Exploring Staff and Participant Perceptions and Experiences of Project Closure: A Case Study of HealthyFoodAfrica's Closure in Kisumu

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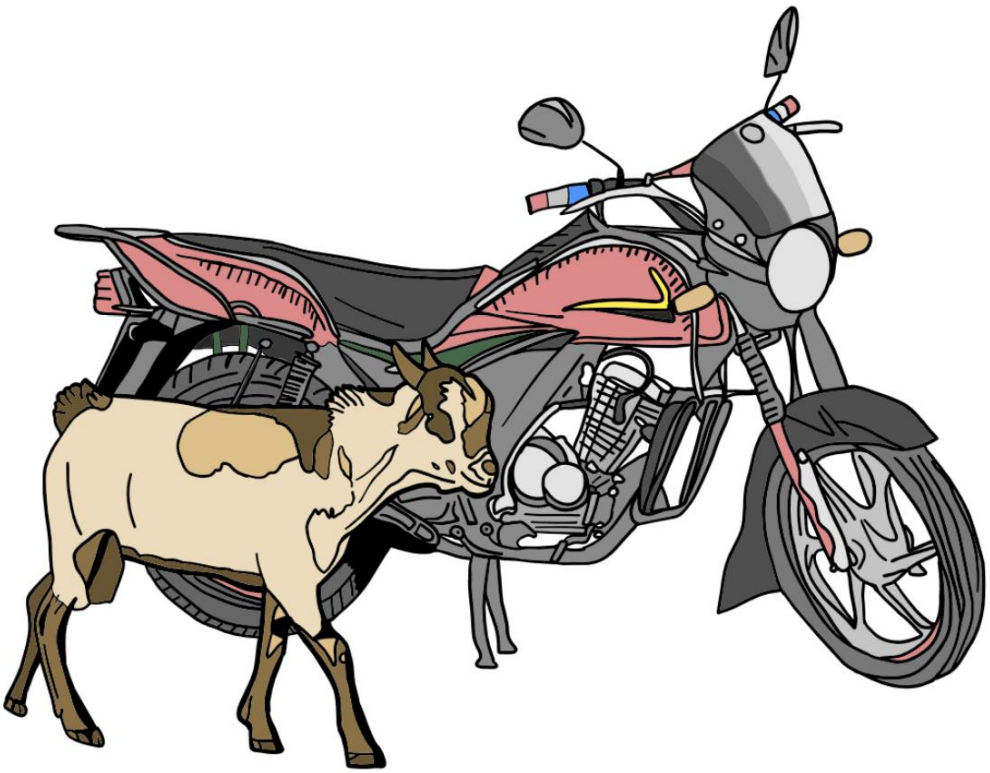

I. Abstract

This study is a case study of the closure of an International Development project in Kisumu, Kenya. Literature consistently demonstrates that the closure of projects is a vital stage, especially if the project is designed for the interventions to continue beyond implementation. However, this field has been under-researched, and the existing literature calls for the contribution of case studies to support academic knowledge. This study asks what participant's perceptions of the project closure were, and whether they were prepared for the future. To assess the future practices of participants, Social Practice Theory was applied to the research, focusing on participants' resources, skills and interest needed for the future. Participants from seven stakeholder groups were interviewed, including the project staff and people supported by the project.

The research found that most participants felt well-prepared for the project to close. Most participants felt motivated by the project and that they had received a high quality of training. Although the project had been designed to limit the need for participants to access expensive resources, some participants did feel that they might struggle to continue engaging due to the barrier posed by access to non-renewable resources. Throughout the research a clear contradiction arose between the project design and the context of the project. While the project attempted to be inclusive and meet high standards of "best practice", it faced external limitations, such as the requirements of donors and complexities found within Kisumu. These findings provide useful insights about best practice, which future research into project closure could assess further.

This thesis therefore concludes that it is important for the project closure process to be better understood, by academics, donors and practitioners, for closures to be implemented effectively. To support future research, suggestions are given for future academic researchers and project staff to consider.

II. Acknowledgements

This thesis was developed across three continents and completed in a bomb shelter, while watching news of violence spreading across Nairobi. It was written with a deep and growing understanding of the complexities of this world and the importance of making sure we support as many people as possible within it.

Many people made this thesis possible. I have long benefitted from the support of my wonderful family, who have consistently encouraged me, whilst asking the hardest and most important questions about the details of my work. Huge thanks must go to Stav, whose intellect is so deep and whose patience and coffee deliveries made finishing this project possible. A huge thank you to friends who stepped up in recent complicated weeks to give support, advice and critiques.

I was lucky enough to be supervised by Dr. Harrison Esam Awuh, who encouraged me to embrace theory, gave me endlessly useful advice and made me laugh. I am so grateful that he connected me to HealthyFoodAfrica, who welcomed me to Nairobi and Kisumu, providing me with support and connections. I am particularly grateful to them for being open and forthright when discussing complex issues. I will always be indebted to the participants of this research who made time to talk to me with incredible honesty about their experiences and perspectives. Thank you to Edward, who not only translated for me, but shared many useful insights whilst we walked around Kisumu.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge many of my previous colleagues, who have taught me what I know about report writing, project evaluation and, most importantly, the importance of treating everyone with dignity.

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IV. Tables of Figures, Pictures and Tables

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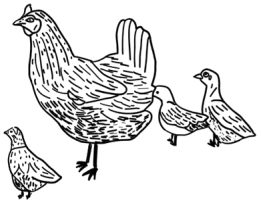
V. List of abbreviations

ALV	African Leafy Vegetables
CA	Capability Approach
CHA	Community Health Assistant
CHP	Community Health Promoter
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSL	Food Systems Lab
HFA	HealthyFoodAfrica
ID	International Development
IDP	International Development Project
KGU	Kitchen Garden User
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
SPT	Social Practice Theory
ToT	Training of Trainers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. Introduction



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1.1. Introduction

The core workload of most International Development (ID) practitioners' is managing or implementing projects. However, this process is not a major source of discussion within the academic study of the industry, which limits knowledge about the relationship between development practices and successes (Heeks and Stanforth, 2014). This thesis is a response to a call within academia for descriptive case studies which investigate several perspectives of the closure of a project[2], a period that is particularly under-researched and can be correlated closely with project success (Pal et al., 2019).

International Development Projects (IDPs) are often short-to-medium term and begin with a predetermined end-point. They often have clear goals which aim to meet the needs of a donor and support a community, traditionally in the Global South. They are typically expected to result in a long-term outcome, which will continue to benefit the participants of the project after the funding has ended (Koch, 2023).

The success of a project is usually judged based on the final report, without learning lessons about the impact of the project closure (Zivetz et al., 2017). According to existing literature and IDP staff, IDP closure is an often-under-considered element of project design, as it typically takes place after final evaluation processes are concluded. A literature review (Lee, 2017) on this subject, concluded that closures are often under-planned and poorly implemented, which could be avoided through learning lessons from evaluations. This can be due to the limited funding often available for evaluating or researching closure processes (Levinger & McLeod, 2002). Existing research, from Kenya, in this area identifies that the long-term success of interventions can rely on the effective closure of IDPs: those which had ended hurriedly or with minimal planning were more likely to see their interventions disintegrate over time (Coates et al., 2016). Given these issues, there are consistent recommendations within academic and industry literature for evaluations after the closure stage and further research into best practice for achieving the long-term sustainability of IDPs. (Tull, 2020; Hayman et al., 2016; Lee, 2017).

This thesis therefore asks the following research question; How do actors perceive the end of the project and how might the project influence the future of the community? This is answered through a qualitative case study about the closure of the HealthyFoodAfrica's (HFA) Food Systems Lab (FSL) in Kisumu, Kenya, which closed in May 2025. This was a European Union (EU) funded project, as part of the EUR

[1] All illustrations throughout this thesis were created by the researcher.
[2] Throughout literature, project closure is also referred to as "project exit" and "project graduation", amongst other terms.

77 Billion Horizon 2020 programme (Knickel et al., 2021)[3]. In line with expectations found within existing literature, the final evaluation of Horizon 2020 was published before the HFA project closed. This was one of 59% of the total number of funded projects which was incomplete at the report stage (European Commission, 2024). Even though most of the projects were meant to lead to long-term behaviour change (European Commission, 2024), any findings about these projects' final evaluations and closures may not be considered by the EU.

To explore the research question in a case study format, qualitative interviews were undertaken with 46 people connected to the HFA Kisumu project. This included participants supported by the project; in the literature reviewed their voices were rarely present. This research therefore stands as a helpful case study for future literature to gain an understanding of some of the issues related to project closures, as perceived by project participants, rather than practitioners.

1.2. Relevance and Significance of this Research

This research has clear relevance, with the existing pool of grey and academic literature consistently highlighting the importance of researching project closures. One wide ranging scoping review (Pal et al., 2019), looking at existing research into project closures, identifies a lack of case studies and research into the experience of project participants, alongside staff. Given that project participants are a key stakeholder within most projects, this is a fundamental literature gap which this thesis develops.

Another motivation to develop this literature pool, is that the existing content is produced by a small group of researchers, including those from INTRAC (Hayman, 2015; Hayman et al., 2016; Hayman and Lewis, 2018), an NGO focused on ID best practice[4]. Their core research is based on a small sample of NGOs who volunteered to work with INTRAC and so cannot be considered a scientifically representative sample. The findings of INTRAC's research are often cited across the literature pool (Tull, 2020; Lee, 2017). Thus, to improve the scientific objectivity of this area, additional case studies are needed.

This thesis may also have significance for IDP managers and future researchers. As can be seen in the literature review, many ideas about project closure are transferable and so the conclusion includes recommendations for future project staff and academics to consider. Additionally, future researchers could utilise the research framework to create additional case studies.

Finally, the HFA Kisumu team hopes to win contracts to continue their work in the city. This thesis therefore attempts to summarise and extend existing understanding on project efficacy and missed

[3] See section 3.2: Project Background.

[4] Even this small pool covers the closure of projects in ways which are less relevant to the case of HFA, including finishing emergency humanitarian aid, the exit of INGOs from countries after running long-term activities and emergency closures to budget cuts (Tull, 2020). For this literature review, advice presented was first assessed as to whether it was relevant to HFA, a five year project aiming to have a long-term impact.

opportunities in Kisumu, to facilitate their potential future planning for project closures. This may help future iterations of HFA to be designed in a way which allows for a more successful closure.

1.3. Outline of Thesis

This thesis explored the impact of the HFA project on stakeholders, utilising a theoretical framework based on practical future action. Overall, the resulting case study is of a broadly successful IDP, whose team navigated a complex environment. Core themes arose, such as the benefits and complications of co-creation, issues of dependency on ID in Kisumu and the importance of clear communication with all project participants.

1.4. Language Choices

In recognition of the complex power structures involved in IDPs, which impact this research project, language used to demarcate power has been carefully considered in this thesis, taking inspiration from Oxfam's (2024) Inclusive Language Guide. This includes:

- "Beneficiaries"[5] implies a one-way relationship. Instead, the term "participants" more accurately describes HFA's target group. The thesis differentiates between these "project participants" and the research's 46 "research participants", or interviewees, where relevant.
- "Informal settlements" is used to describe the target area of HFA's project in Kisumu, rather than "slums", which was a common term used in literature and some interviews. "Informal settlements" was chosen as it is used by Kisumu County and is a more neutral term.
- Drawing on Tull's (2020) analysis of various terms used to refer to the process of ending an IDP, "project closure" has been chosen as the most neutral term to refer to this concept.

[5] This is often used in academic and IDP literature.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

2.1. Literature Review

Core to the issue of project closure is the nature and background of ID funding and how such projects are developed, funded and driven by political and societal trends in international affairs. This literature review therefore begins with a very brief introduction to the origins, norms and expectations of IDPs, followed by a discussion of specific challenges which project closure presents.

Background

Development funding came about as part of the globalisation shift, following the Marshall Plan's support in rebuilding Europe after World War II and the Cold War. As countries became independent of their colonies, the colonising countries created systems to provide financial aid, to maintain soft power relationships (Lancaster, 2009). Funding is often channelled from the Global North to South through INGOs and organisations, who implement projects based on contracts, in which donors stipulate guidelines for projects to follow (Hatley, 1999). The donor-organisation relationship creates a power dynamic that inherently means that an organisation running a project must prioritise accountability to the donor and their budget requirements over project participants (Koch, 2023; Hatley, 1999), which can lead to funding being removed or reduced at short notice. Additionally, Lancaster (2006) identified that ID funding is often one of the first budget lines lowered after a financial crisis, creating additional vulnerability. Hatley (1999, p. 28) argues that this can make organisations "silent accomplices in perpetuating inequitable relations". Additionally, Borda-Rodriguez and Johnson's (2013) interviews with project participants demonstrate frustrations that can arise due to unbalanced power dynamics, such as consultants assuming a lack of participant knowledge. These issues led Moyo (2009) to argue that some countries may be developing slower than they would be without IDPs. Johnson et al.'s (2012) research demonstrates that to move beyond this dynamic requires intentional movement away from ID norms, engaging with the fuller lives of participants.

Best Practice

Best practice within IDPs is a consistently discussed and developing issue, but to take a donor's guidance, the UNDP (2021) requirements include that projects are designed using participatory methods, to be

sustainable[6], cost-effective and to align with the Leave no one behind (LNOB) principle[7]. Some of these issues are relevant to this thesis and are further considered below:

Horizon 2020's (2017) proposal requirements[8] were clear that low-cost proposals would be prioritised. This raises a question of how to spend the minimum possible budget, whilst leaving nobody behind through inclusive IDPs. Zoomers et al. (2021) argue that the broad requirements of the sustainability agenda often require that some people be left behind, such as those displaced for infrastructure projects. This contrast appears potentially impractical and demonstrates the weaknesses of best practice guidelines (De Jong & Vijge, 2024).

