

## Original Research Article

# “Inspirational Leadership” and “Employee Loyalty” as Determinant Success Factors among NGOs in Somalia: A Case Report on Gargaar Relief and Development Organization (GREDO)

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**Abstract:** Most local NGOs in Somalia emerged at the height of the country's relief and humanitarian operations in early 1990s after the collapse of the military regime. The ruin was too overblown that international humanitarian organizations had to intervene to help the starving Somali people with food and medical supplies. As a result of the need to extend the humanitarian services to areas inaccessible to the foreign workers, local NGOs with minimum or no capacity emerged to supplement the emergency relief services as partners of the international agencies. GREDO, the NGO whose success case is under discussion in this study, represents one such local initiative. While many of the local NGOs were unable to survive in the sector, others like GREDO have endured to overcome the hardships and challenges to see themselves gradually mature into larger and more trustworthy establishments. This success case study focuses on four pillars vital to the growth and expansion of GREDO from an inexperienced organization to a giant entity employing a strong force of 322 employees in respective fields of duty and in several regions and states in the country. More specifically, the study analyzes the determinants of GREDO's success from the perspective of four intertwined factors: Leadership and Management, Human Resources, Finance and Funding, and Operations and Expansion.

**Keywords:** Baidoa, GREDO, Humanitarian Aid, NGO Leadership, Relief Services, Somalia.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 NGOs: A Global Review

According to Inamdar (1987), although the activities of NGOs are currently considered professional approaches in the modern sense, their existence can be traced back to the medieval era when human welfare was undertaken freely on voluntary basis, particularly services provided in educational and medical facilities, and others done for cultural promotion. Inamdar submits that the voluntary service provision was a reliable assistance in harsh periods of epidemics, droughts, famine, floods, and invasions by foreign adversaries.

Lewis (2005:22) traces the history or rather active emergence of NGOs towards the end of the 1980s and beginning of 1990s when the NGO Management newsletter of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) started chronicling feature articles, and academic journals on development issues considered publishing NGO management as a specific branch of the management sciences. Due to the arising interest and intensity of the discussions in the academic arena, scholars of management sciences like Lewis (2005:22) called the new development an “NGO management debate,” while to Stewart (1997) it was “a school of NGO

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management science,” that was pulling due scholarly attention.

Lewis (2005:22) explains that NGOs are organized non-for-profit entities engaged in socio-economic development activities aimed at improving the lives of people in general but more particularly rural communities. Salamon described NGOs as a universal movement influencing “global associational revolution,” (Salamon 1994:109), and a force with impactful potential on national and global economic, social and political policies (Salamon 1995).

In the volume *Global Civil Society?*, author John Keane (2003: 5) estimates the number of INGOs to about 50,000 universally, and that 90 percent of these non-profit entities sprung into life from 1970. The growth and significance of the operations and services provided by NGOs, whether local or international, can be gleaned from their impact on donor grants, as member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shifted focus towards INGOs licensed in their nations with an increase of about 384 per cent in the years from 1994 to 2004 (Kaldor *et al.*, 2007: 328).

The two decades from 1970 to 1993, as reported by Riddell and Robinson (1993), witnessed a tremendous upsurge of funds for NGOs from a meagre \$0.9 billion to a hefty \$6.3 billion. In a similar conception, Keane emphasizes that the huge role of INGOs cannot be underestimated when viewed from the evidence that, with the exception of the Bretton Woods institutions, these organizations distribute larger amounts of funds than even traditional UN agencies, while the European Union (EU) grants two-thirds of its aid funds through INGOs (Keane 2003). Recently, *The Straits Times* (2024) reported an initial EU pledge of “€7.7 billion (\$11.2 billion) on humanitarian aid in 2024, less than in 2023 [which was] €8.4 billion in total.”

## 1.2 Prevalent Challenges

On the African scene, Bassey (2008) comments that the donor community tends to give local and national NGOs more consideration as agents of community empowerment, particularly in areas where governments have been ineffective in the provision of sustainable development services to their citizens. With the donor community’s tendency to support, NGOs are availed the opportunity to participate in accessing the billions of dollars granted annually in the fight to eradicate poverty for the aim of achieving development, though with little success so far (Daina, 2012).

Daina (2012) and Matenga (2001) coincide that the emergence and growth of NGOs were influenced by the failure of governments to design and implement appropriate welfare policies for their citizens. Therefore, to fill the gap left as a result of state inefficacy, it was imperative to recruit willing but capable agents to replace

the state in the delivery of the social services needed by the citizens. It was this demand that in the course of time created a mushrooming of non-state, non-for-profit organizations and a tough competition for both funding and legitimacy. A constant on-boarding of new NGOs has resulted the suffocation of funding which had already been facing challenges with existing NGOs.

As Chege Ngugi, Africa Regional Director of ChildFund International, writes, “Bilateral aid, multilateral institutions, large foundations, and international NGOs shaped the continent’s development agenda,” further affirming how “This model undeniably made a difference: it lifted millions out of poverty, built schools and hospitals, and supported generations of children and families,” (Ngugi, 2025). Yet, Ngugi warns that as a consequence of the shifting global dynamics, African NGOs need to navigate alternative sources of funding in the very likely cases of aid suspension, shift of donor priorities, or decrease in donor investments.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA Network 2024) elaborates, “Somalia has a sizeable humanitarian coordination structure, featuring sub-national inter-cluster/sector coordination groups (ICCGs) and, under these, area-based coordination which is undergoing revisions in 2024.” The operation of the mentioned sub-national organizations also varies according to availability of capacity relative to the type, area, and activity of the coordination, though assumed to be inadequate for the implementation of the complex programs involved.

