

Contribution of micro-entrepreneurship to the livelihood improvement of female-headed households in Ibanda Municipality. A cross-sectional study.

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ABSTRACT

Background

The study aimed to assess the contribution of micro-entrepreneurship to the livelihood improvement of female-headed households in Ibanda Municipality.

Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional design targeting female-headed household entrepreneurs in Ibanda Municipality. Using Slovin's formula, 133 respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires, observations, and interviews, while secondary information came from published studies and reports. Instrument validity was established through expert review and Content Validity Index assessment. A pilot involving ten respondents enhanced reliability. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS 25.

Results

A total of 133 questionnaires were distributed and all were returned, yielding a 100% response rate. Regarding education, 74 (55.6%) respondents had primary education, 53 (39.8%) had O-level, 4 (3.0%) had a degree, and 2 (1.5%) had A-level education. Micro-entrepreneurship highly contributed to socio-economic empowerment, with a grand mean of 4.04 (SD=0.66). Strengthening social networks recorded the highest rating (Mean=4.38, SD=0.57), followed by increased household purchasing power and acquisition of household assets (Mean=4.27, SD=0.46 each). Awareness of local economic and development opportunities had a mean of 4.25 (SD=0.43), regular savings 4.23 (SD=0.49), family future security 4.21 (SD=0.66), self-confidence and independence 4.16 (SD=0.77), and improved status and respect 4.10 (SD=0.43). Affording quality education for children and financial decision-making recorded the lowest means of 3.28 (SD=1.11) and 3.28 (SD=1.31), respectively.

Conclusion

Micro-entrepreneurship empowered female-headed households through improved purchasing power, savings, asset acquisition, confidence, independence, and social networks.

Recommendation

Financial institutions should provide affordable loans through group lending, financial literacy, flexible repayment, and reduced stringent credit requirements.

Keywords Livelihood improvement, Socio-economic empowerment, Female entrepreneurs, Household assets, Social networks, Financial literacy

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Micro-entrepreneurship plays an important role in improving the livelihoods and socio-economic wellbeing of female-headed households. Female-headed households may face greater economic vulnerability because women are often responsible for meeting household needs without the financial support associated with dual-adult households. Micro-enterprises provide opportunities for women to generate independent income, meet daily household expenses, accumulate savings, and acquire

productive and household assets (Namatovu et al., 2012). Through these activities, entrepreneurship can contribute to household economic stability and reduce dependence on uncertain sources of livelihood.

The contribution of an economic activity to household livelihoods can be assessed in terms of how it strengthens household assets and other forms of capital (DfID, 1999). Income generated from micro-enterprises may enable

female heads to meet immediate consumption needs while also creating opportunities for savings and investment. The International Monetary Fund (2024) observed that women's independent economic incomes are associated with increased household expenditure, reduced poverty, and acquisition of physical assets such as livestock and land. For female-headed households, the ability to generate and control income may therefore be particularly important for strengthening household resilience.

Micro-enterprise income can also contribute to the wellbeing of household members. Female entrepreneurs may direct business earnings towards children's education, healthcare, nutrition, housing, and other essential household requirements (Friedson-Ridenour & Pierotti, 2019). Business profits can therefore contribute to the development of human capital within the household while improving the capacity of female heads to respond to unexpected financial needs. Savings generated from businesses may also provide a financial cushion during periods of illness, unemployment, poor harvests, or other economic difficulties.

Micro-entrepreneurship can further strengthen women's economic independence and decision-making capacity. According to Mahato et al. (2022), income generated by female heads can provide greater autonomy over household resources and allow women to make decisions concerning household welfare and business investments. Financial strength can increase women's ability to provide for their families and participate in decisions affecting household resources (Friedson-Ridenour & Pierotti, 2019). Economic independence may therefore extend beyond income generation to include greater confidence and control over household financial decisions.

Participation in entrepreneurship can also enhance women's self-confidence, skills, and sense of independence. Through practical involvement in business activities, women gain experience in financial management, customer relations, marketing, problem-solving, and decision-making. Such experiential learning can complement formal training and strengthen women's ability to manage their enterprises (Kaiser & Menkhoff, 2022). Female entrepreneurs may consequently develop greater confidence in their ability to make economic decisions and address challenges affecting their households.

Social empowerment is another potential contribution of micro-entrepreneurship. Business activities provide

opportunities for women to interact with customers, suppliers, other entrepreneurs, community members, local leaders, and business groups. These interactions can strengthen social networks and provide access to information, resources, mentorship, and economic opportunities (Karyeija & Muriaas, 2023; Babajide et al., 2022). Participation in groups and networks may also facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and joint economic activities (Mutesi et al., 2025).

