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*Erasmus*

**Unpacking the Dynamics of Donor-Recipient Issues  
in Partnerships between Local NGOs and International  
Donor Organizations: A Case Study of GYNED Sierra  
Leone**

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***Disclaimer:***

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## List of Acronyms

LNGOs-	Local Non-Governmental Organisations
IDOs-	International Donor Organizations
GYNED-SL-	Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development Sierra Leone
GMI –	Global Mentoring Initiative
UNDP -	United Nations Development Programme

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of Donor-Recipient issues in partnerships between Local NGOs and international donor organizations. The focus was on the case Study of GYNED in Sierra Leone. To achieve this aim, the study examined the specific aid localisation challenges arising in the context of the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP; how GYNED-SL and UNDP actors perceive ensuring equity and complementarity as a solution to localisation challenges in their partnership; the measures taken by GYNED-SL and UNDP to ensure an equitable and complementary partnership in addressing (or not addressing) donor-recipient relation challenges; the challenges that GYNED-SL and UNDP faced when implementing measures to ensure complementarity and equity and what UNDP is doing to empower GYNED-SL in its aid localisation efforts.

The study was conducted as a qualitative research based on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The development of the study sample was done using purposive sampling. Data collection was done using semi-structured interviews conducted through the zoom platform. The data collected in the study was analysed using the thematic analysis method.

The study found that the UNDP and GYNED-SL partnership was influenced by challenges such as burden of accountability and reporting and reliance on the donor (UNDP) for resources. However, these challenges can be solved through complementarity and equitability since these two can enhance understanding and diminish suspicion. The findings also identified some implications of the measures used to ensure equity and complementarity and they include improved decision-making, enhanced collaboration, and better project outcomes for localisation. The pursuit of complementarity and equity faced hindrances such as the lack of mutual understanding, financial issues, delayed decision-making, and contradictory priorities.

The results of this study are important because they add to the existing pool of knowledge about the challenges encountered in donor-recipient relations and how these challenges can be solved to realize workable partnerships. IDOs will use these findings to understand how they can enhance their partnerships with their local recipient partners. It will also be possible for local NGOs to apply the knowledge created in this study to design and improve their partnerships with their donors. The knowledge created in this study can provide the basis for policy development especially where donors and recipients are concerned. To make up for the deficiencies in the findings of this study, it is recommended that future studies should investigate the best ways of achieving complementarity and equitability in donor-recipient partnerships.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This topic of localizing donor-recipient relations in development aid is relevant to Development Studies because it highlights the significance of customizing development interventions to the unique circumstances and requirements of the surrounding communities and areas. This method acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective development and that project success hinges on comprehending and resolving the particular features, difficulties, and possibilities of the target area. Local communities are encouraged to actively participate in the development process through such localization activities. Since local communities are frequently in a better position to recognize their own needs, set priorities for initiatives, and put solutions into action that are consistent with their goals and beliefs, this empowerment may result in more long-lasting effects.

### **Keywords**

Local Non-Governmental Organisations, International Donor Organizations, Aid, Localization, Covid-19, Sierra Leone, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development Sierra Leone (GYNED-SL)

# Chapter 1 : Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Proposed Study

Recognizing the interdependence and interconnectedness between development efforts and aid in addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, including conflict and crises, has led to the evolution of the development-aid nexus (Lie, 2020). The nexus strives to produce long-lasting and sustainable changes in the wellbeing of impacted populations by combining aid and development initiatives. Key organizations that participate in the development-aid nexus include United Nations (UN) agencies, international financial institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), donor nations and organizations, regional organizations, as well as the private sector. Western-based players in the development-aid nexus such as UN agencies and the Red Cross Movement have long viewed themselves as at the core of aid-related activities and indispensable players (Bennett et al, 2016). They serve both as implementing organizations and as coordinators of aid (United Nations, n.d). Nevertheless, since the end of the Second World War up to recent times, there has been significant expansion in the number, type, and size of donor organizations and a proliferation of players laying claim to the aid cause (Collinson, 2016). Such players include national NGOs, faith-based organizations/churches, state actors, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), youth groups, and women's groups. As a shift in the global donor landscape, Collinson (2016) noted that IDOs have been increasingly partnering with these local and national players in delivering emergency and development responses in different nations in the Global South.

Partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs are increasingly touted as an important element of localization efforts. Localization recognizes the existent and potential strengths and benefits of IDOs partnering with LNGOs and state actors (OECD, 2017). In the development-aid nexus, localization has been defined as “making aid as local as possible and as international as necessary” by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, n.p) in 2016. Jideofor (2021) described localization as the willingness of IDOs to hand over control of aid operations and reactions gradually and naturally to national and local actors.

One core element that localization principles and frameworks have focused on is shifting leadership and decision-making to national and local levels (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018: Humanitarian Advisory Group, 2019). This shift is to be achieved by promoting equitable and complementary partnerships between local, national, and IDO actors (Van

Brabant & Patel, 2018; Humanitarian Advisory Group, 2019). Equitable and complementary partnerships, according to several localization frameworks involve such impact indicators as LNGOs having increased power and decision-making capacities (Featherstone, 2019: Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023), LNGOs leading and defining aid, as well as clearly defined parameters for IDOs complementing local actors in aid delivery (OECD, 2017: Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023). IDOs are increasingly employing these impact indicators in gauging the progress of localization of aid.

Nevertheless, equitable and complementary partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs are difficult to attain because the dynamics of relationships between them are intricate and multifaceted as a result of donor-recipient problems existing between the two institutions. The donor-recipient problems include divergent goals, information asymmetry agencies issues, and power dynamics. The problems emerge when the goals and interests of the donors and NGOs are not completely congruent, sometimes resulting in a difference in priorities, poor resource management, or a lack of accountability (Milner, 2006). While LNGOs aspire to carry out their objectives and maintain autonomy, donors want to make the most of the impact of their donations and guarantee that money is used efficiently (Aerni, 2006). To manage agency risks and ensure efficient and effective attainment of shared goals in the context of development and aid operations, effective monitoring, communication, and contractual structures are necessary. Despite the push to shift decision making and leadership to local actors in aid, donor-recipient issues in IDO-LNGO partnerships still persist as demonstrated by several studies (Van Wessel et al., 2020; Jideofor, 2021). This has prompted various IDOs, including the United Nations agencies, to seek to address donor-recipient issues between them and their local or national partners in the Global South through promotion of equitable and complementary partnerships in localization strategies (Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023). Strengthening and enhancing the implications of such efforts requires an understanding of the instruments and procedures employed to shift leadership and decision-making to national and local actors.

Apart from existing donor-recipient issues, the Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges that further threatened partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs. As Nicaise (2020) noted, development assistance and donor organizations encountered new difficulties as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. To help developing countries deal with the sociological, economic, and health crises, they had to quickly offer necessities and financial aid. Partners relied on finance modalities that were different from their typical financing cycles, which increased the danger of corruption during this period. Furthermore, lockdowns, travel

restrictions, and health concerns caused by Covid-19 caused project implementation to be disrupted. LNGOs encountered difficulties in providing services, carrying out fieldwork, and fulfilling project deadlines, which could have caused delays and interfered with the trust between the LNGOs and their IDO partners (Eribo, 2021). Because of the lockdown measures, IDOs found it difficult to efficiently conduct site visits and check on project progress. Due to the decreased ability to evaluate the effects of ongoing projects, possible difficulties with accountability and transparency would emerge. The pandemic and the related measures prevented many IDO-LNGO engagements and in-person visits, which are crucial for fostering relationships and understanding (Nicaise, 2020). The decreased engagement could result in misunderstandings and poor communication, which might put collaboration under stress. The threats that Covid-19 posed to IDO-LNGO partnerships warrant an understanding of the factors that influenced the equitable and complementary IDO-LNGO partnerships in the context of pandemics.

## **1.2 The Nature of the Problem**

Indeed, Partos (2022), Jideofor (2021), and Apollo & Mbah (2022) suggested that the meaningful involvement of local organizations in the global aid system can result in positive changes in aid activities. The meaningful involvement of these actors requires addressing the power inequalities through promoting equitable and complementary partnerships. Recognizing the potential of local actors, United Nations agencies, like other donor organizations worldwide, have committed themselves to strengthening the leadership of local and national NGOs in aid action and treating them as equal partners (Hutchings & Kempe, 2008; Howorth, 2010). The reality, however – as pointed out by Al-Abdeh & Patel (2019), Metcalfe-Hough et al. (2021), and Pellowska (2022) – is that many IDOs still hold a majority of the decision-making power, limiting the ability of LNGOs to do anything much else than following the lead of their international partners' pre-established plans and objectives. Similarly, Haynes & Tanner (2015) stated that, although youth NGOs often become the first responders in times of emergencies, donor organizations normally consider them to be passive actors who can only play limited roles in communicating about, and responding to, crises. The authors also asserted that donor organizations often become instructors to LNGOs instead of looking at them as significant partners in response operations.

Pellowska (2022) hypothesized that improper addressing of agency and information asymmetry issues arising from power imbalances negatively influences attempts by IDOs and LNGOs to attain equitable and complementary partnerships in delivering emergency

responses. This calls for the need to deeply interrogate the implementation of practices to attain equitable partnerships between IDO and LNGOs in the Global South. Studies conducted to evaluate the performance of localization efforts in aid have been done mainly by IDOs. They often employ quantitative evaluation methods that check the outcomes of the efforts against predetermined goals. Such evaluations do not adequately reflect the reality as they frequently use information gathered from a small number of stakeholders, including donor reports or project paperwork (Mueller-Hirth, 2012; Holland & Ruedin, 2012; Bennett et al. 2015). Such approaches then fall short of the long-term and transformational shifts that IDO-LNGO partnerships hope to bring about (Pellowska, 2022). This paper seeks to contribute to filling this research gap by examining a concrete practice example of attempts to develop an equitable and complementary relationship between an LNGO based in Sierra Leone and a global IDO, and the barriers involved.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

Considering the potential of IDO-LNGO partnerships to strengthen localization efforts as my backdrop, the objective of this study was to examine the perspectives on, and the implications of, donor-recipient issues between LNGOs and IDOs partners and also to evaluate the equity and complementarity measures employed to address these issues.

### 1.4 Research Questions

**Main research question:** how does the empowerment of GYNED-SL, through pursuing complementarity and equity in its partnership with UNDP, influence donor-recipient problems within this partnership?

#### **Sub questions**

1. What specific aid localisation challenges arise in the context of the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP?
2. How do GYNED-SL and UNDP actors perceive ensuring equity and complementarity as a solution to localisation challenges in their partnership?
3. What measures were taken by GYNED-SL and UNDP to ensure an equitable and complementary partnership in addressing (or not addressing) donor-recipient relation challenges?
4. What challenges did GYNED-SL and UNDP face when implementing measures to ensure complementarity and equity?
5. What is UNDP doing towards the empowerment of GYNED-SL in its aid localisation efforts?