In order to overcome the challenges of inaccessibility facing international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), local/national non-governmental organizations (L/NNGOs) are recruited as implementing partners to assume crucial service delivery roles during intricate crisis situations in areas beyond the reach of foreign staff working for international organizations (ICVA Network 2024). In their part, L/NNGOs raise complaints that they are “Not sufficiently included in decision-making and face significant [funding] barriers to improving their institutional capacity,” in addition to “lack of equal partnerships, direct funding, and receipt of overheads,” (ICVA Network, 2024).

Although the Somali NGOs are unsurpassed in reaching locations unreachable by INGOs and foreign workers, their efforts are nonetheless affected by “a lack of integrity and accountability, by both international and Somali actors,” effectively damaging the mutual trust required to foster “a fuller partnership in humanitarian aid,” (Hailey *et al.*, 2023:5-6). Hailey and coresearchers unveil some of the persistent challenges in the Somali donor-NGO environment by writing how, “Corruption risks exist across the programme cycle. Identifying partners, awarding and pricing contracts, negotiating access, hiring staff, selecting and registering aid

recipients and monitoring processes are all points at which corruption happens” (p. 21).

Further to the problems discussed, Somali civil society organizations have extensively grown in number and are continuing to increase. Matanga (2010:115) had earlier defined a similar situation by calling it “proliferation of development NGOs in Africa,” while Manji and O’Coill (2002:568) term it an “explosive growth,” of a serious concern and cause of the lack of trust to the detriment of the LNGC-INGO collaboration.

### 3. METHODS AND DATA

#### 3.1 The Success Case Method

A section of methodologists explains that the case study method can be suitably defined as a qualitative research approach aimed at discovering a single case or set of cases as a single unit (Gerring 2007; Eno & Dammak 2014). Its purpose is to know the uniqueness of a single case observed for the reason of its restrictedness as a unit within its own properties (Stake, 1995; Stake & Munson, 2008; Yin, 2003, 2009). Commenting on the success case within the broader frame of the case study method, Hogle and Moberg (2014:2) maintain that the success case study is useful when the intent of the researcher is “to obtain a deeper understanding of the value” attached to the activities that led to the success to be discussed.

Cooperrider & Whitney (2008), Trajkovski *et al.*, (2013), and Stowell & West (1991) observe that the success case study resembles the Appreciative Inquiry, while Davies & Dart (2005) associate it with the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique, which essentially is a participatory method that captures a story-based qualitative impact of a program under evaluation. Success case studies and stories, according to Hogle and Moberg (2014:2), are a discussion of successful aspects of programs and activities by identifying and explaining the factors behind the achievement.

In their view, Hogle and Moberg (2014:2) postulate that, like the success case study, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) tasks itself to give deserved attribute to the rewarding outcomes realized by an organization. Hogle and Moberg agree with Stowell & West (1991) that the AI method, similar to the success case study, is best for application in conditions where institutions are faced with swift innovation and transformation (Stowell & West, 1991).

#### 3.2 Data Collection Method

A triangulation of data collection methods and instruments was applied to gather data. The method included a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary data was the core element for obtaining firsthand information from employees of the organization familiar with the topic under study, while secondary data was necessary for the purpose of filling in gaps if identified in the course of the study (Eno & Dammak 2014). The

overall aim of the triangulation approach was to ensure richness of data through alternative methods by strengthening validity and reliability via a combination of data obtained through diverse methods and instruments.

#### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Three different data collection tools were utilized.

##### 3.3.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire with open-ended qualitative questions was used to collect data from 12 GREDO employees from diverse departmental positions. The respondents were selected from Leadership & Management (7 questions), Finance (6 questions), Operations (8 questions), and Human Resources (6 questions) and each team was advised to answer only the questions directed to its department.

##### 3.3.2 Desk Review

Desk review was conducted on reports and a variety of other documents stacked in GREDO’s archives of over three decades. The purpose was to use the secondary data for filling in any emerging data gaps not covered in the questionnaire and as evidentiary testimony to back up data collected by any of the other two instruments i.e. interview questionnaire and informal interviews and discussions.

##### 3.3.3 Informal Interviews and Discussions

One of the researchers (Mohamed) had access to GREDO staff and benefited from randomly executed informal interviews and discussions whenever necessary. This tool provided more significant help than anticipated as it cleared grey areas and confirmed or reconfirmed validity or reliability of specific data categories from the other two instruments.

#### 3.4 Data Analysis

Interview data were securely computerized as responded and later arranged into thematic categories. A coding system was adopted to condense responses concisely into relevant context, meaning, and resemblance of ideas. Quotes were used verbatim in selected sections in the results and discussion segment of the study. Notes taken from the desk review and the informal interviews and discussions were carefully inserted in relevant parts to reinforce data results and as supporting evidence in areas where these were required.

### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Leadership and Management

*“...vertical and horizontal discussions and honest exchange of viewpoints on matters of concern are made with members of staff.”*

GREDO is an indigenous local NGO which, according to the main principle of its operation, is legally licensed as a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-political

voluntary organization based in Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia. At the height of the emergency humanitarian action in Somalia in early 1990s, necessity was growing for partnerships between international aid agencies who could not reach certain parts of the country and local NGOs. As a consequence, a group of learned youth founded in December 1992 an organization named Gargaar Relief and Development Organization (GREDO) to help reach the most affected grassroots communities in South Central Somalia regions with needed humanitarian relief aid. From there onwards, the organization has implemented various projects under the relief and emergency programs of the 1990s and early 2000s, before expanding its intervention into rehabilitation and development programs and into other geographical locations in the country. Over the years of its engagement in the humanitarian and development programs, GREDO has encountered a multitude of complex challenges but addressed them with resolute leadership vision and tactful managerial skills. It has as well gained experiences that currently advantage it over other organizations. Some of these are briefed in the sub-sections below.

