



# The Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organizations in Economic Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups in Juba, South Sudan: A Case of World Vision

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**Abstract:** South Sudan's long civil war and strife has exposed vulnerable groups to socioeconomic challenges that endanger their survival. As a result, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been pushed to align their services toward sustainable activities to promote long-term well-being and resilience of the impacted groups. This study sought to examine the effectiveness of NGOs in promoting economic empowerment of vulnerable groups using the case of World Vision in Juba, South Sudan. More specifically, this study aimed to assess the impact of microcredit, training, self-help groups, and cash transfers on economic empowerment of vulnerable groups. This study was anchored on Human Capital Theory, Empowerment Theory and Capabilities Based Approach. Case study design was adopted and sample of 50 beneficiaries drawn from World Vision's economic empowerment program in Juba, South Sudan was used. Data was collected through interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. The study found that microcredit services helped vulnerable groups to start income generating activities, training helped vulnerable groups to acquire knowledge and skills and sustain income generating activities, self-help groups supported vulnerable groups in terms of savings and group investments while cash transfer helped vulnerable groups to access basic needs such as food, shelter, education and medical expenses. The study concluded that World Vision-supported economic empowerment interventions were effective in promoting economic wellbeing of vulnerable groups. The researcher proposed that there is urgent need for economic empowerment interventions by the South Sudanese government, NGOs, CBOs, private sectors, and religious institutions to promote resilience of vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled.

**Keywords:** Effectiveness, Non-governmental Organizations, Economic Empowerment, Interventions, Vulnerable Groups

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## 1. Introduction

Vulnerable groups around the world continue to face economic issues that threaten their well-being. Individuals who are in danger or inclined to external difficulties which jeopardize their general well-being and consequently require care and protection are referred to as "vulnerable groups" (Bule & Eckstein,

2019). Orphans, the elderly, people with disabilities, widows and widowers, ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum seekers, and prisoners, as well as the homeless and people living with chronic illnesses like cancer or HIV, are examples of vulnerable populations (Bule & Eckstein, 2019).

Non-Governmental Organizations play a significant role in promoting economic empowerment of

vulnerable groups. A study by Morais and Ahmad (2011) found that NGO-led microcredit interventions were effective in promoting business start-ups and capacity development of beneficiaries in Sri Lanka. Hossain and All-Mijan (2018) in his study in Bangladesh found that microcredit support increased women's self-employment, access to education, health, nutrition, access to water and sanitation. In Pakistan a study by Ali et al.,(2010) found microcredit services were critical in reducing poverty among various groups of disadvantaged people and thereby increasing living standards. The study also discovered that micro loans had high interest rate due to administrative costs.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, NGO-led economic interventions play an important role in promoting economic wellbeing of vulnerable groups. In Ghana, Addo (2017) discovered NGO trainings played a critical role in improving economic wellbeing of vulnerable groups through regular training, advocating for the needs and interests of the poor. On the other hand, Nwankwo and Abah (2013) found that microcredit services in form of small loans to expand agriculture, create enterprises, and promote economic empowerment programs in Nigeria. Besides, Jivani (2010) found that groups who received micro-credit loans in Tanzania used the funds to expand their enterprises, to meet fundamental needs like education, health, and shelter, as well as increase farming. In Rwanda, a study by Data and Borko (2014) revealed that Self-Help Groups were vital in promoting the economic wellbeing of members through savings and small start-ups while in Zimbabwe a study by Bhalla, et al., (2016) demonstrated that cash transfer helped vulnerable groups to access food and nutrition as well as other basic needs.

In South Sudan, there are a number of organizations, which are implementing programs aimed at socio-economic transformation of vulnerable groups (Kumalo, 2019). World Vision in South Sudan supports approximately 1.5 million people with access to critical services (food and cash) and development skills thereby promoting economic strengthening of livelihoods of about 258,406 food insecure household's and vulnerable groups in South Sudan (World Vision, 2017). Human vulnerability is also addressed by non-governmental organizations. Cash transfer initiatives, food distribution, feeding malnourished children, training in entrepreneurial skills and offering microcredit services are all used by NGOs in South Sudan to address empowerment and vulnerability (World Vision, 2018). Thus, it was important for this study to examine the effectiveness of NGO-supported economic empowerment interventions using the case of World Vision in Juba, South Sudan.

