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Organizational Development in Local and International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Balanced Perspectives from Practitioners and Academic Researchers

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Abstract

Organizational Development (OD) practices are critical to enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whether local or international. Despite the growing recognition of OD's importance, there remains a significant gap in understanding how OD principles are applied and adapted within different NGO contexts, especially when comparing local and international NGOs. While academic research has provided valuable theoretical frameworks, insights from practitioners who implement these concepts in real-world settings are notably scarce. This paper aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the perspectives of both practitioners and academic researchers on how OD principles are applied and adapted in the unique environments of local and international NGOs. The main objective of this study is to deepen our understanding of the differences in OD practices between local and international NGOs, examining their impact on organizational effectiveness from both academic and practitioner viewpoints. The specific objectives are as follows: (1) to enhance understanding of context-specific OD practices; (2) to identify best practices and common challenges; (3) to provide actionable policy and practice recommendations; and (4) to propose a framework for future research. Through this study, we aim to make a valuable contribution to the field of OD by identifying effective strategies, addressing knowledge gaps, and offering recommendations to improve the performance and sustainability of NGOs.

The findings from the analysis of 51 research publications indicate that academic work dominates the literature, primarily offering theoretical perspectives that often do not align with the practical challenges practitioners face. This imbalance underscores the need for a greater representation of practitioner insights, which can provide real-world perspectives and complement theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the review reveals that OD has evolved from traditional behavioral change models to more complex, systems-oriented approaches, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies. The comparative analysis between local and international NGOs highlights key differences, with local NGOs often facing more acute resource constraints, resistance to change, and capacity challenges. These factors necessitate the development of tailored OD strategies that account for the specific operational realities of local NGOs.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating both academic research and practitioner experience to advance the field of OD in NGOs. A balanced approach to OD is needed, one that incorporates leadership development, organizational culture, and stakeholder engagement, all aligned with the organization's mission and goals. The recommended way forward involves fostering collaboration between academics and practitioners to co-create knowledge, developing OD frameworks that are adaptable to the unique needs of local NGOs, promoting participatory learning, and investing in leadership capacity-building. Moreover, further research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of OD interventions across different NGO contexts, ensuring that strategies are both practical and impactful. By leveraging a balanced approach to OD, NGOs can enhance their organizational resilience and effectiveness, ultimately improving their ability to address societal challenges.

Categories: Strategic Operation management, Organisational Development

Keywords: organizational development, systematic literature review, practitioners, academic researchers, non-governmental organization

Introduction And Background

Organizational Development (OD) is a broad concept that includes deliberate actions aimed at improving organizational sustainability, adaptability, and effectiveness (Kushner and Mulolli, 2021). While OD has been extensively studied in for-profit organizations, its application and characteristics within non-profit entities like Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are less explored.

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Classical OD literature primarily focuses on for-profit organizations, emphasizing foundational principles such as Lewin's change model (Kallen, 1951) and Theory X and Theory Y developed by McGregor (McGregor, 1989). These seminal works established the foundation for understanding organizational change and human behavior within organizational settings but often overlook the unique challenges and dynamics of NGOs.

Neoclassical OD writings built upon classical theories by incorporating socio-cultural factors, stakeholder involvement, and participatory approaches (Waddell et al., 2016). This shift represented a broader understanding of organizational dynamics, emphasizing the importance of human relations and organizational culture in enhancing effectiveness and adaptability.

Scholars like Schein stress the importance of leadership and organizational culture in fostering change, yet their focus predominantly remains on for-profit contexts (Schein, 2017).

Modern OD literature acknowledges the need for context-specific approaches and the diversity of organizational forms beyond the for-profit sector. Despite this recognition, contemporary works still tend to favor for-profit organizations (Cummings et al., 2020). However, scholars have highlighted the relevance of OD principles in non-profit contexts, though often without sufficient depth (Beckhard, 1969) and (Huang, 2022).

Existing contributions have begun to address the understanding gap of OD within non-profit organizations (Kushner and Mulolli, 2021). They advocate for a nuanced comprehension of organizational dynamics, considering the unique mission-driven nature and stakeholder complexity inherent in NGOs.

Recent literature has expanded OD thinking by recognizing the shift from static interventions to wide, systemic, and dynamic approaches. For instance, Castillo and Tiwari (2023) propose a “practices to policies” framework for OD in the digital sector, emphasizing the wide-process nature of modern interventions (Castillo and Tiwari, 2023). Similarly, other researchers stress the need to build organizational competence for digital transformation, a competence increasingly relevant to NGOs as they modernize (Gonzalez-Varona et al., 2024).

Another new insight in OD is its managed-from-the-top character, with emerging studies emphasizing the role of leadership power and top-down strategy. Leitner (Leitner, 2023) contrasts top-down and bottom-up organizing in building resilience, while Rosita et al. (Rosita et al., 2023) find that leadership power significantly influences strategic decision-making and OD outcomes.

Furthermore, OD is now understood as a continuous and evolving process. Anderson (Anderson, 2023) frames OD as a dynamic process of leading change, while Lee and Lee (Lee and Lee, 2022) highlight the importance of tacit knowledge and informal learning in sustaining innovation within organizations. Mews and Gonzalez (Mews and Gonzalez, 2024) further map the common stages of concern that leaders must navigate, reinforcing the need for sustained engagement throughout change efforts.

