

Faith-Based Organisations, Old Age Pension Scheme & Programme Sustainability: The Case of Compassion International-Supported Children and Youth Development Programme in Uganda

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Abstract

Taking Compassion International as a case study, the paper examines the extent to which Faith-Based Organisations can leverage the Old Age Pension Scheme to generate revenue for financial sustainability, poverty alleviation, and programme continuity in Uganda's local settings. To present the challenges faced by Compassion International in its effort to alleviate economic poverty, historical and contemporary research methodologies were employed. Secondly, Compassion International's policy frameworks and programme implementation guidelines were examined. Thirdly, physical visits were made to field centres. Finally, the research had casual interactions with the programme alumni to learn about their vocational outcomes. Study findings revealed that 18,586 of the 1,019,187 children registered for sponsorship support by Compassion International in Africa since the program's inception had survived. This means that 98%, accounting for 1,000,601 children, dropped out of the sponsorship programme before attaining vocational skills. Next, 1408 of 4132 church partnerships survived, meaning that 2724 (66%) were terminated. Similar trends were observed in the local setting of Uganda. Few young people had graduated from the sponsorship programme and several local church partners were terminated. As a result, poverty is on the rise nationwide, even though Compassion International is active in 123 of Uganda's 135 districts. The 2026 data from the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics show that of Uganda's total population of 45,905,417, 44,138,557 people are experiencing multidimensional poverty. This study then suggests that if Compassion International leverage the old-age social security scheme to inculcate a culture of saving in local commu-

nities, then the treasury can be invested to grow people's funds, with surplus used to support more needy people as years unfold. Such an arrangement is most likely to minimise children's dropouts, reduce termination of local church partnerships, enhance local ownership, and promote programme sustainability and continuity.

Keywords

Poverty, Compassion, Children, Youth, Pension

1. Introduction

Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) that provide humanitarian assistance to poverty-stricken communities trace their roots to the Hebraic, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and several organised religious communities. The proponents are driven by their deeply held religious convictions to support vulnerable groups in society as they pursue meaning in life. Through donations of monetary resources, material hand-outs, and technical expertise, they extend help to the famine-stricken, those affected by civil wars, the homeless, and people struggling with killer diseases (Olsson, 2024: pp. 13-14).

In 1953, studies found that 90% of relief for victims of post-civil war conflicts worldwide was provided by religious organisations (Ferris, 2005: pp. 313-315; Olsson, 2024: pp. 13-14). In their religiously driven agenda,

Both Christians and Muslims believe that there is a witness of faith through charity that is a way of life and expression of obedience to God... considering that religion is the guarantor of morals, charity, good behaviour, and virtue... Thus, Christian and Muslim NGOs share a common commitment whereby their humanitarian actions are based on their religious beliefs (Ferris, 2005: p. 324).

Ferris (2005: pp. 317-324) further notes that Jewish and Muslim FBOs focus on providing aid to members of their religious communities, whereas Christian organisations have a global perspective and occasionally extend support to non-adherents. However, all FBOs are driven by the mandate to convert others to their religious faith.

Faith-based support systems driven by the mandate to convert irreligious people have existed since ancient times. As such, FBOs are motivated by sacred convictions to support vulnerable groups in society in moving out of cognitive ignorance, overcoming indigenous cultural superstitions, strengthening social relationships, addressing economic backwardness, and minimising the impact of disease epidemics (Petersen, 2019: pp. 19-21).

To address humanitarian challenges in Uganda, there are several registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs), among them Faith-based Organisations. Most NGOs focus on alleviating economic poverty and fostering social cohesion

in the country. The Number of NGOs in the country has increasingly grown. There were 160 in 1986, “500 in 1992, 3500 in 2002, 7000 in 2008, and 8500 in 2011.” In 2021, there were 14,000 NGOs, but as of August 2023, the number had dropped to 5021. The numbers have continued to decline, attributed to shifting donor priorities, the termination of external funding due to financial misconduct, government restrictions, and the limited capacity of indigenous leadership to generate revenue locally in a sustainable manner (Bougheas et al., 2022: pp. 2-5; Joseph, 2025).

While there are several FBOs in Africa that are driven by sacred teachings to address the plight of the poor, most of them are tributary plants of foreign religious organisations. The local management leadership promotes programme activities in accordance with the vision and purpose statements, which reflect the foreign funders’ religious convictions. In programme outputs, very little, if any, aligns with African religious convictions in community engagements. In certain instances, the foreign community development strategies that are rolled out to empower indigenous Africans to come out of economic poverty are detached from the host community’s moral formation convictions. That is why, to a certain extent, the European-trained Africans are struggling to help their indigenous communities escape chronic economic poverty (Ferris, 2005: p. 312; Lithuanian Jewish Community, 2026).

Therefore, by taking Compassion International as a case study, the study investigated economic poverty trends and the extent to which Faith-Based Organisations can leverage the old age pension scheme to generate revenue for financial sustainability, poverty alleviation, and programme continuity in Uganda’s local settings.

2. Theoretical Framework

Henry Venn (1796-1873), an Anglican Priest, and Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), a Congregationalist, were disturbed that indigenous churches established by missionaries were being spoon-fed on foreign initiatives. They coined a three-self missionary theory, thus a self-propagating, a self-governing, and a self-supporting indigenous Christian community (Shenk, 1981: p. 170) in the years 1846 to 1865, whereby they clarified “the main goal of mission and the most effective means of realising it” in an indigenous host community¹. In subsequent years, Paul Hiebert (1932-2007) and David Bosch (1929-1992) added a fourth self, namely, a self-theologising, ingenious Christian community (Mission Musings, 2017).

