

# Rethinking Poverty Reduction through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Programmes in Rural Zimbabwe: Evidence from Gokwe North

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## Abstract

The paper is an empirical qualitative case study. In the paper, we provide a critical rethinking of poverty reduction through Non-Governmental Organisations programmes in Gokwe North District. Gokwe North district is a drought-prone and economically marginalised area. The paper is couched on Amartya Sen's (1999) Capability Approach and Martha Nussbaum's Central Capabilities (2011), which present development as freedom that allows people to live the lives they value. The paper employed qualitative case study-based research where interviews and focus group discussions were used and research questions were administered to 20 research participants. The paper responded to one main research question: How effective are the NGOs' strategies on poverty reduction in Gokwe North? The study finds that NGOs contribute to short-term improvements in household welfare but have limited effect on underlying structural conditions. NGOs have limited sustainability due to dependency syndrome and weak institutional integration. By grounding the analysis in empirical evidence from Gokwe, this research study contributes to broader arguments on NGOs' effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa and offers crucial policy-relevant insights for designing more sustainable and transformative rural development interventions.

**Keywords:** Poverty reduction, NGOs, rural livelihoods, sustainability, resilience, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most vexing and pressing development challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa, with rural areas characterised by deep-seated deprivation, vulnerability and limited livelihood opportunities. Zimbabwe presented this reality, particularly since the year 2000, when the country entered a prolonged period of political instability, economic crisis, climate change-induced droughts, structural inequalities, diminishing agricultural output and the disruptive effects of fast-track land reform that collectively undermined livelihoods and employment prospects (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2021; Hupile & Siambombe, 2024; Maviza et al., 2019). The origins of this crisis, however, extend further back to the adoption of the Bretton Woods-inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1990, which triggered record hyperinflation, declining industrial output, endemic poverty and reduced public service delivery (Mlambo, 1997; Kawewe & Dibie, 2000). In response to this multilayered crisis, the post-2000 era has seen the emergence of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as critical actors in poverty alleviation, playing a complementary role to government development efforts

in rural areas through humanitarian assistance, livelihood support programmes and community-based development initiatives. Rural communities such as Gokwe North, heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture, have been particularly exposed to both economic crisis and climate variability (Musasa, 2024; Gwimbi, 2009). Gokwe North district is characterised by semi-arid conditions, poor infrastructural development, inadequate education systems, limited market access, poor health environments, food insecurity and constrained livelihood diversification. The region is historically marginalised and relies on mainly on smallholder cotton farming, a product once celebrated as "Gokwe's white gold" and subsistence agriculture. Its households remain highly vulnerable to rainfall variability and fluctuating commodity prices (Gwimbi, 2009). Persistent droughts related to climate change have further exacerbated this vulnerability, reducing agricultural productivity and household incomes (Gwimbi & Mundoga, 2010). Under dire conditions, NGOs have played a critical role in providing food relief, agricultural inputs, payment of school fees, provision of clothes and uniforms, livestock (goats and poultry), savings and internal lending schemes, water and sanitation projects and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening community resilience. Notable organisations operating in the district include World Vision International, Concern International and Catholic Church-affiliated NGOs such as Caritas International and Catholic Relief Services.

Despite the presence of these various actors and the implementation of diverse poverty alleviation programmes, which range from food aid and agricultural support to microfinance, social protection, education and women's empowerment, the long-term impact, sustainability and transformative capacity of these interventions remain unclear and contested (Mushaka & Majoma, 2023). The people of Gokwe North express gratitude for the tangible benefits brought by NGO interventions, but significant concerns persist regarding their long-term sustainability and alignment with local development imperatives. It is argued that NGO-driven development can engender dependency, fragment local institutional systems of survival and fail to address the structural determinants of poverty (Kabonga, 2024). Many programmes have been criticised for creating dependency syndrome by focusing on short-term relief at the expense of long-term empowerment (Dube, 2021; Nyamboga et al., 2014). Additionally, these programmes sometimes lack meaningful community participation in their formulation, design, and implementation and in some instances, they are not aligned with the socio-economic lived realities of the communities they serve (Nyamboga et al., 2014; Munyao, 2013). In Gokwe, where communities rely mainly on subsistence agriculture and remain exposed to persistent droughts and economic crises, such misalignment is particularly significant. Furthermore, limited supervision, inadequate coordination among stakeholders and weak integration with government development frameworks raise further questions about the sustainability and effectiveness of NGO interventions. While some households experience improvements in income and food security, there is limited empirical evidence assessing whether these programmes lead to enhanced economic resilience and reduced vulnerability over the long term. There is a need to address the apparent disconnect between the intended objectives of NGO poverty reduction programmes and the lived realities of rural households in Gokwe North district. By the same token, there is a growing need to critically evaluate how poverty reduction is conceptualised and implemented at the community level, examining the extent to which NGO programmes move beyond relief-oriented approaches toward transformative, empowerment-driven development. Previous studies conducted revealed that while NGOs contribute meaningfully to poverty reduction through various interventions, their effectiveness is constrained by top-down approaches, donor dependency, weak coordination and macroeconomic instability, [Dube (2021), Kermani et al (2023), Kachumi et al (2025), Ibrahim (2024), Gumbo and Mutizwa (2023), Bwalya et al (2004), Mago et al (2015)]. Success requires

