



## Evaluation of Donor-Funded NGO Projects in Tanzania: A Case Study of the Tupande Usambara Lushoto School-Based Livelihood Project

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Donor-funded projects complement government efforts to promote sustainable livelihoods. Assessing their effectiveness is essential for ensuring accountability, improving project implementation, and sustaining development outcomes. Although numerous studies have examined donor-funded project performance in other contexts, limited evidence exists on the effectiveness of donor-funded NGO projects in improving livelihoods in Lushoto District, Tanzania.

**Objective:** This study investigated the effectiveness of a donor-funded school-based livelihood project implemented by Tupande Usambara Lushoto in Tanzania.

**Method:** A qualitative approach was employed. Data were collected from 38 participants through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations.

**Results:** The findings showed improvements in food quality and timely meal delivery, although some students were dissatisfied with food portion sizes despite adequate supplies being provided to schools. School uniforms were distributed on time and met expected standards, whereas delays in the distribution of books, pens, and pencils disappointed students. Sports equipment was delivered on time and in good condition to Lukozi Primary School, while the other three schools received desktop computers and printers instead, based on requests from school management. Water tanks, desktop computers, and printers were delivered as planned, meeting expectations for scope, timing, and quality. However, the number of improved avocado tree seedlings supplied to schools was below the planned target, indicating implementation gaps. Overall, the project increased school attendance, improved hygiene, and enhanced students' well-being and happiness.

**Conclusion:** The project was generally effective in improving learning conditions and supporting school-based livelihoods in the targeted primary schools. However, implementation challenges remained, including inadequate food portions, delays in the distribution of learning materials by school management, limited provision of sports equipment, and insufficient tree seedlings on school premises.

**Unique Contribution:** The findings provide practical insights for NGOs, schools, donors, and other stakeholders on improving the implementation, monitoring, and sustainability of donor-funded livelihood projects beyond the funding period.

**Key Recommendation:** NGOs and school management should strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems, improve supervision of project implementation, and enhance collaboration with stakeholders to ensure the timely and equitable delivery of project benefits and sustain students' access to quality education.

**Keywords:** Performance, NGOs, Livelihood Project, School, Education



## INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are a collective of bodies distinct from government agencies and business enterprises. Their key characteristic is that they complement, supplement, and provide alternatives to government development efforts (Pearce, 2020). According to the United Nations, an NGO is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group organised at the local, national, or international level that is goal-oriented and driven by individuals with a common interest (United Nations, 2014). In line with the United Nations' definition, the United Republic of Tanzania, through its National NGO Policy (2001), defines an NGO as a voluntary association of individuals or organisations that is autonomous and not-for-profit, organised at the grassroots, national, or international level to promote legitimate economic, social, and/or cultural development, or to engage in lobbying and advocacy on issues of public interest or those affecting particular groups of individuals or organisations (URT, 2001).

Worldwide, NGOs implement diverse projects across sectors such as agriculture, natural resource management, environmental conservation, climate change, rural development, social empowerment, advocacy, and education (United Nations, 2014; IFAD, 2016). These projects are supported by donors to enable NGOs to address developmental challenges facing communities and complement government efforts (Lembani, 2021). To ensure that donor-funded projects achieve their intended objectives effectively, NGOs are expected to conduct continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation are undertaken using performance indicators during project implementation and after project completion to assess progress, determine the effectiveness of interventions, and enhance sustainability. This process enables project teams and stakeholders to gain insights into the extent to which project goals are achieved during implementation and beyond the project's lifespan. Consequently, project evaluation provides evidence that can inform adjustments to project plans and implementation strategies (Lembani, 2021).

