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Accrual Basis Accounting and Accountability in Nigerian NGOs: Practices and Challenges

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Abstract

This study explores how the use of accrual basis accounting influences accountability and transparency among Nigerian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As expectations from donors, stakeholders and partners for financial accountability continue to grow, NGOs face mounting pressure to adopt more reliable reporting systems. The research examines current levels of adoption, the challenges of moving from cash-based to accrual accounting, and the implications for financial reporting. The study uses mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative) research design, agency theory was used to underpin the study and data were collected through questionnaires administered to sixteen (16) NGO staff members, including finance, administrative, and management personnel operating in the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states. Among the organizations studied, eleven were national NGOs and five were international NGOs all operating in the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states. Out of many NGOs operating in the BAY states, sixteen (16) NGOs met the criteria for selection i.e access to audited financial statement, knowledge of Accrual basis accounting and voluntary respondents while others decline to respond. Findings reveal that many NGOs favor a hybrid or mixed accounting approach, largely due to the unpredictable and conditional nature of donor funding. Key barriers to full accrual adoption include shortages of skilled staff, funding structures, and irregular disbursements. The study highlights that limited compliance with IFRS/IPSAS standards may weaken donor confidence and potentially reduce funding opportunities. Overall, the results emphasize the need for capacity building, supportive policies, and harmonized donor requirements. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening practice through training, policy reforms, donor engagement, and further research.

Keywords: Accrual Accounting, Transparency, Accountability, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Financial Reporting

1.0 Introduction

In Nigeria and other developing nations, NGOs plays essential role in advancing social and economic progress. They act as critical partners in addressing systemic development gaps by delivering services in

Healthcare, education, human rights advocacy, poverty alleviation, and humanitarian assistance. Their effectiveness, however, is not only dependent on programmatic efficiency but also on their ability to maintain credibility, legitimacy, and the trust of both donors and the wider public. Given the increasing reliance of NGOs on external funding from international donors, government subventions, and philanthropic contributions, accountability and transparency in financial management have become central to sustaining their operations and long-term impact.

Traditionally, many NGOs in Nigeria have adopted cash basis accounting because of its relative simplicity and ease of application in resource-constrained settings. Cash accounting records transactions only when money changes hands, thereby requiring minimal technical expertise. While this approach may be adequate for smaller organizations with limited financial activity, it has significant shortcomings in larger and more complex NGOs. As Nigerian NGOs expand their operations, diversify their funding sources, and face growing stakeholder demands for clearer, more reliable reporting, the limitations of cash basis accounting become more pronounced. This has brought accrual basis accounting to the forefront as a more robust alternative for enhancing accountability and transparency.

Globally, the adoption of accrual-based accounting frameworks is increasingly promoted as a best practice. International guidelines such as the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) underscore the importance of accrual accounting in strengthening financial governance. Unlike cash accounting, the accrual basis recognizes revenues when they are earned and expenses when they are incurred, irrespective of actual cash movements. This provides a more comprehensive picture of an organization's financial health, enabling better disclosure, improved comparability, and enhanced decision-making. For NGOs, this shift not only strengthens internal financial planning and monitoring but also builds donor confidence by demonstrating accountability in the stewardship of resources.

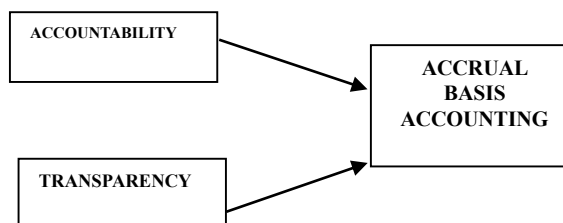
Despite these advantages, the transition to accrual accounting poses significant challenges in developing contexts such as Nigeria. The barriers include shortages of skilled accounting personnel, inadequate institutional capacity, weak technological infrastructure, and organizational resistance to change due to entrenched practices and cost considerations. Moreover, the unique funding and operational models of NGOs often involving restricted grants, in-kind contributions, and donor-specific reporting requirements make

the implementation of accrual accounting more complex. As such, while the theoretical benefits of accrual accounting are well acknowledged, there remains limited empirical evidence on its practical adoption and actual impact on the accountability and transparency of Nigerian NGOs.