participatory, multi-stakeholder approaches addressing structural causes and building community capabilities rather than creating dependency, [Kabonga et al (2022), Mbizi (2024), Ofure et al (2024)] The Chinese experience offers lessons on coordinated poverty reduction (Sun et al (2025), Liu (2016)), while African studies highlight persistent challenges requiring context-sensitive solutions, Mago et al (2015.) This study contributes to this discourse by examining NGO effectiveness in Gokwe North, Zimbabwe. It examines the effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in reducing rural poverty in Gokwe North district, Zimbabwe. Through focusing on both short-term welfare outcomes and long-term structural impacts, the study sought to contribute empirical evidence to ongoing debates on NGO-led development and propose pathways for more sustainable, context-responsive poverty reduction strategies. The study is situated in Gokwe as a critical case, with an aim to generate evidence that can inform more inclusive, participatory and sustainable approaches to rural development in Zimbabwe and beyond.

This study is guided by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA), (1999), which provides a normative framework for evaluating poverty, well-being and development. The approach fundamentally redefines poverty not as low income, but as deprivation of basic capabilities, the real freedoms people must achieve beings and doings they value, such as being healthy, educated and socially included. Development, in this view, is the expansion of human freedoms, with five instrumental freedoms essential to this process: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. This framework is relevant to the study for three major reasons. First, it enables multidimensional assessment of NGO effectiveness beyond income-based metrics, examining whether interventions expand rural households' real freedoms in Gokwe North. Second, it provides a lens for evaluating whether programmes foster genuine empowerment and human dignity or merely create dependency through welfare-oriented approaches. Third, it facilitates critical reflection on sustainability by examining whether interventions build lasting capabilities that outlast external support. The CA was supported by Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2011), who modified the theory into central capabilities which comprise life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one's environment. These two key frameworks provide both a conceptual lens and an evaluative foundation for analysing the effectiveness, sustainability and transformative potential of poverty reduction programmes in Gokwe North District.

### **Research Methodology**

The research is guided by an interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding the experiences lived through the perspectives of individuals. The interpretivist paradigm was chosen to guide the study because it allows a deep appreciation of meaning and creation of knowledge; insights are created through engaging with participants in the natural setting (Scauso, 2020). This approach allows the researcher to explore the effectiveness of the Non Governmental Organisations programmes in poverty reduction in Gokwe North. It deals with how the community perceives NGOs in addressing poverty in Gokwe. In line with that approach, the study adopted an empirical qualitative exploratory research design to assess whether NGOs' programmes are effective in poverty reduction in rural areas. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study because it seeks to understand non-numerical data on people's lives, perceptions and adaptation to different scenarios of life and qualitative studies provide knowledge into people's lived realities and beliefs (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Essentially, a qualitative approach was employed in the study because it helps to understand people's experiences and seeks to respond to research questions (Cleveland, 2017). Qualitative