OD as a systematic and human relations-oriented process is also reaffirmed by recent research. Adeniyi et al. (Adeniyi et al., 2024) emphasize that leadership development and organizational culture remain critical HR levers, while Li (Li, 2024) and Strielkowski et al. (Strielkowski et al., 2023) promote action-research approaches that integrate experiential learning and participatory design, particularly applicable in NGO contexts.

From a contingency perspective, scholars now recognize that effective OD strategies are situation-specific. Leitner (Leitner, 2023) and Ciampi et al. (Ciampi et al., 2022) advocate for adaptive approaches tailored to an organization's digital maturity and agility level, both of which are becoming increasingly relevant for NGOs facing volatile external environments.

The role of the change agent is also under renewed scrutiny. Binyamin and Brender-Ilan (Binyamin and Brender-Ilan, 2018) explore the dual impact of change agents on both facilitating and encountering resistance. Remy and Sané (Remy and Sané, 2024) argue that leaders must be equipped to promote continuous learning, which is critical for OD in dynamic settings.

In terms of scale and integration, multilevel interventions have gained traction. Anderson (Anderson, 2023) and Thorsen et al. (Thorsen et al., 2024) illustrate the effectiveness of interventions that operate across individual, team, and organizational levels—an approach that suits NGOs due to their layered stakeholder structures and programmatic diversity.

Transformative and empowerment-based OD approaches are also emerging in the literature. Quttainah (Quttainah, 2025) calls for bridging classical theories with modern realities, while Burhan and Khan (Burhan and Khan, 2024) demonstrate how empowering leadership stimulates innovation, a key need in mission-driven organizations. Similarly, Remy and Sané (Remy and Sané, 2024) reinforce the value of

organizational learning cultures.

Engagement remains an essential OD pillar. Saurage-Altenloh et al. (Saurage-Altenloh et al., 2023) emphasize remote employee engagement and its correlation with leadership culture, adding new relevance in post-pandemic operational realities. Moreover, OD is increasingly linked to resilience and adaptability. Mhlanga and Dzingirai (Mhlanga and Dzingirai, 2024) and Douglas and Haley (Douglas and Haley, 2024) confirm the connection between learning strategies and organizational resilience, an area of critical concern for NGOs operating in fragile contexts.

In summary, OD is foundational in organizational studies, deeply rooted in the works of classic thinkers like Kurt Lewin, Edgar Schein, and Richard Beckhard (Kallen, 1951), (Schein, 2017), and (Beckhard, 1969). However, recent insights have broadened the scope of OD beyond its classical confines, acknowledging the relevance of wide, dynamic, multilevel, and participatory processes-especially critical for non-profit organizations. This paper aims to analyze the perspectives of practitioners and academic researchers on how OD principles are applied and adapted within the unique environments of local and international NGOs.

An understanding of organizational development

From the standpoint of various contributors to the field, OD is understood by several features as shown in Table 1 below:

OD Parameters	Citations
Wide Process	(Brown and Moore, 2001), (Cummings et al., 2020), (Castillo and Tiwari, 2023), and (Gonzalez-Varona et al., 2024)
Managed from the Top	(Brown and Moore, 2001), (Rojas, 2024), (Leitner, 2023), and (Rosita et al., 2023)
Continuous Process	(Lewis, 2001), (Mews and Gonzalez, 2024), (Anderson, 2023), and (Lee and Lee, 2022)
Systematic Process	(Abiddin et al., 2022) and (Cameron and Green, 2019)
Human Relations Oriented	(Lewis, 2001), (Beer, 2009), and (Adeniyi et al., 2024)
Experiential	(Chandran et al., 2020) and (Watkins and Marsick, 2003)
Action Research Oriented	(Reason and Bradbury, 2008) and (Li, 2024)
Contingency Oriented	(Reason and Bradbury, 2008), (Lawler and Worley, 2006), (Leitner, 2023), and (Ciampi et al., 2022)
Change Agent	(Edwards and Hulme, 1995), (Barza and Galanakis, 2022), (Remy and Sané, 2024), and (Binyamin and Brender-Ilan, 2018)
Multilevel Interventional	(Lewis, 2001), (Cummings et al., 2020), (Anderson, 2023), and (Thorsen et al., 2024)
Transformative	(Schein, 2017), (Young, 2023), and (Quttainah, 2025)
Engagement-Oriented	(Bouchghel et al., 2022), (Post et al., 2002), and (Saurage-Altenloh et al., 2023)
Adaptive and Resilient	(Heifetz et al., 2009), (Bhamra et al., 2011), (Mhlanga and Dzingirai, 2024), and (Douglas and Haley, 2024)
Empowering	(Fowler, 1997), (Spreitzer, 1995), (Remy and Sané, 2024), and (Burhan and Khan, 2024)

TABLE 1: OD Features

Note. This table presents OD features from various studies. OD, Organizational Development

Understanding and tracing the above features of OD both in local and international NGOs is required to correlate how effectively they strategize their path fostering sustainable development and impactful community engagement while aligning with broader organizational goals and addressing unique challenges. NGOs operate in a diverse landscape. Local NGOs focus on community-based initiatives addressing specific local issues, while international NGOs work across borders to address global challenges. Both types of organizations are non-profit, allocating resources toward their missions rather than profit distribution (Lewis, 2014) and (Anheier, 2017).

