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Developing an Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) for Improving Project Performance in International Non-Governmental Organizations: Evidence from Uganda

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Abstract

This paper develops the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) to improve expatriate adjustment and performance in international NGOs. Drawing on empirical evidence from 320 expatriate project workers in 42 NGOs operating in Uganda and a review of existing literature, the study establishes that work, interaction, and general adjustment significantly influence expatriate performance, with work adjustment having the strongest effect. The framework proposes six managerial phases: strategic selection, pre-departure preparation, organizational integration, community integration, continuous adjustment support, and performance monitoring. It provides an evidence-based approach to strengthening expatriate effectiveness, reducing assignment failure, and improving development project performance.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Adjustment; Expatriate Performance; International NGOs; Framework Development; Uganda; International Assignments; Organizational Adjustment.

1. Introduction

International assignments have become an essential mechanism through which multinational corporations, development agencies, and international non-governmental organizations transfer knowledge, build institutional capacity, coordinate global operations, and implement complex projects across national boundaries [39, 15, 32]. Among these organizations, INGOs increasingly deploy expatriate professionals to lead donor-funded programmes, provide specialized technical expertise, strengthen organizational systems, and support local implementation partners, with expatriates often acting as collaborators, mentors, and catalysts of organizational learning [15, 9, 24]. The success of these assignments has important implications not only for organizational effectiveness but also for broader development objectives, especially where knowledge management, institutional memory, and local capacity remain unevenly developed [9, 41, 32].

Uganda represents a major host environment for international development activity and international NGOs, and organizations in such settings depend heavily on expatriates to manage complex projects, coordinate donor relationships, supervise multicultural teams, and facilitate cross-border knowledge transfer [15, 39]. However, expatriates frequently encounter substantial challenges when adapting to unfamiliar cultural environments, organizational norms, and stakeholder expectations, and these adjustment demands

can shape work performance, knowledge sharing, and assignment outcomes [36, 29, 4]. Contemporary evidence shows that cross-cultural adjustment is positively linked to expatriate performance, while factors such as cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, family adjustment, and host-context conditions influence how well expatriates adapt and function in foreign assignments [36, 27, 19]. These challenges can therefore affect project implementation, team effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, employee well-being, and overall organizational performance if they are not managed effectively [24, 14, 31].

The international human resource management literature consistently identifies cross-cultural adjustment as one of the strongest predictors of expatriate effectiveness [8, 6, 20]. Cross-cultural adjustment encompasses the psychological comfort and behavioural adaptation that expatriates develop while living and working in a foreign cultural environment. Previous studies have demonstrated that expatriates who successfully adjust to the host-country environment experience lower stress, stronger organizational commitment, improved interpersonal relationships, greater job satisfaction, and higher levels of performance [36, 19, 1]. Consequently, cross-cultural adjustment has become one of the most extensively researched constructs within international human resource management.

Despite this growing body of literature, two important gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly focused on explaining the determinants and outcomes of cross-cultural adjustment rather than translating empirical findings into practical organizational interventions [2, 35]. Most studies conclude by recommending training, mentoring, or organizational support, yet few provide managers with an integrated implementation framework that specifies what organizations should do, when interventions should occur, and how adjustment initiatives should be coordinated throughout the expatriate assignment [38, 21]. Consequently, managers frequently possess theoretical knowledge regarding cross-cultural adjustment but lack structured guidance for operationalizing this knowledge within organizational practice [23, 35].

Second, most of the expatriate adjustment research has been conducted within multinational corporations operating in developed economies or emerging commercial markets [31, 25]. Comparatively little research has examined expatriate adjustment within international NGOs, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa [29, 2, 34]. Unlike multinational corporations, NGOs operate within highly complex institutional environments characterized by donor accountability, humanitarian emergencies, community participation, multicultural partnerships, and resource constraints, and research on humanitarian and inter-governmental expatriates shows that these assignments often involve hardship postings, extreme contexts, and organizational systems that differ from the MNC norm [24, 5]. These contextual differences suggest that existing expatriate adjustment models may not fully address the realities confronting expatriates working within development organizations operating in countries such as Uganda [29].

The author conducted a baseline empirical study underpinning this paper which confirmed that cross-cultural adjustment significantly influences expatriate performance among NGO project workers in Uganda. Specifically, work adjustment emerged as the strongest predictor of performance, followed by interaction adjustment and general adjustment. While these findings establish the importance of cross-cultural adjustment, they also raise a practical question that remains largely unanswered within the existing literature: How can international NGOs systematically improve expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment throughout the assignment cycle?

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to develop an Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) that provides international NGOs with a structured, evidence-based approach for improving expatriates' adjustment and performance. The framework integrates findings from empirical research with contemporary expatriate management literature to produce a practical managerial model that organizations can implement before, during, and throughout international assignments.

The paper contributes to both theory and practice in three important ways. First, it extends Black et al.'s [8] multidimensional adjustment model by transforming descriptive adjustment dimensions into an integrated managerial implementation framework. Second, it provides one of the first practical expatriate adjustment frameworks specifically designed for international NGOs operating within the Sub-Saharan African context. Third, it offers organizational leaders, human resource

managers, and project directors a structured roadmap for enhancing expatriate adjustment, strengthening project implementation, improving donor accountability, and increasing the likelihood of successful international assignments.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on cross-cultural adjustment and existing expatriate management frameworks while identifying gaps that justify the development of a new evidence-based framework. The subsequent sections describe the methodology used to develop the framework, present the empirical findings informing the framework, explain the components of the proposed Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework, discuss its theoretical and managerial implications, and conclude by outlining recommendations for implementation and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Cross-cultural adjustment is one of the most extensively researched constructs in international human resource management because it largely determines whether expatriates succeed or fail during international assignments. Black et al. [8] conceptualized cross-cultural adjustment as the degree of psychological comfort experienced by expatriates while living and working in a foreign cultural environment. They proposed that adjustment consists of three interrelated but distinct dimensions: general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment. General adjustment refers to adaptation to the host country's living conditions, including accommodation, food, climate, transportation, healthcare, and general lifestyle. Interaction adjustment concerns expatriates' ability to communicate and establish effective interpersonal relationships with host-country nationals. Work adjustment relates to adaptation to organizational procedures, reporting systems, leadership styles, work expectations, and organizational culture.

