The Role of Donor Flexibility in Downward Accountability

by

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Abstract

This research examines how donor and funding flexibility can be fostered to achieve downward accountability in development projects. It offers a case study example of a Canadian province's 2006–2008 food security initiative that was found to have had flexible funding and provides an example of conditions necessary to provide flexible funding. The findings first suggest there are varying degrees of funding flexibility, and that they are consistent with different models of development. Specific to the provision of flexible funding, the research indicates that adopting a process-focused approach to development will enable donors to provide flexible funding. It is also identified that accountability measures need to be adjusted to reflect a more qualitative approach that prioritizes the target audience's assessment of outcomes.

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Acronyms

ABCD	Asset-Based Community Development
ACE	Active, Creative, Engaged
APF	ACE Project Facilitator
CBFS	Community Building for Food Security
DDD	Doing Development Differently
EIR	External INGO Representative
IEPF	International External Project Facilitator
INGO	International Not-for-profit Organization
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LTL	Large Town Leader
NGO	Not-for-profit Organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBM	Results-Based Management
SCL	Small City Leader
SDOH	Social Determinants of Health
STL	Small Town Leader
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic Development and Social Affairs

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0. Introduction

This thesis research examines the relationship between donor flexibility and downward accountability in development work. International aid and development have been an integral part of human security and peacebuilding since the establishment of the Bretton Woods Institutions and the implementation of the Marshall Plan to ensure the reconstruction of Western Europe after World War II (United Nations Department of Economic Development and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2017). Furthermore, there has been a proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) over the past three decades with approximately 37,500 active in the world in 2018 (Brass, 2018). The prevalence of NGOs and the corresponding increase of international development efforts have attracted significant attention and been the subject of much research. One body of research provides compelling evidence that traditional, or blueprint (Brinkerhoff & Ingle, 1989) development is disconnected from the communities it portends to help: i.e. it takes a 'top-down' and technocratic approach that is biased towards the interests of donors. It is also argued that traditional development takes a deficit-focused approach and is unsustainable, not only because it creates a dependency on external experts rather than building local capacity, but also because it is often ineffective and at times, even detrimental to communities (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005; Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015; Isidiho & Sabran, 2016; & Scott et al., 2017). The evidence indicating the overall ineffectiveness of traditional development has driven the Doing Development Differently (DDD) movement initiated by the Building State Capability Program at Harvard University (2014). However, the pull of the technocratic approach to development is strong, and its impetus was not unwarranted as it reflects donors'

need for accountability to ensure that funds are being used efficiently, effectively, and are not subject to corruption (Carman, 2010).

A literature review follows to better understand the disconnect between the concept of donor flexibility and its practice. This literature review focuses on models of development, accountability, and funding flexibility. Based on the gaps in the literature, a line of enquiry was developed into research questions. The Methodology and Methods section (following the literature review) outlines these research questions. It also describes the case study approach that was adopted with the goal of investigating the extent to which funding for a Canadian food security project, Community Building for Food Security (CBFS), was flexible and the factors that impacted the degree of flexibility. The Findings section proceeds with a summary of the most significant findings of this research as they relate to: a continuum of flexible funding, a process focused approach to development and accountability. Finally, the Discussion section compares and contrasts the findings of this research with those outlined in the Literature Review. The conclusion offers recommendations for how funding flexibility can be effectively implemented and provides future research topics helpful to move this work forward.

1.0 Literature Review

The authors and papers included in this literature review were selected because they relate directly to the themes of this research study. The intention was to present research pertaining to the theories around development funding and accountability and how these theories have been operationalized. The majority of literature included in this review is peer reviewed and was found through searches made on Google Scholar ©, the Royal Roads University Library, and academia.edu and by identifying sources common to multiple papers. Key search words included: international development, funding flexibility, donor flexibility, accountability, downward accountability, trust, asset-based community development, community-driven development, and participatory development.

The literature review introduces the literature then highlights key literature pertaining to models of development, accountability in development, the role of funding flexibility, and concludes with implications of the literature review's findings.

1.1 Background

Traditional accountability of NGOs and recipients to the donor is often referred to as upward accountability. At the opposite end of the accountability continuum is downward accountability, which is donors' and NGOs' accountability to the recipients and communities where they fund and implement development projects. The process model of development (Brinkerhoff and Ingle, 1989) and similarly, Chambers' (1994) participatory approach are examples of development models that promote downward accountability. These approaches advocate for communities to be consulted and engaged with during the project

development, implementation, and evaluation phases. It is an iterative process where the project design is co-created as information is gathered and understanding is gained. Contrary to upward accountability which relies on the untampered implementation of best practices, participatory development contributes to projects that tend to be experimental in nature (Brinkerhoff & Ingle, 1989).

In an attempt to reconcile donor needs met through the technocratic blueprint model with recipient needs met through the process (or participatory) model, Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) propose a structured flexibility approach. They suggest that structured flexibility finds the middle ground between the blueprint and process models of development. This is accomplished by providing the parameters and conditions necessary for upward accountability while still allowing enough flexibility to respond to context and enabling downward accountability.

In the spirit of structured flexibility and to strike the right balance between upward and downward accountability, the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness; subsequent 2008 Accra Agenda and 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation; outlines a framework for partnership between donors and partner countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008, 2011). In Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness the OECD (2005) specifically outlines that:

14. **Partner Countries** commit to:

- Exercise leadership in developing implementing their national development strategies through broad consultative processes.

- Translate these national development strategies into prioritised resulted-oriented operational programmes as expressed in medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual budgets (**Indicator 1**).

- Take the lead in coordinating aid at all levels in conjunction with other development resources in dialogue with donors and encouraging the participation of civil society and the private sector.

    15. **Donors** commit to:

- Respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it (p. 3).

    The issue of consistent, fair, and manageable funding conditions along with the reporting requirements of donors and their impact on development has been the subject of much debate for decades. There is significant research that indicates the reporting requirements of donors have a negative impact on citizen participation, even though NGOs and donors both acknowledge the importance of community engagement in development. The scope of criticism ranges from the de-politicization of NGOs (Ferguson & Lohmann, 1994; Scott et al., 2017) to the impact of Results Based Management (RBM) on oversimplifying interventions (and reducing responsiveness to changing and local circumstance), therefore reducing potential impact (Gasper, 2000; Sjostedt, 2013). Despite the persistence of these criticisms for over three decades, many of these concerns persist. In fact, recent progress reports for the Grand Bargain and Making Development Co-operation More Effective both found that donors have not yet met their own commitments to making funding flexible enough to pivot when context changes (Metcalfe-Hough, 2018; OECD, 2016), a dynamic made only

more relevant now with the rapidly unfolding COVID-19 crisis. The Food and

Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2019) had similar findings

in their most recent progress update on the Multi-partner Programme Support

Mechanism (FMM) where they claim that "[i]ncreased levels of volume of flexible

and predictable funding are needed for FMM to make transformative impacts…"

(p. 85). While there has been a great deal of research regarding the causes of

these shortcomings in development, this research attempts to address how the

tension between donor and NGO upward and downward accountability might be

resolved and reconciled with the value of participatory development.

1.2 Models of Development

Long before Chambers (1994) was arguing for a participatory development approach, Arnstein (1969) was advocating for citizen participation in development with her ladder of participation. She claimed that "…it [citizen participation] is the means by which they [the have-nots] can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society" (p. 216). While Chambers (1994) does not reference Arnstein (1969), he advocates for development to engage citizens in a manner consistent with the top three rungs of Arnstein's ladder: partnership, delegated power, and citizen control (see Figure 1.0 below). As an example of this, and consistent with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the World Bank committed between five and ten percent of their annual development budget between 2002 and 2012 to community-driven development projects (Wong, 2012). However, despite recognizing the importance of citizen and community engagement, Williams (2004) argues that many development initiatives only engage in what Arnstein (1969) refers to as degrees of tokenism: informing, consultation, placation, and a version of neo-colonialism.

Figure 1.

Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The figure was a visual of Arnstein's "Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation" (p. 217). The first two rungs are manipulation and therapy and are categorized as manipulation. Rungs three, four, and five are: informing, consultation, and placation respectively and are classified as degrees of tokenism. The final

category is degrees of citizen power and include rungs six, seven, and eight as: partnership, delegated power, and citizen control.

Note. Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation is from "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" by S.R. Arnstein, 1969, *Journal of American Planning Association, 35:4,* p. 217.

The extent of tokenism in development is interesting because traditionally NGOs had strong community ties, representing community interests and advocating on their behalf. However, over time this role has shifted. NGOs have become depoliticized and their connections with civil society have weakened (Scott et al., 2017). This shift is associated with a greater emphasis on being accountable to donors' agendas and the application of RBM, requiring a more technocratic, rather than relationship-centric, approach (Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015; Scott et al., 2017). Furthermore, Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) assert that "[a]lthough recognizing the need for a vibrant civil society, the donor community's narrow emphasis on NGOs and 'results' has curtailed its effectiveness when it comes to facilitating transformative development" (p. 708).

Further complicating matters, Poskitt and Dufranc (2011) posit that "[c]ivil society organizations face the challenge of building their capacities in the context of divided societies, competing agendas and scarce resources" (p. 3). These difficulties could be significant contributors to what Kostovicova (2010) describes as 'NGO-ization'. According to Kostovicova (2010), 'NGO-ization' is a technocratic approach to development that crowds out local, grassroots, and traditional civil society, eliminating the opportunity for meaningful capacity building. The phenomenon of NGO-ization results in an incongruency between what is actually needed for capacity building and what is provided in terms of

expertise and parachuted in 'best practices' (Galtung & Tisne, 2009). Historically, this has resulted in local capacity depletion as it has created "…a dislocated new civil society, which is technical and specialized in mandate, neoliberal in outlook, urbanized and middle class in composition, and which responds to the goals of the international community rather than the society in question" (Marchetti & Tocci, 2009, p. 204).

Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) assert that in order to return to their roots and contribute to transformative social change, NGOs must shift away from the role of service delivery expert, reconnect with community, and utilize their intermediary position to connect grassroots movements with those who develop and institute policy. They go on to argue that NGOs are well situated to leverage their position and connections (geographically, institutionally, functionally, and philosophically) for the benefit of broader social movements and societal transformation. Mathie and Cunningham (2005) suggest that a shift in accountability to focus on qualitative measurements like process-oriented evaluation, relationship development tracking, and descriptions of how social capital and assets are fostered and mobilized could be helpful in prioritizing sustainable community impact over donor determined quantitative outcomes.