OD in NGOs is multifaceted, involving various features that emphasize its broad, adaptive, and human-centric approach. This approach is essential for fostering sustainable and impactful organizational growth and community development. The above features are applicable to both NGOs and profit-oriented organizations in providing a framework to tailor OD strategies effectively to support both types in

achieving their goals.

Interpretation of OD parameters in local vs. international NGO practice

Table 1 outlines key OD parameters and their associated citations, highlighting a range of approaches that influence the practice of OD in NGOs. These parameters, which include aspects like "Wide Process," "Human Relations Oriented," "Action Research Oriented," and "Adaptive and Resilient," offer diverse insights into the strategies that organizations use to foster growth, improve effectiveness, and navigate change.

In international NGOs (INGOs), the OD features tend to align with their larger, more formalized structures, where a "Wide Process" (Brown and Moore, 2001) and "Managed from the Top" (Brown and Moore, 2001), (Rojas, 2024) approach are prevalent. These organizations often emphasize systematic, hierarchical management, ensuring consistency and uniformity across multiple locations and cultures. The "Systematic Process" (Abiddin et al., 2022), (Cameron and Green, 2019) and "Continuous Process" (Lewis, 2001), (Mews and Gonzalez, 2024) features are often implemented through formal structures that support long-term, sustainable growth.

Moreover, INGOs tend to focus on "Multilevel Interventional" (Lewis, 2001), (Cummings et al., 2020) and "Transformative" (Schein, 2017), (Young, 2023) OD strategies, where changes are implemented at various organizational levels, often with a focus on large-scale transformation, global policies, and systems change. This can be seen in the "Change Agent" approach (Edwards and Hulme, 1995), (Barza and Galanakis, 2022), where INGOs place significant importance on leadership roles that drive organizational change.

On the other hand, local NGOs tend to implement OD strategies that are more context-sensitive, adaptable, and focused on community engagement. They often prioritize "Human Relations Oriented" (Lewis, 2001), (Beer, 2009) and "Engagement-Oriented" (Bouchghel et al., 2022), (Post et al., 2002) approaches, where the emphasis is on interpersonal relationships, community engagement, and participatory processes. The "Experiential" (Chandran et al., 2020), (Watkins and Marsick, 2003) and "Empowering" (Fowler, 1997), (Spreitzer, 1995) strategies are more prominent in local NGOs, as they focus on building local capacity, fostering self-reliance, and enabling individuals within communities to take an active role in their development.

Additionally, local NGOs may focus more on "Contingency Oriented" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008), (Lawler and Worley, 2006) OD approaches, where decision-making is more flexible and responsive to immediate local challenges, and "Adaptive and Resilient" (Heifetz et al., 2009), (Bhamra et al., 2011) practices are emphasized to help organizations respond to changing local contexts or resource limitations.

In conclusion, while INGOs tend to employ more formal, top-down, and large-scale OD practices that are aligned with global standards, local NGOs often implement more flexible, community-focused strategies that can adapt to the specific needs of their operational context. Understanding these differences helps to tailor OD practices that are both contextually appropriate and effective for achieving organizational goals.

Given the critical role of OD in driving organizational effectiveness and growth, understanding its application within the specific context of NGOs becomes increasingly important. While OD has been widely studied in various sectors, its application in the unique and often resource-constrained environments of local and INGOs remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the perspectives of both academic researchers and practitioners on how OD principles are applied and adapted in these diverse settings. By exploring this, the study aims to provide actionable insights that can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of NGOs in tackling societal challenges.

Relevance and justification of the study

OD is a crucial area for NGOs aiming to enhance their effectiveness, sustainability, and overall impact. However, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the specific OD approaches and challenges faced by local NGOs compared to their international counterparts. Conducting this study is necessary to address this gap and provide a comprehensive understanding of the differences in OD practices between local and international NGOs.

Several factors underscore the necessity of this study. Firstly, local NGOs operate under distinct constraints and conditions compared to international NGOs. They often face more severe financial limitations, limited technical capacity, resistance to change, and inadequate support systems (USAID, 2010), (Nsengiyumva, 2020). Understanding these unique challenges and how local NGOs adapt their OD practices is crucial for developing tailored strategies that enhance their effectiveness.

Secondly, international NGOs typically benefit from substantial financial and technical support from international donors and organizations, enabling them to implement OD practices influenced by global

best practices and frameworks (Anheier, 2017). In contrast, local NGOs must innovate and adapt these practices to fit their specific contexts, which may lead to significant variations in their OD processes. Investigating these differences can reveal insights into how local NGOs can optimize their OD strategies despite limited resources.