## **1.5 Justification and Relevance of this Research**

Donor-recipient issues in partnerships between youth-NGOs and IDOs curtail positive outcomes of these partnerships (Aluisio et al., 2022). Therefore, investigating the factors influencing the meaningful involvement of local youth NGOs in post-covid-19 responses through partnerships with IDOs is a topic that bears much relevance. The focus on the chosen topic is based on the need to collect information that can help other organizations to understand the potential of LNGOs involved in development aid and the factors that hinder their participation in partnerships with IDOs. The findings of this study can be used by IDOs to inform their program design as they increase their partnership with local NGOs, and the other way around. The findings of this study will also be relevant for students and other researchers.

## **1.6 The Case of UNDP-GYNED Partnership**

The partnership between UNDP and the local Sierra Leonian NGO Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development (GYNED-SL) aimed at delivering the project “Low-Value Grant to Provide Psychosocial Services & Life Skills to 300 Freetown Urban Youth Slum Dwellers” (UNDP, 2020: 2). In this project, the Global Youth Network used funds from UNDP to provide psychosocial support to 300 youth residing in 6 slum areas in the Freetown urban areas affected by Covid-19. The slum communities included Kanikay, Funkia, Marbella, Kolleh Town, and Kroo Bay (UNDP, 2020). The youths were trained on youth entrepreneurship, the importance and benefits of personal and community hygiene, mental health education, consequences of harmful substances and drug abuse, soft life skills, and consequences of harmful substances and drug abuse.

According to the donor-recipient theory, the connection between an IDO and a LNGO is one in which the donor serves as the principal and the LNGO as the agent. This idea entails that donors or IDOs give money and resources to NGOs so they can carry out programs and produce particular results that are in line with their objectives (Parker et al., 2018). As the donor’s agent, the LNGO is expected to act in the donor’s best interests, follow their instructions, and be responsible for the efficient use of resources (Deloffre, 2016; Clough, 2018). Due to the funds and resources held by the donor, the donor organization holds more



power than the LNGO. As a result, power imbalances emerge as one of the significant challenges that occur within, and influence, the donor-recipient relationship.

One of the implications of these imbalances is that those in positions of authority, typically the IDOs who act as donors, may not be knowledgeable about the situation locally or about the type and depth of change that is required (Partos, n.d.; Jideofor, 2021). Information asymmetry is the term used to describe this lack of awareness. Due to information asymmetry, the IDO may not be aware of the social, cultural, and political aspects that have a big impact on how projects are implemented (Hearn 2007; Parker et al., 2018; Clough, 2018). The IDO then may find it difficult to offer the right advice and support without a thorough awareness of the situation, which could result in subpar project design and results.

Power imbalances also lead to agency issues which embroil contradictory techniques and strategies for project implementation due to the misalignment of the IDO and LNGO donors' goals and priorities (Hearn 2007; Parker et al., 2018; Clough, 2018). Information asymmetry and agency problems can damage trust and confidence between the donating IDO and the LNGO and make it difficult to work together. Building trust can be difficult when there is a perceived lack of openness and understanding, which makes it difficult to forge productive working partnerships (Bruen et al., 2014; AbouAssi & Trent, 2016). Macrae (2002) noted that open communication, knowledge sharing, and group decision-making may be hampered as a result of information asymmetry and agency problems, which could harm the execution and results of projects.

## **1.7 Chapter Outline**

The proposed study is composed of five chapters. Chapter one is the introductory chapter. It presents the nature of the problem, the justification for and relevance of the research, the background of the proposed study, and the research objectives and questions. Chapter two discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework relevant to the study's topic and research questions. Chapter three presents the methodologies and methods employed in collecting data to answer the study's research questions. Chapter four discusses the findings derived from the data collected from respondents and secondary sources. The final chapter, numbered five summarizes, synthesizes and reflects on the findings of the study. It also provides suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2 : Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Donor-Recipient Problems as Hindrances to Successful IDO-LNGO Partnerships**

#### **2.1.1 Overview of Typical Relationships between IDOs and LNGOs**

Development aid coordination seeks to enhance the effectiveness of the provision of aid to vulnerable groups of people and this entails ensuring greater accountability, predictability, and partnership. Nevertheless, crises in recent times have become more complex which makes coordination and communication more chaotic among the different actors involved (Altahir, 2013). A crucial way of addressing this challenge is to focus on partnerships, especially those between IDOs and local actors. Pouligny (2003) noted that emphasis on such partnerships can generate opportunities to combine resources, expertise, and skills that more effectively deliver aid to vulnerable groups.

Mayer (2007) concurred with this sentiment and added that often the entry of IDOs into a local community generates an atmosphere of expectation, which is usually unrealistic, of the benefits that the people will get. The expectations are created by the IDOs through their large infusions of financial and other resources and aid and explicitly or implicitly offering solutions to issues affecting the community. However, the dependence also goes the other way with IDOs needing local groups to provide relevance and legitimacy to their work. This creates a benefactor-type relationship between IDOs and local ones. Gray et al. (2006) explained that many IDOs feel that it is their responsibility and mandate to dictate the course of action in such relationships, adding to the complexity of the relationship between them and local groups.

While there may be a case for this argument, it is also clear that no development aid program can be successful without input from the local community (Corbett et al., 2022). This type of situation oftentimes creates competition instead of cooperation. LNGOs usually find themselves competing with IDOs in addition to competing with other local organizations to win the bid to work with the wealthier IDOs (Mayer, 2007). The initiatives taken by the local organizations likely will be based on the donor's wishes and hence may not reflect the priorities and needs of the community (Gray et al. 2006). In a similar study, Goldsmith & Harris (2012) explained that it is important to question the type of relationship between IDOs and the local actors in communities that need aid. If the people or organizations in power are resentful or ambivalent of outsider presence, then they could

hamper the activities of the international aid community. This can be done by denying them access to vulnerable individuals or specific geographic areas; establishing difficult entrance and operations requirements; and being uncompromising on issues that would make operations of the international aid communities easier. Goldsmith & Harris (2012) noted that such issues underline the importance of having a good working relationship between IDOs and LNGOs in providing development aid.

### **2.1.2 Agency issues in IDO and LNGO Partnerships**

Various theories are employed in the analysis of the relationship between IDOs and LNGOs, including agency theory. The latter is used to explain the crucial relationship between donors and recipients. Basically, a donor is a person or organization that significantly depends on an agent to execute specific tasks or initiatives (Cuevas-Rodriguez et al., 2012). By definition, an agent uses resources supplied by the donor and hence incurs little or no risk because any losses are borne by the donor. The theory analyzes problems and solutions pertaining to a delegation of tasks by donors to agents. The issues arise due to a conflict of interests between these two groups (Aerni, 2006). The agent makes decisions and takes actions on behalf of the donor, and this may be a source of disagreements and issues (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). Some of the main causes of agency issues include when the donor acts contrary to the suggestions given by the recipient; when a conflict of interest arises between the donor and the recipient; when a recipient makes a decision that is not in the best interest of all actors involved; and when an agent may act independently from the donor so as to get any type of bonus or incentive (Lister, 2000; Milner, 2006; Gailmard, 2014). From this, it is seen that agency problems are a result of different objectives between donor and recipient. The agency problems can be classified into various categories:

- *Moral hazard*: there are two main types of moral hazard problems. The first is hidden information whereby the recipient has more information compared to the donor prior to the commencement of the partnership (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). The recipient can use this hidden information to satisfy self-interests. The second type is hidden actions. Because of information asymmetry, the donor is not fully aware of the performance and fulfilment of the recipient (Bergh et al., 2019). Even though the donor can observe the final outcome, he/she is not able to assess the specific efforts of the recipient;

- *Hold-up*: the risk of hold-up arises from investments by the donor where he/she has no solid information concerning the recipient's intentions (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). These hidden intentions can become evident to the donor after the completion of the project;
- *Adverse selection*: another risk in the donor-recipient relationship is the donor selecting a wrong/false recipient (Rauchhaus, 2009). This problem of adverse selection may prevent relationships or lead to the collapse of the partnership.

Cuevas-Rodriguez et al. (2012) explained that agency theory discusses setting up agency relationships that may help reduce the likelihood of disputes and other issues between donors and recipients. The main types of agency theory are the principal and positivist theories. Positivist studies have focused on defining situations where the recipient and donor are likely to have conflicting goals and then outline governance frameworks that restrict one party's self-interest or self-serving conduct (Ekanayake, 2004). For instance, a recipient is most likely to work towards the interests of the donor when the agreement between them is outcome-based or when the donor has data that can be used to verify the decisions and actions of the recipient. On the other hand, Van Puyvede et al. (2012) noted that studies on the principal agency theory focus on the relationship and interactions between the donor and recipient with the aim of creating an ideal contract between the two. Under this type of agency theory, a behavior-based contract is considered the most effective because the donor buys the conduct of the recipients. The recipient is also considered more risk-averse compared to the donor and hence an outcome-based contract would overly pass the risk to the recipient.

### **2.1.3 Information Asymmetry Issues in IDO and LNGO Partnerships**

Information asymmetry is one of the causes of donor-recipient issues arising between IDOs and LNGOs working in partnership. According to Auronen (2003), information asymmetry is a concept that originated in the field of economics and has since been applied to other fields including insurance and finance. It posits that in some interactions or transactions, one partner has superior or more information than the other party leading to an imbalance that creates distortions or disadvantages in outcomes and decision-making (Bergh et al., 2019). Overall, a focus on information asymmetry offers insights into how differences in information between partners affect social and economic interactions. The concept provides a framework for understanding and addressing the resulting inefficiencies and challenges in

a donor-recipient relationship. Information asymmetry emanates from, and establishes, an imbalance of power which can lead to inefficient execution of programs and activities.

Information asymmetry is highly relevant in the analysis of the relationship between IDOs and LNGOs. The concept helps reveal the unequal distribution of information between the two parties which can have crucial implications for power dynamics, decision-making, and outcomes of the collaboration (Auronen, 2003). Dixon et al. explain that in relation to knowledge and contextual understanding, LNGOs may have a better understanding of the local context, community dynamics, and cultural nuances. As such, they may have crucial information concerning the preferences, needs, and challenges facing the affected community (Van Brabant & Patel, 2017; Partos, 2022). If this knowledge is not fully shared or understood by the IDO, this can lead to a misalignment of priorities, strategies, and initiatives hence hinder the effectiveness of the collaboration.

Resource disparities are a key factor as well. Compared to LNGOs, IDOs often have greater networks, resources, and access to global information. This information asymmetry often influences the decision-making capabilities and bargaining power of LNGOs (Burger & Seabe, 2013). The LNGOs have to rely on their international counterparts for resources but may still lack the required information to wholly understand the potential risks or implications related to the partnership (Gray et al., 2006). Information asymmetry also impacts accountability and transparency. IDOs often have rigorous evaluation and reporting mechanisms because of their access to expertise and resources. Nonetheless, this information may not be easily accessible to LNGOs or the targeted communities because of information asymmetry (Bergh et al., 2019). In such instances, it becomes difficult to ensure transparency and accountability.

