities value education and they do not always understand why they need to take the children to school. As Mister Mukisa said: “In Nakasongola, many parents would ask: Why should my child go to school? Did I go to school? Don't I have land? Don't I have cows? Am I not doing well?” (Personal communication, 25 May 2023). To achieve project sustainability and education for all, the interviewed experts agree that continuous sensitization on the importance of the education project is crucial and should be specifically planned for as part of the project design. These project designs need to allow for flexible and long-term engagement to be able to adapt interventions, in this case the sensitization activities, to the local context. Because some communities might need more intense sensitization than others.

Adaptation of project goals to local needs

Another factor that builds on multi-stakeholder involvement is the adaptation of project goals to local needs. By involving the beneficiaries in the needs assessment, “you can address the real needs of the community, rather than you imposing on them an educational project that does not really help them.” (F. Musika, personal communication, 25 May 2023). A practical (negative) example of this factor comes from the Child Rights for All projects, whereby they established a non-formal school only 500 meters away from a government-aided primary school. This raises questions: was that a need for that community? Probably not, the school is no longer functioning and the schoolyard is grazed by cattle (C. Okello, personal communication, 21 June 2023).

Limited issuance of money

“People have become used to being given money, money, money...” (F. Mukisa, personal communication, 25 May 2023). The next factor is limited issuance of money. A factor that finds its roots many years ago and interacts with several other factors, like accountability, an enabling environment and a focus on results. According to several experts, it is important to limit the issuance of money instead of providing a lot of money to execute the project, so that the local stakeholders can sustain the project when an external donor phases out. However, limiting the issuance of money can also hinder the implementation of a project as described by Mister Okello:

When I called for a community meeting to inform them about what we are coming to do in their area, they would expect to be fed, expect to be given money as transport refund. They would expect to be given money as sitting allowance. Now sitting

allowance for what? I'm bringing something to upgrade the level of education within that community, but they still want to be paid. That's something we are trying to remove, but it's not easy. Currently I'm implementing a project funded by Aid to Improve and the system of the money I'm talking about is not only affecting the implementation in the community, but also on the district level. [Aid to Improve has] supported a lot of district initiatives. Whatever we do is to support the work of the district people. But you find when you get to a district, they still want to be paid. (Personal communication, 27 May 2023).

This example shows that a limited issuance of money is not a self-evident promoting factor as it can also hinder the implementation of a project, for example because stakeholders sometimes refuse to cooperate if they do not receive any money. Especially on the side of district professionals, the problem described above seems to be part of a broader problem, possibly caused by limited budgetary resources for governmental services as described by Bossert (1990) or institutionalized corruption as described by Harnois & Gagnon (2022). In addition, according to several interviewees, the fact that some civil society organizations provide a lot of money, while others do not, makes it even harder to curb these practices.

Focus on results

The issuance of money trickles down to the next factor because it also influences the focus on results. Now that project beneficiaries are used to being given money, the real cause for the project might move to the background.

People think the bigger benefit of this project is money. People begin to associate what is being done in the project with money. So once you say: no, we don't have the money. Definitely, people lose interest in whatever you were doing. (F. Mukisa, personal communication, 25 May 2023).

And that is exactly what happened to some of the caregivers that used to be paid by Child Rights for All. Once the organization handed over the ECCD centers to the communities and their districts, a lot of caregivers did not continue. However, a focus on results does not only interconnect with the issuance of money, it also links to the next factor.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation

To keep track of the progress an education project makes, all interviewees describe the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation. It helps to identify the level of project

effectiveness, the points of improvement and the possibilities to address these points of improvement to reach the project goals. The experts describe that monitoring and evaluation should start from the inception of the program. Besides, it does not stop when the NGO is phasing out, on the contrary. Therefore, it is important to empower project beneficiaries with the capacity to monitor and evaluate the ongoing project themselves. And that is exactly what Education for Everyone is doing, as Mister Musika described:

For us, it is empowering the stakeholders to discover their own challenges, even without us. Working with the CCTs and the school stakeholders, they identify their own challenges through self-assessment... They discuss them, formulate their own action points, which they put in the system, which system is being shared by the Ministry of Education. (Personal communication, 25 May 2023).

In other words, there are two important aspects when it comes to continuous monitoring and evaluation: keeping track of the project's effectiveness and improving the local capacity to monitor and evaluate the projects. Both aspects are supported by the findings of Hashimoto et al. (2010).

Transparency

The quote above also reveals the importance of transparency. By building evidence about the effectiveness of the project and sharing this information, the government gets informed about the importance to take over the project. The dissemination of findings should therefore not only happen internally but with all different stakeholders. As described by Mister Musika, a lack of transparency about the Child Rights for All projects might have hindered their sustainability:

When [Child Rights for All] did a mid-term evaluation, the results indicated that on average the literacy rates in those schools went higher than the Uganda National literacy rates. The national literacy rate was around 18%. But in the project area, schools managed to improve literacy rates to around 42.5%. Meaning there was a very big improvement. But because this evidence is not built and shared with government... they're not seeing that it's important for them to buy as government. (Personal communication, 25 May 2023).

This factor aligns with the third effectiveness principle *Transparency and accountability to each other* and corresponds with the advice of OECD/UNDP (2019) as they state that sharing

publicly available information about monitoring and evaluation results is essential.

Capacity building

Capacity building is very important. Because if you don't empower them to do the work, and they [don't] get that skill and knowledge, eventually when you leave, it means they will also end there. So for you to ensure sustainability, you need to train and empower them. (F. Mukisa, personal communication, 25 May 2023).'

To ensure project sustainability, several interviewees stress that all stakeholders should be empowered to be able to perform their specific roles, both project beneficiaries as well as education experts, depending on the project goal. For example by empowering the SMCs and PTAs.

In Uganda, the school management committee is a legal border by government. They have a complete guide on what they're supposed to do in the schools. But sometimes, because they don't access this information, they may not know which roles they're supposed to play. But once they got that capacity and the power and the knowledge, they were able to go to the head teachers and ask: 'But how much money did we get from our UPE? We want to see how we have spent it.' (F. Mukisa, personal communication, 25 May 2023).