#### 4.1.1 Advantages

**Rapid response:** GREDO can access target communities immediately, mitigate their suffering, and save lives during emergencies. **Strong Community Ties:** It has engagement with local communities to foster trust and collaboration, enhancing future development efforts. **Resource Mobilization:** Its successful interventions attracted funding and resources from donors and partners. **Capacity Building:** Working in emergencies and with international experts enhanced the skills and resilience of GREDO's staff and community members. **Visibility and Credibility:** Effective interventions elevated GREDO's profile, making it a recognized leader in emergency response and development programs.

#### 4.1.2 Challenges

**Resource Constraints:** Limited funding hinders effective intervention and sustained operations in emergency contexts as well as in relief and development programs. **Coordination Issues:** Collaborating with other NGOs and government agencies can lead to project overlaps and confusion. **Sustainability Concerns:** Focusing on immediate relief may divert attention from long-term development goals. **Access:** Constraints in crisis situations such as security issues and logistical challenges can severely undermine the ability of implementing partners like GREDO to provide immediately needed assistance. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Assessing the impact of emergency interventions in conflict situations can be complex, difficult to measure success, and gain experiences from.

#### 4.1.3 Policy Advocacy

However, by navigating through the advantages and intricacies of the challenges, GREDO has acquired a

vast experience. In effect, the challenges helped the organization enhance its approach and effectiveness in emergency relief while ensuring alignment with its broader development objectives. Alignment of objectives is attributed to GREDO leadership by envisioning strategies for coping with national and state policies while addressing the needs of vulnerable beneficiaries through their participation in the various phases of a program. For instance, policy advocacy, which is a leading element GREDO actively engages in, is based on outcomes of discussions with communities before the organization embarks on its efforts to influence policy decisions that impact the communities it serves. This includes participating in discussions, providing feedback on proposed policies, and collaborating with other organizations as leverage to amplify their voice.

#### Alignment with Government Programs

stands as one of the methods GREDO applies to frame and formulate its projects with existing government initiatives and needs, ensuring that its objectives complement national and state policies. This strategy is approached to not only enhance program efficiency but it also helps secure potential funding and/or support from government agencies. It allows to incorporate in its programs **Capacity Building Activities** aimed to raise the capacity of local communities. The main objective here is for the beneficiaries to understand and navigate policies that underpin GREDO's empowerment in its advocacy for beneficiary communities' rights so they can access needed services.

#### 4.1.4 Mapping out Strategic Avenues

In order to succeed in its humanitarian and development initiatives, GREDO leadership has mapped out new strategic avenues to establish partnerships and collaborations with government bodies, NGOs, and community organizations with the intention of fostering a collaborative approach to problem-solving. These partnerships helped GREDO leverage needed resources and expertise, permitting a better service provision to the vulnerable populations. Among the unbendable policies of GREDO is **Monitoring and Evaluation** which the organization conducts throughout the life span of every individual project. The interviewees emphasized the practice as "a robust monitoring and evaluation system" which extends "beyond project completion" in order "to assess the impact of our projects" on the beneficiaries. Data-driven, evidence-based approaches help GREDO's leadership to adapt its programs to the changing needs of the vulnerable people it serves and for the purpose of providing evidence for advocacy efforts and further funding.

The policy informs community engagement with beneficiaries to understand their challenges and feedback on policy impacts that guide GREDO to tailor its strategic interventions. Using participatory grassroots approach, GREDO leadership and management officials



ascertain that the voices of the beneficiaries are heard and considered in policy decisions. Doing otherwise would mean “compromising the trust” gained from the communities served by the organization. Finally, by integrating these strategies adopted as a result of staff-wide meetings and discussions, GREDO is enabled to effectively negotiate through the complexities of national and state policies while prioritizing the needs of the vulnerable populations that depend on the services it provides.

#### 4.1.5 “Vertical and Horizontal Discussions”

Enshrined in GREDO's policy decisions are systemic leadership and managerial approaches in which “vertical and horizontal discussions and honest exchange of viewpoints on matters of concern are made with members of staff,” an employee replied. It is the outcome of the refined ingredients of these honest discussions that mainly reinforce leadership vision, regulate operation and expansion strategies, shape guiding principles, motivate stakeholders, impact strategic planning, facilitate adaptation, and finally solidify the tools to gauge organizational performance in general and monitoring and evaluation in particular. By effectively conveying “the vision of an inspirational leadership” into actionable organizational culture, GREDO guarantees that its policies and their impacts stay in line with organizational goals of supporting, inter alia, long-term institutional growth and positive bearing on the community.

#### 4.1.6 Distinction of Roles

Quite unlike a majority of Somali NGOs, GREDO distinguishes between leadership and management roles guided by an organizational structure and clearly defined responsibilities. The leaders focus on “setting the long-term vision and strategic goals” of the organization. They “inspire and motivate” staff to align with GREDO's mission towards success. In contrast, “...management undertakes the day-to-day operations, ensuring that resources are allocated equitably and used efficiently to meet program goals.” In addition, results indicate that GREDO's organizational “management policy emphasizes clarity in roles and responsibilities” delegated to members of staff and leadership, effective internal communication, professional development, and performance evaluation as among the core principles that inform “organizational culture and core values.”

The separation of these otherwise inter-linked elements permits GREDO leadership to maintain focus on strategic growth while management is effectively engaged in honing the operational task of the organization. GREDO implements several programs intended to fulfill its commitment to humanitarian relief and development agenda. Some of its key interventions, among others, typically include “Health and Nutrition Programs; Education Programs; Livelihood and Resilience Programs; Water and Sanitation Programs; and Governance and Peacebuilding.” Each program is

tailored to the specific needs of the communities GREDO serves and, in effect, responds to the requirements of its organizational approach of operationalizing the implementation of a comprehensive humanitarian relief work and sustainable development.

