
Women Empowerment And Poverty Eradication In Kyenjojo District, Uganda

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of women empowerment and poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district. The objectives of the study were: to find out the role of women empowerment and poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district; (ii) to identify the challenges affecting women empowerment in Kyenjojo district; (iii) to suggest possible solutions to the challenges affecting women empowerment and poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district. The researcher adopted a cross-sectional research design for the study. The study used questionnaire and interview guide to obtain data from all officials and interviews from women groups and household heads. In all, 191 respondents were selected through purposive, and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected by using interviewing, observation and questionnaire methods. Statistical analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS 16.0) and Microsoft excel 2007. The study concludes that women empowerment has promoted self-employment, reduced gender-based violence in most families, and reduced on the level of income inequality. Women empowerment was found to be facing a number of challenges like low levels of income, low levels of mobilization and weak leaders. The study also concludes that there is need to reduce on interest rates and mortgage on loans for women as a solution to the challenges facing women empowerment in the district. There is still need to support women through sensitization meetings and workshops. The study, among other things, recommended that government should team up with the local rural banks to negotiate for low interest rate and flexible payment terms to encourage more women to acquire more loans for their businesses.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Poverty Eradication and Kyenjojo District

Background of the Study

Globally, the issue of women empowerment and poverty eradication gained prominence in the international development agenda in the 1990s. At the UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, women's rights were defined as an integral part of human rights (United Nations, 1993). This led to adoption of the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1994 and 1995 respectively, which recognized empowering women as key to reducing poverty (United Nations, 1994; United Nations, 1995). In Africa, discrimination against women was widely practiced historically, limiting their role and participation in social and economic spheres (Bruce et al., 2006). Post-colonial governments took initiatives to address this, such as the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa in 2004 which advocated for women's empowerment through education, health services and economic opportunities (African Union, 2004). However, progress was slow and Africa continues to have the highest poverty and gender inequality rates globally.

In East Africa, issues of gender and development started receiving attention from the 1980s with donors funding projects focused on training, credit access and promoting women's groups (Cohen & Lyons, 2018). The East African Community treaty of 1999

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committed member states to gender mainstreaming and empowerment strategies. Still, cultural norms and traditional practices often hindered advancement of women's rights in the region (Amoateng et al., 2007). In Uganda, women faced discrimination through laws and customs historically (Kasirye, 2013). The 1995 Constitution prohibited such discrimination and established the national goal of achieving gender balance and equality. However, implementation of supportive policies remained weak (Nakabugo et al., 2010). It was not until adoption of the Uganda Vision 2040 in 2007 that empowering women economically became a key poverty fighting strategy (National Planning Authority, 2007).

Kyenjojo district is faced with challenges related to gender inequality and poverty due to traditional patriarchal norms, cultural practices that undermine women's empowerment, and lack of economic opportunities in the agricultural dependent region (Birungi et al., 2019). However, in recent years, the Ugandan government and several NGOs have undertaken various interventions to address these issues through programs promoting women's access to education, health services, credit facilities and participation in income-generating activities like crop production, livestock rearing, trade and food processing (Bainomugisha et al., 2020). Specifically in Kyenjojo, organizations like Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, NAADS, UN Women, World Vision and Concern Worldwide have implemented initiatives to boost women's decision making roles, legal rights awareness, and financial inclusion (Gracious, 2023). While progress has been made, more remains to be done as over 60% of the district's population still live below the poverty line according to the 2019 Uganda Bureau of Statistics report, with women disproportionately affected due to prevailing social norms (Kyenjojo District Local Government, 2022). Increased efforts targeting women's empowerment are crucial to reduce vulnerability and accelerate poverty reduction in the area (Nakato et al., 2022). Based on this background, this study was conducted to examine the contribution of women empowerment on poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district, Uganda.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, all members of society should enjoy equal opportunities, rights and access to resources that enable them to participate actively and meaningfully contribute to socio-economic development (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2022). In this regard, empowering women and reducing poverty levels should be high priorities. However, in Kyenjojo district, women continue to face disempowerment and limited empowerment remains a challenge, with over 60% of the population estimated to be living below the poverty line (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Several factors have contributed to the problem. Prevailing cultural practices favoring male dominance coupled with inadequate education have hindered women's decision making ability and participation in economic activities (Byamugisha et al., 2023). Additionally, lack of access to productive resources like land and credit, and unequal workload distribution at household level have restricted women's potential (Twinomugisha et al., 2022). In response, the government through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and other agencies have implemented projects to enhance women's access to vocational skills training, agricultural extension services and financial services (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2022) such as Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, NAADS, Youth Livelihood Programmes among others. Similarly, NGOs and CSOs have undertaken initiatives to raise