This example shows the importance of inserting a training component in the education programs to make sure all stakeholders are able to perform their specific roles. This recommendation aligns with the findings of Bossert (1990) and Ogunjimi et al. (2009) who state that the inclusion of a training component within a development project increases the chance of sustainability.

Accountability

“[Education] is a multi-stakeholder responsibility. It has to be many players, but each player should know what their role is.” (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May 2023). All interviewees describe the importance of accountability of all stakeholders to achieve project success. That might require the empowerment of different stakeholders, as described in the quote above. However, the absence of an enabling environment can hinder accountability, and therefore project sustainability, in many ways. The following quote shows how impeding

factors in the broader environment hindered the accountability of education experts and teachers in the Aid to Improve project.

The number of staff in the [district education] department could also lower the support to the schools. Because for instance, Sembabule has 187 schools. And then when you get to the department at the district level, you don't find more than six. [They are supposed to visit the schools] regularly, but it's very minimal. And that also goes up to school level. When you get to a school, the enrollment is so high and the [amount of] teachers is very low. So, you find a class of over a hundred children being supported by one teacher. (C. Okello, personal communication, 27 May 2023).

This example shows why it is important that all stakeholders are accountable in order to achieve project success, which is supported by Antoninis et al. (2017).

Institutionalization of the project

Another crucial factor is the institutionalization of the project, which can occur in many different ways. First of all, several interviewees describe the importance to align project goals to the national development plan and government strategies as it increases the chance that the government gets involved and eventually takes over the project. For example through integration within the national education system, which enables ongoing financial and education substantive-related support. Besides, the complementation of existing programs or services increases the chances of institutionalization of the project. The project of Education for Everyone is an example of this as the organization complements existing government services and aligns its program goals to the government strategies for development.

What Education for Everyone is doing, is exactly what government should do. It will be sustainable because Education for Everyone is just complementing and maybe intensifying the implementation of quality delivery. And that is the key theme of government. (S. Amuria, personal communication, 28 May 2023).

In addition, it is important to integrate the education project within existing programs or services that are not necessarily part of the Ministry of Education but can be used to address education challenges. Both Aid to Improve as well as Child Rights for Everyone emphasize the integration of their education projects into broader, holistic approaches as described in the following example:

People are poor and the poverty is affecting the education of their children. Because there are roles and responsibilities a parent is supposed to play that government can't meet. A pen, a pencil, a uniform, an exercise book, a meal, medication... But unless a parent has money, they're not able to meet this. And that inability to meet their side of the responsibility meets the inability of the child to attend. So one of the strategies for sustainability is to ensure that household incomes are supported by the different government initiatives that are addressing poverty. (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May, 2023).

This example also illustrates how the factors enabling environment, institutionalization and accountability influence each other.

Enabling environment

“Primary education in Uganda is decentralized. It's a responsibility of the district. Though it's another story whether they have the resources...” (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May, 2023). An enabling environment is another important, multi-faceted promoting factor for project sustainability that occurs on different levels and in many ways. First of all, the willingness of different stakeholders to be supported is a precondition for project implementation. So, even though sensitization on the importance of the education project is important, if a change in mindset cannot be achieved, it is very unlikely to achieve project goals and sustainability. As Mister Okello explained:

We tried in the first year, but the district would just tell you, without money I'm not going. So instead of wasting resources in the district with a team that is not willing to be supported, you move to another district that is willing to be supported. (Personal communication, 27 May, 2023).

Furthermore, the level of sustainability depends on the willingness and ability of different stakeholders to take on responsibilities. And as various quotes presented above reveal, adequate national supportive structures and stable and sufficient national and local economic resources are crucial to achieve project sustainability. For example, an insufficient budget to execute educational activities or an insufficient amount of skilled personnel endangers project sustainability.

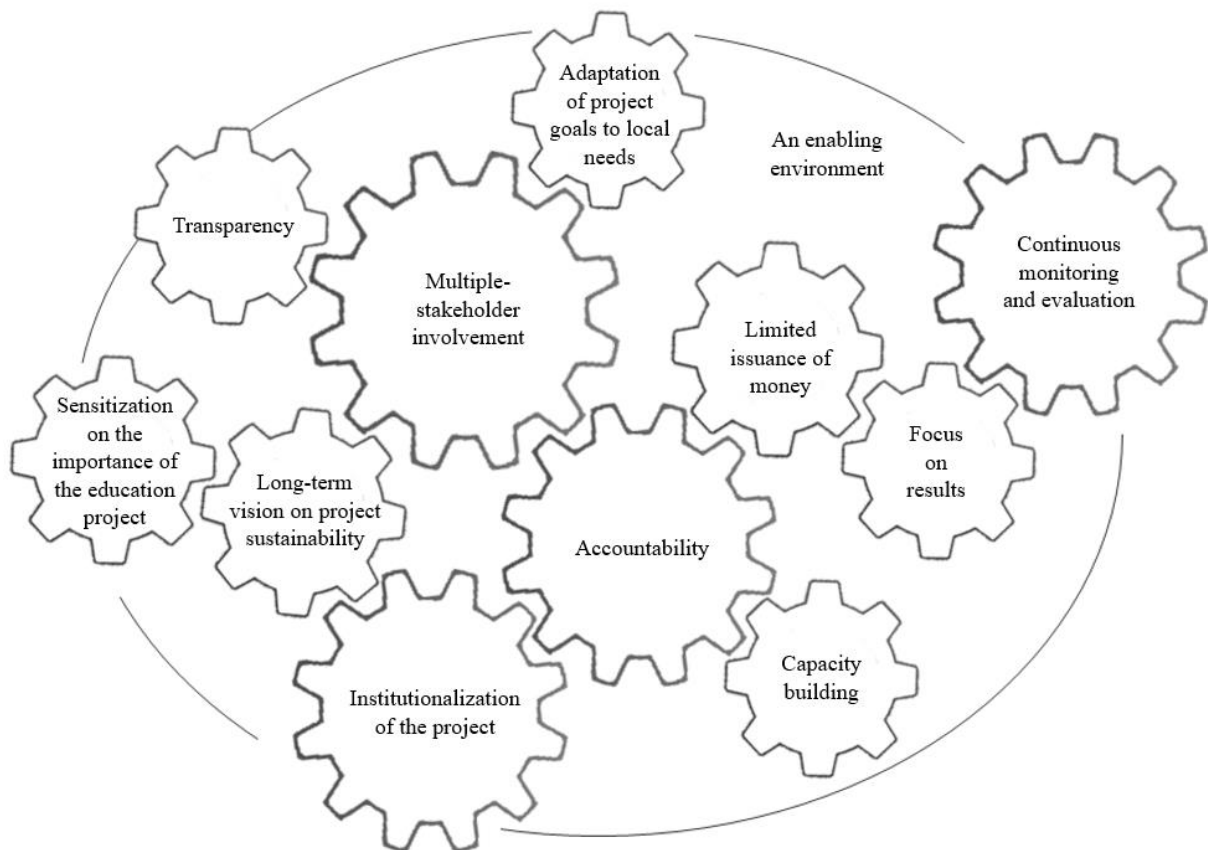
The complex and interacting nature of project sustainability