1.3 Accountability

The accountability movement was born of a narrative about NGO corruption, mismanagement of funds, and skepticism regarding program effectiveness (Carman, 2010). The OECD (2015) claims that "[a]ccountability is about setting clear goals and targets, being responsible for delivering on them and accepting potential sanctions for lack of compliance with commitments" (p. 67). In general, the heaviest accountability emphasis has been focused on program outcomes and the introduction of results-based management or the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), as it is essential to know that development funding is achieving its intended outcomes. However, Gasper (2000) argues that "… the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) tends to over-specify objectives: to over emphasize control as opposed to flexibility when essaying a path forward" (p. 1). Furthermore, Sjostedt (2013) asserts that this drive for results hampers creativity and the emphasis on measurement leads to simplified, easy to measure, short-term interventions; rather than more complex, meaningful, and long-term investments.

At the other end of the spectrum, based on a case study of Norway, Lindkvist and Dixon (2014) argue that outcome measurement is weak among their government aid contributions because the government is more concerned with 'feeling good' than 'doing good'. In other situations evaluation is difficult because NGOs lack evaluation capacity and often do not have long enough timelines to be able to measure long-term impact (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2008). Moreover, Mansuri and Rao (2012) claim that "[d]emand-driven, competitive application processes can exclude the weakest communities and exacerbate horizontal inequities" (p. 188). The exclusion of vulnerable communities and

populations due to prohibitive application processes defeats the purpose of development. However, there is need to measure the effectiveness of development, to do so a balanced approach that can justify development funding expenditures without being onerous, stifling creativity, or undermining the impact of the work is required.

To strike this balance, the OECD (2015) argues that accountability requires partners to agree on shared principles, and that international development co-operation should consist of: countries prioritizing and leading their own development efforts, an emphasis on sustainable impact, stakeholder engagement, and accountability at all levels. Similarly, O'Dwyer and Unerman (2008) propose a shift away from hierarchical (or upward accountability) to holistic accountability. They claim that hierarchical accountability still has a place in holistic accountability in the form of progress monitoring; however, holistic accountability has a longer timeframe and is only accountable to the mission of the project. Holistic accountability is compatible with downward accountability in its value of projects' beneficiaries as "[a]dvocates of holistic forms of accountability tend to recognise that every individual has a basic right to participate in decisions on matters which might impact upon them, irrespective of the power which that individual holds in relation to others" (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2008, p. 804).

As an example of the decision making right that O'Dwyer and Unerman (2008) advocate, Andrews (2014) completed a case study on a Mexican women's empowerment initiative that exhibits the potential power of grassroots advocacy on NGO mandates. The Zapatista Movement was initiated by an NGO

to empower indigenous women in the Chiapas region of Mexico. The project had multiple chapters that were funded by over 70 different NGOs. Less than three years into the initiative, the Zapatista membership decided the focus should shift from women's empowerment to economic development. With overall success, they advocated for the NGOs funding the movement to take up the new cause. Andrews (2014) asserts that there are three major factors that determined which NGOs were able to adjust and support the new direction: access to flexible funding, relationships with the beneficiaries, and horizontal accountability (peer pressure) between participating NGOs. Andrews' (2014) findings around funding flexibility have particular relevance to this research.

1.4 Funding Flexibility

Funding flexibility in development can be defined as the source of funding as Andrews (2014) defines it "…income from sources such as dues, product sales, speaking programs, or grants with subjective or abstract requirements" (p. 100). Particular to Andrews' reference to grants with flexible parameters, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IACS) (2016) definition of fully flexible core contribution used in the Grand Bargain Agreement is "[f]inancial contribution to the aid organisation budget, fully flexible (within the boundaries set in mandates, governing body regulations, etc.)" (p. 16). Furthermore, The Grand Bargain refers to flexible funding as unearmarked funding and suggests that even in the category of unearmarked funds there is a continuum of funding flexibility. The continuum includes fully flexible funding, fully flexible core contribution to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and core contribution to an aid organization. The goal for The Grand Bargain's unearmarked funding is increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness of aid delivery.

Funding flexibility can also be defined by what funding flexibility can offer a project. For the purposes of this research, Honig and Gulrajani's (2018) definition of flexibility is applied: "Flexibility involves seizing opportunities, recognizing dead ends, encouraging innovation, and changing direction when necessary… responding to an uncertainty works best with fewer formal rules and structure, and more empowered sub-organisational decision-making (i.e. decentralisation of decision authority)" (p. 71). This definition fits best for this research as the research is examining the role of donor flexibility in downward accountability, not merely access to flexible funding.

Ban Ki-moon (2014) argued in favour of flexibility in his speech at the Interactive Dialogue of the President of the General Assembly on Elements for an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, where he asserts that "[w]e need an inclusive, robust yet flexible accountability framework". Furthermore, the FAO (2019) found that "[i]ncreased level of volume of flexible and predictable funding are needed for FMM [FAO's Multi-partner Programme Support Mechanism] to make transformative impacts…" (p. 85).

The value of donor flexibility and downward accountability is widely understood and has begun to be reflected in development agreements and planning efforts. Metcalfe-Hough et al. (2018) observe that:

In May 2016, 18 donor countries and 16 aid organisations (including UN entities, INGOs, and the Red Cross Movement) signed a 'Grand Bargain' outlining 51 mutual commitments across ten thematic workstreams—all aimed at improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid (p. 1).

A key component of the Grand Bargain is a commitment from participating donors to increase non-earmarked (flexible) funding to 30% of their total donations annually by 2020 (IACS, 2016).

Despite the recognition of the importance of donor flexibility and commitment to it, Metcalfe-Hough et al. (2018) found that while a few donors made significant progress in this area, "… a number of other donors faced major legal, administrative and political constraints at institutional level and were unable to make substantial progress" (p. 55). They also claim that there are questions of whether donor flexibility is passed along from the NGOs that receive the funding to their beneficiaries. The overall reality of the challenges around achieving funding flexibility and committing to the DDD movement are highlighted in the

Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) 2016 white paper on this subject. They

suggest that the DDD movement is impeded by: disabling environments, strict

reporting, lack of buy-in, maintenance of the status-quo, and difficulties with

mobilization.

In their 2016 progress report on The Global Partnership for Effective

Development Cooperation the OECD and United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) (2016) recommend that donors "[a]llow innovative and

alternative [development] approaches to emerge and be tested" (p. 78). This

supports a departure from evidence-based best practices to tailoring approaches

to the context which they are being implemented and evaluating the

effectiveness of new approaches in specific contexts. Honig and Gulrajani (2018)

support this recommendation and advocate for the application of contingency

theory to donor flexibility to encourage innovation and context specificity. They

assert that contingency theory and donor flexibility are dependent on trust of

frontline staff and community members, and that a lack of trust (warranted or

unwarranted) is the greatest barrier to donor flexibility and are required for the

DDD movement to be successful.

1.5 Implications

The literature indicates a disconnect between the need to prioritize

community driven development and its actual realization. There is evidence that

if donors capitalize on the unrealized potential residing in communities; relinquish

some control in program design and outcomes; and adopt more process

oriented, qualitative accountability measures that increasing the prevalence of

community-driven development is possible. Therefore, this research attempts to

determine how flexible funding can be operationalized to help shift the balance of power from the donors to the communities.

2.0 Methodology and Methods

2.1 Background

The primary purpose of this thesis is to determine how funding flexibility can be mobilized more frequently. A case study was identified to investigate how this can be accomplished. Key informant interviews were completed with case study project participants, NGO and donor representatives, and professionals in the development field external to the case study. The external professional interviews are combined with the literature to corroborate or question findings from the case study. The research aims to answer the key questions identified later in this section by drawing from these three sources. What follows is the rationale for and explanation of the methodology used.

It was determined that a case study methodology would be most effective to focus and frame the research in order to understand how flexible funding works in. The case study selected was a Canadian provincial food security project that my community participated in. I was the leader of the project in my community and perceived the overall project to be flexible and able to respond to the unique context of our community. It seemed that the Donor and NGO strived to close the gap between their values and practices around downward accountability, and that the project would provide a concrete example of how flexible funding can be implemented and what impact it can have on downward accountability.

2.2 Rationale

Case studies are a valuable form of in-depth qualitative research. Overall, qualitative research is descriptive and context-sensitive (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Johnson and Waterfield (2004) explain that qualitative methodologies excel in being able to identify and provide a deeper level of analysis and understanding of values associated with institutional practices and behaviours. In order to establish this understanding, multiple sources of data are collected in the subjects' natural environment and analyzed to provide a well rounded and thorough exploration of the research question (Harrison et al., 2017 and Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research's ability to capture and synthesize what is happening in a complex environment with multiple levels of influence lends itself well to this research. The development landscape is extremely complicated with multiple actors and influences that can impact decision making and project implementation from situation to situation (Pouligny, 2005). The decision to use a qualitative case study research methodology for this study was based on the extent of context sensitivity in development and multi-level perspective of the research question that a case study could unpack.

There are numerous case study definitions, ranging from general in nature to specific. Simons (2009) provides the definition that aligns best with the reason that this research used a case study approach. She claims that a "[c]ase study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or system in a "real-life" context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led" (p. 21).

The case study, as a qualitative research approach, has roots in anthropology and sociology (Harrison et al., 2017). Sociologists and anthropologists used case studies to understand how people interpret the world and make sense of their lives (Harrison et al., 2017). Harrison et al. (2017) assert that qualitative research struggled to gain traction in the positivist era of the 1960s and 70s when quantitative research was considered the most, if not only, legitimate form of research. However, constructivists began to emerge in a variety of fields all around the same time and started to challenge the positivist domination in research methodology. They accomplished this by exhibiting the depth of analysis and meaning that qualitative research and particularly case studies can facilitate across a wide variety of fields of research (including political science, education, health, and social sciences) (Harrison et al., 2017). Over time, case studies have increased in popularity and have proven their rigour and value in understanding phenomenon within context.

With respect to development, case studies are particularly prominent as context analysis is essential to development efforts. Contexts are rarely comparable across communities, countries, and regions in a way that is too often presumed in quantitative analysis, such as on the impact of globally agreed policies. The premise of this research study was underpinned by the importance of context and understanding the complex nature in which development occurs. This study was predicated on the assumption that downward accountability is essential to development work because those whose lives are to be impacted by the work should be the drivers behind the work. This value is consistent with that of the case study research methodology (Simons, 2014). Specific to accountability research in development, precedent for employing a case study

approach was previously presented in the literature review. Andrews (2014) used a case study approach to examine conditions that caused or prevented NGOs to participate in downward accountability when faced with pressure from the Zapatista movement to diverge from their initial goal of women's empowerment to economic development. In the analysis of her findings, Andrews (2014) identified three trends that she admits may not be transferrable from context to context in their entirety, but she argues they offer insight into conditions that could be tested either by practitioners or researchers in other contexts to determine their generalizability.