A common purpose of NGOs is to provide essential services to those in need. Many organisations have reached poor populations, worked in remote areas, demonstrated innovation, and, in some cases, performed better than government institutions (IFAD, 2016). NGOs have also established close relationships with beneficiaries, particularly poor people living in rural areas. Some NGOs are formed by poor or vulnerable groups themselves, while others possess strong expertise in participatory approaches that engage stakeholders and beneficiaries throughout all phases of project implementation (Ndombi et al., 2020). Consequently, NGOs initiate projects to implement activities that contribute to achieving their intended goals and outcomes. According to Lembani (2021) and Ahmed (2023), a project is a temporary development intervention undertaken to deliver specific products or services to beneficiaries. However, projects require continuous monitoring of progress and efficiency so that implementation plans and strategies can be adjusted when necessary.

Project performance refers to the extent to which project outputs and outcomes satisfy the allocated budget, implementation schedule, operational specifications, technical requirements, and the needs or expectations of beneficiaries (Ali et al., 2018; Chen & Lin, 2018). Ahmed (2023) and Zhu et al. (2021) identify several dimensions of project performance, including cost



performance, schedule performance, quality performance, scope performance, process performance, stakeholder influence, time performance, financial performance, safety performance, client satisfaction, and sustainability.

Depending on the nature of the project and its intended goals and outcomes, researchers use different dimensions to assess project performance. For example, Wang et al. (2021) assessed project performance using process performance and stakeholder influence, while Glodzinski (2019) focused on quality and scope performance. Khosravi and Afshari (2011) evaluated project performance in terms of cost, time, quality, environmental performance, and client satisfaction. Assad et al. (2020) examined project performance using cost and schedule performance, whereas Gupta et al. (2019) assessed performance based on cost, time, and future potential. These studies demonstrate that project performance dimensions vary according to the objectives and expected outcomes of a project. Likewise, projects implemented by different organisations in different contexts may influence different aspects of performance. However, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the school-based livelihood project implemented by Tupande Usambara Lushoto between 2024 and 2025 in Lukozi and Rangwi Wards.

To address this knowledge gap, the present study evaluated the effectiveness of the project's implementation across four government primary schools—two in Lukozi Ward and two in Rangwi Ward—using five performance dimensions: schedule performance, satisfaction performance, scope performance, time performance, and process performance. Specifically, the study assessed the effectiveness of the school-based livelihood project implemented by Tupande Usambara Lushoto. The project was funded by Vastenactie (Dutch Lenten Campaign) with a grant of USD 35,000 and implemented over a 12-month period from December 2024 to November 2025.

This study provides NGOs, schools, donors, and local communities with evidence on the effectiveness of the project. The findings also inform planning for the sustainability of interventions beyond the project's lifespan and provide lessons for designing and implementing similar projects in the future. Furthermore, the study contributes to the achievement of Tanzania's Development Vision 2050 and Sustainable Development Goal 4, both of which advocate for quality education for all.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopted the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) to explain the effectiveness of the school-based livelihood project in supporting primary school students from poor households with limited access to essential resources. The theory was first articulated by Edith Penrose (2009). RBT emphasises the importance of an organisation's resources, diversification strategies, and opportunities for improving efficiency and achieving competitive advantage. The theory assumes that organisations can achieve their objectives by effectively coordinating a bundle of resources (Penrose, 2009). These resources include skilled personnel, financial resources, and physical assets such as equipment (Penrose, 2009; Kozlenkova et al., 2014). In this study, the theory provides the conceptual basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of the school-based livelihood project.



## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Lukozi and Rangwi Wards of Lushoto District, Tanzania. The study area is located in the West Usambara Mountains of Tanga Region. It was selected because Tupande Usambara Lushoto implemented a one-year donor-funded livelihood project in four government primary schools—Lukozi and Tiku Primary Schools in Lukozi Ward, and Rangwi and Kilanga Primary Schools in Rangwi Ward—to address challenges faced by students from poor households, including inadequate learning materials and limited access to the school feeding programme. Evaluating the project's performance was therefore essential to inform the project's exit strategy and improve the implementation of similar interventions in the future.