Even though the 12 presented factors were described separately, they should not be seen as

separate aspects, but rather as an interconnected set of ingredients that influence and strengthen each other in order to achieve project sustainability. By using multiple gearwheels as a metaphor, the researcher strives to illustrate the complex, multifaceted, interacting and dynamic nature of project sustainability in Figure 3.

Figure 3

A diagram of factors that promote the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda



The diagram places multi-stakeholder involvement in the center, as this factor seems to influence all other factors. For example, without multi-stakeholder involvement, institutionalization of the project is nearly impossible. In the background, but no less important, the factor enabling environment is displayed. This factor sets all gearwheels in motion. In other words, if the mechanical drive does not run smoothly, other factors might falter or move shockingly which endangers project sustainability. However, as the factors are based on experiences and examples from rather large-scale education projects, it is important to adapt them to the context of small-scale education projects.

Feasible advice for small-scale education projects

As a result of the complex and multifaceted character of sustainability, as many as 12 factors seem to be important to apply to achieve project sustainability. But how can these factors translate into feasible advice for small-scale education projects like the projects of Stichting Kabira? After discussing this question with two experts with experience in both small- as well as large-scale education projects, it becomes clear that the same 12 factors apply to small-scale projects. Mister Okello is clear when he says that even small-scale projects “are supposed to take all these factors into account” (Personal communication, 28 June, 2023).

First of all, it is good to be aware that small-scale projects can make a valuable contribution toward the realization of education for everyone. “Smaller projects have a higher chance of making an impact because you deal with the project in an intense way” (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May, 2023). Mister Okello explains this by discussing the difference between small-scale and large-scale projects:

With small-scale projects, you have a smaller area to cover. So all inputs will be concentrated around [the smaller area of coverage], and you'll really see the impact. But in most cases, the big-scale [projects] look at the data. The number of schools they're covering, the number of teachers, the reaching, the number of learners... They just look at the quantity, not the quality. Small-scale [projects] deliver more quality work than big-scale [projects]. (Personal communication, 28 June, 2023)

By focusing more on quality, the local needs to achieve project goals can be taken into account. For example, when some teachers need more time and support than expected to master and consolidate new skills to improve their instruction, the program can be adjusted accordingly. So a smaller project area creates opportunities to perfectly adapt the project to local needs, to focus more on the quality of the project and to consolidate it (D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May, 2023).

However, the projects can also be more vulnerable, for example due to the limited support the NGO can give (C. Okello, personal communication, 28 June, 2023). While large-scale projects usually have multiple employees from civil society organizations or NGOs that help to implement the project, small-scale projects often work with volunteers when hiring permanent employees is financially not feasible. Limited funding and the absence of permanent employees might also lead to uncertainty about the project duration and influence the capability to build in a capacity-building component. Besides, the small-scale of projects might complicate project institutionalization, as the district education department might

prefer to work with large-scale projects since they reach a larger part and more schools of their district.

The examples illustrated above once again endorse the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement, a long-term vision on project sustainability, accountability and a limited issuance of money among other things. By jointly planning for sustainability from the start of the project, possible adverse circumstances like the aforementioned examples can be taken into account. The sustainability plan that follows from this joint planning must be designed in such a way that the disadvantages are kept to a minimum and the advantages are fully utilized. So to conclude, it is recommended to leave no factor out and to use the power of small-scale projects by delivering tailor-made programs to achieve project sustainability.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the factors that promote the sustainability of small-scale education projects in rural areas in Uganda. A combination of document reviews and additional information from the interviews provided a first overview of four education projects that operate in rural areas in Uganda, including the district Nakasongola. This overview is presented in Table 1. It is remarkable that the two newer, ongoing projects pay relatively more attention to the topic of project sustainability compared to the two older projects that already finished. Another striking difference is that the newest projects operate in government schools that are already integrated into the national education system, while the older projects operated in non-formal schools that were not yet fully institutionalized in the government structures. This difference aligns with the national shift in focus from access to education to quality of education. However, to provide quality basic education for all, the focus should be on both access to and quality of education (Kabay, 2021; UNESCO, 2015). This might require taking risks when it comes to the topic of sustainability.

Critical analyses of the interviews and complementary document research resulted in a diagram of 12 promoting factors as presented in Figure 3. The diagram illustrates the complex, multifaceted, interacting and dynamic nature of project sustainability. As such, there are not only one or two essential factors to achieve project sustainability. Instead, the coherence of all factors is crucial. Most of the identified factors, such as multi-stakeholder involvement, adaptation of project goals to local needs, continuous monitoring and evaluation, transparency, accountability, capacity building, institutionalization of the project and an enabling environment are consistent with the related literature (e.g. Antoninis et al., 2017; Bossert, 1990; Ferrero & Zepeda, 2019; Hashimoto et al., 2010; OECD, 2011; OECD/UNDP, 2019; Ogunjimi et al., 2009; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). This shows that the majority of the sustainability-related factors in the field of education as presented in Figure 3 are quite similar to the factors identified in the health sector and in the literature published in the past two decades. However, this study reveals that there are also factors that were not yet mentioned in earlier studies, factors that create tensions or factors that are contradicted by other researchers.

