IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF DONOR-FUNDED PROJECTS ON LIVELIHOODS, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN KOGI STATE

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Abstract
This study examined the impact and sustainability of donor-funded interventions on poverty reduction, healthcare delivery, and socio-economic development in Kogi State, Nigeria, between 2014 and 2024. Using a mixed-method approach, primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 372 respondents, while secondary data were sourced from project reports and government publications. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests to determine the significance of relationships between donor interventions and key development outcomes. The results revealed that donor-funded projects have made a statistically significant contribution to poverty reduction ($\chi^2 = 124.586$, $p = 0.000$), improved healthcare delivery ($\chi^2 = 35.258$, $p = 0.000$), and demonstrated a degree of sustainability even after donor withdrawal ($\chi^2 = 46.898$, $p = 0.000$). Respondents largely agreed that donor interventions enhanced income generation, job creation, and access to essential services, particularly benefiting vulnerable groups such as women and youth. However, sustainability challenges were identified, including inadequate local funding, weak maintenance culture, and limited post-project monitoring, which threaten long-term project continuity. The study concludes that donor interventions remain a key driver of socio-economic transformation in Kogi State, complementing government efforts to achieve poverty reduction and improved human development outcomes. It recommends strengthening local ownership, integrating donor projects into state budgetary systems, and developing robust post-donor financing and monitoring frameworks to safeguard gains. This research contributes to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness and sustainability of donor-funded interventions at the sub-national level and offers practical insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and donor agencies seeking to optimize development assistance for lasting impact.

Keywords: Donor funding, poverty reduction, governance, sustainability, Kogi State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Donor-funded interventions have become a central strategy in Nigeria's development planning, particularly in rural and under-served states, to catalyse income generation, improve social services, and reduce poverty. Initiatives such as the "Feed the Future Nigeria Livelihoods Project" have demonstrated that agricultural-led growth, combined with nutrition-sensitive interventions and institutional capacity building, can yield positive gains for vulnerable households in states including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and neighbouring regions. These types of programmes often aim to improve agricultural practices, promote market access, and diversify income sources for smallholder farmers (Diamond Development Initiatives, 2024). Nonetheless, evidence from across Nigeria suggests varying degrees of impact, especially in terms of whether improvements in income, health, education and employment are sustained beyond the lifespan of project funding.

Kogi State, with its largely agrarian economy and spatial disparities in access to healthcare, education, and public infrastructure, represents a critical setting in which to examine both the immediate and long-term effects of donor engagement. While many donor-supported projects have operated in Kogi and similarly positioned states—providing inputs, training, and infrastructure—the literature and field reports indicate gaps in maintenance, institutional absorption of programs, and continuity of services after donor exit (see for example NDDC/LIFE-ND in the Niger Delta which, though in a different region, illuminates these sustainability challenges) (NDDC/LIFE-ND, 2024). The risk is that beneficiaries may enjoy short-term relief but lapse back into prior conditions once external support diminishes, particularly in contexts where local governments have limited capacity or financial resources to take over programme obligations.

This study therefore seeks to address two interlinked issues in Kogi State: first, to assess the extent to which donor-funded projects have made measurable and lasting improvements in livelihoods (for example, income levels and employment), and in social services such as health and education; and second, to examine the sustainability of these interventions, both in institutional and beneficiary terms. Understanding how donor projects perform in the specific socio-economic, political, and infrastructural environment of Kogi will help fill a gap in empirical knowledge, and will inform policy makers, development agencies, and community stakeholders about what works, under what conditions, and how to design more sustainable interventions in comparable settings.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the proliferation of donor-funded projects in Kogi State over the past decade, evidence suggests that many interventions generate only transient benefits, with improvements in livelihoods, education, health, and employment often failing to endure beyond the funding period. A recent survey of donor-funded projects in Kogi State (2014-2024) found that while many programmes successfully delivered infrastructure and service improvements, sustainability challenges such as weak maintenance systems, limited community engagement, and dependency on external funds undermine their lasting impact (Onuche & Sumaila, 2025). Without mechanisms for institutional ownership or local financing, gains risk erosion when donor support ends.

Furthermore, there appears to be significant variation in how donor interventions affect different segments of the population. Rural communities and poorer households often benefit less from improvements in social services and economic opportunities compared with their urban or better-resourced counterparts. For example, even where education and health facilities have been upgraded, physical access, affordability, and quality of service remain problematic in many local government areas. These inequalities raise questions about whether donor-funded projects are achieving equitable impact, or whether structural factors such as poor governance, infrastructural deficits, and local capacity limit the reach and depth of outcomes.

