

# The Sustainability of Donor-Funding Towards Non-Governmental Organisations and Their Socio-Economic Impact in Botswana

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## Abstract

Non-governmental organisations have met with immense growth over the past decades with increasing donor support towards their highly regarded work especially in developing countries. However, the social and economic impact of these entities has of late not fared as expected in Botswana. NGOs are frail and easily crippled in the face of volatile donor-funding from developing countries. This qualitative research therefore, adopted a case study research design to investigate the sustainability of Donor-Funding towards NGOs and their Socio-economic impact in Botswana. A sample of 10 NGOs was selected for the study. Structured questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data. Data was presented in form of graphs and tables. The study revealed that NGOs in Botswana are now struggling to reach out effectively to their beneficiaries as much as they are supposed to. Their ability to satisfy the needs of beneficiaries is desirable but gravely challenged principally by sustainability issues. BOCONGO as the coordinating body is in a dire state. It also interprets to less effective abilities to fulfil their own mandate of espousing the local NGOs together. While impartial comments were passed with some agreeing to the government as very supportive, some were differing. There was a general view that the government was moderately assisting towards the upkeep of the NGO sector. Laws and regulations governing CSR of the private sector were highlighted as desirable. Due to the departure of donors, NGOs in Botswana have turned to the private sector and to the government for assistance. There is need for diversification in the funding structures of NGOs to combat survival issues and ensure for sustainable socio-economic impact. As a result, the researchers recommended that NGOs should seriously look further into diversification of their funding strategies more if they are to be sustainable. Furthermore, instead of NGOs competing for resources and donor-funding, they need to employ a culture of endorsing each other's work. Further research may look into NGOs in Botswana sector by sector so as to suggest tailor-made recommendations for their sustainability and funding diversification.

**Key words:** *NGO's, Donor Funding, Sustainability, Socio-economic impact.*

## 1.1 Introduction

Botswana has a population of over two million people. During independence, the majority of the people were rural based but with the increased economic activity in the country, the pattern of settlement has greatly changed with rapidly increasing urban migration. Formerly, Botswana's major economic growth was largely from

diamond mining. Currently, tourism, cattle rearing and manufacturing are progressively contributing to economic growth. Botswana is now rated among the middle to high-income economies. In spite of the remarkable economic performance, of concern are issues of poverty, unemployment, unequal wealth distribution, HIV/AIDS and some traits of gender discourses. Poverty and unemployment have greatly affected the quality of human resources in the country, both in the private and the public sector. Therefore, it is worth noting that the formerly expanding NGO sector in Botswana was paramount and strategic in facilitating aids to poverty alleviation, HIV/AIDS problems as well as unemployment detriments.

Botswana had a large and growing NGO sector which effectively contributed to the country's renowned peaceful and democratic political standpoint, social justice, and the well improved gender equality. Most NGOs in Botswana came after independence and were addressing direct social needs of the people. Most of the NGOs are sectorial with some being multi-sectorial. For the past three or four decades, Botswana's NGOs have been relying on donor-funding from developed countries' governments, International NGOs and other foreign donors. They would support the local NGO sector through money, equipment, personnel, technical assistance and other necessities. Functions that have benefitted immensely include cultural development, poverty alleviation, HIV/AIDS, social welfare, disability, media, environment and philanthropy among others. Unfortunately, major donors who used to support such efforts are exiting the country leaving the NGOs struggling to sustain their work. The remaining donors have greatly reduced their support, for example, donors are no longer willing to contribute to NGOs' administrative expenses. The assumption is that as a middle-income economy, Botswana should be able to sustain their philanthropic work through their own resources. Besides the leaving donor community, NGOs situation is being worsened by the past recession which the country is recovering from. Further exasperating the situation is lack of government and private sector coalitions with the NGO community as well as poor lobbying skills by the NGOs. Botswana is going through a gratifying phase of economic growth which can easily be misconstrued as growth-for-all yet sometimes it could generally be an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor. While the economy is burgeoning, NGOs on the other hand are dwindling and struggling to survive. Donors are pulling out or reducing their funding to Botswana's NGOs on the same pretext of economic growth. They believe that the country has enough resources to cater for its own developmental needs.

After such a shaky experience in the NGO sector, this study seeks to establish the sustainability of the NGOs considering the challenged donor-funding and the subsequent social and economic impact of these NGOs. The government of Botswana has made various attempts at resolving the problem of funding of NGOs to some extent, but most NGOs continue to wind down. The private sector at times has been seen assisting with what they can; but it is questionable if this is helping in sustainable revenues, resources and functionality of the NGOs. By establishing evidence from previous literature, this study wishes to also collect data directly from Botswana's NGOs and coordinating body through research methodology so as to draw meaningful results and conclusions. Recommendations will therefore be substantially drawn from this holistic approach which is expected to contribute to the sustainable survival of the local NGOs and their improved impact socially and economically.

## **Problem statement**

Since Botswana was declared as a middle-income economy, donors have immensely pulled out or significantly cut down their funding on the NGOs. The response was an equally severe shrinkage in the number of NGOs in the country or their downsizing. Subsequently, the social and economic impact of these NGOs has been seriously challenged. The importance of NGOs in society cannot be underestimated. The fundamental question is whether NGOs in Botswana are sustainable under the reduced donor-funding and whether they will manage to exert an effective and efficient socio-economic impact to the communities they serve. To date, NGOs in the country are struggling to survive. Possibly other factors could also be in the playfield other than donor-funding. This study seeks further to establish what the NGOs can do to diversify their revenue base and remain sustainable in the midst of the dynamic global economic landscape. The obscured aim is also for other NGOs in other countries to benefit from the same recommendations that will be drawn in this study.

