

Women's Community Engagement And Its Impact On Empowerment And Social Changes In Mbarara District.

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining women's community engagement in Mbarara district and its impact on empowering women as well as bringing about social changes. It recognized that women play an important role in community development through their participation in various social and economic activities at the grassroots level. However, their agency and contributions have often been overlooked in most societies including in Mbarara district. The study employed a qualitative research methodology to collect in-depth data through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 50 women representing different women's groups and organizations in Mbarara district. It also analyzes relevant documents and reports on women's issues from governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the area. The data collected is coded thematically and analyzed to identify emerging patterns regarding the nature of women's community engagement, their perceived empowerment and social changes resultant of their participation. The findings revealed that women in Mbarara are actively engaged in collective action through different informal groups focusing on savings & loans, agriculture, vocational skills training, and health education. Their involvement has enabled them to build social networks, gain leadership roles, contribute to household decision making, and develop sources of livelihoods. At the community level, such organized efforts of women have led to promotion of girls' education, reduction of domestic violence cases, improved access to health services, and increased participation in local politics and development projects. The study showed that most respondents understood what women's community engagement meant. Women should engage in different activities in order to feel included and add on the community change in Mbarara.

Keywords: Women, Community, Engagement, Empowerment And Social Changes

Background of the Study

Women's community engagement is defined as building, seeding and maintaining effective relationships with people through all critical aspects of human interaction, dialogue, patience, perseverance, care, reflection and clear purpose (District et al., 2023).

Women's community involvement is also defined as an effort to engage the community to achieve sustainable outcomes, equitable decision-making processes, and deepening relationships and trust between government organizations and communities (Faith et al., 2023). Empowerment and social change is the process of building autonomy, power, trust and other necessary means to enact change and pave the way for a better future (Abdi et al., 2020). Empowerment means that people have power and control over their own lives. People get the support they need and which is right for them. Empowerment means that people are equal citizens (Derrick et al., 2023).

Received: 11.04.2024

Accepted: 19.04.2024

Published on: 29.04.2024

For example, in Malawi, the national program to provide water to peri-urban communities was not meeting the needs of most families. The male-dominated water tap committees (80-90% of members were men) did not perform satisfactorily, mainly because most men were absent from the neighborhoods for most of the day (Idris, 2018). Lack of participatory decision-making involving women during the planning phase led to poor placement, inconvenient design and subsequent misuse of water points. A training program was introduced and succeeded in increasing the percentage of women on the bar committees from 20% to over 90%. Women gained confidence and became effective managers of communal waterworks, including their operation and maintenance (Allan et al., 2023). (The joint foundation and UN-Habitat, 1996-2008). Many women, especially in developing countries, are not always able to reach their full potential the way men do. They are thus robbed of the opportunity to contribute on an equal scale to social, political, economic and cultural development. Discrimination against women is a fundamental violation of human rights and also a major limitation of human growth (Zowena et al., 2023).

The vital contribution of African women to their households, food production systems and national economies is increasingly recognized in Africa and the international community. Mbarara District is a district in South Western Uganda. In 2019 Uganda cabinet approved part of Mbarara the then Mbarara municipality to be upgraded to a city status in July 2020. Mbarara District is part of the Ankole sub-region. The districts that comprise Ankole include: (a) Buhweju District (b) Bushenyi District (c) Ibanda District (d) Isingiro District (e) Kiruhura District (f) Mbarara District (g) Mitooma District (h) Ntungamo District (i) Rubirizi District (j) Sheema District. Women in Development (WID) concept came up as a result of Esther Boserup's revelations in her book titled "women in Economic development" that the modernization process supervised by colonial authorities imbued with western notions of the sexual division of labour, had placed new technologies under the control of men.

Problem Statement

Despite the high number of women's economic empowerment programs that the Ugandan government and NGOs have conducted aimed at imparting practical skills to women in Uganda (Isah & Nafiu, 2013). Illiterate rural women are still neglected and the few who have managed to participate have not benefited fully from such programmes, putting them at an economic disadvantage. Therefore, the researcher wants to investigate how women's involvement affects empowerment and social change in Mbarara District. The researcher also wants to examine the social changes brought about by the involvement of women in the community and finally to find out the challenges faced by women in Mbarara district (Musaibah et al., 2023).

Specific objectives

1. To assess the meaning of women's community engagement in Mbarara district
2. To find out different ways of promoting empowerment and social change in Mbarara district.
3. To establish the relationship between women's engagement and empowerment and social change in Mbarara district.

