

FACTORS AFFECTING PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND DONOR'S SUPPORT. THE CASE OF AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (ADS) IN UMKADADA LOCALITY, NORTH DARFUR STATE, WESTERN SUDAN

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Abstract- This research aimed at studying the main factors affecting the sustainability of Donor funded projects, in Darfur, with particular emphasis on the Area Development Scheme (ADS) in Umm Kaddada Locality/ North Darfur State, as case study. Different Methods were used to collect the related data. These include the Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA), observations and interviews with officials in the Central Beneficiaries Organizations using stratified random sample of seven village sanduq societies out of 51 societies. Descriptive and analytical methods were used to analyze the data collected. The results achieved revealed that despite the withdrawal of the foreign assistance, the project existed and performed some activities. Such results are attributed to the approach adopted by the project which promotes the direct involvement of beneficiaries in all project phases. Such results are also attributed to the formation of the mechanism of project sustainability from the previous government counterparts before the cession of the foreign support, with continuous financial support from the State Ministry of Finance. The results achieved also revealed that there was a lack of progress in the implementation of some activities, such as that of the central and grass-root beneficiaries' organizations and the range and pasture. Such results were attributed to the lack of alternative national support that can cover the void left by the withdrawal of the external support, the discontinuous of supervision for the central and grass-root beneficiaries' organizations, as well as the absence of effective professional executive management for the central beneficiaries' organization.

Keywords: Project Sustainability, community participation, community based organizations (CBOs), Village Sanduq Society (VSS), Revolving fund.

I. INTRODUCTION

The role played by donor agencies in improving living standards of families/households, groups and individuals in Darfur region cannot be ignored. There has been a significant increase in activities from donor agencies such as Community-Based Organizations (CBO), Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) among others with regards to funding of various projects especially in areas where the government has failed to deliver services to the poor vulnerable people. Western Savanna Development project in South Darfur, Jebel Mara Rural Development Project in West Darfur and the Area Development Scheme in North Darfur (ADS) to mentioned a few are examples of these

projects. In spite of general agreement that sustainability of improvements in quality of life and valued benefits should be the goal of development assistance, there continue to be many projects undertaken by international development organizations fail to sustain benefits or perform poorly after the termination of donor support. Despite this problem, no study has been conducted to analyze the causes of the termination of these projects.

The main objective of the study is to analyze the underlying factors influencing the sustainability donor's funded projects in Darfur region after the termination of donors' support with particular emphasis on the Area Development Scheme (ADS) in Umm Kaddada Locality/ North Darfur State, as case study.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section two reviews the related literature on the subject under study presented by various researchers, scholars, analysts and authors. Section three discusses materials and methods. Section four presents the results achieved while section five discusses the results. Section six offers some concluding remarks and recommendations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition of Sustainability

Sustainability "has become one of the most over used and abused words in the development vocabulary" (Tafara, 2013). The concept gained wider use after the World Commission on Environment and Development published "*Our common future*" (also known as the Brunt land Commission) which defined it as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987).

The concept arose in response to economic growth models that characterized development models over the last half century. It was eventually recognized that such models did not adequately address social inequalities and led to environmental degradation and other socio-economic problems.

In the most obvious sense, the term "sustainable" refers to something which can be kept going. It also refers to resource use and lifestyles which do not damage resources or society (Tafara.OP.Cit). Sustainable development seeks to meet the

needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future” (Ibid). “Sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs.” Mihelcic et al. (2003) highlighted that sustainable development refers to the design of human and industrial systems to ensure that humankind’s use of natural resources and cycles do not lead to diminished quality of life due either to losses in future economic opportunities or to adverse impacts on social conditions, human health, and the environment.

Other authors emphasize sustainability in relation to the development of underdeveloped regions. For example, Barbier (1987) links sustainable development to ‘increasing the material standard of living of the poor at the “grassroots” level, which can be quantitatively measured in terms of increased food, real income, educational services, healthcare, water and sanitation, emergency stocks of food and cash, etc’ (http://www.legrand.com/EN/sustaoamle_development_description_1287.html). Moreover, the concept of sustainable development is based on a set of requirements. It must allow the basic needs of present and future generations to be fulfilled with regard to demographic constraints, such as: access to water, education, health, employment, and the fight against hunger or malnutrition (Ibid). Another aim of this type of development is to improve quality of life, which involves easier access to medical care, social services, culture, and therefore also social well-being. In addition, respect for rights and freedoms and the promotion of new forms of renewable energy such as wind, solar, and geothermal power, are important aspects of sustainable development (Ibid).

