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**INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON
NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE GAMBIA**

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ABSTRACT

The positive trend that NGOs have developed in this era is motivating many scholars and researchers to conduct myriad of studies regarding nongovernmental organizations. This study is not an exception as it aims to explore peoples' perceptions on NGOs. Further specific objectives are: to have a comprehensive understanding of NGOs, its classifications and importance, to explore university students' level of trust in NGOs in the Gambia, to investigate whether the university students' of the Gambia want more or less NGOs and to scrutinize university students' opinion on the importance of NGOs.

The study adapted qualitative method using semi-structured interviews through in-depth interviews in order to investigate university students' perception, opinions, experiences and feelings on NGOs existence in the Gambia in order to contribute to greater insight on the theme. Coding method was applied through themes categorized to help explain the research questions and fulfill the research objectives. The results revealed that the participants held positive perceptions and trust towards NGO initiatives in the Gambia. Also discovered in the findings is that participants are aware of the importance of NGOs in promoting social, economic, cultural, human and civil rights. However, outline of the major issues are highlighted in the findings.

Key Words: Nongovernmental Organization (NGO), Perceptions, Trust, Opinion, Gambia.

ÖZET

STK 'ların bu dönemde geliştirdikleri olumlu eğilim, pek çok bilim adamı ve araştırmacının sivil toplum örgütleri ile ilgili çalışmalar yapmalarına neden olmuştur. Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin STK 'lara yönelik algılarını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın spesifik hedeflerini şu şekilde sınıflamak mümkündür: STK 'ların, sınıflandırmalarının ve önemini kapsamlı bir şekilde anlamak, Gambia 'daki STK 'lara üniversite öğrencilerinin güven seviyesini keşfetmek, üniversite öğrencilerinin daha fazla veya daha az STK isteyip istemediğini araştırmak ve STK 'ların önemi hakkında üniversite öğrencilerinin görüşlerini ortaya koymak.

Çalışmada, Gambia 'daki STK 'lara yönelik üniversite öğrencilerinin algısını, görüşlerini, deneyimlerini ve duygularını araştırmaya yönelik derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılmıştır.. Sonuçlar, katılımcıların Gambiya 'daki STK'lara yönelik algıları ve, STK'ların sosyal, ekonomik, kültürel ve insan haklarının desteklenmesi konusundaki görüşlerini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sivil Toplum Kuruluşu (STK), algı, güven, görüş, Gambiya.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the world has witnessed the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) as never before. According to statistics provided by The Global Journal (2018) the total number of registered NGOs is estimated at 10million. Another important milestone is the total amount of aid channeled through these organizations. Records from Charities Aid Foundation (2018) show exponential growth of 1.2billion in 2012 to 1.4billion in 2014. Projections for 2030 indicate 2.5billion which almost doubled the last statistics in 2014. This paradigm shift could be attributed to the important role that NGOs play towards societal wellbeing and their structurally organized manner. These roles can be classified into three cohorts such as advocacy role, operational role and integrated & hybrid role (Teegen et.al. 2004). The advocacy role focuses particularly on political and civil rights; the operational role focuses on social, economic and cultural rights and the integrated & hybrid role is a combination of both operational and advocacy roles. Although these roles have existed decades back there were other terms like charity organizations, voluntary organizations, religious groups, community cohorts, foundation and trade unions used to describe them.

The term NGO was first coined by the World Bank (WB) in 1949 (Vakil, 1997, p.2068). The fundamental lingering question is what must have caused the existence of these NGOs? First, NGOs existed to fill social, economic, and political gaps that governments could not, would not or may not be able to provide. Secondly, NGOs surfaced to bridge gaps that the private sector may find unprofitable to venture into (Ewoh, 2002). “Non-governmental organizations have played an increasingly significant role in the development work during the past decades” (Ossewaarde et.al. 2008 and cited by Landoy, 2017).