Received: 11.04.2024

Accepted: 19.04.2024

Published on: 29.04.2024

Methodology

The study used casual research design, this kind of research design aims at generating information after the incidence has occurred. The study looked at impact of women's community Engagement on empowerment and social change in Mbarara district. The area of study was in Mbarara city. Mbarara city is a district in the Western Region of Uganda and the second largest city in Uganda after Kampala (Aslam et al., 2022). The study looked at women's community Engagement and empowerment and social change. A study population is a complete set of individuals, cases or objects with some common observable characteristics and this consisted of over 200 respondents that is, women in Mbarara district, Local Area Chairmen, Community Development officer (L. Nafiu et al., 2013). The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) and this consisted of 100 respondents from the study area. All these was approached from their respective offices and also in the community (L. A. Nafiu & Ph, 2012).

Table 1: Category of the Respondents.

Category	N	S
Women	195	97
Local Area Chairmen	03	02
Community Development Officer	02	01
Total	200	100

N- Study Population S-Sample size **Source: primary data 2023**

The study used purposive and snowball sampling techniques during the process of data collection from the study respondents. The study used purposive techniques because it allows the selection of a sample with experience and knowledge (Olanrewaju & Abiodun, 2021). This method was used in the study, since questionnaires were self-administered and interpreted to the business owners and their employees with the guidance of the researcher and a research assistant so as to obtain reliable data (L. A. Nafiu et al., 2012). Data was analyzed in form of tables, frequencies and percentages using SPSS & STATA (Nelson et al., 2022)

RESULTS

meaning of women's community engagement	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total (%)
It is the intentional interactions between communities and public decision makers.	21 (21%)	34(34%)	45 (45%)	100

Received: 11.04.2024**Accepted: 19.04.2024****Published on: 29.04.2024**

<i>That acknowledge and incorporate the critical role played by women have increased potential to strengthen community development</i>	30 (30%)	19 (19%)	51 (51%)	100
About building, sowing, and maintaining effective relationships with people through all of the critical aspects of human interaction	49 (49%)	20 (20%)	31 (31%)	100

Table 1: showing how respondents responded on the meaning of women's community engagement*Source: primary data 2022*

Table 4 above shows that many respondents agreed that the best meaning of women's community engagement is it is about building, sowing, and maintaining effective relationships with people through all of the critical aspects of human interaction represented by 49% while 31% disagreed. *That acknowledge and incorporate the critical role played by women have increased potential to strengthen community development* was agreed up on by 30% while 19% disagreed and 51% were not sure then the factor of "It is the intentional interactions between communities and public decision makers" was agreed up on by 21% and 34% disagreed while 45% were not sure (Nelson et al., 2023).

Table 2: showing respondents responses on different ways of promoting empowerment and social change in Mbarara district

Effects	Agreed				Disagreed				Total
	Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%	
Organization for locality development	59	59%	41	41%	35	35%	65	65%	100%
Social planning or policy change	68	68%	32	32%	29	29%	71	71%	100%
Organizing for social action, or systems advocacy	53	53%	47	47%	31	31%	69	69%	100%

Source: primary data 2022

The table above shows how respondents agreed on different ways of promoting empowerment and social change in Mbarara district. On the factor of Social planning or policy change, 68% male and 32% female agreed while 29% male and 71% female disagreed. On the factor of **Organization for locality development**, 59% male and 41% female

Received: 11.04.2024

Accepted: 19.04.2024

Published on: 29.04.2024

agreed while 35% male and 65% female disagreed with it. 53% male and 31% female respondents agreed with the **Organizing for social action, or systems advocacy** while 31% male and 69% female respondents disagreed with it (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022).

Table 3: Showing the Relationship between women's engagement and empowerment and social change in Mbarara district

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	45	45
Agree	40	40
Disagree	8	8
Undecided	7	7
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data 2023

This table 3 above shows the total number of respondents and their percentage level that responded to the statement. 7 (7%) respondents were "Undecided" to the question, while 8 (8%) "Disagree" to the question. Also, 40 (40%) respondents "Agree" to the question stated above. Lastly, the majority 45 (45%) respondents "Strongly Agree" in their response to the question.

Conclusion

The study investigated the impact of women's community Engagement on empowerment and social change in Mbarara district. The study showed that most respondents understood what women's community engagement meant. The factors the ways of promoting women engagement respondents agreed on factors like Social planning or policy change and Organization for locality development. The study revealed that there is a relationship between women's community Engagement on empowerment and social change.

Recommendations

Respondents in Mbarara city should focus on involving women in the community in order to realize development and change. Women should engage in different activities in order to feel included and add on the community change in Mbarara.

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Received: 11.04.2024

Accepted: 19.04.2024

Published on: 29.04.2024

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Received: 11.04.2024

Accepted: 19.04.2024

Published on: 29.04.2024
