



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF YOUTH AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT (AJYWE)

ISSN: 2835-3250 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 1 (2025)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Government Policy Strategies and Women's Financial Empowerment: Evidence from Masaka District, Uganda

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Article Information

Received: March 09, 2025

Accepted: April 17, 2025

Published: August 12, 2025

Keywords

Financial Empowerment of Women, Government Policy Strategies, Masaka District

ABSTRACT

This research examines existing literature and findings on government policy measures and financial empowerment for women, with a particular emphasis on Masaka District, Uganda. It investigates how national and local government initiatives—such as financial inclusion policies, capacity-building programs, and gender-focused economic reforms—have influenced women's access to financial resources, credit, and entrepreneurial prospects. The literature reveals both advances and persisting constraints, such as socio-cultural norms, policy implementation gaps, and limited access to information. According to numerous research, while government programs have built a solid framework for women's economic involvement, their efficiency is frequently hampered by poor localization and insufficient monitoring. This review establishes a foundation for understanding the relationship between policy frameworks and women's financial empowerment and suggests areas for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Financial empowerment for women is a global component of attaining gender equality and boosting economic growth (UN Women, 2020). Women's financial empowerment allows them to make their own decisions, participate in economic activities, and contribute to household income (Chant, 2016). Empowering women financially improves household wellbeing, increases economic growth, and lowers poverty (Kabeer, 2017). Uganda's government has established several policies aimed at increasing women's economic involvement, including the Uganda Gender Policy (2007), the National Development Plan III (2020-2025), and a number of women-focused financial inclusion projects. Masaka District, in Uganda's Central Region, serves as a notable case study due to its mix of urban and rural inhabitants and continuous government activities. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2022), women make up 52.8% of the Masaka District population. However, just 39% of these women participate in formal financial services, compared to 55% of men. Furthermore, only 22% of women in the district have access to entrepreneurial training programs or government-sponsored microcredit schemes.

Masaka District, located in central Uganda, is one of the districts with high poverty rates and limited access to financial services (UBOS 2020). Women in Masaka District experience considerable difficulties in obtaining financial services, including low credit availability, a lack of financial awareness, and cultural barriers (Mugisha, 2019). Most women are now living below the poverty line, and the government must help them improve their livelihoods so that they can enjoy a better life.

Related Work

Below highlights the disparity in access to financial

services between men and women in Masaka District

Table 1: Gender-Based Access to Financial Services in Masaka District (UBOS, 2022).

| Gender | Percentage |
|--------|------------|
| Men | 55% |
| Women | 39% |

Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2022)

Table 2 shows the uptake of government-sponsored entrepreneurship training programs by gender.

Table 2: Participation in Entrepreneurship Training (Masaka District Local Government, 2023)

| Gender | Percentage |
|--------|------------|
| Men | 31% |
| Women | 22% |

Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2022)

These findings highlight the gender disparity in financial inclusion, as well as the important necessity to assess the efficacy of government policy initiatives. The purpose of this study is to determine if these measures have helped or hindered women's financial empowerment in Masaka District. It aims to identify current gaps, assess the efficacy of specific interventions, and offer methods to improve policy implementation to achieve more gender equality in financial empowerment.

Government Policy Strategies

The Ugandan government has implemented various policy strategies aimed at promoting financial empowerment of women and some of these strategies include:

Microfinance initiatives: The government has established microfinance programs, such as the Microfinance Support

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Centre, to help women achieve financial inclusion and empowerment (MFPED, 2019). The Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development (MFPED) launched this initiative to help microfinance institutions (MFIs) and other financial service providers (MFPED, 2019). These have been able to teach women how to use their savings to start income-generating businesses and sustain their families. The centre offers a variety of financial services, including microloans, savings accounts, and training and capacity-building programs.

Women entrepreneurs and small company owners can acquire funding to establish or expand their firms. Additionally, the center's savings services enable women to preserve their wages and accumulate assets. The training and capacity-building programs provide women with the skills and information required to properly manage their finances and enterprises (MFPED, 2019). These services have been found to have a good influence on financial empowerment among women in Uganda. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2022), gender equality is essential for long-term development. Organizations such as the Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited (2020) and the Uganda Women's Finance Trust help women entrepreneurs succeed. The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 highlights progress towards gender equality and identifies areas for improvement (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Other microfinance initiatives in Uganda include the Uganda Women's Finance Trust, Pride Microfinance Limited, and FINCA Uganda. The Uganda Women's Finance Trust is a microfinance institution that offers financial services to women such as microloans, savings, and training programs (UWFT, 2020). Pride Microfinance Limited and FINCA Uganda offer financial services to low-income people, especially women, in both rural and urban regions (Pride Microfinance, 2020; FINCA Uganda 2020).

