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The Effect of Non-Governmental Organizations' Project Interventions on Rural Livelihoods in Rwanda: A Case Study of CorpsAfrica in Gicumbi District

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Abstract: *This study examined the effect of non-governmental organization (NGO) project interventions on rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District, Rwanda, using CorpsAfrica as a case. It specifically assessed the effects of income generating activities and agricultural support on rural livelihoods. A descriptive-correlational design using quantitative and qualitative data was adopted. The target population was 1,104 people (one project manager, 15 project staff, six local leaders and 1,082 beneficiaries), and Yamane's formula gave a sample of 294, drawn through stratified, census and simple random sampling. Data were collected from 250 beneficiaries (91.9%) through structured Likert questionnaires and from all 22 key informants through semi-structured interviews, and were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and thematic analysis. Respondents strongly agreed that income generating activities ($M = 4.35$) and agricultural support ($M = 4.37$) were provided and improved livelihoods. Both were positively correlated with rural livelihoods ($r = .598$ and $r = .828$, $p < .001$). In multiple regression, controlling for capacity building, agricultural support ($\beta = .438$, $p < .001$) was a stronger predictor than income generating activities ($\beta = .146$, $p < .001$), and the model explained 80.7% of the variance in rural livelihoods. Interviews corroborated these results. The study concludes that both interventions significantly improve livelihoods, with agricultural support having the larger effect. It recommends expanding inputs, extension and climate-smart farming support, and strengthening business training, savings groups and market linkages.*

Keywords: *Livelihoods, Interventions, Agriculture, Income, Rwanda, Gicumbi, CorpsAfrica*

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1. Introduction

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living, and it is sustainable when households can cope with shocks, maintain their capabilities and improve their well-being without undermining the resource base (Chambers & Conway, 1992). In many developing countries, rural livelihoods remain vulnerable because households depend on rain-fed farming and small-scale informal activities, with limited infrastructure and market access. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become important actors in responding to these conditions, particularly where governments face resource and capacity constraints (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Globally, evidence from rigorous evaluations shows that carefully designed livelihood support can improve the lives of very poor households. Banerjee et al. (2015) reported results from randomized trials in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan and Peru of an integrated approach that combined the transfer of a productive asset

with training, coaching and savings encouragement, and found significant gains in consumption, driven mostly by increases in self-employment income, that lasted at least a year after implementation ended. Banerjee and Duflo (2011) similarly describe poor households as operators of small enterprises whose growth is limited by constraints on capital, skills and markets.

In Africa, rural households typically combine farm and non-farm activities. Barrett et al. (2001) showed that non-farm income is an important part of household livelihood strategies in rural Africa, and Ellis and Freeman (2004), studying four African countries, examined how diversified livelihood portfolios relate to poverty reduction. At the same time, agricultural support remains central. Duflo et al. (2011) found in Kenya that smallholders' use of fertilizer depends on how and when support is delivered, which suggests that providing inputs alone does not guarantee better outcomes.

In Rwanda, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for most rural households, and both government and NGO programmes support farmers and rural enterprises. Rwanda's Crop Intensification Programme, launched in 2007, illustrates that the benefits of agricultural support can be uneven: Del Prete et al. (2018) found that participation in its land consolidation component had an ambiguous effect on household diets. An evaluation of the Graduation Programme in Rwanda by Devereux and Sabates (2016) compared participants with a control group over time to assess gains in assets, savings and wellbeing. CorpsAfrica implements community-driven projects in Gicumbi District in the Northern Province, including income generating activities, agricultural support and capacity building, in Miyove Sector (Miyove and Gakenke cells) and Nyankenke Sector (Butare cell).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Improving rural livelihoods remains a national priority in Rwanda, with NGOs complementing government efforts through community-based interventions. However, rural households in districts such as Gicumbi continue to face low agricultural productivity, limited access to modern farming techniques, inadequate infrastructure and vulnerability to climate variability. Concerns also persist about dependence on external assistance and the sustainability of project benefits after donor support ends. These challenges highlight the need for evidence on how specific NGO interventions relate to household welfare.

