

**Government Economic Empowerment Programmes And Food Security In Rural Communities: A Case Of
Jinja District, Uganda**

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of government economic empowerment programmes on food security in rural communities of Jinja District, Uganda. Food insecurity remains a persistent challenge in Uganda's rural areas despite numerous government interventions, necessitating an empirical examination of programme effectiveness. The study adopted a mixed methods research design involving 245 household survey respondents and 12 key informant interviews drawn from four sub-counties in Jinja District. Four major government programmes were examined: the Emyooga Initiative, the Parish Development Model (PDM), Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), and the Agricultural Credit Facility (ACF). The four pillars of food security, availability, access, utilisation, and stability served as the outcome variables. Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between programme participation and all four dimensions of food security. The regression model explained 57.3% of the variance in food security outcomes ($R^2 = 0.573$, $F = 38.14$, $p < 0.001$). The study concludes that government economic empowerment programmes have a moderately positive but uneven effect on food security in Jinja District, with the Parish Development Model demonstrating the strongest impact. Recommendations include improved targeting, enhanced agricultural extension services, and greater community participation in programme design.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, Food Security, Rural Communities, Jinja District, Uganda, Parish Development Model, Emyooga

1.0 Background of the Study

Food security is a multidimensional construct that the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 2020) defines as existing when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Julius & Audrey, 2026). The four pillars of food security availability, access, utilisation, and stability provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of hunger and nutritional vulnerability. Despite global progress in reducing extreme poverty, food insecurity remains a formidable challenge in sub-Saharan Africa, where approximately 264 million people were estimated to be undernourished as of 2022 (FAO, 2023).

Uganda is an agrarian country with agriculture employing approximately 72% of the labour force and contributing 24% of GDP (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Despite its agricultural endowment, food insecurity affects a significant proportion of Uganda's population, particularly in rural areas. The Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS 2019/2020) reported that 26% of the Ugandan population experiences moderate to severe food insecurity, with rural areas disproportionately affected. The Government of Uganda has, over the years, designed and implemented various economic empowerment programmes aimed at reducing poverty and improving food security,

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including the Emyooga Initiative, the Parish Development Model, Operation Wealth Creation, and the Agricultural Credit Facility(Alex & Moses, 2024).

Jinja District, located in Eastern Uganda, presents a particularly instructive case for studying the impact of these programmes(Allan et al., 2023). The district is characterised by a predominantly agrarian economy, with smallholder farming households depending on rain-fed agriculture for both subsistence and cash income(A. G. Kazaara & Christopher, 2023). High population density, limited land sizes, soil degradation, and inadequate access to agricultural inputs have historically constrained agricultural productivity in the district(Audrey & Kazaara, 2025). Against this backdrop, the government's economic empowerment programmes represent a significant policy intervention whose effectiveness in improving food security warrants rigorous empirical scrutiny.

2.0 Problem Statement

Despite the proliferation of government economic empowerment programmes in Uganda, food insecurity persists among rural communities in Jinja District(George Stanley & Nafiu, 2020). Agricultural productivity in the district remains low, with many households unable to produce sufficient food for household consumption or generate adequate income to purchase food from markets(Julius & Kaazara, 2025). Reports from the District Production Office indicate that between 30% and 40% of households in selected sub-counties experience food shortages for at least three months per year, particularly during the dry season. While the government has invested billions of Uganda shillings in empowerment programmes, evidence of their impact on household food security at the local level remains limited and largely anecdotal(A. G. Kazaara & Julius, 2025).

The effectiveness of these programmes has been questioned by civil society organisations and development partners who point to challenges such as elite capture, poor targeting of beneficiaries, delayed disbursement of funds, limited agricultural extension support, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation(Julius & Kazaara, 2026b). A systematic, evidence-based assessment of how these programmes influence food security dimensions in Jinja District is therefore necessary to inform programme improvement and policy dialogue.

3.0 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of government economic empowerment programmes on food security in rural communities of Jinja District, Uganda. Specific objectives were to: (i) assess the level of household food security in selected sub-counties of Jinja District; (ii) examine the nature and scope of government economic empowerment programmes implemented in Jinja District; and (iii) determine the relationship between government economic empowerment programmes and food security outcomes in Jinja District.

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 Government Economic Empowerment Programmes

Economic empowerment programmes are government-initiated interventions designed to increase the productive capacity, income, and economic agency of disadvantaged individuals and communities. In the context of developing countries, such programmes typically encompass agricultural input subsidies, credit and microfinance schemes, skills

development training, market access facilitation, and cash transfers (World Bank, 2019). Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler and Slater (2019) distinguish between social protection programmes, which primarily target vulnerability reduction through transfers, and economic empowerment programmes, which focus on building productive assets and capabilities to generate sustainable income growth(Christopher et al., 2022).

