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Effectiveness of Child Sponsorship Programs in Promoting Holistic Child Development in Mbeere North Sub-County

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Abstract

Compassion International is a faith-based, evidence-based, non-government child sponsorship organization active across the globe with a focus on individual child development. The organization achieves holistic child development by partnering with various stakeholders, including local churches and international sponsors. Mbeere Sub-County Compassion International Kenya has projects focused on identifying and helping the most vulnerable and marginalized children due to poverty. The focus on children living in poverty is based on the rationale that by promoting holistic child development, the children can become productive members of their families, communities, and countries. The current study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Compassion International program in poverty reduction among secondary school students in Mbeere North Sub Country focusing on their holistic child development outcomes. The study used a mixed method design that involved qualitative and quantitative methods which complemented each other and helped in addressing the research questions. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select participants from students, teachers, principals, and program directors. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. The findings indicate that Compassion International programs effectively promote holistic child development among its beneficiaries in the Mbeere North sub-county. This is through empowering the beneficiaries by developing them social-emotionally, economically, and spiritually and promoting good health and physical behavior.

Keywords : Kenya, Mbeere, Faith-based programs, child sponsorship, child development, youth development, poverty reduction

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1. Introduction

Various stakeholders, including governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are increasingly focusing on how they can solve the intergenerational cycle of poverty through holistic interventions that integrate child development and protect their livelihood. According to Zimmerman et al. (2018), a livelihood involves earning a living using skills and experience acquired over time. Quality of life requires individuals to have food, an income, and some assets. However, poor people find it challenging to meet their daily needs, including basic needs such as food and education, due to a lack of the means or the capability to do so. Holistic programs have been provided to positively impact child outcomes in developing countries, such as behavior change, academic achievement, employment, health, and skills development. As children in poverty are environmentally damaging to their physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental development, they need to focus on how they can help by eradicating the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

In understanding poverty experienced by children, examples include inadequate nutrition, lacking clean water and sanitation, poor health access, poor access to information, and inaccessibility to quality education. Wydick and Rutledge (2013) argue that reducing poverty must commence with children with holistic child development, a critical aspect of empowering individuals to become productive members of society. In agreement, Rahman and Sarker (2015) indicate that it is universally acknowledged that the environment one grows up in impact their general well-being as an adult such that a caring and responsive environment lead to more confident and caring adults. As a result, many governments and organizations across the globe have supported holistic child development.

One of these organizations is Compassion International, which provides children with nutrition, access to health care, access to education as well as holistic support through several strategies such as mentorship. Compassion International is a faith-based child sponsorship organization focused on providing empowerment opportunities to local communities across 25 countries for children and families in extreme poverty. According to Press Center (2017), Compassion International commits to poverty alleviation and the promotion of growth by helping youths by capitalizing and optimizing their strengths while aligning them with contextual resources. In addition, Compassion International is committed to helping empower youths while emphasizing the importance of religion and spirituality in their lives. Compassion International carries out its mandate through a partnership with local churches and organizations; the organization funds and supports locally adapted programming that focuses on spirituality as a critical principle (Wydick & Rutledge, 2013). Compassion International supports diverse programs and identifies engaging activities for the children, such as team sports, trade skills development, life skills, and arts and crafts. Youths are also exposed to faith-based activities such as spiritual retreats and worship. Compassion International programs are holistic by connecting the youths to their families, groups,

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sponsors, and others who support them through monthly financial support, personal mentorship through letters, and in particular cases, gifts and personalized visits.

Compassion International emphasizes the role played by relationships between the participants and caring adults such as project directors, mentors, and pastors. A unique aspect of Compassion International is that it not only focuses on economic sponsorship but focuses on a holistic approach promoting spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions. This allows the development of wholly developed individuals who can thrive and become productive members of society. While there has been valuable evidence on the effectiveness of child sponsorship programs by NGOs reporting positive Impact, there has been less focus on how holistic child development programs such as the one implemented by Compassion International impact poverty reduction. The current research focused on how Compassion International programs have led to holistic child development and have changed the participants' livelihood, allowing for making recommendations for improvement.

2. Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of holistic child development programs on the livelihood of youths in the Mbeere Sub-County by focusing on secondary school students who are participants of Compassion International programs. By understanding the impact of Compassion International on secondary students participating in Compassion International programs, the study was able to determine how effective the programs were in poverty reduction impacts in Mbeere Sub-County. Secondary students participating in Compassion International programs can be reviewed on various measures of the effectiveness of the programs, including their holistic child development outcomes such as social-emotional development as they interact with others, physical health and behavior, and livelihood by measuring their self-sufficiency.

3. Statement of the Problem

A significant number of children in Kenya are deprived of primary education. According to the Educational Statistical Report of the Ministry of Education 2016, more than 30% of primary school-going children have not enrolled in primary schools. More than 50% of the children of those who got enrolled in primary school drop out before completing fifth grade. As a result of this situation, the illiterate population of 6 years and above is increasing in Kenya. This may hinder the nation from attaining its development goals by keeping half its working population illiterate. For most NGOs, working together and engaging in partnerships with the locals puts them in a better position to provide formal and informal education (Zhang et al., 2020). This is because education is considered the most effective dimension is reducing poverty in the world.

Most NGOs' primary goal is to take up education as a prerequisite to teach the people about health, family planning, environment, economic empowerment, etc., to address the challenges encountered due to poverty. Those NGOs who implement child development programs like education sponsorship programs and women development programs like family planning found that without basic literacy, people cannot effectively grasp and utilize knowledge and skills. So most NGOs have undertaken education programs to supplement their main Program, but some NGOs primarily work for non-formal education (Rahman & Sarkar, 2015). Compassion International, a prominent NGO, has been operating in Kenya since 1980. Acknowledging her limitations, Compassion has adopted a partnership model

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with local evangelical churches to reach out to the needy children in the communities (Pearce, 2010). By partnering with local stakeholders, the program has a better understanding of the needs and wants of its beneficiaries.

Whereas there has been valuable prior research on child sponsorship programs by NGOs and community empowerment and what this sponsorship has meant to an individual member of the community, there has been no research meant to evaluate the effect of Compassion International on the community as a result of child sponsorship program (Pearce, 2010). Equally, it is worth noting that whereas Compassion International has a straightforward graduation process for individual children under her Sponsorship program, such criteria are missing regarding a particular operational region. As Konishi and Park (2017) illustrated, in carrying out a comparative analysis, the programs need similar operations and models. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effect of the Child Sponsorship program by Compassion International on the sponsored children and the entire Community Empowerment. It is also meant to look at the challenges that Compassion international has surpassed to change the lives of the children; hence recommended that the program continue as it is, be subjected to some adjustments, or be abolished entirely (Pearce, 2010). By carrying out the study, the research explores best practices in implementing child sponsorship programs, including understanding the challenges experienced.

4. Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To evaluate the extent to which the beneficiaries demonstrate their social-emotional development through healthily interacting with others in secondary schools of Mbeere Sub-County.
2. To evaluate what level the beneficiaries choose good health practices and are physically healthy in secondary schools of Mbeere Sub-County.
3. To evaluate how the beneficiaries exhibit motivation and skills to be economically self-supporting in secondary schools of Mbeere Sub-County.
4. To evaluate some of the challenges the course implementers face during the program's implementation in secondary schools of Mbeere Sub-County.
5. To determine how the implementation of the compassion program can be improved and sustained in secondary schools of Mbeere Sub-County.