Information asymmetry issues emerge from and recreate power imbalances with the party with superior information having greater decision-making authority and control of, for example, the project (Lam, 2023). IDOs with greater financial resources and networks may dictate terms of engagement, resource allocation, and project design. In such a case, the LNGO may face challenges asserting their priorities and maintaining autonomy when making decisions (Ebrahim, 2003; Auronen, 2003). Understanding information asymmetry is crucial in identifying and addressing challenges associated with power imbalances, resource disparities, and effective use of expertise and knowledge. It also helps promote transparency and accountability leading to impactful and equitable collaborations between IDO and LNGOs.

## **2.2 Influence of Aid Localization on Donor-Recipient Relational Issues in IDO-LNGO Partnerships**

The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 resulted in the ‘Grand Bargain’, a voluntary commitment of international donor agencies and major state donors. To give “more funding and support tools for local and national responders” was one of the main commitments and “localization” was the term used to describe this process (Jideofor, 2021). The Grand Bargain 2.0, introduced in 2021, went even farther and made the commitment to give greater support to local responders’ leadership, effectiveness, and capacity as well as their involvement in delivering development aid. As part of the Grand Bargain’s commitments, localization is the one which can shift the power to local actors in aid (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2021). Localization of aid is meant to address several issues including the problem of excessive centralisation in the international aid system. The international aid system is increasingly centralised and remote when it comes to making important strategic, financial, and operational decisions (Van Brabant & Patel, 2017). The solution proposed by localization is to bring the strategic decision-making closer to local actors and the crisis zone.

Another issue that localization attempts to address is the oligopoly of primary recipients. Only a small number of UN organizations, INGOs, and the Red Cross & Red Crescent Movement are the primary recipients of institutional aid funding creating an oligopoly (Parker, 2016). Van Brabant & Patel (2017) noted that these few institutions have exceptional power over global development aid, which constricts the room for local-actor leadership and may reduce the desire for reform and the potential for creativity. Therefore, localization suggests that the answer is to increase the variety of primary recipients, particularly by providing more direct support to local actors (Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020). Localization also seeks to address the issue of the politically unsustainable nature of the international aid system. The structural dominance of the international aid business is frequently seen as being unduly paternalistic, which may not be acceptable to national governments and civil groups in the long run (Van Brabant & Patel, 2017). Localization, on the other hand, will maintain the credibility of globally backed crisis planning and response, even in a changing global order.

Seven years later, according to Jideofor (2021), some of the Grand Bargain’s localization-related aims have been attained, but more needs to be done. The research brief by Jideofor (2021) set forward four notions for advancing the localization cause. One of these notions is changing leadership and retiring regressive terminologies. Under this notion,

it is noted that the possibilities that national and local players will harness their agency to lead and advance the collective outcomes of the development aid are remote if national and local actors still need to be welcomed into processes and activities for development aid (Robillard et al., 2020; Jideofor, 2021). While IDOs continue to think about the localization process in terms that indicate that national and local players are excluded, the transition of leadership to the national and local levels will remain unfinished (Khan & Kontinen, 2022). Harris & Tuladhar (2019) proposed that when an IDO shifts power to local actors it observes the work of national and local performers and takes note. Beyond the improvements accomplished in the localization of aid, important concerns about how the localization process should be conducted still need to be answered. For example, the question of whether partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs attain the shifting of powers to local actors and whether certain donor-recipient issues harm localization. To answer these questions, studies need to delve deeply and critically into the nature of partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs. In this regard, the element of the quality of partnership between an IDO and a LNGO, contained within various localization frameworks, becomes imperative.

### **2.2.1 The Influence of Equitable and Complementary Partnerships on Donor-Recipient Issues**

The two key factors that localization frameworks suggest as solutions to issues affecting the partnerships between donors and recipients are complementarity and equity. Complementarity in IDO-LNGO partnerships is defined as the situation where a partner contributes the capabilities and resources needed by the other partner. The other partner contributes complementary resources (de Groote et al. 2023). Complementarity is also the combination of strengths that each organization can bring in a complementary manner that ensures the ability of each organisation as well as the partnership as a whole, to respond to the needs of those who have been affected (British Red Cross, 2018). In the best complementarity situations, both partners make contributions with each partner providing expertise and resources required by the other organization. Equity in a partnership between IDOs and local actors refers to a relationship in which there is respect between the organizations involved, power and size notwithstanding (Lane, 2010). In a partnership where there is equity, the organizations respect each other's independence, obligations, and mandates and appreciate each other's commitments and constraints.

National and local actors have expressed dissatisfaction with their instrumentalization and the prevalent, frequently imposed subcontracting dynamic by IDOs. They recognize the

value of these organizations but strive for more sincere and fair collaborations, wanting to move from being passive ‘implementers’ to active ‘decision-making’ partners (Elbers & Arts, 2011; Gent et al., 2015; Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023). The Global Mentoring Initiative (GMI) framework proposes that transparency, good communication, shared accountability, and regular evaluations of the quality of the collaborative framework are necessary components for this change. The degree to which IDO and LNGO partnerships actually reflect the idea of a partnership or tend to put one party’s interests ahead of the other is another crucial consideration (Global Mentoring Initiative Framework, 2023). Equally important is how the collaboration ends, namely, if it does so in a polite and responsible manner. These elements greatly influence the collaboration’s overall character and define its effectiveness and genuineness.

A major problem in the partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs is risk perception. The IDOs frequently characterize all local respondents as a risk of corruption and fraud, prejudiced against certain political or social groups, and failing to meet international standards. The Global Mentoring Initiative Framework (2023) noted that few recognize the dangers that a local responder faces when working closely with and becoming financially dependent on an international actor. Risk also exists in various dimensions. In terms of funding, there is a risk of fraud and corruption, but there is also a risk that local responders may not be able to pay their true expenses and will therefore operate at a loss. Additionally, there is always a chance of wasting funds by making unnecessary expenses. In terms of the quality of the relationship, at the opposite end of the spectrum of course stands the notion of trust (Parto, 2022). Localization frameworks suggest that the level of trust between local responders and IDOs is expected to rise when complementarity and equality are employed in their partnerships.

To attain solutions to the discussed donor-recipient issues targeted by localization, several organizations which are party to the Grand Bargain agreement have developed various frameworks. An important area targeted by these frameworks is the quality of partnerships between the international and local actors. In this area, localization insists on different impact indicators that signify complementarity and equity in partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018; Humanitarian Advisory Group, 2019). According to the study of Dixon et al. (2016), local actors in Syria played a crucial role in facilitating access for aid inside Syrian borders, particularly in areas that were not controlled by the regime. More importantly, this study discovered that local actors offer more than just access. Syrian aid organizations had enormous potential for more suitable, long-lasting, and



efficient aid, supporting localization arguments. The authors, however, concluded that it is crucial to note that the degree to which this potential is realized, significantly depends on relationship practices of international donor organizations (Dixon et al., 2016). Hence, the relationship between IDOs and LNGOs becomes a crucial contribution to localization. To this end, various localization frameworks following the Grand Bargain agreement contain indicators for the element of relationship quality even though differently framed. The Global Mentoring Initiative developed a seven-dimension framework for localization which draws on the “Grand Bargain commitment to localization”.

### **The Global Monitoring Initiative Framework (GMI)**

The GMI is a non-profit organization that is involved in the provision of guidance and business skills to university students via online mentorship. GMI originated from the Rockefeller Foundation’s Digital Jobs Initiative and its purposes was to make students ready for their first career job through training. The organization developed a localisation framework that is commonly referred to in localisation initiatives. The localization framework by The GMI (2023) suggests that it is the responsibility of the donor organization to ensure that local players profit from a fair relationship, regardless of whether support is provided directly or is availed through pooled money, networks, or another partner.

This framework emphasizes the relationship quality between IDOs and LNGOs. The framework’s dimension of ‘relationship quality’ suggests several indicators, as revealed in Figure 1 below.

## **INDICATORS FOR EQUITABLE AND COMPLEMENTARY PARTNERHIPS IN THE LOCALIZATION FRAMEWORK**

- *Choosing each other.*
- *Smart trust: intentional trust-building*
- *‘Decision-making’, not ‘implementing’ partner (joint problem-analysis, intervention design; learning evaluation)*
- *Compensating for structural power inequalities*
- *Respectful tone and content of communications*
- *Reciprocal transparency and accountability (reflected in contracts)*
- *Risk-sharing*
- *Budget transparency and fair sharing of resources*
- *Responsible ending of collaboration*

**Figure 1 : *Relationship quality dimension of the Global Mentoring Initiative's seven dimensions framework for localization***

**Source: *Global Mentoring Initiative (2023)***

I employ the Global Mentoring Initiative's indicators for the dimension of equitable and complementary partnership in analyzing the extent to which the GYNED-SL and UNDP partnership addressed donor-recipient issues using equitable and complementary measures. My choice is influenced by the framework's inclusion of indicators that directly relate to donor-recipient problems. I also selected the framework because of its emergence of the internationally acknowledged and widely applied Grand Bargain principles of localization which would enable replication of this study in other contexts as well as the comparison of its findings with other analyses of localization efforts.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

Partnerships between donors and recipients are affected by donor-recipient problems that hinder the IDO-LNGO Partnerships. Although these challenges exist, the input from the local community cannot be done away with. Delegation of tasks by the donor to the recipient, and information asymmetry may adversely affect the IDO-LNGO partnership. The GMI framework has been suggested in this study as a possible solution to the donor-recipient issues targeted by localization. This framework is appropriate for analysing the GYNED-SL and UNDP partnership especially on matters of equity and complementarity, hence it has been applied in this study.

# Chapter 3 : Methodology and Methods

## 3.1 Research Approach

Cresswell & Garrett (2008: 332) defined a research approach as a procedure chosen by the investigator to gather, analyze, and interpret data relating to the phenomenon under study. There are three main research approaches, namely approaches using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The current study adopted a mixed methods approach which entails using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Cresswell, 2012). On their own, quantitative and qualitative research methods address different questions with each method having its own inherent strengths and weaknesses (Mason, 2006). The use of a mixed methods approach allows the researcher to overcome the individual weaknesses of each of the two approaches. As Fetters & Freshwater (2015) explained, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data helps validate, clarify, and elaborate the findings from each method. Data can be analyzed separately, and the findings compared to see if they complement or counter each other. This creates a solid foundation for drawing comprehensive findings and conclusions. Integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches helps achieve a more complete and synergistic use of data leading to a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

## 3.2 Case Study Design

This study is based on a case study design focusing on the Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development and UNDP, in Sierra Leone, and investigates issues that arise from the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP. An appropriate research design for this phenomenon allows the researcher to investigate it in its natural setting. Yin (2014) explained that case study research is preferred when: the researcher has no control over behavioral events; the research questions are “why” and “how”; and if the focus is on a contemporary or ongoing phenomenon. In this study, the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP is one that is ongoing, and the researcher has no control over the behavior of the different individuals involved in the partnership.