The theory was driven by the assumption that once foreign religious principles are owned by the indigenous community, they ought to theologise their contextual development agenda, engage in programme management, use locally available resources to generate sustainable revenue, and ensure the long-term sustainability of religious nurture programmes. Indigenous religious leaders, if they were to influence progressive, holistic societal transformation, were called upon to pe-

¹<https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/t-u-v/venn-henry-1796-1873/>

riodically modify their programmes to speak to the changing cultural lifestyles of a given religious community (Shenk, 1981: p. 170).

Missionary theorists put forward their arguments that during the early spread of Christianity, wherever missionaries planted churches, they: created well organized churches, empowered people with spiritual formation skills, provided hands on income generating trainings, offered pastoral care and counselling, celebrated sacraments, financed church programmes and infrastructure development, participated in governance, encouraged natives to manipulate and align their cultural heritages with Christian ethical teachings, and once the fellowships of believers were functioning normally, they handed management of the programmes over to the converts (Wikiwand, 2022). This line of thinking was taken on by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Christianity became indigenized wherever it set foot, and the continuity of church business was left in the hands of the natives (Shenk, 1981: p. 170).

While the theory provides a uniform yardstick for sustainable and steady indigenous community growth, every community grows at its own pace, depending on its unique historical experiences, cultural convictions, social tradition dynamics, cultivated local revenue-generation measures, government poverty alleviation policy frameworks, and the intellectual calibre of indigenous human resources. As such, a miscalculated withdrawal of foreign support may result in weak local administrations, poor programme management, financial indiscipline, and the extinction of foreign-driven initiatives. Such conditions are observable in most of the sports that were once supported by Compassion International in Uganda.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, historical and contemporary research methodologies (Khan & Gopi, 2024: pp. 27-28) were employed to examine reports that highlight the work of Faith-Based Organisations; the work and historical growth of Compassion International; and poverty trends in the global, African, and Ugandan contexts. Secondly, Compassion International's policy frameworks and programme implementation guidelines were examined. Thirdly, physical visits were made to field centres in Bugiri, Busia, Namayingo, and Mayugu districts in Uganda to observe the impact Compassion International was having on the social set-up of local communities and the nurturing environments of the local churches. The districts were purposely chosen because Compassion International's children sponsorship had existed in these areas since the 1980s, the travel costs were less constraining, and the researcher had previously worked in the same geographical area.

Finally, the researcher drawing on 10 years of professional experience as a former Local Church Children and Youth Development employee and using the snowball sampling technique, with local pastors as initial contacts, casual interviews were conducted among 30 alumni to learn about their vocational outcomes. However, to strengthen the findings presented in this paper, in-depth research involving Compassion International's primary stakeholders is paramount; much

might not have been brought to light due to overreliance on secondary sources, observations, and casual interviews.

4. Compassion International Children and Youth Development Programme

4.1. History of Compassion International

Compassion International, a global Christian-based organisation, traces its roots to the passionate convictions of Reverend Swanson Everett, who was deployed by the American military to provide chaplaincy services during the Korean War in 1952. As the war raged, Swanson was heartbroken when he observed thousands displaced from their homes and lodging on the town streets. Orphaned children outnumbered adults, and many died due to a lack of basic life necessities and the extreme cold weather. Inspired by the biblical scripture: “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mathew 9:36, NIV), Swanson birthed a charity organisation that, as of 2024, was supporting 2.3 million vulnerable children in 29 countries worldwide (Compassion International, 2026).

To raise resources to support vulnerable children, Compassion International currently networks with 9000 local Christian congregations who offer voluntary professional services to nurture children, 1600 music artists and sportspeople who use their platforms to generate donor funds, 15,000 churches that offer sponsorship support to children, and alliance partner organisations that get involved in the child nurture programme design. Globally, 1.67 million individual donors from “Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States” extend sponsorship support to vulnerable children (Compassion International, 2025: p. 6).

It is clear that since its inception, Compassion International has greatly expanded and is doing commendable work globally to support vulnerable groups in society in walking out of economic poverty. The International organisation boasts of 1.67 million individual sponsors who support the mission in various ways. However, a review of the sponsors’ geographic locations shows that none are from Africa (Compassion International, 2025: p. 6, 9). Could it be that people on the African continent are yet to be envisioned to join the donor community, or is their provision of voluntary labour and space to nurture vulnerable children sufficient?

4.2. Philosophy of Compassion International

Compassion International programme outputs are child-focused, Christ-nurture-centred, and dedicated to partnerships with local evangelical Christian communities. Compassion International, guided by Christian moral teachings, works with local Christian congregations and affiliated partner organisations to empower vulnerable children and their caregivers with spiritual, vocational, physical health,

and cognitive skills to alleviate economic poverty. The empowerment is a curricular, child- and youth-stage-managed programme for ages 1 to 22 years (Compassion International, 2025: pp. 4-8).

“Compassion believes holistic development is a long-term approach that starts before a child is born and continues through to school age and beyond.” As such, staged growth activities are curriculum rolled out to empower pregnant mothers, caregivers, and vulnerable children with cognitive, spiritual, physical, economic, and social relationship skills. In developing the children’s nurture curriculum, grassroots implementing church leaderships are equipped with organisational management skills to design relevant programmes for their diverse local settings (Compassion Australia, 2019: pp. 6-10).

At the core of Compassion International’s child development agenda is addressing the life-robbing challenges that manifest in children’s households, their cultural environments, and the surrounding interconnected society. The interconnected social environments are believed to be saturated with challenges that affect children’s early survival and progressive growth. To mitigate the challenges, the critical areas of intervention include: the provision of clean water, emergency medical care, nutritional therapeutic interventions, infrastructure support, and vocational training, so that young people graduate from the sponsorship programme when they are emotionally stable, spiritually mature, and professionally empowered to lead fulfilled and self-sustaining lives (Compassion Australia, 2019: pp. 10-12).

