

## Assessing NGOs' Targeting Performance and Characteristics of Households Participating in Child Development Programmes in Rural Eastern Kenya

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### Abstract

Targeting beneficiaries of development interventions in the context of poverty alleviation remains a challenge to most development agencies and policy-makers. Due to limited resources and the small scale of operations, most non governmental development organisations' (NGDOs) practice targeting in order to limit themselves to interventions that only select a group of individuals considered to be most in need. This paper analyses the targeting performance of two child-safety net programmes operating in rural Kenya and examines the factors influencing it. In addition, an econometric model is developed to identify the characteristics of the households participating in these programmes. Data for this paper was collected through a household survey of 120 randomly selected households, stratified equally into participants and non-participants. The targeting performance of the studied NGOs' interventions was found to be poor due to reliance on local social structures that led to under-representation of the poorest group of households in programme activities. The paper further shows that although the case study NGOs and their child programmes could be supporting households with characteristics that indicate that they are not among the well-off in the society, such households do not necessarily belong to the poorest group of community members in relative terms.

**Keywords:** rural poverty, targeting performance, participants' characteristics, NGOs, Kenya

### 1 Introduction

In the last two decades, non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) have become increasingly important players in the field of international development. Their growth, particularly in many of the developing countries, has been very prolific (CLARKE, 1998). In Kenya, the numbers of registered NGOs grew from about 124 in 1975 to about 3000 in 1999 (DAILY NATION, 1999). With the reduction of state support in the

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provision of social services and following the implementation of the structural adjustment programmes, NGOs in the country are active in many of the service roles carried out by governments in the developed world (NDEGWA, 1996; DAILY NATION, 1999).

One of the major strengths of NGOs, as mentioned in the literature, is their ability to reach the poor and marginalised members of the society. This fact has made them gain credibility in the eyes of the donors, resulting in a trend of donor shift, from governments to NGOs. In Africa, for example, the total official development assistance (ODA) fell from US\$ 17.3 to 15.1 billion between 1993 and 1997, while funds flowing through NGOs rose from less than US\$ 1 billion dollars in 1990 to over US\$ 3.5 billion in 1999 (CHEGE, 1999). A number of criticisms have, however, been raised with respect to the NGOs effectiveness in reaching the poorest members of the society. VIVIAN and MASEKO (1994) point out that few NGOs in Zimbabwe ever target the poorest of the rural poor. This could result from a number of factors. For one, targeting or reaching the poorest and particularly those in some remote poor locations is more resource intensive compared to reaching those who are marginally poor and the non-poor, as well as those located in more strategic locations. Secondly, most NGOs in the South depend totally on donor funds and therefore performance is a key determinant of continued funding. In such cases, NGOs and other development agencies are therefore likely to work with a clientele that is easily accessible and has some resources that would enhance programme impact and quicker results.

Targeting the poorest is particularly important in child development programmes since such programmes are often tailor-made for the most needy in the rural communities. Many large international NGOs are involved in these activities, but there is little research done on their outreach performance (percentage of the poorest participants reached out of the total participants) beyond the rhetoric. There is also scarce knowledge on the characteristics of the households who end up participating in such programmes as a result of adopting particular targeting approaches. This study therefore seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge of targeting performance of NGOs, with special attention to two child development programmes in Eastern Kenya. Its specific objectives are:

- (a) to analyse the relative poverty levels of client households of two child safety net programmes in rural Kenya in order to assess factors influencing outreach performance of the NGOs involved, and
- (b) to identify the characteristics of the local households participating in these programmes.

The two NGOs studied in this paper are treated as an entity since they employ almost a similar targeting approach. They also operate in areas that have similar agro-ecological conditions and communities with similar ethnic backgrounds.

