

# Can Local NGO Strategy Gain Exponentially from an Evaluation Planning? Evidence from Uganda

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**Abstract:-** Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing countries are significantly affected by external donor policies which undermines systematic planning at the expense of localized norms. As the concept of evaluation planning gains prominence among academic community and practitioners, it is subject to various interpretation and misrepresentation. Conversely, in this study evaluation planning was conceptualized as an institutional process that involves establishment of routine mechanism for ascertaining adequate allocation of staffing, budget, and stakeholder engagement actions to ensure evidence is tracked and provided for in strategic decision making. In Uganda just like other developing countries, local NGOs are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate impact and accountability and yet their planning cycles and systems reflects donor driven plans rather than a systematic long strategy continuum. This study sought to examine the relationship between evaluation planning and strategy performance of local NGOs in Uganda. Using a cross sectional design with a quantitative survey methodology, the study drew 349 participants comprising of field workers, mid-level staff and executives from local NGO from all parts of Uganda. The study found that there was a consistent weak positive correlation among the study constructs of fund stability ( $r = .274^{**}$ ), community satisfaction ( $r = .250^{****}$ ) and timelines ( $r = .198^{*}$ ). This study concludes that the correlation is positive but the extent to which it influences strategy performance is weak. The study recommends adequate attention towards the issue of inconsistent application of evaluation planning and strategy approaches. In a coherent way, the National NGO bureau, donor, voluntary associations, and peer networks should continuously ensure long term strategy continuum of local NGOs in all engagement.

**Keywords:-** Evaluation Planning, Strategy Performance, Localization, NGOs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, evaluation planning process among local NGOs in developing countries were heavily influenced by western donor requirements. These neoliberal western paradigms placed more emphasis on market-based techniques and principles at the expense of localized norms and are be blamed by governments for poor development outcomes [1,2,3]

In the past 50 years, the growth of NGOs in the global south has been heavily induced by major donor appetite for performance and this implies an assumed strategy determination by donors. In the donor policy circles there has been an impressive assumption that NGO programming offers better prospect of aid success in development cooperation compared to the government counterparts [4]. The main consistent reason for sustained strategy of any NGO in the global south has been attributed to advantages over government when it comes to cost and fast reach to marginalized communities [5]

The government of Uganda has not had an upfront constructive partnership with NGOs considering the suspicion in the policy cycles that they do not have the country at heart. The government also believe that many local NGOs are too small and strategically inexperienced to handle such a huge magnitude of assistance [1, 6]. Whereas gaps have been identified in local NGO roles, functions, and capacity, a systematic strategic management process that incorporates evaluation planning has become increasingly critical [7].

The government of Uganda has taken significant steps in ensuring that there are legal and policy frameworks and oversights including periodic renewal of license as a means to enforce compliance and commitments to management by objectives. Whereas there has been significant growth in the number of local NGOs in Uganda since 1970s from a handful of NGOs affiliated to the church structures to 14,000 in 2021, more than 60% continues to miss the mandatory strategic requirements expected by authorities [8].

According to Davies [9] no matter the size, each NGO should have a list of objectives and system for evaluation. There has been attempts to create conversion for standards to ensure strategies aligns to different stakeholders' expectations. According to Ayaa [10], if an in Uganda NGO fails to show sufficient evidence of performance, their permit renewal is not usually granted and hence closed. It is upon this background that this research believe that a stronger evaluation planning should be a precursor for performance, a basis upon which a local NGO can be sustained in Uganda.

As evaluation planning as concept is bound to be subject to multiple interpretation and in this study evaluation planning is conceptualized as an institutional process that involves establishment of routine mechanism for ascertaining adequate allocation of staffing, budget, and stakeholder engagement actions to ensure evidence is tracked and provided for in strategic decision making.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study recognizes that there is growing pressure on NGOs to develop acceptable performance standards for their strategy progress tracking. Both Scriven [11] and Stufflebeam [12] alluded that the concept of evaluation is universal by defining it a systematic determination of a subject's merit, worth and significance, using criteria governed by a set of standards. Conversely the independent variable of evaluation practices could be literally defined as a systematic assessment of the work performed by a particular individual or group in the fields of social services to ascertain the merits, worth and significance using a set tool and process.