## **2.0 Theoretical and Conceptual Literature: NGOs**

The term 'NGO' itself is an antonym; rather telling of what it is not than what it is (Lewis, 2009), hence revolting against easy or exact definition. At the same time, NGOs cannot be easily generalised as there are many categories and classes of NGOs, even making it harder to define them (Singhal, 2015). A debate therefore on the definition of the term NGO is inevitable. Lewis and Kanji (2009) pointed out how the term NGO is widely used concurrently with other terms such as 'non-profit', 'voluntary', 'charity' or 'civil society' organisations to name just a few. This challenge in finding out the assortments in the NGOs' world led Najam (1996) to come up with 47 different acronyms, all referring to NGOs all over the world. Examples included the BINGOs (Big International organisations), the ENGOS (Environmental NGOs) and the more commonly used names like the GDOs (Grassroots Development Organisations) and the NPOs (Non-Profit or not-for-profit organisations). Lewis and Kanji (2009) went on to point out how the terms 'voluntary' or 'charity' organisation are widely used in UK whereas 'Non-profit organisation' is mostly used in USA. It somewhat implies that the term NGO is better defined in context; be it geographically, by purpose, structure, size, formal or informal (Lewis and Kanji, 2009), or even ethical stance; the list is endless. Looking at some acronyms in Appendix 1, some NGOs do have adverse connotations than the usual positive outlook in which NGOs are generally associated with (Silvan, 2015). This implies that there are also wolves in sheep's clothing taking advantage. Examples of these include the GONGOs (Government-organised NGOs) and the COME 'n' GOs (simply referring to those NGOs that temporarily exist following donor-funding), which were identified by Najam (1996). Salomon and Anheier (1992) challenged the definitions of NGOs from other writers to have mainly been based on legalistic, economical or functional basis such that proper definition is not fully given but in part. Therefore, they went forward to give a more structural and operationally based definition which is mainly anchored on five key features of an entity that can be seen. These are (1) formal (with the organisation's officers having regular meetings), (2) private (separate from the government), (3) non-profit distributing, (4) self-governing (manages own affairs) and (5) voluntary. This significantly agreed to Sunkin et al., (1993) definition that NGOs are privately constituted entities whether as companies, professional, voluntary or charities which may not make a profit.

### **An overview of Botswana's NGOs**

NGOs noticeably emerged in Botswana in the 1980s and grew swiftly despite their challenges. By the end of 1999, Botswana had approximately 150 indigenous NGOs, about 50 community-based organizations, around 23 trade unions, including a reasonable number of business associations (Maundeni et al., 2007). Notable veteran indigenous NGOs then were the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), The Botswana Council of Women, Metlhaetsile and Emang Basadi (Somolekae, 1998). They have since then enjoyed good relationships with the state and contributed to Botswana's socio-economic environment. Some of these radical women groups managed to network and challenge government policy successfully and today Botswana enjoys better equal rights in the national heritage (Somolekae, 1998).

In 1995, BOCONGO, the mother-body of Botswana's NGOs was formed with over 70 NGOs all from various sectors such as Human rights, Youth and Environment (Maundeni, ed, 2005). BOCONGO's main intentions were to assist NGOs through capacity building, networking, information dissemination and policy advocacy. This growth and emancipation of NGOs in Botswana continued and affected the strength in Botswana's democracy and women empowerment by the end of the 1990s (Molomo and Somolekae, 2000). However, when Botswana was classified as an upper to middle-income economy, the growth and sustainability of NGOs in Botswana was highly challenged through withdrawal of donors (Lekorwe and Mpabanga, 2007)

### **Sustainability of NGOs in Botswana**

Bateh et al (2014) pointed out that the concept of sustainability constantly evolves and can change meaning from one business to another or used in context. Their definition as adopted in this study regard organisational sustainability as including longevity as well as retaining the core principles or purposes, despite internal and external changes over time. Kgauthle (2015) quoted the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO) executive secretary who was hoping for Botswana NGOs to be allocated part of the national budget, as saying, "... since Botswana was declared a middle-income economy in recent years, international donors have stopped funding NGOs locally which resulted in some projects failing. When they stopped funding most projects were put on hold and some stopped altogether ... this reason NGOs became dormant hence affecting their service". The same was agreed by Ditshwanelo (2007) when they stated how Botswana's speedy economic growth has had its flaws such as inequality, unemployment, poverty and excessive dependence on the state. Ditshwanelo went on to reiterate the dramatic decrease in many NGOs in Botswana despite having attained the middle-income status with continued high levels of poverty in the country. Lekorwe and Mpabanga (2007) stated how the previously held fact of how Botswana's NGOs used to enjoy better international funding compared to fellow African countries has now lapsed. They went on to point out how this has reduced NGOs' impact, lobbying capacity and ability to sustain them. It could be that local governments and individuals still have the old perception that NGOs would still get external financing and hence not intervene with the current reality.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