B. Project Sustainability

Project sustainability is indicated by the ability to continue to meet objectives defined in term of benefit levels (Hoclgkin, Op.Cit). Project sustainability can be viewed as the ability of a project to initiate a process by which benefits are maintained. IFAD Strategic Framework 2007-2010 gave the following definition of sustainability: “Ensuring that the institutions supported through projects and the benefits realized are maintained and continue after the end of the project” (IFAD 2007j).

In the context of donor-funded development programs and projects, sustainability can be defined as: the continuation of benefits after major assistance from a donor has been completed / withdrawn (Okun, Op.Cit). Key points to note in this definition are; the focus is on sustaining the flow of benefits into the future rather than on sustainable programs or projects.

Donors usually have the objective of helping to improve the livelihood of the local communities either through direct participation or providing funding to supplement government's budgetary allocation to the various sectors. Unfortunately, the funds provided by most of these donors are project-driven short-term funds, which do not factor into the whole funding mechanism policies which will ensure that such projects become sustainable after donor funds have been withdrawn (Heeks and Baark, 1998). The presence of a well thought out

strategy that not only looks at how a donor funded project is completed, but also the means to continue with the project after donor funds have been withdrawn is critical to the project's sustainability (Young and Hampshire, 2000).

The World Bank’s definition in Bamberger and Cheema is that project sustainability can be viewed as capacity of a project to continue to deliver its intended benefits over a long period of time (Bamber & Cheema, 1990). The USAID argue that a development program is sustainable when it is able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial and technical assistance from an external donor is terminated (USAID, 1988 cited in Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998, p.91). Furthermore, a project is considered sustainable if it continues to deliver a high level of benefits after the donor ends major financial, managerial, and technical support (Lieberson et.al, 1987).

An operational definition which permits some degree of ordinal ranking by sustainability will have to be narrow and specific. For instance, in a study of three African countries, Bossert (1989) defined sustainability in term of outcomes persisting at least two years after project termination; and in a comparative study of five countries in Africa and Central America (1990), he defined it as outcomes at least three years after project termination (meaning completion of construction). Honadle and VanSant (1985), in a study of sustainability of integrated rural development projects, defined it in term of "the percentage of project-initiated goods and services that is still delivered and maintained five years past the termination of donor resources."

C. Factors affecting Project Sustainability

Judging whether a project and its benefits are sustainable is important as a means of determining project success. However, understanding what factors influence sustainability is even more important for designing better projects in the future.

According to Admassu *et.al*, (2002) an important factor for the sustainability of projects is the genuine involvement of local people as active participants and equal partners whose concerns and experience are intrinsic to the project's success. The level of community support determines whether a project becomes established, how quickly and successfully it consolidates, and how it responds and adapts to meet changing needs (USAID, 2009). Williams, (2003) observes that failure by communities and other stakeholders to take up ownership of projects have plunged community projects into immense financial huddles threatening the sustainability and hence threatening them to seize operations daily. It is therefore important that involving local communities, starts at the planning stage, when decisions are being made about what type of project is required. Further, Ingle (2005) highlighted that, for a project to achieve sustainability, it needs to be implemented through a strategic approach. The strategic approach incorporates four main elements, future Orientation: assuming things will change, and planning to maximize benefits which can be derived during and from that change; external emphasis: recognizing the diversity of the project environment and the many dimensions which impact on project outcomes, including technology, politics, society, and

economics; environmental fit: planning for a continual fit between the project (both benefits and delivery institution) and its environment, including mission, objectives, strategies, structures, and resources; and process Orientation: planning and management priorities evolve in an iterative cycle of conscious and deliberate learning from experience as the reality changes.