2.3 Research questions

The subject of this case study was a Community Building for Food Security (CBFS) initiative that was implemented in several communities of a Canadian province from 2006-2008. The CBFS project was initiated through relationships developed by an NGO with local community leaders primarily employed by government. The NGO applied for funding through a fund that was dedicated to building community capacity around the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). This case study was selected because the researcher had been a participant in the project and perceived it to be a flexible initiative that was responsive to community context and without onerous reporting requirements at the community level. This perception was tested in interviews with CBFS project participants from other communities to determine whether it was consistent with other participants' experiences.

The overarching research questions were tailored to understand what stakeholders mean when they refer to flexible funding, how flexible funding is

achieved, and the implications of providing flexibility. The specific research questions were:

- **What does flexible funding mean to recipients, NGOs, and donors?**

  Hypothesis: NGOs and recipients will define flexible funding differently, with donors having the most conservative definition and recipients having the most liberal.

- **How do donors pursue accountability when providing flexible funding in contrast to when providing targeted funding?**

  Hypothesis: Accountability measures for flexible funding will be more qualitative and less onerous in nature than targeted funding, which will be more quantitative focused and time consuming.

- **What conditions or qualities do recipients, NGOs, and donors deem essential to enable flexible funding? How are these commitments to flexibility reflected in a project's vision, mission, and guiding principles; formal procedures; standard contracts; and their practices?**

  Hypothesis: The donor will have valued community participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project. Furthermore, this value will have been reflected in donor documents like the call for proposals, funding requirements, and reporting processes, as well as in practices such as relationship-building and autonomy provided to the NGO and recipients.

- **What evidence is there that the use of flexible funding enables downward accountability?**

Hypothesis: Funding flexibility contributes to downward accountability and evidence of that will come in the form of communities' self-reporting a sense of control and the freedom to design their projects to respond to their unique contexts. Additionally, the community action plans will reflect diversity in outcomes and activities from community to community.

- **Does flexible funding contribute to any unintended consequences? If so, what?**

Hypothesis: Some projects will not have been completed or will not have attained their projected outcomes when provided flexible funding.

2.4 Methods

      To test the hypotheses, relevant project documentation including environmental scan results, the project proposal, call for expression of interest, training resources, community action plans, and project evaluation and reporting documents were collected and analyzed. These documents were provided by the lead Project Facilitator and donor representatives. A key component of the research was the semi-structured interviews completed with the following people: the lead Project Facilitator, one NGO representative, two donor representatives, the Project Evaluator, and four community leaders. The interviews were completed over the phone or Zoom (a web-based video conferencing platform) depending on the participants' preference. They averaged an hour in length and were recorded with consent by two digital voice recording devices.

2.5 Sampling

The interviewees were selected through a combination of selective and snowball sampling. The first interview was with the lead Project Facilitator who also provided contacts of community leaders and the lead NGO representative. The second interview was with the NGO project lead who spearheaded the grant application and served as the intermediary between the project facilitators and the donor. The NGO leader connected the researcher to one of the donor representatives involved in the project and a community leader. The sample continued to snowball from there. The first two community leader interviews were secured through snowball sampling; the other two were the result of a group email sent to all the community leaders explaining the research project and inviting them to participate. Considering the length of time between the project completion and the research, many of the email addresses did not work. However, the email did generate interest from two community leaders that rounded out the community leader representation. The four community leaders who participated in the case study were representative of three different regions in the province. The interviewees are summarized in the table below.

Table 1.

Interviewee Summary Table

Role	Role Description	Gender	Interview Format	Date
Project Facilitator	Lead Project Facilitator contracted by the NGO	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	August 2019
NGO Representative	Lead NGO Employee, Project Supervisor	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	September 2019
Donor Representative 1	Donor Project Officer (early in the project)	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	September 2019
Large Town Leader (LTL)	Volunteer Community Leader	M	Semi-structured, one-on-one via telephone	September 2019
Small City Leader 1 (SCL 1)	Community Leader as part of employment	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via telephone	September 2019
Small Town Leader (STL)	Community Leader as part of employment	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	September 2019
Donor Representative 2	Donor Project Officer (later in the project)	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	October 2019
Small City Leader 2 (SCL 2)	Community Leader as part of employment	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via telephone	October 2019
External INGO Representative (EIR)	INGO Representative outside of the case study	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	November 2019
International External Project Facilitator (IEPF)	International Project Facilitator outside of the case study	M	Semi-structured, one-on-one via Zoom	November 2019
Project Evaluator	Contracted Project Evaluator	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via telephone	February 2020
ACE Project Facilitator (APF)	Lead Project Facilitator for Active, Creative, Engaged Communities (another provincial initiative that occurred around the same time as CBFS), some CBFS project communities also participated in ACE.	F	Semi-structured, one-on-one via telephone	February 2020

This research is framed within the context of a specific case study. However, all the research participants had various funding experiences, and many spoke from the perspective of a funder and a recipient. Additionally, one of the community leaders interviewed as part of the case study only participated in the project's community of practice; his community was not an official project participant. However, the project was so inclusive, communities who were not official project participants did not necessarily differentiate themselves as such. This is reflective of the flexible nature of the CBFS project; but combined with the breadth of funding roles and experience of the research participants, it made it challenging to keep the case study well defined. In fact, it led the researcher to another project happening in in the province (Active, Creative, Engaged (ACE) Communities) around the same time as the CBFS project that was arguably even more flexible in nature than the CBFS project. This will be discussed in further detail in the findings section. Being transparent about this fact is important to contribute to the external validity of the research findings.

Aside from those who did not respond to the email invitation, one person—a project facilitator—actively declined to participate in the research due to a lack of time and concern over the time lapse and potential for forgetting details. While this concern illustrates the disadvantage of potential inaccuracies when researching a project that happened 12 years ago, there are advantages as well. The most significant advantage is a detachment from the project that supports objectivity because the funding is no longer available, and honest reflection on the project's performance cannot have a negative impact on anyone's employment or future funding. The other valuable advantage is the ability to reflect on the long-term impact and sustainability of the project.

In addition to the case study, interviews were completed with three development professionals external to the case study to determine if the lessons about funding flexibility and downward accountability drawn from the case study could be applied to a broader, international context. One of these interviewees was with a large International Non-Governmental Organization who was engaged in this research through a contact of the researcher. The second interviewee was identified through the Canada Helps website and responded to an email invitation to participate. He was with a small NGO in Nepal. The final interviewee was a Canadian community development professional who provides training to community developers around the world. She was a facilitator of the previously mentioned ACE Communities project and was identified through the case study research. The initial criteria for participation outside of the case study was representatives working internationally on development projects, not aid, that focused on food security. These criteria were too restrictive, and it proved difficult to find people willing to participate in the research through 'cold-calling'. Therefore, an adjustment to snowball sampling for participation outside of the case study was made.

2.6 Data Analysis

The researcher manually transcribed each of the interviews and completed a thematic analysis of the transcripts, which was also done manually. The responses were analyzed in terms of each research question; common themes of supportive and contradictory data were identified and coded; finally, key quotes were collected as evidence. These data were collated and presented in a narrative fashion to answer the research questions. The next section begins with an overview of the CBFS Project and then describes the research findings in detail.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Case study summary

The CBFS Project took an asset-based community development approach to increasing food security primarily in rural communities in a Canadian province between 2007–2009. It was initiated by a group of community dietitians from across the province who were concerned about children's nutrition. They were working with an NGO representative who described her role to be:

> *a good listener and to scan the environment… so, for me, this seemed like a good way of supporting our members and their identified need. It wasn't me coming in and saying 'here is what I can do for you'; rather, 'what can I do for you? What would move your agenda? What would help with your deliverables within your regions?* (NGO Representative, September, 2019)

It was with the support of this NGO representative that the dietitians completed an environmental scan to better understand the landscape of children's nutrition in the province.

The results of the scan indicated a need to focus on increasing the understanding of and capacity to enhance food security in general rather than focusing specifically on children's nutrition. They were aware of an organization with a fund that supported population health-based initiatives to impact the SDOH. The organization (Donor) believed that the SDOH were not just affected by regional context but even more by local context. They had a guiding document that emphasized the importance of grassroots program development; the engagement of the target population in identifying the root problem and developing a solution; and the importance of building upon existing assets in

communities. Recognizing the alignment of values, the NGO applied to and secured funding for the CBFS Project through this fund.

The Project Evaluator (February, 2020) described the objective of the CBFS Project as:

facilitating community engagement in bringing people together in communities to work on food security in whatever way the community defined that. It was different in each community, but they used the five A's around access and availability [adequacy, acceptability and agency] and had people look through that lens; and then they had three levels of food security: the relief of hunger level… the capacity building level… and the systems change level… They did a lot around community capacity building, or as [the Project Facilitator] would say, around community capacity strengthening because there was an assumption that there was some capacity there; and used an Asset-Based Community Development approach, so not top-down at all… there was flexibility in what people could do as long as they were in that food security envelope and working on one of those levels and using the five A's lens.

Communities' participation in the CBFS Project was voluntary and community initiated. The NGO released a call for submissions, and the communities that responded had already identified food security as an issue they were trying to address. In their call for submissions and project criteria, the CBFS Project outlined the following "Key Factors for Success in Community", which they borrowed from a Canadian Parks and Recreation Association initiative called Everybody Gets to Play (2000):

- use a holistic approach;

- be flexible;

- commitment – strong, committed leadership for the long term, not a one-shot project;

- innovation;

- participatory – group served involved in planning and delivery;

- respect and understanding;

- a positive approach – building on strengths, rather than on perceived weakness;

- resource[s] – time and people.

In addition to the above characteristics, successful applicants exhibited a commitment to enhancing food security in their community; albeit in different ways. Some communities planned to initiate specific programs (such as collective kitchens, good food boxes, and community gardens), others wanted to increase the understanding and awareness of food insecurity and advocate for policy changes that would support food security. Ultimately, the only project requirements were that the work had to advance community food security in one way or another, each community hold a local CBFS Workshop that culminated in a community action plan, and they had to participate in an ongoing community of practice.

The remainder of this section shares the research findings, which are covered in three sections under three major themes:

1.0 Continuum of flexible funding;

2.0 Process focus; and

3.0 Accountability.

This is then followed by the conclusion.

3.2 Continuum of Flexible Funding

It was important to understand how each of the research participants defined flexible funding to be able to consider the participants' responses in context of their interpretation of what flexible funding means. The hypothesis for how flexible funding would be defined was: Donors, NGOs, and recipients would define flexible funding differently with donors having the most conservative definition and recipients having the most liberal. It was found that while there were varying definitions of flexible funding from conservative to liberal in nature, it was not the Donors who had the most conservative definition but rather, the Community Leaders. This speaks to the Donors' understanding of and commitment to funding flexibility and supports the underlying assumption of this research—that the CBFS Project was designed to be flexible in nature.