In the Gambia the existences of NGOs dates back to decades ago and have proliferated significantly over the years. The total number of NGOs registered according to The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) which was established in 1983 is eighty (80) and their areas of venture range from operational, advocacy and integrated & hybrid activities including both nationally and internationally based NGOs. This organization called TANGO was born to foster integration within the NGOs through membership and their functions are to circumvent NGOs repeating same activities and mitigate rivalry amongst themselves. In other words the association serves as an umbrella body for the NGOs with the mandate to coordinate

and make sure that resources amassed by the NGOs are adequately optimized for “relief and social development purposes through collaboration, networking, and mutual reinforcement of each other’s activities”.

The major focus for these NGOs under the association TANGO are health, education, women’s empowerment, agriculture and credit, as well as small enterprise development projects such as vegetable gardening, food processing and similar activities. With regards to the fulfillment of its advocacy responsibilities, the association also works on peace building activities, and the promotion of human rights and good governance. In terms of operational activities the association further engages towards improving the living standards of the poor and marginalized members of the Gambian society by supporting poverty reduction interventions as outlined in the national development objectives enshrined in the PRSP and MDGs. In as much as TANGO serves the NGOs initiatives over capacity building and representative body and promoter, the association also helps its members in ways in which they can provide services more effectively to civil societies. In this regard, meetings are frequently conducted within the NGO body to deliberate on pertinent issues that will help the NGOs in their dealings with the NGO community. This takes the form of sharing of important information, discussions on their realizations, accomplishments of tasks and dialogue within the member in order to serve the societies better. With the NGOs togetherness will help the association meet its goals and focus on its mission that is “to contribute to national poverty reduction efforts by expanding membership and improving services to members in a cost-effective and financially sustainable manner” (<http://www.tangogambia.org/thematic-groups>).

1.1 Main Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate university students’ perceptions on NGOs presence in the Gambia. In order to reach this objective the specific objectives of the study are:

- To have a comprehensive understanding of NGOs, its classifications and importance
- To explore university students’ level of trust in NGOs in the Gambia
- To investigate whether the university students’ of the Gambia want more or less NGOs
- To scrutinize university students’ opinion on the importance of NGOs

2. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs)

The term nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) was first used by the World Bank in 1949 (Vakil, 1997, p.2068 cited by Teegen et.al, 2004) although prior to this year which was marked as the colonial era myriad of not-for-profit seeking organizations such as charity organizations, voluntary organizations, religious groups, community cohorts, foundation and trade unions existed and were providing welfare support to the needy, education, agriculture, healthcare and disaster relief aids. Any organization whose activities lie outside government (public service delivery) or commercial (private service delivery) can be termed as nongovernmental organization. This can take any size, either big or small and included but not limited to religion, philanthropic actions in the form of grants and donations. Kramer (1998) defines NGOs as “self-governing and non-profit distributing, have some degree of voluntarism, and are expected to produce a public benefit.”

From 1949 to date, there are other terms utilized to describe nongovernmental organizations and they range from grassroots organizations (GRO), indigenous or international nongovernmental organizations or voluntary organizations. According to Ewoh (2002), the emergence of NGOs was as a result of gaps that governments are neither capable of providing nor lies within their priority domain. These gap deficiencies give rise to the mushrooming of NGOs globally. In most cases according to Dornbos (1990), this rapid increase in the number of NGOs specifically in Africa is as a result of certain hardship that African countries face (Dornbos, 1990 and cited by Ewoh, 2002)

Recently, there is vast attention in the activities of nongovernmental organizations and one lingering question is ‘what must have triggered this interest?’ Fernando and Heston (1997) threw light on those questions; first the birth of NGOs is as a result of organized social cohorts that attempt to fight the inequalities in societies. These imbalances can be gender, political, economic, social, ethnic or religious hence, all these are geared towards fighting all kinds of human sufferings and unchallengeable authority or dictatorship. Second, is the disappointment that donors have with activities of public institutions and also trying to avoid private sector supremacy. One major setback in Africa is the high debt borrowing and political instability. In addition, many African countries according to Fernando and Heston (1997) are faced with problems of emigration and asylum seeking. Given these staggering situations has prompted the

intercessions of both international and indigenous nongovernment organizations to help ameliorate peoples living conditions through the promotion of welfare, education and healthcare.