Khan and Hare (2005) pointed out that for an NGO funded project to be sustainable it has to develop a sound institutional base, a strong programmatic approach, and sufficient funds. At the institutional level, the NGO needs to establish the internal systems, structure, and work culture that promote strong leadership and positive organizational image, foster the belief that people are willing to support products and services they find valuable, and facilitate the development plans for sustainability.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Project Background

The ADS programme was designed to focus resources on stimulating village-level economic activity and local self-reliance, through strengthening of community level institutions for sustained development. It targeted to achieve:

1. Establishing a fully functioning organizational framework and processes, for planning and implementing a comprehensive community based development programme;
2. A measured increases in wealth, and improvement in the quality of life of the area's inhabitants, through the implementation of community management sub-projects;
3. The identification, through study and listing of viable development alternatives, which can be subsequently, introduced as community-managed sub-projects.

The ADS approach promotes the direct involvement of beneficiaries in planning and implementation of small-scale, community-based development initiatives. Activities are based on the principle of community participation and cost recovery. A main element of the approach is the provision of development capital at the community level, commonly referred to as the sanduq.

The ADSs, ARSs were chosen on criteria of areas with resources potentialities for development, and areas that are poor in resources, or strained due to environmental or human factors. Umm Keddada and its expansion area, falls within the last group, being marginal in terms of resources, of low rainfall, prone to drought, experiencing food shortage, with high rate of population out-migration. The project started in 1988, centred on Umm Keddada Locality Council, which later became known as the consolidation area, of a total population of 80,000 persons, covering 51 villages. It extended thereafter into El Laait and Tiweisha Locality Councils, as expansion area, of 149,000 indigenous population and 37,000 IDPs, reaching 52 village councils in the two localities.

The State and the Locality, by jurisdiction, are corporate bodies, with full local government autonomy in running their legislative, financial and developmental affairs, while the locality acts as a political body, with the functions of mobilization and maintaining of local security.

The hierarchy of government ties up at the grassroots level in village Salvation Committee, and Native Administration, with functions complementing the civil administration responsibilities. Through the State and the Locality are fairly structured in terms of organization, staff cadres and working laws and regulations, they suffer shortages of financial resources to run activities and implement development programmes due to the poverty of the local economies, which does not generate sufficient revenues. Despite the above shortcomings, the system shows a high level of population involvement in public matters, through the different community bodies.

As to project relationship with other partners it is streamlined through the following bodies:

Steering Committee: The steering committee (SC) at the national and programme level composed of UNDP, Federal government counterpart authority (Ministry of Finance & National Economy/ Ministry of International Cooperation) State authorities, Cooperating Agencies: OPS, FAO etc., community representatives & projects management. The role of SC is to set up policies, and supervision of programme implementation.

Advisory Committee: The Advisory Committee (AC) chaired by State Ministry of finance & Manpower (Executing Agency) and composed of the Commissioner for East Darfur Province (Deputy Chairperson) representatives of Line Ministries, representatives of Localities, Community Leaders, cooperating UN Agencies at State level, Government counterparts and Project management. AC is responsible for approval of project annual work plans.

Localities:

The project coordinate with localities in set up implementation of project activities priorities in related sectors (Health, Water etc..) localities help in community mobilization in early stages of project preparation, provide required counterpart staff, localities also represented in project advisory committee.

Other UN Agencies:

The project coordinates with cooperating UN agencies and NGOs working in the project area to avoid duplication and exchange experiences, UN agencies and NGOs also participate in the project Advisory Committee meetings.

The project, through its three phases has had an effective impact on strengthening communities' governance by implementing its bottom up approach.

This is well shown in:

- 1) The strong partnership of beneficiaries in the project philosophy and implementation modalities, to a level of internalisation of the project, as a development model;
- 2) Organization of a project management set-up, that through effective needs response, succeeded in moving project objectives;
- 3) Maintenance of the necessary linkages with the State Government through establishment of an Advisory Council, with political and technical representation, which enabled a close follow-up of the project activities; And

- 4) Emergence and registration of three companies: Umm Keddada (consolidation area), Tiweisha, and El Lait, Gar El Nabi (expansion area) to function as investment and development companies with their capitals raised from the grass root sanduq finances (25%). Two of the companies (Umm Keddada and Tiweisha) received also support from the project in form of equipment and premises.

In summary the project has passed through 4 organizational phases in the last two years:

1. 1999: assumed full organizational capacity with filling of all vacant posts, (reaching 72 staff members);
2. 2000: prepared its phasing out plan with the organizational set up, accordingly modified (cancelling of 22 posts);
3. 2000-June 2001: with emerging financial shortage, only 22 skeleton staff were kept; And
4. July 2001- March 2002: keeping of a core staff of 6 persons for the hand over and evaluation process.