To measure the global impact of Compassion International, 99 alumni from the Dominican Republic were surveyed in 2024. The study found that 97% moved out of economic poverty, 95% developed self-esteem skills, 95% achieved their educational goals, 95% gained the confidence to confront life’s challenges with a smile, and that, for 93%, their moral lives changed for the better (Compassion International, 2026).

The findings are exciting. If such findings are replicable in all countries where Compassion is at work, then great work has been done to shape the vocational destiny of the young. However, the extent to which graduates apply the skills they have acquired to attain economic independence and contribute to the financial sustainability and growth of the local Christian congregations and the national umbrella organisations that supported them is not spelt in the rolled-out study report.

4.3. Compassion International Work in Africa

Compassion International operates in 10 African countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda (Compassion International, 2025: p. 9). The annual report, released in 2025 and focusing on Africa, highlighted that 18,586 of the 1,019,187 children registered for sponsorship support since the programme’s inception had survived. This means that 98% accounting for 1,000,601 children dropped out of the sponsorship programme

before attaining vocational skills, or had double sponsorship and were deleted from the programme, or they deliberately exited from the programme. Next, 1408 of 4132 church partnerships survived, meaning that 2724 (66%) were terminated due to financial misconduct or, less likely, due to natural disasters (*Compassion International—Africa Region, 2025*: p. v).

However, the low survival rate of children in the sponsorship programme is questionable. Probably the sponsorship support conditions were unbearable, or the mode of child mentorship programmes was not context-friendly to African communal resource-sharing and knowledge-transfer methods.

A critical examination of the philosophy promoted by Compassion International to empower vulnerable African children with the skills to overcome economic poverty is rooted in European Christianity. The European Christian approach, which conveys foreign thought convictions, has, to a certain extent, helped some attain their goals, but to many, the Christian moral values emphasised in the programme curricula are foreign. This could explain why many children are enrolled in the programme: some drop out, but few graduate.

Another challenge that may be contributing to children dropping out of the sponsorship programme could be connected to the religious rivalries between Christians and Muslims. In Africa, Christianity and Islam are intertwined with traditional African religions. While African religion displays the undeniable genetic makeup of all Africans, European Christianity and Arabian Islam have never been incorporated into African language concepts and thought patterns. Certainly, promoting European-crafted Christ-centred teachings that are foreign to African Christians and sidelining the African Muslim community is a disregard for the cultural ideals that bind Africans as a people of Black Culture. Of course, Compassion International focuses on working alongside local Christian congregations engaged in conversions, but such an approach denies the poverty-stricken, indifferent religious others the opportunity to access services that could help them escape economic poverty.

As a matter of fact, the approach used by the African cultural universe to instil constructive moral values and to bond people is not visible in the curriculum design promoted by external funders of Compassion International programmes in Africa. On the contrary, the African moral formation curriculum is embedded in the ceremonial activities of the diverse tribes. In fact, each African culture has an oral curriculum that relies on myths, folktales, proverbs, songs, dances, vestments, rituals, symbols, taboos, legends, stories, speeches, and ceremonies to instil and reward constructive moral values (*Oladipupo, 2022*: pp. 6-7).

On the contrary, Compassion International's community development engagement curricula in Africa are coloured by Europeanised religious interests, complicated scientific symbols and formulas, and complex theories and terminology that lack equivalent translations in African languages. Additionally, English syllable arrangements are not nearly as close to African word-syllable constructions. Astonishingly, within the programme's activity outputs, Africanism is not evident in the staged intellectual development curricula or in the physical environment

and iconic religious expressions. Instead, Christian communities work hard to convert others to their religious aspirations. Such anomalies tend to fuel interreligious discrimination in Africa to the disadvantage of alleviating economic poverty.

In the physical arena, Africans are Muslims and Christians to attain public goods, but in their innate ancestry, their divine, ingrained identities vibrate, and these magnetic forces draw them together as a people of Black culture to engage in traditional social transactions. In Africa, there are several tribes with diverse cultural expressions, but none of them has crafted conversion programmes to proselytise the tribal neighbours.

In reality, no African tribal icons coerce other tribes to convert to their cherished cultures nor to proselytise. Certainly, tribal hostilities, clashes, and vocational discrimination based on cultural differences hold less weight in Africa. People are aware of the intertribal colourful traditions and accord the utmost respect to each tribe's cultural expression.

The greatest challenge is that Christianity and secularism have no genetic ancestry in Africa. They are not part of an African milk-suckled culture, and for that reason, their integration into African cultural expressions, social traditions, and language concepts is lacking. It is such an anomaly that has caused confusion in knowledge absorption, vocational innovations, misunderstandings, and a reduced impact of Compassion International programmes in alleviating economic poverty in Africa.

In Africa, Compassion International has existed for more than 70 years (*Compassion International—Africa Region, 2025: p. iv*). Even if the organisation is not the only player in the field of poverty alleviation in Africa, its existence over time would have ushered in reduced levels of economic poverty. In addition, the organisation would have projected the timelines for phasing its sponsorship programme activities in Africa.

On the contrary, World Bank estimates indicate that, globally, 23 million people were experiencing extreme poverty by the end of 2022. Many people living in poverty were found in sub-Saharan Africa (*Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: p. 11*). The Afrobarometer study across 39 African countries revealed alarming trends in the number of people living in severe poverty, as indicated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Poverty trends in Africa.