Considering the objectives of the research, the naturalistic and interpretive constructionism research paradigms were adopted to allow different views to be drawn. A case study approach was adopted and was triangulated with qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires in order to draw a more holistic understanding of the NGOs' situation in Botswana. Eckstein (2000) expressed how the case study method allows for a more in-depth analysis with fewer data and this was more practical for this research using interviews and questionnaires. Data was collected using a questionnaire from the sampled NGOs and two sets of interview questions for BOCONGO staff and the other for management in NGOs. Lastly questionnaires will be distributed to staff in the various NGO sectors. The structured questionnaires will be distributed to sampled NGOs in Botswana to aid in the collection of data. 17 Questions which were classified into six categories towards fulfilment of the research topic objectives will be delivered to sample NGOs. These are meant to be filled in by staff in NGOs. The researcher took into account the 11 sub-sectors that are recognised by BOCONGO such that each NGO sector will be represented in the study. To help address sustainability, donor-funding and the socio-economic impact of NGOs in Botswana, the target population consists of management and staff in NGOs in Botswana and management at BOCONGO. The population accommodates the major stakeholders to this cause. From a case study perspective, the study was confined to NGOs in Gaborone and surrounding villages where face-to-face interviews could be held with participants. Gaborone is the capital city of Botswana. It was perceived that by mere reason of its size and socio-economic influence, it would be a fair representation of the population of the study to draw the sample from. Sampling was meant to cover all BOCONGO's membership sectors in Botswana.

#### 4.0 Findings and Analysis

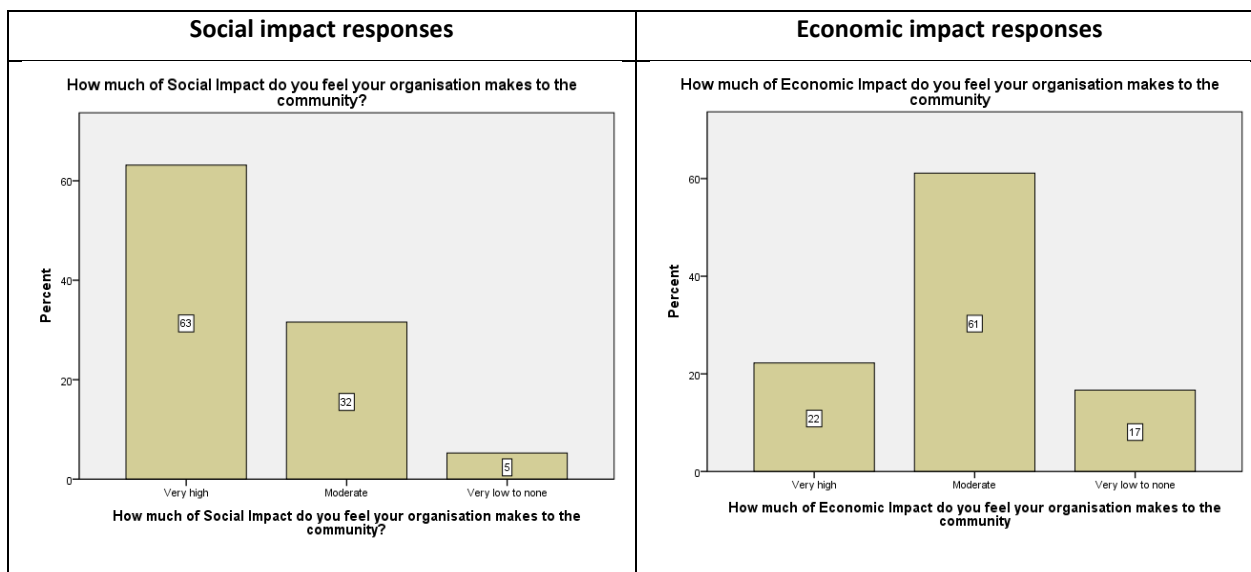
**Table 1: Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

	Sector	Questionnaires correctly completed	Questionnaires condemned (incorrectly filled-in)	Questionnaires dispatched and not responded to	Total questionnaires	% completed from the Total
1	Arts & Culture	0	0	3	3	0%
2	Development arm of the church	1	0	2	3	33%
3	Disability	1	1	1	3	33%
4	Environment & Agriculture	1	0	2	3	33%
5	Gender and Development	2	0	0	2	100%
6	Health & HIV/AIDS	3	0	0	3	100%
7	Human Rights	1	1	1	3	33%
8	Media	4	0	0	4	100%
9	Micro Finance, Credit & empowerment	2	1	0	3	67%
10	Science, Technology & Training	1	0	2	3	33%
11	Youth & Children	3	0	0	3	100%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>58%</b>

#### Social and Economic impact

Lyons (2003) pointed out how NGOs fulfil social needs better than the government. Depending on their mandate, over 60% of NGOs felt that they have a very high social impact while doubts were felt among the 32% and 5% who felt they have a moderate and very low impact respectively. Apparently, the Environmental and wildlife sectors had confidently confirmed to have very high social impact through their teachings about wildlife across community demographics. Only 22% believed they have a very high economic impact with the majority of 61% responding to moderate economic impact. Very few felt they have very low to none social impact and 17% feeling they have very low to none economic impact. With most NGOs working with people, they might sometimes see most of their social significance as compared to their economic impact (World Bank, 1996)