#### 4.2 Finance and Funding

*“...our resilience and rapid response to cope with the new trend of aid reduction or suspension is in principle rooted in our long experience and salient employee loyalty, morale, and motivation to tolerate difficult circumstances.”*

Global affairs are too interconnected that what appears an isolated incident in one region immediately spreads to impact other parts of the world. And the current suspension of global funding by the US is not an exception. As already witnessed, Donal Trump's decision produced potential negative effects difficult to recover from, resulting unavoidable circumstances such as: reduced funding; increased competition for funds; operational constraints; and, finally, project cancellations that incur serious consequences to both the organizations and their vulnerable beneficiaries.

As a consequence of the volatility of the funding regime, many key projects were canceled, halted, or indefinitely postponed; adversely leading to loss of opportunities gained and potential reputational damage hard to regain. Therefore, anticipating the possible ill-fate of funding such as suffered by many organizations, GREDO had the experience that dealing with donors and international organizations was interlaced with various challenges for local partners implementing programs in the country. With these complexities in mind, and capitalizing on lessons learned from previous circumstances, “GREDO had earlier on charted anticipated challenges, along with potential mechanisms it might implement to address them.”

#### 4.2.1 Anticipated Challenges

There are certain predictable constraints that may arise from funding fluctuations as a result of dependence on donor funding which can lead to instability if funding is reduced or withdrawn. For situations like this, GREDO has developed mechanisms to deal with them by “diversifying sources of funding through the development of partnerships with multiple donors,” and exploration and identification of “alternative funding avenues, such as crowdfunding or local revenue generation.” Another technique to overcome the problem was “reinforcing the organization's fundraising strategy with more robust and aggressive approaches ...which the implementation had already been in progress and with encouraging results.”

However, included in the list of challenges is: **Compliance Issues**, which means conformity with regulations, which poses another challenge as it involves

navigating complex regulations and reporting requirements by various donors and international entities. In any case, GREDO addressed the conundrum by establishing a dedicated compliance team that ensures adherence to emergent regulations of new partnerships and maintenance of transparent reporting practices with existing partners. Among the challenges GREDO has successfully overcome include dealing with situations of political instability in Somalia where sudden changes can seriously complicate the political landscape and consequently affect project implementation and personnel safety and security.

With guidance from “professional consultants and expert staff, GREDO has developed contingency plans and risk assessments” to adapt quickly to changing political situations. The strategy is supported by GREDO’s competitive advantage of about 35 years of experience on the ground and in the humanitarian and development aid environments where it had already “dealt with volatile situations with success.” GREDO’s list of challenges successfully accomplished include food shortage crises, break-outs of infectious diseases, incidents of floods and impacts of climate vagaries that disrupted and dilapidated livelihoods (Isack *et al.*, (2025), reconciliation and peace-building among disputing communities. For such volatile circumstances, GREDO has formulated effective disaster response strategies that incorporate the building of resilience into project planning to ensure continuity for both the organization and its beneficiary stakeholders.

Another significant challenge relates to **Changing Donor Priorities**, a factor for serious consideration. This factor has driven promising local NGOs out of business, since shifts in donor priorities can render existing projects less relevant or unsupported. Avoidance of a shift in priority can in certain cases be made by engaging in “regular dialogue with donors on how certain shifts can be achieved by keeping reliable partners on board,” ideologically allowing them a strategy of gradual transitional period of adaptation. The approach is suitable for the sake of (a) aligning projects on priorities, and (b) adjusting programs proactively. From the same perspective, the aligning and adjusting of projects undergirds the organization’s operational strategy by preparing it to simultaneously meet emerging needs and adapt to the objectives of the new shift. Furthermore, “GREDO has mitigated several shocks from similar situations by adopting and maintaining flexibility measures without compromising organizational vision, mission, and core values.”

#### 4.2.2 Strategic Tools

In times of challenging situations, GREDO has learned to exploit existing expertise to address emerging conundrums. Examples of previous challenges GREDO had confronted and solutions applied are: Stakeholder Engagement: Regular meetings with donors to discuss expectations, project updates, and feedback; Capacity

Building: Training programs for staff to enhance skills in project management, grant writing, and financial management that adapts to the emerging situations; Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing robust M&E systems to track project effectiveness and adapt strategies based on findings; Networking and Collaboration: Building alliances with other organizations to share knowledge, resources, and strategies for overcoming common challenges resulting from unanticipated situations.

The reduction in global aid fund, especially the USAID Stop-Work Order, posed unprecedented challenges to GREDO, impacting its ability to manage some of its humanitarian programs effectively. However, strategic coping mechanisms such as diversifying funding sources, strengthening partnerships, enhancing operational efficiency, and reliable experience of over three decades in the national and global humanitarian and development landscape, have assisted GREDO to survive through these challenges and continue its vital duty in the humanitarian work on the ground.

One of the employees explains “For the past few years, GREDO’s annual budget has consistently maintained resilience, resisting against some of the shifts affecting the funding environment and aid grants by bolstering its fundraising strategy.” Another interviewee honestly admits, “There is no doubt whatsoever that, despite the enhancement of our fundraising approach, the recent US shift in aid policy has affected us like a vast majority of NGOs in the country and in the developing world. But, that being a fact, our resilience and rapid response to cope with the new trend of aid reduction or suspension is vehemently rooted in our long experience and salient employee loyalty, morale, and motivation to tolerate difficult circumstances.”