Kogi State has seen numerous high-profile development projects—such as climate resilience and rural roads programmes—that receive substantial donor support (e.g. the ACReSAL and RAAMP initiatives) (Kogi State Government, 2025). Yet local stakeholders frequently report issues around programme continuity, ownership, and accountability. For instance, rural access roads once built may deteriorate without local budget allocation for maintenance; similarly, health or education facilities may operate below capacity due to shortages of personnel or supplies once the donor contracts or grants lapse. There is therefore a critical gap in understanding not only whether donor-funded interventions achieve their immediate objectives, but also how sustainable they are, and what institutional, community or policy conditions support enduring benefits for income, social services, and empowerment in Kogi State.

Research Question

- To what extent have donor-funded projects contributed to income generation and employment opportunities in Kogi State?
- How have donor-funded projects improved access to healthcare and education services for communities in Kogi State?
- What factors influence the sustainability of donor-funded interventions in Kogi State after donor support ends?

Objectives

1. Assess the impact of donor-funded projects on income generation and employment.
2. Evaluate improvements in access to healthcare and education.
3. Examine the sustainability of donor-funded interventions.

Literature Review

Donor-funded interventions have become a central mechanism for poverty reduction and local development in many Nigerian states, with increasing attention on how these projects affect household livelihoods, access to social services, and women's economic empowerment. Recent surveys of donor activity in Kogi State indicate a proliferation of externally financed projects across agriculture, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), erosion control, and livelihood support programs between 2014 and 2024; these reviews emphasize the breadth of donor engagement while noting inconsistent documentation of long-term outcomes. Onuche (2025) provides a recent mapping of donor-funded development projects in Kogi State and highlights the need for systematic evaluation of impacts and sustainability across sectors.

A sizeable body of empirical work links donor-supported agricultural and livelihood programs to short-term income gains and improved production practices, yet these gains frequently attenuate once direct project support ends. Mamman (2024) evaluated the Kogi APPEALS (Agro-Processing, Productivity

Enhancement and Livelihood Improvement Support) intervention and reported measurable improvements in cassava value-chain incomes and food processing capacity among beneficiary farmers during the project period; however, the assessment also documented challenges sustaining market linkages and mechanization after donor withdrawal. Complementary studies on microcredit and rural finance in Nigeria show that access to affordable credit and capacity building can raise household welfare, but that long-term resilience depends on local institutions, continued market access, and beneficiary diversification of income streams (Ilesanmi, Bello, Oladoyin, & Akinbola, 2024). These findings suggest that while donor inputs can catalyze livelihood change, sustainability hinges on local economic integration and follow-on financing.

Donor investments in social services — especially health, education, and WASH — have demonstrable effects on service availability and utilization, yet the literature repeatedly flags governance, maintenance, and recurrent costs as obstacles to sustained benefits. The Lancet Nigeria Commission's analysis of health system financing and service delivery underscores that external financing can expand coverage rapidly but requires parallel investments in domestic financing, workforce, and governance to sustain gains in maternal and child health outcomes (Abubakar, 2022). Sectoral donors and multilateral partners working on WASH and education in Nigeria emphasize that facilities and infrastructure installed through donor projects often fall into disrepair without clear local maintenance plans and budgetary commitments from state and local governments. UNICEF and sector partners continue to stress integrated WASH programming with local capacity building as a route to longer-term service continuity. These insights point to the dual necessity of technical inputs and durable financing/governance arrangements for sustainable social service outcomes.

A recurring theme in the literature is the institutional and political determinants of project sustainability. Comparative studies from the region report that weak local ownership, limited participation of beneficiaries in project design, and misalignment between donor timelines and local budgeting cycles undermine lasting impacts (Nfor, 2019; research on Cameroon contexts). Similarly, analyses of external financing in Nigeria indicate that the macroeconomic environment, state absorptive capacity, and the coordination among donors, state agencies, and local governments shape whether project benefits persist after donor exit (Sule, Onyeje Doki, & Akighir, 2024). Kogi-level project reports and ESMPs (Environmental and Social Management Plans) for World Bank–supported interventions highlight that environmental mitigation and community governance arrangements are necessary but not sufficient — complementary institutional strengthening and local fiscal commitments are needed for sustained outcomes. Together, this literature frames sustainability as a function of both project design and the political-economic context into which projects are embedded.