Both recent and past assessment on the critical importance of planning and performance of a strategy have often pointed that it has a positive significance. In research conducted at a macro level on the relationship between of evaluation planning and performance of Africa Virtual University of Kenya, a positive significant correlation was deduced[13]. In the afore mentioned results, the scholar noted that all the 15 institutions targeted took evaluation planning as a critical stage for ensuring all measures were in place for the success of the strategy.

While the role of evaluation planning has been greatly appreciated among the different actors, Wandwasi [14] identified inefficiencies with some donors in omitting the crucial steps of evaluation planning in their strategies of engagement. The author cited World Bank in the research for failing to undertake formative steps at the evaluation planning. This has resulted to summative evaluation process against the pertinent issues which should have been factored in the evaluation planning process. Although this study was done in the education undertaking, the empirical application of the finding on NGOs operating on different funding frameworks requires further investigation.

In the US defense department, the role of evaluation planning and control has been looked at in terms of hierarchical obligation which is entrusted to few organizations. The authors of the reform in planning in the defense argued that because of the prevalent use of ex ante and ex post evaluation framework in the military, the essential role of budget, staffing, stakeholder involvement has been siloed from the operations planning [15]. To counteract the risks that comes with this reprioritization of evaluation planning in such institution, an evaluation component is embedded in each component of activity.

In the NGO sector, there has been wider belief that meeting and exchanging ideas were the primary evaluation planning and utilization avenue and as such proponents of such approach believed that it was more effective. In a synthesized experience of BRAC which was shared at a UN high level policy discussion in New York, it was advise that evaluation planning should not only look at external relationship but the fundamental stakeholder engagement- in fact the first projects conducted by BRAC benefited the rich but with the stakeholder engagement, they were able to

design effective program that has risen their programming portfolio worldwide [16]

The role of budget has increasingly been discussed in major evaluation practice enabler in many forums. In a study conducted on Uganda on the failure of the foreign aid in the developing countries, Niyonkuru [17] found that performance based contracts was not effective in Uganda because the agencies undertaking assignment assumes that evaluation was cheap and there were no adequate time set to ensure that proper planning was put in place to counteract emerging challenges. The performance based programming which Niyonkuru conceptualized as tool that links incentive to performance target attainment was increasingly being adapted to control underperformance but there were emerging challenges in capacity to execute.

Weak capacity to design, fund and manage PBC led to *ad hoc* acts, short-cuts and uncertainty about size and payment of bonuses... problems were encountered, hasty adaptations resulted in a *de facto* intervention distinct from the one implied at the design stage. For example, inadequate time was allowed for the selection of service targets by the health centres yet they got 'locked-in' to these poor choices. The learning curve and workload among performance auditors weakened the validity of audit results [17].

Although the performance-based payment has been found to be less effective in the Ugandan for NGOs operating in the health sector, studies from Haiti which assessed the impact of performance-based payment found that all the three NGOs contracted exceeded their performance targets for immunization coverage substantially[18]. The authors attributed this success due to adequate staffing and budgeting for monitoring which were embedded in the contract. Although not so much is currently known about the perceived interest and ethical dilemma of the Ugandan NGO on performance-based pay, the practice of performance-based pay is becoming and will become more and more prevalent [19].

Past studies have also recommended the evaluation planning process to incorporate different stakeholders at the inception in order to make sure that the findings and recommendations are used. According to Mathie [20], the design of an evaluation system should bear in mind accountability from design to facilitate utilization of findings from performance. In a study conducted among the cooperate organizations and NGOs, the culture of cooperate consultation with the NGOs and the different stakeholders were found to be extremely significant for strategy performance [21]. Although empirical evidence on stakeholders engagement are implied through this findings, the extent to which such accountability is embedded in the planning among the different NGOs remain unknown.

In this article, literature review examined various views on whether evaluation planning has a significant relationship with the strategy performance. The first study finding focused on the context of academic institution which is not related to NGO sector, the second literature reviewed showed

the culture of omission of evaluation planning and its implication on the organizations. In the defense sector, omitting evaluation planning was justified while BRAC justified the importance of involving stakeholders. The literature has also shown that the success or failure of projects are also dependent on evaluation planning. The researcher has identified research gaps in terms of sectorial target which were majorly in the public and private sectors, yet this research will focus only on local NGOs. The findings presented in the research were majorly drawn from contexts outside of Uganda studies and in cases where they were Ugandan studies, they were generic. This study brings regional perspectives on the evaluation practice.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods approach, featuring secondary data review and majorly quantitative and qualitative methods. The assessment involved the use of structured and non-structured interview approaches covering heads of the non-governmental organization, managers, and staff. This design is deemed appropriate as it involved a study of respondents across a wide spectrum of geographical locations which can scientifically represent a population's view needed for the deciphering the study outcomes [22].

