



East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies

eajis.eanso.org

Volume 8, Issue 1, 2025

Print ISSN: 2707-529X | Online ISSN: 2707-5303

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-5303>



EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Participatory Approaches and Rural Women's Empowerment in Uganda

Francis Twinamasiko^{1*} & Robert Turyamureeba, PhD¹

¹ Bishop Stuart University, P. O. Box 09, Mbarara, Uganda.

* Author's ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9072-165X>; Email: fmatsiko1@gmail.com

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.8.1.2923>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

29 April 2025

Keywords:

Participatory Rural
Development,
Women's
Empowerment,
Community,
Engagement,
Capacity Building,
Uganda.

This study explores the role of Participatory Rural Development (PRD) approaches in enhancing women's empowerment in Uganda. PRD approaches such as inclusive decision-making, participatory planning, capacity building, and resource mobilization have gained recognition as effective strategies for fostering women's socio-economic and political empowerment. Using secondary data, this study examined how these PRD components contribute to women's economic independence, leadership opportunities, access to resources and social inclusion. Findings reveal that PRD interventions significantly enhance women's agency by providing platforms for participation in community development, improving access to financial resources, and strengthening leadership capacities. Community engagement strategies, including self-help groups and participatory governance, have empowered women by fostering collective action and amplifying their voices in decision-making processes. Capacity-building initiatives such as; vocational training, financial literacy programs and legal education have further enabled women to gain essential skills for economic self-sufficiency and advocacy. Moreover, access to resources including; land rights, credit facilities and technology, has played a critical role in reducing gender disparities in economic opportunities. Despite these achievements, challenges such as socio-cultural barriers, limited access to capital and weak policy enforcement continue to hinder the full realization of PRD's potential in empowering women. The study recommends targeted policy reforms, increased investment in women-centred development programs and strengthened institutional support to enhance the effectiveness of PRD initiatives. Strengthening PRD frameworks will not only promote gender equality but also contribute to broader sustainable development efforts in Uganda and beyond.

APA CITATION

Twinamasiko, F. & Turyamureeba, R. (2025). Participatory Approaches and Rural Women's Empowerment in Uganda. *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8(1), 209-225. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.8.1.2923>.

CHICAGO CITATION

Twinamasiko, Francis and Robert Turyamureeba. 2025. "Participatory Approaches and Rural Women's Empowerment in Uganda". *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8 (1), 209-225. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.8.1.2923>.

HARVARD CITATION

Twinamasiko, F. & Turyamureeba, R. (2025) "Participatory Approaches and Rural Women's Empowerment in Uganda", *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8(1), pp. 209-225. doi: 10.37284/eajis.8.1.2923.

IEEE CITATION

F., Twinamasiko & R., Turyamureeba "Participatory Approaches and Rural Women's Empowerment in Uganda", *EAJIS*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 209-225, Apr. 2025.

MLA CITATION

Twinamasiko, Francis & Robert Turyamureeba. "Participatory Approaches and Rural Women's Empowerment in Uganda". *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 1, Apr. 2025, pp. 209-225, doi:10.37284/eajis.8.1.2923.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment has increasingly become a central focus in global development agendas, recognizing its pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Acosta *et al.*, 2019). The achievement of the SDGs by 2030 requires the Ugandan government to prioritize women in planning, implementation and monitoring processes to ensure inclusive and sustainable development (Roselyn, 2016). Women's active participation is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical driver for economic growth, poverty reduction and social transformation.

In Uganda as in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, women continue to face multifaceted challenges rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic disparities and institutional barriers. These constraints hinder their access to economic opportunities, leadership positions and full participation in societal development (Flynn, 2013; Acosta *et al.*, 2019). However, despite these challenges, Participatory Rural Development (PRD) has emerged as a transformative approach to women's empowerment ensuring that development initiatives are inclusive, sustainable and community-driven (Roselyn, 2016). PRD emphasizes grassroots participation, enabling women to play an active role in decision-making processes that directly affect their livelihoods and well-being.

This study examines the role of PRD in enhancing women's empowerment in Uganda with a particular focus on community engagement, participatory planning and implementation of development activities, capacity building and resource

mobilization. PRD not only facilitates economic empowerment by equipping women with skills, knowledge, and access to productive resources but also strengthens their leadership abilities and political engagement (Kabeer, 2018). By actively involving women in rural development initiatives, PRD fosters social equity, enhances economic resilience and promotes sustainable growth. Additionally, PRD strategies help dismantle systemic gender barriers, creating an enabling environment where women can thrive as equal contributors to national progress (Acosta *et al.*, 2019).

The integration of participatory approaches into Uganda's development agenda presents a significant opportunity to achieve gender-inclusive policies and sustainable rural transformation. This study contributes to the discourse on women's empowerment by analyzing how PRD mechanisms can enhance women's agency, economic independence and social well-being, ultimately driving inclusive and sustainable development in Uganda.