In 2003, the United Nations (UN) came with specific definition of an NGO and it capitulates as *"any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, the environment or health"* (Teegen1 et.al. 2004).

In 2012, the World Bank (WB) also defined NGOs in a broader perspective which officially and unofficially outlines the definition. *"the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations, [including such diverse systems as]: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations."*(Ritvo et.al. 2013) Thus, in this study this study will concur and adapt the above definition of NGO by the World Bank for two reasons. Firstly, because it is functional and diverse as it leaves no stone unturned. Secondly, it encapsulates all relevant activities and structures that qualify an institution to be regarded as nongovernmental or not-for-profit organization.

2.1 Classifications of NGOs

Nongovernmental organizations or not-for profit organizations can be broadly classified into three (3) main cohorts. According to Teegen et. al. (2004) these are operational, advocacy and integrated & hybrid NGOs. The way in which an NGO can be termed as advocacy or operational depends largely on the direction in which it functions, the level of operation and firmness. The different groups of NGOs can be explained below.

2.1.1 Advocacy NGOs

Advocacy NGOs are those that stand to help protect vulnerable groups in societies. According to Worms (2002), underprivileged or vulnerable members of the society are mostly powerless and voiceless due to their resource less circumstance henceforth, myriad of challenges that they come across do not consolidate with official principles and thus in contrary to harmonize the ordeal they face. Divergence in terms of religion, ethnicity, gender, race and voting rules are further reasons for people or groups to be exempted in making choices that affect their lives as Woods (2003) stated. The key roles of advocacy nongovernmental organizations are particularly political and civil rights. Examples of the activities that advocacy NGOs undertake are; government lobbying, R&D, conducting meetings, citizen tribunals, information dissemination, championing codes of conduct, monitoring and evaluation of others, organizing boycotts, representatives and advisory experts to decision-making forums and so forth (Hudson, 2002).

2.1.2 Operational NGOs

Operational NGOs mostly focus on social, economic and cultural rights. These include healthcare, education, and clean water, provision of sanitary services, disaster relief, and emergency relief as in drought or famine. An example of an emergency famine situation was in Kantora District in the Gambia between 1942 and 1944. An Anglican Missionary by the name of Reverent John Faye developed a project to remedy the famine situation. Until today, the same rescue methods are applied (Little, 1949). In a forum conducted by local NGOs in West Africa a different mindset was born and from there it was ascertained that "NGOs have begun to recognize explicitly that development is a political process and not simply a matter of economic growth." The Red Cross/Red Crescent, Doctors without Borders and the World Wide Fund for Nature are among the broad nongovernmental organizations that perform operational activities like aid, medication and environmental activities respectively. Through the provision of goods and services, NGOs become experts in their field. This is as a result of their visible presences in challenging situations where government is either unwilling or unable to serve. However, these social welfare ideals and relative immunity from pressures to 'sell out' gives them advantage to earn more trust from the vulnerable members of society than the public sector. As a result, they are obliged to provide high-quality goods and services to the masses at affordable prices (Leonard, 2002).

2.1.3 Integrated and hybrid NGOs

Apart from operational and advocacy NGOs, there is another type of NGO called Integrated and hybrid NGOs which is a mix of the two. This occurs when an NGO's activities extends beyond its goals and incorporates the activities of the other. For example the movement from operational activities to advocacy activities or vice versa gives rise to Integrated and hybrid NGOs. Through social, economic and human rights activities that NGOs engage themselves augment the capacities of these areas. According to studies by Brown and Kalegaonkar (2002); Offenheiser and Holcombe, (2003), these activities are "establishing codes; providing training, resource access, and know-how concerning goods and service delivery; sharing best practices; and creating and supporting institutional settings that promote social welfare". NGOs interest and presence as gap fillers in situations where states cannot may not or should not provide social services to its citizens have greatly increased their societal importance.