Over the past three decades, this multidimensional conceptualization has become the dominant theoretical foundation for expatriate adjustment research. Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that successful adjustment across these dimensions enhances expatriate wellbeing, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, knowledge transfer, and overall job performance while reducing assignment failure, psychological stress, burnout, and turnover intentions [20, 19, 1]. Consequently, organizations increasingly recognize cross-cultural adjustment as a strategic organizational capability rather than merely an individual adaptation process.

Although the multidimensional adjustment framework remains highly influential, more recent scholarship argues that contemporary international assignments have become considerably more complex than when the model was originally proposed. Today's expatriates operate within multicultural teams, digitally connected organizations, matrix reporting structures, humanitarian emergencies, and highly diverse stakeholder environments. Consequently, researchers have begun advocating for adjustment frameworks that move beyond describing adjustment dimensions toward providing practical organizational guidance for managing expatriate assignments [10].

2.2. Existing Frameworks for Expatriate Adjustment

Several theoretical models have attempted to explain how expatriates adjust during international assignments. The earliest explanations were derived from the U-Curve Adjustment Theory, which proposed that expatriates pass through sequential stages consisting of honeymoon, culture shock, gradual adjustment, and mastery [7]. Although the model provided an important foundation for understanding adjustment, subsequent research criticized it for assuming that all expatriates experience identical adjustment trajectories despite considerable differences in personality, organizational support, cultural distance, assignment characteristics, and individual resilience. Black et al. [8] subsequently proposed the Multidimensional Adjustment Model, which remains the most influential framework within expatriate adjustment literature. The model distinguishes between general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment while recognizing that multiple individual, organizational, job-related, and non-work factors jointly influence expatriate adaptation. The framework significantly advanced understanding of expatriate adjustment because it demonstrated that adjustment is multidimensional rather than a single construct.

However, despite its theoretical importance, the Black et al. model primarily explains *what*

expatriates adjust to rather than *how* organizations should facilitate that adjustment. The framework identifies determinants of adjustment but provides limited operational guidance regarding the sequence of organizational interventions, managerial responsibilities, implementation processes, or continuous support mechanisms required throughout international assignments.

Recognizing these limitations, Strubler et al. [40] revisited Black et al.'s framework and proposed a more prescriptive approach emphasizing organizational responsibilities during expatriate assignments. Their model highlighted the importance of integrating selection, training, organizational support, and performance management. Nevertheless, the framework remained largely conceptual and did not provide a structured implementation process for organizations.

More recently, Caldwell et al. [10] critically reviewed more than three decades of expatriate adjustment research and concluded that although Black et al.'s framework continues to dominate international human resource management literature, relatively few studies have translated the model into actionable organizational practices. They argued that future research should focus on developing practical implementation frameworks capable of guiding organizations throughout the expatriate assignment lifecycle rather than merely explaining adjustment outcomes.

2.3. Organizational Practices Supporting Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Recent studies increasingly emphasize that successful expatriate adjustment depends as much on organizational interventions as on individual characteristics. Pre-departure preparation remains one of the most frequently recommended interventions [28]. Cross-cultural orientation programs, language training, cultural simulations, and country briefings enable expatriates to develop realistic expectations before relocation, thereby reducing uncertainty upon arrival [29]. Similarly, careful expatriate selection based on cultural intelligence, adaptability, emotional stability, resilience, and international experience improves the likelihood of successful adjustment [20].

Organizational socialization following arrival has also received increasing attention [16]. Structured onboarding programs, mentoring relationships, supervisor support, constructive feedback, and role clarification facilitate faster work adjustment while strengthening expatriates' organizational commitment [3, 37]. Likewise, interaction with host-country nationals enables expatriates to acquire local knowledge, establish professional networks, and develop culturally appropriate behaviour that enhance both interaction adjustment and organizational effectiveness [11, 18].

Continuous organizational support further strengthens adjustment throughout international assignments. Recent evidence suggests that psychological support, resilience coaching, peer learning networks, wellbeing programs, and regular adjustment assessments reduce work-related stress while improving expatriate performance [13, 17]. Collectively, these studies indicate that expatriate adjustment should be viewed as a continuous organizational process rather than a one-time orientation activity. Nevertheless, most existing research examines these interventions independently rather than integrating them into a comprehensive organizational framework.

2.4. Empirical Evidence Linking Adjustment and Performance

A growing body of empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that successful cross-cultural adjustment enhances expatriate performance across diverse organizational settings. Meta-analytic evidence reported by Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. [6], Harari et al. [20], and Han et al. [19] confirms that expatriates who successfully adjust to host-country environments exhibit significantly higher job performance, stronger organizational commitment, greater job satisfaction, and lower turnover intentions than poorly adjusted expatriates. More recent studies have reinforced these conclusions. Chen [12] demonstrated that cross-cultural adjustment reduces work stress while increasing job involvement. Abdalla et al. [1] established that adjustment directly improves expatriate performance while simultaneously reducing job burnout. Similarly, Setti et al. [36] found that cultural intelligence enhances performance indirectly through successful cross-cultural adjustment. Liao et al. [26] further demonstrated that emotional intelligence and cultural adaptability improve expatriate performance through enhanced cross-cultural competence.

Although these studies consistently establish that adjustment predicts expatriate success, they

predominantly focus on testing causal relationships rather than developing organizational systems capable of improving adjustment. Consequently, managers continue to receive evidence confirming the importance of adjustment without corresponding guidance regarding implementation.

2.5. Knowledge Gaps and Justification for the Framework

The literature reveals three significant gaps that justify the development of the proposed Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework. First, existing adjustment models are predominantly explanatory rather than implementation oriented. While they effectively describe the determinants and dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment, they provide limited guidance regarding how organizations should operationalize adjustment interventions before departure, during relocation, throughout assignments, and during continuous performance management.

Second, empirical studies generally examine isolated interventions such as cultural training, mentoring, organizational support, resilience, cultural intelligence, or host-country networking independently. Few studies integrate these interventions into a single organizational process capable of guiding expatriates throughout the entire assignment lifecycle.

Third, expatriate adjustment research remains heavily concentrated within multinational corporations operating in developed economies and commercial environments. Comparatively little research has focused on international NGOs operating in developing countries despite their unique operational characteristics, including donor accountability, humanitarian emergencies, multicultural partnerships, community participation, and resource constraints.

Uganda represents an important context because international NGOs play a central role in national development, yet no comprehensive managerial framework currently exists to guide expatriate adjustment within this sector.

