Women carrying their products to the Kongo village market for sale. The market day happens every third day and people from all over the Nabdam district and other nearby districts bring their products for sale there. Most of them travel the long distance on foot with heavy loads on their heads.

Poverty alleviation approaches of development NGOs in Ghana: Application of the basic needs approach

Seth Amofah and Lily Agyare
Poverty alleviation approaches of development NGOs in Ghana: Application of the basic needs approach

Seth Amofah1* and Lily Agyare1

Abstract: This paper discusses the applicability of the basic needs approach as a poverty alleviation analysis method in emerging development cooperation. International development organizations at the micro levels in northern Ghana have used various tools and methods in implementing their projects. The possibility to use the basic needs approach to development, which prioritizes the fulfilment of people’s everyday needs as a tracker to the narrative of successes or failures of such interventions was the main objective of this study. A qualitative case study was used to research poverty reduction work of an Estonian NGO, MTÜ Mondo in Nabdam District of Ghana. Results showed that poverty and its alleviation mean differently to different people, hence programs aimed at reducing poverty should be analyzed using a diverse but lower level basic criteria which could be appreciated within specific communities. This paper concludes that “cooperative” basic needs approach to sustainable poverty alleviation works better in communities with acute incidence of poverty. Cooperatives formed as an implementation mechanism for economic empowerment projects serve broader purposes such as providing social capital for acutely disadvantaged communities. The paper recommends that already existing and new entrant NGOs, as well as government interventions, need to conclusively evaluate the needs of each community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS
The author, Seth Amofah, is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at the School of Governance, Law and Society at Tallinn University, Estonia. His research interest ranges from urban sociology, poverty studies, development sociology and emerging development cooperation research. This current article is crafted from Seth’s PhD research, which is critically evaluating an Estonian NGO’s development cooperation projects in Ghana and other parts of Africa. The main objective of the study is to map the mechanisms and processes of the emerging development cooperation in international development. The co-author, Lily Agyare is a Master of Social Entrepreneurship graduate at the School of Governance, Law and Society at Tallinn University. She has researched into topics into topics such as pro-disability social entrepreneurship, rural livelihoods and urban entrepreneurship. Lily currently work as a private researcher and expected to commence her PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies in the Fall of 2022.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
International effort to reduce poverty has been on the ascendency in the last few decades. The means and processes used in assessing poverty reduction programs are as important as the interventions themselves. In this study, development cooperation between an Estonian NGO and some communities in the Nabdam District of northern Ghana was researched from the perspective of the basic needs approach. The basic needs approach to poverty reduction is tackling poverty by solving food unavailability, educational, health, and employment needs. The study wanted to find out how the basic needs approach could be used to evaluate the poverty reduction efforts of emerging development cooperation in Ghana. The results showed that if poverty reduction projects are planned with a specific community and household needs and resources, it provides a wider outcome by targeting basic household needs. The basic needs approach could therefore be a good tool to measure poverty reduction programs.
in which they operate, in order to customize appropriate poverty alleviation tools and projects.

**Subjects:** Sociology; Sociology & Social Policy; Development Studies; Rural Development

**Keywords:** basic needs approach; emerging development cooperation; northern Ghana; NGO; poverty alleviation

1. **Introduction**

This paper discusses how continuous and systematic application of specific approaches to poverty alleviation in emerging development cooperation leads to a quicker reduction in poverty in developing countries. The study concentrates on how the basic needs approach to development could be specifically used in executing and assessing poverty alleviation projects, especially, by non-government organizations (NGOs). Researchers have studied NGO poverty alleviation projects in developing countries such as Bangladesh (Obaydullah, 2000), Kenya (Manyasa, 2009), Uganda (Namara, 2010), and Ghana (Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006; Osei-Kufuor & Koomson, 2014). These studies focused on the successes and failures of the efforts in the communities the projects were implemented. Less is discussed in literature about the approaches used and how they resonate with development theories such as the basic needs approach.

More research findings have questioned the impact levels of development activities aimed at alleviating poverty around the developing world, even though NGOs are increasing within the same space and time. Bob-Miliar (2005) and Brass (2012) have emphasized on the increasing number of NGOs across Africa. Kpinpuo and Sanyare (2015) have argued that, even though there are numerous organizations joining in the fight against poverty in different capacities, it is not clear the extent to which poverty levels have been reduced through the interventions of the organizations.