Partnership approaches, engaging stakeholders in project planning and implementation, are encouraged by donors (Narayan et al., 2000) and within literature, as they can have a higher chance of project success (Hatley, 1999). They have been shown to lead to autonomy, dignity and effective resource use in Kenya (Brunt & McCourt, 2012). In an evaluation of a comparable project, Kain et al. (2016) found that linking projects and policies to existing systems was core to the sustainability of interventions following project closure. However, Kothari (2001) warns that if project staff are unaware of the broader context of participant's lives, or communities' internal power dynamics, participatory approaches can be insincere[9]. For example, participation through irregular meetings focused on donor needs can be symbolic (Brunt & McCourt, 2012) and invite participants to share a specific type or framing of their story (Kothari, 2001). Additionally, participatory approaches can raise unachievable expectations, if staff offer opportunities that are later unavailable (Bratton, 1990).

A prospective benefit of participation is that it will lead to behaviour change; where interventions become part of the participants' everyday activities. Industry experts argue that a community led approach to designing and implementing projects is vital, allowing IDPs to identify and address gaps in local knowledge in a culturally sensitive way. This is a slow process requiring long-term engagement with a community and with donors, who can desire fast results more than behaviour change (DevelopmentAid, 2024).

Project Closure

As ID funding reduces (Murphy, 2025), staff of IDPs must make choices about how to balance the needs of participants and donors. Available to guide them is grey literature from donors and NGOs containing with advice on best practice (Gardner et al., 2005; Hunt et al., 2020). However, few of these discuss closing projects, and within the academic research sphere there is limited discussion of the topic (Hayman, 2015).

[6] See section 2.2 for an explanation of sustainability, within the context of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.
[7] This is prioritised by the SDGs and the EU and means that projects should aim for their benefits to be as inclusive as possible.
[8] Which HFA had to meet to win the contract.
[9] Kothari also questions whether asking participants to cut down their life story to the issues of weakness relevant to the project, conditions them to engage in their victimhood rather than supporting them.

Furthermore, many organisations are unaware of this guidance (Hayman et al., 2016) and where literature exists, it often focuses more on the reporting requirements than human impact of closure.

Three key literature reviews (Lee, 2017; Tull, 2020; Pal et al., 2019) summarise key recommendations for project closure within literature[10]:

- Ensure early consideration and planning of closure.
- Constant communication about closure with participants is important.
- Considering the needs, wellbeing and context of participants should be a priority.

While staff can implement these, some challenges require ID norms to shift; for example, the closure process may require donors to approve additional finance which may not fit within a budget framework, for long-term sustainability (Hayman et al., 2016).

Limited qualitative research has been conducted about the closure process. However, Hunt et al. (2020) identified that the staff of a health programme found the closure process to be particularly complex. Their key findings mirror the three key points listed above. Participants believed that an effective closure ensures mechanisms can be designed to ensure future sustainability and avoid participants experiencing a sudden stop in activities. Staff are a vital factor within project closure, which prompts a need to interview them within this research (Gardner et al., 2005; WHO, 2008). Alongside this research, Hunt et al. (2020) informally engaged project participants in discussions about what they valued in project closure, with answers including transparent timelines and preserving some relationship between the organisation and community.

Therefore, closing IDPs is an important process which is under-discussed and under-researched due to the traditional norms of development funding. The existing literature has consistent recommendations but demonstrates limited qualitative research, especially based on interviews with project participants. This these will attempt to fill this knowledge gap this thesis.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The aim of many IDPs is to support participants' capability to practice. HFA specifically aimed at increasing the long-term sustainability of both people's livelihoods and Kisumu's food systems (HealthyFoodAfrica, n.d.). For this to exist, the project had to develop individual capabilities and engage in systems to ensure practice would be viable. This research therefore took a people-focused theoretical approach, investigating the development of the participants and how the project closure would affect them.

[10] These are consistent across all three citations.

The theoretical guidance is drawn from the core ideas of the Capability Approach (CA), while utilising the more measurable components of the Social Practice Theory (SPT)[11].

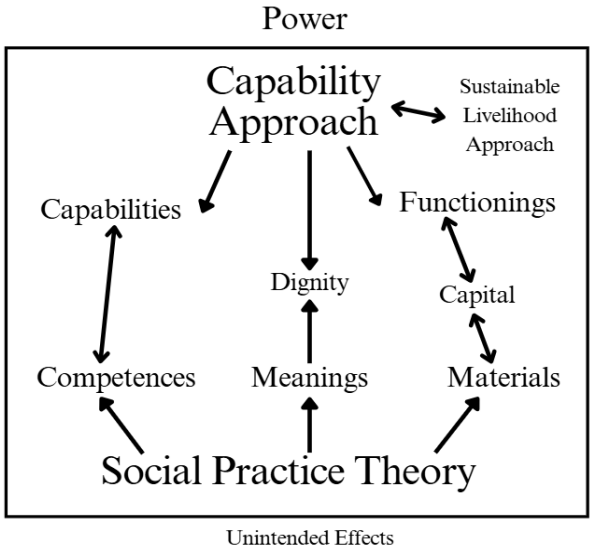


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework (own image).

Capability Approach

The CA focuses on considering the capabilities that individuals require to act independently and fully, focusing on abilities over external factors such as income (Sen, 2001; Sen, 2004). Capabilities in themselves are difficult to clarify, especially through a participant's own perception of themselves (Robeyns, 2006). It is therefore helpful to see them alongside *Functionings*, or what people experience and do, which can depend on their capability. For example, an IDP activities' *functioning* may require *resources* to keep running and for staff to have the *capability* to *utilise* it.

Critiques of the CA inspire this research to consider additional theoretical concepts. Firstly, the CA is too focused on the individual, without considering the wider factors which affect their capabilities (Gore, 1997). Given that many factors are important within the HFA project, this supports the use of SPT, which has a contextual focus, asking what an individual's environment is allowing them to. Additionally, the CA rarely considers well-being or dignity, given Sen's (1999) perspective that these are subjective issues which cannot be quantified. The well-being of participants is highlighted by project literature as important to understand, and SPT can be better utilised for this. However, a key issue is that, regardless of whether participants think they are capable of continuing the interventions, this cannot be proven when looking to the future (Chasanah et al., 2023), opening up a requirement for a theoretical lens to frame capability within.

Social Practice Theory

[11] Demonstrated in Figure 1.

SPT is focused on the actions and practices of individuals and how practices connect between people. It provides a measurable framework to measure capabilities with and goes beyond the CA, factoring in the wider context of people's lives outside of IDPs, such as economics or inequalities. It can be used to ask questions about what motivates and supports certain practices (Spaargaren et al., 2016; Heidenstrøm, 2022). SPT stems from Wittgenstein's sociological ideas of social practices as a basis for human structures and activities (Reckwitz, 2002). Giddens (1979) developed this into Structuration theory, conceptualising that actors and structures are interrelated, while Bourdieu (1977) developed early Practice theory, considering how societal norms develop between actors and structures. Reckwitz (2002) outlines how any practice requires both physical and mental alignment, alongside any relevant objects. Within this research SPT can therefore help identify what impact the closure will have on the continued engagement with or practicing of the project's interventions.

A relevant critique of SPT (Schmidt, 2018) is that it can overcomplicate the idea of practice, and it loses clarity due to its effort to include all forms of human activity. That is why this research utilises Shove et al.'s (2012) clear and practical framework that practices require a combination of three components which can be defined and, to some extent, conceptualised within an interview context. These are; *materials* (e.g. resources), *competences* (e.g. abilities, skills) and *meanings* (e.g. ideas, values, aspirations). The questions used in this study therefore did not ask if participants felt broadly capable, but instead asked if they had the **physical resources, relevant training and interest in** the intervention which could lead to their continued practice. A similar model was utilised in a non-academic research study (Coates, et al., 2016), and appears to have been helpful in clarifying and conceptualising the outcomes of closed ID projects in Kenya.

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The core aim of sustainable livelihoods within the HFA project makes the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), a relevant framework to consider alongside the research. It is utilised within IDPs to ensure that they lead to long-term change for participants, holistically considering policies and activities which can change societal norms (Serrat, 2017). SLA therefore views capability and practice within a broader context and supports this academic research in its link to ID industry practice.

Power

SPT encourages adaptation of the theory to match research projects. Given the importance of power dynamics raised throughout the literature review, it appears relevant to consider societal structures as a fundamental element of this theoretical framework. This surrounds the framework[12] and raises questions of the ways in which power dynamics impacted this case study. This structure creates space for discussion

[12] Figure 1.

of dignity and well-being: although Sen (1999) may be correct that they are not measurable, conceptualising them as surrounding the whole framework means they can be discussed where they arise.

Unintended Effects

Given that this research considers future activities, it also utilises Koch's (2023) theoretical position that IDPs often have unintended effects, both positive and negative, and that these can often be predicted with a deeper understanding of the wider context and implications of the interventions. Most internationally funded projects require a set of planned target outcomes and Koch labels those outcomes which are achieved as *Intended Effects*, while unplanned outcomes (positive or negative) are *Unintended Effects*.

The importance of this is demonstrated throughout the literature review, with academics and practitioners agreeing that conclusions are often poorly planned, leading to avoidable negative unintended effects (Lee, 2017). This concept therefore provides a framework in which it is assumed that, to some extent, negative unintended effects arising during project implementation can be avoided with additional planning, because the inputs of a project can have a direct impact on the outcomes. Koch (2023) says that this theory is a mindset which, if utilised by practitioners, can limit avoidable harm to participants. The issue with this is the level of planning and energy it requires from overburdened practitioners to consider even more factors than they already do; but Koch recognises this and argues that it is a necessity for practitioners to embrace complexity in order to follow principles such as avoiding harm.

Ontological Perspective

This focus on context dictates the adoption of an ontological critical realist perspective, in order to provide a framework within which it is accepted that each participant will have their own subjective understanding and truth about the project, while looking at the reasons why these different truths have arisen (Stutchbury, 2021). This acknowledges the subjective understanding of each participant while recognising the influence of broader structures (e.g. ID, colonial ideas) on the project. Taking a critical realist approach to this should support an understanding of the subjectivity of these stories and a knowledge that this case study exists within a broader global structure, the story of which this research will not be able to explore. This theoretical structure also prioritises the experiences and practice of the project's participants who are expected to benefit from the interventions, prioritising this over the project's additional goals of scientifically researching best practice for future scenarios. This also aligns with guidance on qualitative case studies: limiting assumptions and retaining an open mind to all outcomes of the research (Priya, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the base theoretical ideas of this research come from the CA, with SPT's structure utilised to ensure that the overall research questions can be clearly operationalised. Additionally, ideas of power, context and sustainability are considered throughout the research process to ensure that the final case study reflects the complex dynamics of the research context.

3. Project Context

This research project explores experiences of project closure at the HealthyFoodAfrica site in Kisumu, Kenya[13]. The project was implemented in the two informal settlements of Manyatta-A[14] and Obunga[15]. This section covers the history and geographical context of the project location while also providing relevant background information about the structure of the global HFA project. This is followed by an exploration of ID within a global context and some of the complex implications it has, such as dependency.

Picture 1. A street in Manyatta-A (own photo).

3.1. Project Context[16]

HFA was a five-year project covering six countries and ten project sites. It was funded by the EU Horizon 2020 (n.d.) programme, which had a EUR 77 billion budget, while HFA[17] received EUR 6,917,551. HFA was originally for four and a half years but it later received a no-cost extension for six months[18]. The project's implementation impacted by COVID-19 and staff reported that the project's core implementation

[13] See Figure 2 for a map showing Kisumu's location.
[14] See Picture 1. Manyatta-A is half of a larger settlement called Manyatta.
[15] See Figure 3 for a map of Kisumu, with the informal settlements marked.
[16] Some details of the timeline are sourced from participant interviews.
[17] Globally.
[18] See section 6.1 for details of this.

period was between 2022-2025, while most research participants were engaged between 2023-2024. The project ended in May 2025, with the visit to Kenya for this research taking place between February-April.

Horizon 2020 aimed to fund projects which would scientifically test innovations, including those supporting social development (European Commission, 2020). HFA's overall goals focused on interventions which improved food system resilience and increased nutrition intake. In the Kisumu FSL, a key aim was to achieve this through the sustainable production of nutritious food within the community. (HealthyFoodAfrica, n.d.). This fitted Kisumu's needs, as food production is often exported, leaving an unsustainable food system.

The project was designed as part of the global HFA proposal and, to encourage piloting of suitable interventions, every FSL was given some freedom to develop their own interventions. The Kisumu team[19], took a participatory approach to the project design. This included working closely with the Kisumu County staff to implement the project through existing systems and running co-creation workshops with the community to identify their needs. Similar models have previously been used in Kisumu; for example, a waste management project in 2008 was conducted using similar strategies. A review of the project (Kain et al., 2016) found that respondents felt that although there had been a positive intention, limited financial planning had led to the project's interventions being discontinued. Additionally, many staff the project had worked with left the city and so interest in future practice was limited. Although HFA is a separate case study, this paper provides insights into the challenges a project in Kisumu might face.

3.2. Geographical Context

Kisumu was established by the British colonial administration in 1901 to support the terminus of the new Kenya-Uganda Railway. Racial dynamics between the British, Asian workers and the local Kenyan community, followed by an outbreak of disease, led to segregation by race, with most of the locals settling on the outskirts of the city (Ogot, 2016). These areas were developed without the state support and are now defined as informal settlements. After the independence of Kenya in 1963, Kisumu's new leadership took responsibility for the areas, but due to budget constraints and the rising population the area has remained informal (Michel et al., 2018). Most of the informal settlements have poor sanitation and waste management systems and a higher crime-rate than the more formal areas of Kisumu (UN-HABITAT, 2005).