Furthermore, the choice of a case study is also appropriate because case studies have the advantage of enabling the research to focus on a particular phenomenon and segment of the

population instead of taking a general approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It also considers the relationship between context, phenomena, and people and affords researchers the flexibility of collecting data via different means. As suggested by Takahashi & Araujo (2020), through the case study method, it will be possible to capture the context and lived reality of respondents. From the description, it is clear that the case study research has inherent advantages over other methodologies. For one, it enabled the researcher to investigate the relationship between people, context, and phenomena. Here, the researcher was able to study the phenomenon of donor-recipient relationships using the case of GYNED-SL and UNDP, in the context of Sierra Leone. A case study approach also enabled the researcher to capture the context and lived reality of participants involved in the phenomenon and this has an enhanced ability to explore deeper causes of phenomena.

### **3.3 Sample Selection**

Moser & Korstjens (2018) defined sampling as a process in research where a pre-set number of observations are taken from a wider group. A researcher needs to keenly decide on how to select participants or respondents that accurately represent the population being investigated in order to obtain valid findings in the study. The two main types of sampling are probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling involves random selection of respondents while non-probability sampling involves non-random selection based on various criteria such as availability and convenience (Kandola et al., 2014). For this study, critical case sampling is used and specifically purposive sampling. Also known as judgment sampling, critical case sampling entails the investigator actively searching for people that are most suitable and useful in answering the research questions (Tongco, 2017). Harris et al. (2009) mentioned that this sampling technique is usually used in situations where the investigator wants to get comprehensive information on the phenomenon under investigation from a group of people who understand it better based on personal experience.

However, the use of critical case sampling and specifically purposive sampling in this study may have introduced researcher bias. Based on this sampling approach, the research assistant actively searched for people that are most suitable and useful in answering the research questions. Bias may also have been caused by the fact that the research assistant is actively involved in the work of GYNED-SL. Researcher bias may have reduced the quality of data collected, analysis and its generalizability. To reduce researcher bias, the researcher

employed another method called random sampling for selecting the interviewees which gave everyone in the population a chance to be selected to take part in the study.

Effective purposive sampling has coherent criteria for inclusion and exclusion. In this study, the participants were selected from the two major organizations involved in the project: Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development-Sierra Leone (GYNED-SL) and UNDP. Five staff involved in the implementation of the project were selected from GYNED-SL and five others from UNDP. They were approached by the research assistant who worked at GYNED-SL and acted as the gatekeeper. He made the initial contact, explained to the potential respondents what this study was about and what was its purpose, and then requested their voluntary participation in the study. A snowballing technique was used to get to the targeted number as some additional staff members agreed to participate after being informed by those who had already participated in this study. In total 16 interviews were conducted. Eight employees of GYNED-SL and eight employees of GYNED-SL were involved in the “Low-Value Grant to Provide Psychosocial Services & Life Skills to 300 Freetown Urban Youth Slum Dwellers” project.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

This study entailed the collection of primary data directly from the selected participants. Primary data allows the researcher to collect data that is appropriate for answering the study’s research questions and achieving its objectives. Primary research also provides credible, accurate, and up-to-date data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) which will improve the quality and value of the study. The first step in collecting data involved the research assistant contacting the selected participants, explaining to them the purpose and use of this research study and providing them with consent forms to sign. The research assistant then obtained their contacts and passed them on to the researcher after having made proper introductions between the researcher and the respondents.

The researcher then planned with each respondent to schedule a time for conducting the interviews online. Data collection was done using semi-structured interviews. As explained by Lunenburg & Irby (2008), interviews are used to collect data through exchange of information, and specifically via a series of questions (from the researcher) and responses (from the participants). A semi-structured interview entails asking questions that fall under a pre-determined theme relating to the topic under investigation. In this study, the interviews

had questions covering the experiences of working together among members of GYNED-SL and UNDP.

Semi-structured interviews are guided by a semi-structured guide and the questions to be answered are open-ended (**appendix 1**), allowing for more peripheral discussions that are exhaustive in nature (Majid et al., 2017). The interviews were done online via Zoom and were recorded (with explicit permission from the interviewees) for later transcription and analysis. Zoom-based interviews were difficult to conduct due to technological hitches. For example, some words were lost and the respondents had to be asked to repeat themselves so that the interviewer can get the point. However, the convenience of not travelling to meet the respondents physically saved time, energy and resources for the researcher. Interviewing is a qualitative method of data collection that aligns with the research design and yields large quantities of data that can answer the research questions in an exhaustive manner (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

### **3.5 Research Ethics**

The researcher submitted a formal application to the institution prior to collecting data. Since human participants are involved, they were protected from psychological and physical harm and the researcher adhered to recommended research ethics. The participants could be harmed in case they gave information that could expose them to victimization by their respective employers. This could happen if they let out confidential information and speak about their employers in the wrong way. If such information was made public so their seniors learn about it, probably the participants could be dismissed from work or be penalised in a different way leading to psychological harm.

For one, the participants were also informed of their rights, including confidentiality, privacy, and withdrawal from the study at will (Hürliemann, 2019). According to Fouka & Mantzourou (2011), a researcher must obtain informed consent from would-be participants prior to them being recruited to participate in the study. The participants were requested to give consent for taking part in the study and by filling out a consent form which was delivered with an information sheet containing relevant information including: the purpose of the study, their expected role, the process, procedures, and the type of questions to be asked (Dilmi, 2012). They were also told about the protection due to them as participants.

Another ethical consideration for the study related to confidentiality and anonymity in the data collection phase. In order to protect participants' personal information and to encourage

the participants provided accurate information, the researcher assured them that the data collected could not be traced to them. One way of ensuring this was by using pseudonyms and not real names when drafting the study. This is a way of anonymization whereby no information can be traced back to a specific respondent. Moreover, the researcher also avoided collecting personal identifying information such as physical addresses, social security numbers, passport numbers, financial account information, or email addresses as suggested by Hürlimann (2019). In order to ensure confidentiality, the information collected was stored in a password-protected laptop with no access by unauthorized people.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data analysis process was accomplished through the thematic analysis method. The relevance and appropriateness of thematic analysis are premised on several reasons. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggested that thematic analysis provides theoretical freedom and flexibility that researchers can adjust to fit the needs of their research and to obtain comprehensive and intricate data. As stated by Maguire & Delahunt (2017), thematic analysis allows the researcher to consider and examine the views of various respondents, understand the differences and similarities, and generate unexpected outcomes. The analysis followed the six-step process suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). The first step involved reading the transcribed data several times to gain a deeper familiarity with the information provided by the respondents. The second step involved textual analysis and specifically noting and annotating comments on the text. The notes included remarks about feelings and non-verbal communication observed during the online interviews. Moving to the third step, the process involved developing emergent themes by grouping comments. There is also a comparison of emerging connections and patterns through a critical examination of the transcribed data. Here, the researcher combined the original script with the interpretations from the analysis. Comparing and contrasting emergent themes required careful engagement with the transcript and the notes made by the researcher to ensure the important themes were captured. In the fourth step, the researcher searched for a connection between emergent themes with the aim of discovering connections that were not exposed in the previous step. I then listed the different themes and clustered related ones. From this, new lists were derived and re-evaluated as emergent themes. This step was repeated until the themes appeared clear and covered the findings in a meaningful way. The fifth step involved repeating the entire analytical steps listed above for each interview while acknowledging the undeniable emerging

preconceptions. The sixth and last step involved looking for patterns across cases. I looked at individual cases noting the connections and interrelationships as well as inconsistencies. This step was repeated to ensure reliable connections were made before settling on the final themes.

### **3.7 Limitations of the study**

Since this is a qualitative study, a small sample of only 24 people was used for data collection. The choice of such a small sample became a limiting factor because it may not be possible to generalize the study findings to the broader population. These findings may be true for the partnership between UNDP and GYNED-SL but extrapolating them to all the donor-recipient partnerships in Sierra Leone can result in a lack of credibility and distortion. It is, therefore, important to be cautious when generalizing these findings to the larger population. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews which led to the collection of overwhelming quantities of data. Due to resources scarcity, it was impossible to hire a more skilled and experienced interviewer to conduct the interviews and this became a limitation in the study since data quality was compromised by a lack of experience. The collection of large volumes of data also necessitated the use of a lot of time and other resources to analyze it. This also was a limitation because the study suffered from scarcity of resources and time was also limited.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This study adopted a mixed methods approach where both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. The research is designed as case study whose main focus is on the Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development and UNDP, in Sierra Leone, and it examines issues that emerge from the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample and its appropriateness is based on the fact that the researcher was able to hand pick the people with the best knowledge about the challenges faced by UNDP and GYNED-SL in their partnership. Data was collected through primary methods, specifically semi-structured interviews conducted via the zoom platform. The researcher adhered to all the research ethics requirements such as submitting a formal application to the institution before collecting data, obtaining informed consent, and



observing confidentiality and anonymity in the data collection phase. The data was analysed using thematic analysis method.

## **Chapter 4 : Findings and Discussions**

### **4.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

In this chapter, the findings of the study are analyzed and discussed. The findings are organized based on themes derived from the research questions. The chapter begins by analyzing the donor-recipient challenges arising in the context of the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP and how GYNED-SL and UNDP actors perceive ensuring equity and complementarity as a solution to donor-recipient issues in their partnership. It will also discuss the measures taken by GYNED-SL and UNDP to ensure an equitable and complementary partnership in addressing donor-recipient challenges. Next, it will focus on how complementarity and equity measures enacted by GYNED-SL and UNDP address the donor-recipient challenges. Finally, it will delve into the challenges faced by GYNED-SL and UNDP when implementing measures to ensure complementarity and equity. The findings will be discussed in light of the GMI framework of localisation which emphasizes the need for a fair relationship between the donor and the recipient. This localization framework proposes that the donors should ensure that they maintain a fair relationship with the recipient in a manner that the recipients get the expected benefit from the partnership. After the capacity of the recipient has been improved and deemed to be enough the relationship must be based on the same principles as those applied when partnering with an international organization. The GMI framework suggests that instead of the donor, the recipient should control needs assessment, program design, planning of the budget, and other features of the program cycle.

### **4.2 Donor-recipient Relationship Challenges in the GYNED-UNDP Partnership**

In this section, the challenges affecting the partnership between donors and recipients are analyzed and discussed. The respondents identified a number of factors that they thought were the donor-recipient challenges affecting the GYNED-SL and UNDP partnership. They listed issues related to the the burden of accountability, lack of mutual understanding, and dependence on UNDP as the donor to provide the required resources.

### *Burden of Accountability*

The challenge of shouldering a heavy burden of accountability was cited as a key issue that affected the UNDP-GYNED-SL partnership. When explaining the issue of the burden of accountability, the respondents stated that UNDP requires its partners to engage in rigorous reporting and be accountable. This became a challenge because GYNED-SL may not be in a position to do that and they are not used to such rigorous accountability demands. According to one GYNED-SL project officer “UNDP requires extensive reporting and accountability mechanisms to ensure that funds are used effectively and transparently. These requirements can sometimes be burdensome for GYNED and may not always align with organizational capacities” (GYNED- SL Respondent 1).