Thirdly, the increasing demand for OD interventions among NGOs highlights the importance of understanding the effectiveness of different OD approaches (Abiddin et al., 2022). By comparing local and international NGOs, this study identifies best practices and common pitfalls, contributing valuable knowledge to the field of OD. The persistent issues faced by local NGOs, such as ineffectiveness, capacity constraints, and growing incredibility, further emphasize the need for targeted OD interventions (Rehema, 2014), (Nsengiyumva, 2020).

Additionally, this study aims to contribute to the field of OD in several significant ways such as:

Enhanced Understanding of Context-Specific OD Practices: By examining the distinct OD practices of local and international NGOs, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how context influences OD strategies. This can inform the development of context-specific OD frameworks that are more effective for local NGOs, helping them navigate their unique challenges and constraints (Oyibo and Gabriel, 2020), (Matthew et al., 2021).

Identification of Best Practices and Challenges: The study identifies successful OD practices and common challenges faced by both local and international NGOs. This knowledge can help NGOs refine their OD interventions, leading to improved organizational performance and impact. The integration of core OD values such as inquiry-based thinking, informed choice, authenticity, and group decision-making can create stronger and more resilient organizations (McGregor, 1989), (Liao and Li, 2023).

Bridging the Knowledge Gap: The paper addresses the existing gap in the literature regarding OD in local NGOs as compared to international NGOs. By providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights, the study contributes to a more balanced and comprehensive body of knowledge on OD in the NGO sector. This is particularly important given the recurring issues of inefficacy and credibility among local NGOs (Oyibo and Gabriel, 2020), (Matthew et al., 2021).

Policy and Practice Recommendations: The findings of this study can inform policymakers, donors, and practitioners about the specific needs and effective strategies for OD in NGOs. This can lead to better support and resources for local NGOs, enhancing their capacity to achieve their missions. Emphasizing a holistic approach that integrates capacity building, participatory engagement, learning culture, and strategic alignment can drive organizational effectiveness and sustainability (Mohamed and Otman, 2021), (Barrett, 2021).

Framework for Future Research: The paper lays the groundwork for future research on OD in NGOs, encouraging further exploration of this important topic. It highlights areas where more research is needed, fostering continued advancement in the field. Understanding that integrating OD practices is a long-term process requiring patience, persistence, and ongoing support will help guide future studies (USAID, 2010).

The main objective of this study is to deepen our understanding of the differences in OD practices between local and international NGOs, and to examine their impact on organizational effectiveness by balancing the perspectives of academic researchers and practitioners. The specific objectives of the study are: (1) to enhance understanding of context-specific OD practices; (2) to identify best practices and common challenges; (3) to provide policy and practice recommendations; and (4) to propose a framework for future research. This study aims to make a valuable contribution to the field of OD by identifying effective strategies, addressing existing knowledge gaps, and offering practical, actionable recommendations for improving the performance and sustainability of NGOs.

Review

This paper aims to bridge the gap in understanding by synthesizing existing literature and offering insights into the research question: "What are the key differences in organizational development (OD) practices between local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and how do these differences impact their organizational effectiveness from the stand point of academic researchers and the professional practitioners?"

The objective is to conduct a thorough analysis of the literature in order to determine and compare OD practices used by local and international NGOs in the perspectives of researchers and practitioners. This review intends to understand how these practices influence organizational effectiveness and provide recommendations for optimizing OD strategies tailored to the specific contexts of local and international NGOs.

Research design

To identify and compare the OD practices used by local and international NGOs, an exploratory research design was employed. This methodology was chosen for its suitability in broadly exploring and discovering the unique challenges, practices, and approaches specific to OD within NGOs, thus facilitating the generation of insights and hypotheses for further investigation.

The paper used a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology that was modified from the framework developed by Barbara Kitchenham and Stuart Charters (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007). The selection criteria prioritized recent, peer-reviewed articles focusing explicitly on OD within international NGOs to establish a robust foundation for deriving conclusions based on credible literature.

The systematic review followed steps, including defining research questions, formulating search strategies, screening articles based on predefined criteria, extracting and assessing data quality, and synthesizing findings. Transparent methods, as outlined by Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou, were employed for selecting articles, evaluating their quality, and synthesizing information to derive themes and insights (Booth et al., 2016).

The criteria for article selection, drawn from authors like Cummings and Worley and many others emphasized the relevance of OD in NGOs, focus on capacity building and social impact, and preference for recent and authoritative sources (Alzahrani, 2019) and (Ncube and Ngulube, 2024).

The research questions, "What are the key differences in organizational development (OD) practices between local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and how do these differences impact their organizational effectiveness from the perspectives of researchers and practitioners?". Research questions were addressed through document analysis and literature reviews using research databases, which include Google Scholar, Web of Science, PMED, ERIC, IEEE Explore, Science Direct, JSTOR, Sage, Emerald Insight, Scopus, and the Bielefeld Academic Browse Engines.

The methodology used to evaluate the collected articles is SLR, as shown in Figure 1. Three stages were involved: identification, screening, and eligibility (Abiddin et al., 2022).