As much of the focus of researchers has been on the outcome, less has been on the specific approaches used. Social enterprises (Fatheringham & Saunders, 2014; Lateh et al., 2018; Osei-Kufuor & Koomson, 2014), women empowerment (Fatheringham & Saunders, 2014) among others have been mentioned to be used as strategies for poverty reduction, but literature has largely been silent on how the findings on impacts are evaluated through approaches in development theories. Knowing which development approach a poverty reduction project fits into could go a long way to provide a better understanding of how to interpret the success levels of the projects and initiatives.

The increase in lower impact levels reported from recent research on this topic is a recipe for concern. Also, the understanding of factors considered in international development cooperation projects needs more investigation to ascertain the measurement of sustainability of development projects. Furthermore, the basic needs approach, which prioritizes the need to meet people’s basic essential needs such as food, health, education and employment (Stewart, 1985), is a concept in development economics but has not received much discussion as an evaluation tool in emerging international development cooperation efforts on poverty reduction.

This paper focuses on actively using the basic needs approach as a measure of emerging NGO-community development cooperation poverty reduction initiatives in Ghana. The term emerging development cooperation used in this paper refers to the international development relationship crafted between NGOs from non-traditional NGO origin countries and specific communities in the global south without the direct involvement of national or local governments. Over the years, many bigger international development bodies, including NGOs, have invested in alleviating poverty in Ghana (Kpinpuo & Sanyare, 2015; Osei-Kufuor & Koomson, 2014; Porter, 2003). More than 60% of these of organizations operate in the rural northern part of the country (Porter, 2013) where about 70% of the country’s poor live (Gbedemah et al., 2010; Ghana Statistical Service,
Ghana has made effort to actively reduce the poverty incidence in the country. These efforts have been spearheaded by the government of Ghana and supported by local and international NGOs and development partners. Ghana was the first country in sub-Saharan to meet the millennium development goals (MDGs) of halving extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015 (Ansah et al., 2020). Yet, the national poverty incidence according to the Ghana Living Standard Survey 7 was a little over 23% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019). The situation is worse in the rural northern part of the country where 67.7% of the total population is considered poor (Ansah et al., 2020; Ghana Statistical Service, 2019), almost three times the national average.

This paper uses the work of a development cooperation between an international NGO from Estonia’s and some communities in the Nabdam District located in the Upper East Region of northern Ghana to examine how the application of the basic needs approach could be helpful to ascertain the impact of poverty alleviation programs. The Nabdam District is one of the poorest districts in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The main question this paper seeks to answer is: How are the implementation outcomes of international development cooperation initiatives understood from the basic needs approach in poverty reduction projects? The study is relevant to poverty alleviation research because it provides an alternative to use comparison between poverty indicators and the basic needs elements for NGO project assessment. It also adds to the general source of scientific knowledge on poverty alleviation, especially initiatives from new and emerging NGOs, which has been a growing area of study in recent years.

2. The basic needs approach to poverty alleviation from literature

Poverty could be described as one of the oldest human problems. Its studies in academia date back to centuries. Adam ([1776] (1993), p. 182) as cited in Glennerster et al. (2004) contextualizes it as “the set of scantiness of subsistence that can set limits to further multiplication of the human species.” The definition was expressed in living conditions of the working-class citizen problems such as hunger, housing, environmental conditions, hazardous work conditions and poor health conditions. In the 1990s, international organization adopted the definition of poverty to include what they described as the poverty line, below which, one would be classified as living as an extremely poor person (World Bank, 1992). In other words, the poverty line reflects the capabilities to fulfill basic human needs translated into a basket of goods and services evaluated at a given set of prices. Later, the United Nations extended the definition to include other social factors to such as access, dignity and social inclusion (United Nations, 1995). Whatever the case, poverty is often defined by economists and development practitioners as the absence or difficulties to obtain basic amenities such as food, floor space per person, medical care, education and social inclusion.