5. Significance of the Study

The study findings may be significant to various stakeholders invested in eradicating poverty by focusing on child poverty through implementing holistic child development programs. The government may benefit from acquiring an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of Compassion International programs, including ensuring that the programs are focused on helping children and youths. Further, the results may inform sponsors of Compassion International on how their money is utilized and its effectiveness in reducing poverty. Other beneficiaries include participants of the program, Compassion International, other child sponsorship organizations such as World Vision and Save the Children Fund, and policymakers in providing regulations on managing child sponsorship programs. Finally, the study results may inform researchers of existing evidence on child sponsorship, including its effectiveness in poverty reduction.

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6. Review of Related Literature

In exploring the effectiveness of Compassion International in eradicating poverty among participants of its programs in secondary schools in Mbeere North Sub-county, the study used Marc Zimmerman's empowerment theory (1995). According to Zimmerman (1995), empowerment enables people to gain strength, confidence, and vision to work for positive changes in their lives, individually and collectively, with others. Therefore, individuals are empowered by their efforts and not by what others do for them, with empowerment focused on redistributing power to favor and help the poor and the disadvantaged in the community. The poor can take control of their lives and secure a better livelihood with ownership and control of productive assets. Empowerment includes terms such as self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, a life of dignity following one's values, the capability of fighting for one's rights, independence, decision-making, freedom, awakening, and capability. Empowerment, therefore, provides individuals with real choices. Poor people have extremely limited choices due to their powerlessness in negotiating terms for themselves and their families. Through the empowerment of poor people, they acquire the power to negotiate terms and have a choice in society.

Zimmerman's theory of empowerment advocates for teamwork and collaboration in effecting change and a focus on a holistic approach to problem-solving, resulting in overall improved quality of life (Repetto et al., 2004). This aligns with Compassion International, which focuses on holistic child development in poverty reduction. However, the theory is limited in that the change process is time intensive, and as such, it is impractical to measure the holistic impact of such programs. Despite this, it provides insights into the relevance of empowerment linked to the holistic child development model adopted by Compassion International programs. As such, Zimmerman's theory is appropriate for evaluating the extent to which Compassion International programs change the livelihood of poor children.

Evidence indicates that child sponsorship is one of the most adopted strategies in fighting poverty among the disadvantaged and improvised in society, with the model dating back to the 1930s. Since its development, the model has evolved from a singularly direct benefit of the participants to a benefit to the broader society. Child sponsorship programs are unique to other charitable work in that they promote a long-term commitment to sponsorship of the child whereby a child is sponsored until they become self-sufficient.

Additionally, child sponsorship programs focus on various needs, including cognitive and physical well-being, security, social-emotional well-being, and academic achievement over the years (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012). In addition to the direct sponsorship programs, child sponsorship programs also indirectly use programs such as building and developing infrastructure that directly helps the children. Compassion International is considered as one of the leading global charities that have adopted a child sponsorship model to empower local communities in fighting against poverty.

The Compassion International model focuses on a child's physical, social-emotional, economic, and physical needs. This includes the use of mentorship and building a relationship with a sponsor. As indicated by Campbell and Cochrane (1999) positive sponsor-child relationship is holistic as it allows continued support over the years. In agreement, Compassion International (2018) reports that child sponsorship led to an increase in formal education levels by nearly three years from a base of 8.37, raised the probability of formal employment to 72 percent from 55 percent, and increased the likelihood of white-collar employment to 31 percent from 19 percent while decreasing teenage marriage and

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childbearing. This illustrates the effectiveness of Compassion International programs. Various studies concur with the results indicating that child sponsorship reduced absenteeism, and improved physical well-being, cognitive performance, and academic performance (Miguel & Kremer, 2004; Evans & Ngatia, 2008; Kremer et al., 2009; Ozier, 2011). As such, child sponsorship improved the opportunities for the beneficiaries giving them more chances to excel in school.