Context

Uganda, a landlocked country in East Africa, is characterized by diverse ethnicities, cultures and geographical landscapes. Despite notable economic growth in recent years, the country continues to grapple with high levels of poverty, particularly in rural areas where the majority of the population resides (Flynn, 2013). Rural women in particular face significant socio-economic challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare

and financial opportunities, as well as unequal land and resource ownership rights (Flynn, 2013).

Historically development interventions in Uganda have often followed a top-down approach failing to adequately address the specific needs and priorities of rural women. This has perpetuated gender disparities, limiting women's participation in decision-making processes, economic activities and governance structures. In response, Participatory Rural Development (PRD) approaches have gained importance, aiming to empower marginalised groups including women, by involving them directly in; decision-making processes, development planning and implementation, capacity building and leadership training and resource mobilization for economic empowerment.

By leveraging community engagement, capacity building, resource mobilization and policy advocacy, PRD initiatives have sought to address structural inequalities and empower women to actively participate in and benefit from development processes. Understanding the impact of PRD on women's empowerment is crucial for informing policy and practice aimed at achieving gender equality and inclusive development.

By analyzing existing literature and secondary data, this study aims to uncover the key components and successes of PRD initiatives in Uganda. Therefore, this study sought to analyze the impact of community engagement on empowering women in Uganda, to determine the influence of participatory planning and implementation of development programs on the empowerment of women in Uganda, to evaluate the effect of capacity building on the empowerment of women in Uganda and to assess the role of resource mobilization in enhancing the empowerment of women in Uganda.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative and descriptive research design, employing a systematic review of literature from academic journals, policy reports and empirical studies accessed through Google

Scholar, JSTOR, and Research Gate. The literature reviewed covered the period from 2003 to 2023, ensuring an analysis of historical trends, policy developments, and contemporary research findings. Conducting a thorough review and critical evaluation of each selected source, identifying common themes, patterns, and divergent viewpoints in the literature and extracting relevant information on community engagement, participatory planning, capacity building, and resource mobilization. Since the study employed secondary data analysis, ethical considerations primarily involved; ensuring that all sources of data are properly cited and attributed to avoid plagiarism and using the data in a manner that respects the rights of the original authors and follows the terms of use of the data sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participatory Rural Development

Participatory Rural Development (PRD) is an inclusive approach that seeks to involve local communities in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects. This methodology shifts away from top-down development paradigms, focusing instead on bottom-up processes that prioritize the knowledge, needs and aspirations of the community members themselves. PRD is particularly relevant in rural contexts where traditional development models have often failed to address the specific and nuanced needs of the population (Chambers, 1994).

The concept of Participatory Rural Development gained prominence in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of conventional development strategies. Robert Chambers (1994) introduced Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), a set of participatory and largely visual techniques designed to involve rural communities in assessing their needs and priorities. PRA is grounded in the belief that local people are best placed to analyze and solve their problems, thus enhancing the relevance and sustainability of development interventions (Chambers, 1994). PRD is

characterized by several key principles, including inclusiveness, empowerment and sustainability. It seeks to involve all segments of the community, especially marginalized groups such as women, in the decision-making process. This inclusive approach ensures that development initiatives are more equitable and better tailored to the actual needs of the population (Chambers, 1994).

In practical terms, PRD involves a variety of techniques and methods aimed at fostering active community participation. These include participatory planning sessions, focus group discussions, community mapping and participatory monitoring and evaluation (Estrella, & Gaventa, 2000). Such methods help to build a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of development projects. Participatory rural development represents a paradigm shift in development theory and practice, emphasizing community-driven approaches to address socio-economic challenges at the local level (Chambers, 1994). Rooted in principles of inclusivity, empowerment and sustainability, PRD aims to empower marginalized groups, including women, by involving them in decision-making processes, capacity building, and resource allocation within their communities (Estrella, & Gaventa, 2000).

In Uganda, PRD has been instrumental in addressing socio-economic challenges and promoting sustainable development. Various government and non-governmental initiatives have adopted participatory approaches to improve livelihoods, enhance agricultural productivity and promote gender equality. For instance, Tripp (2003) explains how women's movements in Uganda have utilized participatory methods to challenge discriminatory practices and secure land rights, thereby empowering women both economically and socially. The role of women's groups in Uganda is a testament to the effectiveness of PRD. Kyomuhendo (2009) highlights how these groups

provide platforms for women to engage in collective action, share knowledge and support each other in various endeavours. By participating in these groups, women have been able to address issues such as domestic violence and access to education and healthcare, significantly enhancing their empowerment.

In Uganda, PRD initiatives have gained prominence as strategies to mitigate poverty, improve livelihoods and promote inclusive development in rural areas. These initiatives recognize the centrality of women in agricultural production, natural resource management and household welfare, highlighting their critical role in sustainable development (Kyomuhendo, 2009).