Poverty alleviation on the other hand is the attempt made to reduce the incidence of poverty or to reduce the problem it leaves on people who suffer it. Poverty alleviation theories have evolved over the last six decades. Development theories and discussions on poverty and poverty alleviation were intensified in the 1970s and re-launched in the 1990s by international development organizations and academics (Sen, 1976; Streeten & Burki1978, 2000; Wong, 2012). Over the last three decades, organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank have steered the poverty alleviation agenda around the world, especially in developing countries. These discussions have been the reasons behind the promulgation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; United Nations, 2000, 2011; United Nations Publications, 2010) which was targeted to halving extreme poverty in the developing world by 2015. Furthermore, as a sequel to the MDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been implemented to among other things, erase extreme poverty in all countries by 2030 (United Nations, 2017).

The discussions has mostly dwelt on whether boasting economic growth rate of a country translate into massive poverty reduction (Adams, 2002; Ravallion, 2001; Ravallion & Chen, 1997), or whether
improving individual needs accelerate poverty alleviation better. Pro-economic growth as antidote to poverty use the example of China that has lifted over 400 million people out of poverty since 1979. They also cite India, Mozambique, Tunisia, Vietnam and Ghana to have reduced poverty between 1980 and 2003 by increasing their Gross Domestic Products [GDP] (Ravallion, 2001). Increasing GDP is seen at the macro-level development, but what happens at the household level where the least poor lives and the measures taken to alleviate them out of it should be done at the micro level. At the same time, Ravallion (2001) further argues that, increase in incomes of people lead to significant decline in inequality. Therefore, the basic needs approach to reducing incidence of poverty comes back to be matched with monetary measure or consumption.

There is an inherent admittance of the use other approaches in combatting poverty. First of all, Aoun (2004) claims that, high poverty rate could be attributed to lower education. Research by Schultz (1981) has proven that education has used as a tool to eradicate poverty in many countries. It is designated to use human capital development as the achievement of educational basic need to reduce poverty. The discussions hold it that, as people are given basic education, they are able to create wealth based on the value added to their lives through the education. However, for human development to be achieved through education, Wong (2012) makes an example that children do not have to spend time looking for water and carrying them home before going to school. In other words, for human development to be able to achieve prosperous future for poor people, their basic needs should not hinder them in the present. Therefore, the successes of human development approach to poverty reduction is hinged to the availability of the basic needs. Reinert (2018) and Reinert (2020) have further successfully linked the achievement of basic needs to enforcing human rights and development.

The views and discussions of the basic needs approach over the years make it one possible way to examine real poverty reduction schemes. In 1979, the World Bank reported that people with adequate income were not necessarily healthy and impliedly did not have their basic needs met if they are not healthy (Knight et al., 1979). On this ground, basic needs were classified into “first floor” and “second floor” based on material and immaterial needs respectively (Streeten & Burki, 1978). The need for food, shelter and clothing fall under the material needs. There is even more unseen elements in the “second floor”. Since those are not visible and untouchable, a poverty reduction project may not be seen as successful if it addresses material needs without taking away challenges associated with immaterial needs.

Moreover, cooperation has been used as a means to implement poverty reduction programs especially in developing countries. Most of these cooperations are local and community based and are used to address specific local problems. Owusu (2021) has elaborated on how cooperatives and cooperation in agriculture affects household welfare in Ghana. Also, the Food and Agriculture Organization (2018) has published that when countries, communities or individuals learn from each other, it reduces poverty. They used the example of a south-south cooperation between Kenya, Ghana, Senegal and the Gambia to share experience leading to reduction in rural poverty in the respective countries.

There is a similarity between the definitions of absolute poverty; the measure of extreme poverty and the basic needs. Both concepts have hazy boundaries (Meier, 1989, p. 26; Aoun, 2004). For instance, absolute poverty has been classified as the inability to meet everyday basic needs, which is a measure of the poverty line. Evaluating the impact of a project that intends to reduce the incidence of poverty could be done using the basic needs approach, though recent literature have not looked at how specific application of the approach have fared in poverty reduction activities. That is the gap this paper sought to fill.