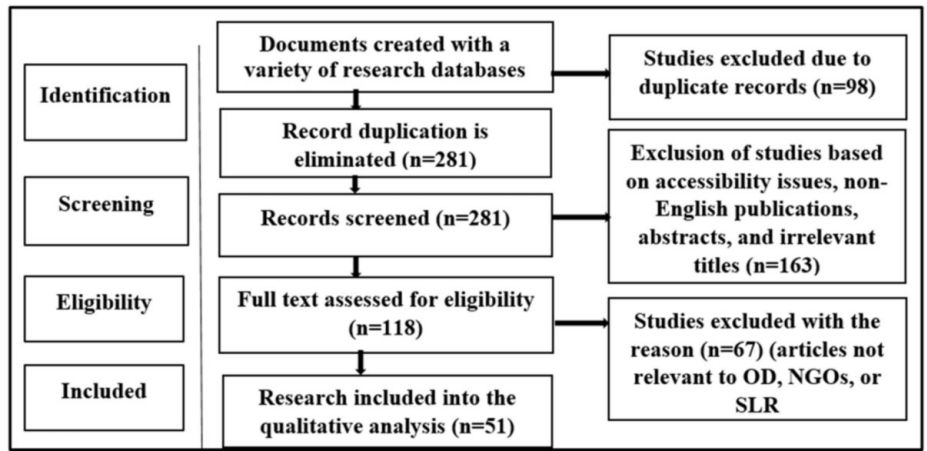


FIGURE 1: Methodology of the Study: Systematic Review

Note. This figure shows the systematic literature review flow utilized by the authors. OD, Organizational Development; SLR, systematic literature review; NGO, non-governmental organization.

Identification

To ensure the relevance of publications for the systematic literature review on OD practices in local and international NGOs, specific criteria guided the selection process. These criteria prioritize publications explicitly discussing or analyzing OD within NGO contexts, with emphasis on recent literature and seminal works. Preference is given to empirical evidence, theoretical contributions, and diverse perspectives from reputable peer-reviewed sources authored by recognized experts. Additionally, the impact and citation frequency of articles aid in identifying influential works.

Keywords such as "organizational development," "NGOs," "local NGOs," and "international NGOs" were used to conduct a systematic literature review. After 98 duplicates were eliminated from the 379 recognized articles, 281 publications remained for screening.

Screening

A total of 118 publications were left for eligibility evaluation after 163 of the 281-screened articles were removed due to exclusion criteria such as accessibility, English language usage, and the relevance of the title and abstract.

Eligibility

Eligibility processes included manually adding or removing publications according to predetermined criteria (Ncube and Ngulube, 2024). In all, 51 publications from the remaining 118 publications were left for additional examination after 67 were eliminated due to their lack of significance for OD within national and international NGOs.

Relevance to the context of OD within NGOs served as the measure for determining eligibility. Articles were evaluated based on their alignment with the research focus, examining aspects such as capacity building, management practices, organizational change, effectiveness, and sustainability within NGOs. Articles that specifically addressed these issues and offered insights into OD in NGOs were thought to be suitable for more examination.

Data abstraction and analysis

The 51 selected publications-37 authored by academicians and 14 by OD practitioners-were systematically analyzed to address the central research question: "What are the key differences in OD practices between local and international NGOs, and how do these differences impact their organizational effectiveness from the perspectives of researchers and practitioners?" A qualitative content analysis was conducted, involving detailed reading and coding of each publication to identify recurring OD-related themes such as leadership, change management, contextual adaptability, and stakeholder engagement. These codes were then categorized into broader thematic clusters-structural approaches, learning and innovation, change and adaptability, resource and capacity utilization, community engagement, and M&E practices. A comparative framework was applied to assess how each theme manifested across local versus international NGOs, while also contrasting the viewpoints of practitioners and academic researchers. This analytical process was guided by the study's specific objectives: (1) to enhance understanding of context-specific OD practices; (2) to identify best practices and common challenges; (3) to provide policy and practice recommendations; and (4) to propose a framework for future research. The resulting insights offer a comprehensive understanding of OD practices in NGOs, revealing nuanced differences and informing strategies for improved organizational effectiveness.

Results

OD in NGOs reflects a complex interplay between global principles and local contexts, requiring a balance between overarching organizational goals and community-specific dynamics (Odoom et al., 2022). Challenges faced by NGOs include financial constraints, limited resources, and the need for improved management practices and sustainability (Bodi, 2023). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of OD in NGOs, there remains a gap in understanding specific OD practices and challenges faced by local NGOs, hindering their ability to navigate organizational change effectively (Omura and Forster, 2014).

The literature on OD within NGOs highlights several crucial themes, including capacity building, participatory approaches, stakeholder engagement, learning culture, innovation, and strategic alignment (Mohamed and Otman, 2021), (Barrett, 2021), (Cooperrider et al., 2003), (Priest et al., 2013), (Sun and Ma, 2020), (Bushe, 2012), (Burnes, 2004), and (Burke and Noumair, 2015). These themes underscore the importance of a holistic approach to OD, integrating various dimensions for organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

Organizational effectiveness and learning capacity can be improved by the integration of OD concepts and active participation in the process (Maxwell and Judith, 2015). NGOs can benefit from adapting standard OD practices, such as capacity assessments and organization snapshots that are utilized by international organizations in the humanitarian and development sectors (Ortiz, 2016).

