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Lasting Community Economic Development Impacts of the Millennium Villages Project: Evidence from Mbola, Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the long-term community economic development impact of the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) in Mbola, Tanzania. Key informant interviews together with direct observation analysis were the key elements used in quantitative – qualitative methods of analysis through integrated, multisectoral interventions in health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure. The findings revealed that while the MVP contributed to short term improvements in infrastructure and service delivery, its long-term impact on sustained economic growth and poverty reduction is still not available. The findings also pointed to the project key challenges which included limited/poor financial capacity for income generation groups to support their activities, poor characteristics of income generation group members that can support effective participation for efficient economic performance and collapsing of technological innovation established to support economic activities established at Mbola Millenium village project. The study concludes with recommendations for designing future rural economic development programs that prioritize long lasting community ownership, and systemic integration beyond the economic project lifecycle between financial sustainability, characteristics of income generation group members and technology innovated for economic development activities.

Keywords: *Community Economic development, Income Generation Groups, Millenium Village project,* Mbola, Tanzania

JEL Classification: O1, O10, O13, O2, O21

1. Introduction

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP), initiated by the Earth Institute at Columbia University in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and Millennium Promise, aimed to demonstrate how integrated, community-based development strategies could accelerate progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in rural Africa. Implemented across ten countries, including Tanzania, the MVP targeted multi-sectoral interventions in agriculture, health, education, infrastructure, and economic development. The Millennium Villages Project is a systematic approach to achieving the MDGs in rural Africa through community-led development with simultaneous, integrated, and science-based interventions in five key areas: agriculture, education, health, infrastructure, and business development. The overarching goal of the project was to achieve the MDGs in the Millennium Village sites in ways that were rigorously documented, replicable, and scalable (Sachs, 2019). One of the Tanzanian sites selected for the MVP was the cluster of Mbola villages in Uyui District, Tabora Region. Prior to the

intervention in 2006, the area was characterized by low living standards, limited infrastructure, and poor human development indicators. The MVP in Mbola, which operated from 2006 to 2015, aimed to improve socio-economic conditions through enhanced access to basic services, capacity-building initiatives, and sustainable livelihood strategies

The project covered 6,068 households with a population of approximately 38,445 beneficiaries. The overall intention was to implement coordinated interventions to enable communities to attain the MDGs by 2015.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) provides a holistic perspective on poverty and economic development by emphasizing the interconnection between human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital assets required for sustainable outcomes (Chambers & Conway, 2022). This framework is highly relevant to the MVP model, which sought to address multiple sectors simultaneously. In addition, Endogenous Development Theory emphasizes the use of internal community resources, knowledge, and institutions to promote long-term self-reliance (Ray, 2018). Participatory Development Theory further argues that meaningful community involvement in decision-making enhances sustainability and effectiveness of development interventions (Chambers, 1994). Integrated Rural Development (IRD) Theory complements these perspectives by highlighting the importance of multisectoral and area-based approaches to addressing complex rural poverty challenges (Rondinelli, 1983). Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a strong foundation for assessing the long-term economic outcomes of the MVP.

Despite the extensive investments and initial achievements of the MVP, questions remain regarding the sustainability of its economic outcomes after donor withdrawal. This article therefore evaluates the lasting community economic development impacts of the Millennium Villages Project in the Mbola villages. The main objective of this study is to assess whether the MVP's economic interventions have translated into sustained improvements in community economic development nearly a decade after the project's conclusion. Specifically, the study examines financial sustainability of income generation groups, characteristics of group members, and technical sustainability of the economic interventions implemented under the MVP.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) was implemented across rural Africa with the expectation that intensive, integrated, and donor-supported interventions would generate sustainable community economic development beyond the project lifecycle (Sachs, 2019). Several studies and official reports document notable short-term improvements in agriculture, health, education, and infrastructure during the implementation period of the MVP (URT, 2018). A large-scale retrospective endline evaluation across multiple Millennium Village sites also reported favourable impacts on several development indicators, though impacts on consumption-based poverty measures were limited, raising concerns about the durability of economic gains after project completion (Mitchell et al., 2018).

Despite these documented achievements, empirical evidence on the long-term sustainability of MVP economic interventions after donor withdrawal remains limited and mixed. Independent evaluations, including studies from Northern Ghana, report modest or uneven effects on core welfare and income outcomes, highlighting variation across contexts and implementation settings (Itad & IDS, 2018). In Tanzania, and particularly in the Mbola Millennium Villages Project, income generation groups and technological innovations were introduced to promote lasting community economic development. However, more than a decade after the project's conclusion, it remains unclear whether these interventions resulted in sustained income generation, financially viable community groups, and continued use of introduced technologies. This lack of rigorous post-project evidence constitutes a critical knowledge gap for policymakers and development practitioners, which this study seeks to address by examining the lasting community economic development impacts of the MVP in Mbola villages.