Women's Empowerment in Development Discourse

Women's empowerment has become a central theme in development discourse, reflecting a growing recognition of the crucial role that women play in achieving sustainable development. Empowerment in this context refers to the process by which women gain control over their lives, make strategic life choices and improve their socio-economic status.

Several theoretical perspectives inform the discourse on women's empowerment. Feminist theories emphasize the need to challenge and transform patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Development theories, on the other hand, highlight the role of economic and social policies in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (Agarwal, 1994; Karl, 1995).

The concept of women's empowerment encompasses various dimensions including economic, social, political and psychological aspects. Economic empowerment involves increasing women's access to income and productive resources, while social empowerment focuses on improving women's social status and access to education and healthcare. Political

empowerment aims to enhance women's participation in decision-making processes, and psychological empowerment involves building women's self-esteem and confidence (Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2005).

According to Kabeer (2011), empowerment originates from the concept of power, which refers to the ability to make choices and take control of one's life. This idea of empowerment highlights the importance of having the agency to decide and act upon those decisions. Similarly, Sen (1985) cited in (Roselyn, 2016) defines power as a dominant factor in decision-making processes emphasizing the significance of influence and authority in shaping outcomes. Together, these perspectives underscore the central role of power in both personal and collective empowerment, where making informed choices and having a say in decisions are crucial for achieving meaningful and sustainable development.

Women's empowerment involves both personal and social transformation unfolding across interconnected psychological, political, social and economic domains. Through this process, women both individually and collectively gain power, make meaningful choices and gain control over their lives (O'Neil *et al.*, 2014), cited in (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). However, this journey is not straightforward or uncontested; it is characterized by negotiation, compromise and unpredictable outcomes (Cornwall, & Edwards, 2016), cited in (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). Empowerment requires persistent effort and adaptation reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of societal and individual change (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Women's empowerment is a central goal of PRD interventions, reflecting broader efforts to achieve gender equality and social justice. Empowerment encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic independence, political participation, access to education and healthcare and control over decision-making processes (Kabeer, 1999). Effective PRD programs empower women by enhancing their agency, capabilities and

opportunities to participate in and benefit from development initiatives (Mayoux, 1999).

Women empowerment is a multifaceted process that involves individual and collective transformation across emotional, political, social, and economic dimensions. It entails women gaining power and influence over their own lives, enabling them to make significant decisions both independently and cooperatively. This empowerment process enhances their ability to control and shape their personal and communal destinies (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). By developing their capacity to influence outcomes in these interconnected areas, women can achieve greater autonomy and agency, leading to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Women's economic empowerment involves ensuring women have equal access to and control over economic resources, enabling them to exert greater control over other areas of their lives (Taylor, & Pereznieta, 2014), cited in (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). Achieving this empowerment has become a global policy priority due to its significant potential to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This importance is underscored by the establishment of a dedicated High-Level Panel by the UN Secretary-General aimed at accelerating progress in this area. By empowering women economically, broader societal benefits are realized, fostering more inclusive and sustainable development (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Focusing on women's economic empowerment supports the ambitions of Agenda 2030 related to growth, decent work, poverty reduction, well-being and human development. The societal and familial benefits are well-documented: women's economic advancement often leads to increased investments in children's education and health and reduces household poverty (World Bank, 2012; 2013) cited in (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Economically, the case for gender parity is compelling. Estimates suggest that achieving

gender equality could boost global GDP from 2016 by \$12 trillion to \$28 trillion by 2025 (Woetzel *et al.*, 2015), cited in (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). Furthermore, national economies suffer when a substantial portion of the population cannot compete equitably or realize its full potential (Golla *et al.*, 2011) cited in (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). By promoting gender equality in economic participation, countries can unlock significant growth and development potential (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

According to Eyben *et al.* (2008), as cited in (Liberata, 2012) Economic empowerment is defined as the process of enhancing women's access to economic resources and opportunities. This includes access to jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development, and market information.

In practice, various strategies have been employed to promote women's empowerment. These include education and training programs, microfinance initiatives, legal reforms, and participatory development approaches. Microfinance, for instance, has been touted as a "magic bullet" for women's empowerment by providing women with access to financial resources and enabling them to start and expand businesses (Kabeer, 2005; Mayoux, 1999). However, the effectiveness of microfinance in empowering women has been debated, with some studies highlighting the need for complementary interventions such as training and support services (Mayoux, 1999).

Participatory development approaches such as those discussed by Cornwall (2003), emphasize the importance of involving women in decision-making processes and ensuring that their voices are heard. These approaches recognize that women's empowerment is not just about improving economic conditions but also about transforming social and political structures that limit women's opportunities and rights.