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awareness on women's rights, boost literacy levels and promote women focused income generating groups (Concern Worldwide, 2023). However, challenges remain. Deeply entrenched social norms that undermine women's role are hard to change. Projects have also had limited coverage and sustainability (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). Credit and market accessibility also require strengthening. Unless these fundamental issues are addressed, women will continue to lag behind in empowerment and contributing to poverty eradication in the district. Therefore, concerted efforts were needed to investigate and find practical solutions to the persistent problems.

General Objective

To establish the contribution of women empowerment towards poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district.

Specific Objectives

- i. To find out the role of women empowerment towards poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district.
- ii. To identify the challenges affecting women empowerment and poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district.
- iii. To suggest strategies to solve challenges of women empowerment and poverty eradication in Kyenjojo district.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design, which is a methodology used to describe the nature, characteristics, and prevalence of a particular phenomenon. The primary aim of employing this design was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contributions of women empowerment and the factors affecting poverty eradication. To achieve a rich and nuanced dataset, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Rasheed et al., 2022). This allowed for the collection and analysis of both numerical data and non-numeric, descriptive information, providing a more complete picture of the research problem. The target population for this research was 128,765 individuals, as established by national statistics (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). From this larger universe, a representative sample size of 443 units was determined using the established sampling table by Krejcie and Morgan to ensure the study remained manageable in scope and resources. This sample was strategically selected from different groups: 380 women participants were chosen using convenience sampling, a method that relies on the willingness of participants who meet the selection criteria, as it can draw genuine responses and save time. Meanwhile, technical staff, politicians, and NGO leaders totaling 63 participants were selected via purposive sampling (Nafiu et al., 2012). This technique, based on the researcher's prior knowledge of key informants and their official positions, ensured that individuals with specific expertise and experience related to women development and empowerment programmes were included.

For data collection, the study employed a trio of methods: questionnaires, key informant interviews, and document reviews. A structured questionnaire, predominantly featuring close-ended items on a five-point Likert scale, was administered to the women participants (Jallow et al., 2022). This instrument was chosen for its ability to facilitate easy data collection from a large group, minimize prejudice, and allow for efficient analysis. To supplement and deepen the quantitative data from the questionnaires, key informant interviews were conducted with the purposively sampled technical staff, politicians, and NGO leaders. These

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interviews utilized a topical guide to ensure consistency while allowing participants wide latitude to elaborate on their experiences and opinions, thereby capturing unanticipated insights and facilitating a natural flow of information (Nafiu et al., 2012). To ensure the quality and rigor of these instruments, their validity and reliability were rigorously assessed. The tools were pilot-tested in a comparable district to assess language clarity and effectiveness, and their content validity was formally calculated using the Content Validity Index. Furthermore, reliability was determined using Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha to ensure the items consistently measured what they were intended to measure.

The data collection procedure was executed personally by the researcher, who obtained an official introductory letter from the affiliated university. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires on the spot to prevent discussion and potential bias. Following data collection, the analysis process was twofold (Maiga et al., 2021). Quantitative data from the questionnaires were coded, edited through double-entry for accuracy, and then analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages, to present the findings in numerical form (Abiodun et al., 2022). Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed thematically; meaningful themes related to the research questions were identified, constructed, and revisited for robustness before being woven into a coherent narrative, with compelling participant expressions extracted verbatim for reporting. Throughout the research process, strict ethical considerations were upheld. The principles of voluntary participation and informed consent were paramount, with the study's purpose fully explained to all respondents, who retained the right to refuse participation.