The study employed a cross-sectional research design using a qualitative approach to collect qualitative data. A purposive sample of 32 students (boys and girls) from the four primary schools participated in four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with one FGD conducted in each school. In addition, interviews were conducted with the four head teachers of the participating government primary schools and two project staff members from Tupande Usambara Lushoto, the NGO responsible for implementing the project. Consequently, the total study sample comprised 38 participants.

An observation method was also employed to verify tangible project outputs, including planted avocado trees, desktop computers, printers, school uniforms, exercise books, and water tanks. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. Similar concepts and themes were grouped into categories and presented using frequencies and percentages where appropriate. The findings were further presented thematically, supported by participants' quotations and descriptive summaries.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Distribution of research participants based on their gender**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Method of gathering information</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
Head teachers	Interviews	2	2	4
Pupils	FGDs	15	17	32
Project officers	Interviews	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>38</b>

The study gathered in-depth information from head teachers from 4 primary schools, the 2 project officers and 32 students as indicated in Table 1. Head teachers and project officers participated in interviews while students participated in focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs included girls and boys in order to provide opportunities for all students to give their views regardless of their gender.



**Table 2: Meals, stationery and uniform support provided by the Tupande Usambara Lushoto against expectations**

Type of support	Expected target students	Actual support provided to students
Meal per day	400 Pupils	300 students from Tiku, Rangwi and Kilanga Primary schools had access to meals on 5 days of the week (100%)  100 students from Lukozi primary school had access to a meal 4 days a week (80%)
School uniforms: skirts, shirts, socks, sweater and shoes	400 students	100% of students received uniforms
Stationery for one year, including exercise books, pens, pencils	400 students provided stationeries	100% implementation in Tiku and Rangwi primary schools.  Students provided occasional support of stationery in Lukozi and Kilanga primary schools.

The Organisation improved learning conditions by providing meals, uniforms, and stationery to 400 students (100 from each of four primary schools: Lukozi, Tiku, Rangwi, and Kilanga). The study found that students in Tiku, Rangwi, and Kilanga received one meal per school day, five days a week (100%), whereas students in Lukozi received meals on only four days per week (Table 2). This variation was not adequately explained by the school management, despite the Organisation having provided funds for meal preparation. Consequently, schedule performance was inconsistent across the participating schools.

During the Focus Group Discussions, students acknowledged the value of the school feeding programme but expressed dissatisfaction with the quantity of food, although meals were served on time. As one student stated:

*“We thank Tupande Usambara Lushoto for providing us with food at school. However, we are not satisfied with the quantity of food we receive.”* (FGD, December 2025)

These findings suggest that, although meal provision was timely, beneficiary satisfaction with food portions was low. Students also explained that many parents, due to poverty, were unable to contribute food to the school feeding programme as required by government policy.

The Organisation assigned school management the responsibility of distributing stationery to targeted beneficiaries after supplies had been delivered. However, distribution was delayed, and in some cases, stationery was allocated to non-targeted students. As one head teacher explained:



*“Some exercise books were given to the best-performing students instead of the intended beneficiaries. The support was meant for students from extremely poor families who could not afford educational expenses.”* (Interview, December 2025)

These findings indicate weaknesses in the distribution process despite the timely provision of learning materials by the Organisation.

**Table 3: Sports and ICT equipment supported by the Organisation for the schools**

Type of equipment	Expected support	Actual support provided
1 desktop computer and 1 printer	3 primary schools	100% implementation. Support provided to 3 primary schools, namely Tiku, Rangwi and Kilanga
Sports facilities (jerseys, footballs and netballs)	4 primary schools	Support provided to 1 primary school (Lukozi), equivalent to 25%

A total of four (4) primary schools were supported with teaching, learning and sports facilities/equipment. The management of three primary schools supported by the Organisation with computer desktops and printers in Tiku, Kilanga, and Rangwi was carried out by the school authorities. The ICT equipment support aimed to improve teaching and learning (Table 2). The project was fully implemented in all three primary schools. Consequently, the provision of ICT equipment was completed within the Organisation's scope of coverage. When interviewed, the head teachers expressed satisfaction with the computers and printers supplied, stating that these resources have helped to enhance learning and teaching. For instance, one of the head teachers said that;

*“A desktop computer and printer we received from Tupande Usambara Lushoto enable our school to prepare tests and exams. We also receive and send information and reports through the internet”* (Interview, December 2025).