Year	2011/2013	2014/2015	2016/2018	2019/2021	2021/2023
Basic Needs	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Cash income	77	74	78	80	81
Medical care	54	49	52	60	64
Food	50	46	49	54	57
Clean water	49	44	47	53	55
Cooking fuel	41	37	37	45	49

Source: *Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: p. 4*.

Despite interventions by African governments, non-governmental organisations, and Faith-Based Organisations in the fight against economic poverty, statistics displayed in **Table 1** reveal increasing levels of human suffering. In 2021/2023, 81% of Africans had inadequate cash incomes, 64% lacked access to quality medical care, 57% struggled to secure stable meals in their households, 55% could not access clean water, and 49% lacked access to cooking fuel (Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: pp. 1-4).

In addition to the poverty trends shown in **Table 1**, Afrobarometer documented the levels of lived poverty across 39 African countries, as shown in **Table 2**. The average across the 39 African countries showed that 29% were experiencing low lived poverty, 36% moderate lived poverty, and 26% high lived poverty. Overall, 91% of Africans were battling multidimensional poverty (Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: pp. 9-10).

Table 2. Levels of lived poverty in Africa [39 countries] 2021/2023.

		LLP ² MLP ³ HLP ⁴					LLP MLP HLP		
No.	Country	%	%	%	No.	Country	%	%	%
1	Seychelles	25	4	6	21	Sierra Leone	38	41	15
2	Morocco	26	14	3	22	Kenya	36	37	22
3	Mauritius	48	9	11	23	Burkina Faso	36	42	18
4	Cabo Verde	40	24	12	24	Angola	18	35	44
5	Tunisia	39	30	10	25	Malawi	22	38	37
6	South Africa	33	30	20	26	Guinea	19	39	39
7	Ghana	50	25	9	27	Senegal	24	42	31
8	Sudan	27	39	23	28	Gabon	19	43	36
9	Namibia	32	34	22	29	Mauritania	13	34	50
10	Gambia	23	32	34	30	Nigeria	19	40	39
11	Tanzania	43	33	14	31	Uganda	27	42	28
12	Mali	33	30	27	32	Benin	20	47	31
13	Botswana	39	34	18	33	Zimbabwe	26	39	32
14	São Tomé & Príncipe	34	39	19	34	Zambia	31	49	19
15	Mozambique	28	37	28	35	Cameroon	17	43	38
16	Liberia	30	39	24	36	Togo	20	41	37
17	Eswatini	30	38	24	37	Congo-Brazzaville	13	38	48
18	Côte d'Ivoire	31	40	22	38	Niger	15	44	40
19	Ethiopia	34	39	21	39	Madagascar	22	41	37
20	Lesotho	30	41	24	39-Country Average		29	36	26

Source: Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: p. 9.

²Low Lived Poverty.

³Moderate Lived Poverty.

⁴High Lived Poverty.

On the other hand, the study conducted by Afrobarometer revealed minimal numbers of the population (9% - 10%) in Africa that had reasonable access to cash income, quality medical care, stable food baskets, clean water, and cooking fuel (Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: pp. 9-10).

Among the Africans with full access to material security, sustainable survival was associated with gender, settlement, education level, age, and employment, as illustrated in **Table 3**. Women (10%) and men (11%) were found to be at nearly the same levels of life survival and material provisions. While it is unclear how the lucky few Africans earned their stable incomes, 15% lived in urban centres, compared with 6% in rural areas.

Table 3. Full access to basic necessities.

Gender	Percent	Age group	Percent
Women	10	18 - 35 years	9
Men	11	36 - 45 years	10
Settlement		46 - 55 years	11
Urban	15	56 & older	14
Rural	6		
Education level		Employment	
Post-secondary	21	Full-time Employed	18
Secondary	10	Part-time employment	10
Primary	7	Not employed and not looking for a job	8
No formal education	4	Looking for employment	5

Source: Mattes & Lekalake, 2025: p. 10.

As illustrated in **Table 3**, the Afrobarometer study further found that among the economically stable Africans, 21% had post-secondary education, 10% had secondary education, 7% had primary education, and 4% had no formal education. Having a stable income without professional skills is quite a challenge, unless individuals inherit resources from their parents or are geniuses whose backgrounds did not provide them with opportunities to develop professional skills. Nonetheless, in every society, there are talented people with less education who have mastered the art of leveraging educated professionals to build their economic empires.

Results in **Table 3** go on to show that among the Africans with stable household economic resources, 9% were found to be aged 18 - 35 years, 10% were aged 36 - 45 years, 11% were aged 46 - 55 years, and 14% were aged 56 years or above. This means that older people were more economically stable than the younger generation, but the percentage differences are minimal, and this does not provide a framework for determining which age group can be relied upon to mentor economically struggling Africans.

Finally, the results revealed that among economically stable Africans, 18% were

full-time professional employees, 10% were part-time professional employees, 8% were unemployed and not looking for work, and 5% were looking for professional employment. In Africa, it is clear that few people are economically stable, even though several government-, civic-, and religion-driven initiatives are in place to empower the struggling poor to attain economic independence. This means that the poverty-alleviation methods need to be reconstructed.

4.4. Compassion International Work in Uganda

Compassion International is documented to have started the child sponsorship programme in Uganda in the 1980s. Since then, 86,292 young people have graduated from the programme, and 142,135 children and youth are currently active, each attached to a caring sponsor from overseas countries. In 2024, 26,130 foetuses were enrolled in the programme, monitored, and pregnant mothers were supported to access quality antenatal care. To keep the programme running, children are enrolled from ages 0 to 9, and they graduate from the programme when aged between 12 and 22 (Agwang, 2024).