In Uganda, women's empowerment has been a key focus of development initiatives. The Ugandan government and various NGOs have implemented programs aimed at enhancing women's economic opportunities, improving their access to education and healthcare and promoting their participation in decision-making processes. Studies by Tripp (2003) and Kyomuhendo (2009) provide valuable insights into the impact of these initiatives on women's empowerment in Uganda.

Tripp (2003) explores how women's movements in Uganda have utilized participatory approaches to challenge discriminatory practices and secure land rights. By participating in these movements, women have been able to advocate for legal reforms that recognize their rights to own and inherit land, thereby improving their socio-economic status and enhancing their empowerment.

Kyomuhendo (2009) examines the role of women's groups in promoting empowerment and development. These groups provide a platform for women to engage in collective action, share knowledge, and support each other in various endeavours. Through their involvement in these groups, women in Uganda have been able to address issues such as domestic violence and access to education, and healthcare, significantly enhancing their empowerment.

Community Engagement and Mobilization and Women Empowerment

Community engagement and mobilization are fundamental components of participatory rural development (PRD) and play a crucial role in enhancing women's empowerment in Uganda (Flynn, 2013). The participation of women in self-help groups (SHGs) serves as a platform for social interaction, fostering solidarity and mutual support among members. This collective environment helps build confidence and encourages women to voice their opinions and participate in community decision-making processes (Flynn, 2013). In Uganda, community mobilization efforts that

include awareness campaigns and the formation of women's groups have shown significant positive impacts with regard to women's empowerment (Flynn, 2013). This is also supported by Kyomuhendo, who asserts that women's groups provide a platform for women to collectively address their issues, share knowledge, and support each other's initiatives (Kyomuhendo, 2009).

The engagement of women in these groups fosters a sense of community and collective action, which is vital for sustainable empowerment. Participatory approaches in rural development enhance women's empowerment by involving them in decision-making processes, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed in policy implementation (Acosta *et al.*, 2019). Acosta *et al.* underscores the critical role of participatory rural development in enhancing women's empowerment in Uganda, emphasizing that overcoming socio-cultural and institutional barriers is necessary to fully realize the potential of these participatory approaches.

Integrated economic development initiatives that focus on collective action can yield numerous benefits (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). Liberata (2012) highlights that women's organizations like the National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU) create platforms for rural women to engage collectively, fostering solidarity, mutual support and collective identity, which are critical for empowerment. Kirahora, & Mulegi (2023) discuss the importance of women's participation in community development activities, demonstrating that engagement in local governance and decision-making processes leads to enhanced empowerment and improved community outcomes.

Participatory Planning and Implementation of Development Activities and Women Empowerment

Participatory planning involves the active involvement of community members in the development planning process, ensuring that their

needs and priorities are considered (Flynn, 2013). For women in Uganda, this approach can be particularly empowering. Participation in policy-making and implementation processes empowers women by providing them with platforms to influence decisions that affect their lives. This involvement is crucial for addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities and promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities (Acosta *et al.*, 2019). In Uganda, participatory planning has led to the development of women-centric projects that have improved access to education and healthcare services (Acosta *et al.*, 2019). This inclusion not only benefits the women directly involved but also promotes gender equality within the broader community. In Uganda, development activities such as agricultural projects, health campaigns, and education initiatives that involve women as key stakeholders have demonstrated positive outcomes (Flynn, 2013). Similarly, the participation of women in agricultural projects has resulted in better crop yields and food security (FAO, 2011).

Women's ability to collaborate and organize with others to enhance economic activities and rights, often referred to as "power with," is crucial for their economic empowerment. By building networks and engaging in collective action, women can amplify their voices, negotiate better working conditions, access resources and secure their rights more effectively. This collective empowerment enables them to overcome individual barriers and create opportunities for economic growth and social change, further solidifying their role in the economic landscape (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). When groups focus on changing social norms such as restrictive attitudes towards women's work and property ownership, they can significantly boost women's self-esteem and strengthen their identity as citizens. This collective effort can lead to transformational gains in gender equality within the community and broader political structures (Domingo *et al.*, 2015, cited in Hunt, & Samman, 2016). By challenging and shifting these norms, women's groups not only enhance individual

empowerment but also contribute to systemic change, creating a more inclusive and equitable society (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Supporting studies show that involving women in planning and implementing development programs increases their agency and ownership, leading to more sustainable and relevant initiatives. Gobezie (2014) demonstrates that programs such as microfinance and value-chain support empower women by increasing their control over resources and decisions. Flynn (2013) finds that self-help groups where women actively participate in planning and decision-making have a positive impact on poverty alleviation and development. Acosta *et al.* (2019) highlight how participatory approaches in agricultural and climate change policies can translate gender mainstreaming norms into practice, empowering women by incorporating their perspectives and needs into policy frameworks.