## **2 Conceptual and Empirical Issues: Targeting and Participation**

Targeting is defined as “the practice of limiting access to an intervention to a select group of individuals” (HODDINOTT, 2001, p. 89). Though widely recognised as an attempt to reach the poorest of the poor, targeting is however not always a straight forward practice to implement and a poorly targeted intervention could end up being more costly and less effective than one that is randomly allocated or made available to all households. There are basically two main targeting strategies: administrative targeting and self-targeting (HODDINOTT, 2001). The former refers to the application of targeting criteria in such a way that participation includes particular individuals but effectively excludes others while in the latter, the intervention is available to all but is fashioned in such a way that it is less attractive to certain groups of people. The NGOs’ programmes discussed in this paper apply the administrative type of targeting. The performance of a certain targeting strategy is hypothesized to depend on wide range of factors including geographical conditions, infrastructural developments and local communities’ power structure. Further, some targeting strategies could have adverse effects, e.g. undermining the local political base of the programme if the affluent feel left out (WORLD BANK, 2001).

Studies on the determinants of household participation in rural development programs identify a number of household characteristics as potential determinants. These include: age and gender, household status, education level, social divisions (heterogeneity in the community), occupation, income level and sources, distance of residence from the project centre, land tenure and employment status (COHEN and UPHOFF, 1977; EVANS *et al.*, 1999). In addition, a strong relationship is expected between targeting approaches and characteristics of those selected to participate in a particular programme.

## **3 Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Description of the Case Study NGOs and their Programmes**

The Christian Children Fund, Kenya (CCF/K), and Compassion International, Kenya (CIK/K), are the NGOs studied in this paper. The two have a long history of working in Kenya, having started their operations in the 1960 and 1980 respectively. They implement child based safety net programmes which are intended to support poor children through individual sponsorship in order to help them get a better chance in life than they would have otherwise had. They do this mainly through support for formal education, provision of basic health care, and other programmes that each NGO considers important for the survival, development and protection of children. The case study CCF/K programme is located in Meru South District, Eastern Kenya, and had about 790 registered children at the time of the survey. The case study CIK/K programme, on the other hand, supports 15 child development centres (CDCs) in the neighbouring Mbeere District (also in Eastern Kenya), each with its own committee and staff. However, due to the vastness of the area, only three such CDCs with about 800 sponsored children were included in the survey.

The CCF/K and the CIK/K implement their programmes through local partners, the Mutonga Development Project and the Mbeere Diocese of the Anglican Church of Kenya, respectively. These partners act as the programmes' managers on the ground, but they are provided with technical and financial support by the two NGOs. They form programme coordination committees<sup>1</sup> and recruit the programmes' technical staff locally. The technical staff is accountable to the committees and is not considered as belonging to the NGOs. As regarding targeting, both programmes explicitly state in their operation guidelines that they aim at assisting children from the poorest families. For the purpose of analysis, the two programmes of the CCF/K and the CIK/K will hereafter be referred to as CCF-Mutonga and CIK-Mbeere, respectively.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The analysis of relative poverty in order to identify the target groups and assess the targeting performance of the two programmes, and the determination of characteristics of participating households are conducted at the household level for two key reasons: first, the programmes being studied targeted the households and not the community units. Second, it is at the household level where decisions concerning resource allocation, including participation in development programmes, are made.

The empirical data analysed in this paper was collected in the two operational regions of the case study NGOs in 2000. This was accomplished through a household survey, which was complemented with information gathered through detailed interviews of key informants. The latter were very useful in explaining factors influencing the targeting performance of the case study programmes. The household survey involved a standardised questionnaire covering household socio-economic profile, participation in the two programmes, and involvement in other community level development activities and organisations. For each programme, a sample consisting of 60 randomly selected households, stratified equally into participants and non-participants, was selected.

The relative poverty of the households targeted by the programmes is analysed using a poverty index which is developed through the principal component analysis (PCA) of a set of selected indicators (ZELLER *et al.*, 2001)<sup>2</sup>. These included household demographics and dwelling indicators, types and number of meals served over a seven-day period, and type and value of assets. Each household is assigned a score depending on the relative poverty level. The score indicates its poverty level in relation to the others. Based on this index, households are classified into three relative poverty groups: poorest, poor and not so poor (see Table 1). Poverty is thus assessed in relative terms whereby comparison is made between the lowest tercile of a population against the upper terciles. This methodology was preferred due to the high costs of conducting a comprehensive expenditure-based household survey as well as the fact that NGOs usually work intensively in small geographical areas and therefore use of local indicators

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike the technical staff who earned a monthly salary, the committee members were not remunerated.