In addition to socio-emotional development, child sponsorship promotes the sponsored children's physical development. Evidence suggests that child sponsorship programs enable physical development by providing meals, uniforms, new classrooms, and textbooks (Handa & Peterman, 2007; Glewwe & Miguel, 2008). By securing and meeting their physical needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing, there were improved academic outcomes, including improved class attendance (Kremer et al., 2013). In addition to focusing on the children, some organizations focus on carers to entice them to secure their children's educational needs. For instance, Behram et al. (2014) report that using cash initiatives for mothers to increase their children's attendance and obtain health care effectively led to higher attendance and improved outcomes for the children. As such, they are focusing on the physical development of the children is linked to improved outcomes for the children.

Socio-emotional development is an essential aspect and dimension of child development. Evidence links socio-emotional development with positive impacts, including improved educational impacts, more active engagement in society, and promotion of personal development (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Hurst et al., 2013; Further et al., 2013; Alhassan, 2015). Similarly, Shala (2013) links social-emotional development with academic success, arguing that children can interact and engage well with others allowing an iterative learning environment. Socio-emotional development is critical for the development of a child. Various programs have been implemented to improve children's social-emotional development, resulting in positive impacts such as improved personal hygiene practices such as brushing daily, regularly bathing, and hand washing, among others (Lal & Kavitha, 2016; Ratnaprabha et al., 2018).

Child sponsorship programs can help improve child's social-emotional development by promoting knowledge, motivating parental engagement in developing good behavior, and enhancing communication with their children resulting in positive emotional responses (Gitau et al., 2015; Gathi, 2017; Shilunga et al., 2018). Socio-emotional development is critical as it helps children cope and thrive in the world outside and inside the classroom. Evaluating the effectiveness of child sponsorship programs in child development, including social-emotional and physical development is essential. This is because holistic child development promotes a well-adjusted individual to thrive and be productive in society.

7. Methodology

The study took place in Mbeere North sub-county in Embu County, located in Eastern Kenya and 140 kilometers from Nairobi. The area faces adverse poverty with various sponsorship programs, such as support from local businesses and international organizations. Compassion International is one of the NGOs with programs in the area, with the current study aimed at exploring its effectiveness in implementing and promoting holistic child development in the area. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach with qualitative and quantitative methods complementary and parallel. As recommended by Gall et al. (1996), the study

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adopted the ex-post factor study design whereby the research variables have already occurred and cannot be manipulated in carrying out the research.

The study targeted 50 schools with over 500 secondary school students who are beneficiaries of Compassion International programs, 100 teachers, and principals. Stratified random sampling was utilized, with the target population divided into strata. Expert and homogeneous sampling was also utilized to identify appropriate study participants. The data collection was through questionnaires, document analysis, interviews, and observation guides. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, while document analysis observation and interviews collected qualitative data. The descriptive and inferential analysis helped analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis allowed qualitative data analysis. Based on the recommendations of Bryman (2012), the study ensures ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, honesty, and autonomy, among others. This ensures that the study participants are protected from any potential harm.

8. Research Results

The study sought to explore the effectiveness of child sponsorship programs in promoting holistic child development with a focus on Compassion International programs. The study had 63 respondents comprising 40 student-beneficiaries, 15 teachers, five school principals, and three project directors, and an overall response rate of 98.4%. The study had 50% of the respondents' male and 50% female to ensure gender equality in the representation. According to the findings, 25.0% of students were drawn from Form 1, Form 2, Form 3, and Form 4. The study examined the period students had benefited from Compassion program support, and findings indicated that the majority (50%) had received support for a period of 11-15 years, 27.0% of the students had received support for a period of 6-10 years, 15.0% of the students had received support for a period of between 16-22 years while 7.5% of the students had received Compassion program support for a period of between 1-5 years. Compassion International (2018) illustrates that Compassion International programs focus on children from different ages throughout their childhood until they become self-sufficient. This demonstrates that Compassion International programs, indeed, take a holistic approach to provide support to their beneficiaries.