[19] Half based in Nairobi and half in Kisumu

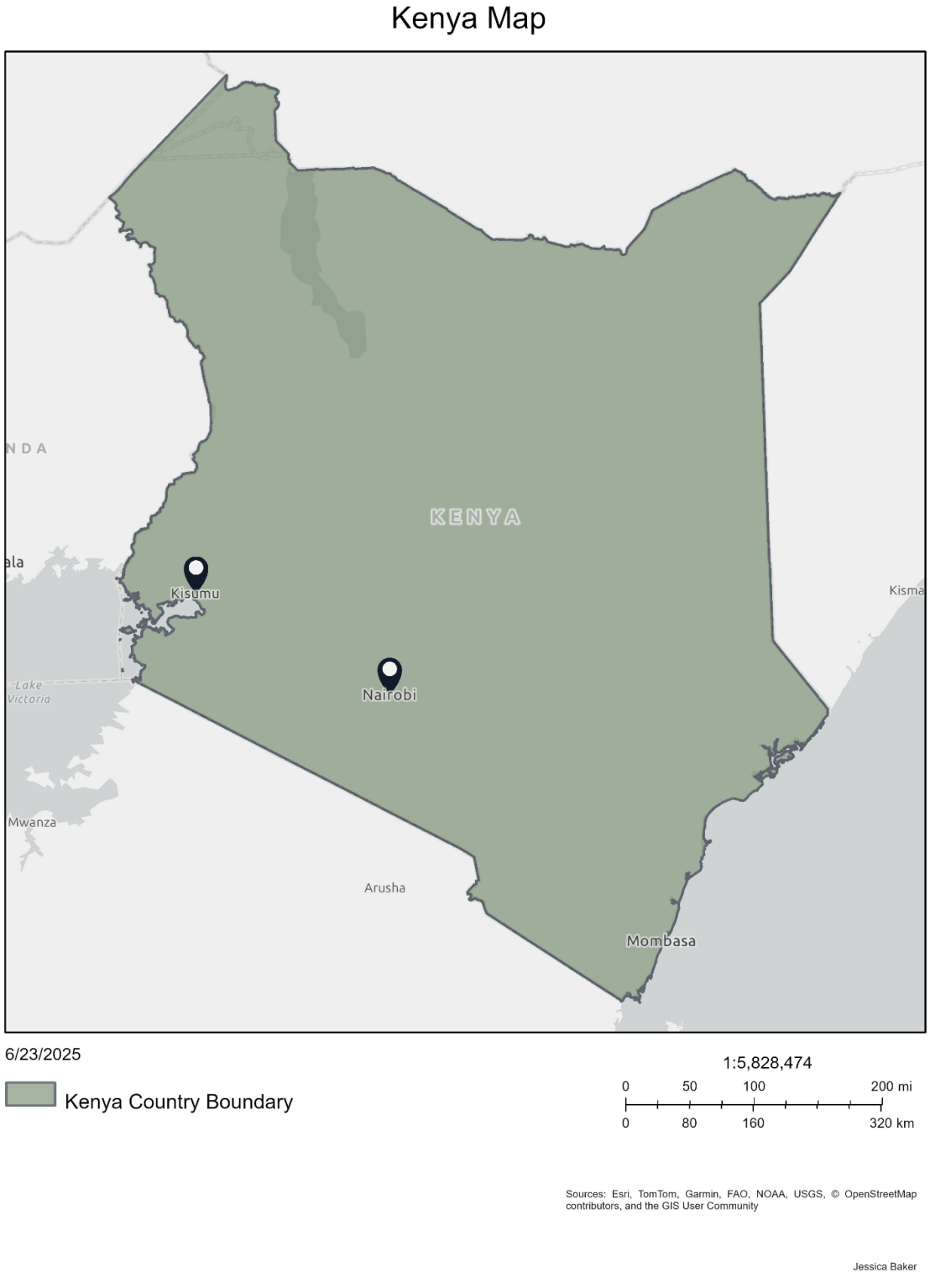


Figure 2. Map of Kenya, with black markers showing Nairobi (centre) and Kisumu (left) (own image). [20]

[20] Basemap: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community. (2015). *Navigation (World Edition)*. Esri. https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=c50de463235e4161b206d000587af18b

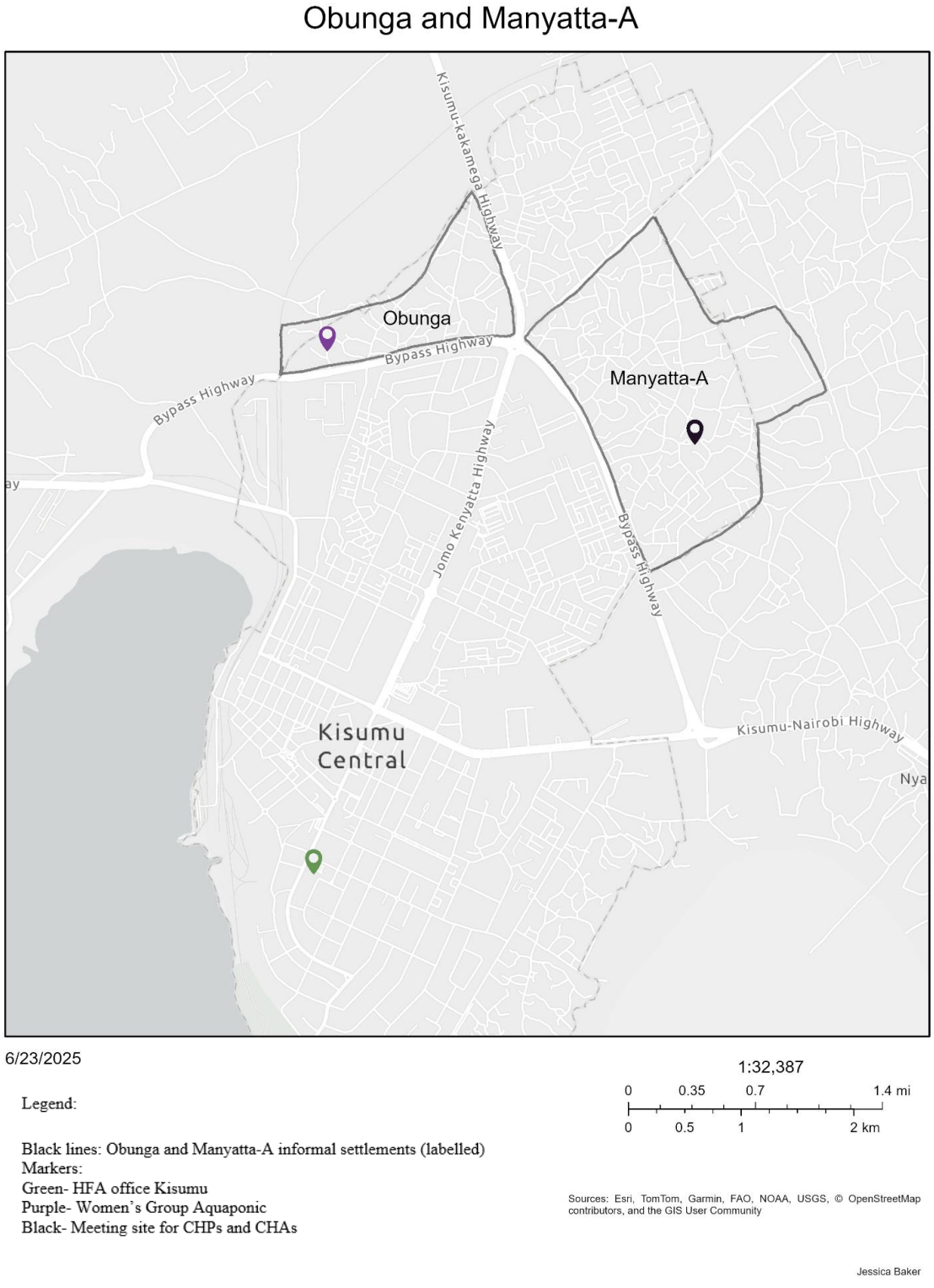


Figure 3. Informal settlements of Obunga and Manyatta-A within Kisumu City (own image). [21]

[21] Basemap: Esri., TomTom., Garmin., FAO., NOAA., USGS., OpenStreetMap contributors., & the GIS User Community. (2015). *Navigation (World Edition).* Esri. https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=c50de463235e4161b206d000587af18b

By 2007, there were 4500 international and national NGOs recorded in operation in Kenya, more than four times the number recorded in 1997. In line with this international attention, Kisumu, the third largest city in Kenya, in 2006 was named the first United Nations Millennium City, expected to work with the UN system to meet the Millenium Development Goals (UN-HABITAT, 2006). Through the work of many internationally and County-funded projects, and the determination of the city's residents, the informal settlements have been quickly developing (Ong'anya, 2024). Some informal settlements, including Manyatta-A, are developing formal roads and infrastructure such as sewage systems, due to a recent grant from the World Bank and the French Development Bank. This is one of a long series of ID funded infrastructure projects, in Kisumu and across Kenya, to formalise the informal settlements (MoTIHUD, 2019, Mahandara 2024). Brunt and McCourt's (2012) research in Kenya demonstrates that although livelihoods have broadly been improving, this has not always been planned in a sustainable way, leading to gentrification and increased poverty for some residents (Kanyinga & Mitullah 2007).

Childhood stunting in Kenya reduced between 2014 and 2022, from 26-18%. In Kisumu County the level was lower at 9%, which was partially credited to successful nutrition messaging projects, demonstrating the benefit of these (KNBS & ICF, 2023). However, in Obunga, one of the two informal settlements in Kisumu targeted by HFA, childhood stunting was at 27% according to one study in 2023. The report linked this to high food prices, and advertising of affordable but less nutritious snack foods (Mbae-Mugambi et al., 2023). This demonstrates the disparity within the County and the importance of the HFA project's work.

3.3. International Development Culture in Kenya and Globally in 2025

In 2024 ID funding to Kenya totalled USD 370 million[22], 54% of which came from USAID (OCHA, 2024). In Kisumu, the impacts of this could be observed within the research process, where participants were aware of their position as *beneficiaries,* while the HFA team began the project by navigating which organisations were already engaged in similar IDPs, to limit overlap.[23]

This issue is more important in 2025 as ID has become a lower priority in many major donor states since the onset of COVID-19, leading to budget cuts. 2025 has seen the USA's Government cancel most USAID projects (Murphy, 2025) while the UN has aimed to reduce its budget by 20% (Gawel, 2025). In this context, best practice principles pose a greater challenge and closure planning becomes more important.

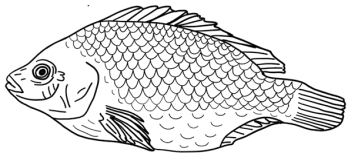
This shift in funding has brought forward conversations (Fengler & Kharas, 2016) about Kenya's relationship with aid. Dependency has a variety of definitions (Lensink & White, 1999), such as where a high proportion of a country's GDP relies on international funding. However, although foreign funding as a percentage of GDP has lowered over time in Kenya (McDade et al., 2021), this thesis does demonstrate

[22] Various estimates are available: some estimates are much higher but lack reliable sources.
[23] This could also mean that some findings of the project's success could be linked to other organisations whose work may have assisted the same communities.

an existing discourse and mentality of dependency within the research participants. This aligns with literature (Lee, 2017; Hayman 2015), which discusses dependency as a risk within IDPs and a particular reason why communication of the end of a project is important. As future donors will likely have greater requirements for IDPs to prioritise a SLA and utilise budgets more strategically (Simba, 2025), this could be challenging.

Kisumu is not necessarily dependent on aid: in addition to Kisumu County providing resources, a system being utilised by several research participants was Table Banking, where community members, often women with limited resources, share their money. They can then request loans out of a shared pool, to invest in resources they could not afford alone, or collaborate on projects to make money (Chimbi-Kenya, 2023). Despite these successes, dependency is an important factor to consider when looking at the issue of continued sustainable practice, alongside the other contextual factors about Kisumu and HFA outlined in this chapter.

4. Methodology



4.1. Research Design

The research utilised qualitative methods, such as Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gain insights into the stories and experiences of participants to feed into a case study format. This allowed participants to explain their own perspectives and explore how their individual capabilities and social practices have been impacted.

Before all interviews[24], a consent form[25] was signed. Most participants spoke some English and in cases where they did not, a translator gave an explanation of the research purpose, in Kiswahili or Dholuo[26] and explaining that they would stay anonymous, with pseudonyms used throughout this thesis. All interviews involved discussing the closure followed by the three areas of practice.[27]

The research design received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Alliance of Biodiversity International and CIAT, the organisation running the HFA Kisumu project.

4.2. Operationalisation of Variables

To address the gaps identified within literature, the following two sections break down the research question[28] into two key variables and outline how they were operationalised and influenced by the theoretical framework of the research to lead to the final interview guide[29]. Where relevant, core concepts are defined.

Section 1: Project Closure Process

Variable: How actors perceive the end of the project.

Definition: The understanding actors have of the HFA closure, how it has impacted them and any emotions they have related to it.

Why is this important?: The literature review demonstrates a lack of academic research into non-staff participant perceptions of project closures. To understand any future participation in the interventions, it is also necessary to understand participants' existing relationship with the project.

