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The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations
in Rural Development in the Gambia: The Case Study
of the United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo"

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Dedication

My Thesis is Dedicated to My Late father and my beloved Husband

To my ***late father***, your blessings and prayers had been for me to succeed in everything in life. Though your sudden demise left a wide gap in my life, the values you instilled in me have to a meaningful life. Your love, daily struggles, care and support remain the greatest memories that gave me the determination to pursue my desired goals, one of them being quality education which I have achieved to this far, also within this Master's course. This moment fills me with gratitude to you Daddy, you have been my inspiration and will forever be. Although you are not here today to witness this greatest achievement, I have you forever in my prayers. May Jannah be your resting place.

To my ***beloved husband, Mr Badjie***, you supported me not only as a husband, but you fill the gap of loving father, a brother and the best friend. Thank you for being my source of strength, in the happy and difficult times I went through while writing this thesis. For your emotional and moral support, for your prayers and patience throughout this entire experience. I am truly blessed to have you as my partner. My love and appreciation goes back to you.

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ABSTRACT

Development is one of the most favored words in the contemporary world, where peoples' well-being and way of life are perceived to be advanced in various aspects including economic, social, political, and cultural. One branch of development is Rural development, defined by Lembani (2020) as the collective process of improving the economic well-being and self-realization of people outside urbanized areas, or areas with lower population density, less social differentiation, and a slow rate of social change.

In the Gambia, the problem of micronutrient deficiency has and continues to be a public health burden predominantly affecting women and children (NANA, 2018). Studies in Gambia by Cost of Hunger in Africa (SGHA, 2018) posit that malnutrition occurs as a result of micronutrient and undernutrition deficiency and it has great implications for health, labour force and education. Moreover, malnutrition has contributed to mortality of under-five at 50 percent especially in poor rural areas in the Gambia (WHO report, 2000). Despite intervention efforts by government, populations in rural communities struggle to sustain

themselves and are caught up in cycles of poverty, hunger, and social inequality. The lack of adequate government resources and the increasing participation of international and local NGOs in alleviating poverty for rural communities mandated United Purpose (UP) NGO to intervene with the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” Project (BTM). This project was launched on 1st of August 2017 targeting five regions in the Gambia: Central River Region (CRR), Upper River Region (URR), Lower River Region (LRR), North Bank Region (NBR) and West Coast Region (WCR). The project’s broader aim was to provide an increased and diversified production, more robust value chains, better market access, and consumption of fortified and high micronutrient foods that will help in reducing undernutrition and poverty among the vulnerable populations.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to understand rural development, connecting it to the role of NGO in poverty eradication and reduction of micronutrient deficiency of women and children through the sustainable and integrated approaches to food fortification of the BTM Project. The study employs the qualitative research method of critical document review to understand the socio-economic impact of the project.

Findings from the project report indicated that achievements have been made as well as challenges are being faced by the project. The project in overall has achieved a significant reduction of undernutrition and poverty of vulnerable populations in rural Gambia. This is said to be achieved through an increment in reduction of malnourished children, wasted children, and reduction in vitamin A deficiency and anaemia in women and children. Findings showed an increase in nutritionally diversified and more resilient agricultural products being realised by smallholder farmers. Evidence is shown on the amount of yield gained from fast growing crops enhancing more food production capacity in its nutritive value. The project led to health benefits, income generation activities from the sale of crops and impact on reduction of poverty and food insecurity. Farmers behaviour on hygiene and sanitation was a challenge in nutrition promotion as well as adapting to new food varieties and modern farming tools.

The use of social media was encouraged as a community base initiative, a platform to raise awareness on the project, its objectives and methods. This enhances link and relationship between producers and buyers which was difficult to achieve prior to the project implementation. Gender mainstreaming was a cross cutting issue the project targeted more

women than men and this could hinder the full involvement and participation of women if their male counterparts didn't give them the go ahead as family heads to participate. Moreover, low involvement of men can lead to low awareness of the project's importance and impact because women empowerment on the side of men will be difficult and women's participation is key in every development-led initiative. Among other challenges from the findings include the issue of fencing for the gardens, inadequate staff for supervision of the work done. Most importantly, training was conducted for women and mother groups on best cooking and feeding practices which were followed by cooking demonstrations to ensure there was full understanding of what had been taught.

The study contributes to credible information on the growing debate and critiques on the role of NGOs in the given context. It will relatively unpack and assess through the case study of the BTM project of UP NGO in its areas of intervention to enhance poverty reduction. The study will attempt to relate to the large literature that has emerged over the years to explore possible contributions of NGOs to the rural development of rural Gambia.

ABSTRACT IN ITALIAN

Sviluppo è una delle parole più gettonate nel mondo contemporaneo, dove il benessere e lo stile di vita dei popoli sono percepiti come avanzati sotto vari aspetti, tra cui quello economico, sociale, politico e culturale. Un ramo dello sviluppo è lo sviluppo rurale, definito da Lembani (2020) come il processo collettivo di miglioramento del benessere economico e dell'autorealizzazione delle persone al di fuori delle aree urbanizzate, o delle aree con minore densità di popolazione, minore differenziazione sociale e un lento tasso di cambiamento sociale.

In Gambia, il problema della carenza di micronutrienti è e continua a essere un onere per la salute pubblica che colpisce prevalentemente donne e bambini (NANA, 2018). Gli studi condotti in Gambia da Cost of Hunger in Africa (SGHA, 2018) affermano che la malnutrizione si verifica come risultato della carenza di micronutrienti e della sottoalimentazione e ha grandi implicazioni per la salute, la forza lavoro e l'istruzione. Inoltre, la malnutrizione ha contribuito alla mortalità dei bambini al di sotto dei cinque anni, pari al 50%, soprattutto nelle aree rurali povere del Gambia (rapporto dell'OMS, 2000). Nonostante gli sforzi di intervento da parte del governo, le popolazioni delle comunità rurali lottano per sostenersi e sono intrappolate in cicli di povertà, fame e disuguaglianza sociale. La mancanza di risorse governative adeguate e la crescente partecipazione di ONG internazionali e locali nell'alleviare la povertà delle comunità rurali ha spinto l'ONG United Purpose (UP) a intervenire con il progetto "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" (BTM). Questo progetto è stato lanciato il 1° agosto 2017 e si rivolge a cinque regioni del Gambia: Central River Region (CRR), Upper River Region (URR), Lower River Region (LRR), North Bank Region (NBR) e West Coast Region (WCR). L'obiettivo generale del progetto era quello di fornire una produzione maggiore e diversificata, catene del valore più solide, un migliore accesso al mercato e il consumo di alimenti fortificati e ad alto contenuto di micronutrienti che contribuiranno a ridurre la denutrizione e la povertà tra le popolazioni vulnerabili.

Pertanto, l'obiettivo di questa tesi è comprendere lo sviluppo rurale, collegandolo al ruolo delle ONG nell'eliminazione della povertà e nella riduzione della carenza di micronutrienti di donne e bambini attraverso gli approcci sostenibili e integrati alla

fortificazione alimentare del Progetto BTM. Lo studio impiega il metodo di ricerca qualitativa della revisione critica dei documenti per comprendere l'impatto socio-economico del progetto.

I risultati del rapporto sul progetto indicano che sono stati raggiunti dei risultati e che il progetto sta affrontando delle sfide. Nel complesso, il progetto ha ottenuto una significativa riduzione della denutrizione e della povertà delle popolazioni vulnerabili nelle zone rurali del Gambia. Questo risultato è stato ottenuto attraverso un aumento della riduzione dei bambini malnutriti, dei bambini deperiti e della carenza di vitamina A e dell'anemia nelle donne e nei bambini. I risultati hanno mostrato un aumento dei prodotti agricoli diversificati dal punto di vista nutrizionale e più resistenti realizzati dai piccoli agricoltori. È stata dimostrata la quantità di resa ottenuta grazie a colture a crescita rapida che hanno migliorato la capacità di produzione alimentare nel suo valore nutritivo. Il progetto ha portato a benefici per la salute, attività di generazione di reddito dalla vendita dei raccolti e impatto sulla riduzione della povertà e dell'insicurezza alimentare. Il comportamento degli agricoltori in materia di igiene e servizi igienici ha rappresentato una sfida per la promozione della nutrizione e per l'adattamento alle nuove varietà alimentari e ai moderni strumenti agricoli.

L'uso dei social media è stato incoraggiato come iniziativa di base per la comunità, una piattaforma per far conoscere il progetto, i suoi obiettivi e i suoi metodi. Questo migliora il legame e la relazione tra produttori e acquirenti, che era difficile da raggiungere prima dell'attuazione del progetto. L'integrazione della dimensione di genere è stata una questione trasversale: il progetto si rivolgeva a un numero maggiore di donne rispetto agli uomini e questo poteva ostacolare il pieno coinvolgimento e la partecipazione delle donne se le loro controparti maschili non davano loro il permesso di partecipare in quanto capifamiglia. Inoltre, il basso coinvolgimento degli uomini può portare a una scarsa consapevolezza dell'importanza e dell'impatto del progetto, perché l'empowerment delle donne da parte degli uomini sarà difficile e la partecipazione delle donne è fondamentale in ogni iniziativa di sviluppo. Tra le altre sfide emerse dai risultati vi sono la questione delle recinzioni per gli orti e l'inadeguatezza del personale per la supervisione del lavoro svolto. L'aspetto più importante è che sono stati condotti corsi di formazione per le donne e i gruppi di madri sulle

migliori pratiche di cucina e alimentazione, seguiti da dimostrazioni di cucina per garantire la piena comprensione di ciò che è stato insegnato.