2. Literature Review

Community Economic Development (CED) emphasizes locally driven economic initiatives aimed at enhancing income generation, employment creation, and community resilience through collective action and effective utilization of local resources. Sustainable CED outcomes depend not only on external financial

inputs but also on internal community capacity, institutional arrangements, and long-term ownership of development initiatives (Chambers & Conway, 2022). Income generation groups are widely used in rural development programs as mechanisms for promoting livelihoods; however, their long-term success is often undermined by weak financial sustainability, limited managerial capacity, and overdependence on donor support.

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) represents one of the most ambitious integrated rural development interventions implemented in sub-Saharan Africa. Existing literature documents substantial short-term achievements during the implementation period, including improvements in agricultural productivity, access to health services, school attendance, and infrastructure development (Sachs, 2019). A comprehensive retrospective evaluation across ten Millennium Village sites reported significant positive impacts on several development indicators, though effects on income poverty and consumption were not statistically significant, raising questions about the project's ability to generate self-sustaining economic development (Mitchell et al., 2018).

Other independent evaluations provide a more critical perspective on MVP outcomes. Evidence from Northern Ghana suggests that while some social indicators improved, impacts on household income and welfare were modest, and sustainability beyond donor funding was uncertain (Itad & IDS, 2018). Scholars have further highlighted methodological and design challenges in evaluating integrated development projects such as MVP, including difficulties in attribution, comparator selection, and long-term impact measurement, which complicate assessments of sustained economic outcomes.

Financial sustainability, group member characteristics, and technological sustainability are consistently identified as key determinants of long-term success in community-based development initiatives. Weak access to finance, poor group composition, limited participation, and inappropriate or poorly maintained technologies often lead to project collapse after external support ends (Chambers, 1994; Ray, 1998; Rondinelli, 1983). Although government reports acknowledge MVP contributions to rural development in Tanzania, there remains limited empirical evidence assessing whether financial, social, and technological components of the project have jointly supported lasting community economic development at the village level (URT, 2017; URT, 2018). This study contributes to the literature by empirically examining these dimensions in the context of the Mbola Millennium Villages Project.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative method approach to comprehensively assess the lasting economic development impact of the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) in Mbola villages. The approach allows triangulation of findings, ensuring robustness and contextual depth in understanding economic changes. The research is conducted in Mbola cluster, located in Uyui District, Tabora Region, Tanzania, which was a beneficiary of the Millennium Villages Project from 2006 to 2015. The Mbola cluster was chosen due to its representative status in the MVP framework and the availability of baseline and endline data.

Purposive sampling applied to reach targeted respondents quickly hence helped to get easily the feedback of targeted groups. Therefore, purposely the study involved thirty members from each of eight income generation groups/projects established during MVP intervention. Thus 240 sample size drawn from each IGG which located at each of eight villages. Convenient and snowball sampling cooperated effectively whenever was potential for important scales. Selection criteria considered the following factors; time frame of the study, financial resources, coverage of the society, and accuracy of information, reliability of information and precision of information. Structured questionnaires administered to 30 respondents per each group from eight villages as per sample size, but one village from the eight ones is a neighbor village at which CED Impacts expected to spread. Data collected from the study area by using questionnaire. The study applies self-completed delivery and collection questionnaires by distributing them to several selected purposely respondents. The researcher used non-participant observation which involves the researcher spending a period of time making field visits at each village. The observation is structured. The observations recorded in terms of a predetermined schedule by using a check list and observed impacts associated with the MVP Poverty reduction interventions. In depth interview as data collection tool conducted with key informants who determined in the field hence making sense of the results obtained through the survey.

These interviews included open ended questions and probing questions. The data handled quantitatively and analyzed via SPSS. Data from different variable scales coded and their values entered into the software. Pilot testing of instruments ensures clarity and appropriateness. Triangulation of data sources and methods enhances validity. Regular debriefings with local collaborators help refine interpretations and validate emerging findings.

4. Results

The section was guided by the question 'What are the lasting community economic development impact of the Millennium Villages Project in the Mbola villages, Uyui District, Tabora Region?" The researcher collected data from the income generation groups at each of eight villages within Mbola area. Every income generation group contained thirty respondents. Thus 240 respondents appeared. Looking for the lasting/sustaining Millenium Village Project economic impacts the researcher based on three variables that leads to economic impacts such as Income Generation Group members characteristics, financial sustainability and technical sustainability of Income Generation Group from eight villages. Basing on these the findings reports as follows.