[24] A summary of interviews undertaken can be found in section 4.4, while a table of participants can be found in Appendix 2
[25] In Appendix 3
[26] As many interviews took place partially in English, it could be observed that most participants fully understood the research from this explanation, somewhat verifying the translator's reliability.
[27] Meanings, materials and competences
[28] "How do actors perceive the end of the project and how might the project influence the future of the community?"
[29] In Appendix 1

Influence of Theoretical Framework: This variable supports the understanding of any "unintended effects" (Koch, 2023) of the closure process and can give insight into relevant perceived power dynamics.

Indicators and definitions of concepts (where relevant)

- How participants think the closure was planned and implemented.
- How participants feel about the closure process.
- What goals the project aimed to achieve:
    - Concept: Sustainability
    - Definition: Continuation of the project activities by participants/County.
- Power dynamics perceived by participants:
    - Concept: Power[30]
    - Definition: Meanings within relationships between different stakeholders.

Sample Interview questions:

- Do you remember the closure being discussed during your training?
- Do you think the closure will affect your life in any way?

Relevant methods:[31] SSIs and FGDs (used to engage in these issues in depth); Observation (utilised with HFA staff to gain contextual understanding).

Section 2: The Future

Variable: How prepared participants are for the future, following the project closure.

Definition: The future ability of the project participants to engage in HFA activities, with limited support.

Why is this important?: HFA intended to be sustainable, leaving the activities in the ownership of the community. The literature review demonstrates that this process is vital for IDPs and this variable is used to investigate HFA's success.

Influence of Theoretical Framework: The indicators align with the three core elements that (XX) say practice requires. This directly operationalises the theoretical model, giving clear insights into the capabilities of participants.

Indicators and definitions of concepts:[32]

- How non-staff participants perceive their **competencies, skills and capabilities** to continue practicing the interventions after the project closes:

[30] See the literature review for a detailed discussion of the role of power dynamics within IDPs.
[31] See section 4.3 for details of these methods.
[32] Chapter 7 has three sections which correlate to the three concepts of competencies, materials and meanings. Details of the definitions here can be understood when read in reference to this chapter.

- Concept: Competencies[33]
- Definition: Participant has necessary skills to carry out HFA activities unaided.
- Dimensions: Ability of participants to recollect, transmit and/or utilise their HFA training; adaptations taken where this is not possible.

- Whether non-staff participants have the necessary **resources or materials** available to them, or the ability to access resources, to continue practicing the interventions:
  - Concept: Materials
  - Definition: Access to the resources required for the activity of the HFA project the participant was involved in.
  - Dimensions: Access to materials; access to finance; availability of materials; participant perceptions of the accessibility of the materials; adaptations made when resources are inaccessible.
- Whether non-staff participants' **values and norms (meanings)** align with the project in a way that motivates them to continue practicing the interventions:
  - Concept: Meanings
  - Definition: The interest of participants in continuing to engage with the project's activities.
  - Dimensions: emotional relationship to project; understanding of the impact of project on livelihoods.
- What HFA staff perceptions are of these indicators.

Sample Interview questions: Do you think you have the **abilities and skills** (such as training) to continue (engaging in the intervention) after the project ends?

Relevant methods: SSIs and FGDs (used to engage in these issues in depth).

4.3. Methods Utilised

Semi-Structured Interviews (30 participants; 20-70 minutes each)**:** Used with participants who were highly engaged in the project and had individual experiences and perspectives that it was appropriate to explore individually, such as *HFA and County staff*[34]. Additionally, *market stall vendors* requested individual SSIs, to respect their time within the workday.

[33] Closely aligned to Sen's (2001) conception of capability.
[34] See section 4.4 for definitions of research sub-groups

Focus Group Discussions (3 FGDs; 16 participants; 60 minutes each)**:** Used to help identify a range of opinions and identify consensuses across a community, with *project participants* and *Community Health Promoters (CHPs)*.

Observation: The researcher engaged with the HFA staff throughout the closure process, gathering contextual knowledge. This included a field visit with two staff, where several sites and staff-participant interactions were observed.

Observational sketching: Many photos taken within the research process risked compromising the anonymity of participants. Instead, sketching has been utilised to represent elements of Kisumu, emphasising the limited and imperfect way in which this thesis can represent the full research context.

4.4. Research Population

It was important to access as many sub-groups as possible, to understand the widest possible range of perspectives. Where possible, at least six participants were interviewed in each sub-group to ensure detailed results. HFA staff acted as a gatekeeper to participants, guided by sampling principles set by the researcher. This required selecting a suitable range of participants, with a mixture of genders and split between the two project areas. Practicalities made total random sampling impossible: many participants could not be contacted directly and so gatekeepers (CHPs, market vendor group leaders) were asked to mobilise participants in their networks.[35]

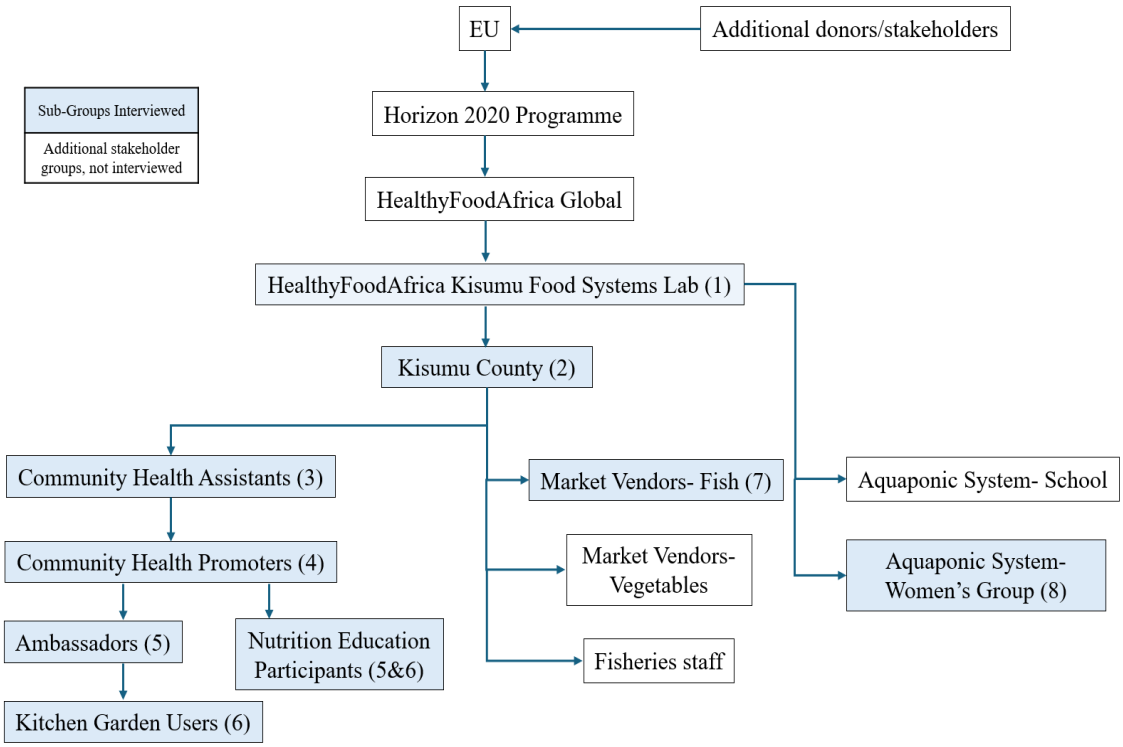


Figure 4. Organisation chart showing key stakeholder groups for HFA Kisumu project, with those interviewed shaded in blue (own image). See Table 1 for details about the numbered sub-groups.

[35] More details can be found in section 8.2: Limitations

Table 1. Interview Sub-groups, with rows numbered in relation

Org Chart No.	**Group**	**Referred to in thesis as**	**No. of Interviews & Tools**	**Description**	**Activity (detailed below)**
1	HealthyFoodAfrica Kisumu	HFA Staff	4 SSIs Observation	Implementing staff of HFA Kisumu project.	Implemented all activities.
2	Kisumu County	County Staff	6 SSIs Observation	Kisumu County staff who worked directly with HFA. County staff led training and developed resources.	Supported, created resources for or led training for **kitchen gardens, nutrition training** and **market vendors.**
3	Community Health Assistants	CHAs	4 SSIs	County staff who oversee and support CHPs within a "Community Unit" of ~5000 people.	Supporting CHPs with **Kitchen Gardens** and **Nutrition Training.**
4	Community Health Promoters	CHPs	8 4 SSIs 1 FGD	County volunteers who implement health provisions and monitoring roles for ~100 households. Most CHPs also own kitchen gardens. CHPs report to CHAs.	Implementing **Kitchen Gardens** and **Nutrition Training.**
5/6	Ambassadors/ Kitchen Garden Users	KGUs/Ambassadors	12 2 FGDs	Community members with kitchen gardens who had received nutrition training. Ambassadors recruited and supported KGUs.	**Kitchen Gardens** and **Nutrition Training.**
7	Market Stall Vendors	Market Vendors	5 SSIs	Market staff who received training and were given market stalls.	**Market Vendor Training.**
8	Aquaponic System- Women's Group	Women's Group/Aquaponic	7 7 SSIs Observation	A women's business group, given the aquaponic system and trained to use it.	**Aquaponic**

Anonymity is particularly important within this study, as the sub-group sizes were small and all participants worked closely with HFA, and sometimes with each other. Therefore, quotes are presented with the participant's sub-group and informal settlement, where available, rather than potentially identifying gender and age. No HFA staff are named, and they are referred to neutrally as "HFA staff" throughout quotes, as assigning several quotes to the same pseudonym could limit anonymity.[36]

Table 2. Project activities.

Kitchen Gardens[37]	Small vegetable gardens grown in the informal settlements, prioritising African Leafy Vegetables (ALVs). ~600 were created during the project.
Nutrition Training	Led by CHPs for half (~50) of the households they were responsible for, focused on nutritious food options for children and pregnant parents.
Market Vendor Training	Training sessions for those working on market stalls. Utilised a Training of Trainers (ToT) model where those trained were expected to train others.
Aquaponic Systems[38]	Two systems to grow fish and plants were given to a school[39] and a women's group, along with training in utilising and maintaining them.

Picture 4 (Left). Kitchen Garden in Manyatta-A (own photo).
Picture 5 (Right). Kitchen Garden in Manyatta-A (own photo).

Picture 4 (Left). Aquaponic System in Obunga (own photo).
Picture 5 (Right). Aquaponic System in Obunga (own photo).

[36] This does limit the ability to share standard anonymised characteristics such as gender or age freely, as in many cases only one person in a sub-group had a certain gender or was within a certain age range and so providing this information would make them identifiable. Therefore, although most participants have been given a randomised fake name that aligns with their gender, this is not always the case. As County staff interviewed came from different departments and had different levels of involvement, all quotes have been carefully considered to ensure their anonymity. See Appendix 2 for the full participant list.

[37] See Pictures 2 & 3.

[38] See Pictures 4 & 5.

[39] The school was closed for exams and holidays during the research period.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were coded[40] and analysed in Nvivo. The interview guide was used to produce deductive codes related to each question, while interview responses inspired additional inductive codes, such as specific resources mentioned.

The majority of analysis was completed by reviewing the quotes linked to each code and manually identifying patterns. All data was given case information, with informal settlement, gender, sub-group and interview method labelled. Data was analysed comparatively to look for differences between different sub-groups. For example, elements coded "resources" were reviewed when separated by informal settlement, or between SSI and FGD participants to identify if experiences were different. No clear patterns were noticed.

Preliminary data was discussed with HFA staff, who were asked for their response to certain scenarios. For example, where participants had given multiple explanations about the project's activities or complained about the project, HFA staff were able to offer a response.[41]

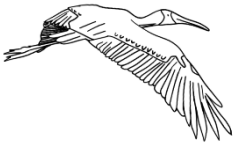
4.5. Positionality

The thesis research was conducted by a researcher perceived as a white British woman, with no previous experience in Kenya or food production. Within the context of post-British colonialism Kenya and a city regularly visited by international donors (McDade et al, 2021) this led to assumptions being made about the researcher's positionality: several participants directly requested additional donor funding during interviews[42]. This was made more complex by the fact that many participants were invited to the interview by HFA staff, with limited context and therefore assumed the interview was being conducted by HFA. The researcher also only spoke in English, or through a translator to participants, possibly limiting some participants' ability to fluently explain their perspectives.

The researcher has worked within ID food programmes in East Africa and has experienced the dynamics of working with donors and project staff. The supervisor of this thesis has worked with the HFA project and staff, so provided additional context about the project prior to the research phase. These factors provided some additional insight to this thesis but could have created unconscious bias.

[40] The coding tree can be found in Appendix 4.
[41] See the issues of seeds or cash in section 7.4 for examples of where this was conducted.
[42] Within the consent form and opening introduction, it was strongly emphasised that the researcher was a student.

Findings



The “Findings” section divides the presentation of results from this research into three chapters. The first covers the design of the project. This is followed by two chapters which each answer one of the two key research questions.[43]

[43] “How do actors perceive the end of the project and how might the project influence the future of the community?”

5. Findings: Project Design

As explained in the literature review, an important element of the success of a closure is how the project was planned for sustainability. This chapter therefore outlines how this occurred within the project, through the lens of the theoretical framework. This provides necessary background information to contextualise the answers to the research questions in the next two chapters[44].