Students' socio-emotional development is an important element and aspect of analyzing the effectiveness of Compassion International programs among its beneficiaries in secondary schools in the Mbeere North sub-county. Various measurements were carried out on the socio-emotional development of beneficiaries of Compassion International programs. First, the nature of the beneficiaries' relationship with the community was evaluated, with the findings indicating that majority had very good relationships at 52.5%, with only 5% indicating poor engagement with society. There were 27.5% who were rated to have a good relationship, while 10% were average and % rated as unsure.

As illustrated by Hurst et al. (2013), interactions with others indicate social maturity and can determine whether an individual is ready to become an engaging and productive member of society. As such, it can be concluded that beneficiaries of Compassion International programs have developed social maturity and are ready to transform their lives as they engage with others in society. Teachers were asked to inform on the social behavior of beneficiaries while in school as it is an indicator of socio-emotional development. According to the findings, the majority (40.0%) of teachers rated student's social behavior in school as very good, 20.0% of the teachers rated it as poor, while 13.3% each of the teachers

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rated student's social behavior in school as good, average, and very poor. Individuals' social behavior indicates how the participant of the program will engage with others in society. This reflects the findings of Campell (1999), who argue that through sponsorship programs, the role of the sponsors is not only to provide funds to support the beneficiaries but also to provide emotional support through an exchange of letters and photos. As a result, child sponsorship programs enable sponsors to provide financial and non-financial support with strategies that help develop the emotional dimension of the child's development.

Good health and physical practices among beneficiaries are also illustrated with the majority (66.7%) of the teachers rating physical and healthy practices among students as very good, 26.7% as good, 13.3% rated students' physical and healthy practices as average, while 6.7% of respondents and 13.3% rated them as poor, and very poor respectively. As illustrated by Konishi and Park (2017), physical and healthy activities are a critical element significant in holistic child development. Therefore, developing food health and physical behavior and activities is important in preparing children for life in society.

The study demonstrates that 40.0% of the respondents rated students' motivation towards economic sustainability as very good, 26.7% of the respondents as good, 13.3% rated it as average, 6.7% as poor, and 13.3% rated it as very poor. On the other hand, the principals all agreed that the motivation for the economic development of the beneficiaries of Compassion International programs was good. This aligns with existing evidence that observes that beneficiaries of child sponsorship programs of Compassion International were motivated to engage in economic sustaining activities (Drèze & Kingdon, 2001; Kremer & Vermeersch, 2004). By securing the beneficiaries' basic needs, there was a refocus on activities that could continue sustaining their livelihood after exiting the programs by becoming productive members of society. This includes an interest in income-generating activities while still at school and other activities illustrating a well-rounded individual, such as helping the less fortunate.

The correlational analysis helped determine the degree to which Compassion program support influenced the holistic development of students in terms of socioemotional, physical, and healthy growth, motivation for personal economic growth, and spiritual development. The findings are shown below in table 1.

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Table 1 : Correlation Analysis

		Compassion Support	Social-emotional	Physical and healthy growth	Motivational for personal economic growth	Religious development
Compassion Support	Correlation	1	.724**	.750**	.787**	.878**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
Social-emotional	Correlation	.724**	1	.923**	.928**	.880**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
Physical and healthy growth	Correlation	.750**	.923**	1	.897**	.858**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
Motivational for personal economic growth	Correlation	.787**	.928**	.897**	1	.941**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
Religious development	Correlation	.878**	.880**	.858**	.941**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	40	40	40	40	40

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data (2022)

The results indicate that the correlation between the variables and Compassion International programs is positive, with socioemotional at (0.724), physical and healthy growth at (0.750), motivation for personal economic growth at (0.787), and spiritual development at (0.878). This illustrates that beneficiaries in Compassion International programs had motivation for personal economic growth and experienced physical and healthy development, spiritual development, and social-emotional development. This aligns with the contention of Zimmerman et al. (2018), who found out that child sponsorship programs helped in holistic child development. As such, Compassion International programs were successful in achieving holistic child development of their beneficiaries.