Lo studio contribuisce a fornire informazioni credibili sul crescente dibattito e sulle critiche al ruolo delle ONG nel contesto attuale. Attraverso il caso di studio del progetto BTM dell'ONG UP, lo studio si propone di analizzare e valutare le aree di intervento per la riduzione della povertà. Lo studio cercherà di entrare in relazione con l'ampia letteratura emersa nel corso degli anni per esplorare i possibili contributi delle ONG allo sviluppo rurale del Gambia.

Keywords: Keywords: NGO, Nutrition, Rural development, Biofortification, United Purpose, Nutritional improvement, Modern and traditional farming

ABBREVIATION

ALVs:	African leafy vegetables
AAITG:	Action Aid International Gambia
BTM:	Baluu Tim Maring Ngo
CCM:	Catholic Charity Mission
CRR:	Central River Region
CUSO:	Canadian University Services Oversea
FFHC:	Freedom From Hunger Campaign
GFPA:	Gambia Family Planning Association
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
IMAM:	Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
LRR:	Low River Region
NaNA:	National Nutrition Agency
NBR:	North Bank Region
NDP:	National Development Plan
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
PM:	Pearl Millet
SAPs:	Structural Adjustment Program
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
UP:	United Purpose
URR:	Upper River Region
WB:	World Bank
WCR:	West Coast Region
WHO:	World Health Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Development is one of the most favoured words in the contemporary world, where peoples' well-being and way of life are perceived to be advanced in various aspects including economic, social, political and cultural. One branch of development is rural development, defined by (Lembani et al., 2020) as the collective process of improving the economic well-being and self-realization of people outside urbanized areas, or areas with lower population density, less social differentiation, and a slow rate of social change. These improvements can come from various geographical spaces ranging from rural to urban through state agencies or NGOs both local and international.

Rural development in Gambia is promoted by both international and local NGO's in different dimensions such as the catholic charity mission (CCM), Freedom From Hunger Campaign (FFHC) and GFPA, Action Aid International Gambia (AAITG) and other NGOs help in filling government's gap of rural intervention through their engagement in different projects and programs that include providing emergency relief to vulnerable communities during emergency, strengthening food security to tackle malnutrition, enhancing health care services and providing education opportunities for children respectively.

In the Gambia, the evolution of International NGOs (INGOs) began in the mid-1970s and 1980s. During this time, INGOs such as AAITG, and Canadian University Services Oversea (CUSO) began their operation by taking good social service delivery roles through implementation of development projects and programs. This was at a time when the Gambia experienced a severe agricultural output shortfall due to the Sahelian drought. The INGOs took a gap filling role in the area of health and education as well to complement government's efforts in enhancing development and eradicating poverty in the Gambia.

In this thesis, the study will specifically focus on rural development promoted by NGOs through a biofortification project to understand the socio-economic implications of the targeted populations, placing specific emphasis on women and children. In particular, this study explores a project, called Ballu Tim Maring Ngo, promoted by the United Purpose Organization (UP) and funded through the World Bank.

UP is one of the leading NGOs in the Gambia, founded in 1992. It works with various relief charities and other development NGOs to improve poor people's welfare and living standards, especially the rural communities. Its focus is to meet the basic requirements of remote villages and communities that are distant from specific amenities such as schools, running water, pharmacies and hospitals, and agricultural production. As a result, BTM is one of the many initiatives they bring to the rural communities in the Gambia. The BTM project represents a concrete example of the possible alternatives to allow community members in rural Gambia, especially women, improve their access to the economic and social resources (United Purpose, 2022). The BTM, which means "food sufficiency and sustainability" taken from the Mandinka language, is a four years project launched on the 1st of August 2017 and officially implemented on the 1st of February 2017 by UP organization. It targets 18,000 rural households in the Gambia's five regions: Upper River Region, Central River Region, North Bank Region, Lower River Region and West Coast Region.

The project's overall objective is to reduce undernutrition and poverty among the vulnerable populations (especially women & children of 5 years), by strengthening sustainable access to and consumption of fortified foods. The BTM project aims at providing an increased, diversified production, more robust value chains, better market access, and consumption of fortified and high micronutrient foods. The project also aims to strengthen the enabling environment for expanding conventional food fortification in the Gambia. These two objectives will be achieved through the three major Action activities and which include:

1. Increased, nutritionally diversified, and more resilient agricultural production for targeted smallholder farmers
2. viable gender-sensitive agri-business and processing opportunities identified, developed, and implemented
3. Community nutritional health education linked to fortified foods.

This is done through the bio-fortification of Orange - flesh sweet potato, African leafy vegetables, and Pearl Millet.

There is long and rich empirical evidence on the role of NGOs in rural development, while evidence suggests that NGOs vary in their types, operations, impact, priorities, and modalities (Rodrigues & Amaral, 2015). For example, NGOs operating in the Gambia come in various forms and focus on different areas of rural development (Fyvie & Ager, 1999). Some NGOs concentrate on advancing environmentally friendly farming methods and expanding farmers' access to markets whilst others focus on expanding access to health care and education especially for women and children. Poverty is a leading obstacle to development in the Gambia and rural Gambia is not an exception. Despite government's efforts and interventions from numerous works of life, the Gambia, especially rural areas still struggle with underdevelopment since the well-being and life of the inhabitants are far reaching improvement. People in rural Gambia still struggle to sustain themselves and thus become trapped in poverty. This has become alarming and has led to other social menaces such as hunger, social inequality and injustice, health issues, poor education and thus leading to low development at rural level. These situations are prolonged because of rural inhabitants' reliance on subsistence farming, poor infrastructure and lack of basic amenities. NGOs have been crucial in improving rural development in the Gambia, as they run independently from the government. They receive financial support from donor agencies and help rural people access economic, social and cultural support in the form of access to food security, healthcare, education and clean water programs.

Despite social interventions from various dimensions, many countries still battle with underdevelopment, with evidence that peoples' life and well-being are far from improved. This might seem overreaching or exaggerating. More specifically, populations in rural communities face serious issues that undermine the quality of life they ought to have. For instance, in the Gambia, rural communities struggle to sustain daily livelihoods and are caught up in cyclic poverty, hunger, social inequality and social injustice. These situations are perpetuated because of the over-reliance on diminishing subsistence farming, poor infrastructure and lack of basic social amenities. NGO' have been instrumental in improving rural development in the nation in this situation (MOTIE, 2019; OECD/FAO, 2016). To put it in perspective, NGOs are organizations that run independently from the government and are often financed by private donors or foreign aid groups while relying on state power for

approval of their actions. They are vital in helping rural people access food security, healthcare, education and clean water programs.

Further, Abiddin and colleagues (2022) highlight that NGOs face resource constraints and other challenges in supporting rural development depending on their area of intervention (Abiddin et al., 2022). For instance, despite the role of NGOs as drivers of development in local communities in the Gambia, they encounter several challenges. Sustainability is a significant issue because many NGOs in the Gambia rely on outside financing, which could be restricted or discontinued at any time (Fiah, 1987). There are also coordination issues between different NGOs, government agencies, private organizations and local communities which can lead to duplication of efforts and wastage of resources. Furthermore, there is need to ensure that NGO's interventions are culturally appropriate and sustainable (MOTIE, 2019). Whilst NGOs are actively involved in championing and supporting rural development, research is limited on the roles that NGOs play in rural development in the Gambia that take care of the specificities of local contexts.

From the above sections, the role of NGOs is extensively discussed in general terms in connection to rural development. Thus, it is crucial to bring the discussion back to the subject, which is the case explored through this study. This dissertation is motivated by the limited extant literature on the role of NGOs in rural development in the Gambia considering local space. Majority of the existing literature has focused chiefly on NGOs and their participation in rural health service delivery, rural tourism activities, and mentoring services in Agriculture (Barrett & Browne, 1989; Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011; Sillah & Adesopo, 2022). Therefore, there is a need for evidence that provides an understanding of the socio-economic roles that NGOs play in rural development in The Gambia through biofortification initiatives.

This dissertation is crucial to the researcher of local development seeking answers to social problems and development issues of contexts. It is motivated by the researcher's desire to contribute to the debate on the socio-economic role of NGOs in rural development in the Gambia with a territorial focus. Over the years, NGOs for example; World Food Program, United Nations Development Program, and United Purpose have assumed active roles in improving rural people's living standards and livelihoods. Local and international NGOs have constantly been recognized for their unique capacity and relentless efforts to reach the

local communities and their needs NGO's complement government's efforts to decentralize projects and programs in health, agriculture, education and other social services. Taking cognizance of the limited studies by Gambian scholars, the findings from this study will fill the literature gaps and provide current focus on the growing debate, critiques, and misconceptions about NGOs' role in this given subject and, most importantly, make use of the available literature that has evolved in recent years, exploring alternative contribution of NGOs in rural intervention. The study findings will lay a framework for further future studies of shifting NGO socio-spatial dynamics.