The research participants defined funding flexibility in three main ways: 3.2.2 budget flexibility, 3.2.3 project flexibility, and 3.2.4 full autonomy. Although not offered as a definition of flexible funding, the research also identified a related phenomenon of recipient flexibility. This phenomenon will also be explored in this section (3.2.1) within the context of the continuum of flexible funding. The definitions are consistent with those of Andrews (2014) and Honig and Gulrajani (2018) outlined in the literature review. They can also be placed on a continuum from the least flexible (budget flexibility) to the most flexible (full autonomy), similar to the continuum presented in the Grand Bargain (IACS, 2016). The remainder of this section describes each of these definitions in detail and how they relate to one another and concludes with a brief summary of key findings.

3.2.1 Recipient flexibility.

The research suggested that the demand for funding is higher than the supply, resulting in a highly competitive funding environment that puts donors in control and can create the phenomenon of recipient flexibility. Two levels of competition were identified. First is a competition between crisis response and long-term development. SCL 1 (September, 2019) argued that while direct personal donations can be used in a more flexible way, individuals tend to be more responsive and inclined to donate to emergency or crisis response. She claimed that:

> *… the public, who provide donations, like charitable donations to fund programs, want it to go to emergency and crises, generally speaking, little children who are starving. They don't want to say they are funding a Food Policy Council or something.*

The second level of competition is between organizations for grant funding, and as SCL 1 (September, 2019) argued, trying to convince "your community foundation to fund you, but you know, many non-profits are looking for money, how do you compete with that?". Research participants identified that this competitiveness could drive applicants to adjust their plans and objectives to fit the parameters of the funding. STL (September, 2019) admitted:

> *Sometimes you've got to be somewhat more flexible to really be that perfect fit, to qualify. I feel that communities… are having to do that, it's just a matter of its so competitive. So you are willing to do just about anything to get money.*

SCL 2 (October, 2019) echoed this assertion and claimed that it can have long-term effects on an organization's focus:

I have seen this happen multiple times. L*ots of people will make their*

funding fit the proposal. Like, they will tailor it to fit whatever the funder is

looking for but yet, it doesn't actually fit their mandate. So what ends up

happening with a lot of different organizations is it ends up being a

mission's drift, like they end up totally going away from what their mission

is.

The research also found that need to be competitive does not always

require such a drastic diversion from organizational mandate; it can also just be a

subtle shift in how the project is framed. SCL 1 (September, 2019) shared,

"When I look at a grant proposal, I have to look at who the funder is. For the most

part, I am doing the same thing, I am just packaging it differently". Regardless of

whether the efforts to meet a funder's criteria are subtle or drastic, the research

found that participants had experienced pressure to tailor their work to the

demands of a donor rather than to prioritize the needs of their community,

resulting in recipient flexibility rather than donor flexibility.

3.2.2 Budget flexibility.

Moving into the realm of donor flexibility, budget flexibility refers to a

donor's willingness to allow a recipient to overspend in one budget line if they

underspend by that amount in another budget line. In these cases, it is stipulated

in the funding contract what percent of the total budget can be reallocated to

which budget lines (e.g., a maximum of 10%). Upon request, reallocation above

the percent stipulated in the contract may be authorized by the donor. The Small

Town Leader (STL) (September 2019) attributes this flexibility to a donor's

acknowledgement that communities are fluid and therefore, must be able to

respond to change to ensure a project's success. It was identified that funding

officers can help maximize budget flexibility while supporting the development of the project budget. The Project Evaluator (February, 2020) provided an example of a funding officer who helped a client structure her budget in a way that maximized the project's financial flexibility. This approach aligns with the External INGO Representative's (EIR) (November, 2019) definition of funding flexibility as:

> *… having broad budget lines, so not so detailed that it defines a very narrow range of activities… I think having those broader budget lines allows our country project offices to implement activities that might look very different from one country to another but meets the same objective.*

3.2.3 Project flexibility.

The second definition of flexible funding, project flexibility, is explained as approval of a community derived plan under a specific topic area. This definition most closely aligns to the CBFS Project as the desired outcome was to enhance food security, but this was achieved in each community quite differently. Similarly, the EIR (November 2019) believes that flexibility is enabled by the donor or NGO prescribing intermediary outcomes but giving communities the freedom to determine some of their own outcomes and the activities that are most appropriate to achieve all project outcomes.

In the case of the CBFS Project, a strength-based, capacity building approach was applied, and it fits well within this category because the same training and development process was used in each community but led to different action plans. Small City Leader (SCL) 2 (October, 2019) felt there was a great deal of flexibility with the funding:

> *I think that initiative, they were very flexible, which was great because, given the fact is wasn't a lot of money, there wasn't a lot of restrictions*

around what we couldn't do with it as long as we showed them an

accounting of what we had done with it.

In addition to the flexibility with the development of community action

plans, the Large Town Leader (LTL) (September, 2019) experienced a high level

of flexibility in adapting their plan after it had been approved. His community had

initially planned to build an all-season, permanent community greenhouse.

However, an opportunity to secure two free, portable, and seasonal greenhouses

presented itself, and they only had a couple of days to decide if they wanted

them. They did have to cover the expense associated with relocating the

greenhouses. He believes their whole project would have been derailed if they

had had to go through official communication channels to obtain approval to

change their plan. He recollected that he had a telephone conversation with the

Project Facilitator to discuss the opportunity, but it was informal and did not

require an onerous approval process:

> *I am sure I let them know, hey, this has come up, and so they would have*
>
> *known about it; but I don't think we filled out any forms or waited for any*
>
> *permission. The thing is, I didn't even know what it was going to cost [to*
>
> *dissemble and transport the greenhouses].*

Project flexibility can also go beyond the activities of a project. The

Project Evaluator (February, 2020) believes that allowing communities to develop

their own outcomes is a feature of funding flexibility. She highlighted a hybrid

model where the funder mandates certain outcomes, and the community can

identify additional outcomes that are specific to them. In this arrangement all of

the outcomes are of equal importance. A similar approach was used in the CBFS

Project, where the NGO had the broad objective to increase community capacity

for tackling food insecurity. Communities then had the freedom to identify where they were on the food security continuum (relief, capacity building, or redesign) and set outcomes that allowed them to progress along the continuum.

3.2.4 Full autonomy.

The hybrid approach of including donor and NGO outcomes and community outcomes edges toward the third definition of flexibility: full autonomy. Full autonomy consists of funding that has broad outcomes (e.g., building community leadership capacity) but utilizes an approved process to build community capacity and allows the community to determine how the funding is used. This broadest definition of funding flexibility came from Donor Representative 1 (September, 2019):

> *Flexible funding has broad objectives, it allows for long term investments, it allows for communities to determine what they need and how to best get what they need addressed. And, it defines success from the community's perspective, not from the [donor's].*

The ACE Project Facilitator (APF) (February, 2020) supported the assertion that broad scope, cross-sectoral partnerships and a capacity building focus are all integral to flexible funding. In terms of capacity building, she especially focused on leadership development and contended that developing leadership skills in citizens is the key to solving communities' most difficult problems. Her observation is that capacity is built through a combination of education and practice; therefore, projects that offer an educational component seed money to apply the skills being taught and coaching to support implementation will have the greatest impact. In this way, communities do not just benefit from an individual project, but skills are consciously acquired by the

community leaders throughout the whole development cycle and can be applied to future community issues. Highlighting leadership skill development as a funder's main outcome allows for significant flexibility around the type of project being implemented, essentially giving communities full autonomy over the project.

3.2.5 Conclusion

Figure 2.
Continuum of funding flexibility

| Recipient Flexibility | Budget Flexibility | Project Flexibility | Full Autonomy |

The four types of funding flexibility can be placed on a continuum (see figure 2). Recipient flexibility is reflective of the most rigid form of funding where recipients respond to

donor demands by adjusting their goals, objectives, and at times, mandates to align with those of the donor. Budget flexibility is the most conservative form of donor flexibility and is a donor's attempt to accommodate emerging issues or changes in context after funding approval has been granted. Project flexibility allows communities to identify some of their own outcomes and activities within a specific topic area to ensure interventions are relevant and appropriate to the community context. Finally, the most liberal version of funding flexibility is full autonomy and is entirely process focused, where a community follows a specified process to determine their own priority area, outcomes, and activities.

Understanding these variations of flexibility and the differences in how each of their outcomes are derived can help organizations critically reflect on if they are truly providing the level of flexibility to which they aspire and implementing the conditions necessary to realize this aspiration. The discussion section explores how these types of funding flexibility align with different models of development and Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). First, however, the process focus and accountability themes are explored below.

3.3 Process Focus

The process focus of the CBFS Project was identified as one of the most essential conditions for flexible funding. The hypothesis around the conditions of flexible funding was that the donor would value community participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project. Furthermore, this value would be reflected in donor documents like the call for proposals, funding requirements and reporting processes, as well as in practices such as relationship building and autonomy provided to the NGO and recipients. The donor's stated objectives:

> *… to develop, implement and disseminate community-based models for applying the [population] health approach; increase knowledge base for program and policy development; and increase partnerships across the sectors to address the determinants of health* (Donor Representative 2, October, 2019),

are evidence the hypothesis is accurate. Moreover, the value of community participation in all stages of the Project life cycle is reflected in the process focus of the Project. This section first describes the process used in the CBFS Project and its implications. The section then continues, explaining that the four values this research found provide the foundation for a process-focused approach to development: local leadership, community empowerment, innovation, and relationships and trust.

The CBFS Project used an Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) process. This was an inclusive, bottom-up approach that helped communities identify and leverage their strengths to increase local food security

in ways that were appropriate and relevant to them. The APF (February, 2020)

champions an ABCD approach and claimed that:

> *… part of success, as well, is a focus on assets instead of need and I*
>
> *think that is a breath of fresh air and that automatically brings hope and*
>
> *trust, because more than anything, it is saying that you [the community]*
>
> *have the answers.*

The CBFS Project's focus on this process did not negate the need for

donor and NGO outcomes to be achieved; however, these outcomes were broad

in nature and centred around building community capacity. It allowed

communities to start wherever they were at on the food security continuum and

required diverse citizen and target audience engagement to develop a

community action plan. The NGO Representative (September, 2019) reported

that they:

> *… framed [the project] well from the perspective of food security, the*
>
> *Social Determinants of Health, [and] the food security continuum. The*
>
> *need to move people along that continuum, but we also grounded it very*
>
> *much in community capacity building… we, on a grand scale, [wanted] to*
>
> *change the language, the discussion around food security in [the*
>
> *province]… We [wanted] to do it in a grassroots way, working with*
>
> *communities and basically, I [didn't] know what they are going to do, it*
>
> *[was] up to them. It [wasn't] for me to say that I am looking for a school,*
>
> *I'm looking for a community garden, I'm looking for whatever. I really took*
>
> *a step back and said what we're looking for is the community to talk*
>
> *amongst themselves and tell us what would have the most impact.*

Therefore, the work completed through the CBFS Project was diverse. The Project Facilitator (August,2019) shared that "[e]verybody did different things but… there was not anybody who didn't move along the continuum". According to the NGO Representative (September, 2019) "…this [diversity] was the success of the project. It showed, it exemplified that communities have different needs, it is not just one size fits all and there isn't just one solution…". The only requirements for each community were process related: to host a Community Building for Food Security Workshop, develop a Community Food Security Action Plan, and participate in the ongoing Community of Practice. In their action plans some communities focused on building awareness and understanding of food security (SCL 2, October, 2019); others concentrated more on program development, like community gardens and collective kitchens (LTL, September, 2019); and others yet, on policy advocacy and development (SCL 1, September, 2019).