Table 1: Respondents demographic data

Demographic Profile/ characteristics of the Respondents

CHARACTERISTICS	**FREQUENCY**	**PERCENT**
Age group of Respondents		
18-35 years	22	10.4
36-45 years	101	42.1
46-60 years	117	47.5
Total	240	100.0
Education level of Respondents		
Standard seven	225	94.6
Form four	5	1.8
Diploma	10	3.6
Total	240	100.0
Gender of Respondents		
Male	180	75.5
Female	60	24.5
Total	240	100.0
Marital status of Respondents		
Married	197	80.9
Single	43	19.1
Total	240	100.0

Association with MVP economic development intervention		
Livestock keeping IGG member	72	36.0
Crop cultivation IGG member	168	64.0
Total	240	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

4.1 Financial sustainability of Income generation groups per each of eight villages

The analysis within the below table involves the data from 240 respondents who are income generation group members established 05% strongly agree that income generation group members have financial sustainability, 05% normally agree also income generation group members have financial sustainability, 33% disagree and 57% strongly disagree that there is financial sustainability on this MVP poverty eradication income generation group members established. A total of 10% agree that financial sustainability exists hence a total of 75% disagree on financial sustainability.

Table 2: Financial sustainability of income generation groups
"(1 = Strong disagree; 2= Disagree; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Agree; 5 = strongly agree)"

No	**STATEMENT**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total%**
1	Organizational capacity to implement activities to produce effects after the cooperation	69	31	0	0	0	100
2	Sense of ownership towards the project sufficiently ensured	52	33	0	7	8	100
3	Budget secured	60	40	0	0	0	100
4	Probability that the budget increases in the future through the implementation of the project	42	24	0	18	16	100
5	Sufficient measures to secure the budget	62	38	0	0	0	100
	Average	57	33	0	5	5	100

Source: Field Data (2025)

4.2 Characteristics of Community Economic Development (CED) Income Generation Groups

Characteristics of Community Economic Development (CED) income generation group members play a critical role in determining the sustainability and lasting economic impacts of the Millennium Villages Project. The study assessed the characteristics of 240 selected income generation group members participated in Mbola MVP interventions if were suitable as per community economic development, philosophies or whatever, so as to support economic impact sustainability of project goals. This assessed on several aspects as in the below table.

Table 3: Characteristics of Community Economic Development (CED) Income Generation Groups in Mbola Millennium Villages Project
"(1 = Strong disagree; 2= Disagree; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Agree; 5 = strongly agree)"

No	**STATEMENT**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total%**

1	Community owns the Income generation group	58	35	0	7	0	100
2	Income generation group members are below 10	74	26	0	0	0	100
3	Full physical participation of members implementing economic activities under the same mission, objectives and vision as agreed	37	63	0	0	0	100
4	Income generation groups under MVP limited growth time for succession and growth	53	47	0	0	0	100
5	Community needs assessment for income generation group under MVP conducted before starting the project	69	23	0	0	8	100
6	Support of resources in terms of material for establishing income generation groups	16	0	0	46	37	100
7	Geographical Proximity for MVP poverty reduction intervention	0	0	0	39	61	100
8	Targeting immediate change on community economic development	0	0	0	19	81	100
	Average	38	24	0	14	23	

Source: Field Data (2025)

The analysis on the below table shows that 240 respondents who are members of Income generation groups established 23% strongly agree that characteristics of IGG members where suitable, 14% normally agree that characteristics of IGG members where suitable for impact sustainability, 24% disagree and 38% agree that characteristics of IGG members where suitable for impact sustainability. A total of 37% agree that characteristics of IGG members where suitable for impact sustainability hence a total of 62% disagree on characteristics of IGG members suitability for impact sustainability. Through that MVP IGG's members selected due to their demographic data as provided before, they are not suitable for impact sustainability of the planned MVP poverty eradication planned economic goals.

4.3 Technical sustainability on MVP IGG groups

The applied technology within the CED activities can determine the impact sustainability and growth of the project interventions. Under the Mbola MVP poverty eradication interventions, groups established for economic intervention. The study assessed technology applied if nourishes the impact sustainability by looking methods of technology transfer used in the project, maintenance and management plan for that equipment which will be introduced in the project appropriateness, project contain a mechanism for its dissemination, probability that the implementing agency can maintain the mechanism for its dissemination and technology one that can be disseminated to other sites for sustainability as the attraction of learning and replicability.