Building upon the empirical findings of the preceding study, this paper addresses these gaps by proposing the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF). Unlike previous models, the framework integrates evidence-based organizational interventions into a sequential implementation process covering expatriate selection, preparation, organizational integration, community engagement, continuous support, and performance evaluation. By translating empirical evidence into practical managerial actions, the framework contributes to both international human resource management theory and the effective management of expatriates within international NGOs.

3. Methodology for Framework Development

3.1. Research Design

Unlike conventional empirical studies that seek to test hypotheses, this study adopted a design and development research (DDR) approach to develop a practical managerial framework for improving cross-cultural adjustment among expatriate project workers. Design and development research is particularly appropriate when the objective is to translate empirical evidence into practical solutions that address real organizational challenges. Within business and management research, DDR has increasingly been adopted because it emphasizes the creation of evidence-based frameworks, models, and interventions capable of improving organizational practice rather than merely extending theory [33].

The development of the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) followed an evidence-based design philosophy. Instead of proposing a purely conceptual model, the framework was derived from empirical findings generated through the preceding quantitative study and integrated with contemporary expatriate management literature. Consequently, the framework represents a synthesis of scientific evidence and managerial best practice.

3.2. Framework Development Process

The framework was developed through five sequential stages adapted from established framework development methodologies commonly applied in management and implementation research [22, 33].

3.2.1. Stage One: Identification of the Organizational Problem

The first stage involved defining the practical problem requiring managerial intervention.

Although previous empirical research consistently demonstrates that cross-cultural adjustment influences expatriate effectiveness, international NGOs continue to experience adjustment-related challenges, including assignment failure, communication barriers, stakeholder conflicts, reduced organizational commitment, and inconsistent project performance.

The empirical study conducted among expatriate NGO project workers in Uganda confirmed that cross-cultural adjustment significantly predicts expatriate performance, explaining 58.3% of the observed variation in performance. Despite this strong empirical relationship, participating organizations reported that expatriate adjustment interventions remained fragmented, largely reactive, and primarily limited to pre-departure orientation programmes. This finding highlighted the need for a more comprehensive organizational framework capable of supporting expatriates throughout the entire assignment lifecycle.

3.2.2. Stage Two: Review of Existing Knowledge

The second stage involved a comprehensive review of theoretical and empirical literature on expatriate adjustment. Particular attention was given to established adjustment theories, organizational support mechanisms, cultural intelligence, international human resource management practices, expatriate performance, and previous adjustment frameworks.

The review revealed that while Black et al.'s [8] multidimensional adjustment model remains the dominant theoretical framework within expatriate management, it primarily explains the dimensions of adjustment rather than providing organizations with practical implementation guidelines. Similarly, more recent studies emphasize interventions such as cultural training, mentoring, organizational support, resilience development, and feedback systems, yet these interventions are generally examined independently rather than integrated into a comprehensive organizational process. This review therefore identified an important opportunity to synthesize existing evidence into an integrated managerial framework.

3.2.3. Stage Three: Integration of Empirical Evidence

The third stage involved translating the empirical findings of the preceding study [30][i], into practical organizational priorities. The regression analysis established that the three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment contributed differently to expatriate performance:

- Work Adjustment ($\beta = .418$)
- Interaction Adjustment ($\beta = .284$)
- General Adjustment ($\beta = .176$)

These findings provided the empirical foundation upon which the framework was developed. Rather than assigning equal priority to all adjustment dimensions, the framework allocates organizational resources according to their demonstrated influence on expatriate performance. Consequently, organizational integration and work adjustment constitute the central components of the proposed framework, while interaction adjustment and general adjustment provide complementary support mechanisms. This evidence-based prioritization distinguishes the proposed framework from previous adjustment models that generally treat adjustment dimensions as conceptually equivalent.

3.2.4. Stage Four: Framework Construction

The fourth stage involved constructing the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework by integrating empirical findings with best practices identified from the literature.

Instead of organizing adjustment around three independent dimensions, the framework conceptualizes expatriate adjustment as a continuous organizational process beginning before deployment and extending throughout the international assignment.

Six interconnected implementation phases were identified:

1. Strategic expatriate selection
2. Pre-departure preparation
3. Organizational integration
4. Community and stakeholder integration
5. Continuous adjustment support
6. Performance monitoring and organizational learning

Each phase contains specific organizational activities designed to strengthen one or more dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment while simultaneously improving expatriate performance.

3.2.5. Stage Five: Framework Validation

To establish the credibility, relevance, and practical applicability of the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF), the framework was subjected to expert validation before its final adoption. The validation exercise was conducted using a panel of 12 experts purposively selected from the international development sector. The panel comprised three Human Resource Managers, three Country Directors, two Programme Directors, two expatriate management consultants, and two senior academics specializing in international human resource management and cross-cultural management. All experts possessed relevant professional experience in expatriate management or international development.

The experts were provided with the proposed framework together with a structured validation guide containing five evaluation criteria, namely relevance, practicality, clarity, completeness and applicability. Each criterion was assessed using a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent), while space was provided for qualitative comments and recommendations for improvement. The expert validation therefore confirmed that the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework possesses adequate theoretical soundness, practical relevance and managerial applicability. Consequently, the framework was considered suitable for adoption by international NGOs seeking to strengthen expatriate adjustment and improve expatriate performance in culturally diverse environments.

3.3. Sources Informing the Framework

The proposed framework was informed by three complementary sources of evidence.

The first source consisted of the empirical findings generated from the quantitative survey of 320 expatriate project workers employed by 42 international NGOs operating in Uganda. These findings established the relative influence of general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment on expatriate performance.

The second source comprised established theories and contemporary empirical literature on expatriate adjustment, international human resource management, organizational socialization, cultural intelligence, organizational support, and expatriate performance. The literature provided theoretical explanations for the organizational mechanisms that facilitate successful adjustment.

The third source consisted of evidence-based international human resource management practices reported in previous expatriate management studies. These practices included pre-departure cultural preparation, mentoring, onboarding programs, supervisor support, stakeholder engagement, coaching, performance feedback, resilience development, and continuous organizational support. Integrating these three sources ensured that the framework remained simultaneously empirical, theoretical, and practical.

3.4. Guiding Principles Underpinning the Framework

The development of the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework was guided by five principles.

First, evidence-based management, whereby every component of the framework is supported by empirical findings and contemporary research rather than managerial intuition.

Second, continuous adjustment, recognizing that expatriate adjustment is not a single event but an ongoing organizational process extending throughout the international assignment.