3. The research process and methodology
The purpose, context and types of research questions define the methodological foundations of a study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). This qualitative study rest on the constructivist worldview to
establish how everyday practices of emerging development cooperation solutions to poverty alleviation could be analyzed. A development cooperation between Estonia’s biggest international NGO, MTÜ Mondo who operate in Europe, Africa and Asia across 14 countries, and some communities in rural northern Ghana were the focus of the study. Ghana was the first operational country of the NGO and it has operated in the Nabdam District, one of the poorest districts in the country (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, 2015), since 2009. The new relationship between the two parties to combat poverty became a case of interest for this study.

To achieve the aims of the research, data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted with partner community members in the Nabdam District from June 2018 to July 2019 and staff of NGO Mondo of Estonia in October 2018 and September 2019. In all, 21 people were purposefully selected to participate in the study. In selecting the participants, the research looked for people who had been directly involved in the development cooperation for at least 2 continuous years preceding the study. All the selected participants had in one way or the other gone through the poverty alleviation activities of NGO Mondo either as a beneficiaries, collaborators or the NGOs workers assigned to the Ghana operations. Different interest groups within the cooperation were represented in the study to provide wider data sources for generalization of the study outcome. They were deemed reliable and competent source of data for the study. Table 1 presents an anonymized details of the respondents indicating the different people who participated in the study, their affiliations and gender.

The paper sought to explore how the basic needs approach could be used as a poverty alleviation tool. The study is situated in case study design to afford deep exploration of multiple cases within the same remits through in-depth data gathering (Yin, 1989, 2009). The use of case study design helped in describing and predicting the phenomena of poverty alleviation approaches. Data collection and analysis are not exclusive of each other, according to Saldaña (2013) because of the time between data collection through interview and when it was analyzed occur almost at the same time. All the gathered data were coded based on Charmaz’s (2017) constructivist grounded theory coding principles. In figure 1, the conceptual framework that visualizes the research process is presented.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Afterward, there was thorough read-through for coding purposes and also to identify mistakes to ensure validity of the data. During the analysis process, similar responses were grouped into themes and common themes merged together. The codes were intended to identify themes associated with the research through open coding. New themes that came up were sub-coded under the main questions and were finally grouped for easy referencing and cross-referencing analysis in relation to the main questions and objectives by using keywords. Charmaz (2017) coding principles were used in filtering the data.

| Respondent ID | Affiliation | Gender | Total |
|---------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| 1–7           | Direct partners: Shea butter extractors | All women | 7 |
| 8–14          | Direct partners: Basket weavers | All women | 7 |
| 15–17         | Institutional heads/Staff | One woman, Two men | 3 |
| 18–19         | International NGO staff | All women | 2 |
| 20–21         | Local partner NGO | All men | 2 |
| Total         | 19 Local community members, 2 NGO Staff | 18 women, 3 men | 21 |
finding patterns and categorizing the data into themes. The themes were interpreted using a hermeneutic approach (Newman, 2014). Hermeneutics permits interpretation of text into details without losing its relevance. The entire data collection process adhered to internationally accepted research ethics, especially consent and anonymity of the participants.

4. Reporting the research findings
This paper presents the outcome of the study on the approaches used by the Estonian NGO, MTÜ Mondo in alleviate poverty in the Nabdam District of Ghana. This section details how NGO Mondo activates poverty alleviation strategies in majority poor district to ensure empowerment for everyday sustenance.

5. Alleviating poverty in a majority poor district
Poverty comes in different shapes and forms. That is the reason why its definition is fluid and borderless from literature and theory. Elements of poverty in one circumstance may not be included in another. It is therefore important to seek the meaning of poverty from individuals and organizations caught in this bracket. In understanding the definition of poverty from the perspective of people tagged as poor, the study enquired from the study participants’ what they called poverty. One of the respondent said that

Poverty is when you can’t get what you want […] If I were the only person suffering and starving, that wouldn’t have been a problem for me, because I have lived through this all my life. But when children become victims to a parent’s lack, then truly, there is poverty. [Interviewee 3]

This participants' understanding of poverty is the “lack” for things needed to live. She goes ahead to use the possibility of passing it on to the younger generation as an extreme kind of poverty that would mean that the problem will be stucked. This understanding expressed in the study inclines into the vicious cycle of poverty, which lives within a household for generations. The meaning of extreme poverty in this regard extends beyond the lack of material things in the present, but local
people also admit it to include the glairiness of the future. Absence of physical tangibles such as inadequate nutrition, clothing, and money is seen as the main concern of the people who deem themselves as poor (Ravallion, 2001; Streeten & Burki, 1978). This was a major problem throughout the study district and any effort to better the livelihood fortunes of the people would extensively have to address those issues.