One of the factors that create tension is the sensitization on the importance of the education project. Even though the interviewed experts were unanimously convinced of the importance of this factor, it also raises questions that need some explanation. While the literature as well as the experiences of experts endorse the importance of involving project

beneficiaries in all stages of the project (e.g. Ferrero & Zepeda, 2019), including the needs assessment, both sources also reveal that donors and NGOs sometimes pass this crucial point and instead come up with an already designed project (e.g. Hasselskog, 2022). In that case, sensitization on the importance of the education project means imposing the opinion that the project is important for the beneficiaries without including the opinion of the actual beneficiaries themselves. Multiple experts confirmed this practice and Mister Mukisa clearly explained that many projects prove to be unsustainable because their design is based on a donor's understanding and view, instead of involving the actual beneficiaries to plan together (Personal communication, 25 May 2023). This, once again, shows the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement and the adaptation of project goals to local needs and the national development plan. Only then, sensitization on the importance of the education project is justified.

Another factor that creates tension is the focus on results. This tension builds upon the tension described above. Research shows that the national policies of recipient countries and the use of development resources are still strongly influenced by donors (Chandy & Kharas, 2011; Hasselskog, 2022), which causes the risk of achieving ineffective outcomes from the local people's perspective (Ferrero & Zepeda, 2019). Others take it even a step further and state that donors' conceptions of what constitutes 'effective development' are complied with to gain support (Ziai, 2016). This might lead to education projects that focus on Western-oriented epistemology and knowledge-making while ignoring crucial traditional and local knowledge, which, according to Breidlid (2020) and Higgs (2012), leads to irrelevant education. Besides, according to Ferrero & Zepeda (2019) and Mansuri & Roa (2013), a strong focus on results might lead to fixed and previously designed projects with clear outputs and optimistic outcomes within a specified timeframe. However, development and social change cannot be completely designed in advance and implemented accordingly due to complex and dynamic contexts and local needs. All these critiques refer back to the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement, the adaptation of project goals to local needs, transparency and a long-term vision on project sustainability. Besides, they illustrate that a focus on results only promotes sustainability if present in conjunction with the other 11 factors.

In addition, the limited issuance of money creates a tension that builds on the concepts supply side and demand side as described by Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and strongly interacts with the factor enabling environment. On one side, experts advocate for limited issuance of money to increase the chance that local stakeholders are able to sustain the

project when an external donor phases out. However, in the absence of an enabling environment, project sustainability might even be endangered due to a limited issuance of money. For example, in the case of limited national financial resources as a result of which not all geographic regions in Uganda can be provided with basic governmental services such as education. Insufficient national funding often leads to the financial contribution of community members to sustain a project (Kabay, 2021). But in many poor and disadvantaged communities, there are only limited available local resources that cannot sustain a project. This tension pleads for the inclusion of the factors institutionalization of the project and a long-term vision on project sustainability, among others. Only in joint presence can a limited issuance of money promote project sustainability.

Finally, it is remarkable to see that one of the frequently mentioned factors in the literature, program champions (e.g. Schreier, 2005; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998), is partially contradicted by the experts in this study. Even though they endorse the importance of advocacy for education projects, they explicitly mention that this should not be the responsibility of only a few ‘champions’, instead all beneficiaries should be included, active and responsible.

As the tensions and considerations described above render, achieving project sustainability is a complex and dynamic process. To optimize the chances to sustain an education project, it is important to take all factors described in the diagram into account as their coherent presence is crucial. This is no less true for small-scale education projects, on the contrary. Even though small-scale projects are able to adapt the project to local needs, to focus more on the quality of the project and to consolidate it (Ferrero & Zepeda, 2019; C. Okello, personal communication, 28 May 2023; D. Sanyu, personal communication, 28 May 2023; Winters, 2014), they might also be more vulnerable. For example, due to limited available support from civil society organizations or NGOs, limited funding and limited chances of institutionalization (C. Okello, personal communication, 28 May 2023). A jointly formed sustainability plan can help to minimize these disadvantages and fully utilize the advantages. So, to conclude, it is recommended to leave no factor out and to use the strength of small-scale projects by delivering tailor-made programs to achieve project sustainability.

Discussion

This explorative case study presents a diagram of 12 factors that arise from the systematization of experiential knowledge and aims to draw attention to the complex and multifaceted nature of the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda. By deriving information from multiple projects, the researcher aimed to strengthen the precision, validity and stability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the study also contains methodological limitations that need to be discussed. First of all, the identified factors are based on critical insights of only five experts by experience. It is therefore important to realize that the diagram does not present an exhaustive list of factors that promote project sustainability. Furthermore, this research was solely conducted online. Even though the researcher has lived in Nakasongola and feels familiar with the educational challenges the district has, the online character of the study limited the possibility to collect data in the real-life situation and from multiple sources of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although the interviewed experts represent multiple perspectives involved in education projects, this also resulted in the exclusion of one of the key perspectives of this study. The project beneficiaries themselves were not represented.

Due to the limitations of this study, it is considered an explorative case study. However, it offers a stepping stone for further research comparing the process of sustaining education programs in different contexts and settings to advance the available empirical knowledge base and to make sure that a growing amount of education projects is sustained.

Even though project sustainability has proved to be important to achieve quality education for all, discussions with experts and the analyses of the four different projects encourage us to reflect on the global emphasis on this topic. As current results suggest, no matter how accurate or exhaustive the list of promoting factors may get, it might not be possible to fully guarantee project sustainability. Perhaps the concept of sustainability is simply too complex and dynamic to take away all risks of unsustainability. But this should not stop people from trying. Maybe it should be accepted that in order to reach the most vulnerable children and the most vulnerable communities, it is necessary to take risks. Only after including these children, we can jointly work towards achieving quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