This study seeks to fill that gap by critically assessing the effect of accrual basis accounting on the accountability and transparency of NGOs in Nigeria. Specifically, it aims to evaluate the extent to which accrual accounting has been adopted among Nigerian NGOs, examine its influence on financial transparency and accountability, identify the challenges organizations face during the adoption process, and explore stakeholder perceptions regarding its benefits and limitations.

The findings are expected to generate valuable insights for policymakers, regulators, development partners, and NGO leaders, particularly in strengthening financial reporting systems and institutional capacity. By highlighting both the opportunities and barriers associated with accrual accounting, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on NGO governance and sustainability in developing nations, thereby offering practical recommendations for enhancing trust, accountability, and long-term organizational effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher Design 2025

2.0 Literature Review

Numerous empirical studies have explored the implications of accrual basis accounting on financial transparency and accountability, particularly within non-profit and public sectors. The following section synthesizes key findings from such studies, offering insights into both global and Nigerian contexts.

Empirical studies reinforce the value of accrual accounting in promoting financial transparency and accountability in NGOs. They highlight benefits such as improved financial disclosures, greater donor and stakeholder trust, enhanced decision-making and planning. However, they also point to substantial challenges, particularly in the Nigerian context, including limited technical expertise, high implementation costs, and resistance to change. Even though there are many empirical studies on similar topic, many of those studies conducted in Nigeria focuses on Public sector IPSAS rather than IFRS and so they studies

was not used in this research due to their irrelevance contribution for example, Babatunde, & Fofie, (2016) “Equipping Public Servants with Accrual Accounting for Transparency, Accountability and Efficiency – Evidence from Nigeria and Ghana”; Oluwamayowa et al. (2024) “Recognition and Measurement Principles of Accrual-Based IPSAS and Quality of Corporate Reporting by Government-Owned Entities in Nigeria” Eke & Ozurumba, (2019) “The impact of IPSAS Adoption on the Quality of Financial Reporting in Nigerian Public Sector Entities Udeh, & Sopekan, (2015) “Adoption of IPSAS and the Quality of Public Sector Financial Reporting in Nigeria” Onwuchekwa & Ezejiofor, (2020) “IPSAS Adoption and Financial Accountability in the Nigerian Public Sector: The Moderating Role of Audit Committee Independence” Eke, Ames and Gift-Eke (2024) “Adoption of International Public Sector Accounting Standards and Financial Reporting Quality in University Rivers State” Adeyemi, (2019) “Public Sector Accounting in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects etc.

While Christiaens & Rommel's 2008 conducted a study on Accrual Accounting Reforms for Governments, Financial Accountability & Management, the study provides analysis on the implementation of accrual accounting in public sector entities. However, this study may not reflect

the true financial position of an organization, as it ignores receivables and payables.

Kober et al. (2010), studying Australian NGOs, found a gradual shift from cash-based to accrual-based systems, with larger organizations leading the transition due to stronger capacity. Similarly, Adams and Bell (2015) revealed that accrual accounting was more prevalent among larger NGOs with better infrastructure, while smaller NGOs leaned toward cash accounting because of simplicity and lower costs.

In Nigeria, Babatunde (2013) emphasized that public institutions adopting accrual-based budgeting experienced significant gains in transparency, suggesting transferable benefits for NGOs. Aderemi and Bello (2019) further supported this in the Nigerian NGO sector, showing that accrual accounting better reflects financial performance and long-term sustainability. These findings align with your study's evidence of mixed adoption (cash, accrual, and hybrid systems), driven largely by funding structures and resource availability.

Kilic, Uyar, and Ataman (2018) found that NGOs using accrual reporting were significantly more transparent, producing clearer financial statements that improved donor trust and internal decision-making. Connolly and Hyndman (2013) compared

NGOs in the UK and Ireland and observed that accrual-based reports provided more comprehensive disclosures on assets, liabilities, income, and expenses, enhancing accountability and comparability across organizations.

In Uganda, Tusiime et al. (2020) showed that accrual-based NGOs achieved better compliance with regulatory requirements, since accrual systems allowed accurate recordkeeping and facilitated audits. In India, Sharma and Lawrence (2015) echoed this, noting that accrual accounting enhanced both compliance and governance. In Nigeria, Aderemi and Bello (2019) confirmed that accrual accounting yielded a more accurate measure of financial health, which is crucial for accountability and strategic planning.

Together, these findings establish accrual accounting as a mechanism for strengthening transparency, compliance, and governance, consistent with international reporting standards (Christiaens & Rommel, 2008).