<sup>2</sup> Due to space limitations we do not discuss in details or show the generation of the poverty index in this paper. The reader could get more information on this in ZELLER *et al.* (2001).

would have a more direct relevance to them. Results in Table 1 are discussed further in Section 4.2.

**Table 1:** Distribution of households across the relative poverty groups.

Relative Poverty Group	Child development programme			
	CCF-Mutonga		CIK- Mbeere	
	Participant	Non-participant	Participant	Non-participant
Poorest	13.3	33.3	20.0	33.3
Poor	70.0	33.3	60.0	33.3
Not So Poor	16.7	33.3	20.0	33.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2$ test	8.141***		8.571***	

Source: own survey

To determine the characteristics of the households that participated in the child development programmes, an econometric model is developed. Since our sample consisted of both participants and non-participants, participation in the programmes is modelled as a binary variable which takes a value of 1 if household is a participant and 0 if otherwise. The probability to participate is assumed to be a function of household characteristics, spatial location of the household and programme characteristics (see Table 2). This could be expressed as a probit model:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta X_i + \mu_i \quad (1)$$

where  $Y = 1$  if a household is a participant and  $Y = 0$  if otherwise.  $X_i$  is the vector for response variables for the  $i^{th}$  household and  $\mu$  is the disturbance term. The meanings of the response variables, descriptive data and hypothesis are presented in Table 2.

## 4 Research Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Assessing the Targeting Performance

The targeting performance of the case study programmes is assessed in terms of how they are able to reach the poor or even the poorest in the targeted regions. This is achieved through the evaluation of the depth of outreach, which refers to how deep in the pool of the under-privileged a programme has been able to reach (NAVAJAS *et al.*, 2000; ZELLER *et al.*, 2003). In this paper it is assessed as the percentage of the poorest participants reached out of the total participants. To analyse the depth of outreach or targeting performance, the relative poverty of participant households was compared with that of the non-participants since they represent the general community. The results for the two programmes are presented in Table 1. The  $\chi^2$  results show that, in both programmes, there were significant differences at one percent (1%) level

**Table 2:** Meaning and description of the variables used in the models.

<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Variable description</i>	<i>Mean</i> *	<i>Std. dev.</i> $\sigma$	<i>Expected sign</i>
HHSIZE	Household size (no. of household members)	6.28	2.27	+
PROGRAM	NGO program (dummy = 1 if CCF-Mutonga, 0 otherwise)	0.5	0.5	?
GENDHHH	Gender of household head (dummy = 1 if male, 0 otherwise)	0.85	0.36	-
AGEHHH	Age of household head in years	44.12	11.89	+
DEPEND †	Dependency ratio (no. of members <15 years and >65 years divided by household size)	0.42	0.20	+
ADULTEDU	Average education of adults in years	6.87	3.09	-
EDUCHHH	Education level of household head in years	6.89	4.09	-
EDUCHSD	Education level of household head squared	64.08	58.55	-
POVINDE	Poverty index of the household (the higher the wealthier)	-0.65	0.62	-
POVISQD	Poverty index squared	0.80	0.71	-
SOCCAP	Social capital index	12.96	16.29	+
REGION 1-4 ‡	Regional dummies for 4 of the 5 regions			

\*  $n = 120$

† Dependent variable is participation in the child programmes

‡ Regions 1- 4 in ascending order are Kanyuambora, Kavengero Kathigagaceru and Mutino. Reference region is Kanjuki

Source: own survey

in the distribution of the participant households and the general population across the three poverty groups. In both programmes the middle tercile group ('poor') was over-represented in the participant population, while the 'poorest' and 'not so poor' groups were almost equally under-represented. The depth of outreach of the programmes is thus 13.3% and 20.0% for the CIK-Mbeere and CCF-Mutonga programmes, respectively. This was rather poor performance given that they are supposed to explicitly target the poorest<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the question arises as to what might have been the underlying causes (factors) of this unintended result as the goal of the NGOs was to assist the poorest children. This question is addressed in the following section.