References

- ADB/WHO (2013). Managing Regional Public Goods for Health Community-Based Dengue Vector Control. Retrieved on May 15, 2023, from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/30167/community-based-dengue-vector-control.pdf>
- Antoninis, M., Barry, M., Bella, N., Köseleci Blanchy, N., D’Addio, A., Joshi, P., Kubacka, K., Loupis, L., Lythrangomitis, K., McWilliam, A., Mechtar, A., Millar, B., Mukizwa, C., Murakami, Y., Owens, T. L., Randrianatoavina, J., Redman, K., Rojnov, M., Smith, W. & Vidarte, R. (2017). *Global Education Monitoring Report Summary. Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments*. UNESCO. Retrieved on May 14, 2023, from <https://www.globalcampaignforeducation.nl/project/gemr-2017-accountability/>
- Babbie, E. R. (2021). *The Practice of Social Research*. Cengage Learning. Retrieved on June 28, 2023, from <https://books.google.nl/books?id=IFvjDwAAQBAJ>
- Benavot, A., Antoninis, M., Barry, M., Bella, N., Köseleci Blanchy, N., Delprato, M., Hertelendy, G., Jere, C., Joshi, P., Kubacka, K., Loupis, L., Lythrangomitis, K., McWilliam, A., Mechtar, A., Millar, B., Mukizwa, C., Murakami, Y., Owens, T. L., Randrianatoavina, J., Redman, K., Rojnov, M., Ruszkiewicz, A. E., Smith, W., Subden, E., Vidarte, R. & Zubairi, A. (2016). *Global Education Monitoring Report Summary. Education for people and planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All*. UNESCO. Retrieved on May 13, 2023, from <https://www.globalcampaignforeducation.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GEM2016Summary.pdf>
- Bossert, T. J. (1990). Can they get along without us? Sustainability of donor-supported health projects in Central America and Africa. *Social Science & Medicine*, 30(9), 1015-1023. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(90\)90148-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(90)90148-L)
- Breidlid, A. (2020). Beyond the Western Paradigm: Indigenization of Education Systems, the Sustainable Development Goals and State Building in Sub-Saharan Africa. In: A. Breidlid & R. Krovel (Eds). *Indigenous Knowledges and the Sustainable Development Agenda* (pp. 12-32). Routledge. <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.4324/9780367853785>

- Brixi, H., Lust, E. & Woolcock, M. (2015). Trust, Voice, and Incentives. Learning from Local Success Stories in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank Group. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/c4104302-bb43-5629-bc4c-2fa49fefe94e>
- Brunette, T., Crouch, L., Cumiskey, C., Dick, AW., Henny, C., Jordan, R., Merseth, K., Nabacwa, R., Pressley, J., & Weatherholt, T. (2017). *International Development Working Paper. Repetition of primary 1 and pre-primary education in Uganda*. Retrieved October 28, 2022, from <https://files-eric-ed-gov.proxy-ub.rug.nl/fulltext/ED582363.pdf>
- Carroll, S., Grenon, M., Nistor, A., James, V., McGuinness, S., Ben Shitrit Haimi, L., Cahill, G., Caner, F., Curtin, S., Dean, K., Fleming, J.V., Garcia Cabellos, G. M., Garcia Terceño, E. M., Germaine, K., Gilleran Stephens, C., Hayes, M., Hihi, M. M., Kirmaci, H., Mangina, E., Moline, F. M. M., Moujdi-Menaue, F., O'Grady, A., Pastor Pina, F., Peleg, R., Prior, S., Santos Antunes, I. M & Siotou, E. (2019). The sustainability of STEM Education Projects. *Scientix*, 1 - 18. Retrieved on 8 May, 2023, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340051610_The_sustainability_of_STEM_Education_Projects
- Chandy, L., & Kharas, H. (2011). Why can't we all just get along? the practical limits to international development cooperation. *Journal of International Development*, 23(5), 739–751. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1797>
- Dornan, M. (2017). How new is the ‘new’ conditionality? Recipient perspectives on aid, country ownership and policy reform. *Development Policy Review*, 35, 46–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12245>.
- Ferrero, G. & Zepeda, C. (2019). Planning and Managing for Human Development: What Contribution Can the Capability Approach Make? In: D. A. Clark, M. Biggeri & A. A. Frediani (Eds.), *The Capability Approach, Empowerment and Participation* (pp. 311-338). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-35230-9_12
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>

- Goodman, R. M. & Steckler, A. (1989). A model for the institutionalization of health promotion programs. *Family and Community Health, 11(4)*, 63-78. Retrieved on May 13, 2023, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44952972>
- Harnois, Y. G. & Gagnon, S. (2022). Fighting corruption in international development: a grounded theory of managing projects within a complex socio-cultural context. *Journal of Advances in Management Research, 19(5)*, 677-712. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JAMR-06-2021-0195>
- Harper-Shipman, T. D. (2020). *Rethinking ownership of development in Africa*. Routledge Focus. Retrieved on May 13, 2023, from <https://books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=fjKoDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd>
- Harvey, G. & Hurworth, R. (2006). Exploring program sustainability: Identifying factors in two educational initiatives in Victoria. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia, 6(1)*, 2-56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035719X0600600106>
- Hashimoto, K., Pillay, H. & Hudson, P. (2010). An evaluation framework for sustaining the impact of educational development. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 36*, 101-110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2010.12.002>
- Hasselskog, M. (2020). What happens to local participation when national ownership gets stronger? Initiating an exploration in Rwanda and Cambodia. *Development Policy Review, 38*, 91-111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12488>
- Hasselskog, M. (2022). What happened to the focus on the aid relationship in the ownership discussion? *World Development, 155*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105896>
- Higgs, P. (2012). African philosophy and the Decolonisation of Education in Africa: Some critical reflections. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 44*, 37-55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2011.00794.x>
- Kabay, S. (2021). *Access, Quality, and the Global Learning Crisis: Insights from Ugandan Primary Education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192896865.001.0001>

- Mansuri, G. & Rao, V. (2013). *Localizing development does participation work?* World Bank. Retrieved April 5, 2023 from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rug/detail.action?docID=1076074>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Sage Publications Inc. Retrieved April 19, 2023, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320353627>
- Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rug/reader.action?docID=2089475>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis. A methods sourcebook*. Sage Publications. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://books.google.nl/books?id=3CNrUbTu6CsC&printsec=frontcover&hl=nl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Ministry of Education and Sports (2022, November 8). Pre-primary and Primary. Retrieved on November 10, 2022, from <https://www.education.go.ug/pre-primary-primary/>
- Nakajima, N., Hasan, A., Jung, H., Kinnell, A., Maika, A. & Pradhan, M. (2021). Built to last: sustainability of early childhood education services in rural indonesia. *Journal of Development Studies*, 57(10), 1593–1612. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1873283>
- Nakasongola District Local Government (2020). *Republic of Uganda. Nakasongola District local government. statistical abstract 2019/2020*. Retrieved on June 26, 2023, from <http://www.nakasongola.go.ug/publications/nakasongola-district-statistical-abstract-201920>
- OECD (2009). *Aid Effectiveness. A Progress Report on Implementing the Paris Declaration*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264050877-en>
- OECD (2011). *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/54de7baa-en>
- OECD/UNDP (2019). *Making Development Co-operation More Effective. 2019 Progress Report*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/26f2638f-en>