## 2. Literature Review

NGOs are goal-oriented entities that bring together institutions or groups which aim to address a particular humanitarian problem in areas such as health, education or humanitarian functions. NGOs work with

governments to raise public issues, monitor policy, program implementation, and foster effective civil society participation at all stages of development (UNDP, 2009). NGOs use professionals and experts to mitigate human suffering and to promote development of poor countries. Similarly, NGO's play a significant role in supporting vulnerable groups with services aimed at making them resilient and self-dependent (Jolly, 1999).

In South Sudan, NGO continues to play a significant role in promoting the economic wellbeing of vulnerable groups. Gale (2011) studied the role of NGOs in improving livelihoods of disadvantaged groups in South Sudan. It found that economic empowerment programs such as BRAC played a pivotal role in addressing salient needs of disadvantaged groups.

Ginsburg (2017) undertook a study to evaluate the role of community engagement in promoting education in South Sudan. The research focused on the Room to Learn initiative funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). According to the findings, the Room to Learn project which was financed by USAID provided in-kind grants such as books and other academic resources, capacity building workshops for PTA members and teachers. Simultaneously, the initiative offered cash for infrastructure construction and ongoing technical assistance.

A study by Bakworo (2013) examined the contribution of young Christian women association in poverty reduction in Yambio County South Sudan. It revealed that young Christian women association business contributed to increased income of the members, improved unity among women, and development of local oil and soap produce.

Enfield (2018) used a qualitative method in his assessment of cash-based programming and found that cash transfers help satisfy humanitarian needs while also improving local economies, lowering logistical costs, and increasing ownership, dignity, and resilience in impoverished areas in South Sudan. Furthermore, according to Enfield (2018), cash transfers in South Sudan have aided disadvantaged households in meeting basic necessities including food and nutrition.

## 3. Methodology

This study used case study design. This design was appropriate because it answers the question of why beneficiaries of economic empowerment programs in World Vision Program are still in desperate need of basic necessities despite the training and kits provided to them to start businesses to improve their lives.

This study used purposive sampling technique to select 50 beneficiaries of World Vision Program in Juba South Sudan who participated in the study.

Beneficiaries were chosen using a targeted sample strategy based on their reputation, leadership position, social metric trends, and decision-making impact in the community. This implies that the beneficiaries who were targeted are those who influence opinions in the community. They were presumed to have rich information concerning the effectiveness of non-governmental organization in economic empowerment of vulnerable groups in Juba, South Sudan.

The interview guide was used to collect qualitative data and covered the themes identified in the study objectives and literature. Questions about the respondents' demographic information, on how microcredit support, training, self-help groups and cash

transfer influenced economic empowerment of vulnerable groups in Juba city, the impact of trainings on economic empowerment of vulnerable groups in Juba city.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The response of the study was positive as the researcher managed to reach all the 50 beneficiaries targeted for interviews. The 100.0% response rate was attributed to collaboration with World Vision workers, and the cooperation of beneficiaries who volunteered to participate in the study.

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristic of Beneficiaries**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	17	34.0%
Female	33	66.0%
Total	50	100.0%
Age of Beneficiaries	Frequency	Percentage
18-24 years	3	6.0%
25-34 years	4	8.0%
35-64 years	23	46.0%
>65 years	20	40.0%
Total	50	100.0%
Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Informal	20	40.0%
Primary	21	42.0%
Secondary	3	6.0%
College	5	10.0%
University	1	2.0%
Total	50	100.0%
Nature of Vulnerability	Frequency	Percentage
Disabled	13	26.0%
Old Age	11	22.0%
Chronic Disease	17	34.0%
Malnutrition	3	6.0%
Blind	6	12.0%
Total	50	100.0

**Source: Field data, 2021**

**Gender:** Table 1 shows that (66.0%) of the beneficiaries were female while (34.0%) of the beneficiaries were male.

**Age:** Table 1 shows that, majority (46.0%) of beneficiaries were aged between 35-64 years followed by (40.0%) of the beneficiaries who were aged above 65 years and (8.0%) who were aged between 25-34 years while (6.0%) of the respondents were aged between 18-24 years.

**Education Level:** Table 1 shows that majority (42.0%) of the beneficiaries had primary education followed by (40.0%) of the beneficiaries who had informal education, (10.0%) had college education while (6.0%) had secondary and (2.0%) had university education.

This finding implies that education attainment among the beneficiaries was low. A report by USAID (2011) revealed that (8.0%) of women in South Sudan are illiterate and there is an acute shortage of trained teachers and the student-teacher ratio is 100:1.