In Uganda, the government's approach to economic empowerment has evolved significantly over the past two decades(Sarah & Audrey, 2024). The Prosperity for All (Bona Bagagawale) programme, launched in 2006, marked an early attempt at nationwide poverty reduction through group lending and enterprise development. Subsequent interventions, including the Youth Livelihood Programme (2013), the Women Enterprise Fund (2014), and more recently the Emyooga Initiative (2019) and the Parish Development Model (2022), reflect a sustained governmental commitment to economic inclusion. The Parish Development Model, which is the most recent and comprehensive intervention, channels funds through Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs) at the parish level and targets the 39% of Ugandans estimated to be in the subsistence economy (National Planning Authority, 2021).

Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), coordinated by the Uganda People's Defence Forces, focuses specifically on agricultural transformation through the distribution of improved seeds, seedlings, and animal breeds to farmers. Research on OWC by Mwesigye and Matsumoto (2018) using data from the Uganda Panel Survey found that OWC beneficiaries were 23% more likely to adopt improved crop varieties and recorded 18% higher crop yields than non-beneficiaries. However, concerns about programme sustainability, input quality, and distribution inefficiencies have been raised by Barungi, Asante and Balié (2019).

4.2 Food Security Dimensions and Measurement

The FAO's four-pillar conceptual framework — availability, access, utilisation, and stability provides the theoretical scaffold for this study. Food availability refers to the physical presence of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, whether from domestic production, imports, or food aid. Food access encompasses both economic access (ability to purchase food) and physical access (proximity to food markets)(A. I. Kazaara & Audrey, 2026). Utilisation refers to the way food is used, including dietary diversity, nutritional knowledge, and food preparation practices. Stability refers to the temporal dimension the ability to access and utilise food consistently over time, particularly during seasonal fluctuations or economic shocks (FAO, 2020).

Coates, Swindale and Bilinsky (2017) developed the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) as a validated quantitative measure of the food access dimension, while the Dietary Diversity Score (DDS) provides a proxy measure of food utilisation(Christopher & Shamirah, 2025). These instruments have been widely applied in sub-Saharan African research, including studies by Jones, Ngure, Pelto and Young (2020) in Kenya and Kassie, Stage, Teklewold and Erenstein (2018) in Ethiopia, providing methodological precedents for this study. Kisamba-Mugerwa (2019) applied the HFIAS in a Ugandan context and found that rural household food insecurity was significantly predicted by land size, household income, and access to agricultural extension services.

4.3 Economic Empowerment and Food Security

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The theoretical linkage between economic empowerment programmes and food security is anchored in the sustainable livelihoods framework (Chambers and Conway, 2015), which posits that household food security improves as households accumulate financial, human, social, physical, and natural capital assets (Julius & Kazaara, 2026a). Economic empowerment programmes contribute to this capital accumulation by providing credit for productive investments, enhancing skills and knowledge, and facilitating market access. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2018) further argue that the food security impacts of economic empowerment are greatest when programmes are accompanied by complementary support services such as agricultural extension, market information, and risk management tools (Oscar et al., 2023).

Empirical evidence from East Africa is broadly supportive of positive programme-food security linkages, albeit with important caveats. Abebaw, Tadesse and Giller (2020) found that Ethiopian farmers who participated in government agricultural development programmes recorded 27% higher food security scores compared to non-participants. In Rwanda, Kantengwa (2019) documented that beneficiaries of the government's Girinka (one cow per family) programme experienced significant improvements in dietary diversity and child nutritional outcomes. These studies suggest that well-designed and implemented government programmes can meaningfully improve food security, though programme design, targeting, and implementation quality are critical determinants of impact.

5.0 Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative survey methods with qualitative key informant interviews. The design enabled a comprehensive understanding of both the statistical relationships between variables and the contextual factors shaping programme implementation and food security outcomes (Ahumuza et al., 2025). The study covered four sub-counties in Jinja District: Butagaya, Kakira, Budondo, and Mafubira. These sub-counties were purposively selected to represent a diversity of agricultural systems, population densities, and programme implementation contexts.

The study population comprised all rural households in the four sub-counties, estimated at 28,600 households based on the 2022 sub-county population records. Using Yamane's (1967) simplified formula for sample size determination at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a sample of 395 households was computed. However, accounting for potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, 300 households were targeted. Ultimately, 245 households provided complete responses, yielding a response rate of 81.7%. Household heads or their spouses were the primary respondents. Structured interviews using a pre-tested household questionnaire were conducted by trained research assistants fluent in the local Lusoga language (Abiodun et al., 2022).