For Lukozi Primary School, the government already provided the school with equipment, including a printer, photocopier and computer to improve the learning and teaching environment. When interviewed, the project coordinator from Tupande Usambara Lushoto demonstrated that they provided targeted schools with computers and printers on time in accordance with the project plan. Although schools received computers and printers as agreed, they are facing some challenges in operating and repairing the equipment.

The Organisations intended to provide sports equipment to 4 targeted schools to build the talent of students in sports. The study revealed that among the 4 schools, one school provided sports equipment, including jerseys, footballs and netballs, which is equivalent to 25% of the project scope of coverage (Table 3). The head of Lukozi Primary School agreed that sports equipment was provided on time, and the process was followed. Students also demonstrated satisfaction with the sports equipment provided by the Organisation. During FGDs, one student was quoted saying that;



“..... nowadays, we enjoy sports. Most boys play football, and girls play netball since we have sports facilities” (FGDs, December 2025).

The study found that students wearing clean uniforms, supported by the project, were happy.

**Table 4: Extent of support related to environmental conservation, climate resilience and water accessibility**

<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Expected support</b>	<b>Provided support</b>
Four (4) primary schools	Supply of water tanks (3000 litres volume)	4 water tanks (1 for each school)	4 water tanks (100%)
	Distribution of tree seedlings	1,000 seedlings planted in school-based areas	585 Avocado tree seedlings planted (58.5%)
Primary school students and the community	Environmental education and climate change awareness	Education was provided to 2,799 students, including 1,380 boys and 1,420 girls from 4 primary schools, and 30 community members, including 15 males and 15 females	100% of targeted students and parents reached by environmental education
Adjacent communities	Distribution of tree seedlings	3,000 seedlings planted in community-based areas	3000 Avocado tree seedlings planted (100%)

The Organisation provided four water tanks - one to each participating school- achieving 100% of the planned target. The tanks support cooking, sanitation, and irrigation of planted trees through harvested rainwater and community water supplies. As the Project Coordinator explained:

*“The negative impacts of climate change have increased the need for water tanks for cooking and watering planted trees. We connected the tanks to harvest rainwater and store water from community pipeline systems.”* (Interview, December 2025)

The project also promoted environmental conservation through tree planting. Of the 1,000 tree seedlings planned for the four schools, 585 (58.5%) were planted on school premises because of limited planting space. The remaining 3,000 improved Hass avocado seedlings (100%) were planted in nearby community areas. The improved Hass variety was selected for its climate resilience, early maturity, nutritional value, and contribution to soil conservation. Although the school heads expressed satisfaction with the intervention, they noted potential risks from



livestock and drought. Overall, the project delivered quality seedlings during the rainy season, supporting successful establishment and climate change adaptation.

In addition, the project delivered environmental conservation and climate change education to 2,799 students (1,380 boys and 1,420 girls) across the four schools, achieving 100% of the planned target (Table 4). Climate change adaptation and environmental conservation training was also provided to 30 parents to strengthen community awareness and resilience against environmental challenges such as droughts, floods, erratic rainfall, pests, diseases, and land degradation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The project provided books, pens, and uniforms to improve students' access to education. However, the distribution of stationery was not effectively managed, as school authorities delayed replacing books, pens, and pencils after the initial supplies had been exhausted. Except for Lukozi Primary School, the other schools demonstrated better process performance, with no complaints regarding access to stationery. Although students appreciated the school feeding programme, they expressed dissatisfaction with the quantity of food provided. Nevertheless, the project contributed to improved school attendance among beneficiary students. These findings are consistent with Enyia and Kaegon (2025), who reported that donor-funded NGO interventions positively influenced educational attainment in Unity Schools, Nigeria.