Third, organizational responsibility, emphasizing that successful adjustment depends not only on expatriates but also on organizational systems, leadership practices, and institutional support.

Fourth, contextual responsiveness, acknowledging that expatriate adjustment strategies should reflect the unique operational realities of international NGOs working within developing countries such as Uganda.

Finally, performance orientation, whereby all adjustment interventions are designed to improve project implementation, stakeholder engagement, organizational effectiveness, and donor accountability rather than adjustment alone.

3.5. Methodological Contribution

The methodological approach adopted in this paper differs from conventional expatriate

adjustment studies in several important respects. Most previous studies have employed cross-sectional surveys to explain relationships between adjustment and performance or to test mediating and moderating variables. While these studies have substantially advanced theoretical understanding, they provide limited guidance regarding organizational implementation.

By contrast, the present study employs a design and development methodology to transform empirical evidence into an actionable managerial framework. Consequently, the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework bridges the persistent gap between expatriate adjustment theory and organizational practice by specifying not only what influences expatriate adjustment but also how, when, and through whom adjustment interventions should be implemented throughout the expatriate assignment cycle. The following section presents the empirical findings that informed the development of the framework before introducing the framework itself.

4. Empirical Findings Informing the Framework

4.1. Overview

The proposed Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) was informed by empirical evidence obtained from a quantitative study involving 320 expatriate project workers employed by 42 international non-governmental organizations operating in Uganda. The purpose of the empirical investigation was to determine the extent to which the three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment influence expatriate performance. The results provided the evidence base for identifying the organizational priorities that underpin the framework.Rather than developing a conceptual model based solely on theory, the framework translates statistically significant findings into practical organizational interventions. Consequently, each component of the framework directly addresses factors that were empirically demonstrated to influence expatriate performance.

4.2. Relative Importance of the Three Adjustment Dimensions

This study established that cross-cultural adjustment is a major determinant of expatriate performance among international NGO project workers in Uganda. Analysis of data collected from 320 expatriates employed by 42 international NGOs revealed that all three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment, namely general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment, significantly and positively influenced expatriate performance. Collectively, the three dimensions explained 58.3% of the variation in expatriate performance, demonstrating that successful adjustment is a key driver of expatriate effectiveness.

Among the three dimensions, work adjustment emerged as the strongest predictor of performance ($\beta = .418$, $p < .001$), followed by interaction adjustment ($\beta = .284$, $p < .001$) and general adjustment ($\beta = .176$, $p = .002$). The descriptive findings also showed that expatriates generally reported high levels of adjustment, with work adjustment recording the highest mean score, followed by interaction adjustment and general adjustment. These findings indicate that while expatriates were generally well adjusted, organizational interventions aimed at strengthening adjustment could further enhance project performance.

The survey findings further demonstrated that successful expatriate adjustment extends beyond individual capability and requires deliberate organizational support. Effective onboarding, mentoring, stakeholder engagement, welfare support, intercultural communication, and continuous performance feedback emerged as practical organizational mechanisms that can strengthen adjustment throughout the international assignment. These empirical findings provided the basis for developing the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF), which translates the study results into a structured managerial process for improving expatriate adjustment and project performance within international NGOs.

4.3. Work Adjustment as the Foundation of Expatriate Performance

The regression results indicate that work adjustment contributes nearly twice as much to expatriate performance as general adjustment. This finding reflects the operational realities of international NGOs in Uganda.

International development organizations operate within highly structured environments characterized by donor compliance requirements, results-based management

systems, financial accountability, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, safeguarding standards, procurement regulations, and complex reporting mechanisms. Newly deployed expatriates are expected to understand these systems almost immediately after arrival while simultaneously leading multicultural teams and coordinating multiple stakeholders.

Consequently, expatriates who receive structured organizational induction, role clarification, mentoring, and continuous supervisory support are more likely to become productive within a shorter period. Conversely, delayed organizational adjustment increases role ambiguity, decision-making uncertainty, reporting errors, and implementation delays, ultimately reducing project performance.

The framework therefore places organizational integration at the centre of expatriate adjustment rather than treating it as one component among several equally important interventions.

4.4. Interaction Adjustment as a Strategic Capability

The empirical findings further established that interaction adjustment represents the second most influential predictor of expatriate performance.

Unlike many multinational corporations, international NGOs depend heavily upon collaboration with local governments, implementing partners, community leaders, civil society organizations, development agencies, and project beneficiaries. Expatriates therefore spend a substantial proportion of their assignments building relationships rather than performing purely technical activities.

Successful interaction adjustment enables expatriates to communicate effectively across cultures, negotiate local expectations, build stakeholder trust, resolve conflicts, facilitate community participation, and strengthen partnerships. These interpersonal capabilities directly influence project implementation because development interventions rely heavily upon cooperation rather than organizational authority.

The findings therefore suggest that interaction adjustment should not be viewed merely as an interpersonal competency but as a strategic organizational capability that strengthens project effectiveness.

Accordingly, the proposed framework incorporates structured community integration, stakeholder engagement, intercultural communication training, and local mentorship as core organizational interventions.

4.5. General Adjustment as a Supporting Mechanism

Although general adjustment recorded the smallest standardized regression coefficient, its influence remained statistically significant. This finding indicates that adaptation to accommodation, transportation, food, healthcare, security, climate, and everyday living conditions creates the psychological stability necessary for expatriates to concentrate on their professional responsibilities.

The results further suggest that organizational investment in expatriate welfare should not be viewed simply as an employee benefit but rather as an important contributor to project performance. Poor living conditions increase stress, reduce psychological wellbeing, and divert attention from organizational responsibilities. Conversely, comfortable living arrangements allow expatriates to devote greater cognitive and emotional resources to project implementation. Consequently, the framework incorporates general adjustment throughout the assignment lifecycle by emphasizing welfare support, family assistance, health services, security guidance, and practical settlement assistance.

4.6. From Statistical Evidence to Managerial Action

While regression analysis successfully identifies variables that predict expatriate performance, statistical relationships alone do not inform managers how these relationships should be translated into organizational practice. For example, the finding that work adjustment is the strongest predictor of performance does not explain:

- **What** organizations should do before expatriates arrive?
- **Which** organizational interventions should occur immediately after deployment?
- **How** adjustment should be monitored throughout the assignment?
- **Who** should be responsible for supporting expatriate adjustment?
- **How** organizations should evaluate adjustment outcomes?