B. Methods of Data Collection

The research used the participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) for data collection, where a check list was carefully prepared that includes the general and specific questions pertaining to the sustainability of the development projects with emphasis on the ADS project at Umm Kaddada Locality of North Darfur State. Different methods of PRA like group discussions; interviews and discussions with beneficiaries, members of different village development committees, and technical staff members; and personal observations were employed to produce primary data. Moreover, secondary data were also collected from documents, books, journals, and, others sources from project and government officials, and concerned department and agencies in and outside the project area.

However, the primary data was collected from the selected sample and other sources about the performance of the ADS institutions for the year 2008 as well the secondary data about the performance of the same institutions were collected for the year 2000 (one year before the withdrawal of the external funds).

1. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The village will be the sampling unit. The ADS defines a village as a cluster that consists of a main village and some satellite ones. A village cluster is the administrative unit which is usually under the control of a single *Sheikh* (or more than one in some cases), have a single popular salvation committee, and have a single ADS village development committee and *Sanduq* (village *sanduq* society VSS) that are managing sub-projects that benefit the whole village cluster population or some individuals in village. The ADS has formulated 51-VSS in already existing village clusters in the locality.

The villages were grouped according to their performance at certain point of time. Accordingly, and benefiting from the

ADS previous information (progress reports & the VSSs annual performance reports), the villages were classified into three strata based on their performance in the year 2000, which divided them to; Good, Medium or low performance. After this sampling frame has been drawn, 7-villages were randomly selected from within the different groups.

Beneficiaries are the main primary data sources in this study. Therefore, a group discussion was organized with some members of the executive committees for each selected VSS (7- 9 members), including women. The discussion was guided by the check-list. Lastly, a total of 105 persons were included as a sample population for primary data source, this comprise the grass-root and central beneficiaries organizations members and other officials and project staff at the locality and state levels.

2. Methods of Data Analysis

The descriptive analytical methods were used to analyze the findings. The quantitative data collected from beneficiaries; technical staff members and village *Sanduq* societies using the check-list, interviews and discussions as well as the observations were used and analyzed to examine the problem under study.

The data collected from the ADS institutions about their performance in the year 2008 was analyzed and compared with the respective information about the performance of the same institutions in the year 2000, and consequently the results and findings of the research were drawn, which has reflected the degree of sustainability of the project.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents indicators of the projects sustainability beyond donor's supports by comparing the project performance between 2000 and 2008 namely in the field of institutional, human, production, environmental capacity buildings and women participation in project activities.

A. Institutional Capacity Building

Comparing the institutional capacity building activities between 2000 & 2008, we observed the relative decrease in the number of activities performed in the year 2008, as shown in figure number (4.1) bellow; with the exception of the few number of meetings held by the VSSs in 2008, the rest of activities were in hold. This could be attributed to a number of factors e.g. lack of implementing unit (CDU), lack of funds, lack of professional competent executive management for the CBO ..etc but the most effective factor that had a negative impact on the implementation of these activities during the year 2008 was the lack of supervision for the beneficiaries organizations (both central and grass-roots).