Therefore, the main objective of the study is to explore the role the UP NGO play in addressing socio-economic problems in rural Gambia and its relational perspective on rural development. Specifically, the study used the United Purpose's project under the theme "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo " as a case study. The researcher will evaluate the impact of the project through a critical document review enumerating future recommendations.

Thus, using this case, the researcher deemed it appropriate to approach it from a socioeconomic perspective. This will allow the researcher to understand the social and economic development of people in rural Gambia through the "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project. The United Purpose's intervention was to increase the nutritional value of women and children in rural areas through the biofortification of food produce and economic empowerment. Thus, to fully comprehend this situation and the project's role in improving the economic and social situation, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" initiative of the United Purpose affected people's social and economic situation in the five targeted rural areas in the Gambia?
2. What were the challenges confronting the United Purpose while attempting to advance people's economic and social situation in the targeted rural territories in the Gambia and how these identified challenges were overcome?
3. How were the targeted beneficiaries in the five selected regions involved in the "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project?

To answer these questions, the following objectives have been set:

1. To examine how the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” initiative of the United Purpose has affected people’s social and economic situation in the five targeted rural areas in the Gambia.
2. To identify the challenges confronting the United Purpose while attempting to advance people’s economic and social situation in rural Gambia and how these identified obstacles were overcome.
3. To know the ways targeted beneficiaries in the five selected regions were involved in the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” project.

Thesis structure

The theoretical foundation is laid forth in Chapter 1, which also provides an ample survey of the literature on the subject of the study. This literature review identifies the most important theories, concepts, and prior discoveries while critically analysing the present state of knowledge on the topic. Additionally, it creates a theoretical framework that acts as the study’s conceptual framework.

The research background and the study’s context and relevance are highlighted in Chapter 2 to set the scene. The problem statement, which outlines the precise problem or knowledge gap that the research attempts to fill, is also included. This chapter also describes the goals that must be accomplished as well as the research questions that serve as the investigation’s compass.

The subject of research methods is covered in Chapter 3. This chapter explains the study’s data collection procedures, analysis methods, and research strategy. It clarifies the overarching strategy and supports the methodologies picked, ensuring the objectivity and validity of the research procedure.

The results and discussion are presented in Chapter 4. It displays the empirical findings from the data analysis and contextualizes them in relation to the study’s aims and questions. This chapter thoroughly explores and analyzes the facts, their implications, trends, and linkages.

The thesis is concluded in Chapter 5, which summarizes the key results and their importance. It also highlights any limitations or difficulties encountered during the research process in

order to acknowledge the study's limits. Additionally, depending on the findings of the research, this chapter offers suggestions for further study or practical applications, furthering the body of knowledge in the area.

CHAPTER 1: Understanding Non-Governmental Organisations in rural development. A LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature relevant to the subject of NGO intervention in rural development. Thus, the research gathered significant amounts of literature from global, regional, and national levels to establish a gap in the existing literature on the subject. Another important area discussed in this chapter is the theoretical framework that guides in describing the role of NGOs in the Gambia paying specific attention to the United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project. This allows the researcher to explore the implications this project had on rural territories in the Gambia.

1.1. Understanding Non-Governmental Organisations

Non-Governmental organizations as defined by (Pearce et al., 2020) are organizational groups that are different from government institutions and business organizations. Pearce posits that the features that differentiate NGOs are that they are formed to complement, supplement, and offer options to government development efforts. Linda and Frik (2004) highlight that NGOs include numerous groups and institutions that are mainly or completely independent of government with its objectives focusing on humanitarian rather than commercial. This is further supported by (Dogra, 2013) who posits that NGOs constitute important institutions engaged in developing and reducing poverty. Non-governmental organisations are legally constituted organisations created by natural or legal persons; such persons operate independently from any form of government stated by (Innes & Gruber, 2001; Lang, 2013; Ramamoorthy, 2019). Sundaram (2020) posits that NGOs could refer to organizations that act purposely as agents that link donor organisations to their target groups. Sundaram further states that NGOs as the term means, is an organisation that is independent and managed on a voluntary basis with the aim of achieving development-oriented goals. Lewis (2009) define an NGO as a group of organisations that take diverse shapes and forms within and across different country contexts (Lewis, 2009).

The United Nations report (2014) also highlights the above point, by describing an NGO as any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group whose organisation is based on local, national or international level. This, they said, is driven by people with common interests.

Begum and colleagues (2004) defines NGO as non-Governmental aid providing organisation (Begum et al., 2004). He clarifies that this definition is given, because NGOs are established to fulfil some social purposes and not just monetary rewards to financial backers. He further posits that NGOs are usually an association of persons organised on a voluntary basis through the initiative of one or more focus persons who are dedicated to the planning and implementation of development projects. NGOs are private institutions whose activities are focused on relieving suffering, promoting the interest of the poor and vulnerable (Lembani et al., 2020). Lembani et al. (2020) further highlights that NGOs pursue activities to protect the environment, provide basic social services and undertake community development referred to as the third sector (Lembani et al., 2020). This he said is a crucial part they form when it comes to development. In the developing world for example, they are seen to form a critical part of development. Hinzen (2000) posits on defining an NGO as a free voluntary association of people acting together on a constant basis for a common purpose and not just the achievement of government purpose or illegal activities. Vakil, (1997) gave a concise definition of NGOs as a self-governing, private, not-for-profit organisation that works on improving quality of life for disadvantaged people. Epstein and Buhovac (2009) highlight a similar point that NGOs are basically those sectors that do not belong to the government and whose operation is not for profit. They further mentioned that NGOs are known through forming various organisations. This includes for example (charitable organisations, social service agencies, religious and fraternal organisations, educational organisations, environmental organisations and many others).

Kumar (2014) gave a different view by seeing NGOs possessing a different feature as private institutions that serve public purposes (Bhaker, 2014). As such, they are given names such as; Not for profit institutions, Third sector organisations, voluntary organisations, community-based organisations, charitable organisations and so on (United Purpose, 2022). Dahal (2001) puts it that NGOs are the third development sector because they have shared vision with government and private sector and that every democratic society needs an independent third sector between the private realm of business and public jurisdiction of the state. To this concept, NGOs endeavour to provide and meet the unmet needs as development agents. The United Nations' Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) asserts that NGOs are private, small, flexible non-profit organisations, formed for

services, religious, charitable or welfare purposes. Thus, in their quest to bridge the gap between the unmet needs, brings in different situations that require different roles to be undertaken by different types of NGOs to address different situations. This shows that there is no particular and acceptable meaning of NGOs, its concept is given by some major dimensions and aspects of its functions and roles.

1.2 Definitions of Rural Development

To better understand the concept of rural development, it is crucial to understand development itself clearly. In the local development context, “development” refers to a multifaceted process encompassing social, economic, and environmental improvements to enhance individuals’ and communities’ well-being and quality of life within a specific geographical area. This definition is based on the perspective of prominent scholar Amartya Sen. Sen, an influential economist and Nobel laureate, has contributed significantly to the understanding of development by emphasizing the importance of human capabilities and freedoms (Sen, 2001). According to Sen, development should be viewed not merely as expanding economic output or material wealth but as expanding individual and collective freedoms. Bearing this definition in mind would give readers a better understanding of rural development.

In this regard, the researcher adopted Lembani et al., (2020) explanation of rural development, which he breaks down the term into two separate terms for better understanding. He states that a rural area is usually where people produce things straight for the first time in cooperation with nature. As such, it is where people are engaged in primary industry. He further asserts that rural development aims at improving the well-being and self-realization of people living outside the urbanized areas through a collective process. To classify a community as rural, its criteria are based on lower population density, less social differentiation, slow rate of social change among others (Lembani et al., 2020). Todaro et al. (2004) posit that rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor. Jayadatta (2023) argues that rural development is not just a strategy but aims to improve sustainable livelihoods (Jayadatta, 2023). This he said is especially done for deprived or weak groups with a close look at local characteristics in the society. Since a clear understanding of the concept of development will aid in a clearer understanding of rural

development (Guinjoan et al., 2016) define development as the steady growth of something for it to become more robust and more advanced. This definition indicates that development involves an ongoing advancement through progressive changes.