The study additionally revealed possible reasons for the excessive poverty in the district. The Nabdam District is one of the poorest in the country (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). Poverty is recognized and admitted as a major problem by most people including the study participants and local government officials. Corroborating this assertion, a respondent stated that:

…Looking at the national categorization of urban areas, no community in this district meet the status of a town. Even the district capital, Nangodi, and the market towns, Kongo and Pelungu, fall short of the criteria. We are therefore a 100 percent rural district and as you know, there is more poverty in rural communities especially in this northern part of the country. [Interviewee 19]

Such a view is a recognition of the problem of poverty in an institutionalized hierarchy. The involvement of government or state policy in calling a place rural or urban also accounts for the high poverty rate in the places that have it. Categorizations is an important element in the fight against poverty because government subventions are distributed based on the level of a district. Ironically, urban districts with more possibility to raise more income through local taxes receive more financial support from the central government than rural districts that have less opportunities to raise taxes because there are many poor people in such areas. This leads to rural local authorities’ inability to meet the basic infrastructure needs and the provision of social projects that would relieve residents of their challenges. Therefore, people in rural districts are pushed farther from the poverty line and their lives become much difficult than their urban counterparts. The problem of poverty becomes a double-trouble as the local institution become poor and the people living in it become even worse. In this regard, the use of the little funds received by the local authority from the central government and other donors to better the odds of the residents become a puzzle.

Moreover, the evidence of scarcity of resources leading to poverty alleviation within the district prompted the study to be interested in what the local authorities use their financial resources to reduce poverty. That query resulted in the study finding out an institutional poverty, which weakens possible poverty reduction efforts from the local government. One of the interview responses to the challenges of fighting poverty from the government level was responded as follows:

Over eighty percent of the staff here in the district assembly live at Bolga1 …... and since we do not raise enough IGF,2 we use majority of the money we receive from other sources such as grant for administrative purposes, including fuelling vehicles to take staff to and from work. [Interviewee 19]

The above response proves that structures that are supposed to be put in place to bring the poverty in that part of the country down are indelibly vulnerable in itself. Most of the workers in the Nabdam District Assembly offices in Nangodi, the district capital, are educated up to tertiary level and hence do not find it comfortable to stay in the district which lacks basic amenities. Even if they prefer to live within the district, there might not be enough up to standard accommodation for them. This therefore creates another challenge to the operations of the district and the fight against poverty. From this indication, it can be said that, public sector workers who are paid by the state and living in the city squander the resources reserved for poor residents of the rural district. The discussion could however be viewed from the point that the unavailability of suitable housing in the Nabdam district is the main reason why public servants live outside the district. In other
words, the lack of proper basic infrastructure as housing is costing the district to lose revenue intended for rural development. Understanding this from Wong (2012) explanation, such a situation hardens the ability to reduce poverty. This study opens up an idea that the cost of the non-existence of basic things in life becomes a detriment to the fight against poverty and even make deprived communities more vulnerable.

The cost of the poverty is even higher when it comes to the effect on the younger generation within the district who are currently in school or within school going age but not enrolled. The prevailing household conditions creates a vicious cycle of poverty which prevent the younger generation to redeem themselves from poverty. A participants expressed that

Majority of the residents are subsistent farmers who can barely feed themselves with the harvest from their farms, you know, it is difficult for them to take care of anything beyond food […] Many parents may seem not to care about their children, especially when they give the teenage girls in marriage. To them, it is a way of seeking for extra hand in taking care of some of these children. …… We at the education office sometimes fight to take the girls from the new husbands who are mostly old enough to be their fathers or grandfathers, but it is difficult because who will feed that extra mouth when it returns to the household. It is very common for young girls, as young as 12 [years] to migrate to the south to work for money and send some to take care of their parents and siblings. [Interviewee 18]