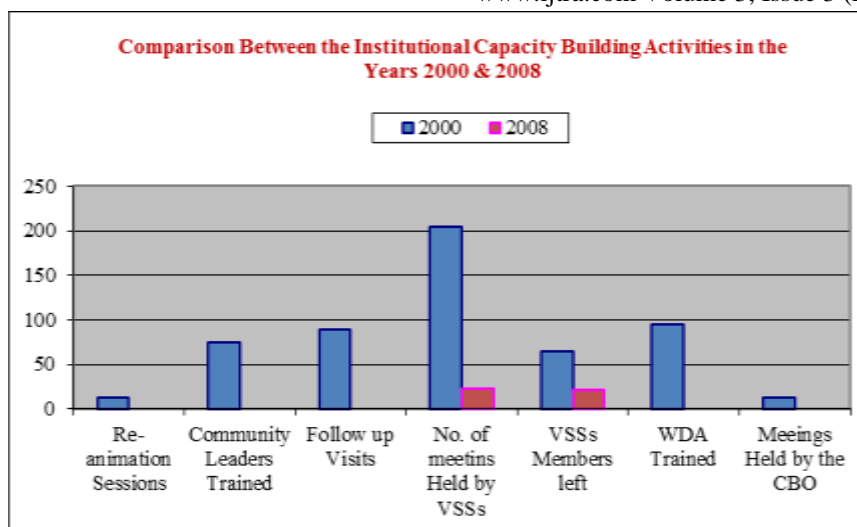


Figure (4.1): Institutional Capacity Building

Source: Researcher's own survey results

A. Human Capacity Building

Figure (4.2) bellow shows the comparison between the human capacity building activities in 2000 and 2008. The human/ social services activities implementation during 2000

was found to be relatively acceptable, due to availability of funds and implementing staff. While, it seems to be drastically reduced in 2008, due to lack of funds and implementing staff, etc.

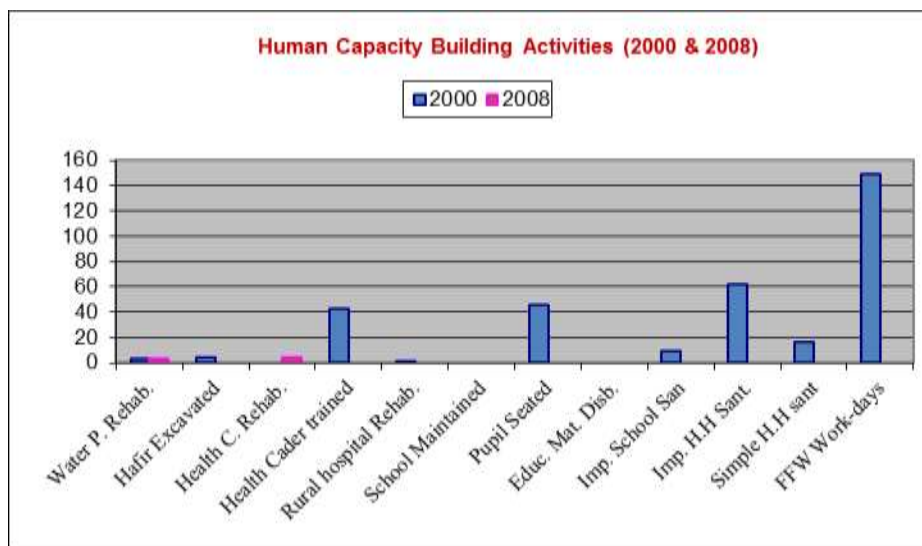


Figure (4.2): Human Capacity Building

Source: Researcher's own survey results

B. Productive Capacity Building

Figure (4.3) bellow, shows the productive capacity building activities in the year 2000 & 2008. It's found that in the year 2000, while the project was fully operational through the existing respective project units (the technical unit; divisions of; agriculture and animal resources) and the beneficiary's organizations (central and grass-root ones), while in the year 2008, there was a sharp decline in the implementation of the productive capacity building activities, especially of the VSSs and CBO. Generally, there was stability in the activities of agriculture and animal resources, though in some cases the activities implemented in 2008 even better than that of 2000 e.g. distribution of the agricultural inputs, village agricultural extension agent training, animal vaccination and animal treating. This is due to the linkage of

these two project divisions with the respective government departments early before the withdrawal of the external funds and consequently the government counterparts of the two divisions were the first who join the project mechanism of sustainability.

Meanwhile, the productive capacity building activities for the beneficiary's organizations in 2008 were far behind the expectations; with the exception of the communal sub-projects receipts, the entire other CBO and VSSs income generation activities were completely inactive. The role of supervision is one of the determinant factors of sustainability of the community based rural development project activities, although the ADS project has implemented the bottom up approached and involved the local communities in all steps of project implementation, but when it comes to the financial

transaction it may require effective supervision and appropriate micro-credit procedures as well as efficient community institutions with proficient CBO executive managements.

However, despite the fact that modern and traditional institutions have facilitated the process of setting up committees and the coordination between them, the development process remains slow (ADS IAS, 1996).