Umebali (2006) posits the changes to be multi-dimensional, including changes in structures, acceleration of economic growth, attitude, institutions, reduction of inequality, and poverty eradication. He further states that development includes economic growth, social justice, and socio-economic transformation. Looking closely at the foregoing, rural development is not an immediate phenomenon, it is instead a continuing and progressive towards perfection. Rural development has captured various definitions. In view of the concept differently, Simon (2004) sees development as not just the material standard of living, but an improvement in the quality of life. He posits that development must be considered a temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, society, space, and culture. Consistent with Bhaker, (2014), rural development is a multifaceted process that entails continuous reorientation and adaptation of traditional values, practices, and institutions (Bhaker, 2014; Setokoe et al., 2019). This, for example, is to include increasing scientific knowledge and technologies that will enhance people's quality of life and welfare. In Latin America for example, NGOs have progressively filled in the downsizing of social welfare and rural development programs. They as well facilitate decentralization forms of governance. As it is today, rural development needs to be given important attention. This is a result of the fact that there is a high and unacceptable poverty rate, poor access to social and economic infrastructure and services like access to safe drinking water, and sanitation, higher rate of health issues such as infant mortality rate, malnutrition, and disease prevalence. This includes but is not limited to low school enrolment of children.

1.3 The role of NGOs in Rural Development

According to Scoones (2009), Douglas (2005) and Warren et al. (1995), the concept of rural development was rethought as a multidimensionality includes political, socio-cultural, socio-economic, and livelihood dimensions (Douglas, 2005). The political dimension of rural development relates to resources, power, accountability, priorities, and development choices (Douglas, 2005). The socio-cultural dimension of rural development includes culture, population change, conflict resolution, social inclusion, equal opportunities

for health and education, and gender equity in participation and decision-making processes (Darmastuti, 2015; Deji, 2007; Sen, 2001). Scholars highlight that the socioeconomic and livelihood dimensions of rural development comprise strategies for poverty alleviation, food self-sufficiency, addressing inequalities in income, increasing productivity and sustainability of household and community assets/resources, and skills development for income generation (Ahmed, 2010; De Haan, 2012; van Dijk, 2011) (Mudgal, 1996). Scholars further argue that rural development also includes changes in structures and institutions, attitudes, social justice, and socio-economic transformation (Abiddin et al., 2022). Therefore, rural development is a continuous and progressive process that is aimed at improving the lives and livelihoods of rural dwellers (Guinjoan et al., 2016).

Having said that, governments in most parts of the world are perceived to be the primary provider of sustainable social welfare systems for ensuring robust development by maximizing their efforts for the social welfare of their citizenry. Governments ensure this by initiating, implementing, and restructuring policies and programs to enhance development. In the same vein, it is vital to point out that governments are not the only actors in the quest for bringing development to people in rural areas. This is evident in the last two decades of the 20th century, which led to the birth of NGOs' involvement in national, regional, and international spaces to foster development through projects and programs. Since then, NGOs have expanded globally with specific objectives of improving the lives and well-being of people. The Gambia is not an exception to this expansion since it has hosted many projects initiated by NGOs to improve the lives of its people.

The “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” project under the United Purpose (UP) is one of many projects. Therefore, NGOs' continued involvement and expansion in the national, regional, and international spheres has triggered an intellectual curiosity. Scholars began to investigate and understand the roles, impacts, and implications their involvements have on actors and their territory (Abiddin et al., 2022). Through an empirical investigation, it has been suggested that NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for social injustice, and improvement of the socioeconomic, socio-political, and sociocultural status of people. Since development is mainly viewed in the spectrum of governments and NGOs' intervention in addressing a particular situation, it is, therefore, safe to describe their relationship as dichotomous. NGOs

complement the government's efforts and, conversely, are critical of government policies and thus constitute essential institutes engaged in fostering development, particularly in rural communities. Begum et al., (2004) suggests that NGOs effectively foster rural development by reinforcing social capital. Similarly, they are also seen as conduits for fostering social and economic development and the democratisation of the economy (Uphoff, 1993).

NGO's constitute important institutes engaged in fostering rural development. This is done through numerous roles taken up by them. In answering the question to what roles NGOs can play, quoting Lewis (2013) they states that NGOs role can be summarised in three broad terms that are interlinked; as implementers, catalysts and partners (Abiddin et al., 2022; Jayadatta, 2023). He further clarifies that the implementer role for example is concerned with the mobilisation of resources to provide goods and services to people in need of them. In their service delivery, numerous activities are being carried out by NGOs in different sectors as conquered by other scholars. Epstein and Buhovac (2009) posits that the role of NGOs includes among others, improvement of lives of individuals, members, organisations, communities and societies. Dogra (2013) for example, highlights that NGOs play a crucial role in the reduction of poverty. Adesopo (2020) arrives at the same point that NGOs in their roles, serves as lobbyists and conducts programmes and activities that help in poverty alleviation (Sillah & Adesopo, 2022; Adesopo, 2020). This he said is done in the form of food provision for the needy. He also asserts that NGOs embark on village development programmes and adult education to eradicate illiteracy. Ramanmoorthy (2019) posits that NGOs also play a key role in improving the education standards in rural areas. He also highlights that in countries such as Uganda (Hunger Project and Heifer), NGOs help improve the lives and livelihoods of the people via training on agricultural practices.

Saiful (2019) arrives at the same assertion that NGOs facilitate investment in different sectors and an example of which is agriculture; this he said consists of livestock and poultry, crops, vegetables, nursery, flower and fruit cultivation. He further buttressed that NGOs in their roles, facilitate non-agricultural activities such as rural transportation, biogas, solar plant, rural house building, agricultural tools and irrigation. Bhaskar et. al. (2001) points out that NGOs' role includes rural development which is not limited to agricultural programmes and health programmes, but involves human resource development programmes, community

development and industrial and trade programmes. Uphoff and Esman (1984) claim that NGOs' role includes that of mobilisation of people for participation in projects. This is pursued through an intermediary role that NGOs play for service delivery to disadvantaged people in society. Analiese (2009) posits that NGOs play a crucial role in mediating intertwined processes of political and economic liberalisation in countries around the globe. Castaneda (2002) posits that NGOs play an important role by serving as advocates for political reform. Newman (2012) arrives at the same assertion that NGOs are prominent in effective implementation of government programs towards sustainable rural development, through third party activities in community development. Todaro (2004) asserts that NGOs in their role, work as resource organisations that aid government bureaucracy to get the local organisation and local grassroot to take part in development initiatives. Thus, their role in a significant way is to mobilise resources for community development purposes. He further posits that NGOs provide training to the population so they can develop their own ability to analyse and respond to problems. Newman (2012) also highlights that NGOs have in them associations such as charitable and religious who play crucial roles by distributing food and family planning services for the promotion of community organisation. The origin of NGOs in the Gambia in 1964, brought in new assumptions or roles in their status, so they provide emergency relief to vulnerable communities during emergencies, strengthen food security to tackle malnutrition and to enhance healthcare services. (Catholic Relief Services, 2016). NGOs in their role, assume greater responsibility than before, they bring solutions to long standing problems of development that are characterised by inefficient government-government aid and inefficient development projects (Lewis, 2009). Most NGOs whose work focus on developing countries, have their bases in rural areas (Mushtaque and Perry, 2020) since government impact is not realised in such areas.

1.4 Community Participation in Rural Development

Community participation is a popular term adopted by development practice in recent times. It is an essential condition required for development especially in seeking project funding. Community participation is one of the main components of an empowered community (Radwan, 2022). Community participation occurs when a community organises itself and takes full responsibility for managing its problems. This for example includes

identifying the problems in hand, developing actions to tackle those problems, putting them to place in order of preferences. This is further supported by Ndevu (2011) who posits that community participation is crucial in the development sector in their efforts to enable the underprivileged to exert influence over decisions and institutions that affect their lives. Lee (2013) posits that the participation of communities in rural development enhances sustainability of any development. He affirms that community's value is increased through enhancement of positive effects and mitigation of negative effects of development. Community participation in rural development as an approach of participation by communities, brings in greater efficiency, more accountability and transparency (Dosner, 2004). He further states that the approach increases ownership and the empowerment of the native community.

Shuib et al. (2015) asserts that communities are provided with a voice in decision making and diverse communities of interest in all stages of project and programmes without compromising an assortment of needs of the local community is what community participation calls for. Raniga and Simpson (2002) highlights that in countries such as South Africa, community participation model helps in addressing and balancing the injustices of the past through its use in the field of social development. Jenkins, (1999) posits that community participation adds up to the development of right policy, legislation and regulations in a country. Kumar (2002) argues that community participation could lead to a retard and slow progress in the first stage of field work and this as such will retard the accomplishment of physical and financial targets (Bhaker, 2014). Contrary to this view, Oakley et al., (1984) affirms that challenges to community participation are rightly related to one's perspective of community participation. Gruber and Tickett (2001) also point out that participation without a leader who is willing to take up the responsibility in ensuring that things are done and who deals with conflict and provide direction for the group leads to inefficiency. In close look of the arguments above, it shows community participation is key for rural development but when it is channelled in the right direction with responsible personnel to take up key leadership positions.

Nampila (2005) posits that different individuals in the same community may have different interests and may not want to participate in development projects of its community.