In terms of Epistemology, this research drew from the coherent theory of truth which holds that empirical facts needs to be coherent as a set. Proponents of coherent theories posits that there are acceptable community facts about systems which may not be automatically accepted as truth because of various conditionalities of the system [23]. This framework guides in the design of both quantitative and qualitative the sampling framework to ensure results are validated from multiple sources. On the philosophical foundation of the research, the research utilized the Pragmatist philosophical foundation.

According to Kelly [24], pragmatic approaches are important in organizational research because it recognizes interconnectedness of knowledge and experience which are contextually relevant and useful for NGO programs. This philosophical foundation suited the research because strategy evaluation is practiced in different organizations with different approaches, different layers of staff and different stakeholders with different interpretation to the approaches.

For quantitative methods regarding the relationship between evaluation practices methods and the performance constructs, the study applied cross sectional study design to collect a one-off information from respondents spread in different geographical areas. These methods have been selected because they help to understand the behaviors in the context while providing options for further examination of relationship between the different study constructs [25].

#### ➤ Population and Sample

According to Mugenda and Mugenda [ 26], a study population refers to the entire set of individuals or entities from which the research findings is based. In this research, the general population were all active non-governmental organizations who have valid license from the national NGO registration bureau from 2017 to 2021. The entire organizational study population were drawn from 14000 registered national local non-governmental organizations with a staff population of 29,000 individuals [27]. Conversely, the applicable sample size was determined as 379 respondents which were to be spread across the different four regions in Uganda.

This chose to sample a total population of 60 organizations drawn from a cluster of 15 organizations in each of the four regions of Uganda. Using a two staged sampling procedure, organizations were identified and this was followed by additional categorization of respondents in the layers of executive, managers, and field staff.. An average of 7 participants were drawn from the selected organizations per region. Ahlstrom [28] justified this sampling method in the interest of coherent national just strategies and policies.

#### ➤ Data analysis

Both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were be used in this study. Quantitative data analysis involved use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to analyze the different segments of questions. Descriptive statistics were be generated via graphs and tables. For measuring strength of relationships, cross tabulation of the research variables were analyzed and tested against the hypothesis using Pearson product moment correlation and regression analysis. For the qualitative assessment, Inductive analysis were conducted on data generated from the expat panel interviews and focus group discussions. Responses were also be graded into themes and interpreted by means of percentages and the degree of agreement or disagreement with the hypothesis being tested.

### IV. RESULTS

The key elements of evaluation planning as an independent variable was analysis using the Likert scale scores. NGO staff were asked to answer to what extent they agree with the statements listed which were related to your organizations' evaluation practices? Respondents were guided to use the following scales: 1=strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure 4=Agree, 5=strongly agree to grade their answers. Responses on multiple variables from the sampled population were computed and measured in terms of mean responses. The table 1 presents descriptive statistics which were generated from NGO staff responses.

NGO staff responses.

Table 1 Mean Score Evaluation Planning Variables

<b>Evaluation Planning</b>	<b>Mean(N=349)</b>	<b>Std. deviation</b>
B1.1 Management allocates money for preliminary strategy scoping	3.80	1.102
B1.2 Management allocates money for routine strategy evaluation reflection	3.81	1.096
B1.3 Staff are assigned time for internal strategy evaluation reflection	3.83	1.130
B1.4 Responsible evaluation staff are assigned strategy evaluation roles	4.06	.978
B1.5 Responsible evaluation staff gives input on strategy options	3.93	1.028
B1.6 Stakeholders' needs are periodically assessed	3.87	1.154
B1.7 Stakeholder representatives are consulted prior to changes of plan	3.80	1.239
B1.8 Stakeholder are given avenue to provide feedback to management	4.00	1.017

Source: Author's Primary data, 2023

Results from the table above shows that the mean scores were skewed towards the mean score of 4 (agree option score). Most of respondents strongly concurred that that staff in their organizations were assigned evaluation role and were given avenue to provide feedback to management (Mean score 4.06, std 0.948). Based on the mean scores, respondents also agreed reluctantly that management was giving money for preliminary strategy scoping. These findings implies that there were favorable perception towards utilization of evaluation planning process within the assessed organizations. Also, because no absolute strongly agree mean score was achieved, it can be deduced that a consistent progressive progress towards improving evaluation planning process becoming more institutionalized.