The results further highlight the growing prominence of OD processes in international NGOs, highlighting their significant contributions to development efforts (Abiddin et al., 2022). Examples include Mercy Corps, which applied OD practices to enhance aid delivery and sustainable change in crisis-affected or impoverished communities and some international organizations, which utilized OD interventions to improve organizational structure and effectiveness in child and community assistance (Almeida et al., 2020) and (Beer et al., 1984). International Rescue Committee and Plan International also implemented OD strategies to enhance crisis response, program outcomes, and operational efficiency (International Rescue Committee, 2016) and (Plan International, 2022).

While OD interventions have contributed to the improvement of international NGOs, their effective implementation in local NGOs remains limited (USAID, 2010). Barriers such as resource constraints,

resistance to change, lack of awareness, limited technical capacity, and inadequate support systems hinder the integration of OD practices in local NGOs. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes addressing organizational culture, capacity building, and leadership development. Additionally, OD procedures must be customized to the unique requirements and circumstances of the organization and in line with its vision and goals. Recognizing that integrating OD practices is a long-term process, patience, persistence, and ongoing support are essential for sustainable change and organizational growth. The emergence of OD in local NGOs underscores the need for tailored approaches that deal with particular issues, such as lack of institutionalization, opposition to change, and resource constraints. Integrating OD practices requires a holistic approach focusing on organizational culture, capacity building, and leadership development, in line with the objectives and mission of the organization.

In local NGOs, issues like ineffectiveness, capacity constraints, credibility challenges, and sustainability issues persist (Rehema, 2014) and (Nsengiyumva, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires OD interventions to strengthen internal structures and foster resilience (Rehema, 2014). Managers in today's organizations, particularly those in NGOs, face significant challenges stemming from internal and external environments, necessitating frequent adaptation to survive and thrive (Oyibo and Gabriel, 2020). OD specialists play a crucial role in helping organizations navigate these challenges by transforming them into opportunities (Matthew et al., 2021). In the current complex and competitive landscape, OD skills are essential for all organizations, including NGOs, to address their pressing issues effectively. In order to promote organizational excellence, local NGOs' leaders must adopt the fundamental principles of OD, such as inquiry-based thinking, informed decision-making, authenticity, and group decision-making (McGregor, 1989) and (Liao and Li, 2023).

Themes extracted from literature on OD within NGOs reveal a multifaceted landscape, emphasizing capacity building, collaborative networks, learning cultures, change management, and impact evaluation (Augier and Teece, 2009), (Anheier, 2017), (Sun and Ma, 2020), (Beckhard and Harris, 1977), and (Lewis, 2001). Successful NGOs exhibit adaptive strategies, emphasize collaboration, foster continuous learning, and value robust evaluation mechanisms to maximize effectiveness and societal impact.

The data abstraction process began with a systematic review of each of the 51 selected publications, focusing on author profiles, institutional affiliations, methodological approaches, and the primary focus of the work. This allowed for a clear and transparent categorization of the publications into two groups: Publications by Academicians (PAC) and Publications by OD Practitioners (PODP). PAC includes works authored by individuals affiliated with academic institutions, typically grounded in theoretical frameworks and formal research methodologies, often emphasizing planned change models. PODP, on the other hand, comprises publications by OD practitioners who contextualize their insights based on field experience within NGOs, offering practical, real-world perspectives on OD implementation. This categorization was essential for enabling a comparative analysis that reflects both scholarly and practice-based understandings of OD in local and international NGO settings.

The results underscore the multidimensional nature of OD within international and local NGOs, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to maximize organizational effectiveness and societal impact. Insights from both practitioners and academic researchers provide a balanced perspective, offering valuable guidance for enhancing OD practices in NGOs as explored in next sections.

The distribution of articles categorized in Table 2 reveals a dominance of publications by academicians (PAC) over those by OD practitioners (PODP), indicating a scarcity of practitioner-oriented literature. It is noteworthy that both academics and practitioners play vital roles in the OD field. Academics contribute to theoretical development, while practitioners apply OD principles in real-world contexts. Both types of publications complement each other, enriching the understanding and practice of OD.

Publication Type	Number of Publications
Publication by Academicians (PAC)	37
Publication by OD Practitioners (PODP)	14
Total	51

TABLE 2: Reviewed Organizational Development Publications Published by Academicians and OD Practitioners

Note. This table shows number of reviewed publications by academicians and OD practitioners considered in this paper.

Table 2 provides a thorough overview of OD through its list of publications. Action research, the positive model, Lewin's, and the general model of planned change are just a few of the models and theories that Thomas and Christopher examine while discussing the history, present uses, and potential future directions of OD (Cummings and Worley, 2019). Conversely, Bushe and Nagaishi discuss the confusion between OD and change management, emphasizing the importance of maintaining OD's focus on development rather than effectiveness (Bushe and Nagaishi, 2018). Rehema highlights the significance of continuously adapting organizations to prevent decline or demise, advocating for OD assessment as a learning opportunity for growth and survival (Rehema, 2014). Brendel proposes Conscious OD as a transcendent approach that facilitates systems to rise above conceptual constraints (Brendel, 2022).