Desktop computers and printers were delivered on schedule to Tiku, Rangwi, and Kilanga Primary Schools, which previously lacked adequate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities. The equipment has improved school administration by facilitating the preparation of examinations, storage of records, and internet-based communication.

The coverage of sports equipment was limited, as only Lukozi Primary School received jerseys, footballs, and netballs. The other three schools opted to receive computers and printers instead of sports equipment during project planning. At Lukozi Primary School, however, the sports equipment enhanced students' motivation to attend school, promoted social interaction, and increased their enjoyment of school activities. These findings agree with Lesage et al. (2012), who reported that Right To Play has successfully promoted sports in developing countries, contributing to children's happiness, social cohesion, and talent development. However, the findings differ from Busa and Nnamdi (2025), who found that although donor-funded initiatives significantly improved student enrolment and school infrastructure in northeastern Nigeria, they had limited impact on student retention and addressing socio-cultural barriers, including inadequate sports promotion. These differences suggest that the effectiveness of donor-funded projects varies according to the nature of interventions and implementation capacity.

The project also supported environmental conservation and climate change adaptation through timely tree planting and environmental education. The improved Hass avocado seedlings distributed are expected to produce fruit within approximately three years while providing shade, controlling soil erosion, and serving as windbreaks to protect school infrastructure. These



findings are consistent with Somwaru (2016), who reported that environmental education programmes implemented by the Suriname Conservation Foundation enhanced environmental awareness and biodiversity conservation. In addition, the water tanks supplied under the project improved access to clean water for cooking, sanitation, and irrigation of planted trees.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that the Tupande Usambara Lushoto School-Based Livelihood Project was generally effective in improving livelihoods and learning conditions in the four participating primary schools - Lukozi, Tiku, Rangwi, and Kilanga. The project performed well in terms of schedule performance, time performance, and beneficiary satisfaction by providing school meals, learning materials, ICT equipment, water tanks, and improved avocado seedlings that supported education, environmental conservation, and climate change adaptation.

However, some implementation gaps were identified, including delays in the distribution of replacement stationery, limited provision of sports equipment, inadequate food portions, and insufficient tree seedlings on school premises. These shortcomings were mainly associated with weaknesses in needs assessment, supervision, and project implementation. The findings support the Resource-Based Theory, which emphasises that effective utilisation of financial, human, and physical resources is essential for achieving organisational objectives and improving project performance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends that:

1. Tupande Usambara Lushoto should strengthen its Monitoring and Evaluation Unit by establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that project resources reach the intended beneficiaries and are used effectively.
2. The Organisation should collaborate closely with Community Development Officers from Lushoto District Council throughout the project cycle, including the exit phase, to enhance supervision and sustain project benefits beyond the funding period.
3. School management and parents should strengthen collaboration to ensure that project support is distributed fairly and reaches the intended beneficiaries.
4. School communities and neighbouring residents should work together to protect planted trees from livestock, while students should continue participating in tree watering and maintenance.
5. Future projects should consider students' additional needs, including school bags and increased food rations, based on beneficiary feedback.
6. Tupande Usambara Lushoto and other development partners should extend sports support to Tiku, Rangwi, and Kilanga Primary Schools by providing footballs, netballs, jerseys, and other sporting equipment.



### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' contributions**

Dr. Emmanuel Paul Mzingula and Yassin H. Kibungi conceived the study, including the design, Said Msagati and Abubakari Kigombola collated the data. Dr. Emmanuel Paul Mzingula and Yassin H. Kibungi handled the analysis and interpretation of data, while the initial manuscript was drafted by Dr. Emmanuel Paul Mzingula. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### **Data availability statement**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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