2.2 Importance of NGOs

NGOs surface to try to bridge gaps that governments are either unwillingly or unable to and also human rights violations gap by soliciting international human rights measures that fall short in local, national and international systems of governance and justice. There is substantial credit given to the important role that NGOs play in human rights particularly in the UN system. Often, NGOs have led the way in proposing new institutional arrangements in order to embody U.N. responses to human rights abuses. This leadership role that the NGOs have gained overtime could be attributed to their fundamental closeness with isolated members of societies thereby NGOs having access to information relevant to human rights dilemmas. One very important function that NGOs played is the establishment of World Bank's Inspection Panel in September 1993. The creation of this panel is to find out violation rights and complaints made against WB financed projects with regards to policies and procedures. NGOs play an advocacy role in situations where a developing country intends to contract with a multinational corporation or borrow from the World Bank. A good example is the case of Shell in Nigeria thus, NGOs engage in the supervision of Multinational Enterprises (MNE) programs with voluntary "codes of conduct" like the UN Global Compact (Ruqqie, 2001) and the Forest Stewardship Council (Domask, 2003).

Meyer (1999) and Hirata (2002) highlighted the fundamental role that NGOs gained in connecting with societies which continuously motivate governments and multilateral institutions to channel their funding via them. NGOs have the flexibility and advantage to focus in either one single geographical area or beyond where governments or states may not have access to given their boundary limits. Again, NGOs can provide services that commercial institutions may not wish to venture in given the non-profit nature of the segment. Given these circumstances, NGOs are capable to serve certain segment needs that government and commercial institutions fall short to deliver (Woller and Parsons, 2002 cited by Teegen et.al. 2004).

Apart from the imperative role that NGOs play in human rights, another key achievement is environmental and developmental policymaking in the developing world (Livernash, 1992). Furthermore and through corporations, NGOs can persuade government with national policies that would contribute to societal wellbeing and finally connect parts of sustainable development like ecology, economics, politics, and culture; and enable individuals to cope with change (Livernash, 1992).

2.3 Perceptions on Nongovernmental Organizations

It is important to emphasize that study on public perceptions towards NGOs is scanty in the Gambia; however, other empirical studies regarding the phenomenon are discovered and explained. According to Reis and Moore (2005) perceptions are a combination of both “evaluative and non-evaluative understanding of a situation” which in other words is a blend of “cognitions (non-evaluative understanding); norms (internalized ideas about appropriate roles); and values (ideals about what might be)”. There are numerous studies done in different regions on people’s perceptions on NGOs and according to their findings for example in 2008, Bano concluded a survey on public perceptions on NGOs in Pakistan and the results of the findings revealed an “Overwhelming Distrust”. Furthermore, the study revealed the failure of civil society organizations in mobilizing aid from members through voluntarism or donation. This could be attributed to the preconceived notions and distrust that the civil society in Pakistan regards NGOs. Respondents familiar with the term NGO, civil society and even educated professionals held negative perceptions that they would joking say ‘There is a lot of money in poverty’; ‘One can only look down on the poor from these NGOs’ four-wheel drives; one cannot feel much for them’; and that NGOs represent ‘marble coffee-table human rights’ (Bano, 2008).

As highlighted by Henderson (2002), Sperling (1999) and Tvedt (1998) foreign donors that channel aid via NGOs to developing countries form selected groups within those civil societies who are familiar with their objective instead of that of the communities they are to benefit. These are some of the reasons why numerous studies examined the connection between NGOs, social capital and civil society. In other studies, the opinions revealed that “NGOs are actually an object of public distrust” (Bano, 2008).