The study aimed to assess the contribution of micro-entrepreneurship to the livelihood improvement of female-headed households in Ibanda Municipality.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional research design in which the investigator measures the outcome and the exposures in the study participants at the same time. A cross-sectional design allows capturing a real-time snapshot of the current socio-economic conditions of female-headed households without requiring extended longitudinal follow-ups. In addition, across-sectional design allows you to measure enterprise types, operational challenges, and livelihood outcomes at the same time. This makes it possible to examine statistical associations between micro-entrepreneurship activities and specific household outcomes using SPSS.

Target Population

Target population is defined as all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events, or objects to which the results of a research study can be generalized. In this study, female-headed household entrepreneurs are the target population in Ibanda Municipality.

Sample Size

The sample size was determined using Slovin's Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where (n) the sample size

(N) given the population size

and (e). a margin of error

$$n = \frac{200}{1 + 200(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 133$$

Therefore 133 was the respondents for this study

Sampling methods

To select the target respondents (female micro-entrepreneurs who are household heads), this study will employ a combination of Purposive Sampling and Snowball (Chain-Referral) Sampling methods.

Purposive sampling

Guided by local leaders and local women group leaders in Kagongo Division, initial trading hubs, market stalls, and informal business areas where female micro-entrepreneurs

operate were purposively identified. Purposive sampling ensures that only participants who meet the defined inclusion criteria being an adult female, the primary head/decision-maker of the household, and the active operator of a micro-enterprise are targeted.

Snowball Sampling

Because female-headed household entrepreneurs are a specific and scattered subgroup within the In the informal sector, snowball sampling was used to expand the sample. Identified participants were asked to refer or direct the study team to other eligible female household heads running micro-enterprises in the same or adjacent wards.

Data sources

In this study, both primary and secondary data sources were used. Primary and secondary data were considered to obtain the information required for the study.

Primary data

Primary data refers to data collected from first-hand sources that have not previously been published. In this study, primary data were collected directly from the study respondents using questionnaires, observations, and interviews.

Secondary data

Secondary data were obtained from studies, surveys, newspapers, journals, magazines, expert statements, published documents, and government reports relevant to the study.

Data Collection Methods and tools

In this study, interviews and questionnaire surveys were used as the main methods of data collection.

Questionnaire

Primary data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Questionnaires were preferred because they are simple to administer and quick for respondents to complete. They also provided respondents who could read and write with adequate time and opportunity to understand and respond to the questions. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide detailed and unique responses, while anonymity encouraged honest responses. All data collected through the questionnaires were reviewed for inconsistencies, and necessary corrective measures were taken before analysis.

Table 1: Data collection methods and tools

Objective	Data collection tool	Justification
The contribution of micro-entrepreneurship to the livelihood improvement of female-headed households	Structured Questionnaire	Questionnaires gather measurable trends on financial growth, savings, and expenditure patterns.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

Any respondent to be included in the study must have consented without any form of coercion. Respondents above 18 years of age were included in the study because they can consent for themselves and make personal decisions.

Exclusion criteria

Respondents who do not consent to participate in the study were excluded from participating in the study. The

decision is made to maintain the research ethics and codes of conduct.

Quality control

Validity

To ensure validity, the first draft of the questionnaire and interview guide will be submitted to experts inclusive of the research supervisors for review and corrections. These instruments will be assessed for clarity of language, relevance to the objectives, adequacy of content coverage, and appropriate length. The Content Validity Index (CVI) will then be computed using the formula:

CVI= Number of items rated relevant

— Total number of items —

A CVI of at least 0.70 will indicate that the research instruments are valid for this study.

Reliability

Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with ten respondents from wards outside the main study area but with similar characteristics, including women entrepreneurs and the officials from the microfinance institutions. The results from the pilot study were used to clarify the questions and make them simpler for the respondents to understand. In addition, the pilot study was used to improve the content validity in which questions that are irrelevant, repetitive, or missing key issues raised by participants were removed, merged, or new items added. This process ensures that the tools used in the study are both accurate and consistent, producing reliable and credible data.

Research procedures

Following approval of the research proposal, the I obtained a letter of introduction from Bishop Stuart University, using this letter; I introduced myself to the appropriate institution and authorities at the study area and seek permission to carry out research. Following formal approval from the Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee (BSU REC), data collection and field activities proceeded systematically through the following sequential phases

Armed with the BSU REC approval letter, an official letter of introduction was obtained from the Department of Social Work and Social Administration at Bishop Stuart University.

The introduction letter and REC approval letter were presented to the Town Clerk of Ibanda Municipality and the Division Assistant Town Clerk for Kagongo Division to obtain formal permission to conduct the study within the jurisdiction.