In situations like those mentioned above, poverty becomes a difficult element to wrestle with, not to talk about defeating it. Involvement of children into early marriages to old men as well cause more problems because such children lose the right to complete their school. What even sinks the poverty situation of these children deeper is that, the men die early after the marriage. This renders most of the girls and young women widows with children. Widows and orphans are some of the most susceptible groups to vulnerability unleashed by poverty (Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006). The human development alternative to combat the bigger problem of poverty is overrun by household basic needs (Wong, 2012). From this trace of evidence from the empirical study, to be able to firmly make progress in sustainable poverty reduction, the basic needs of the present generation have to be addressed.

In tackling the problem of poverty in deep-rooted situations like what exist in the study area, different approaches have to be implemented. The study revealed that, multiple development projects need to be implemented concurrently in the execution of poverty reduction projects. It was mentioned by one NGO staff that

[We] have over the past nine years implemented many development programs in the Nabdam District including education support […] trainings for school teachers […] and sometimes bring midwives from Europe to assist in health facilities around the district. We provide material support to schools including stationary, desks, computers and now we have created an ICT centre at the district education office to provide practical computer trainings and we have sent an IT expert volunteering at the centre. [Interviewee 20]

The NGO support provides a number of options to tackle poverty in an area where it is embedded in both institutions and individuals. One aspect of the project concentrated on providing educational support for both children and institutions. The NGO together with the local partners have used different mediums in addressing the scale of poverty in the district among diverse groups and establishments. It could be argued that education could be used as a vehicle to reduce poverty in future generation (Schultz, 1981). Therefore, as the project solves issues of education, they employ the fulfillment of the educational basic need to solve poverty yet to come onto the people.

Implementing different initiatives at the same time might derail the project goals and objectives. However, in the case where the poverty level is high and many basic services, infrastructure and needs are lacking, a more holistic approach that consider immediate needs and future
requirements. An alternative basic approach used in the study district by NGO Mondo and their local partners was elaborated by an NGO staff that:

When it comes to the parents, we have supported the establishment of social business for basket weavers with about thirty-five women beneficiaries who weave for the local and the European markets. There are also over a hundred women in the shea butter extraction industry working in the supported facility. We have sponsored tree planting, animal rearing and providing axes and donkeys to plough farm lands for the women, usually widows in the cooperative at the beginning of the farming seasons …… [Interviewee 21]

The study district has been declared a poverty dipping area. Therefore, to be able to make real impact in alleviating it, a lot more systems have to be activated at the same time. This is because, most of the lacks are interconnected. Providing solution to one without touching the other difficulties may lead to less impact in the long run. If poverty is vicious in nature, then, as the most basic needs are being provided, there must be simultaneous provision of economic opportunities to ensure sustainable livelihoods and at the same time, human capacity of the targeted people should be developed for sustainability. This has been the position of poverty alleviation and development scholars such as Amartya Sen (1985, 2000), Wong (2012) and Reinert (2020). As poverty is multidimensional, its solution has to be applicable in the present and for the future. NGO Mondo uses a multiple-solution approach to ensure greater realization of their development interventions. Providing school supplies to schools and pupils saves families from using limited resources to provide them. The money could be regarded as savings for the provision of other basic needs. At the same time, the possibility of breaking household poverty cycle increases as children are afforded education, and parents get the opportunity to create wealth through indigenous social entrepreneurship and savings.

The quantum of resources needed to fight poverty in households and communities might not be so much in monetary terms and practice, if rightly done. This pronouncement is deducted from an interview with one of the respondents.