5.1. Project Design for Sustainable Livelihoods

The project was designed with intentional inbuilt sustainability, aiming to improve participant's capabilities. These are outlined, in line with SPT, in terms of how the project aimed to ensure that participants had physical resources, relevant training and interest in the project.[45]

Design to Support Participant Interest

A co-creation model was utilised, in which staff undertook a baseline survey of food access and nutrition within the informal settlements. They then engaged with the community through workshops to identify strategies that the community thought would be beneficial to support them with issues the report highlighted. For example, market vendors said that they needed additional training and stalls, so this was what HFA provided. This was not always the case: staff chose to implement kitchen gardens because it was perceived as a useful method to get families to eat more nutritious food, which had been used effectively elsewhere. However, the design and methods for the gardens was created with participants, to be relevant for the context. HFA staff accept that the ownership model means behaviour change and uptake of interventions may be slower, especially considering the additional dynamics involved with working with collaborative groups. For example, a 55% uptake of kitchen gardens was expected but they believe that there could be many more in the future, once behaviour change is more prevalent. Participants were given consistent reminders during training about their ownership of the interventions and that HFA would eventually leave. Staff perceived that giving participants more direction may have improved the efficiency in implementing some areas of the project, but that this approach would have limited future practice.

The project was also developed and implemented alongside the Kisumu County staff, working in relevant departments, to more effectively embed the project within the future of the County. Participants therefore

[44] All information was confirmed by at least two research participants, from different sub-groups where relevant.
[45] Chapter 7 (sections 2, 3 & 4) details findings about how this design impacted future participation in the project. However, the design is detailed in this section, to provide context for Chapter 6, on the closure process.

met County staff and knew that some would remain in position and be able to help them in the future, if needed.

Design to Support Skill Uptake

Training was led for most project participants and was designed for knowledge to remain within the community after closure. To support this, HFA staff worked with Kisumu County staff to develop resources and lead training, leaving knowledge and resources with the County for the future. Alongside this, HFA staff planned to publish all manuals and tools for all the training online to support ongoing training. The County has also hired new Agricultural Extension Officers to support the kitchen gardens. HFA's interventions are also integrated into the County's monitoring indicators.

Furthermore, one staff member of HFA also works for Kisumu County and will continue engaging with project participants within his County role once his contract with HFA ends. One staff member said that they hope this avoids the dependency attitude they perceive in the County. County staff also confirmed their commitment; where their professional responsibilities overlap with their HFA responsibilities they expect their engagement will continue.

Additionally, HFA's training often used a ToT model, partially to support the retention of knowledge within the community and partially due to budget limitations. For example, in the kitchen gardens intervention, training was run for CHPs, who went on to train community members as Ambassadors[46], leaving many project participants with the skills to train new KGUs in the future.

Both staff and participants said that training regularly included reminders that this was the community's project to own and that at some stage HFA would withdraw. Trainers[47] hoped that this would encourage participants to engage with the training.

Design to Support Resource Access

The project was designed to require minimal resources, partially as the HFA staff did not believe that providing resources is an effective method for sustainable interventions. Some specific and long-lasting resources were provided, such as stalls for market vendors to sell from. The kitchen gardens were designed, through a co-creation model, to use accessible household materials and only require small purchases such as seeds.

CHPs and Ambassadors were provided with stipends for the duration of their involvement, to incentivise them.[48] This was highly motivating and both staff and CHPs said that without the stipends CHPs would have been unlikely to engage with the project, unless they had a particular passion for food and nutrition.

[46]Ambassadors were responsible for recruiting and training additional households.
[47] Research participants who led training included HFA staff, County staff, CHAs, CHPs and Ambassadors
[48] CHPs also receive a small stipend monthly from the government, separately from the HFA project.

Additionally, HFA provided participants with compensation: travel expenses[49], lunch during training, milk and bread. They felt this was necessary as it is part of the ID culture within Kisumu. This motivated people; several KGUs said that receiving this support had been important for their engagement with the project.

5.2. Impact of Power and Structure on Project Design

HFA's Kisumu project was designed within a wider context, which impacted power dynamics, potential sustainability and led to unintended effects within the design process.

The project was funded by the EU, with communication maintained through the consortium coordinator[50]. The Kisumu team had limited contact with the EU, who did not visit the site and engaged with their reports and presentations. This implied to staff that "they want you to tick boxes" (HFA staff), achieving targets demonstrating that donor funds reached a high number of people, rather than demonstrating quality. This differed with the staff's aims of working with a group consistently to achieve long-term sustainability of the activities.

Another limitation was that the HFA Kisumu project's budget, designed for a wider range of activities, was created in multiple parts and heavily cut down early in the design stage. However, the planned activities were not changed, other than where clearly not possible; for example, six aquaponics were planned originally but there was only budget to implement two. Staff expressed that the time limitations on time and budget[51] reduced limited the success of the project overall.

The impacts of these limitations were perceived by non-staff research participants: for example, CHPs were only expected to train half of their households in nutrition, prioritising those with or expecting children. They felt that this excluded those who would likely become pregnant in the near future[52] and that more households should have been targeted. They were unaware of any reasons why this choice had been made. Additionally, many participants[53] suggested interventions for preserving food to avoid waste, would be particularly helpful, but was not affordable within the budget and so was not worked on.

The effects of these approaches and changes to the HFA Kisumu project, outside of the hands of the staff, can be seen trickling down to the project participant's experience. This demonstrates the theoretical model of this thesis well, with power dynamics impacting all areas of the project, and leading to unintended effects.

[49] A different quantity ranging between 1-6 Euros (for travel costs) depending on whether participants were from the community or worked for Kisumu County.
[50] From the global HFA project.
[51] Once contracted, the budget could be moved around to allow for new ideas and allow for the co-creation model.
[52] Newly married women was given as an example.
[53] Two County staff said that this issue should be a priority in Kisumu, while HFA staff recalled this being a priority within co-creation workshops and had intended to work in the area, but were limited by budget.

6. Findings: How was the closure planned and what considerations went into the planning?

Key to the success of the closure of a project is how it is planned and implemented (i.e. meanings, materials and competencies of HFA project participants). This chapter, therefore, outlines that process and answers the question of how actors perceive the end of the project.

6.1. Timeline and Plan of the Project Closure

> "We don't look beyond we just do the implementation fast, but it is important also for the beneficiaries to understand the what next." - HFA staff

The closure of the project was planned for late 2024 but given COVID-19 a six month unfunded extension was given by the EU, at the request of the HFA project.[54] This timeline allowed the Kisumu team to complete the project activities, although as one said, "there's never enough time in a project".[55]

Prior to the closure, staff had aimed to gently phase the project's direct support out of participant's lives. allowing the communities to become more engaged in the project while still being able to receive support as needed. To try and communicate the importance of the community managing the project, messaging was included throughout training. Peter (County staff) recalled that they used to ask at the end of training "Are you able to be your own champions of these practices that we're teaching you?". Almost all research participants who received training remembered this and this practice aligns closely to recommendations identified within the literature review.

Following the confirmation of the final closure date, HFA staff planned a closure process. This involved planning their reporting process for the EU, communicating the closure to participants and ensuring that ongoing interventions were closed slowly.

For those involved in kitchen gardens, the largest group within the project participants, staff intentionally communicated about the closure through the County structures: from CHAs to CHPs, with an assumption that CHPs could tell KGUs where relevant. This decision was made because using the communication

[54] The HFA Consortium lead asked all project branches if they needed an extension and they all gave feedback. The Kisumu team said an extra year, or at least six months, would help. Due to administrative factors, the EU settled on a six month extension without additional funding.
[55] HFA Kisumu staff salaries for this period had to be partially funded by the lead organisation, CIAT.

structure was part of the participatory model and because staff did not have capacity to contact all CHPs: many KGUs can only be contacted in person due to technology barriers. This raises theoretical questions about the power dynamics within the project and how these decisions might affect future practice.

6.2. Participant Perceptions of the Closure Process

A clear finding of the research was that different sub-groups had very different experiences and perceptions of the project closure. Two major factors in this were (1) how much the closure would actually affect them and the sustainability of the interventions they were involved in and (2) whether they had been informed about the closure being in May 2025 by the time of the interview, which was in March or April 2025. This section therefore looks at the experience of each sub-group separately, highlighting the importance of the theoretical issues of power, unintended effects and the importance of this for participants' interest and motivation to continue their practice. Section 4.4 contains descriptions of each sub-group.[56]

Kisumu County Staff

All staff were aware of the closure and felt that it came at a suitable time, as they perceived that the project's participants were largely capable of continuing practicing the interventions alone.

Community Health Assistants

All CHAs were aware of the closure to some extent and felt confident in the future of the project. They recalled being contacted in November 2024 to explain that the project was closing. However, not all CHAs moved this information down the communication chain to CHPs, as HFA staff had expected. Some reported having actively raised the closure with CHPs, although said they could have done more in this area, but they had limited capacity and many priorities. Some felt that HFA could have done more, earlier, to communicate to CHPs clearly and ensure they were not demotivated. Some CHAs may have taken away a message not to tell the CHPs. Staff said may have been a miscommunication because CHAs were told that the staff would talk to the CHPs later in the year to gather feedback.

Community Health Promoters

CHPs had a range of perspectives of the closure, with some feeling it was negative or that they were unprepared, while others felt confident: Violet (CHP, Obunga) said "We will be able now to do it on our own when they are not there". They recalled from training that the project was going to leave, but had been confused by the closure process. Many had just noticed slower communication with HFA and HFA staff reported receiving text messages from CHPs asking if the project was still running.

Staff said that the reference book given to all CHPs included timelines, although accepted these may not have been read. At the time of interviews some CHPs had also been notified of the imminent closure and

[56] Also see Table 1, for the organisation chart, which demonstrates how these groups relate to each other.

invited to a feedback session[57], which two assumed would involve being told about the project continuing. However, those who had not yet been invited felt concerned, and negatively emotionally impacted by the way communication had changed, even assuming that HFA had lost interest in them. Joyce (CHP, Manyatta-A) said "If you get that information prior, then it prepares you psychologically […] but it wasn't done".

Kitchen Garden Users/Ambassadors

Most KGUs said that they had not known the closure date, but were aware HFA would close at some point. They felt that the closure would not affect them, as they will still have their gardens and assumed that they would retain CHP support. Lilian (KGU, Manyatta-A) said that they had understood that HFA's support would not last forever, but had not fully understood that this meant the project would end. She noted though that it "doesn't mean that we're not going to plant seeds anymore or keep doing the activities". One CHP reported that some KGUs had asked them about the project closing.

Ambassadors and KGUs appeared to have similar perceptions. However, some CHPs and CHAs commented that some Ambassadors had previously received free seeds for their gardens and that they might not be aware that they would not receive these in the future, which might change their engagement in the project.

Market Stall Vendors

The market vendors had less consistent engagement in the project, mostly attending co-creation workshops followed by 1-2 trainings, through which it was made clear that they were responsible for utilising the training. The research participants had had limited contact with HFA since their training. Therefore, there was no clear need for the exact closure date to be shared with them and the closure was not expected to have a major impact on them.[58]

Women's Group (Aquaponic System)

The women's group knew that the project would end, but not when, although they noticed communication becoming infrequent throughout early 2025, and had only recently heard from HFA staff to make arrangements for people to visit the site. Around this time, HFA was intentionally lowering the number of visits the aquaponic consultant made to visit the site, to slowly phase out the project.

[57] All CHPs were eventually invited to a feedback meeting in April 2025 and so awareness is likely to be more widespread after the interviews for this thesis were completed.

[58] An unintended effect of the co-creation process and limited communication was apparent during the interviews, however: Most market vendors had understood that they were promised cash during the training, and, unaware of the closure, were still expecting it to arrive. Staff believed that confusion may have arisen from the co-creation process, where they may have requested cash and not been told, or understood, that this would not be provided.

The perceptions of group leaders and group members was different, with group members feeling that they already owned and ran the aquaponic, making the exact closure date less important. Group leaders, however, were surprised by the closure date being so soon and expressed that having more warning about this would have let them prepare better, as they did not feel entirely capable of continuing. Mildred (Aquaponic, Obunga) started by saying they were prepared, and the closure did not matter but later asked "we still need [HFA][...] will [they] still be having some connection with us?".

HFA Kisumu Staff

One factor in the spread of closure information could be the varying staff approaches. There was not a clear written plan for the closure and the senior staff had limited knowledge of the process. HFA staff were in regular contact throughout the project, but staff in Nairobi felt it was important for the staff in Kisumu to be part of the co-creation and make decisions. More recently, a Kisumu-based staff member understood that it would have been better to engage with the KGUs directly and earlier, and that it would have been more effective for this dialogue to have taken place when HFA was present at nutrition education sessions. They realised that it would have been important to make more people aware of the date and closure plans, to better prepare participants. They were also aware that some participants then assume their involvement in the intervention is automatically over, unless they have seen the impact of the project. Other staff accepted that not everyone would know but expected the information would slowly trickle down through the normal structure.

6.3. Conclusion

Power dynamics seem to have led to unintended effects throughout this closure process. Senior project participants, such as CHAs and County staff, were aware of the closure and felt it had been implemented effectively, but this had not been communicated effectively to other participants. Those with less engagement with HFA, such as KGUs, felt the closure had been broadly implemented well and did not think knowing the exact closure date was necessary. Despite this broad success, the participants sitting between these categories, such as CHPs and women's group leaders, were unaware of the closure date and felt unprepared for it. Notably, they also felt let down by HFA for not having communicated with them clearly and were visibly emotional during interviews. Although HFA staff did attempt to ensure that all groups were aware, they may have underestimated (1) the psychological and practical importance of this information in helping certain participants prepare for closure, and (2) the complexity involved in effectively communicating this to such a large group of people. The effect of this communication process feeds directly into the motivation participants have for future practice and the related dignity they experience.

7. Findings: How prepared are non-staff participants for the future, following the project closure?

This chapter is divided into sections related to the elements of future practice: the interest, skills and resources necessary to continue with the project.