Similarly, although interaction adjustment and general adjustment significantly influence performance, empirical statistics provide limited guidance regarding the sequence, timing, coordination, and integration of adjustment interventions. Addressing these practical questions represents the principal purpose of the proposed framework.

4.7. Framework Design Logic

The statistical findings informed four important design decisions during framework development. First, because work adjustment demonstrated the strongest influence on performance, the framework prioritizes organizational integration immediately after expatriates arrive in Uganda. This phase emphasizes structured induction, role clarification, mentoring, leadership support, and familiarization with organizational systems.

Second, because interaction adjustment emerged as the second strongest predictor, the framework introduces structured stakeholder integration immediately following organizational adjustment. Expatriates are supported to develop relationships with local staff, implementing partners, government officials, and community leaders before assuming full project responsibilities.

Third, although general adjustment contributed comparatively less to performance, it remains an essential enabling condition. The framework therefore incorporates welfare support before deployment, during relocation, and throughout the assignment to maintain psychological wellbeing.

Finally, the regression findings demonstrate that adjustment should be viewed as a continuous organizational process rather than a one-time orientation activity. Consequently, the framework extends adjustment support across the entire expatriate assignment lifecycle through coaching, mentoring, performance feedback, and continuous monitoring.

4.8. The Proposed Framework

The empirical findings clearly demonstrate that expatriate adjustment is multidimensional and that each dimension contributes differently to project performance. More importantly, the findings indicate that organizations require an integrated system capable of coordinating these adjustment dimensions throughout the expatriate assignment rather than addressing them independently. Building upon these empirical results and the contemporary expatriate management literature, the next section presents the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF). The framework provides a structured six-phase implementation model that translates empirical evidence into practical organizational interventions designed to improve expatriate adjustment, strengthen project implementation, and enhance organizational performance within international NGOs.

5. The Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF)

5.1. Overview

The empirical findings presented in the previous section established that cross-cultural adjustment is a significant predictor of expatriate performance among project workers employed by international NGOs in Uganda. More importantly, the results demonstrated that the three dimensions of adjustment contribute differently to performance, with work adjustment exerting the strongest influence, followed by interaction adjustment and general adjustment.

These findings indicate that organizations require more than isolated adjustment initiatives; they need a coordinated organizational system that supports expatriates throughout the entire international assignment.

The Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF**)** was developed to address this need. Unlike previous expatriate adjustment models, which primarily describe the determinants or dimensions of adjustment, the ECAEF provides a structured implementation process that organizations can adopt before deployment, during relocation, throughout project implementation, and during performance evaluation. The framework therefore translates empirical evidence into practical organizational actions capable of improving expatriate adjustment and enhancing project performance.

The framework is founded on three principles. First, cross-cultural adjustment is a continuous organizational process rather than a one-time orientation activity. Second, organizational responsibility is equally as important as expatriate capability in determining successful

adjustment. Third, adjustment interventions should be prioritized according to their demonstrated influence on expatriate performance, with greater organizational attention directed toward work adjustment while simultaneously strengthening interaction and general adjustment.

5.2. The Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF)

A structured process for enhancing expatriate adjustment and project performance in international NGOs

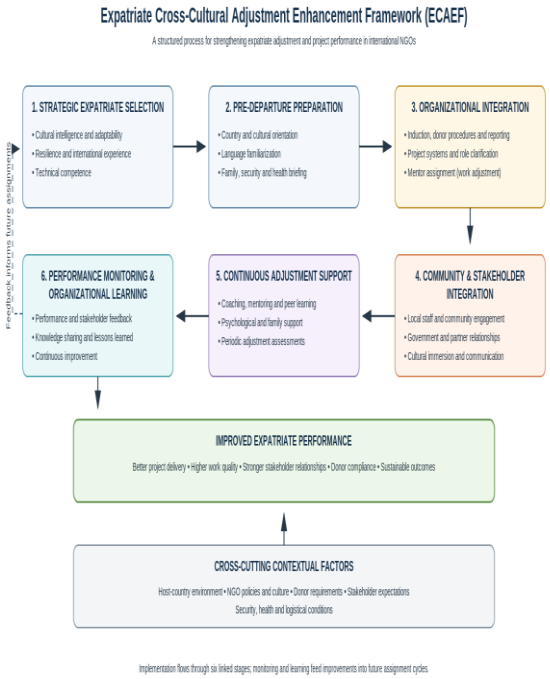


Figure 1: *The Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF)*

5.3. Components of the Framework

5.3.1. Phase 1: Strategic Expatriate Selection

The framework begins before expatriates are deployed. Previous expatriate management research has consistently demonstrated that successful adjustment depends partly on selecting individuals who possess the personal characteristics necessary for international assignments. Consequently, organizations should integrate adjustment considerations into recruitment and selection rather than focusing exclusively on technical competence.

Selection should assess candidates' cultural intelligence, emotional resilience, adaptability, openness to experience, communication competence, and previous international experience. Technical expertise remains important; however, the findings of this study indicate that technical competence alone does not guarantee successful expatriate performance. Organizations should therefore adopt competency-based selection systems that combine professional qualifications with intercultural capabilities.

Within the Ugandan NGO context, strategic selection should also consider previous experience working in multicultural teams, humanitarian environments, developing countries, and donor-funded projects. Selecting expatriates whose competencies align with the realities of development work reduces subsequent adjustment difficulties while improving assignment success.

5.3.2. Phase 2: Pre-departure Preparation

The second phase focuses on preparing expatriates before relocation.

Many organizations continue to limit preparation to administrative briefings concerning visas, travel arrangements, and employment contracts. The proposed framework argues that preparation should instead constitute a comprehensive organizational intervention that equips expatriates with the knowledge, attitudes, and expectations necessary for successful adjustment.

Pre-departure preparation should include country-specific cultural orientation, introduction to Uganda's social norms, communication styles, institutional systems, political environment, legal requirements, donor expectations, security considerations, healthcare systems, and project context. Organizations should also provide introductory language familiarization, even where English serves as the official working language, because basic knowledge of local greetings and expressions strengthens community relationships.

Where expatriates relocate with their families, spouses should also participate in orientation activities. Family adjustment has consistently been associated with expatriate assignment success, and supporting accompanying family members reduces psychological stress while strengthening overall adjustment.

5.3.3. *Phase 3: Organizational Integration (Work Adjustment)*

The empirical findings identified work adjustment as the strongest determinant of expatriate performance. Consequently, organizational integration constitutes the core component of the proposed framework.