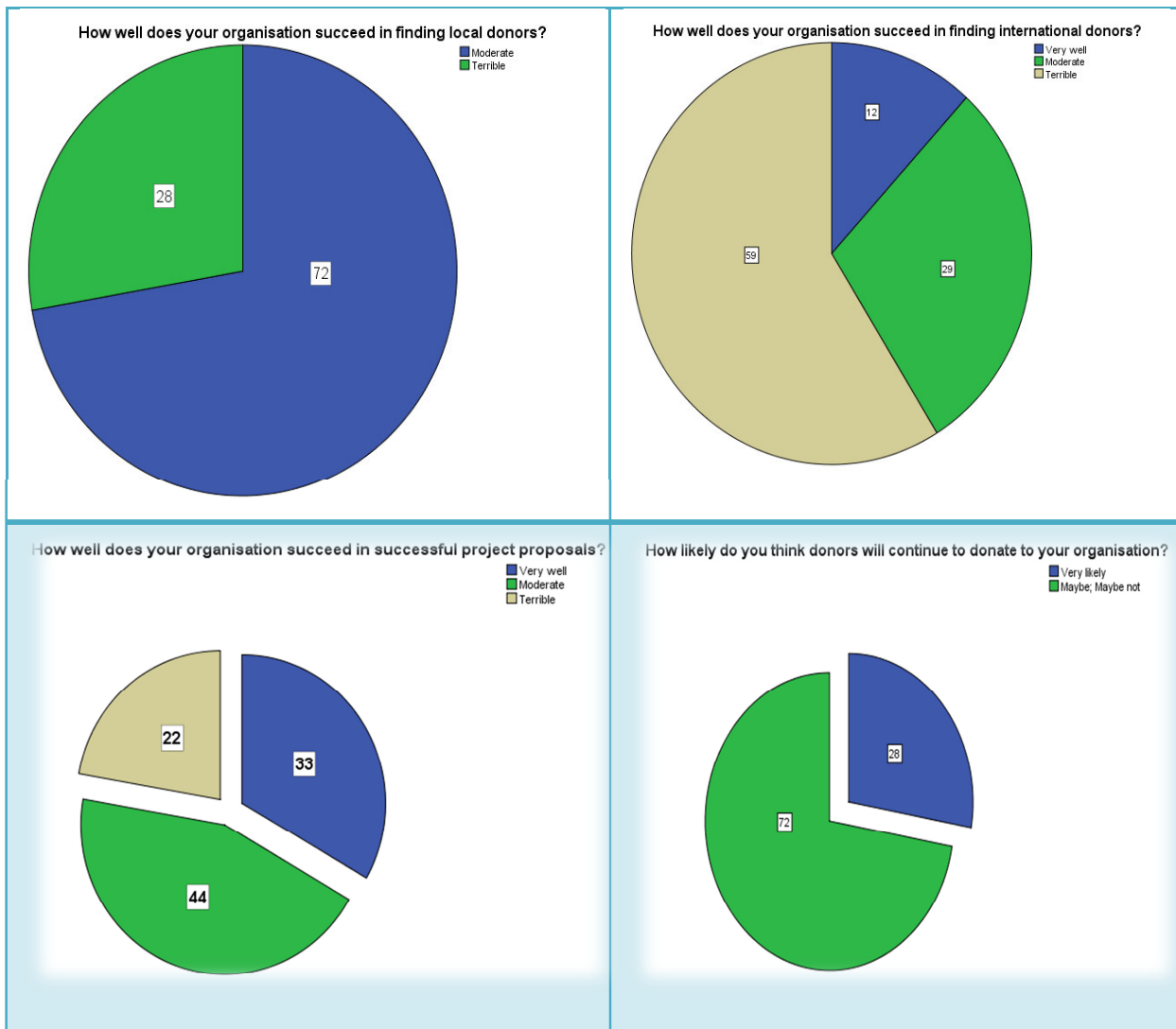
**Figure 1: Socio-economic impact**



### Finding donors and successful project proposals

Most of the donors to NGOs were international donors before the country was recognised as a middle-income economy. The capability of finding donors was split into two categories of local donors and international donors in the questionnaires. The results shows that NGO staffs' viewpoints when asked how well they succeed in finding local and international donors including how their project proposals have fared lately. The results were in agreement with the literature from Molomo and Somolekae (1999) started writing about how Botswana's NGOs will fail to attract international donors through its perceived economic growth status.