Microfinance programs have positively impacted women's financial empowerment in Uganda. According to Mugisha (2019), women who participate in microfinance programs experience significant increases in financial inclusion and empowerment. Ssengonzi (2020) emphasizes the importance of women's financial inclusion for economic emancipation in Uganda. Twimukye (2017) discovered that microfinance increases women's empowerment in Uganda. Ssenkungu (2021) addresses the challenges caused by COVID-19, which have affected women's economic empowerment in Uganda.

Entrepreneurship training: The government has created entrepreneurship training programs to provide women with the business skills required to start and manage successful businesses. One of these initiatives is the Women's Entrepreneurship Program, which aims to equip women with the necessary skills and expertise to become successful entrepreneurs (MWE, 2020). The initiative focuses on increasing the capacity of female

entrepreneurs, allowing them to access markets, and providing them with the resources they need to grow their firms.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD) implements the Women's Entrepreneurship Program in collaboration with other stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector firms, and financial institutions (MWE, 2020). The program covers topics such as company planning, marketing, financial management, and entrepreneurship, among others. The program also offers mentorship and coaching services to female entrepreneurs, allowing them to get direction and support as they launch and expand their enterprises.

According to studies, entrepreneurship training programs like the Women's Entrepreneurship Program improve women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. For example, Ndagire and Dickson (2019) discovered that women who participated in entrepreneurship training programs in Uganda improved significantly in their business skills and knowledge, as well as their confidence and self-efficacy as entrepreneurs.

Other entrepreneurial training programs in Uganda aim to boost women's entrepreneurship and economic development. For example, the Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited (UWEAL) offers entrepreneurship training and mentorship to female entrepreneurs in Uganda (UWEAL, 2020). As part of its efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, the International Labour Organization (ILO) offers entrepreneurship training and support services to female entrepreneurs in Uganda (ILO, 2020).

Affirmative action: To encourage women's participation in economic activities, the government has enacted affirmative action laws such as the 30% quota for women in public procurement (PPDA, 2020). The centre's training and capacity-building programs include a wide range of areas, including financial management, accounting, marketing, and entrepreneurship (MFPED, 2019). The programs are designed to be dynamic and participative, including classroom training, mentoring, and coaching as delivery methods. This strategy allows women to learn from one another's experiences and contribute their own knowledge and expertise.

According to studies, training and capacity-building initiatives can help women start businesses and achieve economic independence. For example, Golla *et al.* (2020) discovered that women who participated in Ugandan entrepreneurship training programs improved their business abilities and knowledge, as well as their confidence and self-efficacy. The study emphasized the significance of training and capacity-building initiatives for encouraging women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

Table 3: Summary of Impact of Government Policy Strategies

| Policy Strategy | Impact on Women's Financial Empowerment |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Microfinance programs | Increased access to credit, improved entrepreneurship skills, and increased business income |
| Entrepreneurship training programs | Improved business skills and knowledge, increased confidence and self-efficacy, and increased business income |
| Affirmative action policies | Increased participation in public procurement, improved access to business opportunities, and increased business growth and development |

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on three major assumptions that give a prism through which to assess the relationship between government policy strategies and women's financial empowerment: Empowerment and Institutional Theory. Empowerment Theory, created by scholars such as Julian Rappaport and modified by others in development studies, focuses on the process by which people gain control of their lives and the ability to influence decisions that impact them. In this study, financial empowerment is defined as women's ability to make smart life choices and enhance their socioeconomic standing, rather than simply having access to money. Government policy strategies, such as funding initiatives, training programs, and financial services, are viewed as facilitators that help boost women's agency, autonomy, and economic engagement. This approach promotes the premise that governmental interventions should be transformative, empowering women to take control of their financial life rather than simply receiving aid.