research is important to this study because it explores and provides in-depth knowledge into real-world challenges (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Hence, qualitative was chosen to inform this study. The study was conducted in Gokwe North, Midlands Province in Zimbabwe, a rural community where NGOs are active in implementing and supporting poverty alleviation. The location provides relevant context for examining how NGOs' efforts and strategies are contributing to poverty reduction. The study uses purposive sampling to select participants who are actively involved in NGOs' activities and frequently engage with poverty reduction in the Gokwe North community. Participants were approximately 20 participants comprising Area Development Facilitators (4), Community Leaders (4), Agricultural Extension Officers (3), Teachers and Head Teachers (3), Youth Development Officers (4) and women (2) in Gokwe North. The participants, ranging from 28 to 60 years, were selected to provide diverse views. They included both female and male research participants to achieve gender balance and for the purpose of triangulation, trustworthiness, reliability and enhancement of data credibility.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data was solicited using semi-structured in-depth interviews and one Focused Group Discussion (FGD). In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) provided participants to share their views on NGOs' strategies on poverty reduction in Gokwe North. The data collection, as it proceeded, with the themes related to poverty reduction strategies, was noted.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using a thematic approach. The process involved analysing interviews and focus group discussions, understanding data through repeated re-reading, coding key issues and patterns of themes related to the dynamics and impact of poverty reduction through the lens of NGOs' perspective. Qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo was employed to organise and code the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were a priority throughout the research. Participants provided informed consent and pseudonyms were used to keep their identities confidential. Data from NGOs on poverty reduction were used responsibly, with care taken to protect privacy and respect participants. To ensure the study's credibility, several measures were put in place: extended time spent with community members helped build trust and produce richer insights, while using interviews and focus groups allowed findings to be cross-checked. Member checking was also carried out, with participants reviewing preliminary findings to confirm the data reflected their realities. Transferability was ensured by providing thick description, including detailed accounts of the research setting, participants and context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar settings. Combined, these strategies helped strengthen the validity, reliability and overall trustworthiness of the study's findings.

### **Results and discussion**

#### **Sponsoring Entrepreneurship and Gardens for Communities**

One of the strategies employed by NGOs in poverty reduction in Gokwe North involves the sponsorship of nutritional gardens for communities. The establishment of community gardens

has been hailed as a vehicle for poverty alleviation in the Gokwe North community. Dube (2021) concurred with the above and noted that NGOs play a crucial role in addressing poverty among vulnerable communities. Several participants in the study noted that NGOs played a part in the establishment of gardens. An area development facilitator noted that:

So many entrepreneurship projects were introduced and supported like bee keeping, mushroom production, gardening projects, soap making and candle making projects so that self sustainability can be enhanced.

One community leader noted that:

NGOs in Gokwe North district are sponsoring gardens for communities for them to grow vegetables for sale and for family consumption. For instance, Chengwena Chitubu and Mbumbuzi nutritional gardens were sponsored with inputs like seeds, fertilisers, pesticides as well as technical advice.

**An Agricultural Extension Officer also noted that:**

Programmes that empower women were also initiated, like the mushandira pamwe (community gardens), whereby women work together in the gardens growing vegetables and crops. In most cases, World Vision donated the seeds they used. In this regard, NGOs helped so much in reducing poverty in the district.

Participants highlighted the role of NGOs in supporting entrepreneurship initiatives, establishing community gardens and advancing women's empowerment. They linked these efforts to broader entrepreneurship and poverty reduction outcomes, viewing entrepreneurship as a mechanism for income generation, economic diversification, skill development, empowerment, local economic stimulation and the promotion of sustainability and self reliance. Kabonga (2023) agreed that NGOs are key in raising household incomes and noted that the raising of incomes for families is hindered by the unstable macro-economic environment in Zimbabwe. In another related study, Kabonga (2023) noted the importance of nutritional gardens in promoting health and education and income generating is made possible through vocational training. However, Dube (2021) noted that, though the NGOs played an important role in assisting the vulnerable communities, the policy of NGOs tends to be based on a top-down approach without the input of the beneficiaries of the projects. Entrepreneurship projects, as noted by participants such as beekeeping, gardening, soap and candle making, enhanced Gokwe North communities' capabilities by giving them freedom to earn income, improve well-being and make choices about their livelihoods (Sen, 1999). The participants of the study engaged in affiliation and social interaction through community gardens, enhance practical reasoning through planning and managing projects as well as controlling their environment by accessing economic opportunities and property ownership as advocated by central capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011). Considering the above, entrepreneurship projects pursued by NGOs in Gokwe expand people's real freedoms and essential capabilities, thereby contributing to human dignity, well-being and reducing poverty.