He further argued that with community participation, people are able to make a decision, act and reflect on their actions as conscious subjects. Citizen's involvement in rural programs and having them empowered, helps in boosting their livelihoods and foster development (Kakumba et al., 2008). This involvement enables the change of the inequalities that have been developed under colonialism. The essence is that it helps people identify and act on problems. Theron (2005) had the same opinion that community participation involves empowering people by developing their skills and abilities to negotiate with the rural development system and make decisions on their own. Nekwaya (2007) highlights that community participation is embedded in democratic approaches to public policy and community planning and development, which assume that people have the right to make decisions that affect their lives. He argues further that a community that gives up the ability to make its own decisions loses some important humanity. Kakumba et al. (2008) posits that community participation rests on the engagement of citizens in a wide range of administrative policy-making activities.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted by the researcher to attain the research objectives of this dissertation. Research methodology refers to the logic behind methods used within the context of research study. It also provides explanations for the choice of methods, tools, and techniques in a research study. This chapter therefore discusses the researcher methodologies that social science researchers adopt and provide justifications for the choice of research methodology.

2.1. Research Design

Research methodology refers to the paradigms and frameworks related to the entire research process (Opoku et al., 2016). It is therefore a system of beliefs, frameworks, procedures and techniques used to provide answers to a phenomenon under investigation (Panneerselvam, 2014. p. 2). Research methodology answers questions such as why a specific method is used and not others and how data will be collected and analyzed. Morgan and Smirch (1980) argued that the choice of research methodology depends upon the nature of the research phenomena. Hence the focus of this dissertation is not to gather facts and measure how often certain phenomena occur, but to understand the different meaning people attach to the phenomena in place and their experiences. Therefore, in dealing with the understanding of the subjectivity of social problems requires the qualitative approach. This dissertation therefore adopts a qualitative research approach to provide rich and complete understanding on the role of NGOs within the context of rural Gambia. Such methodological approach allows for general understanding from the perspective of the selected communities and as such a rationale for selecting the approach.

As mentioned above, the study adopts a qualitative case study research approach (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). Employing this approach allows for a detailed exploration of the research problem, the experiences of individuals involved, the territories included in the project, and the contextual factors influencing rural development in the Gambia. The approach enabled the researcher to gather rich, descriptive data to capture the phenomenon's complexity under investigation. Creswell, a prominent scholar in the field of research methodology, defines the qualitative approach as “an inquiry process of

understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed informants' views, and conducts the study naturally" (Creswell, 2012, 2014, 2015).

They further stated that qualitative research emphasizes exploring and understanding individuals' experiences, perspectives, and meanings within their natural context. This makes it appropriate for the current study since it strives to explore and understand the impact of United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project on the territories and people in the selected regions. Furthermore, the approach involves gathering rich, descriptive data through interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, & Gutterman, 2015; Patton, 2002). Rather than focusing on numerical measurements and statistical analyses, qualitative research delves into the complexities and nuances of human behaviour, social phenomena, and subjective interpretations. It is precious for generating in-depth insights, exploring social processes, and generating theories or hypotheses for further investigation (Creswell, 2015).

The case study method used as the primary research design was to enable the researcher to examine the role of United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" in rural development. The researcher believes that the approach is particularly suitable for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life context, providing an in-depth understanding of the organization's operations, strategies, and impacts on the targeted rural communities in the Gambia.

2.2. Data Collection

This research's primary data collection method was document review. According to Creswell, document review involves systematically examining and analyzing written materials, such as reports, memos, policy documents, letters, and other textual sources relevant to the research topic (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2002). Thus, the project reports generated by United Purpose and other relevant data were collected and analyzed. These reports were produced as the project went on, called progress reports, and the final report was given at the end of the project. This provides detailed information about the United Purpose's interventions, objectives, strategies, implementation processes, and "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project outcomes. The reports used in this study include baseline surveys,

monitoring and evaluation reports, impact assessments, community feedback, progress, and final reports.

Although no interviews were conducted, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select relevant documents for review. Given that the documents aligned with the variables ascribed in the research objectives in order to meet the overall aim of this entire research project. As a result, the researcher focused on the project reports and related documents that specifically address United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" program and its role in rural development in The Gambia. This ensures that the collected data aligns closely with the research objectives. The data gathered from the evaluation of the documents was analyzed using thematic analysis. In this method, patterns, themes, and linkages within the data are identified. After thoroughly reading and rereading the materials, the researcher will code the data into relevant categories or topics. In order to identify crucial facts and reach conclusions regarding the function of NGOs in rural development, these themes will be further structured and improved.

With this knowledge, the researcher uses the thematic analysis strategy proposed by Miles and Huberman. Thematic analysis, according to Miles and Huberman, "is a qualitative research technique used to find, examine, and interpret patterns or themes in a dataset". It entails methodically classifying and organizing textual or visual material, including interview transcripts, field notes, or photos, in order to find underlying themes and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moving on, the researcher went back and forth between the document review and analysis processes in this study because the data analysis procedure was cyclical, and was done concurrently by the researcher. Data extracted from the documents are further condensed by into themes to generate further analysis. This study follows the four processes outlined by "Miles and Huberman: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion".

Ideally, a document review involves analyzing publicly available reports, but in the case of this study, it does require consent from project coordinators for report acquisition. Thus, the confidentiality and anonymity of the project papers are guaranteed by the legal purchase of all documents and the secure data storage following the University of Padova guidelines. The approval to use the project documents was sought through email, and the

Project Director gave consent, as the paper will be shared with the NGO after it has been finalized. The findings of this research will be specific to the case study of United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" program. They may only be generalizable to some NGOs or rural development initiatives in The Gambia.

2.3. Ethical Considerations and limitations

Ideally, a document review involves analysing publicly available reports, but in the case of this study, it does require consent from project coordinators for report acquisition. Thus, the confidentiality and anonymity of the project papers are guaranteed by the legal purchase of all documents and the secure data storage following the University of Padova guidelines. The approval to use the project documents was sought through email, and the Project Director gave consent, as the paper will be shared with the NGO after it has been finalized.

The findings of this research will be specific to the case study of United Purpose's Balu Tingma Ringho program. They may only be generalizable to some NGOs or rural development initiatives in The Gambia.

CHAPTER 3: Enhancing rural development in the Gambia: the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” of United Purpose case

This chapter present a background of the study by featuring the following themes. First, I discussed the overview of the Gambia which provides a detail description of the country. In the second theme, I discussed the nutritional values and its importance to socio-economic development. After that, I elaborated on malnutrition and its effects on women and children in Gambia. Next, I gave explanation to the origin of non-governmental organizations in the Gambia. Finally, I provided a demography of the study sites.

3.1. An Overview of the Gambia

The Gambia is among the poorest countries in the world and ranked 174 out of 189 countries according to the 2017 Human Development Index (Chigudu et al., 2018). Of its total population of approximately 2 million, 40% are rural inhabitants. Poverty has increased since the 1990s, with over 60% of Gambians today considered poor, of which 63% are women and families living less than a dollar daily. As commonly emphasized, poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon that depends on subsistence farming for survival. Nonetheless, regional differences are substantial with a higher prevalence rate in the other part of the country where agro-climatic conditions are more unpredictable. 70% of the economically active population is employed in agriculture mainly in crop production, fishing, gardening, and animal and poultry farming. Soil and water conservation measures are unpopular, and the growing number of people using unsustainable cultivation methods such as the excessive use of fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides, over irrigation and mono cropping, increasingly affects land resources, leading to erosion and soil infertility.

The Gambia is a small country in Mainland Africa, covering 11,295 square km and stretching 450 km along the river Gambia. It is situated in West Africa and surrounded by Senegal on the North and Southern parts and a coastline on the Atlantic Ocean, enclosing the mouth of the river Gambia. The country has 2 million inhabitants, with a high population growth rate of 2.8% per year over the past decade (Kretzschmar et al., 2012). The Gambia is one of the continent’s most densely populated countries (Gambia Bureau Of Statistics, 2018).



Figure 1 - Gambia map section
 (Source: mapsland.com/africa/gambia)

Since the Gambia gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1965, it has been one of the world’s poorest and least developed countries, with a Gross National Income of less than \$ 500 per capita (World Bank 2013). After independence in the 1980s witnessed profound changes in the national policy environment in many least developed countries and the Gambia was not an exception. These changes were mainly brought about within the framework of the structural adjustment program (SAPs). SAPs are economic policies that were set for developing countries that have been prompted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The strategies adopted to regulate the world’s economy and ensure advancement, contributed to the socio- economic backwardness of least developing countries including the Gambia (IMF 2000). Although the SAPs claim to salvage the economy of the developing countries, it was wrapped by conditionalities that the receiving countries must fulfil before getting the loan. The conditions attached to this loan or the SAPs includes: devaluation of local currency, retrenchment of government workers, wage suppression, increased free trade, cuts in social spending, and business deregulation (Pan 2013).

The Gambia accepted these policies to become more financially stable through the given loan. Devaluation of the country's local currency reduced the value of the local currency against the foreign currency; this allowed the foreign investors to make more profit and Gambia, among developing countries paying higher in importation and also received less in exporting its raw materials. Retrenchment rendered the Gambian people poorer as the unemployment rate became higher. Cutting government spending to reduce budget deficits because the health budgets are cut down which resulted in the cut down of health supplies and equipment. These policies slowed down improvements in and worsened the health status of inhabitants and more over the rural women. It resulted in the nutritional status of women and children, increased incidence of infectious diseases, increases in maternity and mortality rate has affected rural women and thus hindered rural development in health.