I use to sell pepper and okro in the [Kongo] market. … No one respected me…. Since I began to work as a basket weaver here [Mondo supported group] in the last two years, I wouldn’t say my life is at its best but things have significantly changed. I find happiness working here and chatting with other women at this centre, even those I never spoke to in the past. My children are better off now because I have a source of income, this weaving job, no matter how small the proceeds might be. I feel respected in the community and traders are ready to sell their products to me even on credit because they know I can pay them back. This didn’t exist a few years back …… [Interviewee 8]

Poverty in this sense as seen in the above response transcended beyond physical things but also include dignity and recognition (United Nations, 1995). The ability for people to be included in societal discourse and their contributions recognized encourage them to do more to maintain the status. Feeling accepted into a group that once despised a person is another way of seeing the impact of poverty reduction activities. NGO Mondo’s method of strictly using cooperatives in its development projects allows for this to happen as it builds social capital and create synergy for a good negotiation power for less privileged people, thereby ensuring a lasting answer to the problem. Analyzing such responses, there is the need to deconstruct and reconstruct it theoretically. The respondent first indicated that she was still living in physical poverty to an extent regarding her life “not at its best”. If such an answer is decoupled from the others that follow, a researcher could conclude that the work of the NGO is not yielding enough. However, when the data is put into the litmus of the factors of the basic needs, then the new characteristics of “respect”, “social capital” and admission of improvement of livelihood may result in interpreting the meaning in a wider spectrum. In this sense, the individual approaches of Osei-Kufuor and Koomson (2014) and Fotheringham and Saunders (2014) are meshed together to serve as a catalyst in the fight against poverty.
Data from the study have highlighted that alleviating poverty and achieving sustainable development requires not only raising funds and giving donations but also there must be a comprehensive understanding of individual situations of the people and communities on the other side of the development cooperation. This paper asserts that satisfying the needs of individuals in a collective manner using cooperative effort do not only provide answers to the definition of the basic needs approach to poverty reduction as the provision of minimum of basic human needs but also includes the availability of future opportunities and dignity as held by Streten and Burki (1978) in their “floor” analogy. The localized cooperative method has proven to be a better way of fighting rural poverty in previous studies such as in Owusu (2021), Ansah et al. (2020) and Food and Agriculture Organization (2018) and in this study as well.

6. Conclusion
This paper examines the operations of development NGOs in Northern Ghana and how their activities fit into the basic needs approach of poverty alleviation. Estonian NGO, MTÜ Mondo’s work in the Nabdam district was the focal study through a case study design. The study unraveled that most of the poverty alleviation initiatives of NGO Mondo, though are geared toward empowerment through education support and social businesses created to increase sustainable economic fortunes of beneficiaries, most of the collective and individual initiatives are indirectly to first resolve basic needs deficiencies. The paper provides evidence that the poverty levels in the Nabdam district is quite higher than many parts of the country. Therefore, poverty reduction development programs from NGOs and other organizations would have to tackle the severity of the poverty cases before value addition of lives could have any impact. On this basis, this paper posits that poverty alleviation projects will be less successful in communities or people living deeper below the poverty line if projects do not tackle the immediate basic needs of the target beneficiaries in a sustainable manner. This paper finally recommends extensive micro analysis of the needs of people NGOs work with in poverty alleviation schemes to ensure higher impact rather than applying a wholesale idea without regard for specific local factors. Furthermore, holistic development approach features must be revisited when ascertaining the impact or otherwise of NGO-driven poverty reduction projects. Finally, collaboration between international development organizations and direct local beneficiaries are the best ways to understand poverty and its alleviation thereof. The paper contributes to the theoretical and methodological discourse around emerging NGOs and poverty alleviation in the developing world. The study recommends that NGO-community development cooperation interventions and government-led poverty alleviation projects should be tailor-made based on specific community needs and resources to be able to achieve personalized results. This kind of approach, when implemented from the basic needs perspective, will make poverty reduction a bottom-up process that will yield more sustainable results one household at a time.

The paper recommends that already existing and new entrant NGOs as well as government interventions need to conclusively evaluate the needs of each community they operate in order to customize appropriate poverty alleviation tools and other development projects. The study is however limited by two factors. One, the concentration on development cooperation rather than aid–recipient relationship. Therefore, the paper only assesses the partnerships where both the local partners and the international NGO contribute resources to the project. As most research in NGO-community relationships usually focus on humanitarian aid angle, this paper takes it from a more collective contribution approach. Second, the specific case of NGO Mondo’s development cooperation with the Ghanaian communities is specific and may not be entirely representative of the general development cooperation environment.

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Notes
1. The Regional capital of the Upper East Region, over 20 Kilometers from Nongodi, the research district’s capital.
2. Internally Generated Funds.

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