Results

Table 1: Showing roles of women empowerment and poverty eradication

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	It promotes self-employment among Women	38	19.9	19.9	19.9
	It promotes domestic and community Duties	24	12.6	12.6	32.5
	It reduces gender based violence in Families	32	16.8	16.8	49.2
	It reduces spread of HIV/AIDs among Women	26	13.6	13.6	62.8

	It increases access to family planning Services	18	9.4	9.4	72.3
	It reduces income inequality	28	14.7	14.7	86.9
	It reduces dependence ratio on men	25	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	191	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Data (2024)

According to the responses from the findings in Table 4.5 above, it was revealed that women empowerment promotes self-employment among women which will make them generate some income that will facilitate them in reducing the level of poverty among women in the municipality, especially when they carry out some businesses. This was revealed by 19.9% of the respondents for the study.

Women empowerment reduces GBV in families’: this was the response of 16.8% of respondents. They revealed that when women are economically empowered, less of violence is recorded in their families because they are not relying on their husbands for all the basic necessities of life. Women with some income will suffer less of GBV because they have some purchasing power that will make them buy what they want, hence reducing the rate of GBV in their families in the municipality (Nelson et al., 2022).

Reduces income inequality between men and women in the district: this was revealed by 14.7% of respondents. When women are economically empowered and carry out some businesses that will support them economically, they will reduce on the gap between men and women. That is why most women in urban areas will have financial freedom than those in rural areas because those in town have chance to carry out some businesses that will support them financially.

Women with some income were at less risk of getting HIV/AIDs because they did not depend on anyone to provide money. Some respondents reported that some men who are HIV positive will target young and poor ladies to give them some money and have sex affairs with them which will increase the rate of poverty if people still depend on others for survival.

Women empowerment reduces the dependence ratio of women on their husbands and relatives: This was revealed by 13.1% of respondents. When women are economically empowered they will not depend on their husband to provide for them what they want. Economically empowered women will even help their husbands in buying some things in the house which will even promote their family welfare than those women who are financially poor and everything has to come from their husbands, hence reducing the level of poverty in Kyenjojo district.

Women empowerment helps women to carry out domestic and communal duties’: this was reported by 12.6% of respondents.

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Domestic and communal duties are essential because they provide dignity especially to women in the communities they come from. Cooperation with others in the areas we come from promotes us to be good citizens of the community especially when there is need like burials, medical attention and church dues, hence reducing the rate of poverty in the municipality.

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Increases access to family planning services and other related health and nutritional services: this was revealed by 9.4% of respondents in that when women are economically empowered they can be in position to afford any medical attention without pulling their husbands to contribute. When family planning is in place, women will not produce many children and they remain good looking. Women who are nice looking are loved much more by their husbands than women who look bad. Family planning helps women to produce children they can afford to look after and put them in good schools and good medical services hence reducing the rate of poverty in the municipality.

Challenges affecting Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

Reducing poverty is a phenomenon that needs to be addressed so as to achieve development in Uganda. Women being the majority in Uganda are mostly affected by poverty since most of them still are not educated due to the cultural beliefs in the 1990s that women should not study higher. This implies that reducing poverty among women will not be easy due to the following challenges as shown on the Figure 4.3 below.

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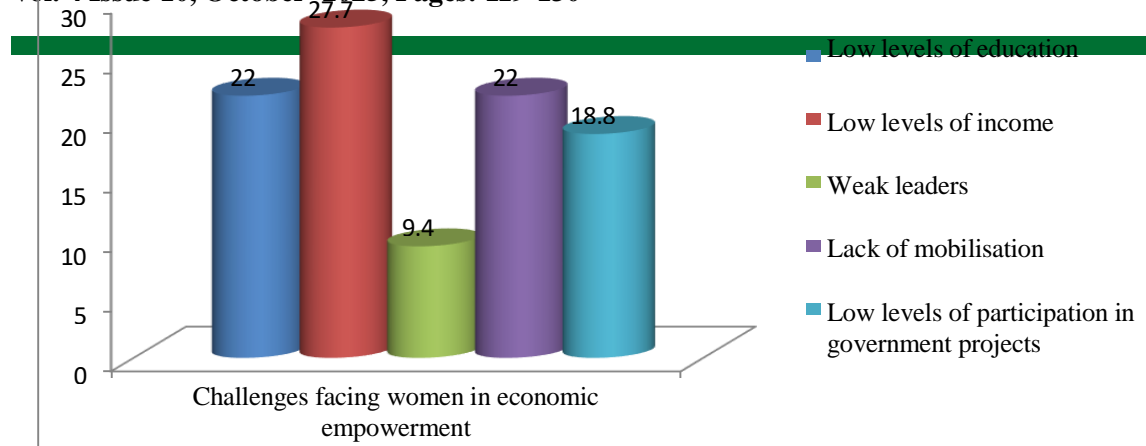