Table 4: Technical sustainability on MVP poverty eradication intervention percentage
"(1 = Strong disagree; 2= Disagree; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Agree; 5 = strongly agree)"

No	STATEMENT	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	methods of technology transfer used in the project	61	39	0	0	0	100
2	maintenance and management plan for that equipment which will be introduced in the project appropriateness	57	43	0	0	0	100
3	project contain a mechanism for its dissemination	56	44	0	0	0	100
4	probability that the implementing agency can maintain the mechanism for its dissemination	37	29	0	11	23	100

5	technology one that can be disseminated to other sites	53	24	0	11	12	100
	Average	53	36	0	4	7	100

Source: Field Data (2025)

The analysis on the below table shows that out of 240 respondents who are members of IGG for IGA established 07% strongly agree that technological sustainability exists, 04% normally that technological sustainability exists for impact sustainability, 36% disagree and 53% strongly disagree that technological sustainability exists where suitable for impact sustainability.

Table 5: Lasting community economic development impact of the Millennium villages project in Mbola Villages.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FN	278	1.00	2.80	1.6719	.56874
TN	278	1.00	2.80	1.7662	.63622
CC	278	2.00	3.00	2.5971	.28204
Overall mean				2.0118	.44776

Source: Field Data (2025)

4.4 Correlation Analysis between Variables

Lasting CED impacts = f (Financial Sustainability of IGG (FSI) + Characteristics of IGG (CI) + Technical Sustainability on MVP (TSM))

Before assessing the lasting community economic development impacts, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between financial sustainability of income generation groups, characteristics of group members, technical sustainability of MVP interventions, and lasting community economic development impact.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis between Financial Sustainability, Group Characteristics, Technical Sustainability, and Lasting Community Economic Development Impact

		FSI	CI	TSM	LCEDI
FSI	Pearson Correlation	1	.583**	.321**	.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
CI	Pearson Correlation	.583**	1	.630**	.297**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
TSM	Pearson Correlation	.321**	.630**	1	-.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	240	240	240	240
LCEDI	Pearson Correlation	.365**	.297**	-.365**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	240	240	240	240

Source: Field Data (2025)

FSI = Financial Sustainability of Income Generation Groups; CI = Characteristics of Income Generation Group Members; TSM = Technical Sustainability of MVP Interventions; LCEDI = Lasting Community Economic Development Impact

The analysis shows that Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The correlation between FS1 and LCEDI is low and positive with value of 0.365 and statistically significant. The correlation between CI and LCEDI is poor and positive with value of 0.297 and statistically significant. The correlation between TSM and LCEDI is low and positive with value of 0.365 and statistically significant. Therefore, no similarities or close relationship between the LCEDI variables; this allows the evaluation of lasting CED impacts on Mbola MVP to come out with expected results.

4.5 Model estimation findings

The researcher used the statistical significance of results to determine the variation between independent variables and the dependent variable. The Researcher checked the statistical significance of the results by using ANOVA based on comparing the variance between the data samples to the variation within each particular sample. If the between-group variance is high and the within-group variance is low, this provides evidence that the means of the groups are significantly different as indicated in Table 05. The results show that the regression model was significant because the p-value is less than 5% ($p < 0.05$).

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.145	3	.048	153.960	.000[b]
	Residual	.086	274	.000		
	Total	.230	277			

Source: Field Data (2022)

4.6 Model Summary

LCEDI= $\mathbf{B_0}$ + $\mathbf{B_1}$, FSI + $\mathbf{B_2}$, CI + $\mathbf{B_3}$, TSM + e

A) Predictors: (Constant), FSI, CC, TSM

b) Dependent Variable: LCEDI

The R-value of 0.792 shows that there is a strong and positive correlation among the three variables as seen on Table 14,

The R-squared value of 0.628 shows that about 62.8 percentage changes in LCEDI is explained by FSI, CC and TSM jointly, while a less part of about 37.2 percentage is captured by the error term. This shows that the model has a good fit.

Adjusted R-squared value of 0.624 shows that about 62.4 percentage changes in LCEDI, is explained by FSI, CI and TSM jointly, while a small of about 37.6 percentage is captured by the error term. This also shows that the model has a good fit.

The Durbin-Watson statistic measures the evidence of autocorrelation in the residuals. The acceptable DW range of no autocorrelation within 1.45 and 2.44, Thus, the fitted regression line result showed that there is no evidence of autocorrelation as indicated by DW statistic value of 2.010

Table 8: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.792[a]	.628	.624	.01769421	2.010

Source: Field Data (2023)

The result confirms that the overall regression model is significant for the data, and this was captured by the ANOVA (F-statistic) value of 153.960 and its associated probability value of 0.00b (F=153.960, p<0.00b), that was found to be significant at 5% level.