The records published in 2025 reveal that 150,370 children were registered, that the organisation partnered with 498 Christian congregations, and that 2460 breastfeeding mothers were supported (Compassion Australia, 2025).

To fulfil its holistic mission, Compassion International's head office in Uganda works in partnership with 485 local evangelical churches and is active in 123 of Uganda's 135 districts. The programme implementers on the ground include professional staff and volunteers, supervised by local church leadership and the Compassion International national technical team. The national technical team approves and monitors the programme curriculum, which focuses on nurturing young people to develop a Christian faith, build social capital, manage their physical health, and acquire vocational skills (Agwang, 2024).

In their strategic endeavours, Compassion International-Uganda occasionally phases out "underperforming field child programs." The move is aimed at minimising financial abuse and resource wastage in some places, while in other places, where their efforts are measured to have reduced poverty levels, the partnership is terminated and resources are allocated to other disadvantaged communities (Kamyokya Times, 2026). However, the puzzle to ponder is why terminate the sponsorship programme, yet the poor will never cease to be in every earthly locality (Deuteronomy 15:11; Mathew 26:11)?

Of course, terminating the sponsorship programme in places where local leadership is involved in fraudulent practices is necessary; however, such a retributive stance needs to be pursued with patience. African conflict resolution relies heavily on ritualistic restorative approaches rather than punitive ones. Seeds planted over time in a given community take root and become deeply rooted in the innocent people's lives; the wound inflicted when such deep-rooted relationships are terminated harms a network of communal relationships.

Certainly, the relationship-termination approaches at hand indicate that the

framers of the Compassion International programme deliveries did not deliberately take steps to build African ritualistic community ownership supervision, craft local resource mobilisation and sustainable measures, and public display programme continuity exit indicators.

True, leadership challenges arise in every organisation, but terminating programmes on the grounds of mismanagement or having reached the exit period, other than due to an irreversible natural disaster, is not what missiologists Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, Paul Hiebert, and David Bosch put forward as the best stewardship approach to build a self-propagating, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-theologizing, indigenous Christian community (Shenk, 1981: p. 170; *Mission Musings*, 2017).

To affirm the complex implementation challenges at Compassion International, a visit to the Bugiri, Namayingo, Mayuge, and Busia districts, where the children and youth sponsorship programmes have existed since the 1980s, revealed the information shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Compassion international-supported field centres.

No.	Local Church Partner	No.	Local Church Partner
Active Youth and Child Development Centres			
1	Nakudi	12	Busia Deliverance Church
2	Budimo	13	Amogura
3	Bunyukhe	14	Syonga
4	Maanga	15	Shabona
5	Busia Town Baptist	16	Bugiri Baptist
6	Nangera	17	Buwongo
7	Kitumba	18	St. Luke, Kasaala
8	Hatumba Banja	19	Mayuge
9	Buluuta	20	Buduma-Sidodo
10	Namoni	21	Habulekhe
11	Buyondo		
Terminated Youth and Child Development Centres			
1	Kayango	9	Bushura
2	Nawonjoki	10	Habala
3	Kilongero	11	Businywa
4	Butema	12	Mawanga
5	Lubanyi	13	Nabukima
6	Bunalwenyi	14	Ezira
7	Nangalama	15	Buteba
8	Bwanika		

Of the 36 sites visited and the ongoing religious activities observed, 21 field centres were still active and receiving technical and financial support from Compassion International. To the 15 centres that had been terminated, while many vulnerable children had been supported, there was no observable continuity of local church community-driven sponsorship programmes. To make matters worse, the church-nurturing environments had nothing visible to show they were nurturing children in the community holistically, and, in the worst cases, some former Christian congregations' child nurture programmes had gone extinct.

The deteriorating church's nurturing environments, poor school infrastructures, poor community hygiene and sanitation, and poor housing observed on the ground were indicative that child sponsorship programmes were forced onto vulnerable people, or that the relational management supervisory approaches were foreign. On the other hand, probably because the programme promoters knew it all, people folded their hands and adopted a lethargic attitude and a dependent mentality.

Development relationships are two-way benefits. The parties endorse policy-convinced terms for engagement at the individual and communal levels. The question to ponder, then, is: why admit the poor into a sponsorship programme without indoctrinating them from the get-go about what they are supposed to pay back to the organisation that intends to lift them out of economic poverty? Of course, not all able-bodied poor people can make it in life at the same pace, but the small number who learn quickly and successfully graduate each year can be resourceful in helping the many who are struggling to rethink their actions and work toward attaining vocational skills.

Hearteningly, the physical and social environments visited in Bugiri, Namayingo, Mayuge, and Busia districts in Uganda (**Table 4**) revealed that even when Compassion International was investing high sums of money to better the lives of the programme recipients, there persist poor school infrastructures, terrible community sanitation and hygiene, community environment degradation, and less involvement of the public in providing school going children with lunch meals. Several beneficiaries who exited the sponsorship programme without attaining vocational skills were living in economic poverty, while a few had made it in life.

Surprisingly, the family setups of those who had made it in life were admirable. Negligible numbers were providing financial support for the infrastructure development of their local churches and schools, and driven by the African collective responsive consciousness, they were paying university tuition fees for their relatives and neighbours. However, such a drive was not within Compassion International's policy framework for inspiring alumni to give back to their communities and the organisation to continue nurturing the localised expanding webs.

It is clear-cut that Compassion International is active in 123 of Uganda's 135 districts ([Agwang, 2024](#)), and for that reason, economic poverty would not be an issue to grapple with. While Compassion International is geared at alleviating eco-

nomic poverty, the trends observed in the districts of Bugiri, Namayingo, Mayuge, Busia and the national poverty levels cannot by themselves establish that the programmes caused, failed to reduce, or increased poverty. Poverty in the Ugandan context is influenced by multiple factors that the organization is struggling to address.