## 4.2 Description and Assessment of the Targeting Approaches

We attempt to find out why the two programmes had a poor targeting performance by looking at how they were initiated and what kinds of targeting approaches they adopted.

<sup>3</sup> It should however be clarified that poverty in this case is in relative terms. Given the incidence and severity of poverty in the study areas, it is possible that children supported could all be from poor households in absolute terms as measured by the national poverty line.

Both programs were started after community leaders from each area approached the NGOs on behalf of the respective communities. Based on the information provided by these rural elite, the NGOs' staff visited the programme areas, conducted some rapid rural appraisals and later the programmes were started. After the identification of the program localities, the next step was to select the program participants. In the case of CIK-Mbeere, this step began with the formation of local child development centre committees whose membership was drawn exclusively from members of the partnering evangelical church. The committees together with the locally recruited project staff identified the children to benefit from the programme. The process was not so different for the CCF-Mutonga programme. During an initial phase, the programme was managed through an intermediary organisation, the local Catholic Church. It was then handed over to a committee elected by the parents of the sponsored children. Thus, just like with the CIK-Mbeere, the local committee, alongside the project staff, was involved in the selection of the children to benefit from the programme. The only unique characteristic is that the local administration personnel of the government were assisting in the selection process.

In both programmes, selection of the participants is based on the local knowledge of who is poor and therefore deserves to be enlisted for the programme. Theoretically, local community targeting agents have advantages of having better information on the household characteristics, needs, and even any economic developments that may not be so obvious to an outsider. This better placement of local targeting agents can thus reduce the targeting errors of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the administration costs. However, this approach of depending on the existing local social structures for targeting purposes was not successful, in terms of enabling the programmes to reach the most needy in the study areas. The participating households<sup>4</sup> felt that the children selection approach was far from being transparent and fair.

About 16.7% and 36.7% of the participants of CCF-Mutonga and CIK-Mbeere, respectively, were not satisfied with the targeting approach of the programmes. They were thus of the opinion that there was need for the selection approach to be more open and hence more effective in reaching the poorest. In-depth interviews with participants and key informants revealed that selection flaws emanated from either one of the following three key areas. First, in some instances committee members were reported to include their own children or their relatives' or friends' children as an indirect mode of compensation for time spent in programme-related activities, even though they may not be the most needy. Second, despite the policy to target all community members irrespective of religious affiliation in Mbeere District, households which were members of the partner denomination (Anglican Church of Kenya) dominated the programme at the expense of other more deserving cases. Third, there were cases of nepotism and even corruption depicted by use of bribery to have unqualified children included. Eventually most of

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<sup>4</sup> The non-participants were not asked to comment on the programmes since it was anticipated they might be biased in one way or the other. The point however is that if some of the participants could agree that there some irregularities in the selection process, how much more would the rest of the community have lamented?

the children included in the programmes were from households with some established social links to the local committees. The households expressed the fact that they did not know the NGOs' rules and guidelines of targeting the needy children and therefore could not disapprove the qualifications of those selected irregularly. Thus their desire was that such criteria should be clearly spelt out and made public to all the community members in order to have an open selection process.

### **4.3 Characteristics of Households Participating in the Child Development Programmes**

The results of the econometric model (Table 3) provide us with the characteristics of households that are likely to participate in the case study programmes. For brevity, only the significant variables are discussed. As the coefficient of household size (HH-SIZE) is positive and significant at the 10% level we can say that larger households had a higher possibility of participating in the programmes. When all is constant, larger households are likely to be poorer than smaller ones due to stretching of available resources per household member (WORLD BANK, 2001). Another aspect in relation to the programmes is that a larger household size, especially where it is directly related to the number of children, increases the chances of at least one child being selected.