Local Council 1 (LC1) Chairpersons across selected wards in Kagongo Division were met to explain the purpose of the study, establish rapport, and seek permission to access local trading centers, markets, and residential areas.

The study purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality were explained to each eligible participant using written consent forms, which were translated into Runyankore where necessary. Participants provided consent through signatures or thumbprints before taking part in the study.

Community engagement plan

Community engagement was conducted through a localized, protocol-driven approach that respects the local leadership structures, trading networks, and socio-cultural norms of the study area. Following BSU REC approval, engagement moved from administrative authorities down to individual household heads through the following specific stages:

After securing the BSU REC approval letter, the study team physically reported to the Kagongo Division Headquarters to brief the Assistant Town Clerk. A one-page summary of the study outlining its purpose, confidentiality assurances, and institutional approval was presented.

Meetings were held with Local Council 1 (LC1) Chairpersons of selected village cells within Kagongo Division. The LC1 Chairpersons provided verbal or written clearance to conduct the study within their village cells and assisted in identifying areas with high concentrations of female micro-entrepreneurs.

The leadership of organized trading groups in major commercial areas was approached directly. The study was explained to market chairpersons and other organized group leaders to build trust and reduce concerns that participation was related to tax assessment or municipal compliance enforcement.

Initial contact with individual participants was made directly at their places of business to minimize disruption to their daily economic activities. Verbal explanations and written consent materials were provided in Runyankore, the primary local language in Kagongo Division, or English, depending on the participant's preference.

Before obtaining consent, the study focus on female household heads was explained sensitively to ensure clarity regarding eligibility without stigmatizing participants based on their marital or financial status.

Participants were informed that participation was completely voluntary, responses would remain anonymous, and no personal tax or business registration information would be shared with Ibanda Municipal Council authorities. Written informed consent, provided through a signature or thumbprint, was obtained before administering the questionnaires.

Risk mitigation plan

In field-based social research especially when interacting closely with vulnerable populations like female heads of

households in busy commercial hubs like Markets, health and safety controls must be maintained routinely, regardless of whether an active epidemic declared by the Ministry of Health guidance was followed throughout the study.

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To protect both the study team and participants, health and safety measures were implemented proactively as routine procedures during all field interactions, rather than strictly in response to an active epidemic outbreak. Since data collection involved face-to-face interactions in densely populated market environments and home visits within Kagongo Division, infection prevention measures and physical risk controls were maintained throughout the study.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer was carried by the study team and made available to participants before and after handling paper questionnaires, consent forms, or shared writing instruments.

A continuous supply of clean, disposable surgical face masks was maintained. Masks were offered to participants and worn by the study team during face-to-face interviews, particularly in enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces or when either party exhibited mild respiratory symptoms.

The support materials such as pens, clipboards, pens, and tablet surfaces used during the data collection exercise will be disinfected between sessions using disinfectant wipes and alcohol based sanitizers.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study used both Quantitative analysis method

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data will be coded and analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages will summarize demographic characteristics and key study variables, including the experiences of female entrepreneurs with micro-finance institutions socio-economic challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in accessing micro-finance services and strategies to address challenges faced by female micro-entrepreneurs.

Academic and Institutional Dissemination

Bound copies of the final thesis will be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and deposited in the Bishop Stuart University Main Library for student and faculty access.

At least one empirical research paper will be extracted from the study findings and submitted to an indexed, peer-

reviewed journal in social work, gender, or development studies.

Community Dissemination

Recognizing that research participants are owners of their lived experiences, a dedicated community feedback mechanism will be implemented in Kagongo Division.

Short feedback sessions in the form of workshops will be organized to present the overall study findings to participants in a simplified, non-technical format. Participants will be given an opportunity to validate the findings and discuss possible solutions to the identified challenges.

As one of the main approaches for sharing the study findings with the academic community, a manuscript will be prepared and submitted for publication in a scholarly journal. This will enable academics and other interested stakeholders to access the findings.

The study findings will also be disseminated through research dissemination workshops organized by Bishop Stuart University to explain the findings to the community and other relevant stakeholders.

To make the study findings accessible to researchers, educators, and students, copies of the completed study will be bound and deposited in the Bishop Stuart University library.

Copies will also be provided to Ibanda Municipal Council and other relevant stakeholders. Digital repositories will also be considered as an additional platform for disseminating the study findings to interested parties.

Ethical considerations

After the completion and approval of my proposal, I submitted to the research ethics committee of Bishop Stuart University (BSU) for approval to collect data. This approval letter was then used to seek for an introduction letter from the department.

The information obtained from this study was used solely to fulfill the academic requirements of the study. The information was kept confidential and was not disclosed to unauthorized third parties. Respondents' names were not recorded or disclosed to protect their privacy, rights, and personal information. In addition, the participation in this study was entirely voluntary and an individual can

withdraw their participation at any time they feel cannot continue without any losses.