- Ogunjimi, L. O., Ajibola, C. A. & Akah, L. U. (2009). Sustenance of education sector reforms in Nigeria through adequate participation by all stakeholders. *International NGO Journal*, 4(4), 104-108. <https://doi.org/10.5897/INGOJ.9000134>
- Olmos-Vega, F. M., Stalmeijer, R. E., Varpio, L. & Kahlke, R. (2022). A practical guide to reflexivity in qualitative research: AMEE GUIDE No. 149. *Medical teacher*, 45(3), 241-251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>
- Schreier, M. A. (2005). Is Sustainability Possible? A Review and Commentary on Empirical Studies of Program Sustainability. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26(3), 297-434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005278752>
- Sekiwu, D., Ssempala, F., & Frances, N. (2020). Investigating the Relationship between School Attendance and Academic Performance in Universal Primary Education: The case of Uganda. *African Educational Research Journal*, 8(2), 152–160. <https://doi.org/10.30918/AERJ.82.20.017>
- Shediac-Rizkallah, M. C.. & Bone, L. R. (1998). Planning for the sustainability of community-based health programs: conceptual frameworks and future directions for research, practice and policy. *Health Education Research*, 13(1), 87-108. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/13.1.87>
- The UNESCO Courier (1970). *The Pearson Report: a new strategy for global development*. Retrieved on May 13, 2023, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000056743>
- UNESCO (2015). *Education for all 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. Retrieved on October 31, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232565/PDF/232565eng.pdf.multi>
- UNFPA Uganda (n.d.). *Uganda. Data overview*. United Nations Population Fund. Retrieved on May 20, 2023, from <https://www.unfpa.org/data/UG>
- UNICEF (2022, June). *Education overview*. UNICEF Data. Retrieved on November 7, 2022 from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/overview/>
- United Nations (n.d. a). *Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Retrieved on March 31, 2023 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

- United Nations (n.d. b). *The Sustainable Development Agenda*. Retrieved on May 8, 2023, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>
- United Nations (2022a). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*. Retrieved on March 31, 2023 from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/>
- United Nations (2022b). *The Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart 2022*. Retrieved on March 31, 2023 from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/>
- Uwezo (2019). *Are our Children Learning? Uwezo Uganda Eighth Learning Assessment Report. Twaweza East Africa*. Retrieved on October 28, 2022, from <https://twaweza.org/uwezo-uganda-2019-are-our-children-learning/>
- Wiley, D. (2007). *On the Sustainability of Open Educational Resource Initiatives in Higher Education*. OECD. Retrieved on May 5, 2023, from <https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/38645447.pdf>
- Winters, M. S. (2014). Targeting, Accountability and Capture in Development Projects. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58, 393–404. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12075>
- Yoshida, K. & Van der Walt, L. (2018). The policy-implementation-results linkage for education development and aid effectiveness in the *Education 2030* era. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 48(1), 39-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1283583>
- Ziai, H. (2016). *Development Discourse and Global History. From colonialism to the sustainable development goals*. Routledge.



Appendix A. Informed Consent

Dear participant,

Am glad to hear that you are willing to participate in an interview about the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda. This interview will be used in a qualitative explorative multiple case study about factors that promote the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda.

The interview will be recorded for research purposes. The recording will not be shared with others and will be deleted after completion of the research. Results from the interview will be processed anonymously.

After the interview, you can contact me in case you have any doubts, or additions to what you have said during the interview. It is also possible to receive the transcript of the interview afterward.

- I would like to receive and read over the transcript.
- I would like to receive the research report.

You can withdraw from this research at all times. In case you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach out to me via a call or a WhatsApp text on +31631683592 or via email on v.l.harthoorn@student.rug.nl

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,

Vera Linn Harthoorn

Consent form

By signing this form I consent the researcher to:

- conduct the interview
- record the interview
- process the interview data
- store and archive the collected data
- publish the data in the research report anonymously

Place and date:

Signature participant

Appendix B. Interview guide for expert interviews

Introduction

As you are aware I write my master's thesis about the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda. To identify factors that promote and hinder the sustainability of education projects, I conduct an explorative multiple case study. The projects of Child Rights for All in ECCD centers and non-formal schools in Nakasongola as well as education projects of Aid to Improve and Education for Everyone are included. Since you were involved in one or more of these projects, I hope you can tell me about your experiences. The interview will last approximately one hour.

Before we start, I would like to tell you that this interview will be recorded for research purposes. The recording will not be shared with others and will be deleted after completion of the research. Results from the interview will be processed anonymously. Finally, I would like you to know that you can withdraw from this research at all times. If you agree with this, we can start the interview.

Personal information

Can you tell me about your experience in education projects in Uganda?

- > *Which training did you follow?*
- > *How many years of experience do you have?*

Can you tell me about your role in the projects of Child Rights for All?

Starting question

Which factors do you think are crucial in order to achieve project sustainability?

- > *Which factors hinder sustainability?*

-----possible exploratory topics-----

Project design and implementation factors

Can you tell me about the design of the project?

- > *How were project goals, strategies and time frames developed?*
- > *Which stakeholders were involved in the design of the project?*
- > *When it comes to the design phase of the project, what are the differences and similarities between the Child Rights for All project in Nakasongola and the project you're currently working on?*

Can you tell me about the stakeholders that were involved in the implementation of the project?

- > *Which stakeholders were involved in the implementation of the project?*
- > *How did you account for your responsibilities?*
- > *How did you experience the accountability and transparency of other stakeholders?*

The project was carried out according to a timeframe. After the project ended, Child Rights for All left. What do you think about the timeframe of the project?

- > *Was the project carried out as planned?*
- > *Do you feel the remaining stakeholders were capable to continue the project after the external support of Child Rights for All in the project ended? If so, what made them capable? If not, what needed to be done better?*

The project was funded by Child Rights for All. Were there other sources of funding?