The existing literature provides limited evidence in three areas. First, many studies evaluate livelihood programmes as a package, making it difficult to distinguish the contributions of income-generating activities and agricultural support. Second, evidence from cross-country studies and large-scale programmes offers limited insight into district-level settings with distinct social and institutional conditions. Third, recent empirical research on CorpsAfrica's interventions in Gicumbi District remains limited. This study addressed these gaps by examining the separate associations of income-generating activities and agricultural support with rural livelihoods within CorpsAfrica projects implemented between 2020 and 2025. The findings provide context-specific evidence to inform programme design and policy.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective was to assess the effect of NGO project interventions on rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District, Rwanda, with CorpsAfrica as the case. The specific objectives were:

i. To examine the effect of income generating activities on rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District.
ii. To assess the effect of agricultural support interventions on rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 5% level of significance:

H_{01}: Income generating activities have no significant effect on rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District.

H_{02}: Agricultural support interventions have no significant effect on rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study is anchored in the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, developed from the work of Chambers and Conway (1992) and elaborated by the Department for International Development (1999) and Scoones (1998). The framework explains how households use five types of asset (human, financial, natural, social and physical capital) within a context of vulnerability to pursue livelihood strategies and achieve outcomes such as higher income, better food security and reduced vulnerability.

The framework maps directly onto the study objectives. Income generating activities strengthen financial capital by raising income and savings, and they diversify household income sources, which Ellis (2000) and Barrett et al. (2001) identify as a central livelihood strategy in rural Africa. Agricultural support strengthens natural, physical and human capital through inputs, techniques and extension, which raises productivity and food security in households that depend on farming. The framework is,

however, largely descriptive. It identifies pathways but does not quantify the size of each, which is why this study estimates the effects statistically.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Banerjee et al. (2015) provide the strongest global evidence on income-oriented support. Their trials in six countries found that bundling a productive asset with training, coaching and savings encouragement produced lasting gains in consumption and self-employment income. This implies that the effect of income-generating activities depends on the accompanying package of support. Banerjee and Duflo (2011) likewise emphasize capital, skills and market constraints as the main limits on small enterprises. For agriculture, Duflo et al. (2011) showed that the benefits of input support depend on delivery and farmer decisions, so input provision should be paired with farmer training.

Barrett et al. (2001) found that non-farm income diversification is an important part of rural household livelihood strategies in Africa, and Ellis and Freeman (2004) analyzed livelihood portfolios and poverty reduction in four African countries. Both studies indicate that income generating activities and farming are complementary parts of rural livelihoods rather than substitutes. Ellis (2000) reaches a similar conclusion for developing countries more broadly.

Devereux and Sabates (2016) evaluated Rwanda's Graduation Programme, which combined support for income-generating activities with complementary assistance, using a difference-in-differences design to compare participants and a control group over time. In agriculture, Del Prete et al. (2018) combined propensity score matching with difference-in-differences analysis of household survey data and found mixed effects of participation in land consolidation, a component of the Crop Intensification Programme, on household diets. These studies highlight the importance of programme design, context and the outcomes assessed when evaluating livelihood interventions. However, evidence comparing the distinct contributions of income-generating activities and agricultural support within a single NGO's district-level programme in Rwanda remains limited. The present study addresses this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Study Area

The study adopted a descriptive-correlational design (Kothari, 2019), supplemented by qualitative interviews. The descriptive component described the interventions and respondents' perceptions, while the correlational component examined the relationships between the interventions and rural livelihoods. It was conducted in Gicumbi District, Northern Province, Rwanda, in Miyove Sector (Miyove and Gakenke cells) and Nyankenke Sector (Butare cell), where CorpsAfrica implements community-driven development projects. The projects studied were implemented between 2020 and 2025.

3.2 Population and Sampling Procedures

The target population was 1,104 individuals: one project manager, 15 project staff, six local leaders and 1,082 beneficiaries. The sample size was determined with Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error: $n = 1{,}104 / (1 + 1{,}104 \times 0.05^2) = 293.6$, rounded to 294. Stratified sampling divided the population into four strata. Census sampling was applied to the three small strata, so all 22 key informants were included, and simple random sampling selected 272 beneficiaries. Table 1 presents the distribution.