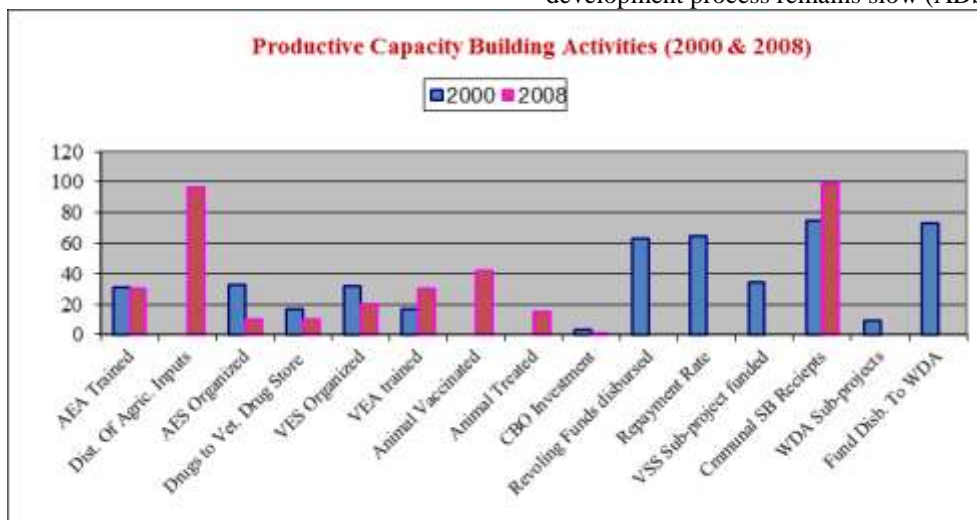


Figure (4.3): Productive Capacity Building

Source: Researcher's own survey results

C. Environmental Capacity Building

In figure (4.4) below the environmental capacity building activities were reflected. Both the forestry and range and pasture sub-projects were well established during the period of project implementation up to the year 2000. While in the year

2008, still most of the forestry activities were going on, smoothly with the same previous rate of implementation. However, the range and pasture activities were not preceding well, which is negatively affected by the absence of range and pasture counterpart in 2008.

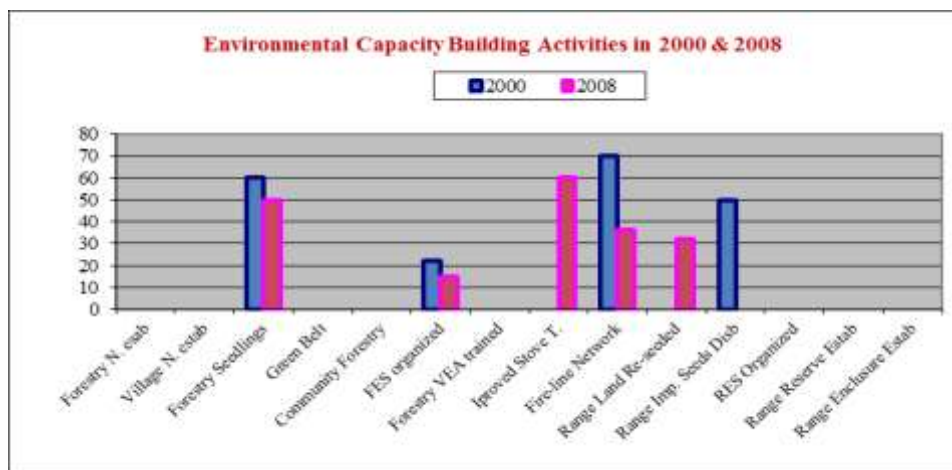


Figure (4.4): Environmental Capacity Building

Source: Researcher's own survey results

D. Women Participation

Women participation in project activities; sub-projects and community institutions in 2008 were found to be low compared to their past activities (in 2000) and actual needs as well as the role performed by them in productive, and community management. However, no more activities were performed by women institutions during this period other than the previous women specific activities (sub-projects) funded by the women societies, utilizing the funds allocated for women. Moreover, women contribution in decision making process was also examined, but found to be negligible, due to men domination of the leading and decision making position in the community organizations.