Accordingly, participatory planning and the active involvement of women in development activities significantly enhance women's empowerment by addressing their specific needs, promoting gender equality and ensuring sustainable development outcomes. Participatory planning and implementation of development programs involve including community members, particularly women, in the decision-making process of development initiatives. This approach ensures that the programs are tailored to meet the specific needs and priorities of the community. Tripp (2003) highlights that participatory approaches in planning and implementing land reform initiatives in Uganda have led to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. When women are actively involved in these processes, they gain a sense of ownership and are more likely to benefit from the development programs.

Kyomuhendo (2009) further supports this by illustrating how participatory development practices in women's groups have empowered rural women. These groups often engage in planning and

executing small-scale development projects such as savings and credit schemes, agricultural initiatives, and educational programs. By participating in these activities, women develop leadership skills, improve their economic status, and become more active in community governance.

For Uganda to achieve the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, women must be at the forefront of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. This requires creating an inclusive society where gender equality is mainstreamed and human rights are integral to the system. Ensuring women's active participation in these processes is essential for their economic empowerment and for reducing instances of gender-based violence (Roselyn, 2016).

Capacity Building and Women Empowerment

Capacity building is essential for empowering women as it provides them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively in development activities. In Uganda, such initiatives have proven to be particularly impactful. Participation in self-help groups (SHGs) has led to the development of various skills among women including financial literacy, business management and leadership. Training sessions organized by SHGs equipped women with the knowledge and tools to manage their finances effectively and run successful enterprises (Flynn, 2013). These skill development activities have not only improved women's economic independence but also boosted their self-esteem and confidence.

Capacity-building programs focusing on vocational training, literacy and leadership have been instrumental in empowering women in Uganda. Participation in informal groups offers women a crucial chance to cultivate confidence, self-belief and effective leadership skills. These experiences empower women to assume leadership roles within these groups and establish the support needed to transition into leadership positions within formal or public structures, including political offices

(Domingo *et al.*, 2015, cited in Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Capacity-building activities such as training in business skills, financial management and leadership provided by organizations like the National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU) significantly enhance the ability of rural women to manage businesses, access markets and improve their economic independence (Liberata, 2012). Such training helps women develop the competencies necessary for successful entrepreneurship and economic participation.

According to Hunt, & Samman (2016), capacity building in various domains, including economic and social skills, is crucial for overcoming constraints and enabling women to navigate challenges, leading to greater empowerment. This argument is supported by Lecoutere *et al.* (2023), who provide evidence that targeted information and role models in agricultural extension services empower women by enhancing their skills, knowledge, and confidence. This, in turn, contributes to improved decision-making and productivity.

According to Kyomuhendo (2009), capacity-building initiatives within women's groups in Uganda have significantly contributed to women's empowerment. Training programs on financial management, entrepreneurship and agricultural techniques have equipped women with the necessary skills to improve their livelihoods and achieve economic independence.

Tripp (2003) also underscores the importance of capacity building in legal literacy and advocacy. Empowering women with knowledge about their legal rights and how to advocate for themselves has been pivotal in challenging discriminatory practices and securing land rights. These efforts have not only improved individual women's circumstances but have also contributed to broader societal changes in gender norms and attitudes. Capacity building is a critical component of PRD, focusing on enhancing

the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals and groups to enable them to participate effectively in development processes.

Resource Mobilization and Women Empowerment

Resource mobilization involves securing financial, human and material resources to support development initiatives (Kyomuhendo, 2009). Resource mobilization is a critical component of participatory rural development (PRD), involving the identification and utilization of both local and external resources to support development activities. For women in Uganda, access to resources such as credit, land and technology is crucial for their empowerment (Flynn, 2013).

Research by Rebecca Flynn (2013) highlights the role of rural finance self-help groups (SHGs) in Uganda in providing women with access to savings and credit facilities. This financial inclusion has enabled women to start or expand small businesses, leading to increased household income and economic independence. Flynn's study underscores the significance of participatory rural approaches in empowering women and contributing to broader poverty alleviation and development goals in rural Uganda. The findings support the claim that SHGs are successful in alleviating poverty and increasing human development, particularly among women (Flynn, 2013).

In Uganda, resource mobilization initiatives have enabled women to start and expand their businesses providing them with financial independence and a stronger voice in household and community decisions (Flynn, 2013). Economic and social empowerment through SHGs has contributed to enhancing women's status within their families and communities. Women who were once marginalized have gained respect and recognition as contributors to the household economy and active community members (Flynn, 2013).

The study by Roselyn N. (2016) found that land tenure policies significantly impact women's

economic empowerment in Arua District, Uganda. The results demonstrated that secure land tenure is a critical factor in enhancing women's economic status by providing women with greater access to and control over agricultural land. This secure tenure positively influences agricultural productivity and food security as women with land rights have greater control over farm inputs and outputs (World Bank, 2011). Moreover, land ownership provides women with the collateral needed to access credit facilities, enabling them to invest in and expand their businesses.