In examining poverty among the 23,181,629 Ugandans aged 10 years or above, the 2024 housing census found that 20.2% had never attended school, 39.4% were primary school dropouts, and 5.7% had attained post-secondary education. The census also found that 17.4% of males and 22.7% of females could not read or write. In the Karamoja sub-region, the literacy rate was at 25.4%, the lowest countrywide (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2024: pp. xxi, 42-43).

In addition, UNICEF Uganda (2024: p. 13) reported that even with free universal education and additional support from development partners, the number of out-of-school children was increasing, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. 2014 to 2017 out-of-school children aged 6 to 18 years.

Indicators	2014	2015	2016	2017
Population Projection	12,609,085	12,898,850	13,283,300	13,662,140
Total primary and secondary enrolments (government and private: 6 - 18 years)	9,944,968	9,337,943	9,868,066	9,970,872
Enrolment in alternative education pathways in post-primary and non-formal education	68,785	53,739	63,285	63,695
Number of out-of-school children	2,595,332	3,507,168	3,351,949	3,627,573

Source: UNICEF Uganda, 2024: p. 13.

Table 5 is illustrative that even when there exists free universal education promoted by the government of Uganda, interventions by Faith-Based Organisations, and support extended by several tributary development stakeholders in support of young people to attain meaning in life, study results show that multitudes of young people either dropout of schools or do not value education or there are life survival inadequacies that are affecting children's participation in formal education.

On the other hand, the low number of young people accessing post-primary and non-formal education indicates multiple roadblocks that hinder Ugandans from acquiring professional skills. This finding accurately reflects the on-the-ground reality in places where Compassion International has invested resources for decades.

Region-wise, the average numbers experiencing multidimensional poverty across aspects established by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2026: p. 5), that is, educational deprivation, inability to access quality medical care and basic social services, and poor household living standards, are indicated in Table 6.

Table 6. Multidimensional poverty in Uganda.

Region	Average % of Weighted Deprivations	Number
Kampala	45.3	1,506,268
Buganda	49.1	10,440,451
Busoga	50.2	4,250,749
Bukedi	50.4	2,358,364
Bugisu	49.7	1,779,724
Sebei	49.7	374,537
Teso	48.4	2,401,059
Karamoja	62.3	1,465,616
Lango	49.5	2,505,515
Acholi	50.8	2,010,005
West Nile	53.0	3,281,251
Madi	49.3	536,818
Bunyoro	51.4	2,735,290
Tooro	51.0	2,099,349
Rwenzori	51.1	1,200,392
Ankole	49.6	3,519,606
Kigezi	49.7	1,673,563
Total		44,138,557

Source: [Uganda Bureau of Statistics \(UBOS\), 2026](#): p. 33.

Of Uganda's total population of 45,905,417 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024: p. 13), 44,138,557 people, as shown in **Table 6**, experience multidimensional poverty. Besides the adult population, there exist millions of children in Uganda affected by poverty. Of the 22.9 million Ugandan children, over 4.2 million are living in extreme poverty ([Serugo, 2025](#)).

Given the poverty alleviation programmes supported by the Government and development partners such as Compassion International, it would be reasonable to conclude that the visualised inputs of the development groups are yielding sustainable results in alleviating economic poverty in Uganda, but the contrary is what is noticeable on the ground. This means that the poverty-alleviation empowerment methodologies rolled out by the government and development partners are not well-engineered to guide indigenous people towards self-discovery.

Even when life-robbing challenges that affect humanity on the surface are universal, solutions born in a particular cultural setting may yield little impact in another. Every earthly locality is unique, and beneath its mental shadows lie hidden treasures that, if the beholder of the culture is not unleashed towards self-discovery, can lead to a waste of invested resources in the process of alleviating economic poverty.

Just as human beings differ in their biometric makeup, so each community is

unique, and once that convictional uniqueness is discovered, then society can emerge from economic poverty at its own divine-driven pace. As such, it is important to spend quality time piloting development programmes in a particular setting. It is on the basis of newly discovered knowledge that aligns with indigenous aspirations that the community can be unleashed towards self-discovery and local resource mobilisation.

To raise local resources, a programme is in the pipeline, crafted by the Compassion International Uganda office, to reach out to alumni who benefited from sponsorship support, inviting them to contribute financially to support the needy in the country (Kamyokya Times, 2026). While the initiative sounds worthwhile, it is doubtful whether its massive rollout will yield results. European nationals are driven by their moral convictions and statutory frameworks to contribute resources to support charitable activities. A foreign cut-and-paste resource mobilisation strategy that is not immersed in African collective responsiveness is most likely to yield negligible results and waste financial resources in executing the ambitious Alumni Fund Project. Besides, a good initiative that is not tied to government policy frameworks and African conventional values that inspire voluntary giving, public accountability, and two-way benefits for givers and receivers is less likely to survive.

5. African Collective Responsiveness

African black culture consciousness upholds that a person's identity, economic progress, and social belonging are an interconnected web of relationships with family lineage, deceased ancestors, friends, clan, tribe, and the cosmopolitan abode community (Mugumbate et al., 2023).

At the forefront, African society is highly interconnected through the bonds of family lineage. In most African cultures, the concept of cousins as family members does not exist. Aunties and uncles are understood differently compared to the European understanding. The title "Uncle" is only reserved for the brothers of one's biological mother and their sons. Any woman who shares a clan with an individual's biological mother is accorded the respect due to a mother. On the other hand, "Aunties" are sisters to one's biological father. Maternal uncles have a duty to prepare their sisters' sons, and paternal aunties have a duty to prepare their brothers' daughters to become responsible and productive members of society (Oladipupo, 2022: pp. 6-7).