#### 4.2.3 Compliance with International Accounting Systems

Not surprisingly, what GREDO members of staff mentioned as another strategic instrument already in place for application is Compliance with International Accounting Systems, a process that entails several problems which need special expertise and professional skills. In order to comply with diverse international accounting and reporting systems, GREDO uses specific strategies such as Standardized Reporting for which it has developed standardized reporting templates and guidelines that follow the requirements of international best practices. It is a mechanism meant to ensure that, like all other stakeholders, it adheres to a consistent framework that makes reporting more coherent and reliable. Capacity Building is part of the solution as it encourages investing in training and capacity-building programs for staff. It helps GREDO personnel understand and implement standardized accounting practices to augment compatibility across different systems and improve overall reporting quality. Collaboration and Partnerships are identified as

necessary strategic components actively engaged according to organizational policy, based on the fact that GREDO collaborates with partner organizations to share best practices and tools—a collaborative approach that fosters a shared understanding of reporting standards, enhances interoperability and reduces fragmentation.

#### 4.2.4 Regular Audits and Reviews

Other matters germane to the field of accounting and finance are: Regular Audits and Reviews: Implementing regular audits and reviews of accounting practices allows GREDO to identify discrepancies and areas for improvement. This approach ensures ongoing alignment with established standards and supports continuous improvement. Advocacy for Harmonization: GREDO actively engages in advocacy efforts intended for harmonizing accounting and reporting standards across its partner organizations. This promotes consistency and reduces the complexity associated with diverse systems of financial reporting. Software Solutions: GREDO utilizes the Integrated Reporting Platform (IRP) system, which enhances transparency and efficiency in reporting. This platform, the IRP system, supports integrated data management, a process which practically simplifies navigation through the complexities of reporting across different sectors.

The integration and application of the aforementioned accounting and financial reporting strategies enabled GREDO to satisfactorily overcome the challenges and possible discrepancies posed by diverse accounting and reporting systems, particularly when the various donor institutions hail from different countries, with each donor preferring its own system of reporting relative to the funds it allocated to a particular project. Compliance has, therefore, enabled GREDO the realization of more efficient and transparent operation and management of funds for humanitarian activities, ultimately leading to mutual trust with all stakeholders, including the donors, and continuity of its collaboration with them.

#### 4.3 Human Resources

*“GREDO offers internship opportunities to qualified senior university students and/or recent graduates, allowing them to gain on-the-job experience and potentially transition into full-time roles...”*

Human resources is the backbone of any functioning public or private entity. It is virtually the department that selects and recruits the organizational workforce, the machine that designs the workplan and ensures its transformation into action with the aim of accomplishing institutional goals efficiently. For the purpose of implementing the multi-sectoral projects under its management, GREDO has a strong professional team of 322 employees of whom 228 are men and 94 women. There is one woman on a list of three members at the topmost senior management level, a rare scenario

in the Somali traditional system of leadership where women are not usually appointed to top positions.

GREDO's endeavor of appointing two females to the executive board, in addition to the one in senior management role, is highly commendable, despite the overall female representation of 29% in the organization. However, although the number is on the lower side, anecdotal counts suggest that it exceeds way better than many organizations in the country save in the case of women organizations. Looking into HR issues, Complaints and Unequal treatment, two main factors haunting many organizations, with no exception to public institutions and international agencies, are among the factors the researchers investigated, and the remedies GREDO applies. The study found that GREDO addresses complaints and compensation issues in several ways some of which we summarized below:

##### 4.3.1 Employee Feedback Mechanisms

GREDO implements regular surveys and feedback sessions where employees can voice their concerns anonymously so that the management deals with identified issues promptly.

##### 4.3.2 Open Communication Channels

The organization fosters a culture of open dialogue, encouraging employees to discuss their grievances directly with the management without fear of retaliation.

##### 4.3.3 Regular Audits and Assessments

GREDO conducts regular assessments of working conditions and employee satisfaction to ensure compliance with labor standards and identify areas for improvement.

##### 4.3.4 Competitive Compensation Review

GREDO regularly reviews its wages and benefits packages so that they are competitive and aligned with industry standards, although “this doesn't mean the organization offers salaries and packages equivalent to those offered by international NGOs.”

##### 4.3.5 Annual Salary Increment

Based on budget availability, GREDO employees are entitled to an annual salary increment of 5% for every staff member to help them cope with inflation and rising living costs. These and other mechanisms applied to address employees' complaints are testament to GREDO's “commitment to creating a healthy work environment” and responding effectively to issues affecting its employees.

##### 4.3.6 Staff Recruitment

One of the areas the researchers carefully examined via all three data collection instruments was GREDO's recruitment process, a factor of massive debate in Somali as well as in African society where a strong belief persists that corruption, nepotism, and

clan/tribal affiliation are the dominant qualifications for recruitment rather than hiring on merit (Ali *et al.*, 2022). As the results reveal, GREDO typically follows a structured policy for staff recruitment that includes several key procedures outlined here:

**Job Postings:** GREDO advertises vacancies on various platforms such as the organization's official website, job boards, and social media, to reach a wide audience of potential candidates.

**Networking and Partnerships:** The organization often collaborates with institutions of higher education and professional networks to tap into a pool of qualified candidates.

**Internship Programs:** GREDO offers internship opportunities to qualified senior university students and/or recent graduates, allowing them to gain on-the-job experience and potentially transition into full-time roles, depending on their performance during the period of internship which usually lasts 3 to 6 months.

**Referral Programs:** Encouraging current employees to refer candidates helps the organization identify professional individuals or candidates who can adhere to GREDO's organizational values.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** GREDO focuses on creating a diverse workforce by actively seeking candidates from various social and experiential backgrounds, regardless of clan or ethnic affiliation.