Since UNDP insists on extensive reporting and accountability, GYNED-SL must maintain the required levels of accountability otherwise the partnership will be ruined. The strictness of UNDP on accountability had the capacity to cause other trust and resource-related issues that may have affected the smooth implementation of the project. The burden of accountability and reporting was discussed as having a negative impact on resource allocation, decision-making, and project implementation.

According to GYNED- SL Respondent 2: “UNDP’s reporting and accountability requirements may be extensive, involving detailed financial reporting and performance indicators. The local NGO, with limited administrative capacity, may struggle to meet these requirements. The burden of reporting and accountability can divert resources and attention away from project implementation. Therefore, GYNED may need to allocate more staff, time, and resources to meet these requirements, and that may potentially affect the quality and efficiency of project activities.

The findings about the burden of accounting and reporting being a donor-recipient challenge is discussed in the GMI Framework (2023) as an important indicator of complementarity and equity. This implies that although it was a challenge for GYNED-SL, it was an important requirement for the partnership to survive and succeed so that the project can be effectively implemented. The GMI Framework (2023) considers risk perception to be a key problem in the partnerships between IDOs and LINGOs because IDOs normally view all local actors as a risk of corruption and fraud, that do not meet international standards. This includes the globally accepted standards for accountability and reporting in development aid projects. The GMI framework also recommends that transparency, good

communication, and shared accountability should be practiced in the donor-recipient partnership.

The findings of this study echo the findings of past studies such as Bergh et al., (2019) who argue that information asymmetry affects accountability and transparency since IDOs tend to have painstaking evaluation and reporting mechanisms because they have access to expertise and resources. LINGOs do not have access to such information which is needed for accountability and reporting and that can be a source of misunderstanding in the partnership.

### ***Lack of Mutual Understanding***

The interview responses indicated that there was a serious challenge of UNDP and GYNED-SL not understanding each other in many things. The respondents explained that the lack of mutual understanding became a contributing factor to many other challenges that the partnership faced.

According to GYNED-SL Respondent 6 “Both UNDP and GYNED-SL seemed to be pulling in different directions in terms of the preferences and priorities they had in the project. For example, GYNED-SL wanted many more people to benefit from the project but UNDP did not want the numbers increased beyond a certain limit”. UNDP Respondent 4 shared that “[t]he partnership faced obstacles because we could not agree on certain pertinent matters. That became a major point of concern for us because we really wanted the affected people to benefit from the project” (UNDP Respondent 4).

In these quotes, the respondents provide sufficient evidence that mutual understanding was elusive in the partnership and that may have been the cause of the many setbacks that the project had to deal with. If the partners understood each other, that understanding could have helped to prevent them from landing into more trouble with issues such as finances, accountability, and information asymmetry.

It was not expected that UNDP and GYNED-SL could have serious issues with understanding each other. This was strange because initially, they had chosen each other as partners to undertake the project together and the terms of the partnership should have been made clear at the start before they engaged on the project. Therefore, it was a unique finding that the two partners could encounter serious obstacles in understanding each other.

The issue of the lack of mutual understanding between donors and recipients undertaking development aid projects was not anticipated in the GMI framework either.

Although the framework addresses the need for other factors such as trust, respectful tone, and content of communications and choosing each other which are necessary for mutual understanding, it falls short of discussing mutual understanding as an independent factor that is integral to the achievement of equity and complementarity.

However, the findings do confirm what was discovered in various past studies. For example, Aerni (2006) found that issues exist between IDOs and their agents and these issues arise from the conflict of interests between these two groups. Conflict of interest implies a situation where each partner puts forward matters that are of lesser interest to the other partner. As in the case of UNDP and GYNED-SL the other partner may also totally have no interest in the issues raised by the first partner. This study also echoes the findings of Panda & Leepsa (2017) who stated that the agent makes decisions and acts on behalf of the donor, and this may cause conflicts and problems that can affect their partnership

### ***Reliance on UNDP for Resources***

The issue of GYNED-SL relying on donors was also discussed as a principal challenge because they do not have an opportunity to make decisions. According to UNDP Respondent 4: since GYNED-SL depends on donors, it makes them have limited say in the project discussion” . Depending on donors is a challenge that affected the partnership because UNDP had its conditions of engagement which the GYNED-SL might not have been comfortable with. Failure to meet these conditions would mean that resources may not be released as expected by GYNED-SL.

The respondents also stated that reliance on the donor and the limited say that GYNED-SL had as a result affected decision-making, resource allocation, and project implementation within the partnership. They discussed the lack of decision-making opportunities as one of the ways in which depending on UNDP for resources affected the partnership. According to a junior UNDP staff member, “Being that GYNED-SL depends on donors, they cannot get the chance to contribute strongly in decision-making that can influence resource allocation” (UNDP Respondent 2).

In a congruent past study, Burger & Seabe (2013) found resource disparities to be a major challenge because compared to LNGOs, IDOs normally have better networks, resources, and access to global information and this information asymmetry often affects the decision-making capabilities and bargaining power of LNGOs. Another consistent study by Gray et al., (2006) also states that although the LNGOs depend on their international

counterparts to provide resources, they can still lack the necessary information to fully understand the potential risks or implications of the partnership, and information asymmetry also affects accountability and transparency.

The similarities between the findings of this study in this section and past studies imply that partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs are intricate and that even after many years of such engagements, organizations have not found permanent solutions to the challenges affecting IDO and Local NGO partnerships.

The results of the study in this section provide more elaborate knowledge about the dynamics of donor-recipient partnerships. They provide a better understanding of the challenges that LNGOs face in their partnerships with IDOs, and how best these challenges can be solved. From these findings, GYNED-SL and UNDP can understand how to handle the issues affecting them in future similar partnerships. Using Other LNGOs and IDOs will also have an opportunity to understand how to solve challenges arising in their partnerships.

The discovery that the partnership between UNDP and GYNE-SL was rocked by many challenges related to the partnership supports the expectations held before. It was expected that the GYNED-SL and UNDP partnership will have challenges because in practice there is no perfect relationship or partnership either between individuals or organizations that can be said to be devoid of challenges.

### **4.3 Perception of the Influence of Equitable and Complementary Partnership Indicators on Donor-Recipient Problems**

The findings in this part discuss how equitability and complementarity could be used to solve donor-recipient problems. When asked how they perceive the concepts of equity and complementarity as potential solutions to the donor-recipient challenges within the GYNED-SL and UNDP partnership, most of the respondents (10 out of 16) were of the view that these two principles have the potential to solve most of the challenges. GYNED-SL Respondent 5 perceived “the concepts to be very useful because they foster openness and support for the partners in the relationship one to the other”.According to this quote, this respondent was very optimistic that equitability and complementarity can deal with the challenges faced by UNDP and GYNED-SL

According to the responses more broadly, complementarity and equitability are necessary for fostering understanding between the partners so that there is no suspicion and

hidden secrets that can fuel conflicts. Nevertheless, some respondents cautioned that these principles must be appropriately and fully implemented for them to have good outcomes. According to UNDP Respondent 2: “If this concept is well implemented and GYNED-SL is given a chance to maximize their own idea equally as UNDP, then there will be a positive outcome”. GYNED-SL Respondent 3 strongly believed “that if the principles of equity and complementarity are fully applied, GYNED-SL and UNDP will have a strong and long-standing partnership and the impact will be huge in the society”.

Lack of full implementation of complementarity and equity would lead to a situation where both organizations still feel that the other partner is not treating them right and that would cause the partnership to collapse or endure but fail to have any major impact on society. This study also found that equity and complementarity as proposed by localization frameworks could help address the potential misalignment of interests and information between GYNED-SL and UNDP. Most of the respondents (n=11) said that equity and complementarity make it possible for information about the relationship to flow smoothly. They consider equity and complementarity to be ingredients for improved communication because the partners will be engaging from a level of equality and not just the donor and the recipient. As GYNED-SL Respondent 3 shared: “When equity and complementarity exist in a partnership relationship information will always flow well and interest will also be well and genuinely communicated therefore if GYNED-SL and UNDP respect equity and complementarity that will help to avoid misalignment of interest and information”.

The interview responses also allude to the significance of equity and complementarity in other areas, such as resource allocation. They claimed that allocating resources with an understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of the other partner is very helpful. For instance, GYNED-SL Respondent 2 stated that: “In Capacity Building, the UNDP should support the capacity building of GYNED to bridge capacity gaps. This helps ensure that the GYNED can meet UNDP’s requirements and expectations, promoting equity in resource distribution and project management. And also equitable distribution of resources should be guided by an understanding of how each partner’s strengths complement the other’s. This means allocating resources not just equally but in a manner that maximizes the impact of each partner's contributions”.

However, some of the respondents were of the opinion that complementarity and accountability do not provide solutions for the challenges facing the GYNED-SL and UNDP partnership.

“Since the concept of equitability does not exist as a result of the power of the donor partner, this concept does not serve as potential solutions” (UNDP Respondent 1).

“Equitability and complementarity can be on paper and in theory but when it comes to practicing them, the donor who has more power always feels that the LNGO is a lesser partner who only needs to agree with the decisions made by the donor” (GYNED-SL Respondent 5).

As indicated in the quotes above, these respondents felt that UNDP always has power and occupies a superior position in the partnership by virtue of being the provider of the resources. Therefore, according to them, it cannot be possible for GYNED-SL to bargain for equal treatment from UNDP. The implication is that equity and complementarity were impractical in the UNDP-GYNED-SL partnership.

Although there were a few dissenting voices, throughout the findings, there was an agreement in most of the responses that complementarity and equitability have the potential to solve the challenges identified. Most of the respondents expressed optimism that the challenges they had identified could find their solutions in complementarity and equitability. However, most respondents also emphasized on full implementation of these factors for effective partnerships and this was a pattern that was observed in almost all the responses. This pattern suggests that UNDP and GYNED-SL did not implement equitability and complementarity in full. Otherwise, the challenges affecting the partnership between them would have been solved.

The interview findings confirm what is stated in part of the existing literature. Several past studies e.g. Elbers & Arts, (2011) and Gent et al., (2015) emphasize the need for equitability and complementarity as a solution to the challenges affecting donor-recipient partnerships. Elbers & Arts, (2011) state that national and local aid actors are dissatisfied with their instrumentalization and the predominant, regularly imposed dynamics for subcontracting that IDOs have. A consistent study by Gent et al., (2015) states that local actors know the value of IDOs but strive for more honest and fair collaborations because they want to move from being inactive ‘implementers’ to active partners involved in decision-making. Furthermore, the GMI (2023) framework supports transparency, good communication, shared accountability, and regular evaluations of the quality of the collaborative framework as important solutions to partnership challenges.

It is also important to note that some inconsistencies with findings also exist in past research. For example, the Global Mentoring Initiative Framework (2023) suggests that equity and complementarity may not solve the challenges of the IDO and LNGO



partnership because of risk perception, especially by the IDO. This is so because IDOs often characterize all local NGOs as a risk of corruption and fraud, are prejudiced against some political or social groups, and fail to meet international standards. When IDOs view LNGOs in a negative way, they cannot agree to have equitability and complementarity with them.