**Figure 2: Finding donors**



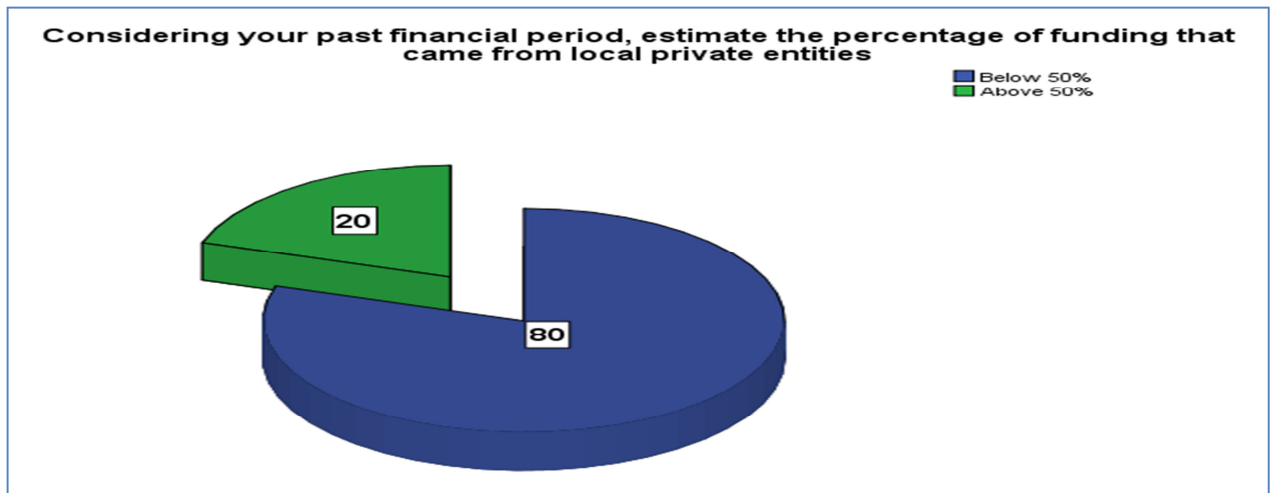
72% of the respondents agreed that they find more donors locally against the 59% terrible chance of finding donors internationally. None of the respondents said finding donors locally was terrible. About a quarter agreed that there was a moderate chance of finding local donors. Just above 10% agreed to finding international donors very well. It seems easier to find local donors than to find international donors in Botswana. A closer look at the respondents' project proposals' success rate shows that the majority seem to be successful or to be in the moderate zone. 22% have a terrible experience in successful project proposals. While the results on finding donors, mostly locally, with averagely successful project proposals seem satisfactory, most NGOs seem not to be certain that the donors will continue to donate to them in future considering that the majority are slowly becoming local donors.

### Sources of funding

The NGOs' staffs were asked to estimate the percentage of funding that came from individual donations, Local private entities, international donors and other sources of funding. No individual donations were

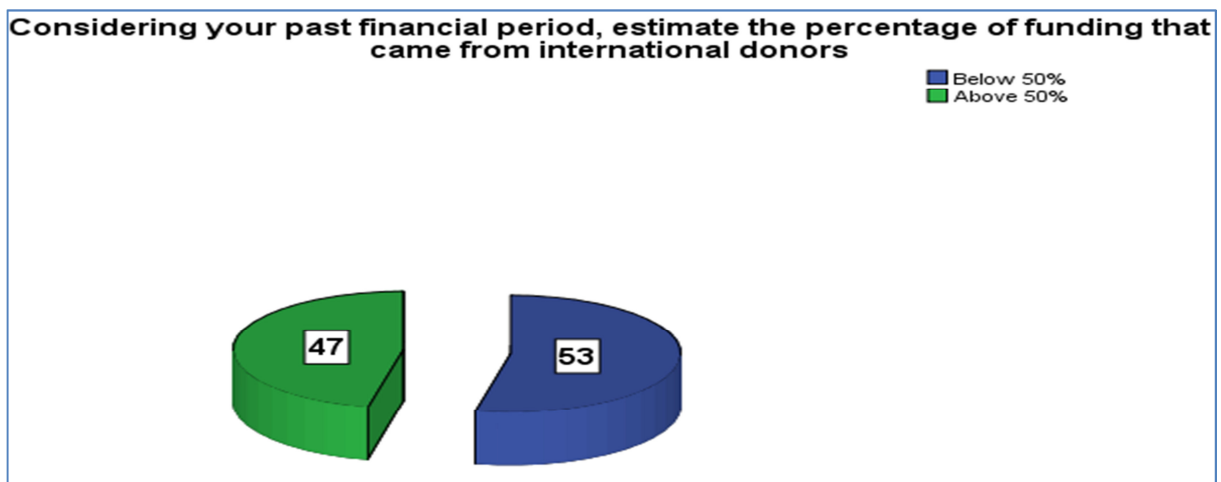
recorded by any of the NGOs. The results below show how these contributed to the NGOs latest financial period:

**Figure 3: Local donations**



20% responded that they got above 50% revenue from local private entities in their last financial period. The other 80% of respondents got below 50% of their last period's revenues from the local private entities. It implies that revenues that were acquired from the local private entities were very small to average. This supports the finding that while most NGOs are easily able to find funding locally, they seem to be getting very little from the local private entities.