**Funding Education and Infrastructural Development**

NGOs were and are still key partners of the government of Zimbabwe in funding and supporting infrastructural development in Gokwe North. NGOs in Gokwe North contribute to

poverty reduction by supporting education through financial and material assistance. One of the NGO programme practitioners noted that:

The NGOs are funding education in Gokwe North district. For instance, schools' infrastructure was built by World Vision International at Machichiri, Muchowe as well as Mavanga Primary schools. In addition, teachers' houses were built at various schools such as Gumunyu High school, Muchowe primary school and Mavanga primary school among other schools in the district.

**An area development facilitator noted that:**

World Vision, an NGO in Gokwe North, has improved education by building a school in Gokwe North known as Muchowe Primary school, to cut the distances where learners used to walk in search of better education. It has also supported schools with textbooks, paying school fees to orphans and vulnerable learners. Some of the learners were given bicycles to cycle when travelling to school. Furniture for learners was also provided to Gumunyu High school. Teacher training was done as a way of capacitating learners' education.

**A teacher in Gokwe North noted that:**

Some children have their fees paid for and some receive learning materials like books, pens and pencils. In some schools, textbooks were donated making learning and teaching easier for the learners and teachers. Classroom blocks were built, for example, at Muchowe primary school in the district. All these projects were meant to reduce poverty among the people due to lack of education.

**A Head Teacher noted that:**

In education, NGOs are playing an integral role in sponsoring girl child education. For instance, Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) is sponsoring the girl child education in Gokwe through providing them with payment of schools, school uniforms, socks, neck ties, shoes, sanitary pads, provision of exercise books and ball points, payment of examination fees and taking those who pass their secondary education through tertiary education. Some of the products of CAMFED in Gokwe North are now teachers and acting as role models to other girls in the CAMFED PROJECT.

**Area Development Facilitator also shared:**

An office was built at the Gumunyu Area with a library to support the education of the local learners.

Participants described NGO contributions to poverty reduction in Gokwe North through the construction of schools and teacher housing, provision of teaching and learning materials, financial support to schools, promotion of girls' education and the distribution of bicycles to learners. By improving access to quality education and learning resources, these interventions build human capital, equip individuals with the skills for employment or entrepreneurship and break inter-generational cycles of poverty. Liu (2016) noted that NGOs are critical in improving the lives of communities and assist in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim at quality education and the reduction of poverty. However, Nyabonga

et al (2024) noted the importance of NGOs and International donors in fighting poverty in Kenya, but they have minimal impact on the lives of the people and contend that poverty is still prevalent among Kenyan communities despite the efforts of NGOs. The activities of NGOs in Gokwe North on education expand real freedom of learners by supporting learners to acquire knowledge, develop skills and make choices about their future livelihoods. This is key to increasing opportunities to escape poverty and improve one's well-being (Sen, 1999). Indeed, education and infrastructure development by NGOs in Gokwe North play a crucial role in poverty reduction by expanding people's opportunities and improving access to essential services.

### **Sponsoring Health and Sanitation Services**

Access to health and sanitation is a key indicator of the poverty reduction in Gokwe North. NGOs were and are still participating in supporting health services through initiating various projects for the empowerment of the communities.

One of the teachers in Gokwe -Gumunyu area noted that:

Also, I remember there was an outbreak of cholera in the area due to lack of clean drinking water. People were resorting to drinking contaminated water because of the scarcity of clean drinking water that led to the outbreak of waterborne diseases. World Vision donated tablets to treat the water and, in some areas, boreholes were drilled to make sure people have access to clean water in the district.

One of the Development Area Coordinator of the NGOs in Gokwe noted that:

In the health sector, World Vision International did not only build clinics but ensured that they are equipped with medicines and everything that is useful for the health of the people in Gokwe North district. Gandavaroyi Clinic was built with the help from World Vision International. The clinic now serves as a hub for health to many people. Thanks to the coming of NGOs in the area.

#### **A Youth Development coordinator noted that:**

NGOs are key in sponsoring health initiatives. For instance, clinics were built with funds from NGOs. A good example is the Tschoda Gumunyu Clinic, which was sponsored by World Vision International with medicines and mosquito nets to counter malaria.