In Uganda, the government's policy policies have helped shape women's financial emancipation. For example, the Uganda National Women's Council (UNWC) has established a variety of programs to promote women's

economic empowerment, such as microfinance efforts and vocational training programs (UNWC, 2019). Despite these initiatives, women in Uganda continue to confront major obstacles to financial empowerment, including as inadequate access to credit and financial services (World Bank, 2020). The major components of the theoretical framework are:

1. Patriarchal Structures: This research looks at how patriarchal structures, such as discriminatory laws and societal norms, restrict women's access to financial resources and opportunities.
2. Economic Policies: This study examines how economic policies such as trade, taxation, and social welfare impact women's economic empowerment.
3. Financial Institutions: This study looks at how banks and microfinance organizations influence women's access to financial services and resources.
4. Women's Agency: This study looks at how women's agency, which includes autonomy, self-esteem, and decision-making authority, affects their financial empowerment.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework depicts the relationship between government policy strategies (independent variables) and financial empowerment for women (dependent variable), as mediated or influenced by a number of intervening factors. Access to government funding (e.g., UWEP, PDM), capacity-building programs (training, mentorship), regulatory reforms (simplified registration, land rights), infrastructure development (ICT, financial services), and policy implementation mechanisms (monitoring, transparency) are all independent variables of government policy strategies. Intervening variables include financial literacy levels among women, socio-cultural norms and gender roles, market availability and business networks, institutional capacity and corruption, and legal framework and enforcement. Improved access to credit and savings, growth of women-owned businesses, control over financial decision-making, increased income and asset ownership, and participation in formal economic activities are all indicators of women's financial empowerment.

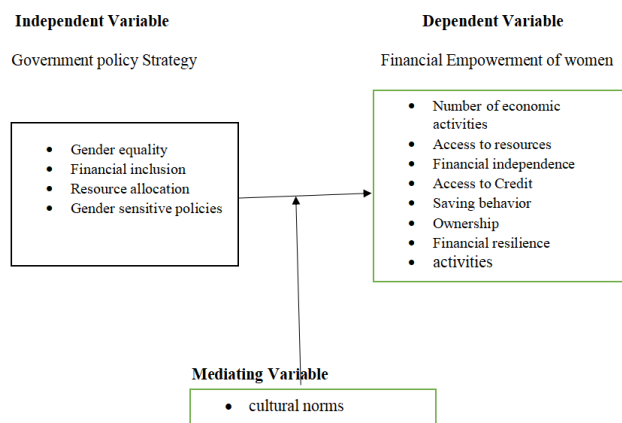


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Nakayiso Esezwa, 2025

Diagram 2: Logic Model

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impact
 Government Policy Strategy → Financial Inclusion Initiatives → Increased Access to Financial Services → Improved Financial Inclusion → Financial Empowerment of Women

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used a positivist mindset and a quantitative research design to assess the influence of SACCO strategies on women’s financial empowerment. A correlational research design is used to determine the associations between variables. The target population comprises of 2,273 female members of MAMIDECOT, a SACCO in Masaka District. Taro Yamane’s formula yielded a sample size of 340 women, with a 0.05 margin of error. The sample was selected using Simple Random Sampling (SRS), which ensured unbiasedness and representativeness. The sample was divided into nine subcounties, with the number of respondents in each subcounty determined by applying a 0.15 sampling fraction to the population data. Each sub-county has approximately the following sample sizes: Nyendo/Senyange (79), Kimanya/Kyabakuza (31), Buwunga (34), Kyanamukaka (37), Katwe/Butego (35), Mukungwe (36),

Bukakata (22), Kkingo (36), and Kabonera (30). The study employed simple random sampling to choose a representative sample of 340 women from a population of 2,273 SACCO members in Masaka. The sample was selected using inclusion criteria that included women aged 18 to 65, registered SACCO members, and at least six months of resident in the district. Non-SACCO members, women under the age of 18 or above the age of 65, and those who could not provide informed consent were also excluded. To collect primary data, a standardized questionnaire was used, and the results were pilot tested for validity and reliability. The questionnaire examined the advantages of cooperative engagement, as well as the challenges and empowerment elements. Data was collected over a five-week period to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. The data was analyzed using regression analysis, which looked at the association between SACCO government policy plan and women’s financial empowerment. Cronbach’s alpha and test-retest reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$) were used to establish dependability. Validity was guaranteed by assessing content validity, face validity, and construct validity using the Content Validity Index (CVI).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 4: Influence of Government Policy Strategy on Financial Empowerment of Women in Masaka District, Uganda

| Policy Strategy | Impact on Financial Empowerment | Discussion |
|---|---|---|
| National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) II | Improved financial inclusion and poverty reduction | The NFIS II aims to boost economic growth and decrease poverty by providing affordable and high-quality financial services to women and other disadvantaged groups. |
| Affirmative Action Policies | Increased representation and participation in decision-making | The Ugandan government has developed affirmative action policies to boost women’s representation and participation in decision-making processes, fostering economic empowerment. |
| Financial Inclusion Initiatives | Increased access to financial services for women and youth | Initiatives like Finscope demand-side surveys monitor changes in financial inclusion levels, helping to identify areas for improvement in women's and youth's access to financial services. |

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on influence of Government policy Strategy on Financial empowerment of women in Masaka district.