5. Discussion

Trough table 1, shows that, 33% disagree and 57% strongly disagree that there is financial sustainability on this MVP poverty eradication IGG established. A total of 10% agree that financial sustainability exists hence a total of 75% disagree on financial sustainability. Furthermore, the income generation groups suffering financial constraints due to the fact that IGG's capacity to implement activities to produce effects after the cooperation is poor, Sense of ownership towards the project sufficiently is not ensured, no Budget secured, no Sufficient measures to secure the budget and there is no probability that the budget increases in the future through the implementation of the project. Comes to the area of the study there was the Mbola Millenium Saccos owned by the MVP where the IGG members and their groups use to keep fund, collapsed and the members didn't refund their money. The fruits processing factory at Mbola villages also collapsed due to poor service of machines as the results of financial constraints. The house where incubators for chicken keeping also collapsed due to inefficiency of running maintaining costs.

About the characteristics of income generation group members, the analysis within table shows that 240 respondents who are members of income generation group members established 62% disagree on characteristics of income generation group members income generation group members suitability for impact sustainability. Through that MVP income generation group members selected due to their geographical location but they are not suitable for impact sustainability of the planned MVP poverty eradication planned economic goals. There was poor selection of members to be participated on income generation group members economic development activities. This hinders the impact sustainability as a lot of established activities failed up to now. No income generation group members resulted from the established ones and no any income generation group members continues to operate in Crop cultivation and livestock keeping as planned.

The applied technology within the CED activities can determine the impact lasting and growth of the project interventions. Under the Mbola MVP poverty eradication interventions, groups established for economic intervention. The study assessed technology applied if nourishes the impact lasting by looking methods of technology transfer used in the project, maintenance and management plan for that equipment which will be introduced in the project appropriateness, project contain a mechanism for its dissemination, probability that the implementing agency can maintain the mechanism for its dissemination and technology one that can be disseminated to other sites for sustainability as the attraction of learning and replicability. A total of 11% agree that technological sustainability exists where suitable for impact sustainability hence a total of 89% disagree on that technological sustainability exists for impact sustainability.

5.1 The innovation container

Named after Chombo cha Kuvumbua Maisha this was for the production of high current electricity to run the incubators for reproduction of chicken eggs settled at two buildings at Mbola mashariki village where income generation group members used to work for entrepreneurship. Until now the container is there but doesn't work hence some tool read stolen.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Finally, table four shows that the analysis that involves the data from 240 respondents who are members of income generation group members disagreed that income generation group members have financial sustainability on this MVP poverty eradication income generation group members established. Its scale is 1.6719 that addressing respondents' disagreement on this. The technology innovated to support the CED activities during the intervention also respondents disagree on its sustainability. 1.7662 is the scale from it that implies respondents strongly disagree. Respondents disagree on the supporting characteristics of CED income generation group members, this observed through its scale which is 2.5971. The overall average on this objective is 2.0118 which within the scale imply respondents disagreed on existence of Lasting Community Economic Development Impact of the Millennium Villages Project in Mbola villages, Uyui district at Tabora region. This is due to the MVP poverty eradication activities under the income generation group members suffered financial constraints, technical support hence characteristics of CED income generation group members do not meet good requirements of CED Group Practitioners. This hinders Lasting Community Economic Development Impact of the Millennium Villages Project in Mbola villages.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Basing on the study, the findings concludes that there is no the Lasting Community Economic Development Impact of the Millennium Villages Project in Mbola villages, Uyui district at Tabora region. This is due to the fact that the all determinants of economic impact established failed, no financial sustainability of established income generation groups to make them sustain and expand for a long period of time. Millenium village Saccos where they kept their money collapsed. The innovation technology to support economic production also collapsed Solar Electricity via innovation container, the eggs incubators laboratory for Chicken production and its facilities collapsed. Bee keeping classes established collapsed, fruits processing industry also collapsed. The characteristics of income generation group members do not qualify to support effective economic activities associated within. Respondents whom where group members are not thinking of utilizing what they obtained for economic development but they are waiting for the other donor to come and sponsor them again. MVP expected the expansion of their economic development plan to other nearby villages. But even the MVP involved villages economic activities via income generation group members established already collapsed. There is no continuing economic activity that attracts sustaining of economic goals. The study recommends that, on achieving the economic goals through donor fund projects in collaboration with community beneficiaries through groups, the financial sustainability, characteristics of participating members should be under control of community economic development principles to enable efficiency on them which paving the way to longer lasting of specified economic goals and technology innovated to ensure the economic activities continues forever. Stakeholders like government authorities must be engaged as a part of supervision and monitoring of established community economic activities.

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