> "You know, in Africa, we are very fine once you guys go forever. Okay. So at least we chip in once. You know, once in a while, you come back."
>
> - Ruth (CHA, Manyatta-A)

7.1. Case Study

Participant responses varied, filled both with a confidence in the activities' continuation while demonstrating a continued reliance on support. The women's group is presented below as a stand-alone holistic case study which is demonstrative of many of the issues and possible future practice of participants, demonstrating how this chapter can be viewed as a coherent narrative.

Women's Group Experience of the Aquaponic System

"When we started the projects, they brought us everything… but it did not come out well."- Mercy (Aquaponic, Obunga)

The women's group share resources and work together in the fish and agriculture business. They were provided with an aquaponic system[59] to raise fish and grow vegetables and were running it independently in May 2025. HFA[60] trained several members to maintain the equipment and ensured warranty policies would support future sustainability. Basic costs, such as fish and feed, were provided in the first year, but the group self-fund water, fish feed, rent, electricity, fish, security and compensate themselves for time worked. When asked, one HFA staff member said this was the most likely of all the interventions to be successful.

The group understood the potential benefits of this intervention, and were heavily involved, with most members tending to the plants and paying to support upkeep. However, they felt that they lost about 80,000 shillings (580 Euros) in the first two rounds of fish harvesting. They faced challenges such as harvesting fish during rainy season, without storage options, meaning the selling price was lower than in dry seasons. Their base costs were higher than HFA expected,[61] which some staff were unaware

[59] See Pictures 4, 5 & 6.
[60] HFA hired a consultant to support the implementation process.
[61] They were encouraged by HFA to find free land to put the aquaponic system on, but when the landowner learnt they were sponsored by the Global North and making profit, they were charged rent.

of, but which limited their profits. Senior members felt that unless a profit was made in the next harvest, they would have to change approach or end the project. The HFA staff felt that this sentiment was due to inaccurate accounting and believe that the aquaponic made a large profit. They questioned whether the group was using the aquaponic to its full potential or needed to "widen their scope of thinking" (HFA staff).

The group felt they were not made aware of the space required for the system and were pushed to find land quickly, pushing them to choose a smaller area. Jane's perception was that the HFA team had been more interested in implementing the project efficiently than in their long-term success and that the project could have been more successful elsewhere. However, most of the women are confident in their ability to navigate any challenges they might face, on the back of the training they have received and their own skills. If the group project becomes unmanageable, they have considered how to adapt the system into individual household fish tanks and gardens.[62]

Picture 6. Seedlings growing in aquaponic system (own photo).

Over half of the research participants said that a freezer would help them to store fish to sell over a longer period. In April 2025, a private donor provided freezers through HFA staff. During informal discussions after this, multiple women said they felt more positive about the future profits.

This case study represents some of the ways in which this project, despite creative ideas and strong encouragement, may not have predicted some unexpected effects, leaving this women's group with some financial issues but without future support.

7.2. Do non-staff participants values and interests align with the project in a way that motivates them to continue practicing the interventions?

When asked, all research participants said that they wanted to continue. Overall, it was apparent that most participants are interested in continuing to engage because they have understood the benefits of the project and want to continue to benefit. CHPs think many of their households have understood the benefits of the nutrition and kitchen garden interventions and have also enjoyed them; Alice (CHP, Manyatta-A) explained that after harvesting her own vegetables "on the table you are just smiling". This is affecting the wider community, with one KGU explaining that his neighbour had copied his garden without any training

[62] Obunga residents helped construct the main aquaponic and so retain the relevant skills to implement this.

or engagement in the project. This could be credited to the co-creation model, as the project was aimed to align closely with the interests of community members from the beginning.

Future CHP engagement will depend (1) on their personal interest/prioritisation and (2) on their support from CHAs and the County, who all pledged to provide this within interviews. County staff understood the benefits of the project, which they believe has supported single mothers, reduced crime and engaged many people. They were therefore committed to championing the project and working towards a restructuring of the County's engagement with healthy food, although some staff were aware that if the work was not introduced to budgets, it would be hard to keep up. It was broadly agreed that not all CHPs have a personal interest in the work and that if they do not have it, the CHAs must work harder to remind and push them to engage their households in these areas. Most CHPs said they understood the importance of the project and were motivated to continue because of it. CHP involvement also motivates participants: Kelvin (Ambassador, Manyatta-A), said that having a direct relationship with his CHP had helped ease his project involvement because "they know us in detail".

Some participants were concerned that if project participants did not understand that HFA had exited, then they might become demoralised from the work, with some participants showing misunderstanding that if HFA was not engaging with them then the work was also over. Staff were also aware of this mentality, especially given the number of projects some participants have worked with, which mean they cannot get particularly invested, but staff felt "the thing that could help break this mentality is communication and preparing the community.". Even if participants do understand, Rose (CHA, Manyatta-A) thought that without "someone beside you pulling you, right, or pushing you" some might just lose interest.

Overall, participants spoke about their passion for the project and were keen to explain ways in which it had impacted their lives. For those with a clear practical path towards continued engagement with the project activities they had been involved in, it was evident that most wanted to continue and understood why continuing would benefit them and their families. This could be credited to the co-creation model and HFA's engagement with participants. Additionally, further consideration of the importance and power dynamics of communication about project closures, could have increased future motivation.

7.3. How do non-staff participants perceive their competencies, skills and capabilities to continue practicing the interventions after the project ends?

> "Everything starts with the training because that is what changes somebody"
>
> - Dennis (County Staff)

All 12 KGUs said "yes" when asked if they felt they had the skills to continue utilising their garden; Anne (Ambassador) said "The ideas they shared with us were let me say magical". They could also clearly explain nutrition knowledge they had learnt, and many explained how it had changed their perspective on feeding their children particularly. Several CHPs referred to *knowledge* as a powerful tool and told anecdotes about families who had become healthier following engagement with the project. The women's group all expressed a clear

understanding of how to run the aquaponic and were clear that with the right resources they could absolutely continue. Overall, the training sessions were perceived as very good, although one market vendor did mention that some deaf women were invited to training sessions without interpreters and so could not gain as much knowledge. Several market vendors were clear that the training has had a long-lasting impact on their businesses and finances, feeling they have gained from the training about customer service. They did comment that being able to attend more sessions would have been welcome.

The most commonly named "favourite memory" or "most effective" activity of the project, were the food cooking demonstrations, led for community members as part of nutrition training. Brian (County staff) said "you could see a bigger crowd coming in to smell or taste this small meal […] actually grown […] within the same informal settlement by their own people". These were funded by HFA, Kisumu County[63] and a participatory model in which the CHPs engaged the households to bring small ingredients or produce from their gardens[64]. As most participants did not believe that HFA or the County were likely to fund this in the future, it would be up to CHPs to coordinate similar events on their own. No future demonstrated plans for this were known of at this stage, and CHAs were concerned that this would limit future knowledge recollection or acquisition. Participants agreed they would only return with a donor and so although many trained households will continue practicing, nutrition training practices may not fully expand into the informal settlements.

Local Structures

Use of pre-existing structures in Kisumu was referenced by several people as something that would help project sustainability, because if someone forgot a skill, they had people still to ask. CHPs will continue working together in other contexts so suggested they will train and support each other. They expressed having the necessary skills and knowledge to continue and there was a Clear understanding that although the project is closing, they keep the knowledge and responsibility for utilising it. County staff said they were inspired to introduce similar models of training into their work and continue practice in that way. The ToT model was questioned by some participants as, although the project reached more people by cascading knowledge, some were concerned by its effectiveness. HFA staff shared concerns about the capability of these trainers: although there had been an attempt to recruit senior and respected community members, they may not have received enough training to effectively train others. Some market vendors thought it had helped somewhat, with several having passed on new knowledge to family members.

Business Mentality

The definition of having necessary skills in this framework could involve the aquaponic owning groups being able to continue using the system, or CHPs being able to continue educating with little or no future

[63] Kisumu County provided resources for larger food demonstrations led by HFA rather than CHPs
[64] Some CHAs understood that CHPs had been expected to spend their own money to fund these, but staff rejected this.

support, from HFA staff and reasonable support from the County. Although this appears to be the case, the staff also trained participants in their business capabilities, including encouraging KGUs to run their gardens like a business and make money from it to fund seeds. Staff expressed their perception that their "business mentality, that is lacking" (HFA staff), linking this to a perception of some participants having a dependency mentality instead. KGUs rarely discussed selling their gardens' produce and it could be argued that some KGUs, and women's group members, may not have all the skills the staff expected of them. Equally, they expressed feeling comfortable with the knowledge they do have.

Movement of Knowledge

An additional issue is that although those who were trained may have knowledge, there is regular movement between the informal settlements and in or out of Kisumu, meaning education will quickly move out of the community. This has positive effects, with some participants saying that they knew of people setting up kitchen gardens and teaching others to, outside of Obunga and Manyatta-A. Movement can also mean stricter or looser regulation from landlords about whether a kitchen garden can be created and how big it can be. However, it can leave kitchen gardens being abandoned, putting a greater responsibility on CHPs to teach new residents how to upkeep the gardens.

Refresher Training

> "The information we give, it will never be enough."
>
> - Lucy (CHA, Manyatta-A)

Many project participants and CHPs said they would appreciate refresher training or additional training on certain topics. Blessings (CHP, Obunga), despite being confident in her knowledge, was unconfident in her ability to continue with the work unsupported and thought she would struggle without refresher training and support. Kelvin (Ambassador, Manyatta-A), asked for HFA training on how to stop his tomatoes getting infected, something he could potentially research or ask for advice from his CHP on. In response to this, HFA staff said that this had not been possible due to funding, and some felt it was not their responsibility, as it should now be possible for participants to train and support each other. County staff also felt that CHPs could have been supported in other ways, such as by being provided with knowledge not just about training but about the programme structure. Brian (County staff) recognised that learning could have improved by having better cross community meetings to learn from what was working across the two settlements.

Overall, it can be seen that training was at a high standard and has led to a strong communal knowledge base, but that the ToT model could have been managed differently for a more effective outcome.

7.4. Do non-staff participants have the necessary resources or materials available to them, or the ability to access the necessary resources, in order to continue practicing the interventions?

When asked what was most effective about the project, many participants mentioned the resources they had been provided with. Notably, the project helped most participants create their own renewable resources, leading to long-term food security for some. Although, overall, a recurrent reference to the importance of resources, especially those which were not strictly necessary, such as stronger fences, within interviews appeared to indicate a reliance on donor-provided resources. This section explores the impact of resources, particularly resource access, on the likely future practice of participants.

It is clear that several structural and environmental issues within the informal settlements raise limitations for resource accessibility[65]:

- Garden fences can be required due to the presence of goats. Staff presented fence options such as thorny branches pushed into the ground, but KGUs worried less stable designs would lead to the destruction of their gardens.
- Poor sanitation and drainage systems in the settlements can affect the food safety of the plants, if gardens get contaminated with unsafe water.
- During droughts, water can cost too much for some KGUs to afford, meaning gardens can wilt.
- Some landlords are not willing to allow residents to create gardens. Other landlords do appreciate the gardens, however.

HFA intentionally designed for sustainable accessibility. Kitchen garden training included education about how to use household objects and about the lack of need for fertilisers, removing one resource barrier from participants' lives as well as benefiting the environment. Additionally, nutrition information was placed within the digital platform that CHPs use with households. When Blessings (CHP, Obunga), was asked what would happen if a fence fell down,[66] she said that HFA has brought them knowledge, not "things". She thinks CHPs would not rely on HFA, but would collect money, potentially using a table banking group, to buy a new fence. She felt that HFA supported her to think in this way. Brian (County staff) agreed HFA had succeeded at designing the interventions for affordability and that this contributed to the likely future practice of participants.

[65] These issues largely impact the kitchen gardens intervention but may be relevant across the whole project.
[66] CHPs were given chain link fences by HFA but said this would likely be unaffordable to average households.

HFA's policy of providing minimal resources was core to the process of designing the project to be accessible. One staff member said this was to avoid participants becoming dependent: "where everything is given for free and then the project stops, everything stops.". Finding a balance was important, however: if HFA provided no resources the project would also "not go anywhere" (HFA staff). Therefore, the training sessions explained how to choose resources at different budget points, and CHPs were asked to support households where possible, for example with seedlings, to ensure the gardens could be adopted by everyone. Naomi (CHP, Manyatta-A) predicted that "with the community where we live, people are used to being given", but that without receiving her HFA stipend it would become harder to share her resources and money with the households she is responsible for. HFA staff understood that the norms of the environment meant some resources were required, such as providing seeds for some early kitchen gardens and small payments for those attending meetings, to ensure motivation. Additionally, to offset the costs to participants, training included capacity-building information such as how to access credit, navigate table banking, or sell vegetables to buy new seeds, to support participants in self-funding future investments rather than relying on a donor.

> "Since we are in this urban setting everything is money, even water"
>
> - James (CHP, Manyatta)

However, many participants said they would struggle, or knew someone who might struggle, to continue engaging with the interventions without future resources being provided. This sentiment appeared to relate to various sub-groups' differing perceptions of the accessibility of resources. Affordability is clearly a deciding factor: many research participants, particularly HFA and County staff, agreed that if the project participants have passion, they will try to continue. It is clear though that if they cannot afford resources they would be unlikely to succeed, making access to these potentially more important than motivation or skills. It is due to this motivation that many project participants were committed to trying to continue anyways "with what is available" (Anne, Ambassador), but motivation alone could not address the lack of resource access.