**Nature of Vulnerability:** The results shown on Table 1 indicates that majority (34.0%) of the beneficiaries who participated in the study had chronic disease followed by (26.0%) of the beneficiaries who were disabled and (22.0%) of the beneficiaries were vulnerable because of old age while (12.0%) of the beneficiaries were vulnerable because of malnutrition.

## Microcredit Support and Economic Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups

Data gathered through interviews with beneficiaries revealed that microcredit support in form of money, sorghum, oil or seeds enabled vulnerable groups to start businesses as well as acquire business tools and equipment. One of the participants said,

*“I received money, sorghum and oil four times.... I used the money to start a business and buy charcoal and food stuff.... however, the money is not enough...”*

Participant VG10 (Personal Communication, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another respondent stated,

*“I used the money for starting a business and feeding.... the money was not enough to meet basic and emergency needs such as food, shelter, clothing, medical and education... I recommend that World Vision should increase the amount of money provided...”*

Participant VG15 (Personal Communication, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Microcredit support plays an important role in promoting economic wellbeing of vulnerable groups. As it can be seen from the findings, microcredit services assisted vulnerable groups to start income-generating activities such as small businesses, farming, and livestock keeping, as well as gaining access to food and nutrition. Microcredit support was important in helping vulnerable groups to meet basic and business start-up kits and equipment and improved personal income, creating jobs and improving decision making and resilience of vulnerable groups. The findings are in line with a study by Jivani (2010) that examined the impact of non-governmental organizations on wellbeing of vulnerable groups in Tanzania and discovered that more than 81 percent of those who received micro-credit loans used the money to expand and move their businesses, as well as meet basic needs like education, health, and shelter, as well as boost farming.

## Trainings and Economic Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups

The beneficiaries revealed that World Vision provided trainings on a regular basis on areas such as business, agriculture, family management and hygiene and sanitation. These trainings were important in equipping beneficiaries with knowledge and skills necessary for them to be self-reliant. One of the participants said,

*“I was taught about building under World Vision... I am now a builder. I build houses and if there is no building, I work at the street cracking stones and selling them for building...and I recommend that World Vision*

*should support us builders by recommending us to work in or out of the program”*

Participant VG 34 (Personal Communication, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant stated,

*“I have participated in at least five trainings in the last six months...the trainings focused on agriculture, business, nutrition and sanitation...the trainings helped me to cultivate vegetables which I used to buy. I am now boiling water for drinking and cooking different types of food.”*

Participant VG 14 (Personal Communication, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant added,

*“I have participated in five-day training for six months and it focused on nutrition, business, sanitation and agriculture...the training helped me to start a business of peanut butter and charcoal and I have benefited by making profit...”*

Participant VG 3 (Personal Communication, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2021).

Training involves providing information, educating and sensitizing the vulnerable groups on various ways to improve their economic status. The study revealed that trainings focused on process of starting and sustaining a business and this was important in creating ownership and harnessing opportunities around vulnerable groups for financial independence. Trainings also facilitated vulnerable groups to discover new business ideas, make informed economic decisions and understand where to access critical financial services in the community. Further, trainings promoted adoption of modern innovation as well as forging business partnerships and collaboration which created value addition, promoted asset growth, created jobs and strengthened resilience and sustainability of business start-ups among vulnerable groups. The findings are in line with those of Vinaygathasan and Pallegedara (2014), who discovered that NGO-led programs enhanced the population's standard of living by increasing household income, education, and access to basic health care services in Sri Lanka.

## Self-Help Groups and Economic Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups

Finding from beneficiaries revealed that self-help groups helped members to improve their income and meet basic needs. Members of self-help groups met on a weekly or monthly basis to discuss and share ideas on how to improve their sources of income. One of the participants said,

*“I have been a member of self-help group since 2016....we meet on a monthly basis...new members join the group when all old members have received their money. Self-*

*help group has helped me to earn income which has helped me to pay school fees for my children and providing food for my family.”*  
Participant VG 23 (Personal Communication, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant added,  
*“I have been a member for the last three months....we meet twice a month and self-help group has helped us in getting income and using it to meet family needs.”*  
Participant VG 13 (Personal Communication, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant said,  
*“We meet regularly and new members join after a year....the benefit with self-help groups is that benefit come when we open the box and distribute the money.”*  
Participant VG 36 (Personal Communication, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Self-help groups involve vulnerable members coming together for a common goal. Self-help groups may engage in group economic activities for the purpose of improving member’s income and meeting basic necessities. The study revealed that self-help groups were critical in promoting personal savings, improving income through accrued interest from loans and group investments and helping vulnerable groups to meet daily and emergency needs as well as addressing psychosocial issues affecting vulnerable groups. Through self-help groups, vulnerable groups were able to access critical financial services from institutions such as banks or MFI and invest in group activities thereby improving their decision making, creating jobs and reducing dependency on World Vision services. These findings are consistent with a study by Bakwaro (2013) which found that self-help groups increased income of the members, improved unity among women, and development of local oil and soap produce in South Sudan.