A study was concluded by Fowler and highlighted that NGOs ‘in many developing countries, are the object of government mistrust and public suspicion’. A sighted example was in China where NGOs battle to tap into domestic resources due to inflexible political and social justice (Fowler, 1991). Another case at point is the perceptions held by Vietnamese towards NGOs as examined by Harper (1996). He explained that the lack of proper connections between NGOs and civil society raise eyebrows about NGO legitimacy among the people of Vietnam such that they regard NGOs as either “profit making” or “foreign organizations”.

In Tanzania, a study on “attitudes towards NGOs initiatives aiming at alleviating poverty” was concluded by Manyama (2011) and the results of the findings revealed that many of the beneficiaries held negative attitudes towards NGO initiatives.

In Uganda, a study was conducted by Barr and Fafchamps investigating the satisfaction level of the local people towards NGOs activities. The results of the findings revealed two scenarios. One perception tends towards less satisfied and the other highly satisfied. Less satisfied meant that the “NGO was stationed in wealthy communities and remote areas whereas highly satisfied meant that the NGO used a participatory approach, either by having an NGO permanently present in the client-community, or community involvement in NGO decision making” (Barr & Fafchamps, 2006).

As Holloway (1999) puts it, NGOs no longer occupy the admirations that they believe to have. The people of the South have negative perceptions about them. This is as a result of the luxury lifestyles that NGOs convey in the forms of occupying sophisticated offices, running 4 x 4 cars and earning big salaries. For NGOs to enhance their legitimacy and cause positively, they must be seen as responsible institutions so that when they want to test other similar players in terms of their accountability they can prosper (Holloway, 1999).

In a study conducted by Grodeland (2006) “exploring public perceptions of non-governmental organizations in Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Macedonia” revealed their relationship to be “perceived as trouble” which was gathered through focus group outcomes. There were mixed views from the focus groups by country. In Serbia particularly the results indicated negative perceptions towards NGOs whereas in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Macedonia the results indicated positive perceptions on NGOs. Perceptions on participation seem to lose popularity among these people as small number of them show interest to take part in an NGO initiative. Interestingly, even with those participants in Serbia despite their positive attitude towards NGOs held suspicion about the activities of the NGOs, their legitimacy and long-term sustainability (Grodeland, 2006).

According to research concluded by Gelman and Gibelman (2004) on “A Loss of Credibility: Patterns of Wrongdoing Among Nongovernmental Organizations” he contends that it is with impunity that most of the non-governmental organizations convey their duties upon, although he further pointed out that cases of wrong doing by NGOs begins to paint their image negatively which if the trend continues will eventually lead to public distrust. According to Edelman (1988), Zaller (1992) and cited by Gelman and Gibelman (2004) the great way to influence public perceptions faster is through the media which is either malignant or biased. However, given the inevitable scandals, people’s suspicion about NGOs will perpetuate thereby deterring fundraising actions and potential donations made through philanthropic gestures. By comparison with public and private sector, NGOs are completely different from these institutions. (Leat, 1994; Salamon, 1995 cited by Gelman and Gibelman, 2004).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study tries to investigate university students’ perceptions on NGOs presence in the Gambia and also explore their level of trust for NGOs; hence, the study used qualitative research methods. According to Fossey et al (2002) qualitative research is most suitable especially if the objective of the study is to establish an understanding as to how people see a specific problem. Patton & Cochran (2002) stated that there are three types of qualitative data collection method namely; “interviews, observation and documents.” But in this study interviews was opted in order to have “in-depth responses about people’s perceptions, experiences, opinions, feelings and

knowledge” (Patton & Cochran, 2002). This method helped to have the participants to comprehensively express their viewpoints about the NGOs in the Gambia.

In addition, this study adapts the semi-structured interviews because many of the articles reviewed adapted this method and also it allows the interviewer and the interviewee to fully interact in the process about the phenomena of interest.