The Community of Practice connected not only CBFS Project communities but any communities in the province working on food security with one another. It provided an opportunity to brainstorm, share resources and support each other in their food security work. One of the non-Project communities that participated in the Community of Practice was participating in another provincial initiative called Active, Creative, Engaged (ACE) Communities. ACE had an even broader scope than the CBFS Project, as it was intended to build community and develop local leadership. However, it took a similar approach to CBFS in offering professional support for capacity building (they called it community coaching) and a small amount of seed money for the implementation of a community derived action plan. The LTL (September, 2019) was an ACE Communities participant and participated in the CBFS Community

of Practice without being an official CBFS Project site, In speaking about what

enabled ACE's flexible funding, he shared:

> *I think it was the nature of the ACE program itself, it was open ended –*
>
> *you come up with the ideas, you come up with how you want to utilize this*
>
> *resource… It was designed to foster community building – Active,*
>
> *Creative, Engaged Communities.*

The APF (February, 2020) was the provincial lead for ACE Communities.

She argued that they "…learned it was as much about the process as it was the

project". They provided training and coaching to build foundational knowledge

and skills around community development and then used a micro-project of the

community's choice to apply these learnings and practice leadership skills. Not

only did the projects help provide experiential leadership learning, but they

helped to build relationships across sectors. It did not matter what the project

was, it just had to be agreed upon collectively. The process was supported by

community development coaches to help ensure success, because they believed

that once a group has experienced success together, the process was more

likely to be replicated and applied to more complex issues.

The IEPF (November, 2019) supports the community building approach

and encourages a holistic perspective to development:

> *Our [foundation], in engaging in community development and*
>
> *regenerative development…, we are really taking a look at the overall*
>
> *needs of a community and how we provide services to them which build*
>
> *their capacity and engage them from the very beginning steps of program*
>
> *design, all the way through to the implementation and evaluation and*
>
> *learning and sharing and communicating and tweaking their programs.*

> *People are engaged and we are addressing the overall holistic needs of*
>
> *those individuals, the people in the community and the environment that*
>
> *they live in.*

He argued that development should not be pushed into communities, that communities need to identify for themselves if or when they engage in development. He felt that the desire to push into communities comes from a deficit perspective and a societal focus on gross domestic product as the measurement of quality of life. He contended that many communities in the developing world are rich in culture and community, and they don't need 'us'. For the ones that are ready, he claimed:

> *… there is a reason that they're ready and there's influences and there's*
>
> *their own village culture and everything that affects them to be at a point*
>
> *where they're ready to engage us, just as we are affected by our*
>
> *experiences and how we worked and the results… which put us in a*
>
> *place to work with different communities; but this isn't a model that needs*
>
> *to expand across the whole world, I don't think.*

Similarly, the EIR (November, 2019) shared that her organization works with local communities that they have well established relationships with to identify needs. They then find appropriate funding opportunities and work collaboratively with local community organizations to develop project proposals. Her organization has been able to secure large funding streams that allow them to work on achieving common objectives in multiple locations with significant diversity in the activities undertaken to account for the unique context in each location.

Ultimately, this research has found that funding flexibility was prevalent in the CBFS Project, which applied an ABCD process and focused on building community capacity. The funder and NGO trusted that the communities knew what they needed and could meet those needs with some additional support. In fact, the NGO Representative (September, 2019) shared that they were looking for communities who wanted "… to bring people together within their community to have that conversation, do the creative brainstorming, and maybe solution finding". Communities also had to have at least one identified leader who was committed to moving the food security agenda forward. The leader did not have to have any particular credentials, they just had to be willing and able to work inclusively with the target audience and diverse community stakeholders. The leaders also had to commit to working along side the Project Facilitators to strengthen their leadership capacity.

3.3.1 Local leadership.

The role of leadership in flexible funding was addressed by multiple research participants. The findings regarding leadership's relationship to flexible funding can be categorized in three main ways: instability of leadership provided by government employees, need for citizen leadership, and building citizen leadership capacity. Each of these are discussed in further detail below.

All but one of the community leaders in the case study were government (or government funded) employees located in the Project communities. Small Town Leader (STL) (September, 2019) and SCL 1 (September, 2019) both discussed being government employees and having restrictions around policy development and time available to dedicate to the CBFS Project. It was also identified that organizational restructuring can threaten a project's success when

its leadership is embedded in an organization. SCL 1 provided an example of the impact of restructuring:

> *We lost one key person who had been helping a lot with the initiative… and [the new organization] took over, and that changed my mandate. It limited the amount of time… I was not allowed to do a lot of the things I had been doing… our momentum stalled.*

This research identified that investing in citizen and volunteer leadership development was one way to mitigate the risks associated with project leadership being embedded within organizations. The APF (February, 2020) stressed that funders need to be more willing to fund citizen led initiatives:

We felt that the only thing that was going to be sustainable was investing in the local leadership, because we did not want to be one of those projects that ended when the funding ended. So we made a decision to invest in community leadership. That was huge.

To do this with confidence, she asserted that investment in leadership development at all levels is required. Her argument was that the challenges society faces are becoming increasingly complex, and we need to increase our ability to work collaboratively through process to find solutions to these challenges. She claimed that "every complex issue is a leadership issue, yet very rarely are we investing in leadership capacity and organizational capacity and our capacity for transformation and innovation".

Another advantage to citizen leadership is a greater willingness to take risks. APF (February, 2020) was working for the project that funded LTL's greenhouses. She asserted that the procurement of these greenhouses is a perfect example of why citizen-led initiatives should receive direct funding. LTL

was a community volunteer who was willing to bear the risk of having the donor deny the expense of moving the greenhouses; whereas, had he been an employee of an organization who was taking the lead on the initiative, the organization would have been unlikely to bear that risk and the opportunity would have been lost.

Furthermore, in speaking of her experience with the ACE Project, APF (February, 2020) asserted that:

> *The greatest leadership that we saw… didn't have anything to do with staff or their titles. The leadership came from people who were young, or they were females or they were from different cultures, they were citizens who cared. They were removed from the organizations and from the systems. We don't even seem to understand the importance of citizen-led initiatives because they are not attached to organizations, they are not attached to mandates, they are not attached to the red tape and bureaucracy… Citizens just get things done… I am not sure funders really understand that and I think they are nervous about funding or investing in citizens.*

IEPF (November, 2019) also believes that direct funding citizen led initiatives allows for more flexibility with the added bonus of increasing the amount of funding available to communities. He argued that to make this shift, small community-based organizations must dedicate themselves to increasing their capacity to lead the whole development process, from engagement and planning to implementation and evaluation. He emphasized that garnering the confidence of donors requires self-awareness and objectivity. "I think it's important that we're critical of ourselves and how we have been doing local

development over the years. We need to understand our own weaknesses as organizations". Increasing community capacity to understand and manage every stage of project development within the context of food security was the overarching intention of the CBFS Project.

As for donors and INGOs, IEPF contended that despite increasing talk among INGOs about local participation and leadership, they have not changed their approach accordingly. He argued that many of the engaged 'local' leaders are at a national level; they are men of a high class rather than local leaders who are directly impacted by the issues they are tackling. This default to 'traditional' leadership combined with the organizational leadership that generally dominated the CBFS Project indicates that there are challenges around engaging citizens in leadership roles in their communities.

A lack of community-based leadership capacity was identified as one of the detractors from flexible funding. For example, the research indicated there is often an inability to meet project timelines. The push to spend the money was attributed in part to relying on project leaders who are doing the work off the side of their desk or are volunteers, rather than having paid staff dedicated to the initiative (STL and LTL, September, 2019). SCL 1 (September, 2019) spoke to the dependency on organization and agency staff in project implementation and the negative impact organizational change (loss of positions and shifts in priorities) can have on the sustainability of projects that are led by staff who are not solely dedicated to the project and where the work load is too heavy for a volunteer commitment. For example, SCL 2 (October, 2019) noted that:

> The majority of us were doing the work over and above our regular
>
> working hours because it wasn't something that we could put into what

we could do within our working hours. We were all stretched and getting others to come onto the committee [and] really take on part of it was almost impossible. In fact, it ended up we couldn't find anybody to take on that piece anymore.

The inability to recruit and retain community volunteers also suggests that even projects spearheaded by community-based organizations may reflect the priorities of the organization and not have community support. SCL 2 admitted that just because a 'community' identifies a need and establishes a plan to fulfill it, does not mean that it is an accurate reflection of the whole community:

I realize [community-based solutions are] a product of different champions coming forward and… being willing and able to do the work to move ahead and perhaps what their agenda was that they were able to convince the community of. I mean, I know that things happen on the ground for reasons too… I don't have my head totally in the clouds.

Additionally, LTL (September, 2019) expressed that when an approach is inclusive and engages with the whole community, the process can be quite lengthy and get bogged down; for example, "… we had had a lot of meetings and activity going on, but we didn't feel like we were any closer to getting anywhere. It was just a lot of visioning exercises, which you know, less talk, more doing". Therefore, while it was identified that a process focus helps to enable flexible funding, the work needs to move beyond process into action to be engaging and have an impact.

The findings regarding leadership point to a tension between the benefits of citizen-led development and constraints around the skills and time commitment required effectively lead community-based development initiatives.

The solution to easing this tension might be found in the mobilization and empowerment of large swaths of the community, as opposed to concentrating on the leadership capacity of a select few.

3.3.2 Community empowerment.

Donor Representative 2 (October, 2019) provided an example of how community empowerment is essential to determining local needs and solutions. Her hypothetical example consisted of an NGO coming into a community and deciding that a collective kitchen is required without getting input from the target audience; then securing the funding to start the kitchen but not being able to get it off the ground because the community didn't want that program. She asserted that valuing the engagement and contributions of the target audience increases sustainability of the project. Furthermore, she emphasized that engagement must be genuine and sustained throughout the whole program cycle, not just a token effort at the beginning of the planning process. It is this level of engagement that increases community capacity by "building skills and knowledge that stays in the community once the project ends" (Donor Representative 2, October, 2019).