V. DISCUSSION

This study depicted that despite the withdrawal of the foreign assistance; the project existed and performed some activities including institutional, human, production, environmental capacity buildings and women participation in project activities. Such results are attributed practically to the ADS approach which promotes the direct involvement of beneficiaries in planning and implementation of small-scale, community-based development initiatives. Activities are based on the principle of community participation and cost recovery. The main element of the approach is the provision of development capital at the community level, commonly referred to as the sanduq. This finding is in line with Chappel,

(2005) who urged that by their support, community ensures the success of a project through collective efforts to increase and exercise control over resources and institutions on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from control. In decision making the stakeholders endorsed the project budgetary allocations, vetted the employees to work in the project, proposed the policies to be implemented. In the sharing of development activities the stakeholders approached strategic personalities and institutions to aid in management of the project, and in lobbying for support from the government and private sector.

The findings are also similar to Oakley and Marsden (2007) who posited that stakeholders' support brings together individuals, families, or communities who assume responsibility for their own welfare and develop a capacity to contribute to their own and the community's development. In the context of development, community participation refers to an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receive a share of project benefits. In their support, the community participates in the community projects and therefore saves the projects resources which can later be channeled to produce more benefits to the project.

The study established that the project has facilitated participation of local communities in development initiatives in the study area, encouraged residents to take ownerships of their own community resources, enhanced partnerships between the local community and the government or non-governmental organizations. The findings are similar to Roseland et al., (2005) who indicated that project sustainability involves community participation in a collective decision-making process that meets the social, cultural, environmental, and economic needs of the community. Sustainable community involves development of a local and self-reliant economy that does not damage the social well-being of communities.

Such results are also attributed to the formation of the mechanism of project sustainability from the previous government counterparts before the cession of the foreign support, with continuous financial support from the State Ministry of Finance

The results achieved also revealed that there was a lack of progress in the implementation of some activities, such as that of the central and grass-root beneficiaries' organizations and the range and pasture. Such results were attributed to the lack of alternative national support that can cover the void left by the withdrawal of the external support, the discontinuous of supervision for the central and grass-root beneficiaries' organizations, as well as the absence of effective professional executive management for the central beneficiaries' organizations.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study aimed at establishing the factors affecting the sustainability of the Area Development Scheme (ADS) in Umm Kaddada Locality of North Darfur State after the termination of donors' support.

The results achieved revealed that despite the withdrawal of the foreign assistance, the project existed and performed

some activities due to effective stockholders' participation in all project cycle in addition to the formation of the mechanism of project sustainability from the previous government counterparts before the cession of the foreign support, with continuous financial support from the State Ministry of Finance. The results achieved also revealed that there was a lack of progress in the implementation of some activities, such as that of the central and grass-root beneficiaries' organizations and the range and pasture. Such results were attributed to the lack of alternative national support that can cover the void left by the withdrawal of the external support, the discontinuous of supervision for the central and grass-root beneficiaries' organizations, as well as the absence of effective professional executive management for the central beneficiaries' organization

Based on the above mentioned results, the research offered the following recommendations:

1. Adopting encouraging development policies at grass-roots levels, such as exemption of development inputs from custom duties and taxes.
2. Involvement of the relevant government departments in all phases of the development projects with a suitable support to cover the administrative costs and implementation of some activities in order to sustain them for longer period.
3. Involve the local communities in all phases of these projects with giving women a chance in decision making in all project phases and organize the beneficiaries in relevant institutions, legalize them and provided with reasonable and continuous support.
4. Build the capacities of the government counterparts and beneficiaries to enable them to effectively manage such projects after the cession of donors' support.
5. Gradual withdrawal of the donors' support and formation of the national mechanisms to ensure the gradual transition of these projects to them smoothly.
6. Supervision by all actors and beneficiaries intuitions on these projects after the withdrawal of donors' support, and recruitment of qualified professional executive management to run the central beneficiaries' organizations.

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List of Acronyms:

- ADS: Area Development Scheme
 AC: Advisory Committee
 ARSs: Area Rehabilitation Schemes
 FBOs: Faith-Based Organizations
 CBOs: Community-Based Organizations
 GOS: Government of Sudan
 IDPs: Internally Displaced Persons
 NGO: Non-governmental Organisation
 PRA: Participatory Rapid Appraisal
 SC: Steering Committee
 SVDC: Sub-Village Development Committee
 VSS: Village Sanduq Society
 VDC: Village Development Committee
 UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
 UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
 WFP: World Food Programme