Figure 1: Challenges affecting Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Study findings presented in Figure 1 above indicate different challenges that affected the proper performance of women economic empowerment in a way to reduce the rate of poverty among women in Kabale municipality. Low levels of income among women was identified by 27.7% of respondents to be the major challenge to women economic empowerment in that women have been vulnerable and unable to keep the little money they get. A husband will come from the bar and again grab the little money that the woman had worked for. Women are not capable to start their own income generating projects without capital which they must get either from friends, selling of certain properties or loans to facilitate them begin businesses. This becomes a challenge to many and hinders women economic empowerment.

Low levels of education among women in the district: this was reported by 22% of respondents. It was revealed from the interview with some respondents that some women are not educated and therefore they take time to adapt to the new programmes that are generated to fight poverty in the municipality. Education levels matters in any a sphere in that an uneducated person will understand all matters differently from an educated one. Due to this low level of education, it becomes hard for an uneducated woman to join a saving association because she feels that the loans are acquired by the educated and rich women hence economic women empowerment.

Lack of mobilization especially in a bit rural areas of the district: this was also reported by 22% of respondents. Most women are not aware about the government projects or other developmental sphere in Kyenjojo district that can help women to overcome poverty within their households. Those responsible for mobilizing women are not practically doing it; this makes a smaller number of women to participate in poverty reduction, hence leaving other women in poverty.

Low levels of participation in co-curricular activities have also led to the process of empowering women economically. This is a problem in that most parents believe that ladies or girls should not participate like in bicycle races, playing football, joining politics, etc believing that such activities are meant for boys and therefore girls cannot do them well, as revealed by 18.8% of respondents

Weak leaders have also been a challenge to economic empowerment of women due to the fact that some leaders have not practically done their roles to empower women. More especially, the leaders representing women in some councils have not fully

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represented the issues pertaining to women and end up addressing their own issues that are irrelevant with regard to empowering women. Some women revealed that they have not seen their woman MP since the general election of 2016, implying that they have not critically shared with her what they face and how it can be addressed.

Table 2: Possible solutions to challenges facing women empowerment and poverty eradication

Possible solutions	Agree		Strongly Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Encourage education at Levels	79	41.4	89	46.6	09	4.7	11	5.8	03	1.6
Reduce interest rates and mortgage on loans for women	98	51.3	105	55	06	3.1	07	3.7	-	-
Encourage co-curricular activities	73	38.2	76	39.8	03	1.6	03	1.6	11	5.8
Demand accountability from Leaders	46	24.1	65	34	67	35.1	08	4.2	05	2.6

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Findings in Table 2 above indicate that women empowerment can be improved through applying the issues in the table. This can be done in the following ways. Reducing the interest rates on loans and mortgage’, this will help women to acquire loans that can make them set up simple businesses that will support their financial situations. Over fifty- one per cent (51.3%) of respondents agreed with the statement, 55% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 3.1% of respondents were not sure, and only 3.7% of respondents disagreed with the statement (Nelson et al., 2023).

Women empowerment can be improved through encouraging women to acquire education at all levels that will enable them to understand world development and what knowledge they can apply to acquire development within Kyenjojo district. This can be done through supporting affirmative action like 1.5 points given to female students joining the higher institutions of learning. Female education loans and scholarships should be given to supplement the education of women not only undergraduates but also on postgraduates and not only in sciences but in all spheres of education. About forty-one per cent (41.1%) agreed with the statement, 46.6% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 4.7% of respondents were not sure, 5.8% of respondents disagreed with the statement and only 1.6% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

Encouraging of co-curricular activities among ladies and girls: will support them economically and reduce the rate of poverty within the district, acquiring vocational skills can support women to get some income that will support them economically. Over thirty-eight per cent (38.2%) of respondents agreed with the statement, 39.8% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 1.6% were not sure, 1.6% disagreed with the statement and only 5.8% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