Next, all brothers of one's biological father are accorded the respect due to fathers, not paternal uncles. There is nothing like a stepfather and a stepmother in African linguistic public expressions. Disregarding the genuine roles step-parents play and not according to them the very respect given to biological parents is a sign of disrespect, and it attracts a curse. It is not allowed to address father, mother, uncle, aunt, or grandparent by their name (Oladipupo, 2022: pp. 6-7).

On the other hand, nephews and nieces are titles accorded only to boys and girls by the family members of a woman's ancestral clan. Such individuals play

important sacred roles in the ritual ceremonies of their mother's clan. For that reason, they are highly respected. Offending them unjustly and refusing to extend support to them when they are in critical life conditions can bring a bad omen to their maternal uncles' households (Oladipupo, 2022: pp. 6-7).

In African thought patterns, the path the interconnected family member takes to overcome life's challenges and ultimately attain success must be made known to others so they can also travel on safe ground. To Africans, "one tree cannot make a forest." Driven by this proverb, Africans across diverse social settings connect to support one another in solving prickly life challenges (Oladipupo, 2022: pp. 6-7).

In that regard, the African kinship interconnectedness consciousness guides community social interactions, moral formation, communal responsiveness, business transactions, and conflict resolution. Without understanding such dynamics, it becomes hard to influence progressive social change in the community. Such social engagement guiding principles are not documented in books or legislated by governments, but they are enforced orally at different levels of society to ensure that every community member is supportive and dependent on one another (Mugumbate et al., 2023).

To the contrary, the traditional African society's mode of oral governance is without criticism. Critics argue that some moral formation practices are at odds with international human rights treaties that promote freedom of expression, thereby undermining individuals' ability to exercise personal autonomy. On the other hand, Europeanised African Christians and Arabised African Muslims condemn their indigenous customs and social traditions as beastly, barbaric, satanic, and beastly. Besides that, most Africans who have received a European education and are influenced by Eurocentric culture have adopted an individualistic approach to social engagement, especially those who reside in cosmopolitan and urbanised communities. Nonetheless, Africans are still strongly connected to their social traditions and rural-based cultural networks. The few who disengage themselves are shunned by the community when irreversible seasons of bereavement or the solicitation of votes to run for political office force them to reconnect with their ancestral roots (Mugumbate et al., 2023).

In African society, even when one has all it takes to hire specialised services to scale down occasional life-traumatic challenges, the collective involvement of the community is a therapeutic social capital that cannot be underestimated. "For Africans, community is vital to what transpires in one's life. Without community, there is no individual, and without an individual, there is no community. In other words, both are necessary for their existence and survival." Ignoring communal responsiveness leads to isolation, stigmatisation, and a tainted family legacy for generations to come. Within African social traditions, there exists a divine force that directs humanity's affairs, for good or ill. The good is manifested among those who use their resources wisely to uplift others, while the selfish, although they flourish for a while, their accumulated earthly resources tend to vanish (Oladipupo, 2022: pp. 6-7).

As a matter of fact, in traditional African societies, cultural norms govern the economic, political, health, relational engagements, and spiritual needs of the people. Such dynamics, if not taken into consideration, mean that very little can be realised by external funders who work hard to alleviate economic poverty in Africa. In most instances, Africans enrol in development programmes that receive external support not to attain foreign intellectual knowledge but to benefit from the basic life necessities hand-outs—medical treatment, clothes, food, shelter, etc. (Isiko, 2019).

6. Old-Age Savings and Financial Sustainability of Compassion International Programmes

Old age, as defined by the United Nations, starts at 60 years and above. World-wide, it is estimated that by 2050, the share of older people will increase from 12% to 22%, with 80% residing in low- and middle-income countries. In 2020, 54.3 million elderly people lived in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2022, there were 1,661,100 older persons in Uganda. As of 2024, there were 2.21 million Ugandans who were older adults, and it is estimated that this number will rise to 5,420,000 by 2050 (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023: p. 2; Mpofu et al., 2025: p. 2).

To meet people's social security needs, African societies are characterised by informal rather than formal social security groups. Informal groups are much preferred because they are easier to form than formal ones, which require legalistic procedures and specialised personnel to manage. The groups include burial, savings, religious, cultural, farmers, and business groups. These groups are located mainly in rural areas. Most subscribers to the informal groups are people with lower educational attainment. Regardless of their levels of educational attainment, informal groups have been found to be "influential forces in the day-to-day governance of African societies" (Archambault & Ehrhardt, 2022: p. 2).

The diverse African cultures rely on informal social security networks to provide technical, financial, and material support for building a vibrant, communal, and responsive society. The informal support is not documented, but the communal interconnectedness remains recorded in people's oral mental horizons. Informal support is extended to disaster-stricken households that have lost loved ones or essential household property. One-time collective specialised support goes to orphans, the homeless, the sick, marginalised groups, and the elderly to address their needs for shelter, clothing, food, clean water, medication, education, and justice. On the other hand, gifts are given to those who celebrate their life and career achievements (Murisa, 2020: p. 1).

In most instances, informal social security support is provided only occasionally. People are motivated to support others because society upholds such gestures as an investment in social capital. Individualistic people who do not extend a helping hand to others in their social network are shunned by community members when scarcity strikes them (Oladipupo, 2022: pp. 6-7).