SAPs resulted in cutting of government spending on programs such as education, health and social care as well as removing subsidies designed to control the prices of basic commodities such as food. This has deeply and continues to affect the rural poor because they depend heavily on these services and subsidies. The Gambia depends highly on foreign aid and the SAPs reduces the development impact of aid because it subtracts from the level of aid resources available for developmental purposes and it adversely affects the quality of aid. This has been the socio-economic ridges the country has faced from the 80s and 90s. From this perspective, it realized that Gambia's poverty and underdevelopment has been characterized by not only slavery and colonialism, but also the SAPs in the name of aid.

3.2 Nutrition and its importance to socio economic development of the Gambia

Nutrition is defined as a basic human right that is not only important for human development but also as a result of development (Gibney et. al, 2013). An investment in nutrition is judicious and beneficial since it improves physical work capacity, development, good education and health as it reduces mortality and morbidity and this in turn leads to increased productivity, socio economic growth, poverty reduction and development (Gambia National Nutrition Policy, 2020). Nutritious foods are essential in meeting the dietary needs for an active and healthy life of Gambians, especially children. Lack of safe, sufficient and nutritious foods has led to acute and chronic food insecurity, and health related issues. Attaining the required nutritional value in food consumed daily has proven difficult as the

2016 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA, 2016) shows that 8 percent of the total population is either food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity in normal times, at national level (Abed et al., 1998; United Purpose, 2022). Integrated Household Survey, (2016) also highlighted that the population is food insecure and 35.9 percent of the population would not meet their daily food requirements of 2400 kgs even if given all their consumptions to food (Gajigo, 2016). The IHS report further posits that due to increase in the national population growth, there is corresponding increase in the food requirement.

In realising the importance of nutrition and its related issues, and in achieving the nutrition related to the SDGs, Goal 2 (UN SDGs,2012) and Gambia National Development Plan (2018-2021) the government felt the need for complementing the national and sectoral development policies and programs by community base actions that is aimed at enhancing household and food and nutrition security. According to the World Food Programme (2020) several programs over the years have been implemented towards the enhancement and addressing of food and nutrition insecurity. These programs include; support to communities and households to create gardens, provision of capacity building, social safety nets and moreover, value chain addition of products of agriculture (livestock, poultry and fisheries). Adapting to the agricultural value chain development will further enhance the improvement and access by all people particularly rural inhabitants who are the most vulnerable to safe and sufficient food all year around, thereby, reducing undernutrition and promoting a healthy life for all and thus improving community development.

3.3 Malnutrition and its effect on Women and Children in Gambia

Sound nutrition is the foundation for every child's survival and growth and development of every individual. An undernourished child may become an undernourished mother thus resulting in the cycle of micronutrient deficiency. Studies in Gambia by Cost of Hunger in Africa (2018) posit that malnutrition has great implications for health, labour force and education. The studies found that a loss of 3.96 billion (\$83.4 million) was incurred by the country in 2018 due to malnutrition and equates to 5.1 % of the country GDP (Barrett & Browne, 1989; United Purpose, 2022). An analysis from 10 perspective studies from Africa (including the Gambia), Asia and Latin America found that malnourished children under 5

years are at greater risk of dying (World Food Programme, 2000) further posits that malnutrition has contributed to mortality of under-five at 50 percent. In order to address the issue of malnutrition for infants and children under 5, programs like that of the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) was introduced to improve the health and nutrition status of young children, by treating and controlling acute malnutrition in under five children. It was also aimed at creating an enabling environment for mothers and caregivers to make and implement informed feeding choices for children and to promote the use of safe and nutritious locally available complementary foods for the health and well-being of the children and their mothers. However, over the years, malnutrition prevalence rate amongst children has improved. Highlighted by Demography and Health Survey (2019-2020) stunting among children under five years was 17.5 per cent, underweight was 11.6 percent and wasting were 5.1 per cent. Reduction has been felt to 24.5 per cent, 16.2 per cent and 11.5 percent respectively (Jallow, 2020; United Purpose, 2022).

Despite the various interventions there still remain challenges in combating micronutrient deficiencies stated by Food Fortification Regulations in Gambia (2020). The intervention areas include but are not limited to intake of vitamin and mineral supplements, bio fortification and food fortification, the promotion of intake of foods rich in micronutrients, the use of iodized salt. These are followed with regulations to enhance its effectiveness but with little improvements made.

3.4 The Origin of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Gambia

In the Gambia, the origin of NGOs dates to 1964 through the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which the Catholic Bishops of Banjul invited. It then assumed an NGO status called Christian charity mission, whose presence was acknowledged in providing emergency relief to vulnerable communities during emergencies, strengthening food security to tackle malnutrition, enhancing healthcare services, and providing educational opportunities for children and members of their families (Catholic Relief Services, 2016). The late 1960s marked the evolution of some national NGOs and International NGOs becoming operational in The Gambia. The NGOs they operate include the FFHC and GFPA, established in 1968. The NGO community, during the 1960s to 1970s, realized some growth, and the period

coincided with the dawn of political independence when the national government expected to provide for its citizens their basic needs.

The mid-1970s to 1980s witnessed the formation of the second phase. This period marked the establishment of international NGOs such as AATG, established in 1979 and Canadian University Services Oversea (CUSO). This period came when the Gambia experienced a severe agricultural output shortfall due to the Sahelian drought. Their establishment marked the commencement of good social service delivery and implementation of other development projects and programs. This is done in areas where government capacity is weak or does not exist (GBoS, 2005). In their quest to solve all problems, they cover areas such as health (HIV/AIDS), food security, education, women empowerment, agriculture, environmental protection, and human rights-based approaches to development and advocacy, to mention but a few. The third period which began in 1980-1994, observed an addition in the number of activities of NGOs in the Gambia to provide for the needs of children, the visually handicapped, and the aged. This included the Christian Children Fund and currently known as Child Fund the Gambia, whose focus and commitment are to solve the plight of deprived, excluded, and vulnerable children in The Gambia.

The 1980s coincided with a fall in the Gambia's economic fortunes. This reduced living standards due to the debt burden that hindered meaningful economic development during the period. As a result, this led to implementation of the Economic Recovery Programmes (ERP) under the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's supervision. The main emphasis was reviving the economy and reducing its financial commitment to the social services sector through the structural adjustment programs recommended by the Briton Wood institutions. The health and education sector realized a cost recovery alongside the privatization of several public institutions. The lack of total concentration of government in these sectors mentioned above led to more roles for NGOs to help fill the gap left by the government to make the Gambia a better place to live in.

Despite the fascinating contributions of NGOs to the development and well-being of people, especially in the area of rural development, their roles and contributions are overlooked by most governments. Given the above, the study seeks to examine the role of NGOs in rural development in the Gambia concerning the United Purpose Organisation.

3.5 Demography of the study Site

This study focuses on “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” of United Purpose as a case study to investigate and assess the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in rural development in the Gambia. To thoroughly understand the experiences, viewpoints, and outcomes of the NGO’s efforts in rural development, this research used a qualitative case study approach. Document review served as the major approach for gathering data for the study, particularly the quarterly and annual reports produced by United Purpose and other pertinent data sources.

This study was centred on the united purpose’s BTM project, which was launched in the rural communities in the Gambia including Lower River Region, West Coast Region, Central River Region, North Bank Region, and Upper River Region respectively. These communities are described to be inhabited by diverse people with various cultural, economic, and religious distinctions. Population wise, the rural Gambia used to host a significant portion of the country’s total population. Due to urbanisation, this is not the case anymore. According to global data (2021) a total of 914,646 people reside in the rural communities compared to 1, 725,270 people in the urban communities as of 2021.

Furthermore, the rural communities consist of various ethnic groups including Mandinka, Fula, Wolof, Jola, Serahule, and other smaller ethnic groups. As mentioned above, each of these ethnic groups have their own cultural traditions, languages, and practices, contributing to the cultural richness of the region. Speaking of language, the majority of people speak the local languages mentioned and English which is the country’s official language. As for religion, the majority are practising Muslims, and Islam is a dominant actor in shaping their daily activities ranging from culture, traditions, customs, social structures and other social practices.

Economically, agriculture is the primary economic activity in the rural Gambia with a significant portion of the population engaged in subsistence farming. People cultivate crops such as rice, millet, maize, and groundnuts, and raise livestock for sustenance and sale. Fishing and forestry also contribute to the rural economy. On the other hand, in the area of education, access is still low in the rural communities compared to that of their urban

counterparts. However, a series of efforts are being put in by various agencies including government and non-governmental parastatals to remedy these situations including their economic and health aspects. Furthermore, until today people in the rural communities are facing serious challenges in terms of infrastructural facilities. Access to electricity, clean water, and transportation is still a major challenge which can potentially limit the quality of life and economic opportunities in these areas.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section aims to provide findings from the case study to gather information and analyse the information obtained from the project report. The section will further discuss the findings by considering the dissertation's research questions and main objective.