3.1 Sample Size and Targeted Population

This study’s targeted population is Gambian university students living in Turkey and primary data method that is first-hand was employed which is presumably believe to be more authentic and also in my opinion intercultural experience gives individuals chance to look at their countries with different lenses. The sample size was selected on convenient bases due to limited resources and time available. Since this study is for academic purpose and all the resources employed towards the realization of the thesis are self-sponsored thus convenience sampling which is a non-probability method in research was used. According to Dunn (2010) in qualitative research interviews take a lot of time and the sample size does not really matter especially if the data collected is rich (Fossey et al 2002). Thus, a small number of samples can provide relevant information to the phenomena of interest.

3.2 Interview Process

Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and others were conducted via telephone using electronic recording applications downloaded from the Google Play Store and they are *Call Recorder and Voice Recorder HD* which were both installed on 22 January 2019. These applications greatly helped in the data collection process. The total number of interviews conducted was 22 and between 29th January and 3rd February 2019 all were completed and the transcribing followed thereafter. All the students speak English language and it really made the transcribing process successful. In addition, the participants’ educational levels are diverse as some are at bachelors’ level, some Masters and some PhD. Also interestingly, some of the students are from the urban areas and the others are from the rural areas in the Gambia. Therefore, this made the study more balanced, captivating yet diverse and that was even felt during the course of the interviews as most of participants shared their rural childhood experiences with the NGOs in the Gambia.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

All the interviews conducted were either call-recorded or voice-recorded with the approval of the interviewee and the message was discarded immediately after transcribed however, it is important to mention that this agreement with the participant was ethically honored. The data collection method adopted in this research is semi-structured using in-depth interviews and in analyzing the data coding method was used. According to Cope (2010), ‘Coding’ is a method in qualitative research where the researcher tries to downsize data into smaller sizes like “packages”. In other words it helps the researcher to identify and organize themes in qualitative data (Cope, 2010). The data analysis was immediately administered after collecting the data in order to manage the time more resourcefully. Prior to coding the data, the entire information captured in both the call-recorded and voice-recorder were written word-by word but excluded interviewees’ real identities. Thereafter, thematic content analysis was applied on the recorded interviews which were explained by McGuirk & O’Neill (2016). In this kind of analysis the entire information is read according to paragraphs and coded by either using a particular word or small axiom without stepping on the rationality of the manner. The coding really helped in analyzing and interpreting the data as transcribing the information in an interview can be overlong. The most important thing in coding is that it aids the researcher in organizing the data in a more systematic way in order to answer the research questions.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Benefits from an NGO Initiative

The data collected revealed the number of participants that benefitted from an NGO operating either nationally or internationally. From the findings, sixteen (16) which is 73% out of the twenty-two (22) participants benefitted from the initiatives of an NGO whereas six (6) which is 27% of the participants had not benefitted from an NGO initiative. Among those that benefitted from NGO initiative considered programs such as school feeding programs, junior school scholarships, bed nets, immunizations, first aid and free medical services as those that they enjoyed to be regarded as benefits. These programs mentioned can be broadly categorized as communal benefits that they enjoyed at very tender ages from the NGOs. The results of the findings are as shown in Figure 1.