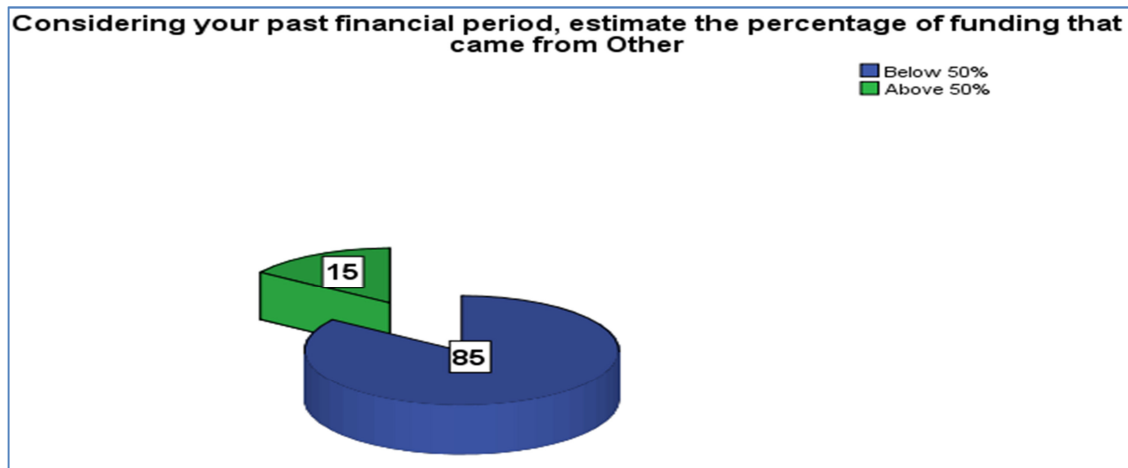
**Figure 6: International donations**



From the responses above, it seems that almost half of the local NGOs still get above 50% of their revenues from the international donors (Lekorwe and Mpabanga, 2007). Botswana still has some international donors. However, most NGOs (53%) are getting below 50% revenues from the international donors.



**Figure 4: Other donations**

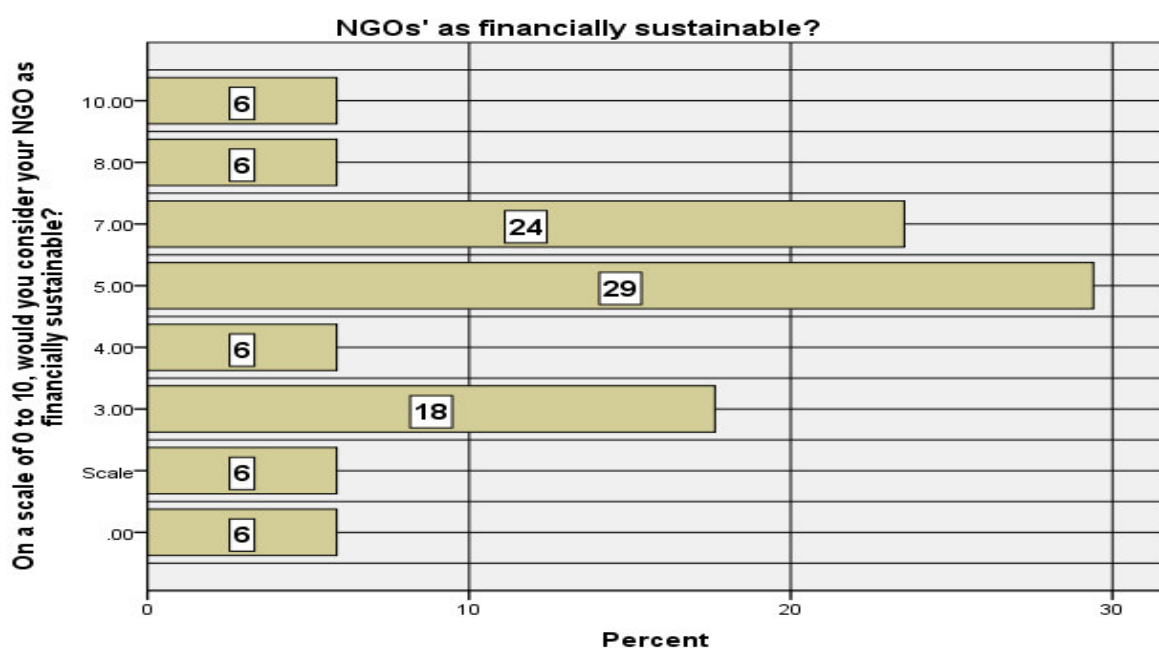


Only 15% of respondents got more than half of their revenue during the past period from other sources of funding such as their own fund-raising activities and possibly government support. 85% of respondents were getting below half of their revenue from other sources.

### Sustainability

Responding to a question about their sustainability, respondents were required to give a score on a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 not being sustainable and 10 was very sustainable). The modal selection was a score of 5 which was also the average and median score. There seems to be some balance between the NGOs' views here. Some believe they are sustainable while some see themselves as unsustainable. This partially challenges the notion of stereotyping all NGOs as unsustainable by Ditshwanelo (2000).