To answer research question one of this study which was designed to assess the effect of the UP's effect on the social and economic situation of the targeted population, the following criteria are put into account when assessing the reports. First, I look into the nutritional improvements reported through the project reports. These improvements include dietary diversification through biofortification food consumption and improvement in the nutritional status of people in the targeted regions. Meaning, by assessing the dropdown in "malnutrition rates, vitamin, and mineral deficiencies, and overall health and well-being."

Secondly, I assess agricultural Productivity. In other words, I look into the amount of biofortified crops produced compared to traditional varieties, considering factors like quality, quantity, and resilience to environmental stresses. In addition, I looked into the extent to which the beneficiaries in the rural communities have adopted biofortified crop production. Thirdly, I considered the economic empowerment efforts of the project through its effort on income generation and cost-effectiveness. Fourthly, the researcher considered the social empowerment of the targeted groups through capacity building, and gender equality/equity in the decision process. In addition, community participation and ownership are observed to evaluate the extent of their involvement in the project implementation and decision-making. Finally, the researcher looked into the environmental effect of considering sustainable agricultural practices.

These criteria are assessed relying on the project reports. Thus, it should be noted that the information provided as findings for research question one is not verified through any other means since the researcher could not interview to get the perspectives of the local communities directly.

4.1. Research Findings

4.1.1. Findings for Research Question: How has the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” initiative of the United Purpose affected people’s social and economic situation in the five targeted rural areas in the Gambia?

The main arguments derived from the findings and indicated by the report is that the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” project led to the reduction of undernutrition and poverty of vulnerable populations, especially the targeted beneficiaries (women and children) in the Gambia by enhancing access to consumption of fortified foods sustainably. According to the project report, a significant achievement was realized through an increment in the reduction of malnourished children of 50 percent, from 16 percent to 5.8 percent reduction in the number of wasted children, 51 and 18.3 percent reduction in vitamin A deficiency and anaemia in women and children respectively (United Purpose, 2022). The project supported 29,166 farmers in 242 gardens by providing them with planting materials to grow bio-fortified food products. An increase in the number of farmers that grow the OFSP was felt compared to the number recorded before the initialization of the project. An increase in nutritionally diversified and more resilient agricultural products was realized for the targeted smallholder farmers. The reports reveal the project’s impact on the rural people’s socio-economic development. Evidence shows that the project has relevance in agriculture, food production, and production capacity in its current food and nutrition context. Evidence shows crops that grow fast, showing tolerance to drought, thus helping improve the population’s food and nutrition.

From the analysis obtained in the report, general conclusion is arrived at from the interviews conducted on beneficiaries in the five regions that sustainability of the project is guaranteed with continuity of the consumption and cultivation of biofortified crops and nutritious ALVs, OFSP and Pearl Millet after the project ends. This as the report posits is due to the health benefits, income generation activities from the sale of the crops and the impact it has on poverty and food insecurity reduction. More to the socio-economic benefit is that the project has impact to not only the targeted beneficiaries and communities, but to non-intervention communities that intend to cultivate biofortified crops and nutritious ALVs,

OFSP and Pearl Millet due to the above-mentioned benefits it has. To conclude, the project according to the above findings in the project report had made an impact and contribution to the development of rural Gambia through the project's indirect effect on neighbouring communities of the intervention areas.

More to the achievements of the project includes a sense of ownership to farmers as the reports state that the approach used in introducing the biofortified crop is the bottom-up approach. It is said to have built the capacity of not just farmers but women-led marketing federations through training provided by them on focused areas of sustainability and development of the groups. Local planting done by women farmers is believed to ensure their financial sustainability. Women's needs stated by the project have been addressed. This includes access to safe food, health, and the opportunity to earn income by selling food products after harvest. The knowledge instilled in women is believed to go a long way in their health and livelihood.

4.1.2. Findings of Research Questions 2: What were the challenges confronting the United Purpose while attempting to advance people's economic and social situation in the targeted rural territories in the Gambia and how these identified challenges were overcome?

Among the challenges faced in the project posited by the report is farmers' behaviour on hygiene and sanitation as a result of the limited knowledge they had on nutrition and had an effect on activities geared towards nutrition promotion. Adapting to the new varieties and farming tools was a challenge due to the old diets they were used to and the ancient farming methods. To effect this change in the communities, promoting the biofortified crops was done using social media platforms (YouTube, M alerts, and WhatsApp), community-based initiatives (radio broadcasts and caravans), print media, and TV shows. The project's significance was realised through close coordination and collaboration between stakeholders in supporting UP, whose programs and activities aligned with the national nutrition agenda. This initiative, together with the training sessions featuring nurses and health workers, was to effect change in the behaviours of the community population. This also facilitated the creation of links between producers and buyers which was difficult to achieve by the farmers.

Gender mainstreaming was a cross cutting issue as gender equality was mainstream in the project. The project involved more women in the production of the biofortified crops as well as training sessions. This as shown in the report is due to the fact that the project's targeted beneficiaries were mainly women who are believed to be largely excluded from the most profitable parts of the value chain and production of field crops. The project in bridging the gender gap, targeted 75 percent of women in the targeted population to produce biofortified crops, improve their nutrition status and behaviours and strengthen their involvement in the value chain platforms. This has helped the women to become empowered, become large seed producers, manage project resources and most importantly served as agents of behavioural change on nutritional health. Evidence from the data showed that the project had the challenge of dependency from regional NGOs whose sole dependency was on the BTM project as they should have taken or created other initiatives to find other projects to improve their capacities on and address issues of nutrition through it.

The issue of fencing has also been a challenge for UP organizations and the farmers. Many gardens that the project initially intended to focus on, already had fencing issues and crops had been destroyed as a result of that. The NGO thought it wise for the fencing to have been part of the community participation on good development plans and thus do the fencing by themselves as only little amount was allocated for fencing of the farming areas and could not cover all the hectare areas. Lack of fencing on the project intervention areas has led to animal invasion in the gardens and thus affected and reduced interest in the number of farmers willing to engage in the production of the biofortified crops.

Staffing was another major issue as two field workers for example will intervene in more than 60 gardens across the 5 regions. This is believed to have hindered the proper implementation of activities in all the gardens. Consideration given was for the BTM project to have been limited to few regions and to those that have gardens already being fenced.

4.1.3. Findings for Research Question 3: How were the targeted beneficiaries in the five selected regions involved in the “Ballu Tim Maring Ngo” project?

Findings also highlighted that tackling the nutrition and poverty of vulnerable rural populations was a key target of the project. In tackling this issue, the project embarked on

nutritional and health education in rural communities. This was done by establishing mother clubs and conducting training sessions on nutrition and hygiene for pregnant and lactating mothers. In ensuring the project's sustainability, results show that mother clubs were provided with cooking utensils, farming machines, and mobile phones to facilitate communication.

Women empowerment is key in every development plan and sector. As such, the project report shows that Agribusiness was introduced in a gender-sensitive way through processing opportunities that were identified, developed, and implemented to bridge the gap between men and women farmers and, as such, seen as a way of empowering women farmers through the projects. The impact was felt in the three main varieties of crops introduced, and it targeted young infants and school children with convenient foods through the mother clubs.

The project beneficiaries were involved directly and indirectly. Women in their corporate groups (Kafos), after gaining capacity-building training and training on nutritive value cooking methods, embark on demonstration sessions such as cooking and child feeding. This has indirectly helped children receive nutritive value foods at home, likewise breastfeeding children from their mothers. The cooking demonstration aligns with relevant areas, such as key health and education messages that helped improve the health and nutrition levels in the project communities, especially for vulnerable women and children. The overall findings will be further analysed to generate results about the research objective and literature, and a conclusion will be drawn with recommendations.

4.2. Analysis of findings

The current study's overall objective was to explore NGOs' role in rural development using United Purpose's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project as a case. Reflecting on theories of space, whose premise indicates that NGOs employ numerous strategies to achieve their goals. This is consistent with the case of the UP project, which aims to reduce the undernutrition and poverty of vulnerable populations, especially women and children. Based on the data gathered from the project reports, it is suggested that the project had impacted the lives of rural Gambia's direct beneficiaries. I intend to reaffirm this position, arguing that NGO

interventions usually impact the project beneficiaries when the projects are targeted to address a specific targeted problem; in this case, it aims to address the undernutrition issue.

Circling back to the data, it is reported that the project had made a 50 percent reduction in moderately malnourished children of age 6-59 months and a 25 percent to 15.7 percent reduction in the number of children experiencing stunting aged 6-59 months. Moreover, malnourished children were reduced from 16 percent to 5.8 percent, and a 51 percent reduction in mild, moderate, and severe vitamin A deficiency and anaemia in women. In addition, an 18.3 percent reduction in mild, moderate, and severe vitamin A deficiency and anaemia in children was also achieved. As such, the project was, in its capacity, able to increase nutritionally diversified and more resilient agricultural products for the targeted smallholder farmers and reaching to the above-mentioned percentages. NGOs' roles were investigated by scholars looking into their continuous involvement and expansion in the international, national, and regional spheres. This is to understand their impacts and implications on actors and the territory (Abiddin et al., 2022)). The UP organization in this "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project can be connected to have played a crucial role in improving the socio-economic status of the rural inhabitants in the five targeted rural areas. Therein, they complement the government's effort by fostering development initiatives in the rural communities of the Gambia.