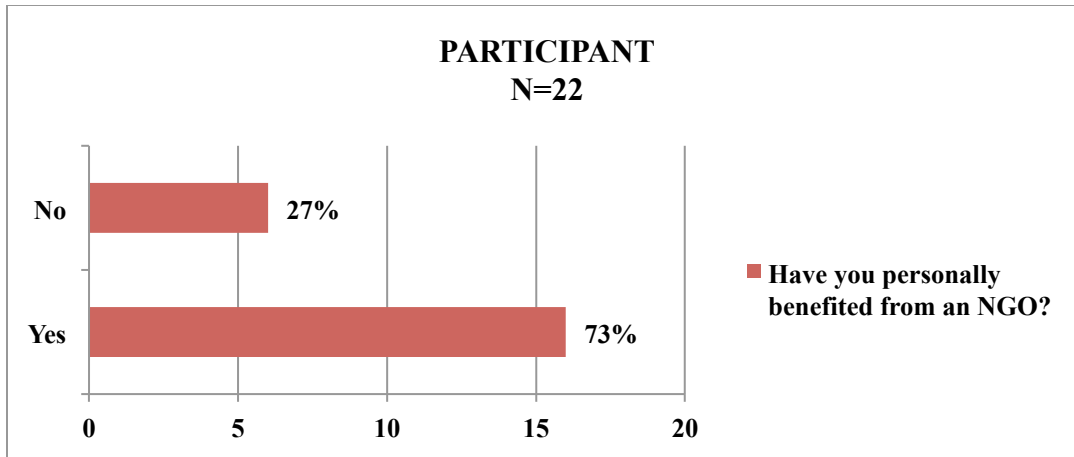


Figure 1: Showing Participants’ Benefit Status from NGO Initiative

One of the participants explained his/her NGO experience as:

“Yes I have benefitted a lot from that information and it helps me actually with the realization of what was me that without them I would not have probably known. For HUMANITY FIRST I attended a high school that was sponsored by them so obviously that had a direct impact on me because from the education that they have helped sponsor today I can say I am in a better position”.

4.2 Project Community Gratitude

This subtheme was established in order to explore the participant’s perception on how gratified the communities are regarding NGOs programs on the stated question: *Do you think the effects their projects have are appreciable in the areas in which they are located?* Participants held divided perceptions regarding the impact and appreciations of projects in the communities in which they are located. Majority of participants are with the opinion that the projects run by the NGOs are appreciated in the areas in which they are located. Other participants express higher opinion appreciations by the communities with word emphasis like, ‘very much’, ‘highly’ ‘really’ and ‘much’ which was categorized as ‘highly appreciated’ to describe the degree of participants appreciations as shown in Figure 2.

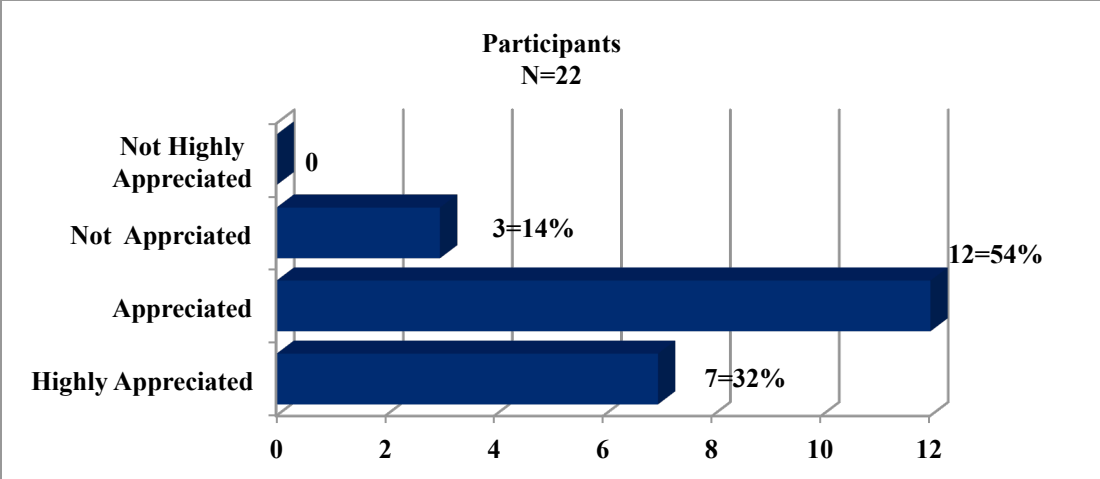


Figure 2: Showing Project Impact Appreciation by Participants

4.3 NGOs with Funds

In order to establish better understanding about the perceptions of NGOs with the participants they were asked to either agree or disagree with the statement: *NGO personnel misappropriate large sums of money and material allocated to the projects.* The statistics of the findings are shown in Figure 3.