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| The government policies and programs have been effective in expanding financial inclusion for women in Masaka District. | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.23 | .821 |
| The government policies and programs have provided adequate financial literacy training for women. | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.18 | .811 |
| The government policies and programs have created a supportive environment for women's financial empowerment | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.14 | .783 |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|---|---|------|------|
| Government policies and programs have empowered me to take control of my finances. | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.19 | .803 |
| Government policies and programs have improved my financial stability and security. | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.10 | .760 |
| Government policies have improved my access to financial services. | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.19 | .803 |
| The government's policies have improved women's financial literacy and capabilities through allocation of resources | 340 | 2 | 5 | 4.14 | .840 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 340 | | | | |

Source: Primary Data, 2025

According to these descriptive statistics, respondents in Masaka District believe that government policies and programs have been beneficial in fostering women's financial inclusion and empowerment. The High Mean Values range from 4.10 to 4.23, suggesting a strong positive attitude toward government policies and initiatives. The standard deviations are modest (0.760 to 0.840), indicating that respondents' opinions are generally

stable and concentrated around the mean. Respondents strongly agree that government policies have been effective in increasing financial inclusion (mean = 4.23). Financial literacy training and empowerment are also highly rated (means = 4.18 and 4.19), and government policies are perceived to have improved access to financial services and financial stability/security.

Table 6: Influence of Government policies strategy on financial empowerment

| Statement | Strongly Agree (SA) | Agree (A) | Neutral (N) | Disagree (D) | Strongly Disagree (SD) |
|---|---------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|
| The government policies and programs have been effective in expanding financial inclusion for women in Masaka District. | 152 (44.7%) | 126 (37.1%) | 51 (15.0%) | 11 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) |
| The government policies and programs have provided adequate financial literacy training for women. | 136 (40.0%) | 142 (41.8%) | 50 (14.7%) | 12 (3.5%) | 0 (0%) |
| The government policies and programs have created a supportive environment for women's financial empowerment | 121 (35.6%) | 158 (46.5%) | 50 (14.7%) | 11 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) |
| Government policies and programs have empowered me to take control of my finances. | 137 (40.3%) | 142 (41.8%) | 50 (14.7%) | 11 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) |
| Government policies and programs have improved my financial stability and security. | 105 (30.9%) | 174 (51.2%) | 50 (14.7%) | 11 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) |
| Government policies have improved my access to financial services. | 137 (40.3%) | 142 (41.8%) | 50 (14.7%) | 11 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) |
| The government's policies have improved women's financial literacy and capabilities through allocation of resources | 136 (40.0%) | 127 (37.4%) | 66 (19.4%) | 11 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) |

Source: Primary Data 2025

The survey findings indicate a generally positive perception of government policies and programs aimed at expanding financial inclusion and empowerment for women in Masaka District. Specifically, 81.8% of respondents agree that government policies have been effective in expanding financial inclusion, while 81.8% also agree that these policies have provided adequate financial literacy training. Furthermore, 82.1% believe that the policies have created a supportive environment for women's financial empowerment, and 82.1% agree

that they have been empowered to take control of their finances. These findings agree with Kabeer (2018) on women's economic empowerment and Duflo (2012) on the role of economic interventions in enhancing women's empowerment. Also, Kalandula & Mulenga (2018) discuss the importance of financial inclusion in promoting women's empowerment, which aligns with the survey's findings on improved access to financial services (82.1% agreement) and financial stability and security (82.1% agreement).