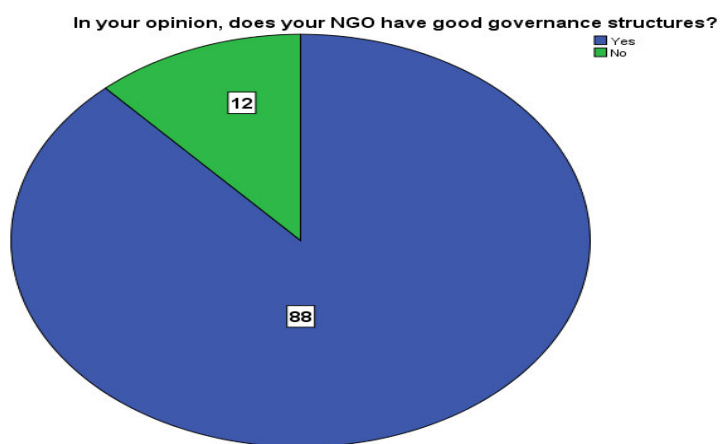
**Figure 5: Financial sustainability**



### Corporate governance

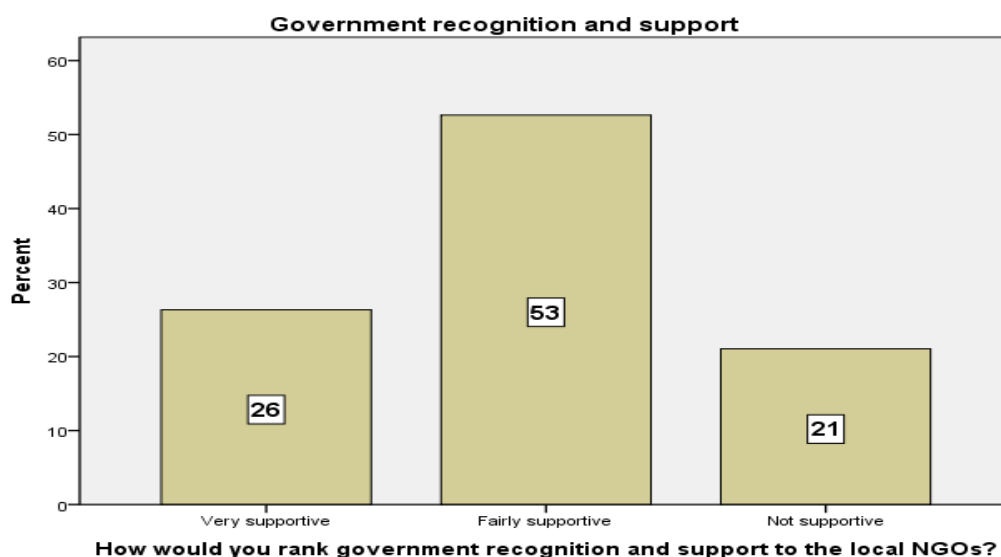
Most NGOs agreed to have good governance structures. With more than three quarters agreeing to have good governance structures and just above 10 percent saying they do not have adequate corporate structures, it seems the majority of NGOs have learnt to put proper structures towards meeting donor requirements. Reporting structures have therefore greatly improved as well as performance measurements. The results disagree to theorists like Madon (2004) who see NGOs as lacking in communication systems but agrees to Kruse et al (1997) that many NGOs now have good governance structures since it is now critical to their performance measurements for acquisition of donor-funding.

**Figure 6: Corporate governance structures**



### Government support

**Figure 7: Government support**



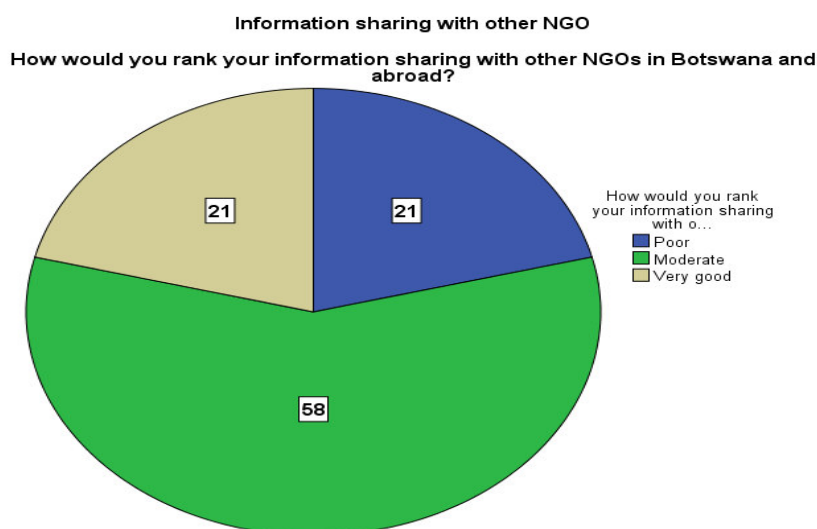
Most respondents felt that the Government's efforts towards NGOs are fair. While it may not be the best they can do, most felt that the government could do better in assisting NGO work. Even though 21% of respondents thought that the government was not supportive, 26% actually saw the government as very

supportive of NGOs. These results defied most theories that view governments and NGOs as antagonistic (Bratton, 1989) but agree to optimists like Smillie (1995) who believe in potential partnerships between governments and NGOs.

### NGOs' information sharing

Just more than half of NGOs are involved in information sharing with other NGOs whether in Botswana or abroad. The remaining 42% is split equally between the other two extremes of poor information sharing or very good at information sharing. Sharing information between NGOs enables exchange of very valuable information including sustainable impact strategies and how to overcome challenges common to the NGOs. Alternatively, information sharing will enable NGOs to endorse each other rather than to compete for donors.

**Figure 8: Information sharing with other NGOs**



### Partnerships with the private sector

Berrientos (2013) commented that most NGOs are limited in resource acquisition or relationships. Increasing relationships with the private sector after donor-flight from the country is commendable. 80% of respondents confirmed that they are securing partnerships with the private sector which is quite pleasing as donations can be acquired from the private sector.

**Table 2: Private sector partnerships**

Do you have any partnerships with the private sector?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	4	21.1	21.1	21.1
	Yes	15	78.9	78.9	100.0
Total		19	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3: Standards of living in Botswana versus middle-income economy status**

**Botswana was declared as a middle-income economy. How do you rank the standards of living of your beneficiaries since then?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Standards of living in the country have improved	3	15.8	16.7	16.7
	No connection; standards of living are the same	10	52.6	55.6	72.2
	Standards of living have decreased	5	26.3	27.8	100.0
	Total	18	94.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	5.3		
Total		19	100.0		

The majority of respondents viewed the middle-income economy status as having no effect on standards of living in Botswana. The results in table 3 above are skewed towards decreasing standards of living in agreement to Ditshwanelo (2000) where a speedy economic growth has flaws such as poverty and excessive dependency on the state. These results and theory corresponded with the interview responses from NGO management and BOCONGO that standards of living have actually decreased than improved.