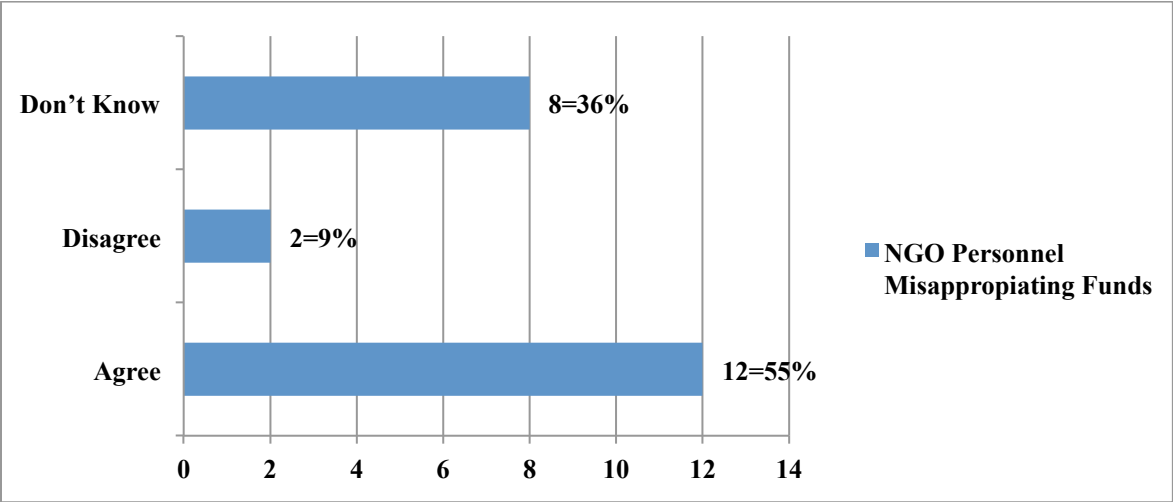


Figure 3: Showing Participants' Opinion on NGO Personnel with Funds

As shown in Figure 3, fifty-five (55%) of the participants agree with the statement that NGO personnel misappropriate large sums of money and material allocated to the projects and some of them even highlighted some examples of such cases. Thirty-six (36%) of the participants

indicated that they don't know only because they have insufficient facts to substantiate the claim but held high suspicion that those claims tend to happen and the public share that perception as well. Two (2%) of the participants indicated that they disagree given the reason that NGOs operate to serve societal needs without getting anything back in return. Thus, they stressed that NGOs are institutions that operate for the welfare of the communities.

5. CONCLUSION

The results revealed important insights that better explained the research questions and shed light on the objectives of this contemporary study. In the Gambia particularly, the NGOs have been active in advocating for the socio-economic advancement of the societies through impactful projects demonstrated in their activities. The findings of this study revealed loopholes in awareness, participation and engagement in NGO activities in the Gambia. Participants revealed key interest in volunteerism and participation in NGO activities which means there is growing passion among young Gambians which the NGOs need to capitalize in order to expand their membership cards and contributions.

Interestingly, participants share the perception that NGOs can fix some societies problems but not all since there are problems that are huge and requires government participation. Therefore, NGO-Government collaboration is what many foresee to be the solution to fix societies dilemmas adequately. Again, project sustainability and benefits to the communities in which they are allocated are what many criticized the NGOs for. Some NGOs engage in short-term projects that are of little benefits to the society and eventually cease an operation which causes disappointment to the communities. In that light, participants yearn for more, bigger and quality NGOs in order to help ameliorate standards of living for the poor and needy.

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