Roselyn (2016) recommends that the Ugandan government, particularly the ministries of agriculture and land, should lead an awareness campaign focused on women's land rights. Additionally, there should be a policy review targeting the agricultural land tenure system to further support women's economic empowerment.

When women can own and manage assets, they are better positioned to contribute to and benefit from economic activities, leading to improved livelihoods and overall economic stability. Ensuring women's access to these resources is critical for fostering sustainable development and promoting gender equality (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). Extensive evidence highlights the significance of women's control over household resources such as land and housing, in enhancing their self-esteem, earning respect from family members, increasing economic opportunities, improving mobility outside the home and boosting decision-making power. Liberata (2012) demonstrates that resource mobilization facilitated by NAWOU, such as access to financial resources, materials, and networks, enables women to scale up their businesses, acquire productive assets, and improve their livelihoods. Guloba *et al.* (2017) highlight that effective resource mobilization, including access to credit and savings schemes, significantly enhances the economic empowerment of rural women, allowing them to invest in their families and communities. The International Labour Office (2019) emphasizes

that resource mobilization in the rural economy through initiatives such as savings and credit services is vital for empowering women by providing them with the financial means to improve their economic and social status.

Effective resource mobilization is essential for sustaining community development projects and ensuring their impact on women's empowerment. Kyomuhendo (2009) highlights that women's groups in Uganda have been successful in mobilizing resources through various means including member contributions, partnerships with NGOs and government support. These resources have been utilized to fund income-generating activities, provide educational scholarships, and improve access to healthcare services.

Tripp (2003) adds that access to resources, particularly land, is a crucial factor in empowering rural women. By securing land rights, women gain a valuable asset that can be used for agricultural production, housing and as collateral for loans. Land ownership enhances women's economic security and provides a foundation for further empowerment and participation in community development.

Other Findings

This section presents the findings from the secondary data analysis on the role of participatory rural development (PRD) in enhancing women's empowerment in Uganda. The findings are organized based on the key components identified in the literature review: community engagement and mobilization, participatory planning, capacity building and resource mobilization.

Community Engagement, Mobilization and Women's Empowerment in Uganda

Community engagement and mobilization have proven to be key drivers of women's empowerment in Uganda, particularly in rural areas where traditional socio-cultural norms often limit women's participation in decision-making and

economic activities. Various studies and practical initiatives highlight the significant role of community-based participatory approaches in enhancing women's agency, economic independence and social inclusion.

Findings indicate that women's participation in self-help groups (SHGs) and community-based organizations has strengthened their capacity for collective action and economic resilience. Women in SHGs benefit from financial literacy programs, microfinance opportunities and social support networks that enhance their ability to start and sustain businesses (Flynn, 2013). Additionally, SHGs serve as platforms for peer learning and knowledge sharing where women collectively address issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive health and entrepreneurship. Kyomuhendo (2009) emphasizes that SHGs and women's groups provide crucial spaces for advocacy and empowerment, allowing women to negotiate better social and economic conditions within their communities.

In Uganda, various community mobilization initiatives have been implemented to enhance women's empowerment. Awareness campaigns led by organizations such as the National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU) have successfully sensitized rural communities on gender equality, financial inclusion and political participation (Liberata, 2012). These campaigns have encouraged women to take on leadership roles within their communities and engage in decision-making processes.

Studies indicate that active participation in local governance structures significantly enhances women's empowerment. Research by Kirahora, & Mulegi (2023) reveals that women who are actively involved in community leadership, local councils and development committees experience greater agency in shaping policies that affect their lives. Participation in these structures ensures that women's voices are heard, their concerns are addressed and gender-responsive policies are

implemented. Additionally, their involvement contributes to improved service delivery and community development outcomes, as women prioritize critical areas such as education, healthcare and economic development.

Participatory Planning, Implementation of Development Activities and Women's Empowerment in Uganda

Participatory planning and the implementation of development activities have emerged as powerful tools for women's empowerment in Uganda, fostering gender-inclusive decision-making, economic participation and social transformation. The findings from various studies indicate that involving women in policy-making, community development projects, and governance structures leads to more sustainable and equitable outcomes.

Research findings indicate that participatory planning enhances women's agency and influence in decision-making among rural women in Uganda. Studies by Acosta *et al.* (2019) reveal that when women are actively engaged in policy formulation and planning processes, their unique needs and perspectives are incorporated into education, healthcare and economic programs. This involvement has contributed to increased access to essential services, particularly in rural communities where gender disparities in resource allocation are prevalent.

Additionally, women's engagement in planning land reform and agricultural policies has led to more inclusive land ownership frameworks, ensuring that they gain rightful access to productive assets (Tripp, 2003). The mainstreaming of gender perspectives in these initiatives has helped to challenge patriarchal norms that traditionally exclude women from land and property rights.