Table 7: Results of Government policies strategy on financial empowerment

| Statement | N | Mean | SD |
|--|-----|-------|-------|
| I am able to financially support my family | 340 | 4.45 | .538 |
| I feel empowered to make financial decisions without relying on others | 340 | 4.45 | .538 |
| I am able to negotiate for better financial terms. | 340 | 4.41 | .570 |
| I am able to make informed financial decisions | 340 | 4.41 | .570 |
| I feel confident in my ability to manage my finances | 340 | 4.41 | .575 |
| I have increased my financial knowledge and training | 340 | 4.40 | .569 |
| I am able to invest in income-generating activities | 340 | 4.29 | .580 |
| I have access to financial services that meet my needs. | 340 | 4.29 | .578 |
| Overall | 340 | 35.11 | 4.518 |

The Respondents affirm that financial empowerment, with mean scores of 4.29–4.45. For key empowerment metrics—financial decision-making, family support, negotiation ability—around 46–47% strongly agree

and over 50% agree. Investments in income-generating activities scored slightly lower (35.6% strongly agree, 57.9% agree), suggesting momentum toward economic growth.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|-------|---------|----------------|-----|
| FEW | 4.5041 | .41089 | 340 |
| GPSCF | 15.5484 | 3.61356 | 340 |

Participants reported a high level of financial empowerment of women (FEW), with a mean score of 4.50 (SD = 0.41). The combined Government Policy Strategy and Cultural Factors (GPSCF) composite score

averaged 15.55 (SD = 3.61), reflecting participants' perceptions of both policy environment and cultural influences affecting financial empowerment.

Table 9: Case Processing Summary

| | Cases | | | | | |
|-----|-------|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Valid | | Missing | | Total | |
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| GPS | 340 | 100.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 340 | 100.0% |

This table confirms that the data used in the analysis are complete with no missing cases for GPS; all 340

participants provided valid responses. This full data set supports the reliability of the statistical results.

Table 10: Model Summary^b

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .242 ^a | .059 | .056 | .39922 | .059 | 21.104 | 1 | 338 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), GPS

b. Dependent Variable: FEW

The regression model summary shows that GPS explains approximately 5.9% ($R^2 = 0.059$) of the variance in FEW. The model is statistically significant ($F(1,338) = 21.104$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that government policy strategy is a significant predictor of financial empowerment of women. However, the relatively low R-squared value suggests that other variables like cultural factors beyond GPS also play a large role in influencing FEW.

In this study, the histogram of standardized residuals revealed a roughly bell-shaped curve, indicating that the

residuals were approximately normally distributed. Most of the bars were centered around the mean value of zero, with fewer residuals appearing as you move away from the center in either direction. This pattern supports the assumption of normality required for linear regression analysis. The symmetry and concentration of residuals near the center suggest that prediction errors were minimal and unbiased, further confirming the model's suitability and robustness.