Although the coefficient of the level of education (EDUCHHH) is not significant, it is positive, and the coefficient of its squared value (EDUHHSQ) is negative and significant meaning that the relationship to participation increases at a diminishing rate. Those with high education, and hence not so poor, are less likely to participate in the programmes. Given that *ceteris paribus* higher education translates into more wealth, this result shows an apparent success of the programmes in screening out the highly educated and well-off households.

The coefficient of the poverty index (POVINDEX) is not significant but has the expected negative sign. However, the coefficient of its squared value (POVISQD) coefficient is negative and significant at 1% level. This shows that poverty is one of the considerations in the selection process as most of the participating households are likely to have a lower index. The positive and significant coefficient of social capital (SOCCAP) indicates that households with more social networks and social responsibilities ended up benefiting by having their children selected into the programmes. This result supports our earlier findings that households with social links to the programmes' committee members and local leaders could easily benefit from the programme irrespective of their poverty status.

Although the case study programmes showed under-representation of the poorest relative group, the result of the econometric analysis indicates that most of the households likely to become participants are not likely to be well-off. This finding is congruent to earlier results that showed that most of the participating households (more than 60%) belonged to the poor relative group (Table 1). Thus, although the programmes did not reach the 'poorest', they never targeted the well-off members of the community.



**Table 3:** Characteristics of participants of CCF-Mutonga and CIK-Mbeere programmes.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Constant	-0.947	-0.678
PROGRAM	-0.835	-0.850
HHSIZE	0.188	2.47**
GENDHHH	-0.665	-1.574
AGEHHH	0.012	0.668
DEPEND	0.970	1.098
ADULTEDU	0.003	0.632
EDUCHHH	0.158	1.160
EDUHHSQ	-0.017	-1.858*
POVINDE	-1.121	-1.590
POVISQD	-1.420	-2.68***
SOCCAP	0.020	1.681*
REGION1	-0.256	-0.390
REGION2	-0.261	-0.325
REGION3	-0.645	-0.677
REGION4	0.115	0.281

$n = 120$ ;  $\log \text{Likelihood} = -59.908$ ;  $\chi^2 = 46.539$

\*\*\*, \*\*, \*  $\equiv$  significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively

Source: own survey

## 5 Conclusions

This paper uses a simple methodological tool to generate the relative poverty groups of households in order to assess the outreach performance of two child development programmes. The results of our analysis show that the two case study programmes had an under-representation of the 'poorest' households though this had not been the intention of the funding NGOs. This poor performance can be traced from a combination of factors that emanated from adoption of a targeting approach that relied on the existing local social structures without stipulating clear guidelines for the identification of poorest households. As the econometric results also show, there was a higher likelihood of households endowed with higher levels of social capital to participate in the programme than those with less social ties. This confirmed the finding that households which were more socially active and had closer ties to the local programme committees and their proxies were easily included as participants. The paper thus demonstrates that existing social structures can sometimes be responsible for perpetuation of social exclusion and

exploitation of the poor in socio-economic development initiatives, and thus cannot always be expected to be pro-poor. An important policy implication is that NGOs' and programmes' technical staffs wishing to operate in the study districts should seek to first understand the limitations of depending on the local social structures for targeting purposes before taking it for granted that they would facilitate reaching of the most needy or poorest in the community.

The other results of the econometric analysis, other than that of social capital, show that the households participating in the case study programmes are not likely to be among the well-off in the community. This is because they are likely to come from larger and less educated households and those depicted to belong to lower groups in terms of relative poverty. Therefore the results of this econometric analysis provide the evidence that the case study NGOs did target the worse-off members of the community though they had an under-representation of the poorest relative group. Thus, this paper shows that although the case study NGOs and their child programmes could be supporting households with characteristics that indicate that they are not among the well-off in the society, such households do not necessarily belong to the poorest group of community members in relative terms.

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