Conversely, IEPF (November, 2019) argued that non-flexible funding is based on a charity model, which he was passionate about eliminating, not only because it is unsustainable but also disempowering:

> *We have to get rid of this [****]ing idea of charity, because charity, as soon as you say you are doing charity, it means you are already devaluing the community that you're working in, that they need charity somehow. What we really try to do from the beginning is take the approach, what are the strengths of the community first. We can easily see the weaknesses of communities and base our programs on that, but*

we don't go far enough in engaging the strengths of the community.

Especially,… utilizing local resources, including resource people and

empowering those people from the very beginning and stop looking at it

as a charity and a charitable act; but that we're investing in communities

and really start to think about it as an investment.

Similarly, Project Evaluator 1 (February, 2020) claimed that:

If there is flexibility, then I think communities are able to do things that

truly meet the needs of the people they work with. The needs and the

strengths, because I don't just want to talk about the needs, but also can

harness the strengths of communities as well and allow them to do the

work that needs to be done and be able to report to funders the outcomes

that matter. Rather than report on the outcomes that matter to somebody

else.

This sentiment was also supported by EIR (November, 2019):

If we are looking for that flexibility, I think it is in response to what our

partners or the communities are asking for… it is really developing

something that is reflective of something that they see is needed and

where those resources are needed. If there is that involvement into

defining what the project is and advocating for that flexibility of the

funding, then to me it just seems like there is more ownership… and the

more ownership, then the accountability just kind of rests with the people

who are involved in defining the work, as opposed to if the [INGO] were to

seek out the funding without that consultation and without that

understanding, then it is really difficult to achieve the objectives that we

have without the engagement of the local community or local partner

organization.

The crux of this finding is that the more people are engaged and empowered, the more relevant and sustainable the project will be. Another benefit of having extensive and diverse engagement in development work is the potential for innovation, which is the third underlying value of process-focused development and explored in detail below.

3.3.3 Innovation.

A willingness to fund innovative work was not a universal theme throughout the interviews; however, it was common enough to warrant attention in the findings. To this point, APF (February, 2020) contended that "… often we think we need to have the solution before we fund it and that's not possible any longer because I think the issues are just far too complex". She argued that the majority of funders only want to fund evidence-based best practices but because of the complexity of today's issues and the varying contexts from community to community best practices are at best, promising practices, and claimed that:

> *We have to get much better at not knowing the answers because the issues are really complicated… we have to call the meeting before we know the answers. We have to be capable enough to bring together diverse stakeholders together and knowledgeable enough and having the capacity to facilitate those conversations and build that trust. That takes time and I am not sure that funders want to fund that.*

This speaks to both a process focus approach to development and the underlying value of innovation. The connection between funding flexibility and innovation was also recognized by several research participants, for example, LTL (September, 2019) shared:

> *I think another benefit might just be allowing creative ideas to take root. When you are solicited with here's a little bit of money and free rein to do whatever you want, you get together with people and you get original ideas. If it is presented to you in very narrow parameters of this is what this is for then you're going to get a much narrower range of ideas.*

SCL 2 (October, 2019) supported the assertion that flexible funding and community empowerment result in innovative work "having more autonomy is actually fantastic, because you can be innovative and creative in what you want to use the funds for".

Furthermore, when asked about the unintended consequences of flexible funding, SCL 2 (October, 2019) claimed that "If you give people the freedom to do a project from the start and say this is exploratory, and this is an initiative we really want to try, then you can have some really [positive] unintended consequences". Willingness to provide the flexibility required for process focused development and embracing innovation as a core value of this approach is not without risks. One of the ways to feel secure in taking on this risk is the fourth value of process focused development, relationships and trust.

3.3.4 Relationships and trust.

The most prominent value underlying process focused development that emerged from the research was the need for donors to have a strong relationship with and to trust the NGOs and the communities they fund. SCL 2 (October, 2019) asserted that:

> *It goes back to [*the *relationship] that you have with… your funding*
>
> *person... To be able to really have a good relationship with them so that*
>
> *they understand your project*, *and they understand your need to change*
>
> *things and their need to be more flexible with the parameters around the*
>
> *dollars.*

More specifically, it was identified that shared values, proximity and regular communication, and a proven track record provide the foundation for strong

relationships and trust. The remainder of this section delves into these requirements for relationship and trust building.

The Project Facilitator (August, 2019) argued that ensuring the donor understands and values a bottom up and strength-based approach is essential to flexible funding and was crucial to the success of the CBFS Project. Providing an example, she cited a time outside of the case study when she provided Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) training to a donor organization to help build their foundational knowledge and understanding of the value of an asset-based approach. This opportunity strengthened the relationship and resulted in shared foundational values for future work.

The importance of shared values between donors and NGOs was also identified in the relationship between INGOs and their community partners. The EIR (November, 2019) asserted that her organization's willingness to establish partnerships with local communities is dependent on objectively evaluating if her organization's values and objectives align with those of the local community partner. If they are not aligned, a partnership is not established; but if they are, they enter the relationship with a common understanding and trust that they are there for the same reasons.

According to the NGO Representative (September, 2019), relationship-building and alignment of values begins even before a project's inception. She finds it useful to identify donors whose values align with her organization's and to build a relationship before asking anything of them:

> At the time, there was a group within [the donor organization]… that were
> absolutely committed to the [SDOH] and pushing that message out
> through all of the work they did… it was very important that we created a

good working relationship with them. I wasn't always the one being

funded, but I was at various tables… so, we just kept bumping into one

another all the time and growing that relationship in terms of a shared

vision. You know, that sounds very small in terms of individual

relationships, but I really think that had a lot to do with it at the beginning.

Access and in-person contact were identified as being essential to growing a

relationship.

Informal relationship building prior to entering a contractual relationship

relates to the second component required for developing trusting relationships,

regular communication, and proximity. The NGO Representative (September,

2019) reported that having an adequate number of staff to dedicate the time

required to communicate effectively with recipients, support them with coaching,

and connect them to additional resources is integral to building trusting

relationships. The Project Evaluator (February, 2020) shared that the Donor's

funding officers were well connected to communities, understood local context,

and built relationships with community leaders not only through project work but

also through professional development opportunities the Donor offered.

While common values, regular communication and proximity are essential

to building trust, this research found that action is required to solidify trust. The

NGO Representative (September, 2019) argued that having a proven track

record for successfully managing grants is a requirement for an NGO to gain a

donor's trust and for a community to gain an NGO's trust. However, trust and

relationships are reciprocal particularly for NGOs who not only have to acquire

the trust of donors but also the trust of communities. The International External

Project Facilitator's (IEPF) (November, 2019) organization began by only working

in communities where they had connections and pre-existing relationships. As their work has proven successful and garnered attention, other communities have started reaching out to work with them.

Communities' trust of NGOs also increases when project facilitators act as advocates for the communities they work with. This was exhibited in the CBFS Project when the Project Facilitator connected project communities with other funding sources and resources available outside of the CBFS Project. It was apparent in all of the interviews that the Project Facilitators were empowered to work on behalf of the communities, and they embraced that role and acted in the best of interest of the communities, not just as an agent of the NGO.

The value of relationships and trust forged through shared values, communication and proximity, and a proven track record are foundational to process focused development. The APF (February, 2019) observed that supporting grassroots work—and subsequently funding flexibility—is about "trusting people, it's empowering people. It's not blind faith but it is about trust". When a high level of trust is present donors are more willing to be flexible with their funding.

3.3.5 Conclusion

The CBFS Project did not go into communities with solutions rather with broad process related outcomes that empowered communities to determine their own specific plans to meet their unique needs. Local leadership, community empowerment, innovation, and relationships and trust were the values that served as the foundation for this process focused approach and were fostered through what the Project Facilitators referred to as RAFF (relationships, action, food, and fun). The findings supported two of the research hypotheses: (1) The

donor will have valued community participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project. Furthermore, this value will have been reflected in donor documents like the call for proposals, funding requirements, and reporting processes, as well as in practices such as relationship-building and autonomy provided to the NGO and recipients. (2) Funding flexibility contributes to downward accountability, and evidence will come in the form of communities self-reporting a sense of control and the freedom to design their own projects to respond to their unique contexts. Additionally, the community action plans will reflect diversity in outcomes and activities from community to community. The following subsection addresses how the effectiveness of process focused development is measured and what the CBFS Project's funding requirements and reporting processes entailed.

3.4 Accountability

Accountability is a priority in development work to ensure that funding is used in responsible, effective, and impactful ways. Accountability strives to manage donors' risk for providing funding to external organizations. LTL (September, 2019) reasoned that efforts to minimize a donor's risk contributes to inflexible funding because of the fear that money could be:

> *… pilfered away on something, squandered without accountability and oversight. We could have spent $5 000 on a shiny new toy and then found out it didn't work. There's risk and that would cause anyone to pause and maybe want to increase oversight or tighten the guidelines perhaps.*

Many of the research participants had experience as both a recipient and a donor and identified occasions where money was unintentionally 'pilfered' or used irresponsibly, supporting the hypothesis that an unintended consequence of flexible funding would be that some projects will not have been completed or will not have attained their projected outcomes when provided flexibility. This could explain the Project Evaluator's (February, 2020) impression that donors' trust in communities is decreasing and that "[t]here's this assumption that communities will be unaccountable unless forced to be otherwise". With further grounds for this assumption, SCL 2 (October, 2019) noted that, in her role as a donor (outside the CBFS Project), she experienced situations where recipients were given some flexibility but then were unable to report on the impact of the funding. STL (September, 2019) suggested that small communities do not always have the resources or capacity required to fulfill all the funding requirements. She and other community leaders also identified that short timelines and limited human

resources can affect a recipient's ability to implement a project according to plans. STL reported that sometimes "things aren't happening as quickly as they need to, they become just about needing to spend the money… rather than focusing on the outcomes".

As exhibited in the literature review, there is much debate around how accountability should be measured to accurately assess the effectiveness of a project without being so onerous that the accountability expectations detract from the work itself. This section examines how the research participants understand the difference between accountability measures for flexible and targeted funding. It was hypothesized that flexible funding would be more qualitative and less onerous in nature than targeted funding, which would be more quantitative focused and time consuming. This hypothesis was supported by the findings; however, the findings offer additional insight into fundamentals for the accountability of flexible funding. These findings are presented as flexible funding's four pillars of accountability: early engagement of a project evaluator, community defined success, broad donor and NGO defined outcomes, and commitment to continual improvement.