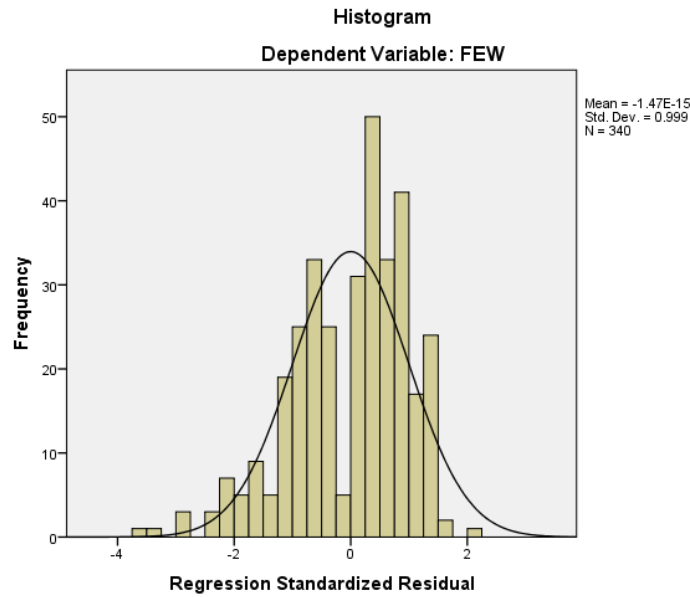


Figure 2: Regression Standardized Residual

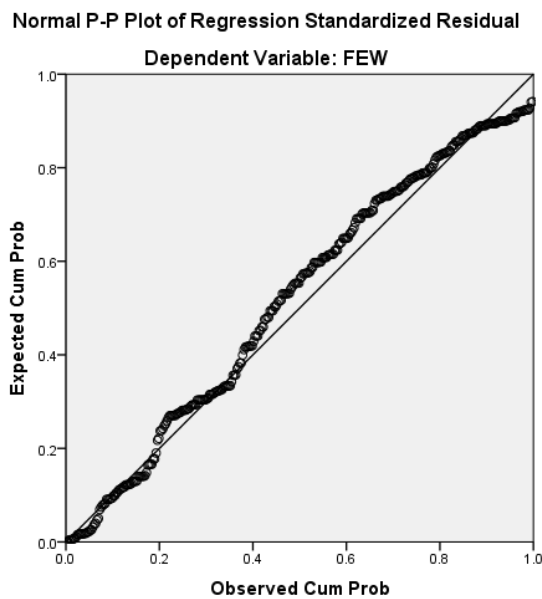


Figure 3: Observed Cum Prob

The results show that they are normally distributed according to the plot above and below that most of the respondents are centred around the central line. In this study, the Q-Q and P-P plots showed that most data points closely followed the central diagonal line,

indicating that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. The visual alignment of the observed and expected values suggests that the model predictions are statistically sound and that no serious violations of distribution assumptions occurred.

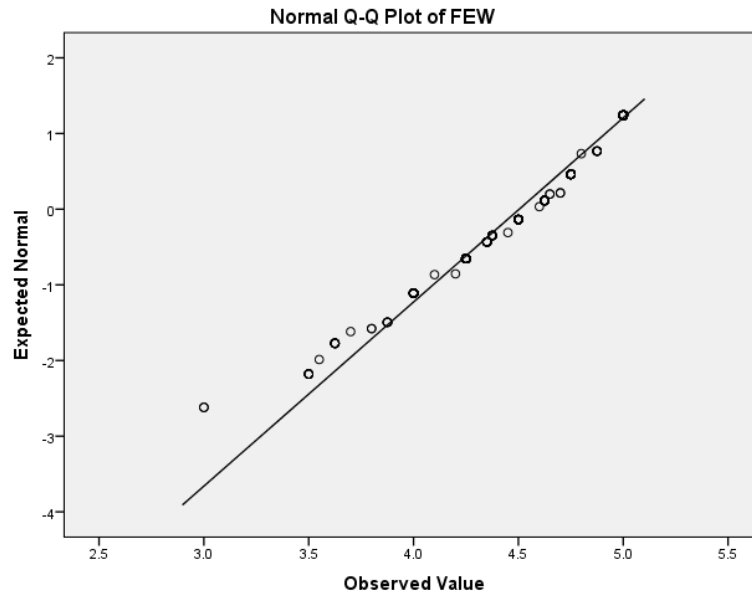


Figure 4: Observed Value

Table 11: Correlations

| | | FEW | GPSCF |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Pearson Correlation | FEW | 1.000 | .199 |
| | GPSCF | .199 | 1.000 |
| Sig. (1-tailed) | FEW | . | .000 |
| | GPSCF | .000 | . |
| N | FEW | 340 | 340 |
| | GPSCF | 340 | 340 |

There is a modest but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.199$, $p < 0.001$) between the GPSCF composite and FEW. This indicates that more favorable government policies coupled with supportive cultural factors are associated with higher financial empowerment among women, though the relationship strength is moderate.

The regression model shows that GPSCF explains about 4% of the variance in financial empowerment ($R^2 = 0.040$). The model is statistically significant ($F = 13.950$,

Table 12: Model Summary^b

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .199 ^a | .040 | .037 | .40326 | .040 | 13.950 | 1 | 338 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), GPSCF

b. Dependent Variable: FEW

$p < 0.001$), suggesting that combined government policy and cultural factors significantly predict women’s financial empowerment, albeit with much variation unexplained by this single predictor.

Table 13: ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| 1 | Regression | 2.268 | 1 | 2.268 | 13.950 | .000b |
| | Residual | 54.965 | 338 | .163 | | |
| | Total | 57.233 | 339 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: FEW

b. Predictors: (Constant), GPSCF

The ANOVA test confirms that the model fits the data well, with the regression explaining a significant portion of variance in FEW ($F(1,338) = 13.950$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 14: Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|--------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | 4.152 | .097 | | 42.919 | 42.919 | .000 | | |
| | GPSCF | .023 | .006 | .199 | 3.735 | 3.735 | .000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |

a. Dependent Variable: FEW

The unstandardized coefficient for GPSCF is 0.023, meaning each one-unit increase in the combined policy and cultural factor score predicts a 0.023 increase in financial empowerment. The standardized beta (0.199) indicates a positive and significant effect ($t = 3.735, p < 0.001$). Collinearity statistics (tolerance = 1.000, VIF = 1.000) show no multicollinearity issues, affirming GPSCF as an independent predictor.