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Distribution

Category of respondents	Population	Sample	Technique
Project manager	1	1	Census
Project staff	15	15	Census
Local leaders	6	6	Census
Beneficiaries	1,082	272	Simple random sampling
Total	1,104	294	

3.3 Data Collection Instruments, Validity and Reliability

Beneficiaries completed a structured questionnaire with socio-demographic items and five-point Likert statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) on income generating activities, agricultural support and rural livelihoods. Semi-structured interviews were held with the project manager, project staff and local leaders on the design and delivery of the interventions, challenges and sustainability, and project reports and monitoring records were reviewed to support triangulation. Permission was obtained from local leaders and CorpsAfrica, and respondents who could not read or write were assisted by the researcher.

Content validity was strengthened through review of the instruments by research supervisors and subject experts, construct validity through alignment of items with the conceptual framework, and clarity through piloting with respondents who resembled but were not part of the final sample. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, with .70 as the minimum acceptable value (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) [insert Cronbach's alpha for each scale from the SPSS output].

3.4 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Questionnaire data were analyzed in SPSS. Means and standard deviations described agreement with the statements (Pallant, 2020), and the following convention was used to interpret means: 1.00–1.80 strongly disagree, 1.81–2.60 disagree, 2.61–3.40 neutral, 3.41–4.20 agree and 4.21–5.00 strongly agree. Pearson's correlation coefficient assessed the strength and direction of relationships, and multiple regression estimated the effect of each intervention on rural livelihoods (Field, 2018). The model was $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$, where Y is rural livelihoods, X_1 is income generating activities, X_2 is agricultural support, and X_3 is capacity building, included as a control. Null hypotheses were rejected where $p < .05$. Interview data were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explain and corroborate the quantitative findings.

Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, respondents could withdraw without penalty, names were excluded from the records, and the data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes in line with Rwanda's data protection law.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are presented according to the research questions. Of the 272 questionnaires administered to beneficiaries, 250 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 91.9%. All 22 planned key informant interviews were conducted, representing 100% participation. Overall, 272 of the 294 targeted participants took part in the study, giving a combined response rate of 92.5%.

4.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 2 shows that respondents were drawn from both genders and from productive age groups: 167 (66.8%) were aged 30 to 49 years. Most had substantial exposure to the projects, with 206 (82.4%) having participated for two years or more, so they were well placed to judge the interventions.

Table 2: Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

Characteristic	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	142	56.8
	Female	108	43.2
Age	Below 30 years	43	17.2
	30–39 years	95	38.0
	40–49 years	72	28.8
	50 years and above	40	16.0
Education	Primary	38	15.2
	Secondary	90	36.0
	Diploma	57	22.8

Characteristic	Category	f	%
	Bachelor's degree	58	23.2
	Master's degree or higher	7	2.8
Years in CorpsAfrica projects	Less than 2 years	44	17.6
	2–4 years	102	40.8
	5–7 years	71	28.4
	More than 7 years	33	13.2

Note. Source: Field data.

4.2 Income Generating Activities and Rural Livelihoods

Respondents strongly agreed that CorpsAfrica supported income generating activities (overall M = 4.35, SD = 0.641; Table 3). The highest-rated statement was that these activities contributed to improving rural livelihoods (M = 4.43), followed by increased household income (M = 4.38) and improved entrepreneurial skills (M = 4.35). Establishing activities (M = 4.29) and support to expand small businesses (M = 4.31) were rated slightly lower. Standard deviations below 0.70 show that views were consistent.

Table 3: Respondents' Perceptions of Income Generating Activities

Statement	M	SD
CorpsAfrica has supported beneficiaries to establish income-generating activities	4.29	0.673
The project has improved beneficiaries' entrepreneurial skills	4.35	0.648
Beneficiaries have received adequate support to expand their small businesses	4.31	0.662
Income generating activities have increased household income	4.38	0.625
Income generating activities have contributed to improving rural livelihoods	4.43	0.598
Overall	**4.35**	**0.641**

Key informants (the project manager, project staff and local leaders) described a package of support made up of entrepreneurship training, vocational skills, business planning and financial management training, support for small enterprises, and the formation of savings groups and cooperatives. They reported that households used these to start or expand small businesses, save and borrow small amounts, diversify income and meet family needs more easily, and that some had become more resilient to economic shocks. The project manager stressed that activities were chosen to match local resources and skills.