The findings on equitability and complementarity support the expectations held before the study. It was expected that complementarity and equitability have the potential to solve the challenges in the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP. Since this position has been supported by the majority of the responses, it can be said that the expectations have been met.

#### **4.4 Measures to Ensure an Equitable and Complementary Partnership between UNDP and GYNED-SL**

The findings in this section are meant to analyze the measures required to achieve complementarity and equity in the UNDP and GYNED-SL partnership. The respondents discussed the measures that can be employed to ensure an equitable and complementary partnership in addressing donor-recipient challenges. Most of them (n=13) agreed that UNDP and GYNED-SL applied the correct measures to achieve equity and complementarity. They mentioned different practices including the use of equity when choosing a partner, trust building and Intentional trust, decision-making, and reciprocal transparency and accountability. The respondents also talked about risk sharing, budget transparency, resource sharing, and responsible ending of collaboration as measures that can be applied to enhance equity and complementarity.

##### ***Equity when Choosing a Partner***

The majority of the respondents identified equity when choosing a partner as one of the factors necessary for ensuring complementarity and equity. When required to explain further, they stated that equity when choosing a partner lays the foundation for the terms of engagement at that time and even for the rest of the life of the partnership.

GYNED-SL Respondent 3 was of the view that “when equity has been applied in the choice of a partner, it can still exist in the partnership and everything that pertains to the

partnership will be approached with a consciousness for equal rights in the partnership between the donor and the recipient”.

As stated by UNDP Respondent 3, “there was a signed MOU, and UNDP approved GYNED-SL implementations plan and GYNED-SL implemented the project as planned. They tried to form the partnership on equal terms and I think that is a great way of forming a partnership and demonstrating a mutual commitment to collaborate although there was a fiscal organization between them”.

As stated by GYNED-SL Respondent 5: “The choice of a partner based on equity is a good strategy for UNDP and that is how they should have chosen GYNED-SL”.

Furthermore, UNDP Respondent 2 believes that “choosing a partner should be done on equal terms so that none of them feels that they are being despised or looked down upon”.

According to the above responses, the respondents believe that when the choice of a partner is founded on equity then the partnership will easily have equity and complementarity at every stage going forward. The idea of equity when making the choice of a partner can also be found in the GMI framework which also supports equity when choosing a partner.

Past studies also support equity in the choice of partners. One such study is Cuevas-Rodriguez et al. (2012) who stated that the quality of relationship between the donor and the recipient must be founded on equality. In another study that supports the findings, Van Brabant & Patel (2018) and the Humanitarian Advisory Group (2019) suggest that localization emphasize a number of impact indicators that imply complementarity and equity in partnerships between international donor organizations and local actors. Therefore, donors must uphold equity when they are choosing local partners because that forms the basis for future equitable actions. On such a foundation, it is also easier to build and nurture trust.

### ***Trust Building and Intentional Trust***

Another measure suggested by the respondents was trust building and intentional trust. Trust entails the confidence that one partner has in the other that they can work together, with each partner effectively playing their role so that they both attain their goals without ill intentions on the partner. Most of the respondents (n=12) were of the view that having trust can increase the chances of attaining complementarity and equity: “A partnership cannot have equity or complementarity if there is little or no trust between the partners. One partner must trust the other and vice versa. They must learn to intentionally build trust amongst

themselves” (UNDP Respondent 3). Or, “GYNED-SL and UNDP must learn to nurture trust in their partnership because that is what can make them get to a level of equity and complementarity” (GYNED-SL Respondent 1).

In these quotes, trust building and intentional trust are considered to be integral to the UNDP-GYNED-SL relationship as they form the basis upon which trust and complementarity are founded. The significance of trust has been emphasized in the GMI Framework (2023) as well. Intentional trust-building is one of the indicators of relationship quality suggested in the framework. The need for trust in donor-recipient relationships was also underscored in previous studies. One of these studies is Parto (2022) who stated that, in the implementation of complementarity and equity, the level of trust must increase. A study by Aerni (2006) also considers trust to be a powerful ingredient for partnerships between LNGOs and IDOs. In agreement, the GMI Framework (2023) also identifies risk perception as a product of a lack of trust in the agent by the donor. Donors consider agents to be a risk of fraud and corruption and therefore their trust in them is low. In such cases, trust-building and intentional trust are crucial measures necessary for equity and complementarity to be realized. Where trust reigns, organizations can feel free to give equal decision-making opportunities to their partners.

### ***Equal Opportunities for Decision-making***

Some of the respondents identified fair decision-making among the measures that should be implemented to bring about equity and complementarity. In their responses, the process of making decisions is a key determining factor of whether or not there will be equity and complementarity. This is so because the decisions made are the ones that determine whether the two partners will view each other as equals and work at complementing one another. The findings indicate that poor decision-making can lead to unequal relationships where each partner works at achieving their own goals which may be contradictory to the objectives of the other partner or in some cases may be counterproductive. For instance, according to UNDP Respondent 6: “For me, the type of decisions made is very important because wrong decisions will take the partnership in the wrong direction. No equity or complementarity can be attained when partners continue to make decisions that are not helping to achieve their common goals”. GYNED-SL Respondent 5 considers “decision-making to be very crucial because even to be equal and complement one another is a decision that must be made by either partner. Failing to decide together to focus on attaining equity and complementarity means no progress”. These two respondents discussed the need for having the right decisions

made because the partners must also make a deliberate intention to implement equity and complementarity.

An important aspect of decision-making is the chances that are available to each partner to make decisions. Often, in donor-recipient partnerships, the donor may make the decisions as the partner contributes to their implementation. However, such an arrangement does not contribute to equity. GYNED-SL Respondent 4 thinks that: “both the IDO and the local actor should get equal chances at the table of decision-making because that is a strong sign that they are enjoying equal rights and opportunities in their partnership” ()

The need for proper decision-making that gives each partner equal chances in achieving equity and complementarity is also one of the indicators of relationship quality suggested by the GMI Framework (2023) which also advocates for joint problem analysis. Decision-making was also mentioned by Van Brabant & Patel, (2017) as necessary in quality relationships between donors and recipients. The authors stated that localization aims to bring strategic decision-making closer to local actors and the crisis zone. Interestingly, no other previous studies discussed decision-making in the pursuit of equity and complementarity. Furthermore, a congruent study by Featherstone, (2019) suggested that, based on several localization frameworks, equitable and complementary partnerships involve such impact indicators as LNGOs getting more power and capacity to make decisions. Equal decision-making is therefore, very crucial in forming an equitable partnership where complementarity is practiced.

### *Transparency in Accounting*

The GMI framework lists reciprocal transparency and accountability that are reflected in contracts as being integral to the pursuit of equity in donor-recipient relationships. Transparency also featured in the interview responses since some of the respondents talked about the need for partners to be accountable and transparent: “Transparency in accounting for all funds allocated and agreements on the date of completion are very important” (GYNED-SL Respondent 4). And, UNDP Respondent 7 stated that: “since we expected GYNED-SL to be accountable to us and complement us, we did our best to be accountable to them as well as complement their activities”. As these responses indicate, the Respondents emphasized that being accountable is a recipe for complementarity and equity probably because no one feels cheated when the other partner is accountable. Accountability is

important as a sign that one partner is ready to work together with the other partner in meaningful collaboration.

### ***Risk Sharing***

Risk sharing was discussed by the respondents as a crucial measure that could be applied in the UNDP-GYNED-SL partnership if they want to be equal and complement each other. UNDP Respondent 4 put forward the following: “It is very necessary to share risks because that helps to remove the feeling of lacking equality in a partnership. One partner does not feel that the other one is a burden to them” (UNDP Respondent 4). According to GYNED-SL Respondent 4: “My thinking is that just as partners share benefits, sharing risks is also a must because it creates a balance in the partnership that overcomes any bad feelings” (GYNED-SL Respondent 4). These responses imply that, when UNDP and GYNED-SL share risks in their partnership, the feeling that one is being used by the other for selfish interests diminishes. Often partners fail to understand each other when one feels that they are losing as the other one benefits. Risk sharing can help deal with this challenge.

The need for risk sharing has been suggested as one of the dimensions for complementarity and equity in the Global Mentoring Initiative Framework (2023). The need for risk sharing was not discussed in previous studies as necessary for equity and complementarity. This does not diminish the importance of this measure for achieving a quality partnership. However, just as it is shown in the findings in this study, Gent et al. (2015) discussed risk perception as a key problem in the partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs but fell short of identifying risk sharing as a necessary measure for equity and complementarity. Hence, risk sharing can play a huge role in bringing about equity and complementarity.

### ***Budget transparency***

A majority of the respondents were of the opinion that GYNED-SL and UNDP should lay everything bare for each other to see whenever they do their budgets. Since budgeting has to do with resource use and distribution, it is a potentially thorny issue in any partnership. According to UNDP Respondent 8: “Transparency with issues such as budgeting can play a very crucial role in increasing accountability and complementarity. It is necessary for dealing with suspicion”.

GYNED-SL Respondent 3 argued that “Being transparent with budgeting can make GYNED-SL feel equal to UNDP and have the motivation to complement them even more”.

GYNED-SL Respondent 1 said this: “I am of the opinion that the two organizations must stop hiding any information regarding budgets and resource use from each other”.

To show how important budget transparency is, the GMI Framework’s dimension of ‘relationship quality’ suggests several indicators and budget transparency and fair sharing of resources is one of them.

### ***Resource Sharing***

Most of the respondents stated that the issue of not sharing resources well can cause many challenges for partners. They suggested equitable resource sharing as one of the measures for ensuring that partners complement each other and they treat each other equitably.

According to GYNED-SL Respondent 2: “Sharing of resources well could have made GYNED-SL to feel equal to UNDP”.

While emphasizing the same point, GYNED-SL Respondent 5 had this to say: “Although UNDP provides the resources, we need to make sure that the resources we have are shared equitably so that no partner feels disenfranchised”.

Past studies also identified resource sharing as being integral to equity and complementarity in donor-recipient partnerships. Mayer (2007) stated that IDOs have the role of making large infusions of financial and other resources into projects while LNGOs provide the necessary knowledge about the local atmosphere. The two types of knowledge must be shared for the partnership to last and excel in the projects involved.

The findings about the measures used to ensure equity and complementarity support the initial expectations. Initially, I expected that the study would find that complementarity and equitability are nurtured through various practices such as openness, effective communication and close collaboration. Since the responses produced findings that are similar to that, then my expectations have been met.

## **4.5 Implications of the Measures for Ensuring Equity and Complementarity on Donor-recipient Challenges**

The interviewees were requested to discuss how the complementarity and equity measures enacted by GYNED-SL and UNDP contributed to addressing the donor-recipient

challenges identified earlier. From the responses, a number of implications were listed for ensuring equity and complementarity on donor-recipient challenges. Some of the respondents talked about improved decision-making, enhanced collaboration, and better project outcomes for localisation.