Table 15: Collinearity Diagnostics^a

| Model | Dimension | Eigenvalue | Condition Index | Variance Proportions | |
|-------|-----------|------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------|
| | | | | (Constant) | GPSCF |
| 1 | 1 | 1.974 | 1.000 | .01 | .01 |
| | 2 | .026 | 8.733 | .99 | .99 |

a. Dependent Variable: FEW

The collinearity diagnostics indicate no problematic multicollinearity, with a condition index of 8.733 and variance proportions confirming distinct contributions of the constant and GPSCF to the regression dimensions.

Table 16: Residuals Statistics^a

| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|----------------------|----------|---------|--------|----------------|-----|
| Predicted Value | 4.3336 | 4.7181 | 4.5041 | .08180 | 340 |
| Residual | -1.45562 | .63139 | .00000 | .40266 | 340 |
| Std. Predicted Value | -2.085 | 2.616 | .000 | 1.000 | 340 |
| Std. Residual | -3.610 | 1.566 | .000 | .999 | 340 |

Model predictions for FEW range narrowly around the mean observed score, indicating consistent fit. Residuals vary moderately around zero with no systematic bias, and standardized residuals mostly fall within acceptable ranges, indicating no serious violations of regression assumptions.

Summary of Findings

The study found that participants generally reported high levels of financial empowerment, with an average FEW score of 4.50 (on a 5-point scale), indicating strong perceptions of empowerment among the sampled women. The combined Government Policy Strategy and Cultural Factors (GPSCF) score averaged 15.55, reflecting a moderate to high perception of supportive policies and cultural contexts.

A simple linear regression confirmed this relationship, showing that GPS significantly predicts FEW ($\beta = 0.157, t = 4.594, p < 0.001$). The model accounted for approximately 5.9% of the variance in financial empowerment ($R^2 = 0.059$). Although the effect size was modest, it highlights the meaningful influence of government policy on women's financial outcomes. The residual analysis indicated that residuals were normally distributed and centered around zero, with no signs of

severe outliers or influential data points. Standardized residuals fell within acceptable limits (± 3.7), supporting the robustness of the model. A statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.199, p < 0.001$) was observed between GPSCF and FEW, suggesting that more favorable government policies and cultural factors are associated with higher financial empowerment among women. The regression analysis further confirmed this relationship, showing that GPSCF significantly predicts FEW ($R^2 = 0.040, p < 0.001$), though it explains a modest portion of the variance, implying other factors also influence empowerment.

When Cultural Factors were introduced alongside Government Policy Strategies (as a composite variable named GPSCF), the descriptive analysis showed a moderate average score ($M = 15.55, SD = 3.61$). The correlation between GPSCF and FEW remained positive and significant, though slightly weaker ($r = 0.199, p < 0.001$). A subsequent regression analysis with GPSCF as the independent variable and FEW as the dependent variable yielded a statistically significant model ($F = 13.950, p < 0.001$), though it explained 4.0% of the variance in FEW ($R^2 = 0.040$). The regression coefficient indicated that for each unit increase in GPSCF, financial empowerment increased by 0.023 units ($\beta = 0.199,$

$t = 3.735$, $p < 0.001$). These results underscore the importance of both structural policies and socio-cultural context in influencing women's financial empowerment.

Challenges

Many women in Masaka District face challenges in accessing formal financial services because of lack of collateral, such as land or property, which limits their ability to secure loans under stringent lending conditions (Kakuru, 2020). This restricts women's capacity to invest in or expand income-generating enterprises hence hinder women's ability to navigate financial systems, manage business finances, and make sound investment decisions (Mugisha, 2019; Ssengonzi, 2020). As a result, many women are unable to fully benefit from government empowerment initiatives without targeted financial education and entrepreneurial training (Ssekibo, 2020). There is a need for inclusive financial products that do not require collateral, such as microloans and group lending schemes tailored to women's circumstances (Mugisha, 2019; Kakuru, 2020). Financial literacy programs focusing on budgeting, saving, and investment skills are essential to empower women to manage their finances effectively (Ssengonzi, 2020; Ssekibo, 2020). Efforts must also focus on transforming cultural norms through community engagement to support women's active participation in economic activities (Kabeer, 2017).