Gender and empowerment literatures show mixed evidence on whether donor programs translate into durable gains for women's economic status. Where donor projects incorporate explicit gendered targets (training, asset transfers, market access), short-term increases in women's participation and income are frequently recorded; however, persistent structural barriers — such as limited land rights, restricted access to formal credit, and intra-household power dynamics — often limit the depth and durability of empowerment outcomes. Nigeria-focused evaluations call for gender-sensitive monitoring frameworks that measure not only income but also control over resources, decision-making, and time burdens. In

Kogi State program assessments, gender outcomes have been reported unevenly, with some programs achieving measurable female participation while others failed to translate participation into sustained economic independence, indicating a need for targeted, contextually adapted gender strategies.
Despite the expanding literature on donor-funded interventions, important gaps remain that justify the present study. First, much existing documentation is project-centric or short-term; few studies provide longitudinal evidence on whether livelihoods, service quality, and women's empowerment persist beyond two to three years post-intervention. Second, Kogi-specific syntheses are recently emerging but are not yet comprehensive in triangulating household-level outcomes, administrative data on service provision, and fiscal commitments from state actors (Onuche, 2025). Third, cross-sectoral analyses that compare livelihood, social service, and empowerment outcomes within the same programmatic footprint are scarce. Addressing these gaps will require mixed methods, longer time horizons, and attention to governance and financing mechanisms that enable local ownership — precisely the focus of the current study on the impact and sustainability of donor-funded projects in Kogi State.

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to capture multiple perspectives on the effects of donor projects.

Population

The population of this study comprises the entire residents of Kogi State, Nigeria, who have either directly or indirectly benefited from donor-funded projects implemented between 2014 and 2024. Kogi State, located in the North-Central region of Nigeria, is made up of 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and has a population estimated at approximately 6 million people according to the National Population Commission's projection based on the 2006 census and subsequent annual growth rate.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study is 400, gotten from the population of 6, 000, 000 of the population of citizen of Kogi State, using the Taro Yamane Sample determination formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e2)}$$

Where:

- **n** = Sample size
- **N** = Population size
- **e** = Margin of error (expressed as a decimal)

  N=6, 000, 000

  e= 0.05^2

  n = N/ (1+N (e^2))

  n = 6000000/ (1+6000000 (0.05^2))

  n = 6000000/ (1+6000000(0.0025))

  n = 6000000/15000.0025

  n = 399.99

n = 400

Data Collection

Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used for primary data collection, while secondary data were obtained from project reports, government documents, and donor agency publications.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, while regression analysis was used to establish relationships between donor interventions and poverty indicators. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed to capture insights into governance challenges and sustainability concerns.

Results

Research Hypothesis 1: Donor-funded projects have no significant contribution to poverty reduction in Kogi State between 2014 and 2024.

Table 2: Chi-square on the Extent of Contribution of Donor-funded Projects on Poverty Reduction in Kogi State.

Responses Mode	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Df	Sig. level	Chi-square	p-value	Decision
SD	50	74.4					
D	49	74.4	4	0.05	124.586	0.000	Rejected
N	27	74.4					
A	100	74.4					
SA	146	74.4					
Total	372						

The results presented in Table 2 provide statistical evidence to assess the validity of the first research hypothesis, which posits that donor-funded projects have no significant contribution to poverty reduction in Kogi State between 2014 and 2024. The Chi-square value obtained from the test is **124.586** with **4 degrees of freedom (Df = 4)** and a **p-value of 0.000.** Since the p-value is significantly less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is **rejected.** This suggests that the observed distribution of responses is not due to chance, indicating a statistically significant relationship between donor-funded projects and poverty reduction outcomes in the state.

This statistical outcome aligns with the pattern of responses where a greater number of participants selected **"Agree" (A)** and **"Strongly Agree" (SA)** as their responses. These modes of response reflect a general consensus among respondents that donor-funded interventions have made tangible contributions to poverty alleviation. On the contrary, fewer participants selected **"Strongly Disagree" (SD), "Disagree" (D),** or **"Neutral" (N),** indicating that most community members perceive the projects as having a positive effect. The consistency of this trend supports the conclusion that the impact of donor initiatives is both meaningful and widely recognised at the local level.

In practical terms, the rejection of the null hypothesis implies that **donor-funded projects have positively influenced key poverty-related indicators** in Kogi State, including improved income levels, better access to healthcare and education, and increased employment opportunities—especially for vulnerable groups such as youth and women. These findings not only validate the effectiveness of external development assistance in the region but also underscore the need for continued and expanded donor engagement in local poverty reduction efforts. Overall, the statistical evidence reinforces the view that donor interventions between 2014 and 2024 have played a critical role in enhancing the socio-economic well-being of the people of Kogi State.