#### **A woman in the community also shared:**

Drilling water sources like boreholes is being done by NGOs in Gokwe North. For instance, OXFAM has drilled several boreholes and repaired those that were not functioning.

An area development facilitator also noted:

Gumunyu Tschoda Clinic has been improved with the supply of medicines, solar powered. So many boreholes have been drilled and solar powered to boost gardening projects and water sanitation

The research participants noted that NGOs in Gokwe North sponsored health and sanitation services by making access to clean water, addressing the issue of cholera, providing medicines and providing solar-powered clinics and boreholes. The NGOs' activities in Gokwe North contributed to poverty reduction through improving health, productivity and living conditions. Kachumi et al (2025) noted that NGOs such as the Churches Health Association of Zambia were key in funding health programmes in rural Zambia, but efforts of NGOs' interventions were hindered by a lack of resources, dependency syndrome, a lack of strategic planning and inadequate funding. Ibrahim (2024) noted that NGOs' poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria achieved little success owing to high levels of corruption, policy inconstancy, weak institutional capacity and poor implementation strategies. Sen (1999) argued that poverty is the deprivation of basic capabilities, not just a lack of income and access to clean water, which improves health and prevents water-borne diseases like cholera. Provision of medicines ensures treatment when people fall sick and addressing cholera outbreaks prevents illness and death. Nussbaum (2011) also noted that NGOs' health and sanitation services are key in poverty reduction as they enhance life, bodily health and integrity. In the foregoing analysis, NGOs' health and sanitation services are an important vehicle for poverty reduction in Gokwe North through prevention of diseases, reduced health care costs, improved productivity and well being of the people.

### **Provision and Support of Micro Projects**

The NGOs participated in providing micro-capital to support some small projects that are key to reducing poverty. The projects supported by NGOs in Gokwe North ranged from cattle, goats, poultry and piggery projects.

A community leader noted that:

*In area of Makotore village where I come from there are several children who were provided with houses by World Vision from scratch. They came and built houses for them when they discovered that sometimes the children were orphans without decent accommodation. They carried out their needs assessment process to see what was of great need to these children and then provide. Thus, how NGOs contributed to poverty reduction.*

An agricultural extension officer (Mudhumeni) in Gokwe North noted that:

*Livestock inoculation is also being done to reduce poverty. A case in is that of Nyamasaka, Makotore and Gandavaroyi Dip tanks that had been repaired by World Vision International. The NGOs had also provided insecticides and chemicals to be used to control livestock diseases and insects like tsetse fly which causes trypanosomiasis, anthrax, black lack and food and mouth diseases just to mention but a few.*

A Councillor in Gokwe Gumunyu Constituency noted that:

*NGOs in Gokwe North are sponsoring communities to curb poverty through providing capital for beneficiaries to buy goats, sheep and cattle. This goes a long way in reducing poverty*

Youth Development Officer noted that:

*To the youth and the disadvantaged people in the area, World Vision started goat projects for*

*them. Some got money to buy cows to start cattle rearing projects. This helped those without means to have cattle and goats to have them and hence bridged the gap between the haves and have nots. This is a positive contribution by the NGOs to curtail poverty.*

The research participants noted that NGOs in Gokwe North were critical in the construction of houses in villages for the orphans and vulnerable children, livestock inoculation, provision of financial capital for beneficiaries to buy goats, sheep and cattle, as well as the pioneering of the goat project for the youths and disadvantaged members of the community. These activities of NGOs help NGOs reduce poverty, improve livelihoods, support vulnerable groups and promote sustainable community development. Kabonga et al (2022) noted that, while NGOs are critical in initiating development, there is a need for a collaborative approach with other stakeholders if development is to be realised. Kabonga (2023) noted NGOs are important in assisting households to achieve assets, as indicated by the participant who noted that NGOs constructed proper houses for OVCs in rural villages. However, Mago et al (2015) noted that NGOs are failing to reach the poorest members of the community, despite their presence. Sen (1999) argued that development should be measured by people's capabilities, their real freedoms to do and be what they value. Hence, houses for OVCs increase the capability for safety, shelter and a stable life. Livestock inoculation protects income-generating resources, allows owners of the cattle the freedom to maintain sustainable livelihoods and the final provision of capital expands the capability to earn income. Therefore, these interventions enhance real freedom and opportunities, not just material wealth.