The dependent variables in this study focused on strategy performance aspects of community satisfaction, fund stability and timeliness. NGO staff were asked to reflect on their experience and score what factors had defined the strategy performance in their organization. Study participants used the scales as follows: 1-Not at all, 2-Small extent, 3-Moderate extent, 4-Great extent, and 5-Very great extent. Responses on multiple variables from the sampled population were computed and measured in terms of means(averages) scores for each response. The table 4.5 below presents descriptive statistics which were generated from NGO staffs' responses.

Table 2 Mean Score Strategy Performance Variables

<b>Fund Stability</b>	<b>Mean(N=349)</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
C1.1 Attracting new streams of grants	3.24	1.044
C1.2 Maintaining donor relationship	3.80	1.022
C1.3 Delivering programs within the budget	3.63	1.022
C1.4 Saving costs	3.28	1.092
C1.5 Meeting audit requirements.	3.57	1.025
C1.6 Management supervision directives	3.56	.962
<b>Community Satisfaction</b>		
C2.1 Reaching more marginalized community beneficiaries	3.73	1.041
C2.2 Innovation towards beneficiary wellbeing	3.48	1.035
C2.3 Addressing competition by rival entity in the community.	3.22	1.059
C2.4 Acceptance of the organization by the beneficiaries	3.75	1.028
<b>Timeliness</b>		
C3.1 Capability to deliver service as and when needed	3.73	1.004
C3.2 Delivering program within agreed time	3.70	.993
C3.3 Responsiveness to opportunities within time	3.70	.979

Source: Author's Primary data, 2023

Findings from the table above shows that all strategy performance variables of fund stability, community satisfaction and timeliness were rated between the average scores of 3.2-3.8, this implies that the respondents were more inclined to rate the variables as moderate extent and great extent. Under the study variable of fund stability, respondent scores of saving costs and attracting new streams of funding were mostly rated as a mod reaching marginalized community was also rated towards a great extent scale and this resonates with the ever-increasing demand of leaving no one behind which is articulated in the sustainable development goals. Maintaining donor relationship was rated high and this implies local NGOs tended to value constructive engagement with the donors compared to making efforts in gaining community acceptance. Similarly, under the study variable of community satisfaction respondents mostly rated addressing competition by rival entity in the community on moderate extent scale.



All other dimensions under timeliness were more included to a great extent. The finding implies that majority agreed that timeliness is a factor of great influence for the performance of strategic actions. The mean scores above 3.5 in the result above implies a favorable perception towards prioritizing it to a great extent. None of the mean scores were skewed towards the score of 2 or 5, and this implies that there were slow but progressive favorable opinion towards achieving the dependent strategy variables indicated in the study.

#### ➤ Correlational Analysis

This study sought to establish the relationship between evaluation planning and strategy performance among local NGOs in Uganda. This is analyzed and interpreted using the data from Table 3 and secondary data review results.

Table 3 Pearson Product Moment Correlation Results (N=349)

	Planning	Fund stability	Community satisfaction	Timeliness
Planning	1			
Fund stability	.274**	1		
Community satisfaction	.250**	.662**	1	
Timeliness	.198**	.675**	.702**	1

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's Primary Data, 2023

The results in table 4.3 above shows that there were consistent weak positive correlational scores achieved under the strategy performance variables of fund stability ( $r = .274^{**}$ ), community satisfaction ( $r = .250^{***}$ ) and timelines ( $r = .198^{*}$ ). This finding implies that evaluation planning is on a slow pace towards positively influencing strategy performance among the local NGOs. It can be deduced that the correlation is positive but the extent to which it influences strategy performance is weak. An additional regression analysis was conducted to determine if evaluation planning had a significant impact on strategy performance. Results are presented in the table below.

Table 4 Regression Analysis between Evaluation Planning and Strategy Performance

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.269 <sup>a</sup>	.072	.070	.66191

a. Predictors: (Constant), evaluation planning

Source: Author's Primary data, 2023

Table 5 Anova between Evaluation Planning and Strategy Performance

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.854	1	11.854	27.056	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	152.029	347	.438		
	Total	163.883	348			

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Evaluation planning

Source: Author's Primary Data, 2023

Table 6 Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.625	.189		13.910	.000
	Evaluation planning	.248	.048	.269	5.202	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy performance

Source: Author's Primary Data 2023

Results above shows that the proportion of variance which is the R squared ( $R^2$ ) is 0.072. This shows the extent to which evaluation planning influences strategy performance. It implies that only 72% of strategy performance is determined by evaluation planning. It is an indicator that there are other factors outside the scope of this research which explains performance of the strategy.