In the well-being of people throughout their life cycle, good nutritional status is important for their health and productivity. The body is impaired to function well when insufficient energy and nutrient supply are lacking. In the Gambia, malnutrition remains a major public health problem, with the vulnerable group being women and children. Due to poor dietary habits, heavy workloads and frequent health challenges, most Gambia rural women are vulnerable. Gambia Demographic Health Survey (DHS, 2019-2020) posits that 13.6 percent of nonpregnant women and children of childbearing were underweight, and 22.2 percent and 14.2 percent were overweight and obese due to poor nutrition.

However, there has been an improvement over time, with a 16.7 percent improvement in overweight and obesity increased from 15.3 percent and 7.3 percent (Gambia DHS, 2013). Furthermore, the reports show that 44.3 percent of women aged 15-49 were anaemic in which (54.8 percent for pregnant women, 46.6 percent for breastfeeding mothers, and 42.4 percent

for non-pregnant, non-lactating women. The statistic above clearly shows that overnutrition, undernutrition, and micronutrient deficiency are predominant among women. This makes the United Purpose's intervention relevant to improve the nutritional values of this category of people. Equally, it would elevate the socioeconomic status of women in rural Gambia.

Going back to the project findings, a close link could be seen with the statistics above, showing the important role UP as an organization has by researching to arrive at the point that nutrition is important in the health and well-being of every individual and as such, found the need to implement a nutrition project based on biofortified food. The project's targeted beneficiaries are women and children, and clear evidence from above also shows and acknowledges that women and children are the most vulnerable and affected.

Despite the efforts of UP organizations and their various intervention in numerous works of life, rural Gambia still battles with underdevelopment as people's life and well-being are far from improving. The inhabitants of rural Gambia still struggle to sustain themselves and are caught in poverty, hunger, and social inequality. This among other reasons is that the Gambia is classified by (FAO, 2016) as a low income food deficit country that produces about 50 percent of the total nutritional food consumption needs.

Women empowerment is key in both national and local community development and to empower women, men need to be empowered to facilitate and ease problem solving through understanding of the male counterpart. In the report findings, the BTM project's main focus and target was on women and children with little focus on men and clear evidence is in the targeted beneficiaries that accounts for 75 percent of women. According to (Oakley et al, 1984) Community participation is one of the main components of an empowered community and challenges to community participation are rightly related to one's perspective of community participation. My perception of community participation is that there should be equal gender representation especially of beneficiaries to enhance empowerment and achieve a desired goal or objective if sustainability is of key importance. The incorporation of men in equal portion or at least a higher percentage in the discussion on nutrition, in the training and to all the project activities and programs could have benefited the project and women and their families in the rural communities, closing the gender equality gap. In Gambia, rural communities to be specific, decisions are taken mainly by men through

patriotic cultural norms, leaving women and children less empowered. This could be on what the house needs, what activities the woman engages into are all determined by their male partners or household heads and as such, in gaining access to opportunities in the communities which also includes land that is predominantly owned by men. Women should be included in decision making to bridge gender inequality and disrupt traditional cultural values and attitudes that oppress women gender, and also children in the community.

Going back to the community participation and involvement that UP's intervention needs to be reconceptualized. In most instances, projects' sustainability is determined by the level of communities' involvement, solidarity, and understanding of project's specific targeted needs in the target communities. Using a top-down colonial approach to project implementation has impaired enhanced community participation. The project highlighted the use of bottom-up approach and engaging the community from inception to the project implementation. This was unclear to the researcher as the UP and the stakeholders initiated biofortified food production with limited historical knowledge and changing nature of the territories while the researcher did not have the privilege of the initial pre-project evaluation reports and the time lines. This begs the question, how well are local people familiar with biofortification? How are these selected territories selected for this project? What are the heterogeneous factors of these territories? This is unclear to the researcher since she did not have the opportunity to interview the local communities to gain a deeper understanding of project territorial knowledge.

However, based on the project objective, it is argued that the project equips rural people with a farming method that helps improve their lives, well-being, and economic status. In addition, it also brought in new knowledge, ideas, and skills to which the beneficiaries must adapt. The sophisticated machines to be used and the new food varieties tested at the project's laboratory are among the things the rural communities need to be more familiarized with but must adapt to because they need to farm and sell their farm products to survive. The researcher questions the coloniality of project dependence to the sponsors while questioning the sustainability of laboratory processed seedlings, new equipment and how the local communities traditional knowledge, skills and opinions were integrated. There seems to be new challenges envisioned with dependence on newly modified seedlings, new equipment,

knowledge and skills as territorial traps that are not easily transferable to the communities for future sustainability.

Despite the noble intentions of the project, one thing that is always observed in NGOs' intervention in rural Gambia is their unsustainability. This prompted me to raise this question since the report failed to highlight the continuity plans explicitly. Who continues to test the food varieties and takes full responsibility for maintaining the machines? Once the farmers encounter difficulties in these areas, they tend to drop the methods taught to them and return to the old farming habits contesting NGO's so perceived efforts of developing the other. As mentioned in the findings, the NGO behavior challenged the project as they tried to convince them to do away with the old farming methods instead of integrating both the traditional methods towards new alternatives.

Furthermore, the community participation seen and acknowledged in the findings was only through the cooking demonstration that brings mother clubs together to showcase the best cooking practices they were trained in and good feeding methods for their children. Community participation calls for more than what the project referred to it. While the project claims positive results but it didn't take into consideration the specific challenges of each of the 5 rural territories as each region is very different. From the findings, it is seen that the project assumes that all regions are homogeneous therefore implementing a "one size fits all". This could challenge also the adapting of targeted territorial policies that need to be flexible with changing demographics and time.

The project is an EU funded project and so colonization of the Gambia through foreign aid continues. This is an aspect that link to vicious interdependence of western nations in rhetoric of intervention while it has been argued that Gambia and many African countries can't get out of aid traps. This as well questions the role of foreign aid in local context interventions while wondering whether the people themselves with their traditional cultures would have done better. This begs the question, development for who, by who and the concept of redevelopment that needs to take alternative meaning and interventions beyond aid to deconstruct colonial powers.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current study explored the role of NGOs in the advancement of rural communities, using the UP's "Ballu Tim Maring Ngo" project as a case study. The study first and foremost recognises the relevance of agencies' intervention in rural communities. Given that most communities in rural communities are prone to face challenges in the area of socio-economic development including poverty, hunger, malnutrition, low educational access, poor health facilities and general infrastructural problems.

Therefore, based on the data gathered through an extensive document review, the study came up with the following conclusion. First, the study concludes that the Balu Tingma Ringho project is found to play a very important role in reducing malnutrition amongst children and women in the rural communities in the Gambia. Hence, UP's intervention in rural development was critical in the targeted communities in the rural Gambia.

Secondly, several factors are found to challenge the implementation of the project including poverty, farmers educational level, attitude and behaviours, farming methods, infrastructural facilities and socio-cultural factors. Farmers in these communities found it difficult to transition from their traditional farming methods to the modern approach of bio fortifications introduced by the project. In addition, local communities were sceptical about the intentions of the project coordinators, thus, it took them time before they fully embraced the project.

Finally, communities were said to be involved from the beginning of the project initiation to the implementation through sensitisation campaigns, training works, house-to-house campaigns and social media advertisement including radios and television. However, I argue that whereas all these are done, they seem to be insufficient since the rural communities appeared to be informed about the project resulting in suspicion. Generally, the biofortification project was effective and will contribute to the country's progress towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 1 (reduction of poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).

However, it should be noted that the conclusion drawn above cannot be the generalisation of the rural communities in the Gambia, but it is limited to the beneficiaries of the BTM project in various regions in the rural Gambia.

From the research findings and analysis, it is evident that governments should commit to the fight against malnutrition as an important part of poverty reduction. It should as well provide resources and necessitate nutrition specific research and intervention and make it a key priority. Likewise, NGOs should expand their intervention areas by mobilising more resources and funding for nutrition programming to ensure sustainability of projects and not leave the burden onto the communities, especially the rural poor that find it difficult to make ends meet. In addition, it is no doubt that women are significant actors to Agric food system, production and consumption, and more importantly the key role they play in care and support of their children and family at large, other similar or rural projects should consider the involvement of equal men to facilitate and fully attain the empowerment of women through the support from men.

Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct field research to directly engage local communities and personnel involved in the implementation of the project. That suggests a use of different data collection instruments like interview, observation, and focus group discussion to gather more in-depth data for more relatable conclusions. Document review used in this study is not sufficient to generate detailed information on the role of NGOs in rural development particularly on the case explored.

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