### **Food Security and Social Protection**

NGOs activities in Gokwe North support vulnerable households, orphans and disadvantaged members of the community through food assistance and social protection. One of the Agricultural Extension Officers noted that:

In times of drought, for example, in the year 2008, we saw several NGOs like CONCERN International coming to our area providing food to people. They donated beans, cooking oil, matemba and maize, meal- mealie to the people in need. With all these initiatives, one can conclude that NGOs played a pivotal role in reducing poverty in Gokwe North district.

#### **A Community leader noted that:**

Before the NGOs came, some families lost their relatives and loved ones due to hunger. But thanks to the NGOs that came and bailed us out of poverty.

#### **A local councillor noted that:**

NGOs food aid donations were politicized. The food aid is normally received by those whose political affiliations are known. When food donations come, they are hijacked by politicians through their proxies, who use food aid as an instrument for political mobilisation. Some members in the community never received food aid in 2008, even though the hunger outbreak was at its peak. Some community members were segregated along political lines.

The research participants highlighted that NGOs' activities were key in the provision of food aid, loss of lives due to hunger was witnessed in 2008 and the politicisation of food aid for political gain. The statements from research participants in the study highlight the challenges facing poverty reduction efforts, severe hunger, reliance on food relief and political

interference in food aid distribution, all of which contribute to hindering the effectiveness of poverty reduction by NGOs in Gokwe North. Chemkemoi and Kisimbi (2021) noted that in Kenya, there was no political interference as all donor-funded programmes were transparently accounted for. Ongesa et al (2014) differed significantly and noted that international donors and NGOs have a limited impact on Kenyan community development. In Sen (1999) food aid in Gokwe North is important but insufficient, because real poverty reduction requires enabling people to live lives they value. Nussbaum (2011) noted that true poverty reduction is about ensuring every individual can exercise their essential capabilities, not relying on food handouts. Both Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) highlight that poverty is multidimensional since poverty is not just a lack of finances, but a lack of freedom, opportunity and capabilities. Food aid relief saves lives but does not empower people long-term. Politicisation of food aid restricts freedom and equality, worsening deprivation. Considering the above, effective poverty reduction in Gokwe North should focus on enhancing capabilities through fair, transparent food distribution, agricultural development, as well as access to education and to health care

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study concludes that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play an important role in addressing poverty in rural communities such as Gokwe North through development programmes that focus on improving livelihoods, food security, income generation and community empowerment. These programmes often include agricultural support, training and savings groups and small-scale income-generating projects aimed at strengthening household resilience and improving living standards. Therefore, such interventions contribute to improving access to resources, enhancing skills and creating opportunities for rural households to participate in local activities. The findings also indicate that the long-term effectiveness of NGO programmes in reducing poverty is constrained by structural and contextual challenges. Key barriers include donor dependency, limited community involvement in programme design, poor coordination with government institutions, political interference and broader economic pressures such as inflation and market instability. These factors can weaken the sustainability of development initiatives and foster beneficiary dependency instead of promoting self reliance. Based on the findings, this study proposes four interconnected recommendations for enhancing NGO-led poverty reduction in Gokwe North. NGOs should transition to participatory, community-driven programming that includes sustainability planning and addresses structural poverty through capacity building, asset growth and livelihood diversification. They should also improve coordination by aligning with national and local development frameworks, partnering formally with government ministries and using district-level multi-stakeholder platforms to avoid duplication and scale efforts. To curb dependency, NGOs should substitute handouts with productive assets and support self-reliance through behavioural change initiatives and stronger savings groups that transition to formal finance. Governance and accountability should be improved via political insulation, transparent selection processes, independent grievance and monitoring systems and outcome-focused evaluation. The government should also invest in rural infrastructure and apply multidimensional poverty metrics aligned with the capability approach. Collectively, these recommendations recognise that effective poverty reduction requires participatory, well-coordinated and sustainable approaches that address structural constraints while empowering communities to lead their own development, consistent with Sen's vision of development as freedom. Most importantly, while NGOs remain critical actors in rural development in Zimbabwe, their programmes must move beyond short-term relief interventions toward sustainable, community-driven and capacity building approaches that empower rural populations to reduce poverty independently over the long term.

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