## **Cash Transfers and Economic Empowerment among Vulnerable Groups**

According to the beneficiaries, cash transfer in form of money and food stuffs provided weekly or monthly helped them to access basic needs, treatment and earn profit from investing in business. One of the participants said,

*“I benefited in terms of money and I used the money to repair my motorcycle for my business...I bought plastic sheet to cover my leaking roof...I suggest that World Vision should provide money to those who deserve it and concentrate on building shops for those who have plots.”*  
Participant VG 43 (Personal Communication, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant indicated,  
*“I benefited from money they gave me...I started a business of charcoal, fried groundnuts and sell them to people and the benefit I get from the business help me for my treatment and feeding..I suggest that World Vision should help old age people by providing hand craft work to make their business and benefit from it.....”*  
Participant VG 40 (Personal Communication, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant said,  
*“The money supported my tea business and I also used it for treatment and while the profit from the tea business is what sustain us.. I suggest that World Vision should increase the money because now the money is not helping much due to high prices in the market.”*  
Participant VG 7 (Personal Communication, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2021).

Another participant added,  
*“I used the money for buying a sack of charcoal and put it for sell and the profit is what I used for feeding.”*  
Participant VG 11 (Personal Communication, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).

Cash transfers are payments delivered on a regular basis to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups in society to assist them satisfy basic needs. The study found that cash transfer was important in promoting access to food and nutrition, starting of income generating activities such as businesses and enabling vulnerable groups to access at least two meals a day. Similarly, the findings revealed that cash transfers assisted vulnerable group to meet emergency needs such as medical or house repair, helped vulnerable groups to access equipment or kit for starting a business and enhanced decision making power and choices of vulnerable groups. Cash transfers were also important in enabling vulnerable groups to gain financial independency and create jobs among vulnerable groups. However, the study revealed that cash transfer could also create dependency among vulnerable groups. These findings are in line with those of Migwi (2017), who investigated the role of cash transfer programs in promoting sustainable development goals among Nairobi's urban poor women and discovered that cash transfers increased beneficiaries' participation in income-generating activities, thereby reducing poverty.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study concludes that World Vision-supported interventions (microcredit, training, self-help groups, and cash transfer) are significant role in fostering economic empowerment of vulnerable groups in South Sudan. This study revealed that microcredit support helped vulnerable groups to start income generating

activities thereby become self-reliant. Trainings which focused on sustainable livelihoods helped vulnerable groups with knowledge and skills on how to run their businesses and self-help groups helped vulnerable groups to start joint investments and save while cash transfer in form of stipends helped vulnerable groups to meet basic needs.

## 5.2 Recommendations

From the study, the following recommendations are made in order to bolster the economic empowerment programs among vulnerable groups in South Sudan.

1. The government of South Sudan in collaboration with NGOs, religious institutions and other stakeholders should scale-up identification and enrollment of vulnerable groups in economic empowerment programs. This should be combined with sensitization and awareness creation to inform the beneficiaries about economic empowerment programs and its intended goals and outcomes. This will also form a basis for building and strengthen a good

- relationship with all the players in a bid to enhance a conducive working atmosphere.
2. The government of South Sudan and NGO's should invest in training vulnerable groups on sustainable livelihoods. Trainings should focus on helping vulnerable groups with information on entrepreneurship and how they can tap on their potential by involving in income generating activities. Trained professions should conduct the trainings and through these trainings; the various economic empowerment activities, which the beneficiaries would wish to engage in, will be explored. These trainings are expected to address issues on economic vulnerability of disadvantaged groups.
3. Working with relevant ministries, NGO's should mobilize resources to help in supporting economic empowerment activities of vulnerable groups. This should be done through partnership and writing funding proposals to donors soliciting for funds. Resources acquired should be spent prudently to help vulnerable groups start or grow their business.

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