### ***Improved Decision-Making***

The respondents cited better decision-making as an outcome of the measures implemented towards the attainment of equity and complementarity. They noted that the implementation of those measures had resulted in better decision-making processes for the UNDP-GYNED-SL partnership. Most of the respondents (n=9) praised the efficacy of the complementarity and equity measures enacted by GYNED-SL and UNDP for the good decisions made afterwards.

UNDP Respondent 7 stated thus: “Those measures were very effective and they helped to solve the challenges of low equitability and complementarity through effective decision-making. For example, decisions about budgeting were done well based on equitability and complementarity”.

In support of the above response, GYNED-SL Respondent 8 said: “Most of the challenges mentioned such as were related to how our two organizations handle their decision-making issues and therefore, we saw a difference in the way decisions were being made.

Some respondents had negative responses about the effectiveness of the measures used. They expressed this dissatisfaction with these measures because according to them, they did not produce the outcome they had expected.

GYNED-SL employee 7 expressed doubt about the measures in this manner: “I don’t believe these measures are as effective as they appear to be because there have been wrong decisions made even when these measures were being implemented”.

Another respondent with a negative experience had this to say:

“I would have loved to see the measures replaced by other workable measures or the strategy of their implementation changed because according to me, the progress we have attained in making decisions is too small and the partnership between UNDP and GYNED-SL continues to be affected” (UNDP employee respondent 8).

It was not outrightly clear from the responses why UNDP and GYNED-SL continued to make wrong decisions and yet they had put in place these measures to improve their performance. Probably, the measures were implemented late or in part, all to the displeasure

of some respondents. However, only a few respondents thought that decision-making had not improved.

From the above responses, it is evident that the claim by some respondents that the measures employed were effective for dealing with the donor-recipient challenges creates a contradiction because other respondents did not support their views. Probably, this discrepancy in the findings may have come about because the respondents were drawn from two different organizations which seemed not to be reading from the same script because one was a donor (UNDP) and the other one was a local NGO (GYNED-SL) and these two had differing objectives and goals.

No wonder, some of the respondents (7 out of 16) warned that proper implementation of the measures is the determining factor of whether the measures can work or not. They stated that, since the measures were implemented fairly well, they produced positive outcomes.

For instance, UNDP Respondent 2 was of the opinion that “it is not just implementing the measures for complementarity and equitability that is needed but people must be keen and do it properly”.

In line with the above comment, UNDP Respondent 6 said: “personally, I believe the solutions were effective because we consulted with people from the two organizations and ensured that they were being applied in the best ways possible”.

When asked to share the instances where the application of equity and complementarity principles of localization resulted in improved decision-making different projects were mentioned:

GYNED-SL Respondent 5 cited “the case of trying to deliver quality for a project done and of value to the target group”. To add to this, another example was given by UNDP Respondent 3 who said: “yes, like the Youth Living in slums area project I supervised. It brings a very good outcome” Furthermore, UNDP Respondent 6 also said: “Yes, in the just successful implementation of the bike rider project there was very good collaboration.

As stated, the respondents quoted above participated in different projects and they witnessed better decisions made as a result of the use of equity and complementarity localisation principles. They provide proof that equity and complementarity can improve decision-making.

### ***Better Outcomes for Localization***



Most respondents were optimistic that the measures used to achieve complementarity and equitability were effective for the localisation of the UNDP and GYNED-SL projects.

According to a junior male UNDP Respondent, “When issues of accountability, transparency, decision-making and resource sharing were addressed, the partnership by UNDP and GYNED-SL took a different turn towards success” (UNDP Respondent 2). In the same line of thought, GYNED-SL Respondent 5 said: “I think the efforts we made to achieve localization became fruitful when we started pursuing equity and complementarity. Before then, we were not going to realize much success”

Most of the respondents agreed that measures such as reciprocal transparency and accountability meant to achieve equity and complementarity improved the localisation attempt. The fact that most of the responses pointed at the effectiveness of these measures is evidence that when employed in a partnership, they can make localisation a success.

The interview findings on the question of the implications of the measures used to ensure equity and complementarity on donor-recipient challenges confirm the findings of previous studies. The GMI Framework (2023) suggests decision-making, trust building, transparency and accountability among other indicators as crucial components for nurturing equitability and complementarity for purposes of effective localisation. In addition, Parto (2022) suggests that measures such as transparency, good communication, and shared accountability are necessary for effective localisation.

Although the above studies paint a positive image, there are also studies with contrary findings. One such study is Milner (2006) who stated that equitable and complementary partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs are not easy to achieve because the dynamics of relationships between them are complicated and multi-layered as a result of donor-recipient problems found between the two partners. Jideofor (2021) also stated that the donor-recipient problems including conflicting goals, information asymmetry agencies issues, and power dynamics are not easily solved during localisation.

### ***Increase in Collaboration***

From the interview results, this study found an increase in the level of collaboration between UNDP and GYNED-SL. As a result of the implementation of the measures used to realize

equity and complementarity, the responses indicated that the collaboration between UNDP and GYNED-SR registered drastic improvement.

According to a senior UNDP employee, “Trying to attain equity and complementarity in the partnership was a good sign for both of us because it led to better relations. Each side started viewing the other in a better way” (UNDP Respondent 2).

These sentiments were supported by GYNED-SL Respondent 4 who opined: “The efforts made towards equity and complementarity were good and the measures applied made it possible to improve our cooperation because now we started working more closely with coordination”.

The quotes above provide proof that indeed, collaboration between UNDP and GYNED-SL improved a lot. This implies that the measures employed were effective for dealing with the negativity that existed between the partners. The increase in collaboration was not discussed in the GMI localisation framework as an indicator for localisation. Past studies discussing better collaboration were also not found in the literature.

The findings about the implications of the measures for ensuring equity and complementarity on donor-recipient challenges contradict my initial expectations. Some respondents indicated a very tough relationship between UNDP and GYNED-SL. Therefore, I expected that since UNDP and GYNED-SL had many serious donor-recipient challenges rocking their partnership, the respondents would suggest that the measures implemented to ensure complementarity and equitability cannot make localisation successful. Instead, the responses in this section indicate that these measures were effective in achieving equitability and complementarity in the partnership.

## **4.6 Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned**

A number of challenges were identified in the study as having affected the GYNED-SL and UNDP process of implementing the complementarity and equity measures within the partnership. The respondents also talked about how the challenges were addressed. Most of them (12 out of 16) identified specific challenges associated with certain measures including lack of mutual understanding, financial issues, delayed decision-making, contradictory priorities, and power imbalances.

### ***Lack of Mutual Understanding***

The difficulty in understanding each other emerged as a serious challenges according to the responses. UNDP and GYNED-SL could not agree on several issues such as the strict

accountability and reporting standards and dependence on UNDP as the donor to provide the required resources. Some of the responses appear in the quotes below.

As stated by one Gyned-SL respondent; “There was always a mutual understanding problem between the two” (GYNED-SL Respondent 4).

From the view of UNDP Respondent 3 “mutual understanding could not be achieved easily because because the two organizations had different priorities, and this necessitated some long negotiations. For example GYNED-SL wanted a larger number of people to benefit but UNDP was very strict on resource use”.

The fact that the respondents mentioned this challenge means that GYNED-SL and UNDP had a rough time when trying to negotiate their terms of cooperation. For example, one respondent quoted above said there were problems related to mutual understanding. When two parties cannot understand each other, then their progress would be slowed down leading to more challenges that may require more time to deal with. This was true for UNDP and GYNED-SL.

Another lesson learned from this challenge emerging from the the responses is that proper planning, and having balanced negotiations about the collaboration would suffice.

This was emphasized by GYNED-SL Respondent 3 who stated thus: “For me, the partners should never stop talking and negotiations about the plans are required before any venture”.

As indicated in the quotes, the need for mutual understanding between agents and IDOs was also cited as an important lesson taken from the UNDP-GYNED-SL partnership. According to UNDP Respondent 5: “There should always be a mutual understanding between UNDP and GYNED-SL because that can be a solution to the many problems they faced” (UNDP respondent 5).

As a lesson drawn from the lack of mutual understanding between UNDP and GYNED-SL, it was suggested in the responses that there should be conflict resolution mechanisms. This was captured in the quote by GYNED-SL respondne t6 who said: “In that partnership, there must be mechanisms to solve conflicts. That is necessary to deal with any misunderstanding between the partners”.

The interview findings on the question of the challenges faced by GYNED-SL and UNDP when implementing measures to ensure complementarity and equity confirm what was found in previous studies. First, there is a similarity because past studies have recognized the existence of challenges in IDO-LNGO partnerships whenever the partners try to achieve complementarity and equitability. For instance, Auronen (2003) identified information

asymmetry as one of the main challenges hindering complementarity and equitability. Information asymmetry when poorly handled could lead to problems such as the absence of mutual understanding. The GMI Framework (2023) also cites respectful tone and content of communications as an indicator of equity and complementarity. This implies that when proper communication is absent, mutual understanding cannot be realized.

### ***Financial Challenges***

As stated by the respondents, this challenge was associated with resource sharing as a measure used to achieve equity and complementarity: According to GYNED-SL Respondent 2: “There were financial challenges on the side of GYNED-SL and also decision making but they were addressed in a way that both parties were happy”. In addition, GYNED-SL Respondent 7 stated thus: “The issue of sharing of resources was not easy because the money comes mainly from UNDP and they have their conditions for giving it out”. Finally, GYNED-SL Respondent 2 said: “There were resource imbalances and disparities in funding and resources between GYNED-SL and UNDP power imbalances created problems”.

To address the issue of resource imbalance and scarcity of finances, a female respondent stated that UNDP is the one that should provide resources but the two organizations should also work together to obtain more funds: “UNDP provides financial and technical support to GYNED-SL to help bridge resource gaps. But both partners work together to identify and leverage additional funding sources” (UNDP Respondent 2).

Being the donor, UNDP provided the finances. However, the issue may have been on the conditions set by UNDP for partnership and not necessarily the availability of funds. As a lesson, the respondents suggested that UNDP must remain in the position of providing resources as GYNED-SL partners with it. This implies a clear division of roles whereby each partner takes their place and they cooperate where there are shared roles. Past studies identified some challenges which were also mentioned in the interview responses given in this study. According to GMI (2023), a key issue in the partnerships between IDOs and LNGOs is risk perception because the IDOs often classify all local respondents as a risk of exploitation and fraud, and they also fail to meet international standards. A congruent study by Panda & Leepsa (2017) lists adverse selection as a challenge that could lead to financial problems.

### *Delayed Decision-making*

Delayed decision-making also featured among the challenges faced by UNDP and GYNED-SL: “The following are the challenges: delay in decision making and the increase in the cost of project implementation” (GYNED-SL Respondent 3). And, according to GYNED-SL Respondent 8: “Trying to look for equity just slowed down the process of making decisions about other issues because the problem of equity and complementarity needed to be dealt with first.” . And, “Indeed, trying to attain equity and complementarity created a situation where issues piled up and decisions were made slowly” (UNDP Respondent 5).