Regression analysis illustrates the significance of the effectiveness of Compassion International programs on the beneficiaries' growth and development. This is summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2 : Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error in the Estimate
1	.892 ^a	.796	.772	.389

a. Predictors: (Constant), Religious development, Physical and healthy growth, Social-emotional, Motivational for personal economic growth

As shown above, the value of R square was 0.796, indicating a variation of 79.6% of the Compassion International program due to changes in religious development, physical and healthy growth, and social-emotional, motivational for personal economic growth of students

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at a 95% confidence interval. This indicates that 79.6% of students' socioemotional, physical, and healthy growth, motivational for personal economic growth and spiritual development, could be explained by participation in Compassion International programs, while only 20.4% is explained by others factors not included in the study. ANOVA analysis on the study model illustrates a significance value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05; thus, the model is statistically significant in predicting how the Compassion International program influences student's; socioemotional, physical, and healthy growth, motivational for personal economic growth, and religious development as summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3 : Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.669	4	5.167	34.084	.000 ^b
	Residual	5.306	35	.152		
	Total	25.975	39			

a. Dependent Variable: Compassion Support

b. Predictors: (Constant), Religious development, Physical and healthy growth, Social-emotional, Motivational for personal economic growth

As shown in Table 4 below, when all independent variables are constant at zero, the Compassion program support coefficient was 1.359. Further, the findings indicate that with all other independent variables at zero, a unit increase in socioemotional growth will lead to a 0.171 decrease in Compassion support, a unit increase in physical and healthy growth will lead to a 0.169 increase in Compassion program support, a unit increase in motivation for personal economic growth will lead to a 0.179 decrease in Compassion program support. In contrast, an increase in spiritual development will lead to a 0.679 increase in Compassion program support.

Table 4 : Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.359	.133		10.192	.000
	Social-emotional	-.171	.155	-.273	-1.109	.275
	Physical and healthy growth	.169	.133	.264	1.270	.213
	Motivational for personal economic growth	-.179	.166	-.313	-1.077	.289
	Religious development	.679	.130	1.187	5.231	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Compassion Support

Source: Field Data (2022)

The findings indicate that Compassion International programs promote holistic child development by influencing the beneficiaries' social-emotional development, physical and healthy growth, motivation towards economic growth, and spiritual development. Compassion International (2018) illustrates that the model of its child sponsorship programs is to ensure that once an individual leaves the programs, they can successfully participate in society socially, economically, and spiritually. Therefore, Compassion International programs take a holistic approach to supporting children and transitioning them into productive

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members of society. As illustrated by Zimmerman et al. (2018), child sponsorship programs enable poverty eradication by empowering individuals.

9. Conclusion

The study concludes that Compassion International programs focus on the holistic child development of its beneficiaries whereby the program supports and promote growth and development throughout the different dimensions of the individuals on spiritual, socio-emotional, economic, and physical. With poverty a complex concept that negatively affects all aspects of life, its eradication must incorporate all four dimensions of life. The study indicates that the Compassion International programs are long-term in nature and sustainable, helping the child through childhood and helping them transition into adulthood. The study concludes that the beneficiaries of Compassion International programs are physical health and adopt good practices about their health while also being able to interact with others socially. Further, the beneficiaries are motivated to become economically self-supporting while spiritually mature with practices such as helping those in need. The Compassion International program, as such, can promote child development holistically and effectively in a beneficial way to become productive members of society.

10. Recommendations

The following measures are recommended to address the gaps identified in implementing Compassion International Program for Poverty Reduction among secondary schools in Mbeere Sub-county, Embu County. First, to realize full sustainability of the Program, increased financial support, such as financial assistance, either as start-up capital or grant compounded with support groups for parents, is encouraged. This will sustain parental support for the student's education if the sponsor withdraws financial support. Second, the study recommends broad participation as an essential tool to enable students and parents to take full ownership of economic sustainability programs.

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