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Demanding accountability from leaders': this will make leaders active and present women issues in relation to economic empowerment in the municipality, and this will make women reduce on the rate of poverty within Kyenjojo district. Over twenty-four per cent (24.1%) of respondents agreed with the statement, 34% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 35.1% of respondents were not sure, 4.2% of respondents disagreed with the statement and only 2.6% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

Summary of Study findings

Role of Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

According to the responses from the findings in Table 4.5, it was revealed that women economic empowerment plays a number of roles like self-employment among women representing 19.9%, reduces GBV in families by 16.8% of respondents, and reduces income inequality between men and women in the municipality by 14.7% of respondents. Over thirteen per cent (13.6%) of respondents indicated that women economic empowerment reduces the rate at which women acquire HIV/AIDs. Over thirteen per cent (13.1%) of respondents also indicated that women economic empowerment reduces the dependence ratio of women on their husbands and relatives. The findings revealed that women empowerment helps women to carry out domestic and communal duties, representing 12.6% of respondents. Over nine per cent (9.4%) of respondents indicated that when women are economically empowered, this increases access to family planning services and other related health and nutritional services. The responses from the participants indicate that the majority of them are knowledgeable about the importance of empowering women. This should be encouraged further if the programme is to succeed in the district.

Challenges facing Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

Study findings presented indicated different challenges that affected the proper performance of women economic empowerment in a way to reduce the rate of poverty among women in Kabale Municipality. Low levels of income among women was the major challenge identified with 27.7% of the respondents, low levels of education among women in the municipality was reported by 22% of respondents, lack of mobilization especially in peri-urban areas of a municipality which was reported by 22% of respondents, low levels of participation in co-curricular activities which have rendered the process of empowering women economically a problem in that most parents believe that women or girls should not participate in sports like bicycle races, playing football, joining of politics representing 18.8% of respondents, weak leaders were also indicated as challenge to economic empowerment of women representing 9.4% of respondents. Amidst all these challenges mentioned by the respondents, the government should put appropriate measures to address them if women and the general public are to benefit from this programme.

Possible solutions to the challenges affecting Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

The findings indicated that women empowerment can be improved through applying the measures in the Table. According to the results, the majority of the participants indicated that challenges affecting women economic empowerment for poverty reduction can be solved through reducing on the interest rates and mortgage on loans for women. There is also need to encourage education at all levels. There is need to encourage co-curricular activities among women and girls that will support them economically and

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reduce the rate of poverty within the municipality. Acquiring vocational skills would support women to get some income that will support them economically. Participants also indicated that demanding accountability from leaders will make leaders active and present women issues in relation to economic empowerment in the municipality and this will make women reduce on the rate of poverty Kyenjojo district.

Conclusion

Role of Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

According to the participants, women economic empowerment has promoted self-employment, reduced GBV in most families and reduced on the level of income inequality among other roles. This should be encouraged further especially by the government through sensitization meetings in communities to ensure that all women and the general public are aware of the importance of women economic empowerment and how it is helpful in reducing poverty levels.

Challenges facing Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

According to the study results, women empowerment is still facing a variety of challenges like low levels of education, low levels of income, weak leaders, lack of mobilization, and low levels of participation in government projects though it has played a number of roles in the district. If women empowerment is to be achieved, the government together with the responsible stakeholders should move down to the communities and encourage appropriate measures to address such challenges.

Possible solutions to the challenges affecting Women Empowerment and Poverty Eradication

Although most participants suggested that there is need to reduce on interest rates and mortgage on loans for women as a solution to the challenges facing women empowerment in the district, there is still need for the government and other supporting agencies to support women through sensitization meetings and workshops where women would be motivated and encouraged to adopt the right solutions to the challenges associated with women empowerment.

Recommendations

The government should sensitize people in their communities to ensure that the public is aware of the roles of women economic empowerment and how it is helpful in reducing poverty levels.

Kyenjojo district management should collaborate with Non-Governmental Organizations and other agencies working in the interest of women to intensify the education of women at all levels in general since there is high illiteracy rate especially among women in rural areas. This has to reduce on poverty levels.

Girls and women should be involved in co-curricular activities that will equip them with skills and other developmental ideas that will help them participate in projects and activities that can empower them economically and make decisions on needs in the areas of their locality.

The government should team up with the local rural banks (micro finance institutions) to negotiate for lower interest rates as well as flexible payment terms to encourage more women to acquire big loans for their businesses.

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