Similarly, the strength of relationship between evaluation planning and strategy performance was found to be positive as shown by the beta coefficient at ( $\beta = 0.269$ ). This means that evaluation planning indeed does influence strategy performance positively. The regression, anova and the coefficient analysis shows that evaluation planning does predict strategy performance welfare; with a probability of  $P < 0.072$  ( $R^2 = 0.072$ );  $F(27.056) = 2.625$  and  $\beta = 0.269$ .

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research question of this study was ‘What is the relationship between evaluation planning process and strategy performance of NGOs in Uganda?’ As shown in the correlational analysis in table 4.5 above, the study found that there was statistically a weak positive correlation between evaluation planning and the independent variable(strategy performance) constructs of fund stability( $r = .274^{**}$ ) community satisfaction ( $r = .250^{**}$ ) and timeliness ( $r = .198^{**}$ ).

This finding provides empirical evidence for localization stakeholders with a backing that local NGO institutions were already beginning to have a good footprint in addressing institutional inefficiencies that undermines evaluation planning owing to continued omission of critical step of planning by donor agencies. This addresses the concern of Wanadwasi, 2018 on the emerging institutional inefficiencies among the local NGO and there are gradual steps being taken by local NGOs to influence strategies at a planning stage. This finding can also be explained by the long-term contribution of QUAM, an indigenous voluntary membership agency that has invested significantly in ensuring that evaluation planning gains prominence among the local NGOs. According to some scholars the establishment of QUAM was positively viewed by stakeholders as a starting basis for developing monitoring and evaluation systems among the NGOs [30].

A positive correlation between evaluation planning and community satisfaction rejects the previous theoretical argument that poor stakeholder engagement at the inception results into poor strategy performance [16]. By and large it can be argued that local NGOs in Uganda were putting greater importance on community engagement owing to the consistent interest in meeting donor interest at the expense of community engagement but this is still gradual and dependent on donor priorities.

Similarly, a weak positive correlation between evaluation planning and fund stability can be explained by improved perception on institutional conceptualizations of evaluation as a cheap aspect which can be done at summative stage. It rejects the validity of arguments hypothesizing that even if NGOs are given performance-based payment contracts, their performance were unlikely to be good owing to weak planning system embedded in their institutional culture [17]. In summary, there is a gradual consistent progress in institutionalizing evaluation planning as a means of survival among the local NGOs.

### ➤ Study Implications

To overcome the challenges that come with inconsistent application of evaluation planning, NGO forums should advocate for a coherent policy and standards that facilitates wider and consistent adaptation of evaluation planning. The biggest task lies with the national NGO bureau, the national NGO forum and other voluntary quality assurance actors to ensure that a framework is put in place to support local NGO evaluation planning process. Appropriate trainings should be

given to the regional NGO forums to ensure that peer support to local NGOs. NGO board should set up a quality assurance unit to ensure appropriate guidelines to the NGO forums.

To practitioners, the study has also found that evaluation planning, not yet highly influencing strategy performance of local NGOs in Uganda. Attempts by national NGO executives to make strategic choices based on evidence are limited due to varied institutional inefficiency landscapes which are dictated by external donors rather than the national quality assurance mechanism. Therefore donors, NGO bureau, NGO boards and all development stakeholders should know that the current evaluations practices are less likely to influence strategy performance unless they are reformed to reflect common rational frameworks.

To policy makers, this study also provides empirical evidence to policy makers in the field of localization to understand the complex challenges brought by unpredictable aid context. Future policy attempts to improve strategy performance through evaluation practices should be cognizant of funding terrains. Policy makers have a role to advocate for equitable, flexible, transparent and predictable funding for local NGOs based on the national development priorities.

To the associations, quality assurance agencies and independent consultants, this study provides statistics and a yardstick for measuring the strength of evaluation planning which can be further used to inform future self-assessments and organizational capacity development prioritization.

### ➤ Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors declare that this is their original work and that this study was not funded by any local or international organization throughout the assessment and reporting. We fully declare that there was no conflict of interest.

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