Research Hypothesis 2: Donor-funded projects have not significantly improved access to healthcare services in the study area.

Table 4: Chi-square on the Evaluate improvements in access to healthcare and education.

Responses Mode	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Df	Sig. level	Chi-square	p-value	Decision
SD	73	74.4					
D	67	74.4	4	0.05	35.258	0.000	Rejected
N	40	74.4					
A	111	74.4					
SA	81	74.4					
Total	372						

The result of the Chi-square test presented in Table 4 shows a Chi-square value of 35.258 with a significance level (p-value) of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies across respondents' views on improvements in access to healthcare services. The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that donor-funded projects have indeed contributed to improving access to healthcare services in the study area. The distribution of responses shows a greater concentration of respondents agreeing (A = 111) and strongly agreeing (SA = 81), which further reinforces the conclusion that a majority perceive a positive impact.

These findings imply that donor-funded interventions in the area have been effective in expanding healthcare access, either through the construction or renovation of facilities, provision of medical supplies, recruitment of healthcare workers, or health education campaigns. The significant Chi-square result demonstrates that respondents' experiences and perceptions are not random but reflect meaningful improvements attributable to donor efforts. This outcome highlights the importance of sustained donor engagement and suggests that such initiatives are likely contributing to better health outcomes in the community.

Research Hypothesis 3: Donor-funded interventions are not sustainable in the study area after donor withdrawal.

Table 6: Chi-square on the Examine the sustainability of donor-funded interventions.

Responses Mode	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Df	Sig. level	Chi-square	p-value	Decision
SD	83	74.4					
D	80	74.4	4	0.05	46.898	0.000	Rejected
N	23	74.4					
A	98	74.4					
SA	88	74.4					
Total	372						

The Chi-square test results in Table 6 reveal a Chi-square value of 46.898 with a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance level. This finding leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis that donor-funded interventions are not sustainable in the study area. The statistical evidence indicates a significant association between respondents' perceptions and the sustainability of donor-funded projects. The observed frequencies show that a large proportion of respondents agree (A = 98) and strongly agree (SA = 88) that donor-funded interventions have continued to deliver benefits even after donor withdrawal, suggesting a positive perception of sustainability in the study area.

The response pattern further highlights that while some respondents disagreed (D = 80, SD = 83), the combined agreement levels outweigh the disagreement, pointing to a general consensus that donor interventions have been relatively well institutionalized. This could be attributed to factors such as community ownership, local capacity building, government support, and effective project management structures that ensure continuity beyond the funding phase. The low number of respondents who remained neutral (N = 23) indicates that most participants had a clear opinion on the subject, strengthening the validity of the findings.

These results have important implications for development planning and policy. The perceived sustainability of donor-funded interventions suggests that such projects have created lasting value, potentially through infrastructure development, strengthened local institutions, and skills transfer to beneficiaries. However, the relatively high number of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed shows there may still be gaps in full sustainability, such as insufficient local funding, maintenance challenges, or inadequate follow-up support. This calls for policymakers and development partners to prioritize long-term planning, capacity enhancement, and community involvement to ensure that project benefits continue to accrue well beyond the donor funding cycle.

Discussion and findings

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that donor-funded projects have made a significant and positive contribution to poverty reduction in Kogi State between 2014 and 2024. The Chi-square value of 124.586 with a p-value of 0.000 strongly supports the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that donor interventions have not only targeted but effectively addressed the underlying drivers of

poverty. This aligns with the descriptive analysis, which revealed that most respondents selected "Agree" and "Strongly Agree," demonstrating widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of donor efforts. These findings corroborate recent literature highlighting the role of externally financed interventions in boosting local incomes, creating jobs, and enhancing economic resilience, especially for vulnerable groups such as youth and women (Onuche, 2025; Sule, Onyeje Doki, & Akighir, 2024). This study thus affirms that donor participation remains a key driver of socio-economic transformation within the state.
Access to healthcare services emerged as another area where donor-funded projects have had a statistically significant impact. The Chi-square value of 35.258 ($p = 0.000$) confirms that respondents' views were not random, and the majority agreed that donor efforts have led to tangible improvements in healthcare delivery. This can be linked to specific interventions such as the construction or rehabilitation of health facilities, the distribution of essential medicines, the deployment of trained health personnel, and community sensitization campaigns on disease prevention (Abubakar, 2022; UNICEF, n.d.). These improvements are crucial for reducing preventable diseases and mortality rates, which are critical indicators of human development. The findings imply that donor support has filled important gaps left by government health spending, suggesting that continued collaboration between donors and public health agencies could further consolidate these gains (World Bank, n.d.).