Pariag-Maraye (et al., 2023) *Evaluated NGO accounting and reporting practices in a developing economy, the case for reforms*. study focusing on NGOs in Mauritius identified core weaknesses in accounting and reporting. Key constraints included absence of NGO-specific accounting standards, inadequate engagement in

narrative reporting, shortages of properly trained NGO officers and weak monitoring and control mechanisms.

Kober et al. (2010) observed similar struggles in Australia, particularly among smaller NGOs that lacked resources for full adoption. Adams and Bell (2015) also noted that the costs of transitioning to accrual systems disproportionately affect resource-constrained organizations.

Hyndman and McDonnell (2009) found that donors preferred NGOs using accrual-based reporting, perceiving it as more reliable and complete, which increased willingness to fund. Chew and Osborne (2009) confirmed this in Southeast Asia, where accrual-based reports enhanced donor trust and improved prospects for long-term funding.

Uddin and Belal (2019) added that accrual systems not only improve donor accountability but also facilitate beneficiary accountability, since they provide detailed financial tracking that links resources to outcomes. However, Epstein and Yuthas (2010, 2011) cautioned that overemphasis on donor-focused reporting risks “mission drift,” where financial compliance overshadows core program objectives.

Wanja & Rotich (2021) studied Kenyan NGOs and found that donor-imposed financial reporting

requirements strongly influence the choice of accounting basis, mirroring the “donor template” challenge you identified.

Tusiime et al. (2020) explored the role of accrual accounting in enhancing regulatory compliance among NGOs in Uganda. The study found that NGOs adopting accrual accounting were better positioned to comply with regulatory requirements, including tax obligations and financial reporting standards. This compliance was linked to the detailed and accurate financial records maintained under the accrual system, which facilitated audits and inspections.

Aderemi and Bello (2019) examined the relevance of accrual accounting in measuring the financial performance of NGOs in Nigeria. The study indicated that accrual accounting provided a more accurate measure of financial performance by recognizing all economic events in the reporting period. This method enabled better evaluation of an NGO's financial health and sustainability, crucial for long-term planning and strategy.

Dhanani and Connolly (2012) compared the financial reporting practices of local NGOs in India using cash basis versus accrual basis accounting. Their findings indicated that accrual accounting provided a more comprehensive view of an organization's financial position, including

obligations and future revenues. The study suggested that accrual accounting could help local NGOs in resource planning and long-term financial sustainability, although the initial implementation costs were a concern for many smaller organizations.

Kober et al. (2010) conducted a study on the adoption of accrual accounting by NGOs in Australia. The research found that local NGOs were gradually shifting from cash-based to accrual-based accounting, driven by the need for more accurate financial reporting and compliance with donor requirements. The study highlighted that smaller local NGOs faced significant challenges in implementing accrual accounting due to limited financial and human resources.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Agency theory. Donors (principals) face agency problems when managers (agents) can withhold or time information (e.g., reporting only when cash moves). Accrual accounting reduces information asymmetry by recognizing obligations and revenues when they arise, limiting opportunistic timing and offering a fuller view of financial health. By constraining discretion in recognition and providing audit trails, accrual information can

reduce monitoring costs and perceived risk for donors.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative (extent of adoption, impact on accountability and transparency) and qualitative (challenges and stakeholders perception). The aim is to evaluate the use of Accrual Accounting on Accountability and Transparency on Non-Governmental Organization in Nigeria while also capturing stakeholder perceptions of accounting practices through a structured questionnaires All registered NGOs operating in Nigeria that are legally required to prepare annual financial statements, including those that receive donor funding and are involved in humanitarian interventions. Sixteen (16) NGOs were purposively selected based on accessibility of financial reports and relevance to the research scope who are basically operating in the BAY states with clarity of accounting basis used. The sample includes 11 National NGOs namely FOMWAN, EYN Projects, NEXTGEN, COWACDI, JDPC, Greencode, Hope Alive Health Awareness, CPPLI Nkafamiya Rescue Mission, AHNi, ROHI, and 5 International NGOs namely Norwegian Rescue Mission NRC, International Medical Corps IMC, Danish Refugee

Council DRC, New Incentives and International Rescue Committee IRC

Purposive sampling was used for selecting NGOs because the research seeks to obtain in-depth information from respondents who possess specific knowledge, experience or characteristics relevant to the subject of study. This approach ensures that only individuals or organizations with direct involvement, expertise or practical experience with the phenomenon being studied are included thereby enhancing the validity of the responses.