Immediately after arrival, expatriates should participate in structured onboarding programmes that introduce organizational culture, reporting systems, project management procedures, financial accountability requirements, procurement regulations, safeguarding policies, donor compliance standards, monitoring and evaluation systems, and organizational decision-making processes.

Each expatriate should be assigned an experienced mentor responsible for facilitating organizational socialization during the initial months of the assignment. Mentors should assist expatriates in understanding informal organizational norms, navigating internal communication systems, clarifying role expectations, and resolving operational challenges.

The framework also recommends structured performance discussions within the first 30, 60, and 90 days following deployment. These meetings provide opportunities to clarify responsibilities, identify adjustment challenges, provide constructive feedback, and strengthen role confidence before adjustment problems become entrenched. Given the empirical evidence demonstrating the importance of work adjustment, organizations should allocate the greatest proportion of adjustment resources to this phase.

5.3.4. *Phase 4: Community and Stakeholder Integration (Interaction Adjustment)*

Following organizational integration, expatriates should receive structured support for developing relationships with external stakeholders.

International NGOs rarely operate independently. Their effectiveness depends upon collaboration with district local governments, implementing partners, community-based organizations, civil society organizations, religious institutions, traditional leaders, development partners, and project beneficiaries. Consequently, interaction adjustment extends beyond interpersonal communication to include institutional relationship management.

Organizations should facilitate introductions to community leaders, organize cultural immersion activities, encourage participation in community events, establish partnerships with local staff, and provide opportunities for informal interaction outside the workplace. These activities enable expatriates to develop trust, strengthen stakeholder ownership, and improve project acceptance within host communities. Local staff should also be actively involved in supporting expatriate adjustment. Rather than expecting expatriates to navigate unfamiliar cultural environments independently, organizations should establish reciprocal learning partnerships whereby local employees share cultural knowledge while expatriates contribute technical expertise.

5.3.5. *Phase 5: Continuous Adjustment Support*

Cross-cultural adjustment should not conclude after the orientation period. Adjustment challenges frequently emerge several months into international assignments as expatriates encounter increasing work demands, cultural fatigue, family concerns, or organizational pressures. The framework therefore recommends continuous adjustment support throughout the assignment.

This phase includes regular coaching sessions, mentoring meetings, peer learning forums, counseling services where necessary, family support, wellbeing monitoring, and periodic adjustment assessments. Organizations should establish structured mechanisms for identifying adjustment difficulties before they negatively influence project performance.

Adjustment should be reviewed alongside traditional performance indicators during routine supervision meetings. This integrated approach enables supervisors to distinguish between technical performance challenges and adjustment-related difficulties, thereby facilitating more appropriate organizational interventions.

5.3.6. *Phase 6: Performance Monitoring and Organizational Learning*

The final phase links expatriate adjustment directly to organizational performance.

Organizations should monitor expatriate effectiveness using both traditional performance indicators and adjustment indicators. Suggested performance measures include project implementation milestones, donor compliance, stakeholder satisfaction, teamwork, innovation, knowledge transfer, leadership effectiveness, and achievement of project objectives.

At the conclusion of each assignment, organizations should conduct structured learning reviews that document successful adjustment strategies, organizational challenges, lessons learned, and recommended improvements. These lessons should subsequently inform future expatriate selection, training, onboarding, and organizational support programmes. In this manner, the framework becomes a continuous organizational learning system rather than a static expatriate management model.

5.4. Distinctive Features of the ECAEF

The Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework differs from previous expatriate adjustment models in several important respects.

First, whereas Black et al.'s [8] framework explains what expatriates adjust to, the ECAEF explains how organizations should facilitate adjustment throughout the international assignment lifecycle.

Second, unlike previous models that treat adjustment primarily as an individual responsibility, the ECAEF positions organizational systems, leadership practices, and institutional support as central drivers of successful adjustment.

Third, the framework prioritizes adjustment interventions according to empirical evidence rather than theoretical assumptions. Because work adjustment demonstrated the strongest influence on expatriate performance, organizational integration becomes the framework's central component.

Finally, the framework has been developed specifically for international NGOs operating in developing-country contexts characterized by donor accountability, community participation, multicultural partnerships, and complex stakeholder environments. This contextual focus distinguishes it from adjustment models developed primarily within multinational corporate settings.

Collectively, these features position the ECAEF as a practical, evidence-based managerial framework capable of strengthening expatriate adjustment and improving project performance within international NGOs.

6. Framework Validation and Managerial Implications

6.1. Framework Validation

The Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) was validated using a two-round Delphi technique to establish its content validity and practical applicability. The Delphi method was selected because it facilitates systematic consensus building among experts through iterative anonymous evaluation and controlled feedback. A panel of 12 experts was purposively selected from the international development sector to participate in the validation exercise. The panel consisted of three Human Resource Managers, three Country Directors, two Programme Directors, two expatriate management consultants, and two senior academics specializing in international human resource management.

All experts possessed more than ten years of experience in expatriate management or international development. The same 12 experts participated in both Delphi rounds, with no change in panel composition or attrition between the rounds. During the first Delphi round, the proposed framework and a structured evaluation instrument were distributed electronically. The experts independently assessed the framework using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Very Poor to 5 = Excellent. The assessment focused on five evaluation criteria: relevance, clarity, completeness, practical feasibility, and potential effectiveness. Open-ended comments were also collected to identify areas requiring refinement.

Table 6.1: *Composition of the Expert Validation Panel (N = 12)*

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Human Resource Managers	3	25.0
Country Directors	3	25.0
Programme Directors	2	16.7
Expatriate Management Consultants	2	16.7
Senior Academics	2	16.7
Total	**12**	**100**

The first-round evaluation indicated that the framework was highly relevant but required several refinements. The experts recommended strengthening the expatriate selection stage by incorporating cultural intelligence and resilience assessments, expanding organizational integration to include structured mentoring during the first three months of deployment, integrating continuous adjustment assessments throughout the assignment, and including organizational learning mechanisms after assignment completion. These recommendations were incorporated into the framework before the second Delphi round.