In the above responses, the process of making decisions on other aspects of the project seems to have been neglected due to the need for complementarity and equity. Respondents suggested that a key lesson from this challenge was the use of equitable decision-making. This requires every partner to take part in making decisions in an equal manner.

The issue of effective communication was common in most of the responses given and that created a pattern. Most of the respondents suggested clear or better communication as a solution to this challenge listed. They saw clear communication as having the power to iron out any issues in the partnership. This pattern where most of the respondents talk about clear communication as a solution suggests that in their partnership, UNDP and GYNED-SL had serious communication lapses. Otherwise, the interviewees would not have emphasized it.

These findings echo what was found in past studies. A study by Auronen (2003), found that based on the information asymmetry theory one partner has superior or more information than the other party leading to an imbalance that creates distortions or disadvantages in outcomes and decision-making. A consistent study by Bergh et al., (2019) stated that moral hazard whereby the agent possesses more information than the donor can cause problems in decision-making because the information may be harbored for self-interest.

### *Power Imbalances*

There was a mention of the existence of power imbalances in the UNDP and GYNED-SL partnership and it was cited as an impediment when trying to implement equitability and complementarity: “Power imbalances were evident in the partnership because UNDP had more power over decisions made than GYNED-SL” (GYNED-SL Respondent 5). And, “The real issue of not being equal in terms of power stood in the way but for me, it is not supposed to be a hindrance. We just need to understand that power is always with the donor”

(UNDP Respondent 3). And then, “Donors are always powerful and because they give the money, they hold sway in the decisions made in a partnership. I think the issue of equitability between UNDP and GYNED-SL cannot be realized fully” (UNDP employee 4).

The issue of power imbalances did not have a solution in the responses given because the respondents did not give any suggestions on how power on the side of UNDP can be reduced so that part of that power is given to GYNED-SL. Some of the responses indicated that donors always have power over their local partners because they are the ones who provide all or most of the resources for project implementation.

To deal with the issue of power imbalances, one interview findings suggests the use of clearer communication: “Power can be shared well if partners communicate on how that should be done. Communication is the solution to many of these problems” (GYNED-SL Respondent 2).

This study echoes what some past studies found about power imbalances between donors and recipients. The findings corroborate Khan & Kontinen, (2022) who stated that IDOs exclude local players in partnerships and when they they consider them, they reserve the leadership for themselves. A study by Harris & Tuladhar (2019) proposed that when a donor gives power to local actors it observes the work of national and local performers and takes note and that can improve localisation.

### ***Contradictory Priorities***

Respondents also cited conflicting priorities as a major impediment to the attainment of complementarity and equity between UNDP and GYNED-SL:

“Challenges or obstacles encountered by GYNED-SL and UNDP are differing priorities and agendas, power imbalance, capacity, and resource constraints” (GYNED-SL Respondent 1).

Another GYNED-SL respondent talked about the priorities of each organization. He said: “Each organization had its urgent needs and they could not agree even on trying to implement equity and complementarity” (GYNED-SL Respondent 4).

As a solution for dealing with this challenge, the respondents talked about the readiness of UNDP and GYNED-SL to collaborate appropriately. For example, GYNED-SL Respondent 7 stated thus: “The success of addressing this issue relies on the willingness of both GYNED-SL and UNDP to work together, talk to each other well, respect each other's perspectives, and adapt their approaches as needed”. This quote is indicative of the fact that GYNED-SL and UNDP must be ready to implement the solutions in close cooperation or

else they fail. Their readiness to cooperate in putting the solutions in place should be the priority because lack of it means they will implement the measures half-heartedly leading to failure.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Gailmard, (2014) and Milner (2006) who stated that challenges arise when the donor fails to follow the propositions of the recipient when there is a conflict of interest between the recipient and the donor and when the local NGO makes decisions that are not in the best interest of the partners.

Another study by Aerni (2006) suggested that the issue of conflict in priorities arises due to a conflict of interests between the IDO and the local actor. In agreement, Panda & Leepsa (2017) stated that the agent can decide and act on behalf of the donor, and this can cause disagreements and issues. Gailmard (2014) listed some major causes of agency issues such as when the donor does contrary to the propositions made by the agent; when there is a conflict of interest between the agent and the donor; and when the agent makes decisions that do not serve the interests of all actors involved.

On the question of the challenges faced when implementing measures to ensure complementarity and equitability, the findings supported the expectation held prior. I expected there to be challenges and the study has revealed the existence of challenges in the attempt by UNDP and GYNED-SL to ensure complementarity. I also expected the challenges to relate to decision making, communication issues, power imbalances, and resource sharing and that has been supported by the findings of this study.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the study findings were presented and discussed. The study findings indicate that the challenge of the burden of accountability, lack of mutual understanding, and the reliance on UNDP for resources affected the UNDP-GYNED-SL partnership negatively. Equity and complementarity were suggested by most of the respondents as the solution to the above mentioned challenges. To ensure that equity and complementarity are realized, there should be equity when choosing a partner, trust building, equal opportunities for decision-making between the donor and recipient, transparent accounting and budgeting practices, and the sharing of risks and resources. With the implementation of these measures, the outcome would include better decision-making, improved localisation outcomes, and increased collaboration. However, in the UNDP and GYNED-SL partnership, the pursuit of equity and complementarity was rocked by financial challenges, delayed decision making,

power imbalances and conflicting priorities. In order to deal with these challenges and have a smooth implementation of equity and complementarity, communication must be streamlined.



# Chapter 5 Conclusions and Reflections

## 5.1 Summary of Findings

This study was done in a manner that all the research questions were answered and the interview responses collected provided enough data to appropriately answer all the research questions. In summary, the study found that the partnership between UNDP and GYNED-SL was affected by partnership challenges such as burden of accountability and dependence on the donor for resources.

The study also revealed that it is possible to solve the donor-recipient relational challenges affecting the partnership using complementarity and equitability because these two can increase understanding and reduce suspicion. However, for favorable outcomes, complementarity and equitability should be implemented fully because failure to do that would lead to incomplete results.

Based on the interview responses, the measures to ensure complementarity and equitability should be founded on the Global Mentoring Initiative's (2023) Framework and they include the use of equity when choosing a partner, trust building and Intentional trust, making the right decisions, and risk sharing, resource sharing, good communication, budgetary transparency, and reciprocated transparency and accountability.

The responses also identified several implications of the measures for ensuring equity and complementarity in donor recipient challenges including improved decision-making, enhanced collaboration, and better project outcomes for localisation. As some suggested that the measures applied were effective, others stated that those measures did not meet the desired goals. The implications include improved decision-making, enhanced collaboration, and better project outcomes for localisation.

This study also unveiled several challenges in pursuing complementarity and equitability by implementing the above-mentioned remedial measures. The lack of mutual understanding, financial issues, delayed decision-making and contradictory priorities featured prominently in the interview responses. The lessons learned included the use of clear communication, equitable decision-making, and conflict resolution mechanisms to deal with the donor-recipient challenges.

## **5.2 Reflections on Key Findings and Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research**

The analysis of data revealed some key findings that are interesting to consider. Most of these findings were expected and therefore, they supported the expectations I had when collecting and analyzing the data. It was expected that UNDP and GYNED-SL will have challenges and that complementarity and equitability can be used to solve these challenges.

The findings of this study are vital because they add to the existing pool of knowledge about the challenges of donor-recipient partnerships and how these challenges can be countered to realize workable partnerships. The study explicitly elaborates what the specific challenges are, their effects on the partnership and how donors and recipients in localization arrangements can apply them to improve their working relationships. The study also has suggested outcomes whenever various corrective measures are applied appropriately. Using these findings, it will be possible for IDOs to understand how they can enhance their partnerships with their local partners. Local NGOs can also apply the knowledge in this study to design and improve their partnerships with their donors. The knowledge created in this study can provide the basis for policy development especially where donors and recipients are concerned. Such policies may be at the organizational or national level but their aim should be to enhance smoother relations between donors and recipients and eliminate all the donor-recipient challenges discussed on this study.

When analyzing the findings of this study, it was not clear why the partnership between UNDP and GYNED-SL was affected by many serious donor-recipient challenges that even with the implementation of measures that could bring about equitability and complementarity, the challenges were not completely eliminated. In view of this, future studies should investigate the best ways of achieving complementarity and equitability in donor-recipient partnerships.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Respondents

I would like to thank you for choosing to participate in this interview. My name is Mohamed Lamin Jalloh, and I am a master's student at The International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am doing this research to complete my master's thesis on the topic of the Dynamics of Donor-Recipient Issues in Partnerships between Local NGOs and International Donor Organizations: A Case Study of GYNED Sierra Leone.

This interview aims to collect insights and perspectives from people such as you who have valuable understanding and knowledge about the topic. Your contribution will greatly add to the depth and understanding of the research topic.

I wish to assure you that every bit of information you give us in this interview will remain confidential and it will be used exclusively for the purpose of my research. I encourage you to share your thoughts agreeably and honestly.

The interview will take about 30 minutes from start to finish, and I have a number of questions to ask you. However, feel free to volunteer any extra information or insights that you consider to be relevant to the topic.

Your know-how and experiences are very important, and I significantly appreciate your involvement to my research. In case you have any questions or concerns in the course of the interview or afterwards, kindly tell me.

### 1. Demographic Data and general questions

- i. Age.....
- ii. Gender.....
- iii. What was your role and connection with UNDP and the local Sierra Leonian NGO Global Youth Network for Empowerment & Development (GYNED-SL)?
- iv. How familiar are you with Donor-Recipient issues in partnerships between local NGOs and International Donor Organizations?

### 2. What specific aid localisation challenges arise in the context of the partnership between GYNED-SL and UNDP?

Mention any localisation challenges you feel arose in the time UNDP and GYNED-SL were working together.

Why do you think these challenges arose in the partnership?

### 3. How do GYNED-SL and UNDP actors perceive ensuring equity and complementarity as a solution to localisation challenges in their partnership?

What value is given to equity and complementarity in dealing with partnership challenges between GYNED-SL and UNDP?

How effective was equity and complementarity in solving the challenges facing the UNDP and GYNED-SL partnership?

4. **What measures were taken by GYNED-SL and UNDP to ensure an equitable and complementary partnership in addressing (or not addressing) donor-recipient relation challenges?**

What did UNDP and GYNED-SL do to deal with the issues affecting their partnership?

Were these measures implemented effectively?

What challenges stood in the way of these measures and their implementation?

5. **What challenges did GYNED-SL and UNDP face when implementing measures to ensure complementarity and equity?**

Could you mention some of the challenges faced by GYNED-SL and UNDP when pursuing equity and complementarity in their partnership?

Do you think these challenges had any major impact on the partnership?

How could these challenges be solved or reduced?

6. **What is UNDP doing towards the empowerment of GYNED-SL in its aid localisation efforts?**

Has UNDP made any efforts to empower GYNED-SL?

What strategies has UNDP employed towards this goal?

So far, has there been any success in the efforts made by UNDP?

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