A structured questionnaire was administered to 16 key personnel (1 from each NGO), ranging from finance officers, managers, administrative officers and executive directors whose contributions are crucial to answering the research questions and achieving the research objectives Questions focused on challenges in adopting accrual accounting, availability of trained staff, flexibility of policies, funding challenges among others. A structured checklist based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), IPSAS, or national NGO reporting guidelines. Key items could include: Accounting basis stated (Cash, Accrual, or Modified), Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Activities/Income and Expenditure, Notes to the financial statements,

Disclosures on grants, donations, and expenditures.

4.0 Results and discussion

4.1 Results

Table 1: Adoption level

Adoption level	Respondents
Cash Basis	3
Accrual Basis	5
Mixed Basis	8
Total	16

From the above table, it can be seen that the adoption level between the 16 NGOs used for this study stated 3 representing 18.75% uses cash Basis Accounting, 5 NGOs representing 31.25% uses accrual basis accounting while 8 NGOs representing 50% uses mixed method.

Table 2: Perceived challenges with not complying with Accrual Basis

Challenges of not using Accrual	Frequency	% Respondents (n=16)
Nature of funding	11	68.75
Timing of funding	9	56.25
Inadequate trained personnel	6	37.5
Templates used by donors not requiring accrual	2	12.5
Lack of interest/policy restrictions	3	18.75

Source: Researchers computation 2025

The results show that among the 16 respondents, the most common challenge of not using accrual

accounting was the nature of funding (68.8%), followed by timing of funding (56.3%), while fewer respondents highlighted inadequate trained personnel (37.5%), lack of interest or policy restrictions (18.8%), and donor templates not requiring accrual (12.5%).

Table 3: Does Accounting Basis affect Donor Funding

Responses	No. of NGOs	Percentage (%)
Yes	7	43.8
Maybe	5	31.3
No	4	25
Total	16	100%

Source: Researchers computation 2025

From the above table seek to explore the stakeholders perception on the benefits and limitations of using accrual basis, it can be seen that a plurality of NGOs (43.8%) responded *Yes*, showing significant support for the issue being assessed, 31.3% (*Maybe*) indicates uncertainty, suggesting that some NGOs may lack adequate information or confidence to take a firm position while 25% (*No*) reflects outright disagreement, which is still a notable minority. This distribution highlights a divergence of views among NGOs, with nearly three-quarters (75.1%) leaning toward *Yes* or *Maybe* see a link or potential link between accounting basis and ability to secure donor funds while only one-quarter is opposed.

Table 4: Reasons for mixed basis accounting

Reasons	Responses	Percentage (n=16)
Nature of funding received	8	50
Uncertainty of funding	2	12.5
Policy flexibility	1	6.3
Best practice for NGOs	5	31.3
Total	16	100

The result shows that the major reason (50%) for not fully adopting accrual accounting among the respondents was the nature of funding received, which often comes with restrictions that make accrual less practical. About 31.3% considered best practice for NGOs as a factor, while uncertainty of funding (12.5%) and policy flexibility (6.3%) were mentioned less frequently. This suggests that the structure and conditions tied to funding streams strongly influence accounting practices in NGOs, more than internal policies or perceptions of best practice.

Table 5: Impact on financial transparency and Accountability

Impact on Financial & Accountability	Responses	% Percentage
Not receiving funding as expected	8	50
Lack of donor trust	4	25
Challenges in reporting	3	18.7
Payment time frame issues	0	0
Inaccurate financial picture	1	6.3
Total	16	100

Source: Researchers computation 2025

The results indicate that the greatest impact of not using accrual accounting is not receiving funding as expected (50%), highlighting how financial reporting gaps can affect fund disbursement. About a quarter of respondents (25%) linked it to a lack of donor trust, while 18.8% cited reporting challenges. A smaller proportion (6.3%) pointed to an inaccurate financial picture, and none reported issues directly tied to payment time frames. Overall, this suggests that weak financial transparency under non-accrual systems primarily undermines donor confidence and timely funding.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study provide insights into the level of adoption of accrual accounting among NGOs and the implications for financial transparency and accountability. Table 1 reveals that half of the NGOs (50%) adopt a mixed basis of accounting, while 31.3% use the accrual basis and 18.8% apply the cash basis. This suggests that although accrual accounting is gaining acceptance, many NGOs still combine it with elements of cash basis to align with their operational realities and donor requirements. The predominance of mixed accounting reflects the transitional nature of financial reporting practices within the NGO sector.