Equally significant is the finding that donor-funded interventions are perceived as relatively sustainable, even after donor withdrawal. With a Chi-square value of 46.898 and a p-value of 0.000, the study rejects the null hypothesis and concludes that a majority of respondents believe that donor projects continue to deliver benefits over time. This perception of sustainability may be attributed to strong community participation, capacity building, and institutional arrangements that were embedded within the projects (Mamman, 2024). However, the proportion of respondents who disagreed highlights that sustainability is not absolute; challenges such as inadequate local funding, weak maintenance culture, and limited post-project monitoring still pose threats to continuity (Sule, Onyeje Doki, & Akighir, 2024). This underscores the need for donors, local governments, and beneficiary communities to jointly develop long-term financing and governance frameworks to safeguard these achievements and ensure that development gains are not reversed.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that donor-funded projects have significantly contributed to poverty reduction, improved healthcare access, and achieved a degree of sustainability in Kogi State. These results reinforce the importance of external development assistance as a complement to state-led development efforts (Onuche, 2025). Nevertheless, they also call for deeper emphasis on sustainability planning, including local ownership, budgetary integration, and follow-up support, to ensure that donor contributions translate into enduring socio-economic transformation.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact and sustainability of donor-funded projects on poverty reduction, access to healthcare, and long-term development outcomes in Kogi State between 2014 and 2024. The results from the Chi-square analyses provide strong statistical evidence that donor interventions have significantly contributed to socio-economic transformation in the state. The rejection of the null hypothesis across all three research hypotheses confirms that these interventions have meaningfully reduced poverty, enhanced access to essential health services, and achieved a degree of sustainability beyond the funding cycle.

The findings reveal that donor projects have not only targeted immediate welfare needs but also strengthened local capacities through the provision of infrastructure, skill development, and institutional support. These outcomes have translated into improved income levels, better health outcomes, and increased opportunities for vulnerable populations such as women and youth. Moreover, the perception of sustainability expressed by a majority of respondents underscores that many of these benefits have been institutionalized at the community level, although gaps still exist in terms of funding continuity and maintenance culture.

Donor-funded projects remain a vital complement to state-led development initiatives in Kogi State. However, for their impact to endure and expand, greater emphasis must be placed on sustainability planning, including local ownership, government co-financing, capacity building, and robust post-project monitoring frameworks. Strengthening these dimensions will ensure that donor interventions continue to deliver inclusive and lasting benefits, thereby contributing to the overall goal of poverty eradication and improved quality of life for the people of Kogi State.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Local Ownership and Capacity Building:** Donor-funded projects should incorporate comprehensive capacity-building programs for local stakeholders, including government agencies, community leaders, and beneficiaries. Training in project management, financial planning, and maintenance will empower local actors to sustain project outcomes beyond donor withdrawal.
2. **Integrate Co-Financing and Budgetary Support:** The state government should adopt co-financing mechanisms and allocate dedicated budget lines to maintain and scale up donor-supported interventions. This will ensure continuity of services such as healthcare provision and community infrastructure maintenance, reducing over-reliance on external funding.
3. **Establish Post-Project Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks:** A robust monitoring and evaluation system should be developed to track the long-term impact of donor interventions. This system should involve community participation, periodic assessments, and transparent reporting to identify gaps, inform policy decisions, and guide future donor engagement strategies.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes significantly to the existing literature on the impact and sustainability of donor-funded projects, particularly in sub-national contexts such as Kogi State. First, the research provides empirical evidence that donor-funded interventions have had a statistically significant effect on improving access to healthcare and education in the study area. This finding expands the discourse on the effectiveness of external funding in strengthening social services and aligns with global development goals aimed at reducing inequalities in access to essential services.

Second, the study adds to the body of knowledge by highlighting the challenge of sustainability after donor withdrawal. The results demonstrate that while donor-funded interventions are impactful during the funding period, there is a risk of decline in outcomes once external support ends. This insight underscores the importance of designing projects with strong exit strategies, community participation, and government co-financing to ensure long-term benefits.

This study bridges a gap in localized research by providing context-specific data on the performance of donor interventions in Kogi State. It offers a framework for policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers to understand the interplay between donor support, local capacity, and project continuity. The evidence generated here can guide future donor programming and state-level planning to enhance sustainability, inclusiveness, and resilience of development projects.

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