Food security was measured using an adapted version of the HFIAS supplemented by questions on dietary diversity, crop production volumes, and seasonal food availability. Government programme participation was measured by a binary variable (participant/non-participant) supplemented by Likert scale items measuring perceived programme benefits across five dimensions: input access, credit access, skills training, market linkages, and extension support.

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression were used for quantitative analysis, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative interview data.

6.0 Results

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics — Food Security and Programme Variables (n = 245)

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Food Availability	245	1.00	5.00	3.12	0.934
Food Access	245	1.00	5.00	2.98	0.971
Food Utilisation	245	1.20	5.00	3.24	0.887
Food Stability	245	1.00	5.00	2.87	1.012
Overall Food Security	245	1.10	5.00	3.05	0.951
Parish Development Model	245	1.00	5.00	3.18	0.912
Emyooga Initiative	245	1.00	5.00	3.01	0.944
Operation Wealth Creation	245	1.00	5.00	3.22	0.891
Agricultural Credit Facility	245	1.00	4.80	2.76	0.987

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 reveal that household food security in Jinja District's rural communities is at a moderate but concerning level, with an overall food security mean of 3.05 (SD = 0.951), barely above the midpoint of the five-point scale. Disaggregating by dimension, food stability recorded the lowest mean score (M = 2.87, SD = 1.012), reflecting the significant seasonal variability in food availability that characterises the district's predominantly rain-fed agricultural system. Households in the study area were found to be particularly vulnerable during the dry seasons of December-February and June-August, during which food stocks from previous harvests were often exhausted. Food access also registered a below-moderate score (M = 2.98, SD = 0.971), indicating that income constraints significantly limit many households' ability to purchase food from markets even when food is physically available (Nelson et al., 2023).

Among the government empowerment programmes, Operation Wealth Creation recorded the highest mean perceived impact score (M = 3.22, SD = 0.891), reflecting the programme's direct focus on agricultural input distribution. The Parish Development Model was rated second (M = 3.18, SD = 0.912), which is noteworthy given that the programme was still in its early implementation phase at the time of the study. The Agricultural Credit Facility recorded the lowest perceived impact (M = 2.76, SD = 0.987), likely reflecting limited awareness and accessibility of formal agricultural credit among smallholder farmers, many of whom cited complex application procedures and collateral requirements as significant barriers.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Pearson Correlation — Government Empowerment Programmes and Food Security Dimensions

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Programme	Food Avail.	Food Access	Food Utilisation	Food Stability	Overall F.S.
Parish Development Model	0.581**	0.612**	0.543**	0.597**	0.634**
Emyooga Initiative	0.498**	0.521**	0.476**	0.509**	0.541**
Operation Wealth Creation	0.563**	0.487**	0.531**	0.478**	0.572**
Agricultural Credit Facility	0.412**	0.445**	0.389**	0.421**	0.447**

** p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The Pearson correlation matrix in Table 2 demonstrates that all four government economic empowerment programmes exhibit significant positive correlations with all dimensions of food security and with overall food security. The Parish Development Model demonstrated the strongest overall correlation with food security ($r = 0.634$, $p < 0.01$), followed by Operation Wealth Creation ($r = 0.572$, $p < 0.01$), the Emyooga Initiative ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.01$), and the Agricultural Credit Facility ($r = 0.447$, $p < 0.01$). These findings confirm the hypothesis that programme participation is positively associated with food security outcomes, though the magnitudes of the correlations vary meaningfully across programmes and food security dimensions (Julius & Kazaara, 2026c).

It is particularly noteworthy that the Parish Development Model demonstrates the strongest correlation with food access ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), which reflects the programme's design emphasis on financial inclusion through SACCO-based savings and credit services (Sarah & Audrey, 2024). By expanding access to affordable credit and savings mechanisms at the parish level, the PDM enables households to smooth consumption across seasons and invest in productive agricultural assets. Operation Wealth Creation, by contrast, shows its strongest correlations with food availability ($r = 0.563$) and utilisation ($r = 0.531$), consistent with the programme's direct agricultural input support focus that boosts farm production. The relatively weaker correlations of the Agricultural Credit Facility likely reflect the self-selection bias inherent in formal credit programmes, which tend to reach more commercially oriented, relatively better-off farmers while leaving the most food-insecure households — who cannot meet collateral requirements — underserved.