Similarly, Errida and Lotfi explore the foundation of behavioral change within vision, systems, products, and cultural changes, while Susan underscores the positive impact of integrating organizational change theories and technology across all levels and functional units (Errida and Lotfi, 2021) and (Susan, 1991). Maxwell and Judith present an expanded OD model with six stages, including the "empowering and withdrawal" stage, suggesting a focus on empowering clients toward becoming learning organizations (Maxwell and Judith, 2015).

The following section provides a comparative analysis of OD in international and local NGOs from the perspectives of academicians and practitioners.

Comparative analysis of OD in international and local NGOs: insights from OD practitioners

The integration of OD into the operations of NGOs has undergone significant evolution since the 1990s. Practitioners, drawing on their experience and insights, emphasize the importance of adapting OD practices to the unique challenges and opportunities within both international and local NGO contexts.

Practitioners have increasingly emphasized the need for effective OD practices to ensure NGOs remain adaptive, responsive, and impactful (Ortiz, 2016). The integration of OD concepts into NGO operations reflects a comprehensive approach to addressing various organizational challenges, such as improving management practices, enhancing sustainability, and ensuring the alignment of organizational goals with community needs (USAID, 2010). New insights from Castillo and Tiwari (Castillo and Tiwari, 2023) further support this by introducing the "practices to policies" framework, which links OD processes with policy development, a particularly useful model for NGOs navigating digital transitions.

Prominent international NGOs, such as Mercy Corps and World Vision, have implemented OD strategies to enhance their effectiveness in delivering aid and driving sustainable change (Almeida et al., 2020), (Beer, 2009). The International Rescue Committee and Plan International have also utilized OD interventions to improve their crisis response capabilities and program outcomes (International Rescue Committee, 2016) and (Plan International, 2022). Practitioners have increasingly recognized the relevance of digital transformation in OD, especially in global crises, aligning with the work of Gonzalez-Varona et al. (Gonzalez-Varona et al., 2024), who propose frameworks for building digital competencies in organizations-a growing area of concern in international NGOs.

Practitioners emphasize the need for tailored OD approaches that consider the unique challenges faced by local NGOs, including resource constraints, resistance to change, and limited technical capacity (USAID, 2010). Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on organizational culture, capacity building, and leadership development. Adeniyi et al. (Adeniyi et al., 2024) reinforce this by highlighting the interplay between organizational culture and leadership development as central to HR-based OD approaches. Practitioners also stress the importance of contextualizing OD practices to align with the specific needs and circumstances of local NGOs, ensuring they are relevant and

impactful (Rehema, 2014).

Insights from practitioners underscore the importance of participatory approaches, stakeholder engagement, and learning culture in OD practices within NGOs (Sun and Ma, 2020), (Mohamed and Otman, 2021). Practitioners advocate for a holistic approach to OD, integrating various dimensions to enhance organizational effectiveness and sustainability (Cooperrider et al., 2003) and (Priest et al., 2013). Recent literature by Lee and Lee (Lee and Lee, 2022) expands on this, suggesting the optimization of informal learning and tacit knowledge to drive continuous innovation-particularly vital in resource-constrained local NGOs. Additionally, practitioners highlight the importance of leveraging capacity-building initiatives and collaborative networks to foster innovation and strategic alignment within NGOs (Burnes, 2004) and (Burke and Noumair, 2015). Leitner (Leitner, 2023) contributes a new perspective by examining the roles of top-down versus bottom-up organizing strategies in building resilient organizations, offering practical implications for OD strategies in both international and local settings. Rosita et al. (Rosita et al., 2023) further explore how leader power influences strategic decision-making in OD, reinforcing the managed-from-the-top dimension of successful interventions.

Practitioners' perspectives reveal the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in OD practices within NGOs (Beckhard and Harris, 1977) and (Lewis, 2001). Successful NGOs exhibit adaptive strategies, emphasize collaboration, foster continuous learning, and value robust evaluation mechanisms to maximize effectiveness and societal impact (Augier and Teece, 2009) and (Anheier, 2017). Mews and Gonzalez (Mews and Gonzalez, 2024) provide updated insights into navigating organizational change through the common stages of concern, offering OD practitioners a refined process lens.

Comparative analysis of OD in international and local NGOs: insights from academic researchers

Academic researchers offer a distinct perspective on OD within NGOs, focusing on theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and critical analysis. Their insights complement the practical experiences of OD practitioners, providing a comprehensive understanding of the field.

Researchers have highlighted the importance of OD in enhancing organizational effectiveness and sustainability in both international and local NGOs (Sun and Ma, 2020) and (Bushe, 2012). They emphasize the role of OD in fostering organizational learning, innovation, and strategic alignment, which are critical for NGOs operating in complex and dynamic environments (Burnes, 2004) and (Abiddin et al., 2022). Anderson (Anderson, 2023) and Thorsen et al. (Thorsen et al., 2024) emphasize the importance of multilevel OD interventions, integrating system-level, team-level, and individual-level changes to produce measurable psychosocial and performance outcomes.