Development programs in agriculture, microfinance and climate change adaptation have demonstrated significant benefits when women are actively involved. Studies indicate that: Agricultural projects that incorporate women's participation

result in higher crop yields, improved food security and increased household incomes (FAO, 2011). Microfinance and value-chain programs, such as those documented by Gobezie (2014), have empowered women by increasing their financial independence and decision-making power over household resources. Participatory approaches in climate change policies have successfully integrated gender considerations into resilience-building strategies, enabling women to adapt better to environmental challenges (Acosta *et al.*, 2019).

Participatory planning fosters women's ability to organize collectively, leading to enhanced economic and social empowerment. Studies by Hunt, & Samman (2016) highlight that women who form networks and engage in collective action negotiate better wages, secure land rights and access financial resources. This concept of "power with" enables them to challenge restrictive norms and improve their economic standing.

Additionally, Kyomuhendo (2009) demonstrates that women's groups engaged in savings schemes, credit cooperatives, and small-scale enterprises develop stronger leadership skills and gain more control over community resources and decision-making. These activities contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods in rural Uganda.

Beyond economic empowerment, participatory approaches help shift restrictive gender norms. Kirahora, & Mulegi (2023) find that women's participation in local governance structures and decision-making bodies strengthens their political influence and community leadership. This breaks traditional gender barriers, ensuring more inclusive development policies at both local and national levels.

Capacity Building and Women Empowerment in Uganda

Capacity building plays a pivotal role in empowering women in Uganda by equipping them with the skills, knowledge and resources necessary

for effective participation in economic, social, and political activities. The findings highlight that training programs, self-help groups (SHGs), vocational education, and legal literacy initiatives significantly contribute to women's independence, leadership, and decision-making abilities.

Studies show that financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and business management training enhance women's ability to generate income, manage resources and sustain economic ventures. Key findings indicate that: Participation in self-help groups (SHGs) has fostered financial literacy and business acumen among women enabling them to start and manage enterprises effectively (Flynn, 2013). In addition, training provided by organizations such as the National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU) has helped rural women access markets, manage businesses, and achieve economic independence (Liberata, 2012). Furthermore, Vocational training programs focusing on agriculture, small-scale businesses and craftwork have enabled women in Uganda to enhance productivity and improve household incomes (Hunt, & Samman, 2016).

Additionally, Lecoutere *et al.* (2023) emphasize that providing women with targeted agricultural training and access to role models in extension services significantly enhances their confidence, skills and productivity, leading to greater participation in Uganda's agricultural sector.

Capacity-building efforts have also been instrumental in enhancing women's leadership potential in Uganda. Studies show that: Training in leadership skills within informal groups helps women develop confidence and self-belief, enabling them to take up leadership positions both in community structures and formal political institutions (Domingo *et al.*, 2015, cited in Hunt & Samman, 2016). In addition, participation in women's groups and SHGs has encouraged women to engage in local governance and policy-making, thereby strengthening their role in decision-making

processes (Kyomuhendo, 2009). These efforts have contributed to higher representation of women in leadership roles, promoting gender-inclusive governance and policy formulation.

Empowering women through legal literacy and advocacy training has been critical in challenging discriminatory practices and securing their rights. Key findings indicate that: Training programs in legal literacy have helped women in Uganda to understand their land rights, inheritance laws, and labour protections allowing them to advocate for themselves in legal and policy frameworks (Tripp, 2003). Awareness campaigns and capacity-building efforts have shifted societal attitudes, contributing to broader gender equality by challenging patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices.

Resource Mobilization and Women Empowerment in Uganda

Resource mobilization is vital in empowering women in Uganda by providing access to financial, material and human resources necessary for economic independence, business growth and social inclusion. The findings highlight that self-help groups (SHGs), financial inclusion, land ownership and institutional support are key enablers of women's empowerment.

Access to financial resources, including credit facilities, savings schemes, and microfinance initiatives has significantly improved women's economic independence in Uganda. Key findings reveal that: Self-help groups (SHGs) provide savings and credit facilities, enabling women to start or expand small businesses, which increases household income and financial stability (Flynn, 2013). More to that, microfinance programs and credit access have helped women invest in productive assets, reducing poverty and improving their livelihoods (Liberata, 2012). Furthermore, savings and credit services within the rural economy have played a crucial role in enhancing women's economic and social status (International Labour Office, 2019).

Studies by Guloba *et al.* (2017) confirm that access to credit and savings schemes significantly enhances rural women's economic empowerment, allowing them to invest in their businesses, support their families, and contribute to community development.