The challenges associated with non-adoption of accrual accounting (Table 2) further reinforce this trend. The most prominent barrier identified was the nature of funding (68.8%), which is often restricted and project-based, thereby complicating full accrual adoption. Timing of funding (56.3%) and inadequate trained personnel (37.5%) were also significant obstacles, pointing to both structural and capacity-related constraints. Fewer NGOs mentioned lack of interest or policy restrictions (18.8%) and donor templates not requiring accrual (12.5%), indicating that while external templates influence practice, internal financial systems and skills remain more critical limitations.

The effect of accounting basis on donor funding (Table 3) highlights the practical importance of the issue. Nearly 44% of respondents agreed that the choice of accounting basis influences donor funding, while 31.3% were uncertain and 25% disagreed. This distribution shows that although a plurality recognizes the value of accrual accounting in donor relations, a considerable segment either lacks sufficient awareness or does not perceive a direct link. Nevertheless, when combined, almost three-quarters (75.1%) of respondents lean toward recognizing a potential link between accounting method and donor support, suggesting that accrual reporting could be

increasingly important for sustaining donor confidence.

Further insight comes from the reasons for adopting mixed accounting (Table 4). Half of the respondents (50%) cited the nature of funding as the major reason, while 31.3% pointed to adherence to perceived best practices. A smaller share referenced uncertainty of funding (12.5%) and policy flexibility (6.3%). This again underscores the strong influence of donor funding structures on accounting choices, with NGOs adapting their reporting practices to meet funders' expectations rather than strictly following standardized accrual principles.

Finally, the impact of non-adoption of accrual on financial transparency and accountability (Table 5) shows clear consequences. The most cited impact was not receiving funding as expected (50%), while 25% of respondents identified a lack of donor trust, and 18.8% mentioned challenges in reporting. A small percentage pointed to inaccurate financial pictures (6.3%), while none directly associated the issue with payment time frames. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that limited adoption of accrual accounting undermines both financial credibility and reporting accuracy, thereby affecting funding flows and stakeholder trust.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the results indicate that while accrual accounting is recognized as valuable, its full adoption is constrained by the funding environment, limited technical capacity, and partial reliance on donor-imposed reporting formats. The dominance of mixed accounting practices reflects a pragmatic balance between accountability demands and operational realities. However, the evidence that non-adoption negatively impacts transparency, donor confidence, and financial sustainability suggests that stronger policy direction, donor alignment, and capacity-building initiatives will be necessary if NGOs are to fully realize the benefits of accrual-based reporting.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge for strengthening accountability and transparency in Nigerian NGOs through more effective adoption of accrual accounting.

- i. Investment in the training of NGO financial personnel is essential to reduce the skills gap that hinders full accrual implementation. Universities, professional accounting bodies, and donor agencies should collaborate to develop targeted programs that equip NGO staff with the technical expertise required for accrual-based reporting.
- ii. Donors play a critical role as principals in shaping NGO reporting practices. Harmonizing donor reporting templates with international standards such as IPSAS and IFRS would reduce reliance on mixed or cash-based systems. Clearer donor signaling would also minimize information asymmetry and incentivize NGOs to adopt accrual methods more fully.
- iii. Nigerian regulatory bodies, including the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and the Financial Reporting Council of Nigeria (FRCN), should provide sector-specific guidance on accrual accounting for NGOs. Tailored frameworks and simplified compliance requirements can lower agency costs and create an enabling environment for standardization.
- iv. Given resource constraints, NGOs should be encouraged to adopt accrual accounting in a phased manner, beginning with core areas such as revenue recognition and liabilities. This gradual approach reduces transition costs while still improving accountability over time.
- v. Boards of NGOs should play a more proactive role in demanding transparent

reporting systems and ensuring that financial practices align with accountability commitments. Enhanced oversight can mitigate agency risks, reduce monitoring costs, and reinforce donor confidence.

- vi. Establishing networks or platforms where NGOs can share best practices, challenges, and experiences with accrual adoption would foster peer learning and build collective capacity across the sector.

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