The example of seeds demonstrates how resource accessibility was perceived differently by participants. HFA and County staff thought seeds were very accessible, while some KGUs and CHPs saw them as a major challenge for the future. The project was designed for seeds to be accessed in multiple ways:

- CHPs received seeds for their gardens[67] or purchased seeds, and some distributed these to ambassadors and KGUs.
- Seedlings could be produced from CHPs' cuttings and gifted or sold to households.
- Seeds could be purchased from a seed bank.
- Households could pool money[68] to share seed purchases.
- Once households have grown their first plants, they can sell them and use the profit on seeds.

> "Because as I say that when you look at economy, some don't even have something to put in the table for that buying seed"
>
> - Irene (CHP, Manyatta-A)
>
> "With enough knowledge and telling them that the seeds are cheap, uh, they can prioritise that […] the problem is prioritisation"
>
> - Rose (CHA, Manyatta-A)

Given these options, HFA staff, County staff and CHAs perceived seeds to be accessible to households. However, CHPs, Ambassadors and KGUs shared concerns that some households would struggle to maintain their gardens unless they received support from CHPs. Few of these participants mentioned the variety of options for acquiring seeds listed above, potentially demonstrating a limitation within training. Cynthia (KGU, Obunga) said she could not currently afford seeds, but was motivated to continue trying. Lilian (KGU, Manyatta-A) described a mother barely affording to feed her children and asked when she would have the capacity to plan beyond daily finances and invest even a little into seeds. Additionally, CHPs expressed concern that Ambassadors who regularly received seeds may lose motivation if they were not provided, although many Ambassadors did state that they would buy seeds. While a County staff member shared they felt a need to teach participants that cash lasts less time than knowledge, one HFA staff member did say they wished they could have done more to support communities living in poverty in establishing their gardens.

An exception to HFA's approach to resources was in giving stalls to a small number of market vendors to lift their products off the ground. While this was a limited intervention, HFA staff said they hoped other people might be inspired by these and use table banking to buy their own platforms.

Many participants stated that the model of using pre-existing County structures was one of the most effective components of the project to support sustainability. However, County staff expressed that there was a lack of financial resources to continue engaging in the activities. Several said that it would be better to implement IDPs with Development partners: Dennis (County staff) said "You know, when you lose a partner, it's like you lose one arm". Although County staff and CHAs are aware that the County's reliance on partners is unsustainable, they also expressed concern that the County might not have the financial or logistical capacity to implement similar interventions alone. HFA staff perceive that this is less relevant

[67] Some of these were funded by Kisumu County and others by HFA.
[68] EUR 0.3-0.6 per household was suggested by research participants for this purpose.

given that County staff are now both trained and the County now has the necessary training resources and County staff experienced in running the training.

It is the nature of any project aiming to have an impact after its funding period, resources will need to be carefully considered. This case study appears to demonstrate that providing too many expensive and non-renewable resources needed for continuation would leave participants in a difficult position if they want to continue. Alternatively, not providing enough resources limits the ability of the least economically able within a community to engage in interventions. This is a careful balance which participants feel HFA managed relatively well, despite some concerns in relation to a few resources.

8. Discussion of the Findings

8.1. Reflections

Chapters 5-7 reviewed the findings which demonstrate the likely capability and future practice of participants, guided by the SPT framework and the ideas of the CA. Although the participants are broadly "capable" and motivated, it can be concluded that their future practice is most likely to be linked to their access to resources. This is demonstrated by the issue of seeds, which some participants felt may determine the continuation of gardens. A key factor in this accessibility will be whether the County staff and CHPs continue to support participants with resources, training and motivation. As demonstrated by (Kain et al., 2016), the County's engagement has previously been a major factor in a similar context.

In relation to the best practice guidelines for project closure in the literature review (Gardner et al., 2005), the project was participatory and considered carefully how to support behaviour change. In this it seems to have surpassed many of the concerns raised in literature (Kothari, 2001., Johnson et al., 2012) about how participation could be a symbolic process. Instead, where possible, HFA did try to engage with their participants, within the full context of their lives, throughout the project. There are many methods and practices demonstrated in this thesis that future IDP staff can learn from, such as the co-creation model and consideration of resource access. However, participants were clear that behaviour change and potential sustainable practice has been hampered by factors somewhat outside of HFA Kisumu's control, such as the short project length, an important limiting factor raised within literature.

This section therefore consists of reflections on four key areas that particularly impacted the HFA project closure and relate to the broader nature of ID: communication about the closure; dependency mindset of participants; external obstacles; and the expectations of IDPs.

Communication

> "Maybe you still know that you're on the programme and then all of a sudden it stops just like that… then all of a sudden it goes. It cuts you; it cuts you" - Violet (CHP, Obunga)

This is an area that was heavily emphasised across literature as vital to project success (Lee, 2017), especially in relation to communicating project closure plans. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, this was not always implemented effectively within HFA. HFA's communication process to CHPs, of asking CHAs to

communicate with them, was important for encouraging County-level ownership. However, the findings clearly demonstrate the unintended effects of this communication sometimes not taking place, not only on practical issues but also mental health and inclusion. Some CHPs were informed of the closure timeline within the context of the thesis interview and were upset or surprised by the news, emphasising the importance of communication for respect and dignity of the project. This issue could have affected the participants future interest and motivation within the project, as staff now recognise, and demonstrates the importance of prioritising well-being within project design, alongside practicality.

Dependency

Dependency[69] is an important factor reflected across this research: the community's relationship with ID strongly affected how they understand their future relationship to a project. Participants in all sub-groups requested additional funding, training or continued support from HFA. The model of community ownership was welcomed and many participants, both County staff and project participants, felt they had all the necessary resources and skills already. Simultaneously, many also expressed that more funding would help. Some HFA staff commented that this happened *due to* their dependency; because they thought a researcher from the Global North could provide funding[70]. The staff's perspective also highlights their view of the project participants, including their assumptions of participants' motivations being financial, or expecting a lower level of capability in the participants than was demonstrated in interviews. Given the tendency of the community towards dependency, this can be somewhat understood but these further assumptions could have acted as a barrier to participant-staff relationships.

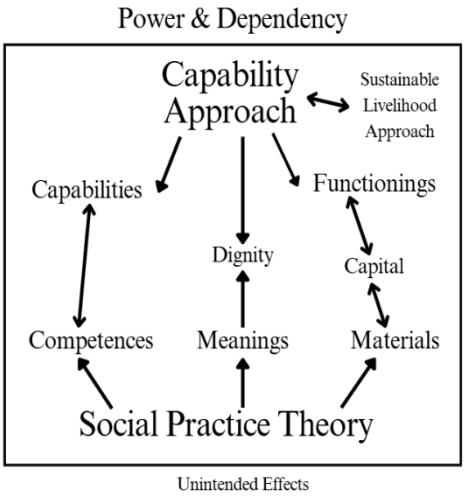


Figure 5. Updated Theoretical framework, adding dependency (own image).

Dependency is closely linked to power within the theoretical framework of this thesis. Therefore, in an updated framework[71] dependency is joint with power, as a factor within the structures in Kisumu and International funding models.

External Obstacles

The variety of challenges faced by HFA that were outside of their control, feeds into a wider academic discussion of the broader nature of ID and the limitations of context. This includes the structures organisations like the EU place on most projects, with reporting requirements and expectations that do not align with a dignifying or long-term process. For example, staff recognised that if they had followed up with project participants to make them aware of the closure through additional workshops, this may have

[69] As detailed in section 3.3
[70] Every interview began with an explanation that the researcher was a student with no organisational power.
[71] Figure 5

been beneficial but would have required an unavailable budget. This aligns with the findings of the literature review and an area in which change is needed.

Realistic Expectations

These issues lead into wider questions within the field of ID and links to the complexities outlined in the literature review. For example, the high expectations in the industry of behaviour change and sustainability appear unrealistic within the current landscape: HFA staff were balancing these aims with pressure from the EU to also reach as many people as possible. Notably, with ID funding reducing, it would be logical for the EU to both want their funding to affect the maximum number of people, whilst also improving the sustainability of interventions so that less funding is required in the future, through principles such as LNOB. However, a sustainable intervention with behaviour change requires more, unlimited, funding for longer, according to both existing literature and a HFA staff member. They compared HFA's shorter timeframe and broader reach to another similar project which was leading to behaviour change after ten years' work with a smaller population.

The findings are clear that interventions involving limited engagement with HFA were not particularly effective: for example, the project engaged many market vendors briefly, which had some clear benefits, but only minor long-term outcomes. Comparatively, working with the CHPs more consistently has had a notably stronger impact on their work and lives in the long-term, and has directly impacted many CHPs interest and motivation to continue the practice. Alongside the HFA staff's experiential understanding that longer projects can lead to more behaviour change, this also aligns with Koch's (2023) arguments about unintended effects; the longer a project is actively involved in someone's life it makes sense that it would be more likely to impact them.

A related example of this is how HFA decided to limit resources with the hope that this would support behaviour change as participants would need to invest in the interventions themselves. Although this was potentially limited by the shorter implementation period, broadly this still appears to have worked, and many participants see limited barriers to participants due to resources. Some groups such as the women's group feel that they did not receive enough early resource assistance to give them a strong start within an expensive and complex intervention. Similarly, many participants were concerned for those on lower incomes in the informal settlements who they felt would struggle to begin a kitchen garden without being provided the first seeds. Although this is related to other issues like dependency, it seems to demonstrate the importance of finding balance between community ownership and support when aiming for sustainable future practice. The balance will be different for every project and HFA broadly seems to have been effective in this area.

Although this thesis has compared HFA's work to industry-based "best practice", these issues raise the question: *is best practice both good enough, or viable at all?* The standard for a project desired in some academic literature is high, with the expected inclusion of all and sustainable livelihood outcomes. It is

complex to balance these expectations against a reality where for HFA to, for example, be able to implement the kitchen gardens without any participant struggling with resource access. Koch (2024) may be right that we can predict unintended effects of projects, but is also right that the structures IDPs exist within can limit this possibility. IDPs are expected to align the two contrasting ideals of continuously reducing budgets and reaching larger numbers of participants, at the same time as increasing the likelihood of future behaviour change and sustainable practice of interventions. It does appear that HFA will lead to future practice, and that aiming towards these targets seems to have motivated the staff to design the project effectively, but these contrasts have also led to limitations and some frustration. This is an issue that donors and researchers should consider in more detail.

8.2. Research Limitations

Target Number of Participants

Due to the quantity of relevant sub-groups involved in the project, a thorough study would need to interview a minimum of 80 participants, to reach a minimum of six of every possible sub-group. A larger group, and particularly a wide scale quantitative survey, would likely have produced more detailed findings, but would have been beyond the scope of an MSc thesis. Particularly given that not all groups were available, the limited timeline and the financial implications of providing gifts or a stipend to each participant, this was not possible.

Access to Research Population

HFA acted as a gatekeeper and engaged all participants, and although this was done based on requested guidelines, there was limited control to ensure an unbiased research population. With the opportunity for additional observation, it may have been possible to gain greater contextual understanding of the community. However, it proved possible to navigate a complex data collection process to speak to a wide variety of participants whose contributions helped to provide a contextual understanding.

Although most participants appeared comfortable to criticise HFA where relevant, the County staff are colleagues of one HFA staff member and were almost entirely positive. Additionally, participants were contacted by HFA staff or CHPs to attend interviews and therefore often arrived assuming that the interview would be conducted by HFA staff. This was clarified at the beginning of interviews. It was not possible to access the research areas without HFA's arrangement, somewhat limiting contextual understanding of the project.

HFA encourages all student researchers to align travel expense quantities[72] and types of gifts[73] with their own normal practices. This methodology was decided to be inappropriate as it might have appeared to add to the impression of the thesis research being linked to HFA and was outside of the thesis budget. Instead,

[72] Different quantities, based on the seniority of participants.
[73] 2 packets of milk and a loaf of bread.

the researcher provided a smaller gift[74] to each participant and kept the specific items out of sight during interviews to limit the impression of similarity.

Translator

HFA provided a recommendation for a translator, and informed the researcher that he had conducted some data collection for the project's Endline report and had a background in nutrition so would be well-equipped to understand the research project. During an interview, a participant explained that they recognised the translator because he was a nutritionist who had taken part in the training and project activities. The translator was consistently professional and translated answers without showing bias, but his presence could have led to concern in participants' responses. However, he did not attend all interviews, and many negative comments were given in his presence.

Understanding of the Project Closure

In all interviews (except those with HFA staff), participants were asked if they were aware the project would close within two months. Although most knew the project would close in the future, many project participants and CHPs were unaware of the specific details and the researcher had to explain the news. Some participants struggled to understand this or made assumptions about what this meant (for example, one women's group member assumed the aquaponic would be taken away). Transcripts were carefully considered before analysis to remove statements that appear to have been made under false understandings.

[74] 2 packets of milk. Travel expenses remained in line with HFA norms.

9. Conclusion

This case study feeds into a wider literature pool and should be joined by additional future case studies, to help IDP practitioners and researchers to better understand important factors within project closure. The conclusion provides clear answers to the research question, which have both social and theoretical implications. These lead to recommendations for future project managers and academics to consider when designing and implementing interventions.

9.1. How do participants perceive the process of closing the project?

Overall, many participants perceive the project closure with sadness and hope for future similar funding, due to the passion for nutritious food which it has inspired. The closure was planned and implemented with intentions that align with some of the best practice for project closure outlined in the literature reviews . However, the process being designed later within the project timeline and the communication method chosen led to confusion, which both some staff and existing literature agree could have been avoided (Lee, 2017).