3.4.1 Early engagement of a project evaluator.

The first accountability pillar is the early engagement of a project evaluator to help determine the project's objectives and desired outcomes. Having this early engagement in the CBFS Project helped maintain focus at the community level and build a project that was flexible in nature yet able to achieve clear outcomes. The Project Evaluator (February, 2020) reflected, "I still think of the [fund for this project] as one of the best funds I have ever worked with as an evaluator". She suggested that increasingly donors are determining not only the

outcomes and indicators of the projects they fund but also mandating the data

collection tools NGOs are required to use, whether they are appropriate for the

context or not. These parameters can be presented upfront or be discovered

through revisions to submitted proposals. However, this was not her experience

with the CBFS Project. The reporting tool was mandated, but data collection tools

were not, and communities were empowered to determine their own outcomes.

3.4.2 Community defined success.

To allow communities to set their own outcomes required the mobilization of the second accountability pillar (community defined success) and the third pillar (broad donor and NGO outcomes) to ensure they are complimentary of one another. The Project Evaluator (February, 2020) claimed that often donors are inclined to see NGOs as an extension of themselves, so much so it can seem like they are contracting not-for-profits to do their work. Conversely, the CBFS Project's steering committee was responsible for developing the logic model, outcomes, and indicators; which they did in conjunction with their partners and the communities, and the Donor did not tamper with it. The Project Evaluator "found that [the Donor] really trusted the communities to come up with the outcomes that were important".

This approach was so novel to the NGO Representative (September, 2019) said she was nervous about the Project's accountability:

> *In terms of the proposal 'I don't know what the outcomes will be, it will be community driven and we will invite them to evaluate the success'. And, it was a little bit of 'trust us', and I think they were incredibly brave to fund us. We then felt compelled to support these communities to be successful, because we know what a brave endeavour this was from a funder's perspective, and that's where [the Project Facilitators] just worked their hearts out, and the community dietitians that worked in that group. I mean, everybody pulled together to make this as successful as possible.*

Community defined success in the CBFS Project would not have been possible without broad donor and NGO defined outcomes that allowed communities the

flexibility to identify their own specific outcomes and activities that were

responsive to their unique needs and context.

3.4.3 Broad donor and NGO defined outcomes.

While the communities determined their specific outcomes and activities after the funding had already been approved, the CBFS Project did have to use a mandated reporting tool specifically for community-based projects to assess the impact of the project. The tool required the NGO to report on the broad outcomes identified in the project proposal as well as the diverse community-derived outcomes identified through the Project implementation process. As previously indicated, the NGO's broad outcomes included offering the CBFS workshops, developing a community of practice, and supporting communities to develop and implement their own action plans. The specifics of what was happening in each community were reported on, but these activities were different in each community and also served as evidence of the project's success.

The NGO Representative (September, 2019) shared her experience of having to report on a project that was so flexible in nature and had so much diversity between communities:

> *It was terrifying, it was absolutely terrifying. I mean, I was signing invoices for shovels and saskatoon berry bushes, going 'oh good lord'… I think [the donor] was brave in terms of… where I'm saying basically*, *'I don't know what the deliverables will be, we're going to let the communities decide. I need you to give me some money so I can give it to them. We'll make sure that its… accounted for', and we did*. Y*ou know we had to have invoices.*

Ultimately, the donor was gauging success by the communities' response to the project. Donor Representative 1 (September, 2019) asserted:

> *… that's ultimately how you know you have made a difference, if the*
>
> *community sees the difference, feels the difference, lives the difference.*
>
> *So, you would think we would be the happiest when our funding could say*
>
> *that and do that for people and because, ultimately, that's what it's all*
>
> *about.*

This sentiment was supported by IEPF (November, 2019), as he also believed that the best accountability measure is how the community feels about the project:

> *We care about doing a good job and getting results and having the*
>
> *community's feedback in that yes, this is good and it worked, or no, this*
>
> *isn't good and didn't work and us being able to adapt to that. That's key*
>
> *for us.*

3.4.4 Continual improvement.

Soliciting and responding to feedback from the communities relates to the fourth accountability pillar for flexible funding, continual improvement. In addition to placing emphasis on the community's impression of the project as an accountability measure, both APF and IEPF (February, 2020 and November, 2019) argued that flexible funding has a continual improvement approach to evaluation, "[m]oving forward, learning, taking a step back, and moving forward again in a slightly different direction" (APF, February, 2020). They claimed that this requires a close relationship with the donor and the security to know that it is okay to disclose failures as well as successes to learn from the experience and be more effective in the future.

Two of the research participants spoke to their appreciation of donors interested in learning from project communities and who are aren't afraid of failures. STL (September, 2019) appreciated when "… there is opportunity to meet throughout the funding period and to share your challenges. Rather than feeling like, you know, you have done something wrong, and people are reluctant to share that". She also noted that projects are learning opportunities for the donors, and that it is nice when the donor is interested in learning about outcomes they didn't necessarily plan for or expect.

Conversely, the IEPF asserted that he believes the strict project parameters and reporting requirements employed in targeted funding lead to dishonest reporting, so the reported results do not accurately reflect what occurred:

> … you actually aren't communicating completely truthfully because if you
> communicate truthfully or report truthfully about your program, you are

going to lose the funding the next year because it is not exactly what the

donor wants to hear.

The Project Evaluator (February, 2020) supported the claim that there is a risk to accurate reporting. With her fear that there is a trend toward service contracts being disguised as grants, she is afraid dishonest reporting will increase, because if an organization accepts a 'grant' with very specific deliverables and reports that the deliverables were not achieved in full, the organization is at risk of losing the funding. She believes this could result in the perpetuation of projects or programs that are ineffective. Whereas, a commitment to continual improvement supports honest reporting and increased project effectiveness because it eliminates the fear that funding will be in jeopardy if projects experience setbacks or need to change course to respond appropriately to unexpected circumstances.

3.4.5 Conclusion

The accountability related findings of this research support the hypothesis that the accountability measures of flexible funding are qualitative in nature because they value input and feedback from the target audience and funding recipients. Additionally, the findings indicate that considering accountability at the start of the project by engaging an evaluator during the planning process can facilitate a more qualitative approach to accountability. Allowing communities to define their own specific outcomes and plan for how to measure these outcomes also contributes to stronger accountability. Finally, valuing continual improvement encourages honest reporting and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes. Further analysis of accountability and funding flexibility is included in the discussion section below.

4.0 Discussion

This section provides an analysis of how the findings of this research

compares and contrasts with the literature. To provide a foundation for the rest of

the discussion, this section begins with a summary of the continuum of flexible

funding and how it relates to the models of development. Following that are

sections discussing the value of process focused development and accountability

implications of flexible funding.
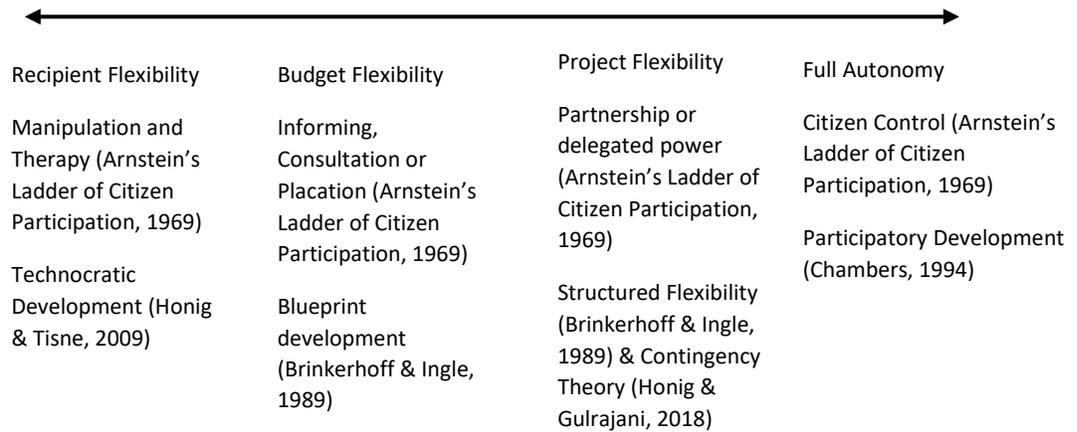
4.1 The Continuum of Flexible Funding

The types of flexibility found in this research (recipient flexibility, budget

flexibility, project flexibility, and full autonomy) align with the continuum of

flexibility found in the literature and can also be associated with Arnstein's Ladder

of Citizen Participation (Arnstein's Ladder, 1969). As illustrated in figure 3, the

most rigid end of the continuum manifests as recipient flexibility. It reflects donors

exerting control and employing a technocratic approach (Honig & Tisne, 2009) to

development and pushes communities to conform to donors' parameters rather

than advocating for their needs. This approach is comparable to the manipulation

and therapy rungs on Arnstein's Ladder (1969) which assume external experts

know best and can fix what is broken in communities. As exhibited in the

literature review, evidence that this approach does not work has amassed over

the past three decades.

Many donors have responded to evidence that outcomes are better when

context is considered and have made efforts to incorporate flexibility to

accommodate for context in their development efforts. However, as this research

has found, there are varying degrees of funding flexibility. The most conservative

type of funding flexibility, budget flexibility, allows a maximum percentage (e.g.,

10%) of each budget line to be moved to another budget line with approval from

the NGO or donor. This form of donor flexibility is the most traditional and

comparable to what Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1994) describe as blueprint

development and closely aligns to the degrees of tokenism (informing,

consultation, and placation) on Arnstein's Ladder (1969).

Figure 3.

Continuum of funding flexibility, degrees of citizen participation and models of

development

Recipient Flexibility	Budget Flexibility	Project Flexibility	Full Autonomy
Manipulation and Therapy (Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, 1969)	Informing, Consultation or Placation (Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, 1969)	Partnership or delegated power (Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, 1969)	Citizen Control (Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, 1969)
Technocratic Development (Honig & Tisne, 2009)	Blueprint development (Brinkerhoff & Ingle, 1989)	Structured Flexibility (Brinkerhoff & Ingle, 1989) & Contingency Theory (Honig & Gulrajani, 2018)	Participatory Development (Chambers, 1994)

Note. The continuum of funding flexibility compares levels of funding flexibility

with degrees of citizen participation and models of development.

　　　　The middle of the continuum, project flexibility, is consistent with Honig

and Gulrajani's (2018) definition of funding flexibility where recipients have

decision making authority, innovation is supported, and changes in context are

accommodated. It is also aligns with Brinkerhoff and Ingle's (1994) structured

flexibility approach and the partnership or delegated power rungs on Arnstein's

Ladder (1969). This type of flexibility was exemplified in the case study with

LTL's spontaneous procurement of the donated greenhouses when the

opportunity presented itself.

Finally, at the most liberal end of the spectrum and providing full autonomy over funding, are personal donations, NGO sales and service revenue, and donor funding with broad parameters. Andrews (2014) argues these types of funding minimize or eliminate funding restrictions and increase responsiveness to communities. This end of the continuum is reflective of Chambers' (1989) participatory approach and the citizen control rung on Arnstein's Ladder.