Table 6.2: *First Delphi Round Evaluation Results (N = 12)*

Evaluation Criterion	Mean	SD	Positive Ratings[ii] (%)
Relevance	4.75	0.45	91.7
Clarity	4.33	0.65	83.3
Completeness	4.25	0.75	75.0
Practical Feasibility	4.17	0.72	75.0
Potential Effectiveness	4.58	0.51	91.7
Overall Mean	**4.42**	**0.62**	**83.3**

The first-round results showed that relevance (Mean = 4.75) and potential effectiveness (Mean = 4.58) received the highest ratings. However, completeness and practical feasibility each recorded 75.0% positive ratings, falling below the predetermined consensus threshold of 80%. These findings, together with the qualitative recommendations, informed the refinement of the framework. The revised framework was redistributed to the same 12 experts during the second Delphi round. The experts reassessed the revised framework using the same five evaluation criteria and the original five-point Likert scale. Consensus was defined as at least 80% of the panel members rating a criterion as either Very Good or Excellent. The percentage was calculated by dividing the number of experts assigning ratings of 4 or 5 by the total number of participating experts (12), multiplied by 100.

Table 6.3: *Second Delphi Round Evaluation Results (N = 12)*

Evaluation Criterion	Mean	SD	Consensus[iii] (%)
Relevance	4.92	0.29	100.0
Clarity	4.75	0.45	91.7
Completeness	4.75	0.45	91.7
Practical Feasibility	4.58	0.51	83.3
Potential Effectiveness	4.83	0.39	91.7
Overall Mean	**4.77**	**0.42**	**91.7**

The second-round results demonstrated substantial improvement across all five evaluation criteria. Every criterion exceeded the predetermined consensus threshold of 80%, indicating strong agreement regarding the quality and practical applicability of the revised framework. Relevance recorded the highest mean rating (Mean = 4.92), with all 12 experts (100.0%) providing positive ratings. This demonstrated that the framework adequately addressed the challenges associated with expatriate adjustment in international NGOs.

Clarity and completeness each recorded a mean of 4.75, with 91.7% consensus, equivalent to 11 of the 12 experts. Potential effectiveness also received a high mean rating of 4.83, with 91.7% consensus. Practical feasibility recorded the lowest mean (4.58), although 83.3% of the experts, representing 10 of the 12 panel members, rated it positively. This result nevertheless exceeded the established consensus threshold, demonstrating that the experts considered the framework implementable within resource-constrained NGO environments. Overall, the framework achieved an average expert rating of 4.77 out of 5 and an overall consensus level of 91.7%. These results confirmed the framework's content validity, clarity, completeness, practical applicability, and potential effectiveness in improving expatriate adjustment and project performance. The validated framework was therefore adopted as the final Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF) presented in this study.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The proposed framework has important implications for managers responsible for expatriate assignments within international NGOs. Rather than viewing cross-cultural adjustment as an individual responsibility, the framework positions adjustment as a strategic organizational capability that requires systematic planning, implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

6.2.1. Implications for Human Resource Management

Human resource departments should integrate cross-cultural adjustment into every stage of expatriate management, beginning with recruitment and continuing until assignment completion. Recruitment processes should assess not only technical competence but also adaptability, cultural intelligence, resilience, communication skills, emotional stability, and previous international experience.

Similarly, performance management systems should incorporate adjustment indicators alongside traditional performance measures. Organizations that evaluate only project outputs may overlook adjustment difficulties that eventually reduce organizational effectiveness. Incorporating adjustment assessments into routine performance reviews enables managers to identify challenges early and implement appropriate support interventions before performance deteriorates.

Human resource policies should also institutionalize structured mentoring programs whereby experienced expatriates and host-country employees support newly deployed staff during their adjustment process. Such programs facilitate organizational learning while reducing uncertainty among newly appointed expatriates.

6.2.2. Implications for Organizational Leadership

Senior managers play a critical role in creating organizational environments that facilitate successful adjustment.

The framework emphasizes that expatriate adjustment extends beyond formal orientation programs and requires continuous leadership support throughout the assignment. Managers should therefore establish organizational cultures characterized by open communication, inclusive leadership, constructive feedback, psychological safety, and continuous learning.

Leaders should also recognize that successful expatriate adjustment contributes directly to project performance. Investments in mentoring, coaching, intercultural training, and employee well-being should therefore be viewed as strategic organizational investments rather than administrative costs. Organizations that proactively support expatriates are likely to experience higher project effectiveness, improved donor accountability, stronger stakeholder relationships, and lower assignment failure rates.

6.2.3. Implications for Project Management

Project managers should incorporate adjustment planning into project implementation strategies.

The empirical findings demonstrated that work adjustment exerted the strongest influence on expatriate performance. Consequently, project managers should prioritize activities that facilitate rapid organizational integration during the early stages of assignments. These activities include structured induction, role clarification, introduction to reporting systems, familiarization with donor procedures, and assignment of workplace mentors.

Project managers should also promote interaction adjustment by creating opportunities for expatriates to collaborate closely with Ugandan colleagues, implementing partners, local government officials, and community leaders. Such interactions strengthen stakeholder trust while improving project ownership and sustainability.

Regular project review meetings should include discussions concerning expatriate adjustment alongside technical implementation progress. This integrated approach enables organizations to address adjustment challenges before they negatively influence project outcomes.

6.2.4. Implications for International NGOs

The framework offers international NGOs a practical roadmap for strengthening expatriate management systems.

Many organizations currently implement adjustment activities independently, including orientation sessions, security briefings, mentoring programs, or cultural awareness workshops. While valuable individually, these interventions often lack coordination and continuity. The ECAEF integrates these activities into a structured organizational process covering the entire expatriate assignment lifecycle.

Implementing the framework is expected to generate multiple organizational benefits, including improved expatriate well-being, stronger organizational commitment, enhanced stakeholder relationships, improved donor compliance, better project delivery, increased organizational learning, and reduced assignment failure.

Furthermore, because the framework emphasizes continuous monitoring and organizational learning, it enables NGOs to progressively improve their expatriate management practices based on accumulated organizational experience rather than relying exclusively on external training providers.

6.3. Theoretical Implications

Beyond its managerial contributions, the proposed framework also extends expatriate adjustment theory.

Black et al.'s [8] multidimensional adjustment model remains the dominant theoretical explanation of expatriate adjustment. However, the model primarily explains the dimensions and determinants of adjustment without specifying how organizations should operationalize adjustment interventions. The ECAEF complements rather than replaces this foundational theory by translating its conceptual dimensions into an integrated implementation process.

The framework also contributes to international human resource management by integrating adjustment, organizational socialization, stakeholder engagement, mentoring, performance management, and organizational learning into a unified management system. Rather than treating these organizational practices independently, the framework demonstrates how they interact to improve expatriate adjustment and organizational performance.