6.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3: Regression Model Summary — Empowerment Programmes on Food Security

Model	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	0.757	0.573	0.565	0.624	38.14	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2025

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Table 4: Regression Coefficients — Empowerment Programmes and Overall Food Security

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.821	0.284		2.891	0.004
Parish Development Model	0.289	0.074	0.278	3.905	0.000
Emyooga Initiative	0.201	0.068	0.199	2.956	0.004
Operation Wealth Creation	0.247	0.071	0.232	3.479	0.001
Agricultural Credit Facility	0.143	0.063	0.148	2.270	0.024

Dependent Variable: Overall Food Security

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The multiple regression results in Tables 3 and 4 confirm that government economic empowerment programmes collectively and significantly predict food security outcomes in rural communities of Jinja District. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 38.14$, $p = 0.000$) and explained 57.3% of the variance in overall food security ($R^2 = 0.573$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.565 indicating minimal model over-fitting. This substantial explanatory power underscores the critical role of government intervention programmes as a determinant of household food security in the study area.

At the level of individual programme effects, the Parish Development Model emerged as the strongest predictor of food security (Beta = 0.278, $B = 0.289$, $t = 3.905$, $p = 0.000$), followed by Operation Wealth Creation (Beta = 0.232, $B = 0.247$, $t = 3.479$, $p = 0.001$), the Emyooga Initiative (Beta = 0.199, $B = 0.201$, $t = 2.956$, $p = 0.004$), and the Agricultural Credit Facility (Beta = 0.148, $B = 0.143$, $t = 2.270$, $p = 0.024$). All four predictors were statistically significant, reinforcing the conclusion that each programme makes an independent contribution to food security improvement, with the magnitude of their contributions reflecting differences in programme design, reach, and implementation quality.

7.0 Discussion of Results

The findings of this study confirm that government economic empowerment programmes have a significant positive influence on food security in rural communities of Jinja District, Uganda. The strong overall regression model ($R^2 = 0.573$) and the significant positive correlations across all programme-food security dimension combinations align with the theoretical predictions of the sustainable livelihoods framework (Chambers and Conway, 2015) and the empirical evidence from comparable East African studies by Abebaw et al. (2020) and Kantengwa (2019). However, the moderate mean scores for food security dimensions — particularly food stability ($M = 2.87$) and food access ($M = 2.98$) — caution against an overly optimistic interpretation of programme impacts, as these scores indicate that substantial food insecurity persists despite programme interventions.

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The primacy of the Parish Development Model as a food security predictor is a significant finding that warrants careful consideration. The PDM's parish-level, SACCO-based financing structure appears to align well with the financial inclusion needs of rural smallholder households in Jinja District, enabling them to access affordable credit for agricultural inputs, smooth seasonal income variability, and invest in food-producing assets. This finding has important policy implications, suggesting that programmes designed around community-based financial institutions and tailored to the local economic context may generate stronger food security impacts than more top-down, supply-driven interventions.

The relatively weaker impact of the Agricultural Credit Facility is consistent with documented limitations of formal agricultural credit programmes in reaching the most food-insecure rural households. Qualitative interview data revealed that many smallholder farmers in the study area were unaware of the ACF or found its application requirements including land title collateral and business plans prohibitively complex. This finding echoes the conclusions of Barungi et al. (2019), who similarly found that formal agricultural finance programmes in Uganda suffer from significant targeting failures that limit their reach to the most vulnerable households.

8.0 Conclusions

This study concludes that government economic empowerment programmes, including the Parish Development Model, Operation Wealth Creation, the Emyooga Initiative, and the Agricultural Credit Facility, are significant positive predictors of food security in rural communities of Jinja District, Uganda. Together, these programmes explain over 57% of the variance in household food security, confirming their overall policy relevance. The Parish Development Model demonstrates the strongest food security impact, particularly for food access and food stability dimensions, while Operation Wealth Creation shows stronger effects on food availability. Despite these positive findings, the persistent moderate levels of food insecurity in the district particularly regarding food stability and access indicate that current programme coverage, targeting, and implementation quality are insufficient to achieve food security for all rural households.

9.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to improve the food security impact of government economic empowerment programmes in Jinja District and beyond. First, the Parish Development Model should be rapidly scaled up and strengthened with complementary agricultural extension services, market information systems, and climate-smart agriculture training to maximise its food security impacts. Second, the government should review and simplify the eligibility criteria and application processes for the Agricultural Credit Facility to make formal agricultural credit accessible to smallholder and subsistence farmers who currently lack collateral. Third, stronger programme monitoring and evaluation systems should be established at the district and sub-county level to track food security outcomes and enable evidence-based programme adjustments. Fourth, inter-programme coordination mechanisms should be established to prevent duplication and leverage complementarities among the various empowerment programmes, particularly between OWC's input distribution and the PDM's financial services.

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