4.3 Agricultural Support and Rural Livelihoods

Respondents also strongly agreed that agricultural support was provided and was beneficial (overall M = 4.37, SD = 0.641; Table 4). The highest rating was for agricultural support contributing to improved rural livelihoods (M = 4.47), followed by improved household food security (M = 4.42) and increased productivity (M = 4.38). Access to improved inputs had the lowest mean (M = 4.24) and the widest spread (SD = 0.702), although it remained in the strongly agree band.

Table 4: Respondents' Perceptions of Agricultural Support

Statement	M	SD
CorpsAfrica has supported beneficiaries with improved agricultural inputs	4.24	0.702
Beneficiaries have received training on modern farming techniques	4.33	0.661
Agricultural support has increased agricultural productivity	4.38	0.634
Agricultural interventions have improved household food security	4.42	0.617
Agricultural support has contributed to improving rural livelihoods	4.47	0.589
Overall	**4.37**	**0.641**

Informants explained that agriculture is the main livelihood in Gicumbi and that CorpsAfrica therefore combined training in modern techniques (land preparation, crop management, soil conservation and post-harvest handling) with improved seeds and other inputs and continuing technical support. They reported higher yields, better harvests, enough food for home use with surplus sold for income, and stronger knowledge sharing through farmer groups.

4.4 Rural Livelihoods

Respondents agreed strongly that livelihoods had improved (overall M = 4.37, SD = 0.629; Table 5). The overall standard of living (M = 4.41) and food security (M = 4.39) were rated highest, while employment and self-employment opportunities (M = 4.28) were rated lowest.

Table 5: Respondents' Perceptions of Rural Livelihoods

Statement	M	SD
Household income has improved because of CorpsAfrica project interventions	4.32	0.654
Household food security has improved following participation in the project	4.39	0.626
The project has increased employment and self-employment opportunities	4.28	0.681
The overall standard of living of beneficiary households has improved	4.41	0.609
CorpsAfrica project interventions have significantly improved rural livelihoods	4.47	0.576
Overall	**4.37**	**0.629**

4.5 Inferential Results and Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 shows that both interventions correlated positively and significantly with rural livelihoods. Income generating activities showed a moderate-to-strong relationship ($r = .598$, $p < .001$) and agricultural support a strong one ($r = .828$, $p < .001$). The two interventions were also moderately correlated with each other ($r = .539$, $p < .001$), which indicates complementarity without problematic overlap (no correlation among the predictors exceeded .90).

Table 6: Pearson Correlations among Interventions and Rural Livelihoods

Variable	1	2	3
1. Income generating activities	1		
2. Agricultural support	.539*	1	
3. Rural livelihoods	.598*	.828*	1

The multiple regression model, which also included capacity building as a control, was significant overall, $F(3, 246) = 342.642$, $p < .001$, with $R = .898$, $R^2 = .807$ and adjusted $R^2 = .805$. The three interventions together therefore accounted for 80.7% of the variance in rural livelihoods. Table 8 shows the effects of the two interventions of interest, net of capacity building.

Table 8: Multiple Regression Results for Rural Livelihoods

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Decision
(Constant)	.424	.146		2.915	.004	
Income generating activities	.171	.040	.146	4.298	< .001	Reject H_{01}
Agricultural support	.395	.038	.438	10.415	< .001	Reject H_{02}
Capacity building (control)	.553	.052	.435	10.656	< .001	

Income generating activities had a positive and statistically significant effect on rural livelihoods ($B = .171$, $\beta = .146$, $t = 4.298$, $p < .001$). A one-unit improvement in income generating activities was associated with a .171-unit increase in the livelihoods score, holding the other interventions constant. H_{01} was rejected.

Agricultural support had a positive and statistically significant effect on rural livelihoods ($B = .395$, $\beta = .438$, $t = 10.415$, $p < .001$). It had the largest standardized coefficient of the interventions examined, roughly three times that of income generating activities. H_{02} was rejected.