In the African informal social security framework, society shields people from the infirmities associated with old age. Elderly people are cared for by their close relatives, and this care is tied to the fact that the elders helped them acquire vocational skills. However, due to modern trends in which family members have become dispersed in search of employment and business opportunities, family structures are now fragmented. As such, old people spend their final earthly hours disconnected from the emotional and physical touch of their relatives. While African governments have rolled out programmes to support older people, the hand-outs are peanuts (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2024: pp. 3-4).

Painstakingly, old age has been found to be associated with reduced capacity to generate survival incomes and increased chronic and diet-related illnesses. Such anomalies drain family finances, undermining households' ability to meet basic necessities, care for orphans, and support less successful family members. The situation worsens for older persons who did not have the opportunity to save funds to support their survival in old age. Elderly people have been found to be subjects of abuse, neglect, isolation, and abandonment by family members and community social structures (Nzabona, 2016, pp. 2-3; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2024: pp. 3-4).

In a nutshell, informal, fragmented, and short-term social security investments are what Africans are used to. For instance, Studies conducted in 2022 revealed that 66,000 informal social security groups, with 1.8 million subscribers, comprising 72% women, existed in Uganda. Most subscribers (56%) were under 35, and 70% had only primary education (FinScope Uganda, 2018: pp. 1-4; Grameen Foundation, 2022: p. 6).

Certainly, building long-term social security support is what Compassion International can ride on to remain connected to the communities for generations. Children who are recruited into the programme progress towards old age, and if they are not properly prepared much earlier to visualise plans to overcome the challenges of old age, then the resources invested in them to alleviate economic poverty would have been half-done. Astonishingly, in Africa, fewer children graduate successfully from the sponsorship programme, and the majority drop out without attaining a professional survival skill; however, if they are enrolled in the old-age savings scheme, future functional adult programmes can benefit them (Compassion International—Africa Region, 2025: p. v).

In Uganda, there exist policy frameworks that regulate old-age savings. However, those who benefit most are the people employed in the formal sector. For such categories of employees who make up 3,791,074 of the Ugandan population, there are punitive mechanisms in place that require employers to make statutory deductions on a monthly basis. On the other hand, 17.6 million Ugandans, who make up 80% of the workforce, work in the informal sector; a few save in structured self-help groups, and the majority are not involved in voluntary old-age savings. This means that most Ugandans have not been supported in progressing from informal community social security to formalised old-age savings and in-

vestments (Kakayi, 2025).

To regulate, enforce transparency and accountability, and monitor all registered old-age savings groups, the government has mandated the Uganda Retirement Benefits Regulatory Authority (URBRA) to sensitise the public and encourage people working in the informal sector to form structured old-age retirement savings groups. People are encouraged to start with small amounts that can be saved weekly or monthly and to invest the accumulated funds to generate profits (Kakayi, 2025; *The Uganda Retirement Benefits Regulatory Authority Act, 2011*: pp. 6-59).

It is then incumbent upon Compassion International's country technical leadership to examine the legal framework and then sensitise the local church leadership, workers, alumni, and caregivers of sponsored children about the benefits of embracing a retirement scheme. When people come to understand how their humble contributions can support their household's financial growth and the long-term sustainability of the child sponsorship programme, old-age savings is most likely to become a culture that is inseparable from the community.

While retirement savings in Uganda focus on adults who have the opportunity to earn a living, such an endeavour needs to be encouraged among sponsored children. Caregivers can start saving small amounts for their children until the time comes when young people are able to pick up the culture. In due course, there will be those who work in the formal sector, but having multiple old-age savings schemes is much more profitable, and, above all, the ancestral roots localised one builds long-term social bonds. Certainly, the combined contributions of all stakeholders in the Child and Youth Development Programme can yield substantial funds that can be invested in real estate, bonds, microfinance businesses, and less risky ventures to grow people's contributions.

As people's savings grow and the investment profits are digitally monitored and distributed among members, a certain percentage can be set aside to cover administrative expenses and sponsor more needy children. Such a transparent approach is most likely to cultivate long-term relationships between Compassion International and the local communities. In addition, fewer dropouts are most likely to be registered, and large numbers of children are most likely to remain glued to their mother project. As young people transition to adulthood, the laid cultural systems become stepping stones for the future generations to reflect on, keep modifying, and build a better destiny. Of course, greedy and fraudulent people will never cease to exist as time unfolds, but using legal means and African relationship-ritualistic restorative measures to curb such vices is preferable to terminating sponsorship programmes in a given locality.

Viewed through the lens of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: pp. 18-20), the overall duty of Compassion International's technical staff is to make disciples among the diverse ethnic groups, who ought to go on to influence socioeconomic transformation in their communities. This means that by the time external technical inputs cease to trickle into the community, the host community should have

been supported in moving towards the self-propagation of the Children and Youth sponsorship programme, the self-governance of the organisational mundane, the sustainability of local revenue generation, and contextual self-theologising to influence moral decisions towards spiritual enrichment and economic prosperity.

7. Conclusion

To address humanitarian challenges in Uganda, several Faith-Based Organisations operate. Religious organisations have existed since the early 1980's; however, their efforts to alleviate poverty have yielded minimal results. The 2026 data from the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics show that of Uganda's total population of 45,905,417, 44,138,557 people are experiencing multidimensional poverty. In addition to the adult population, millions of children in the country are affected by poverty.

The challenges experienced by faith-based organisations in alleviating economic poverty are attributed to foreign religious approaches that convey foreign thought convictions disconnected from African moral formation techniques. As a matter of fact, the approaches used by the African cultural universe to instil constructive moral values and to bond people are not visible in the curriculum design promoted by Compassion International in Uganda. If Compassion International does not integrate European-tailored approaches to poverty alleviation with African indigenous practices, the organisation will continue to register few graduates to the disadvantage of the collective progressive growth of indigenous communities.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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