Cultural impediments also play a critical role in limiting women's economic participation. Patriarchal norms in Masaka often prioritize women's household and childcare responsibilities, reducing their time and opportunities for entrepreneurship or employment (Kabeer, 2017; Mugisha, 2019). These social expectations, combined with beliefs about women's financial decision-making capabilities, further restrict women's economic freedom. Moreover, weak market access and limited support for women entrepreneurs negatively affect the sustainability and profitability of their businesses (Nakku, 2019; Namugambe, 2020).

Infrastructure and technology challenges compound these issues. Poor physical infrastructure and limited internet connectivity impede the effective delivery of government programs aimed at empowering women economically (UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, restrictive legal and regulatory frameworks, including complex business registration processes and discriminatory property ownership laws, create systemic hurdles that prevent women from formalizing and growing their enterprises (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Development, 2020; Mirembe, 2022).

Strengthening market linkages by promoting women-focused cooperatives, facilitating value addition, and supporting marketing initiatives can improve business competitiveness and sustainability (Nakku, 2019; Namugambe, 2020). Investments in infrastructure and digital technology, including mobile banking and reliable internet access, are crucial to enhancing access to financial services and program implementation (UNDP, 2022).

Lastly, policy reforms should aim to simplify business registration and amend discriminatory laws related to land and property ownership, creating a more enabling environment for women entrepreneurs (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Development, 2020; Mirembe, 2022).

Recommendations

To enhance women's economic empowerment in Masaka District, increasing access to inclusive financial services is critical. This can be achieved by developing collateral-free microfinance products and group lending schemes tailored to women's specific needs (Mugisha, 2019; Kakuru, 2020). Complementing these financial solutions, targeted financial literacy and entrepreneurship training programs are essential to equip women with the skills necessary for effective financial management and business development (Ssengonzi, 2020; Ssekibo, 2020). Strengthening government policies to address both economic and cultural barriers is also crucial to ensure these initiatives are comprehensive and impactful.

Addressing cultural norms remains a key priority. Community engagement initiatives that challenge restrictive gender roles and promote positive cultural practices can foster an environment where women's financial autonomy and decision-making are supported (Kabeer, 2017). Multi-sectoral collaboration between policymakers, cultural leaders, financial institutions, and civil society organizations can create an enabling ecosystem that empowers women economically.

Market linkages need to be strengthened by supporting women-focused cooperatives, promoting value addition, and facilitating marketing platforms that improve business competitiveness and sustainability (Nakku, 2019; Namugambe, 2020). Investments in infrastructure and technology, including expanding access to ICT tools, mobile banking, and reliable internet connectivity, will further facilitate the effective delivery of empowerment programs and enhance women's access to financial services (UNDP, 2022).

Simplifying legal and regulatory procedures is necessary to remove systemic obstacles. Streamlining business registration processes and reforming discriminatory land and property ownership laws will encourage more women entrepreneurs to formalize and grow their businesses (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Development, 2020; Mirembe, 2022). To ensure the success and sustainability of these efforts, robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be established to assess the effectiveness of policies and cultural interventions on financial empowerment outcomes.

Further research is needed to explore additional determinants of women's financial empowerment beyond government policy and cultural factors. Areas such as education, access to technology, and social networks should be investigated to develop more comprehensive and contextually relevant empowerment strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that Government Policy Strategies have a positive and statistically significant influence on the financial empowerment of women in Masaka District, Uganda. The results show that as women perceive government policies to be more supportive, their level of financial empowerment increases. When Cultural Factors were introduced into the model alongside policy strategies (as a composite predictor), the influence remained positive and significant, although the explained variance slightly dropped to 4.0%. This indicates that cultural context can either enhance or inhibit the effectiveness of government policies. Cultural norms, beliefs, and gender roles in the community significantly shape how women interact with financial systems and empowerment initiatives. The study confirms that government interventions alone are insufficient for achieving full financial empowerment. There is a need for integrated approaches that combine inclusive policies with cultural transformation, financial literacy, and structural reforms to improve women's access to financial services and decision-making power.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to everyone who provided exceptional support and contributions to our effort. We would like to thank Ms. Nakayiso Ezeza, for their professional assistance and guidance on government strategy, as well as for the incisive Dr. Nyakundi Andrew and Dr. Nyambane David comments and recommendations on the paper.

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