Academic research has identified key themes and principles that underpin effective OD practices within NGOs. These include capacity building, participatory approaches, stakeholder engagement, learning culture, and strategic alignment (Barrett, 2021), (Mohamed and Otman, 2021), (Cooperrider et al., 2003), and (Priest et al., 2013). Li (Li, 2024) strengthens this view through the lens of action research, demonstrating how participatory inquiry can facilitate OD in a culturally grounded and community-driven manner. Researchers emphasize the need for a holistic approach to OD, integrating various dimensions to enhance organizational effectiveness and sustainability (Burke and Noumair, 2015).

One of the critical contributions of academic research is the identification of specific challenges faced by local NGOs in implementing OD practices. These challenges include resource constraints, resistance to change, limited technical capacity, and inadequate support systems (USAID, 2010). Researchers have proposed strategies to address these challenges, such as capacity-building initiatives, collaborative networks, and leadership development programs (Rehema, 2014) and (Nsengiyumva, 2020). Newer research by Strielkowski et al. (Strielkowski et al., 2023) supports process optimization using Soft Systems Methodology as a human-centric approach to address complex organizational challenges, particularly in settings with resource limitations.

Academic researchers also emphasize the importance of contextualizing OD practices to align with the specific needs and circumstances of local NGOs (Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2020) and (Ronquillo et al., 2012). They advocate for a tailored approach to OD that considers the unique challenges and opportunities within local contexts, ensuring that interventions are relevant and impactful (Uppal and Nair, 2018). Ciampi et al. (Ciampi et al., 2022) contribute to this discourse by framing OD within digitalization and organizational agility, highlighting the co-evolutionary nature of change, especially in tech-savvy development environments.

Finally, the role of change agents and organizational learning champions has been emphasized in recent academic discourse.

Remy and Sané (Remy and Sané, 2024) and Binyamin and Brender-Ilan (Binyamin and Brender-Ilan, 2018) shed light on the influence of internal champions on both resistance and receptiveness to change-a critical dynamic in successful OD within NGOs.

In summary, insights from academic researchers provide a broad understanding of OD within NGOs, highlighting key themes, principles, and challenges. Their research complements the practical experiences of OD practitioners, offering a balanced perspective on the field and guiding effective OD practices in both international and local NGO contexts.

Implications of the study

The study yields several significant implications for multiple stakeholders.

For Practitioners: Local and international NGO leaders are encouraged to embrace OD frameworks that are responsive to local realities, prioritizing capacity building, participatory planning, and organizational learning. Strengthening internal leadership and creating a culture of adaptive change are critical steps toward long-term sustainability.

For Academics and Researchers: The research highlights the need for more context-sensitive OD models that reflect the lived realities of NGOs, particularly in low-resource settings. Academics are urged to engage in applied research that incorporates experiential data from field practitioners.

For Policy Makers and Donors: The findings suggest that donor support mechanisms should be flexible and oriented toward capacity enhancement, not just compliance. Policymakers should also support platforms that encourage knowledge co-creation and the institutionalization of learning within NGOs.

For Capacity Builders and Intermediary Organizations: There is a strong case for investing in training and mentoring systems that align OD practices with local cultural and operational dynamics, enabling more tailored and sustainable capacity development efforts.

Future scope of the study

This review opens up several avenues for further inquiry and development.

Longitudinal Studies: Future research should explore the long-term impact of OD interventions in both local and international NGOs, analyzing outcomes related to organizational effectiveness, sustainability, and community impact.

Comparative Regional Analyses: Investigating how OD practices vary across regions or sectors (e.g., health, education, governance, climate change) can help tailor approaches for specific operational contexts.

Participatory Action Research: Promoting collaborative research methodologies that include NGO staff, beneficiaries, and local stakeholders can lead to more grounded, inclusive, and effective OD frameworks.

Digitalization and OD: Exploring the role of digital tools and platforms in facilitating OD processes- especially in data management, communication, and learning- can reveal new opportunities for efficiency and innovation in NGO operations.

Framework Validation: There is a need to test and refine new or hybrid OD models across diverse NGO settings, ensuring they are not only academically sound but also practically effective and scalable.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of OD practices in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of NGOs, both local and international. By examining the gap between academic research and practitioner insights, it reveals the need for a more integrated approach to OD, one that combines theoretical frameworks with practical, context-specific applications. The study highlights significant differences in the OD practices of local and international NGOs, with local NGOs often facing unique challenges such as resource constraints, resistance to change, and limited capacity. These challenges demand tailored OD strategies that account for the specific operational contexts of local NGOs.

The findings emphasize the importance of fostering collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners to co-produce knowledge that is both theoretically robust and practically relevant. This collaborative approach can help develop adaptable OD frameworks that meet the unique needs of local NGOs while promoting participatory learning and leadership development. Furthermore, the study advocates for continued research into the effectiveness of OD interventions, particularly in diverse NGO contexts, to ensure that strategies are both practical and impactful.

Ultimately, by adopting a balanced approach to OD- one that integrates both academic and practitioner perspectives- NGOs can improve their organizational resilience and effectiveness, enabling them to better address the complex societal challenges they face. This study makes a significant contribution to the field

of OD by offering actionable recommendations for improving the performance and sustainability of NGOs, with a focus on bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Additional Information

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All authors have reviewed the final version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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