4.6 Discussion

The positive association between income-generating activities and rural livelihoods is consistent with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which emphasizes financial capital and income diversification as resources for household wellbeing (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Department for International Development, 1999). It also aligns with evidence identifying non-farm activities as an important component of rural livelihood strategies in Africa (Barrett et al., 2001; Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Freeman, 2004). Key informants described entrepreneurship and financial management training alongside savings groups and small-business support, resembling the multifaceted assistance examined by Banerjee et al. (2015) and Devereux and Sabates (2016). Nevertheless, income-generating activities had the smaller regression coefficient. Possible explanations include constraints on enterprise capital, skills and market access (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011), continued reliance on farming, and shared variation with capacity building ($r = .497$). These explanations remain tentative because the study did not test them directly; the slightly lower ratings for establishing and expanding businesses provide descriptive context rather than conclusive evidence.

Agricultural support showed the stronger association with rural livelihoods, consistent with the framework's emphasis on natural, physical and human capital. Informants' accounts suggest that farming support addresses both household income and food needs in a district where agriculture is a principal livelihood. Their descriptions of inputs combined with training and continuing assistance offer a plausible explanation for the favorable beneficiary ratings, although the contribution of each component was not estimated separately. The comparatively lower rating for improved inputs identifies a potential area for programme improvement, but does not establish the extent or causes of unequal access. Moreover, Del Prete et al. (2018) reported ambiguous dietary effects from participation in Rwanda's land consolidation programme, illustrating that agricultural interventions do not necessarily translate into consistent welfare gains. The strong perceived benefits reported here therefore require confirmation through verifiable yield, income and food-security measures.

Taken together, the findings indicate that both interventions were positively associated with rural livelihoods, with agricultural support showing the larger coefficient in the reported model. Their moderate correlation ($r = .539$) indicates that the interventions were related, but does not establish complementarity or demonstrate that joint delivery produced additional benefits. Nevertheless, the combination of farming assistance and income-diversification opportunities is consistent with the multifaceted livelihood approach examined by Banerjee et al. (2015). CorpsAfrica's programme may therefore address several household needs simultaneously, while the cross-sectional, self-reported evidence limits conclusions about causation and the independent contribution of each intervention. Future evaluations should examine whether integrated support produces more sustained livelihood gains than either intervention delivered separately.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that income-generating activities and agricultural support delivered through CorpsAfrica projects were positively and significantly associated with rural livelihoods in Gicumbi District ($p < .001$), leading to the rejection of H_{01} and H_{02}. Agricultural support showed the stronger association ($\beta = .438$; $r = .828$), with beneficiaries reporting improvements in productivity, food security and household income. Income-generating activities also contributed positively ($\beta = .146$; $r = .598$), supporting entrepreneurial skills, savings and income diversification. Beneficiaries rated both interventions highly, and key informant accounts reinforced the reported livelihood benefits. Together, the findings support integrating agricultural assistance with income-generating opportunities to address households' livelihood needs, although the additional benefit of delivering the interventions jointly was not directly tested.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. CorpsAfrica should strengthen income-generating activities through business and financial management training, support for savings groups and cooperatives, and improved access to start-up finance and markets. Enterprise performance should be monitored beyond the support period to assess sustainability.
2. CorpsAfrica should prioritise agricultural support, particularly access to improved inputs, which received the lowest rating. Inputs should be combined with practical training, extension services and climate-smart farming practices. Support for farmer groups should continue, while changes in yields and household income should be assessed using verifiable records. Local authorities and relevant government agencies should complement these efforts by strengthening extension services, irrigation and market access.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

The study focused on one NGO in Gicumbi District, limiting the generalizability of its findings. Livelihood outcomes relied on beneficiaries' self-reported perceptions, while the final item in each intervention scale explicitly addressed livelihood contributions, creating measurement overlap that may have inflated the observed associations. The cross-sectional design establishes associations after adjustment for capacity building but does not demonstrate causation. Furthermore, the strong correlation between agricultural support and capacity building ($r = .715$) warrants caution when interpreting their separate regression coefficients. Future research should compare multiple NGOs and districts, incorporate verifiable measures of yields, income and assets, and follow households over time to assess whether livelihood gains persist after donor support ends. Access to finance, infrastructure and climate adaptation should also be examined.

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