**Competency-Based Assessments:** GREDO employs a recruitment process that includes assessments to evaluate candidates' skills and fitness for the role, to make sure that the best candidates are selected on merit.

**Continuous Improvement:** A laudable practice is GREDO's periodic review of its recruitment policy, updated regularly and based on feedback and changing market conditions; it advantages the organization to maintain its edge over other local NGOs and remain competitive.

#### 4.3.7 Inclusion Policy

The research findings demonstrate GREDO's strong commitment to inclusion, considering opportunities for various minority groups in its staffing and program strategies. Below are some of the key aspects of GREDO's inclusion approach:

**Diverse Staffing Policies and Recruitment Practices:** GREDO actively seeks to recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic minorities, women, and people with disabilities. Job postings are widely disseminated in communities with specific remarks encouraging these groups to apply on the premise of priority cases.

**Internship and Training Programs:** GREDO offers internships and trainings specifically targeting underrepresented groups, supporting them in gaining skills and experiences in humanitarian work.

**Physical Accessibility:** GREDO ensures that facilities and services are accessible to people with disabilities, including physical access and communication aids.

**Advocacy, Awareness & Community Engagement:** GREDO engages in community awareness campaigns to

promote the importance of inclusion and diversity, fostering a supportive work environment for all groups.

**Partnerships:** Collaborating with other organizations focused on minority rights enhances GREDO's capacity to advocate for systemic change. By integrating these strategies, GREDO aims to not only support minority groups within its organization but in addition empowers them with advocacy by exposing them to institutions and environments where their voices could be heard and their needs addressed.

#### 4.3.8 Staff Professional Development (PD) Training

The responses received provide a detailed account of GREDO's strong commitment to staff training and professional development (PD) as part of its HR strategy towards employee empowerment and retention. Several respondents highlighted the factor as part of the organizational "mission to enhance effectiveness of community impact through well-trained personnel."

A description of GREDO's policy regarding staff training, types of training, and the aims and benefits for conducting them is given in various HR materials analyzed across different years and policy review documents:

**Technical Skills Development:** Training programs that focus on specific skills related to project management, community health, and education.

**Soft Skills Training:** Workshops on communication, leadership, and teamwork are conducted to enhance interpersonal skills.

**Cultural Competency:** Training aimed at intercultural communication and respect for cultural diversity, particularly relevant for staff working in diverse minority communities.

**Policy and Advocacy Training:** Educating staff on relevant laws, policies, and advocacy techniques to empower them and the communities they work with.

**Alignment with Needs:** Training programs are designed to address staff needs and as part of GREDO's overarching goals of personnel empowerment, building human capital and impacting sustainable development.

**Community Needs:** Training is tailored to address separately the specific needs of staff and the communities served, enabling employees to effectively respond to local challenges. Reasons for Training were coded and categorized into the following themes:

**Capacity Building:** To equip staff with the necessary skills to improve program delivery and community engagement.

**Adaptation to Change:** As the socio-political landscape evolves, training helps staff remain adaptable and responsive to new challenges.

**Employee Retention:** Investing in staff professional development responds to GREDO's organizational strategy of creating human capital, job satisfaction and retention, thus fostering a committed workforce.



**Enhanced Productivity:** Training is a pivotal tool to improve staff productivity and efficiency in executing projects.

**Improved Quality of Service:** Well-trained staff are well-equipped to deliver high quality services, leading to better quality outcomes for stakeholders.

**Motivation and Moral Boost:** Continuous professional development (CPD) creates a positive work environment, boosting staff morale to a higher motivational level.

#### 4.3.9 Evidence of Participation

GREDO regularly organizes local training initiatives such as workshops and training events in the Southwest and other regions/states, with significant participation from local staff. GREDO's community training programs are carried out to inform the community while simultaneously fulfilling specific policy goals in which the organization has some objectives, such as:

**Collaborations with Other States:** Partnerships with organizations in other states have facilitated training exchanges, allowing staff to gain insights from broader perspectives and cultures.

**International Exposure:** Some staff members have participated in training programs outside the country, enhancing their skills and bringing back valuable knowledge to GREDO.

In conclusion, GREDO's obligation towards staff training and staff professional development strengthens the organization by multiplying its ability and efficiency to serve the community. The organization's ongoing investment in training and CPD reflects its extensive strategy of achieving sustainable development goals through empowered and skilled personnel.

#### 4.3.10 Motivational Schemes

GREDO implements various motivational schemes to enhance staff satisfaction, motivation, and performance. Examples among them are:

**Recognition Programs:** GREDO has initiatives that acknowledge and reward employees for their hard work and achievements, such as "Employee of the Month" awards and public recognition in meetings.

**Professional Development:** Offering training programs, workshops, and opportunities for further education supports employees in skills enhancement and career advancement in upward mobility.

**Team-Building Activities:** Regular team outings and collaborative projects instill in employees a sense of community, teamwork that nurtures organizational dynamics.

**Feedback and Communication Channels:** Encouraging open dialogue through regular feedback sessions about good performance acknowledges employee contribution, hence emulation by others to obtain similar recognition.

**Incentive Programs:** GREDO offers its employees benefits such as Eid bonus, annual gratitude bonus, and health insurance. These schemes collectively contribute to a positive work environment, leading to a high level of employee performance and motivation.

#### 4.4 Operation and Expansion

*"Our competitive advantage of over three decades of verified operational success, credibility among the donors, and an above-average staff expertise have, among others, facilitated the expansion of our operation to different parts of the country."*

This department oversees the efficiency of GREDO's various programs and the activities implemented under every department. "Matters related to effectiveness of our planning and intervention, quality of the services we provide, cost efficiency of all our operational tasks, and compliance issues with donor objectives and our organizational goals are observed under the microscope of this department." With this expression, one realizes that in GREDO, an effectively continuing checks and balances method of operation is at play as one of the factors behind the major achievements extrapolated in the study.