The co-creation model and engagement with Kisumu County seem to have been key to the overall success. This can be seen in the limited effect the closure is expected to have on KGUs and women's group members, who already feel total ownership of their activities. The various participant groups perceive the process of closing the project differently, based on their seniority within the project, closeness to the project and their level of understanding of the closure. Potentially, more communication about the project closure could have taken place with CHPs earlier in the project timeline, on top of the efforts that were made, to ensure their understanding. Overall, although there were certainly areas that could be managed differently in the future, more of the project has been successful than the literature reviewed might have predicted, demonstrating the theoretical implication that additional similar case studies will build a clearer understanding of this issue.

It appears that any further continuation of implementation of projects or training new participants, such as those moving into houses with pre-existing kitchen gardens, could rely on the interest and resources of Kisumu County. This could include County staff adapting policies and budgets to allow for larger scale implementation, and CHAs motivating CHPs to engage with nutrition issues within their work.

9.2. How prepared are non-staff participants for the future, following the project closure?

Amongst non-staff participants, the **motivation** to continue engaging in interventions or utilising knowledge gained within the project is high, although some are concerned about the practicalities of continuing. There was a large quantity of well-considered **training** and some participants were confident that the community can continue to refresh one another, although additional training would be appreciated by many participants. **Resources** pose some challenges to continuation, especially given the issue of dependency and participant expectations. However, it seems unlikely that issues caused by lacking resources will limit future engagement for most participants, although this could depend on whether the County or CHPs continue providing support. Regardless, given the range of projects and finance groups in Kisumu, it is likely that solutions can be found to some financial or practical challenges.

This case study feeds into a wider network of research aiming to understand key factors in successful project closure, as it demonstrates both effective implementation of best practices and some areas that could be further considered. Although every project is different, recommendations for future projects include:

9.3. Recommendations for Practitioners

- Build in considerations of dependency and the impact it might have on the project, including unintended effects, to project design.
- Effective communication about project closure with all participants is important and should be specific and repeated to ensure comprehension.
- Not being aware of project closure can cause a negative impact on the mental health and participant's preparedness for the future.
- Co-creating projects with participants is beneficial in formulating a project that meets the needs of the community.
- Resources required for a project to be sustainable should be accessible, in the eyes of project participants, and be planned alongside clear alternatives.
- Project closures should be planned early, with consideration for budget requirements that might allow for more effective implementation.

9.4. Recommendations for academia

- Continue producing case studies and additional research within this field, particularly in the area of intended sustainability and related practice outcomes.
- Where possible, conduct longer term research which monitors the effects of project closure over multiple years.
- Further research about the viability of standards for sustainability and best practice in the context of ID budget cuts, will continue to be relevant and support future practitioners.

- Engage further with real IDP implementation. The success of IDPs is crucial to the continuation of the ID concept, so understanding each stage of them is important.

9.5. Concluding Thoughts

This case study demonstrates that co-creating project design in a meaningful way with participants is key to their future interest and engagement. Additionally, in order for projects to be closed in a way that can lead to long-term sustainable behaviour change, adequate thought is required about the closure process throughout the planning and implementing period. Although project teams can take some responsibility for this, if this issue is not prioritised by donors then the necessary budget and work required for a successful closure may not be prioritised either.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Introduction

1. Could you please introduce yourself and what your role is/what your engagement in x organisation is?
    - *Ask more about the organisation as relevant*
2. How did you get connected to the HFA project/*this intervention*?
    - *When did they get involved?*
3. What has your involvement in the HFA project/*this intervention* been?
4. What was the effect of the project on your organisation/life?
    - *Ask more about what interventions they received*
5. Do you know that the project closes and *the intervention* will no longer receive funding soon?
    - *If they do not- explain, including that there is a chance that Kisumu County will incorporate some of the work*

Main Questions

Section 1:

6. Do you remember the timeline/closure being discussed when you first got involved?
    - *If no, "do you remember the idea of it being sustainable/long lasting being discussed?"*
    - *If yes, who discussed it? What was said? Did they understand it? Do they think the people in the wider group understood it?*
7. Can you tell me about more recent times that the closure has been discussed?
    - *Prompts- did anyone talk to you about it since October? (who?) did you feel you received enough information? Do you think the timing was good? Did anyone explain what would change?*
8. Do you think the closure will affect your organisation/life/job in any way?
    - *If no, why? If yes, how?*
    - *Do you think it will affect the people around the organisation?*
9. Do you think it would have made a difference to you or your experience if you had known the closure date?

Section 2:

10. Do you **want** to continue (engaging in the intervention- *specify to the group- i.e. "using your aquaponic system"*) after the project ends?
    - *Why/Why not?*
    - *Do you think the other people involved want to?*
11. Do you think you have any necessary **resources or materials** that you would need to continue (engaging in the intervention) after the project ends, or the ability to access those resources?
    - *Prompt- Has HFA provided anything to you to support the intervention? If so, what would happen if that was not provided next year/when needed?*
12. Do you think you have the **abilities and skills** (such as training) to continue (engaging in the intervention) after the project ends?

*If they say **yes** to "**want**" and **no** to **"resources and abilities**":*

13. Do you think you can continue the intervention without *these things*?
14. What adaptations or changes would be necessary or helpful to allow you to continue the work (at all, or better?)

15. As relevant: In your opinion, what were the practices from the HFA project that you think were well embraced by the community and that you think will continue even after the project closes out?

Everyone:

16. So, in five years time do you think (*The intervention in question)* will still be running?
    - *Why/Why not? Does anything about the closure (timing/approach/communication) affect your answer?*

17. This is not an offer, but if the staff could provide anything else to you in the last weeks of the project, to ensure it could run for five years, what would it be?
    - *Prompt- could be training/resources/money/time*
18. What do you think has been effective about how the project has tried to ensure that this intervention will be sustainable in the future?
19. What do you think has been less effective, or could have been done differently/better, to ensure that this intervention will be sustainable in the future?
    - *prompts- in terms of how it was communicated/implemented/how you were supported?*
20. How did you experience communication & support systems from HFA, especially in the last 6 months?
21. Do you have any other information else you'd like to share?

Closing:

22. Would you like to share a memorable moment or interesting experience you had while working with the HFA project?
23. *For leaders/involved community members:* What do you hope for the future of your organisation, as a whole?

24. As relevant: What else would you like to see happening to increase consumption of nutritious foods in Kisumu?

Appendix 2: List of Respondents

As noted within the thesis, most identifying information has been redacted, due to the specific anonymity concerns related to this study.

Pseudonym	Activity	Informal Settlement (where available)
Ruth	CHA	Manyatta-A
Lucy	CHA	Manyatta-A
Caroline	CHA	Obunga
Rose	CHA	Manyatta-A
Violet	CHP	Obunga
Faith	CHP	Manyatta-A
James	CHP	Manyatta-A
David	CHP	Manyatta-A
Blessings	CHP	Obunga
Naomi	CHP	Manyatta-A
Irene	CHP	Manyatta-A
Alice	CHP	Manyatta-A
John	County Staff	N/A
Samuel	County Staff	N/A
Peter	County Staff	N/A
Dennis	County Staff	N/A
Brenda	County Staff	N/A
Brian	County Staff	N/A
Mercy	Aquaponic	Obunga
Sharon	Aquaponic	Obunga
Esther	Aquaponic	Obunga
Elizabeth	Aquaponic	Obunga
Mildred	Aquaponic	Obunga
Jane	Aquaponic	Obunga
Grace	Aquaponic	Obunga
Daniel	Kitchen Garden	N/A
Margaret	Kitchen Garden	N/A
Anne	Kitchen Garden (Ambassador)	N/A
Steven	Kitchen Garden	Manyatta-A

Lilian	Kitchen Garden	Manyatta-A
Joyce	Kitchen Garden	N/A
Purity	Kitchen Garden	Manyatta-A
Cynthia	Kitchen Garden (Ambassador)	Obunga
Kelvin	Kitchen Garden (Ambassador)	Manyatta-A
Jackie	Kitchen Garden (Ambassador)	Manyatta-A
Matthew	Kitchen Garden	Manyatta-A
Doris	Kitchen Garden	N/A
Nia	Market Vendors	Manyatta-A
Beatrice	Market Vendors	Manyatta-A
Diana	Market Vendors	Manyatta-A
Lilac	Market Vendors	Manyatta-A
Catherine	Market Vendors	Manyatta-A
Staff	Staff	N/A
Staff	Staff	N/A
Staff	Staff	N/A
Staff	Staff	N/A

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form: Agreement to participate in this MSc. Thesis research project:

Exploring Perceptions and Experiences of Project Staff and Beneficiaries on Project Closure: A Case Study of the HealthyFoodAfrica Project in Kenya

Thank you for taking the time to consider my MSc. Thesis research project. I can try to answer any questions you might have.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gather data on people's opinions and experiences of the HealthyFoodAfrica project closing in Kisumu in order to create a case study for use in my Thesis.

Procedures

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The main use of the information you provide will help me to understand your thoughts about the project closing. The study will take between 15-60 minutes to complete, depending on the discussion. There will be a minimum of 40 participants, with a minimum of four from each target group I interview.

Risks, discomforts and Benefits

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. The benefits of participating in this study include the potential for contributing to the understanding of the project closing.

Confidentiality

Your contributions in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be associated with any data collected, and any data collected will be kept confidential. I will anonymise details of your work and practice where necessary or possible.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the research privacy, the treatment of research participants or this study project, please contact Jessica Baker at j.k.baker@students.uu.nl. If you have any complaints regarding the research or the researcher, you may contact the supervisor Harrison Awuh at h.e.awuh@uu.nl.

I can confirm that (please tick box):

□ I have read and understand the information sheet and consent form of this research project.

□ I have had the opportunity to discuss this study. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.

□ I agree that my participation in this research project is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the study until the moment that the study has been published, and to decline to answer any individual questions in the study without needing to say why.

□ I understand I will not be paid for my participation, although may be given a gift/travel reimbursement at the discretion of the researcher.

□ I understand I can ask questions at any point during, before or after the activity about any aspect of the research.

□ I understand that I can request any photos with identifiable features to be blurred, made non-identifiable or removed from the research.

□ I understand that the data collected for this study will be kept confidentially either in a locked facility or as a password-protected encrypted file on a password-protected computer of the researcher. Audio files or transcripts will be deleted after the completion of the research.

□ I understand that the information collected for this study will be used only for research purposes only, such as a MSc thesis, articles, book chapters, published and unpublished work and presentations (if relevant).

□ I consent to my interview/focus group discussion being audio-recorded, and understand I have the right to ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off at any time.

□ I understand that my name will not be used on any documents, presentations or other output of the research.

□ A pseudonym of my own choosing can be used in this research:_____

"I agree to participate in this individual research project and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet."

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

"I agree to abide by the conditions set out in the information sheet and I ensure to minimalise harm done to any participant during this research."

Signature of researcher:_____ Date: _____

Please fill in the following information. It will only be used in case you want to be sent a copy of interview notes and/or transcripts [so that you have the opportunity to make corrections; if relevant].

Phone Number:_____

Email:_____

Appendix 4: Coding Tree

Parent Code	Child Code	Description	Strategy
Planning	Timeline of Closure	Any information to add to the timeline of when events (discussions/training) took place	Deductive
	Length of project discussed	Any date/timeline referenced showing participant awareness of timeline	Inductive
	Understandings of what is affordable to different people	All discussion of affordability	Inductive
	Project design	How the project was set up/planned before implementation	Inductive
Implementation	HFA Effective	Response to question "What was effective?", or other similar comments	Deductive
	HFA Ineffective	Response to question "What was ineffective?", or other similar comments	Deductive
	Support from HFA	Specific instances of the HFA team directly supporting a participant	Inductive
	Project effects	Ways in which the project has impacted the local community	Deductive
	Unexpected Consequences	Ways in which the project has impacted the local community (unexpected)	Deductive
	Learnings	Specific things people remember learning about	Inductive
	Community Interest	Community (outside of participants) being interested in or influenced by the work of the project	Inductive
	Movement in/out/around informal settlements	Related to issue of people (& their knowledge) transferring with their migration	Inductive
	EU	EU mentioned	Inductive
Preparation for closure	5 years time	Responses to the question "Will this intervention be running in 5 years"	Deductive
	Want (Practice)	Response to question "Do you want to continue?", or other similar comments	Deductive
	Resources (Practice)	Response to question "Do you have resources?", or other similar comments (additionally, code specific resources)	Deductive
	Skills (Practice)	Response to question "Do you have skills?", or other similar comments (especially all discussion of training & any gaps in learning raised)	Deductive

	Specific resources	Resources which people identify as easy to get or hard to access without funding and suggest would be important for the intervention	Inductive
	Seeds	Anything related to the debate of whether seeds are an affordable resource	Inductive
	Aware of closure	Response to question "Are you aware of closure?", or other similar comments	Deductive
	Knowing dates	Participants are aware of specific closure date/month	Deductive
	Closure discussion	Closure process/experience- quite broad	Deductive
	Intention/Certainty for future	People asserting what they intend to do	Inductive
	Adaptation	Activities people are doing to get around the challenges of the project	Inductive
Attitudes/emotions	Quote	Short quote which represents a common sentiment of participants	Deductive
	Dignity	Issues of respect, dignity, especially between stakeholders	Deductive
	Nice memories	Any nice memories referenced which are clear & succinct & make a point	Deductive
	Prayer	Participants call for religious assistance with their interventions	Inductive
	Hand holding metaphors	Referencing hand holding	Inductive
HFA	HFA team mentioned	Any reference to specific team members or important comments about whole team	Deductive
	Unaware of HFA	Participants not knowing what HFA is	Deductive
	Assumption that researcher works for HFA	People talking to researcher as if they are from HFA	Inductive
	Requests to HFA	Anything people ask for that they want from HFA	Inductive