- > *Did the project receive national funding/financial support from the government?*
- > *Did the project receive funding from the community?*
- > *Can you tell me more about becoming financially independent from Child Rights for All?*
 - * *Was there gradual financial independence?*

Can you tell me more about the training component of the project?

- > *What kind of training was provided?*
- > *Who did the training focus on?*

The projects of Child Rights for All were carried out in pre-primary education and primary education. The project you're currently working on is carried out in primary education. What differences do you experience in this area?

When it comes to the implementation phase of the project (*cooperation with stakeholders, timeframe, finances, training*), what other differences and similarities between the Child Rights for All project in Nakasongola and the project you are currently working on do you identify?

Can you tell me about the monitoring of the project?

- > *What were the advantages and disadvantages of the way the project was monitored and evaluated?*

Factors within the organizational setting

The projects of Child Rights for All were carried out in non-formal schools. The project you are currently working on is carried out in formal schools. What differences do you experience in this area?

- > *Which project type do you prefer? Why?*
- > *Are there differences regarding institutional strength? If yes, what are these differences?*

Can you tell me about the integration of the project within existing systems, e.g. the district department of education?

- > *Head inspector: Is there a difference between the integration within existing systems of Child Rights for All schools (non-formal schools) and government schools in the district?*
- > *Do you think the project is integrated enough within existing systems? If yes, why?*

If not, what should be done to improve?

> Are there differences regarding integration within existing systems between the Child Rights for All projects and the project you are currently working in?

What can you say about the willingness of different stakeholders to continue the project after Child Rights for All phased out?

> Is there someone who was taking the lead in promoting and sustaining the project?

Factors in the broader community environment

Looking back at the financial aspect of the project, was the plan to become financially independent from Child Rights for All realistic given the socio-economic context of the projects?

Why or why not?

Child Rights for All implemented their project in 24 schools. Was there any difference when it comes to project design, implementation or monitoring between those 24 schools?

> Were there adaptations made during the project that differed from the initial plan?

Do you feel the projects of Child Rights for All were well adapted to the local context and the local needs?

In the project you are currently working on, a lot more schools participate. Is there any difference when it comes to project design, implementation or monitoring between those schools? And between districts?

> Are there adaptations made during the project that differed from the initial plan?

> Do you feel your current project is well adapted to the local context and the local needs?

In what ways did the community participate in the Child Rights for All projects?

> Did the community members have any responsibilities?

> Did the community members gain enough skills to continue the project after phasing out of Child Rights for All? If yes, what skills did they gain? If no, what skills did they lack?

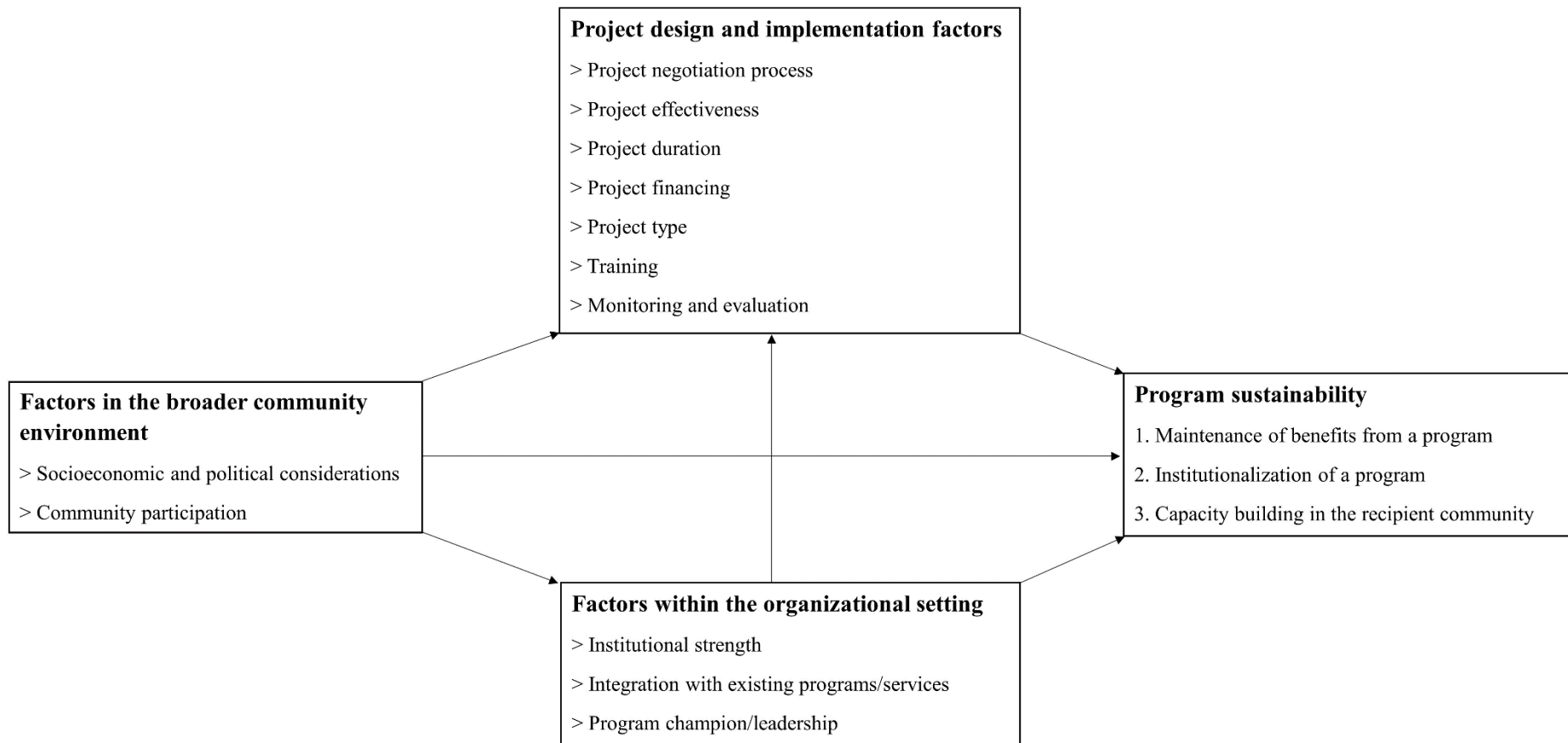
> Is there a difference regarding community participation between the Child Rights for All projects and the project you are currently working on?