In a more elaborate sense, the success was instigated by "appreciable fiscal responsibility and meticulous resources utilization"—factors donors consider as basic principles of trust in humanitarian collaboration. Hence, for GREDO, "...building and maintaining good reputation among our donors and beneficiary communities on the basis of trust," inform the "essential ingredients in the organizational DNA and as demonstrated in our provision of high quality services and evidence of its impact on the lives of the people we serve."

Exploiting the experiences gained from the numerous challenges encountered and overcome, and the superb reputation the organization has maintained among the donors encouraged GREDO to chart an expansion strategy by which it sought and won grants projected for the development of the areas it surveyed and planned to intervene according to its general expansion policy and on the basis of data-driven, evidence-based reports. "Our competitive advantage of over three decades of verified operational success, credibility among the donors, and an above-average staff expertise have, among others, facilitated the expansion of our operation to different parts of the country." In addition to the strategic positioning of its operation, GREDO capitalizes on visionary leadership and staff expertise where both its advantages of scope and scale easily respond to the adaptation of the unique socio-economic, cultural, and regulatory landscapes practiced in the new sites.

In many parts of rural Somalia where communities are faced with food insecurity, including

inaccessible remote areas, GREDO stole the opportunities by surveying possibilities of operation and initiating the implementation of life-saving programs that combine delivery of relief food, agricultural training, access to microloans for farmers, and the introduction of resilient crop varieties to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable people affected by either natural or man-made disasters. In contrast, in an urban area with high pollution levels, the organization may work on the diversification of its activities by focusing on the promotion of renewable energy solutions and waste management systems that improve public health, among other benefits.

GREDO pursues its interventions by using strategic positioning influenced by experience, aggressive fundraising approaches, detailed know-how of diversified service provision, and credible reputation in the management of humanitarian relief and development funds. Furthermore, experienced personnel with international exposure lead the organizational operation alongside teams of staff with enviable knowledge of the cultural context of each project area, collaboratively executing the practical implementation of the activities.

Staff feeling of ownership of the organization, healthy atmosphere of collegiality, collaboration with the communities and other stakeholders in the humanitarian and development sectors leverage GREDO over other competitors. Empowered by these advantages, GREDO attracts donors and delivers services to the satisfaction of the beneficiary stakeholders, according to the specific project target group, and as defined in the specific service sectors such as education, nutrition, and other health services particularly focused on supporting children <5. In all sectors of service provision, “we give special attention to communities and individuals from minority groups including ethnic minorities and people with disability who usually face exclusion in resource sharing and constraints of representation and participation in available economic opportunities or access to humanitarian and development services.”

Unlike local NGOs with a limited focus on a single geographical area, strategic positioning increases GREDO’s presence and popularity among the beneficiary communities as it empowers weaker local community-based organizations (CBOs) in the locations it is active by giving them subcontracts, leveraging their strength and influence in the community, and thereby contributing to GREDO’s journey towards advocacy for the empowerment and capacity-building of small but growing CBOs. GREDO’s aim is to “work effectively together with CBOs to address humanitarian needs of the grassroots communities they represent, because these small grassroots CBOs may grow into large organizations in the near future.”

As a consequence of its reputable standing and proven fiscal responsibility, GREDO is currently active in Jubaland State and Galmudug State where it is implementing multi-sectoral projects for the improvement of livelihoods and development of communities. Therefore, while some of GREDO’s projects portfolios might be hurt by the US decision to freeze overseas funds for aid and international development, others will remain financially and operationally unaffected by the US move. The reason is because, “with its visionary leadership, GREDO has been remodeling its strategic plans over the last few years by expanding its service delivery potential to regions it had not been traditionally operational, though the services were on a high demand.” Nonetheless, the expansion has reached Hirshabeele State (Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle regions), districts in Galmudug State, and other locations in the State of Puntland, responding efficaciously to GREDO’s commitment to humanitarian service delivery to underserved communities across the nation.

Although GREDO experiences challenges similar to those faced by local NGOs in developing countries, and more seriously in conflict-ridden zones like Somalia, it has built areas of competitive advantage in accessing grants and funding for the operation of its projects. A few examples of the areas of competitive advantage, made up of a composite of factors mainly attributed to the organization’s reputational asset, were themed together as indicted below:

#### **4.4.1 Establishment of Relationships**

GREDO has built strong trust and mutual relationships with grant-making organizations and stakeholders and has maintained its collaborations with them to date, facilitating its easier access to funding opportunities whenever available.

#### **4.4.2 Proven Track Record**

In its credibility asset, GREDO can demonstrate a chain of successful past projects in the sectors of health, education, and peacebuilding, a matter which led to its high rate of reliability among the donors—a unique advantage that makes it an attractive candidate for funds.

#### **4.4.3 Innovative Approaches**

GREDO utilizes a mixture of strategies and exclusive methods in its project implementation techniques that distinguish it from competitors, appealing to funders keen on the application of innovative solutions to volatile situations and inaccessible locations in Somalia.

#### **4.4.4 Alignment with Funder Goals**

GREDO’s projects are implemented in alignment with funders’ objectives and goals, in that case increasing the likelihood of receiving project grants in very competitive situations.

#### 4.4.5 Strong Community Engagement

Its traditional approach of actively involving local communities in the various phases of its projects helps GREDO showcase its commitment to sustainable development, thereby fulfilling a major priority factor for funders as well as beneficiary communities.