Finally, the framework extends expatriate adjustment literature within the international development sector. Existing expatriate research has predominantly focused on multinational corporations operating in commercial environments. By contrast, the ECAEF responds to the unique realities of international NGOs operating within developing countries where donor accountability, humanitarian operations, community participation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration significantly influence expatriate effectiveness.

6.4. Practical Contribution of the Framework

The principal contribution of the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework lies in its ability to bridge the long-standing gap between expatriate adjustment theory and organizational practice.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that cross-cultural adjustment predicts expatriate performance, yet they provide limited guidance regarding implementation. Consequently, organizations often understand the importance of adjustment but lack practical systems for managing it.

The ECAEF addresses this gap by providing managers with a structured implementation framework that specifies:

- **What** interventions should be implemented?
- **When** they should occur during the assignment lifecycle?
- **Who** should be responsible for implementation?
- **How** organizational support should be coordinated?
- **How** adjustment should be monitored and continuously improved?

By transforming empirical findings into actionable organizational practices, the framework provides international NGOs with a practical management tool capable of strengthening expatriate adjustment, improving project implementation, enhancing donor accountability, and ultimately increasing the effectiveness of international development interventions.

7. Conclusion

International non-governmental organizations increasingly depend on expatriate professionals to deliver donor-funded development and humanitarian interventions in culturally diverse environments. While previous research has consistently demonstrated that cross-cultural adjustment influences expatriate performance, comparatively little attention has been devoted to translating this knowledge into practical organizational frameworks capable of guiding expatriate management. Consequently, many organizations recognize the importance of cross-cultural adjustment but continue to rely on fragmented interventions that are often reactive, uncoordinated, and limited to pre-departure orientation.

This paper addressed this gap by developing the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework (ECAEF), an evidence-based managerial framework designed to improve the adjustment and performance of expatriate project workers employed by international NGOs.

The framework was developed by integrating empirical evidence obtained from 320 expatriate project workers employed by 42 international NGOs in Uganda with established expatriate adjustment theory and contemporary international human resource management literature.

The empirical findings confirmed that all three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment significantly influence expatriate performance, although their relative contributions differ. Work adjustment emerged as the strongest predictor of expatriate performance, followed by interaction adjustment and general adjustment. These findings suggest that organizations should prioritize structured organizational integration while simultaneously supporting expatriates' interaction with host-country stakeholders and adaptation to local living conditions. Rather than treating these dimensions as independent organizational activities, the proposed framework integrates them into a coordinated six-phase management process covering expatriate selection, pre-departure preparation, organizational integration, community and stakeholder engagement, continuous adjustment support, and performance monitoring.

The proposed framework makes several important contributions to knowledge. First, it extends Black et al.'s [8] multidimensional adjustment theory by moving beyond explanation to implementation, demonstrating how organizations can operationalize cross-cultural adjustment throughout the expatriate assignment lifecycle. Second, it contributes to the relatively limited body of expatriate management research conducted within international NGOs operating in Sub-Saharan Africa. Third, it provides an evidence-based organizational framework that translates empirical findings into practical managerial interventions capable of improving expatriate adjustment and organizational performance.

From a practical perspective, the ECAEF provides international NGOs with a structured roadmap for strengthening expatriate management. Organizations adopting the framework are likely to improve organizational socialization, stakeholder engagement, expatriate wellbeing, donor compliance, knowledge transfer, and project implementation while reducing assignment failure and adjustment-related challenges. Because the framework incorporates continuous organizational learning, it also enables organizations to progressively refine expatriate management practices based on implementation experience.

Overall, the paper demonstrates that effective expatriate performance depends not only on technical competence but also on systematic organizational support that facilitates successful adjustment before, during, and throughout international assignments. By integrating empirical evidence with practical management principles, the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework offers international NGOs a comprehensive approach for improving expatriate effectiveness and strengthening the delivery of development interventions in culturally diverse environments.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Although the Expatriate Cross-Cultural Adjustment Enhancement Framework was developed using empirical evidence and an extensive review of contemporary literature, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the framework was informed by empirical data collected from expatriate project workers employed by international NGOs operating in Uganda. While Uganda provides an appropriate context because of its large international development sector, organizational environments differ across countries. Variations in national culture, institutional arrangements, donor priorities, and organizational structures may influence the applicability of the framework in other regions. Future studies should therefore examine the transferability of the framework within other Sub-Saharan African countries and across different international development contexts.

Second, the empirical evidence underpinning the framework was derived from a cross-sectional survey. Consequently, the study captures expatriates' perceptions at a single point in time and cannot fully explain how adjustment evolves throughout the international assignment lifecycle. Longitudinal research following expatriates from pre-departure through assignment completion would provide stronger evidence regarding the dynamic nature of adjustment and enable refinement of the framework.

Third, although the framework was developed using robust empirical findings and established theoretical foundations, it has not yet undergone formal organizational implementation and evaluation. Future research should pilot the ECAEF within international NGOs and assess its effectiveness in improving expatriate adjustment, assignment completion, stakeholder satisfaction, project delivery, and organizational performance. Such implementation studies would provide valuable evidence regarding the framework's practical

effectiveness and identify opportunities for refinement.

Future research should also investigate how organizational factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, human resource practices, digital technologies, and organizational learning influence the implementation of the framework. Similarly, individual characteristics including cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, resilience, personality traits, family adjustment, and psychological wellbeing may strengthen or moderate the effectiveness of the proposed intervention and warrant further investigation.

Despite these limitations, the present study provides an important step toward bridging the gap between expatriate adjustment theory and organizational practice. By offering an empirically grounded and practically oriented framework, the study lays the foundation for future implementation research while providing international NGOs with a systematic approach for strengthening expatriate adjustment and improving project performance.

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[i] *https://jenerjournalarchive.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/cross-cultural-adjustment-and-performance-of-expatriate-ngo-project-workers-in-uganda.pdf*

[ii] *Note: Positive ratings represent the proportion of experts who rated each criterion as either Very Good (4) or Excellent (5). The percentages were calculated using the 12 participating experts as the denominator.*

[iii] *Note: Consensus represents the percentage of the 12 experts who rated each criterion as either Very Good (4) or Excellent (5). For example, 83.3% represents 10 out of 12 experts, while 91.7% represents 11 out of 12 experts.*