Access to and control over land is a critical factor in women's economic empowerment, providing them with a secure foundation for agriculture, business expansion, and financial independence. Findings indicate that secure land tenure policies positively influence women's economic status by providing them with greater control over agricultural resources, food security, and business opportunities (Roselyn, 2016; World Bank, 2011). In addition, land ownership enables women to use property as collateral for accessing credit, thereby expanding their businesses and improving their financial standing (Tripp, 2003). Land rights advocacy and policy reviews are recommended to support women's empowerment by ensuring fair land tenure systems and legal protections (Roselyn, 2016).

Beyond financial and land resources, mobilization efforts have contributed to women's increased participation in household and community decision-making. Findings suggest that women who gain financial independence through SHGs and microfinance initiatives also experience greater social recognition and influence in family and community affairs (Flynn, 2013). Control over household resources (such as land and housing) enhances women's self-esteem, mobility and decision-making power, leading to greater gender equality (Hunt, & Samman, 2016). Partnerships with NGOs and government support have helped women access resources for healthcare, education, and economic development further solidifying their empowerment (Kyomuhendo, 2009).

Strong institutional frameworks and women's groups have been effective in mobilizing resources for sustainable community development. The findings highlight that NAWOU's resource mobilization efforts have facilitated women's

access to financial resources, business networks, and productive assets, allowing them to scale up enterprises and improve livelihoods (Liberata, 2012). Women's groups in Uganda mobilize resources through member contributions, NGO partnerships, and government programs, which have funded income-generating activities, education scholarships, and healthcare initiatives (Kyomuhendo, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

The study has examined the critical aspects of community engagement and mobilization, participatory planning and implementation, capacity building and resource mobilization in fostering women's empowerment in Uganda. The findings highlight that these components collectively contribute to women's economic, social and political advancement addressing key barriers to gender equality and inclusive development.

Women's empowerment in Uganda is deeply intertwined with community participation, resource availability and capacity development. The findings underscore that empowering women through financial inclusion, skills training, participatory governance, and equitable resource allocation can lead to sustainable development. While progress has been made, addressing the remaining barriers requires coordinated efforts among policymakers, development organizations, and local communities. By implementing the recommended strategies, Uganda can further advance gender equality and unlock the full potential of women as drivers of economic growth and social transformation.

Community engagement and mobilization have proven to be powerful tools for enhancing women's participation in development initiatives. Self-help groups (SHGs), local women's organizations and grassroots movements have provided platforms for women to collectively address socio-economic challenges, enhance their leadership skills, and access financial and social resources. Through active involvement in community-driven programs,

women have gained greater decision-making power, economic stability, and social recognition.

Participatory planning and implementation of development initiatives have enhanced women's engagement in decision-making processes at household, community, and institutional levels. The findings demonstrate that when women are actively involved in designing, planning, and executing development projects, they become more aware of their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for economic growth. This participatory approach has fostered sustainable development, ensuring that women's voices are represented and their unique needs are addressed in national and community policies.

Capacity-building initiatives have played a pivotal role in equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve economic independence and leadership positions. Programs focused on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, vocational training, and legal rights awareness have significantly enhanced women's ability to manage businesses, secure employment, and advocate for gender equity. These efforts have led to improved self-confidence, social inclusion, and a stronger presence of women in leadership roles within various sectors, including politics and governance.

Resource mobilization has been instrumental in improving women's access to financial services, land, and technology, which are crucial for economic empowerment. The availability of microfinance programs, savings groups, and land ownership rights has enabled women to expand their businesses, gain financial security, and contribute to household and community decision-making. However, barriers such as limited access to credit, restrictive land tenure policies, and insufficient government support still hinder women's full economic participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to further enhance women's

empowerment in Uganda through participatory rural development:

- Promote the establishment and strengthening of women-led community organizations to facilitate networking, knowledge sharing and advocacy for gender equality. In addition, encourage local governments and development partners to support community-driven initiatives that empower women through skills training, leadership development, and financial inclusion programs. Furthermore Increase awareness campaigns on gender rights and empowerment, ensuring that communities recognize and support women's contributions to development.
- Integrate gender-sensitive approaches in national and local development policies to ensure that women's perspectives and needs are adequately considered. Also, encourages women's participation in decision-making structures, including local councils, cooperatives and business forums, to amplify their voices in governance and economic policies. Provide training programs for both women and community leaders on inclusive governance and participatory development planning.
- Scale up entrepreneurship and financial literacy programs to enable women to manage and expand their businesses effectively. Strengthen vocational and leadership-training initiatives tailored to women in rural and urban areas to enhance their employability and competitiveness in various industries. Increase investments in digital literacy and technology training, allowing women to leverage ICT tools for business and communication.
- Develop inclusive financial policies and microfinance programs that provide women with easier access to credit and savings schemes. Implement land reforms that promote equal land ownership rights, ensuring women

have secure access to land and can use it as collateral for loans and business expansion. Strengthen partnerships between the government, NGOs, and private sector to mobilize resources that support women's economic initiatives and leadership programs.

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