## 6.0 Conclusions

Most NGOs in Botswana are truly facing serious sustainability issues with most closing shop except a few select sectors. BOCONGO confirmed how their membership figures have terribly dwindled down. Recent trends might not have been revealed in real figures, but the fact that they are at 150 indigenous NGOs, shows lack of growth from 2015 or a serious backdrop in numbers (Kgauthle 2015) especially due to the flight of international donors. As such, the civil societies are now turning to the private sector and the government but are still far from sustainable revenues' reach locally. It could be argued that NGOs in Botswana may now be vulnerable due to lack of donor-funding. Not all the NGO sectors are sharing in the outcry of sustainability and lack of donor-funding like the majority. Some NGOs are doing very well. Not that they do not consider sustainability as an issue, but it is not a threat to their existence currently. Other NGOs that seem to be doing very well currently include the wildlife conservation and environmental sectors. Some have managed to establish strong coalitions with the local private sector and support is immense and sustainable. It can be concluded that the two cannot be easily separated; when sustainability is challenged, so does the consequential socio-economic impact. The responses given during information gathering revealed that NGOs in Botswana are now struggling to reach out effectively to their beneficiaries as much as they are supposed to. Their ability to satisfy the needs of beneficiaries is desirable but gravely challenged principally by sustainability issues. BOCONGO as the coordinating body is in a dire state. It also interprets to less effective abilities to fulfil their own mandate of espousing the local NGOs together. While impartial comments were passed with some agreeing to the government as very supportive, some were differing. There was a general view that the government was moderately assisting towards the upkeep of the NGO sector. Laws and regulations governing CSR of the private

sector were highlighted as desirable. Due to the departure of donors, NGOs in Botswana have turned to the private sector and to the government for assistance. There is need for diversification in the funding structures of NGOs to combat survival issues and ensure for sustainable socio-economic impact. The recommendations below will help address issues towards the future of NGOs in Botswana.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

### **Diversification of funding strategies**

In view of the inconsistent donor funding, NGOs should seriously look further into diversification of their funding strategies more if they are to be sustainable (Farrington et al, 1993; Thrun & Pratt, 2012). Revenues need improvement and this may call for better skilled personnel and commensurate salary scales may be hard to secure but are desirable.

### **Partnerships with the private sector**

With no external donors to look up to, NGOs in the country will need to involve the private sector in their programmes and secure funding (Berrientos, 2013). Involving the private sector has been harnessed by some NGOs such as the Kalahari Conservation Society. Not only are they receiving donations from them, but also educating them on wildlife and protection of the endangered species. Impact is thus augmented but with creative systems that are sustainable and beneficial across all age groups and various communities.

### **Government assistance**

NGOs need immense government support. Their work complements government efforts contrary to public stereotyped view of notorious NGOs against government efforts (Lyons, 2003). It is imperative that NGOs are consulted towards policy making as they have close contact with the communities they serve. Possibly, government should consider regulating CSR of companies towards local NGOs work for the betterment of the communities served by the multinationals and other organisations. Notably, mining towns should benefit immensely from the mining prospects in their area. NGOs will be the best sector to accountably utilise those resources from CSR towards the advancement and benefit of the affected communities.

### **Information exchange and sharing**

Instead of NGOs competing for resources and donor-funding, they need to employ a culture of endorsing each other's work (Omura and Forster, 2013). United they can fight and win the battle of donor-flight compared to a defragmented state whose voice will be obscured and muddled on common causes like this very issue of sustainability. It calls for a change of attitudes and behaviours than to wait for a saviour-who-will-not-come to the defragmented NGO sector. Information sharing, learning new strategies and collective efforts such as this kind of research are needed to regenerate and revive harmony amongst the NGO local community (Thrun & Pratt, 2012).

### **Regulated civil society and registration**

The functionality and initial registration of the NGO sector needs disciplined regulation and monitoring. While the proliferation of NGOs was desirable at certain stages of national transformation, its irrepressible growth has attracted undesirable competition among the civil society, confusion and different voices (Korten, 1990). Some NGOs will start cropping up with ulterior motives against ethical or societal benefit. If not regulated, the growth of NGOs can be harmful in itself. Government effort is desirable in identifying convenient and disciplined effort for NGOs.

### **Limitations to the research study**

Typically, it would be more effectual for a research of this type to traverse the whole country of Botswana towards more representative sample results and interpretations. Some NGOs are located close to their beneficiaries in rural areas and some spread around the country for effective reaching out to communities. However, this would have required additional manpower, increased costs and absolute commitment to the research which was not feasible given the resources at the researcher's disposal.

### **Further research**

This research was limited in costs. Within the given time and available resources, only NGOs in Gaborone were sampled. From each sector, only a handful of NGOs were also sampled and thus limiting the efforts to gather fully compelling evidence. Therefore, further research can be done in the following areas: Further research may look into NGOs in Botswana sector by sector so as to suggest tailor-made recommendations for their sustainability and funding diversification. This very research again could be done countrywide afforded with sufficient resources for more meaningful and convincing establishment of facts for NGO sustainability in Botswana.

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