> If you had to start a new education project, is there anything you would do differently regarding community participation? If yes, what/why?

If you look at the following framework. Do you think there are factors in this framework that are really important to achieve project sustainability?

> Are there factors that can be left out?

> Would you want to add factors to this framework?



Note: Based on A framework for conceptualizing program sustainability. Taken from Planning for the sustainability of community-based health programs: conceptual frameworks and future directions for research, practice and policy by M. C. Shediac-Rizkallah & L. R. Bone, 1998, *Health Education Research*, 13(1), p. 99, Copyright 1998, Oxford University Press

Exploratory

4.5 years after phasing out of Child Rights for All, some schools are still functioning and others are not. What do you think are the main reasons that some schools proved to be sustainable, while others are not?

Finalization

Is there anything you would like to add to the questions I just asked?

Do the answers you have given represent your vision on the topic of project sustainability?

> *Do you want to rephrase any of your answers?*

Do you have any feedback for me as an interviewer?

Concluding words

Thank you for participating in this interview. I will transcribe the interview and incorporate the information in my research. Do you want to receive the transcription of this interview or the final research report?

Appendix C. Codebook expert interviews

Factors that promote the sustainability of education projects in rural areas in Uganda

Category	Code	Subcode
A long-term vision on project sustainability	> Planning for sustainability from the start of the project	- Reserve sufficient time to do thorough research for the initiation phase of the project
	> Development of sustainability plans	
	> Flexible project duration	- Minimal project duration of 5 years - Total project duration depends on project goals - Total project duration depends on the context
Multi-stakeholder involvement	> Involvement of the (local) government	- Involvement in a needs assessment
	> Involvement of educational stakeholders	- Involvement in the design of the project
	> Involvement of the project beneficiaries	- Involvement in the implementation of the project
	> Involvement of other civil society organizations	- Involvement in monitoring and evaluation
Sensitization on the importance of the education project	> Continuous, as part of the project design	
Adaptation of project goals to local needs		
Limited issuance of money	> Agreement between civil society organizations on the issuance of money	
Focus on results	> Targeting the quality of delivery	
Continuous monitoring and evaluation	> To identify the level of project effectiveness	
	> To identify points of improvement	
	> To identify ways to address points of improvement	
	> To successfully guide the gradual transfer of the project	- At school level - On the community level - On the district level
Transparency	> Sharing project information	- Sharing information about the set-up of the program - Sharing information about project effectiveness
Capacity building	> Building the capacity of project beneficiaries	- Using standardized approaches
	> Building the capacity of education experts	
Accountability	> The (local) government is accountable	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The different departments of the Ministry of Education are accountable > Civil society organizations and NGOs are accountable > Education experts are accountable > Schools are accountable > Teachers are accountable > Community members are accountable > Parents are accountable > Agreement on each stakeholder's responsibilities 	
Institutionalization of the project	> Alignment with the national development plan and government strategies	
	> Integration within the national education system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial support from the national education budget - Education substantive-related support from education departments and education experts
	> Integration within existing programs or services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Parish Development Model (PDM) activities - Activities from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) - Cooperation with educational training centers
	> Complementation of existing programs or services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensify existing programs or services - Connect ECCD projects to basic education schools
Enabling environment	> Integration within community systems	
	> Willingness of the different stakeholders to be supported	
	> Willingness and ability of the different stakeholders to take on responsibilities	
	> Adequate national supportive structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sufficient skilled personnel at the district level - Sufficient skilled personnel at the school level - Enforcement of education laws
	> Stable and sufficient national economic resources for the education department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate and regular salary for teachers - Sufficient budget to execute activities
	> Stable and sufficient local economic resources for the education department	

Appendix D. Interview guide for follow-up interviews

A few weeks ago we had an interview about factors that promote and hinder the sustainability of education projects. After conducting interviews with 5 experts, the interview analyses reveal 12 promoting factors. Today I would like to present these preliminary findings to find out if my interpretation is correct and unbiased or needs adjustments to better capture the promoting factors. Thereafter I would like to discuss how these factors can be translated into feasible advice for small-scale education projects in rural areas in Uganda, like the projects of Stichting Kabira. The interviews will last approximately 30 minutes.

Before we start, I would like to tell you that this interview will be recorded for research purposes. The recording will not be shared with others and will be deleted after completion of the research. Results from the interview will be processed anonymously. Finally, I would like you to know that you can withdraw from this research at all times. If you agree with this, we can start the interview.

Presentation of the preliminary findings

Discussion about the preliminary findings as presented in the codebook in Appendix C.
Presentation of the idea about the design of the diagram.

Personal information

Can you tell me about your experience with small-scale education projects in Uganda?
> *Which advantages and disadvantages of small-scale education projects did you experience compared to large-scale projects?*

Starting question

How can the 12 factors translate into feasible advice for small-scale education projects?
> *Which specific factors are important to consider for small-scale education projects?*
> *Are there factors that can be left out for small-scale education projects?*
> *OR: Will small-scale projects be able to take all factors into account?*

Finalization

Is there anything you would like to add to the questions I just asked?

Concluding words

Thank you for participating in this interview. I will transcribe the interview and incorporate the information in my research.

Appendix E. Codebook follow-up interviews

Outcomes of the follow-up interviews on feasible advice for small-scale education projects in Rural areas in Uganda

Category	Code	Subcode
Promoting factors for small-scale project sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A long-term vision on project sustainability > Multi-stakeholder involvement > Adaptation of project goals to local needs > Capacity building > Accountability > Transparency > Institutionalization of the project > Enabling environment > Limited issuance of money > Focus on results > Continuous monitoring and evaluation > Sensitization on the importance of the education project 	
Advantages of small-scale education projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Projects are intense and impactful > Projects focus on quality instead of quantity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentration on a smaller cover-area - Adaptation of goals and project programs to the specific context - Consolidation of the program - Direct impact on the project beneficiaries
Disadvantages of small-scale education projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Limited funding > Hindered institutionalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited time - Limited capacity -> limited deployment of experts -> Limited resources