#### 4.4.6 Clear Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Having robust systems in place for measuring project processes, procedures, and outcomes advantages GREDO by assuring funders that the investments are wisely and responsibly utilized for the purposes stipulated in the agreements and project contracts.

#### 4.4.7 Participatory Approaches

GREDO's humanitarian and development programs are designed with input from minority communities, encouraging their self-representation by allowing them to voice their needs and preferences.

**Inclusive Program Design:** "We need to conduct thorough assessments that consider the specific needs of minority (ethnic and otherwise) groups, to ensure that our programs are effectively accommodating excluded groups," read a 2021 policy document, while a report in 2024 highlights "several projects were accomplished with successful inclusion of marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and disabled persons." Photos and group names the beneficiaries belonged to were attached to the report.

**Support Services:** Programs include support services for marginalized groups, such as counseling and advocacy, to empower beneficiaries and address their specific challenges.

**Exclusive Minority Meetings:** GREDO holds internal meetings exclusively discussing minority issues; and minorities-only meetings are held with them to express their concerns without the presence of non-minorities.

**Inclusive Metrics:** GREDO tracks the participation of minorities in both staffing and program engagement to assess effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

**Feedback Mechanisms:** Regular feedback from minority beneficiaries helps inform ongoing strategies for inclusion and ensures that services remain responsive to community needs.

Leveraging a variety of competitive advantages in scope and scale, GREDO boosts all possibilities towards successful obtainment of funds, notwithstanding the aggressive competition in the funding regime. The major factors the organization considers during an intervention in the local scene or expansion in other regions are, among others: Needs and demands on the ground; funding opportunities; security and access challenges; community and government (state/federal) acceptance. Analyzing the numerous indicators presented in the different sections of this study gives one the thought that it is not by virtue of coincidence that GREDO expanded the geographical scope of its operation or that it collaborates with a good number of

reliable donors in the humanitarian and development sectors.

In GREDO's donor portfolio appear giants such as USAID, FCDO, the World Bank, and the Danish Government as the instrumental grant supporters of the organization's humanitarian and development programs. Equally included in the list are GREDO's international partners among them UN agencies such as the International Organization for Migration, in addition to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) such as Save the Children, CARE International, Oxfam International, Plan International, Finland Church Aid, ACTED, Concern Worldwide, to name but only a few examples. The amount of grant donations from each partner is accounted for separately as indicated in the agreements and contracts and followed to the dot by way of donor satisfaction. In cases where there is co-funding or match-funding, in both financial and narrative reports are indicated the amount of grant of each co-financier or as stipulated in the project agreement.

## 5. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study presented four select issues as the determinant factors behind the success achieved by GREDO, a local/national Somali NGO with its headquarters in Baidoa city, Southwest State of Somalia. Since its inception in 1992, GREDO has encountered numerous challenges in the operation of its programs. From working in perilous situations of unpredictable conflict, threatening conditions to project operation and lives of staff who mainly consisted of a few volunteers inexperienced in humanitarian service delivery, and a young leadership cum management team driven by humanity and humanitarian cause rather than material gains, GREDO has painstakingly established itself into a mature, very credible organization highly privileged in the national and global environments where humanitarian aid, policy, and service provision are discussed. The recognition, which GREDO has so deservedly won, came as a consequence of persistent endurance for overcoming versatile challenges in the span of almost three decades and half. Transforming every challenge encountered into a learning experience helped GREDO build staff expertise by refining their skills. As a consequence, the human capital invested in the employees has paid back as demonstrated in the praiseworthy fiscal responsibility and fundraising strategies, leadership growth and vision, sound managerial skills, employee size and integrity, as well as competitive advantages in the scope and scale of operations undertaken. The study concludes that among other factors, the powerhouse of GREDO's success is generated by inspirational leaders and management team, donor trust influenced by proven fiscal responsibility and management, unwavering staff loyalty, and operational strategies that pursue funding

opportunities through partnerships and expansion of activities to various parts of the country.

## 5.2. Recommendations

Based on the results and particularly the growing challenges adversely affecting the funding regime of NGOs in developing countries, the study recommends GREDO to consider the following:

- Extend interventions to the various underserved communities in most parts of rural Somalia;
- Increase advocacy and empowerment of minority and/or marginalized communities by clearly distinguishing them by ethnic, gender, occupation, and disability;
- Consider organizing local events with higher education institutions (HEIs) to increase organizational positioning by empowering young researchers;
- Put specific emphasis on bringing local higher education institutions (HEIs) on board of GREDO's intervention policy in areas both parties can enhance mutual collaboration;
- Convene local/national events that showcase GREDO's success by sharing its experiences and expertise with the local communities striving for capacity building;
- Consider more aggressive, donor-focused fundraising strategies to overcome problems such as the current funding volatilities or possible future grants fragility;
- Capitalize on the success achieved by considering humanitarian intervention beyond Somalia and into neighboring countries.

## 5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

This study reported four areas as determinant success factors behind the achievements recorded by a single NGO in Somalia, namely GREDO. In order to view the success from different perspectives, the study suggests the following for further research.

### 5.3.1 Research on the Beneficiaries

The study suggests the importance of carrying out a survey on the perception of GREDO among the beneficiaries and recipients of the various services it provides. Results of such a survey would either support or disprove the success attributed to the organization, and/or identify areas for further improvement that might solidify the success.

### 5.3.2 Research on Similar Success Cases

Studying other NGOs with success cases is suggested in order to identify similar success factors or new ones that would broaden the scope by finding different factors as determinants of their achievements. This suggestion is made with consideration that most scholarly studies focus on examining phenomena to solve existing social problems without much attention to the successes realized. Instead, success cases highlight the endeavors

and strategies utilized that have yielded positive results which others can learn from.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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