It is important to understand the various types of funding to determine what level of flexibility is appropriate for what type of development. This research has made a case for the value of project flexibility—and to some extent, full autonomy—to contribute to downward accountability to communities. In situations when it has been determined that a specific program or invention that requires strict adherence to an evidence-based model is appropriate, non-flexible funding may be required. In these cases, in the spirit of downward accountability it would be prudent to ensure that the community or target audience has made the ultimate decision to implement the intervention. This would require a community-based engagement and assessment process be undertaken prior to making any decisions around interventions. The next section examines the value of process focused development.

4.2 Process Focus

The CBFS Project's employment of process focused development is consistent with the literature's evidence and DDD's guiding principles which support participatory and grassroots-based approaches to development (Brinkerhoff & Ingle, 1989; Mathie & Cunningham, 2005; Building State Capability Program, 2014; Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015). The project embraced the same values that Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) asserted are integral to a process

approach: "It is people-oriented, seeking to build coalitions that can steer the design and implementation of solutions to locally identified development problems. Process management requires strategic thinking and entrepreneurship, rather than internal control" (p. 489). This section analyzes this research's findings around process in relationship with those of the literature.

As identified in the findings, the specific process used by the CBFS Project was an ABCD approach. Innate in ABCD's emphasis on community strengths rather than deficits is the belief that communities have the ability to identify, prioritize, and create the change they desire. It exhibits faith in the wisdom of the community and dictates engagement at the local level. The Donor for the CBFS Project enacted this faith by acting in accordance with Banks, Hulme, and Edwards' (2015) advice that "… civil society may be best nurtured when donors do less: stepping back to allow citizen groups themselves to dictate the agenda and to evolve structures that suit their concerns and contexts" (p. 709). Furthermore, the ABCD approach empowers communities to acknowledge and reflect on their accomplishments and to build upon and leverage their strengths to continuously improve themselves in the ways they deem necessary.

The focus on identifying assets and strengthening capacity in the CBFS Project required process guidance, which the NGO provided through the Project Facilitators. The CBFS Project Facilitators worked on behalf of the communities, helped to build their capacity, and to secure additional resources to ensure the sustainability of local projects; however, they were not the leaders of the local projects.

There must be a clear distinction that project facilitators or program staff are advocates and a resource for development, not leaders of development. This

advocacy role requires both donors and NGOs to trust and empower field workers (or project facilitators) to make decisions on the ground that are responsive to the community (Honig & Gulrajani, 2018). Empowering field workers to work on behalf of communities enables NGOs to "…situate themselves to work in support of MBOs [Member-based Organizations] in their efforts to act as a countervailing power to more powerful actors" (Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015, p. 709). Therefore, this role must be supportive and complimentary of the local leadership that a participatory approach demands. The CBFS Project exemplified this with their requirement that successful community applications reflect pre-existing community leadership and capacity to build from, providing a foundation for sustainability.

Recognizing the limitations of case studies in terms of generalizability, it is important to acknowledge the broader context of the CBFS Project. The Project took place in a developed country and in communities that have numerous organizations, services, and resources at their disposal. As highlighted in the findings, in most cases, while the leadership was local and provided in-kind to the Project, it was institutionalized and primarily embedded within government organizations. It was identified that organizational influences and pressures impacted the direction and sustainability of the Project in some communities. The type of local leadership that Arnstein (1969); Chambers (1989); Mathie and Cunningham (2005); Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) and so many others advocate for is not institutionalized (even at the community level); it is citizen and grassroots-based and not subject to organizational or government influences.

Ideally, development builds the capacity of citizens to lead community-based development and respond to societal challenges in context specific and

innovative ways. Ironically, a potential impediment to building the capacity of citizens may be an abundance of local organizations and agencies with development mandates. A high level of organizational capacity could alleviate pressure for volunteer citizens to step up and lead the charge, resulting in community capacity residing within organizations as opposed to citizens. This may not be a significant issue in communities where organization employees are locals and whose lives are enmeshed in the community (as in the case of the CBFS Project). However, it could be detrimental in situations where these organizations or government agencies are responsible for the marginalization of certain populations or the employees are arms-length service providers working out of a regional or national hub and not personally impacted by local realities.

One way to alleviate the risk of embedding leadership capacity within organizations rather than the community is to focus on building collective community capacity. The CBFS Project did this by encouraging an inclusive process that actively engaged diverse stakeholders and held space for anyone interested to participate. It used Food Security as the container, but its process focus built capacity to effectively tackle any community issue as opposed to teaching content skills required to implement a specific solution that was not transferable to any other issue. Furthermore, it requires the community to be engaged in determining their own priorities and outcomes.

As the CBFS's Project Evaluator (February, 2020) argued, funding flexibility can be achieved by allowing recipients to determine at least some of their own project outcomes. This was enabled in the CBFS Project by the Donor's broad goal of increasing community capacity for improving people's SDOH. A donor's broad scope allows NGOs to narrow their scope by focusing on

increasing capacity in a specific topic area (e.g., food security) without dictating community level outcomes. This is particularly effective when communities have already mobilized around a need and are actively seeking external resources to support their work. Once engaged in a project, communities can be supported by an NGO to determine their unique outcomes, activities, and outputs as they relate to the issue at hand. Offering communities the flexibility to determine their own outcomes increases downward accountability. To feel comfortable in offering this flexibility requires trust established through strong relationships.

As the findings indicate, relationships and trust are fostered through honest communication, proximity, and a proven track record. Honig and Gulrajani (2018) and the Project Evaluator (February, 2020) argued that trust is also a choice. Furthermore, Honig and Gulrajani (2018) asserted that trust begets trust—the more someone is trusted, the more they will behave in trustworthy ways. The CBFS Project Donor prioritized building relationships with NGOs and communities, they trusted the ability of communities to identify, plan, and implement projects that would enhance the social determinants of health for the most vulnerable and offered a level of funding flexibility that reflected these beliefs. Trust, however, does not need to be blind and does not negate the need for accountability. The next section considers the implications of flexible funding on accountability.

4.3 Accountability

The biggest objection donors—and to some extent NGOs—have to broadening their scope and being flexible with their funding are their inferences about accountability. Quantitative measures are traditionally the gold standard in project accountability with qualitative measures being undervalued. In addition to

donor and NGO commitment to broad parameters and empowering communities

to have influence over project outcomes, the shift to qualitative accountability

requires trust. Consistent with the literature, this research found that for donors to

broaden their scope they must trust the NGO they are supporting and in turn, the

communities. As previously identified in this paper, Honig and Gulrajani (2018)

argue that donors' lack of trust is a significant barrier to flexible funding. Similarly,

participants in this study identified potential misuse of funds (intentional or not) as

the biggest barrier to flexible funding.

Ultimately, to trust is a political decision, and when systems are tailored to

compensate for a lack of trust they tend to lose their effectiveness. Development

has tried to use accountability measures that concentrate on outputs and

quantitative evaluation to replace trust and while accountability is important and

can help build trust, it cannot replace trust. In fact, donors' pressure to hit targets

and emphasis on quantitative evaluation has led NGOs who would otherwise be

honest to ensure their reporting reflects what donors want. As IEPF (November,

2019) and the Project Evaluator (February, 2020) both asserted, results can be

manipulated, and sophisticated program staff can present results in a way that

tells the story donors want to hear rather than the reality.

Considering that current reporting is not always forthcoming and is

subject to manipulation, shifting to a qualitative accountability focus should not be

a stretch and is essential to increasing funding flexibility. Qualitative reporting

contributes to downward accountability by evaluating the process, placing

significant value on target audiences' evaluation, and accommodating long term

reporting. As Donor Representative 1 (September 2019), flexible funding should

be accompanied by reporting that "…defines success from the community's

perspective, not from the [donor's]". The fact that it was a Donor Representative who shared this sentiment speaks volumes to the commitment her organization had to a community-driven approach and which they evaluated qualitatively.

5.0 Conclusion

Both the literature and the findings of this research speak to the value of providing flexible funding to increase downward accountability. However, because making the leap from funding flexibility in theory to practice has proven easier said than done, this research endeavored to determine how funding flexibility can be mobilized more robustly. Prior to determining the conditions necessary to provide flexible funding, it was important to understand how the research participants understood it. The findings suggest there are different variations of flexible funding. Naming each of these variations and understanding them as a continuum can create common language that clarifies flexibility expectations for all stakeholders. Furthermore, aligning the types of funding flexibility with corresponding development models and levels of citizen participation can help donors ensure consistency between their development values and their funding model. Further research is required to identify agreed upon names and characteristics of the variations of funding flexibility to create a common language around funding flexibility.

If donors are to meet their stated goals around funding flexibility, they must adopt a process focused approach to development. This requires making relationship building a priority by ensuring proximity to and maintaining open communication with the target audience. Donors must also have broad outcomes that enable them to empower communities to develop their own plans to meet their needs. Furthermore, they must be committed to promoting and supporting local leadership development and building community capacity. Finally, donors must reimagine accountability by allowing communities to define success, committing to continual improvement, and evaluating projects qualitatively.

Ultimately, to provide flexible funding requires donors to relinquish some power and control and put faith in communities' ability to use funding in impactful ways. This was exemplified by the CBFS Project Donor understanding and value of community-based development and willingness to 'get out of the way' of the good work that they trusted communities would do.

The Grand Bargain and DDD movement are evidence that there is increasing desire and efforts to shift toward community-driven development. However, the lack of substantial progress in mobilizing flexibility over the past three decades (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018 & FAO, 2019) suggests that commitments to doing development differently are paying the issue lip service, resulting in token efforts that have not produced real change. Often this lack of change is attributed to the threat of corruption and the need for accountability (Carman, 2010); therefore, further research into the disconnect between the expressed value of flexibility and its practice within contexts of no or low levels of corruption would be valuable. This research would help to identify additional motivations for adopting a rigid approach to development that allows donors to retain control and how this might be resolved.

In the in-term, this research also found a potential bottom-up approach to encouraging donor flexibility. NGOs have the potential to encourage donors to be more flexible with their funding by being strategic about who they accept money from. NGOs can resist the pressure that causes recipient flexibility by ensuring that they only work with donors who value participatory development and offer the appropriate degree of funding flexibility to support this approach. Discernment of funding sources requires great sacrifice as it results in limited funding and decreases an NGO's competitiveness in the development industry.

However, with collective sacrifice fostered through horizontal accountability, NGOs could return to their roots of community advocacy and put pressure on donors to increase the flexibility of their funding. Another alternative presented in the research is for NGOs and communities to make social enterprise a priority, which would decrease the long-term dependency on donors altogether. These approaches to encouraging donor flexibility and other ways donor power can be equalized would benefit from further research. Moreover, the literature would also benefit from more research into how donors, like those who have signed onto the Grand Bargain, can be held accountable to their commitment to funding flexibility.

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