RESULTS

Response rate

Table 2: Response rate

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Distributed	133	100
Questionnaires Returned	133	100
Questionnaires Not Returned	0	0
Total	133	100

The response rate of 100% was considered adequate for statistical analysis and interpretation of the study findings.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study examined selected demographic characteristics of respondents, including age, gender, education levels and occupation to provide context for interpreting the study findings.

Distribution of Respondents by Age

Table 3: Age distribution

Age	Frequency	Percent
21-25	6	4.5
26-30	15	11.3
31-35	42	31.6
36+	70	52.6
Total	133	100.0

From the findings as presented in table 3 indicated that majority of the respondents were above 36 years of age, followed by those between 31 and 35. A relatively smaller proportion was above 15 years, while very small proportion was between 21 and 25.

Distribution of Respondents by education level

Table 4: Education levels

Education level	Frequency	Percent
primary	74	55.6
O-level	53	39.8
A-level	2	1.5
Degree	4	3.0
Total	133	100.0

The study findings further revealed that majority of the respondents had primary as their highest education level, followed by those with ordinary level. A relatively smaller proportion had a degree and the least of the all the respondents had A-level as their highest education level.

Contribution of micro-entrepreneurship to the socio-economic empowerment of female-headed households

Table 5: Contributions of micro entrepreneurship

Contribution	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Increased household's purchasing power	4.27	0.46	High
Established regular personal or household savings.	4.23	0.49	High
Profits from my business have enabled me to acquire household assets	4.27	0.46	High

Affording quality education for children	3.28	1.11	low
Significantly increased self-confidence and independence.	4.16	0.77	High
I am the primary decision-maker regarding how household finances and resources are allocated.	3.28	1.31	low
Status and respect have improved	4.10	0.43	High
Micro-business provides a sense of security regarding family's future well-being.	4.21	0.66	High
Being an entrepreneur has strengthened my social networks.	4.38	0.57	High
Engagement in entrepreneurship has increased my awareness of local economic and development opportunities.	4.25	0.43	High
Grand Mean	4.04	0.66	High

Source: Field data, 2026

The findings presented in the table 5 indicate that micro-entrepreneurship highly contributed to the socio-economic empowerment of female-headed households (Grand Mean =4.04, SD = 0.66).

The highest rated micro-entrepreneurship contribution was strengthened social networks (mean=4.38, SD=0.57) suggesting that through micro entrepreneurship, female headed households have built and strengthened s social networks. Other contributions such as increased households purchasing power, ability to acquire household assets, increased awareness of local economic and development opportunities and security of future family wellbeing also recorded high ratings.

The lowest-rated micro entrepreneurship contribution was being able to afford quality education for their children (mean= 3.28, SD=1.11) although it remained within a high contribution category.

Overall, the findings suggest micro entrepreneurship had contributed to the socio-economic empowerment of female-headed households through strengthening social networks, improving their purchasing power, acquiring household assets and increased awareness of the local economic and development opportunities in Ibanda municipality.

DISCUSSION

The second objective was to examine contribution of micro-entrepreneurship to the socio-economic empowerment of female-headed households in Ibanda municipality. The findings showed that micro entrepreneurship highly contributed to the economic empowerment of female headed household with an overall mean score of 4.04 and standard deviation of 0.66.

This finding indicates that majority of the female headed households are empowered socio-economically. Specifically, female headed households reported increased household purchasing power, increased personal savings, ability to acquire household assets, increased self-confidence and independence, strengthened social networks and increased my awareness of local economic development opportunities.

The highest rated contribution was strengthened social networks. This suggests that female headed household benefit from the engaging in entrepreneurial activities because which is central in socio-economic empowerment. Social networks are important in entrepreneurship because success often depends on social capital, connections and shared problem solving.

The findings align with Sustainable Livelihoods Theory which acknowledges the role of social capital in business growth. The theory further states that one of the core assets is human capital which only built through social networks which influence livelihood strategies and outcomes. Through entrepreneurship activities, women interact with their fellows in businesses, share ideas, and build confidence which develops into strong ties and social networks.

The findings are also consistent with Mutesi et al., (2025) whose study found that engagement of female entrepreneurs in micro-enterprises provide opportunities to develop friendships, share knowledge, and collaborate on economic activities. Social interactions and group cohesion plays a significant role in shaping women entrepreneurs perceptions and experiences in micro-entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Micro-entrepreneurship has contributed to the socio-economic empowerment of the female headed households in Ibanda municipality. Their involvement in

entrepreneurial activities has improved their purchasing power, increased personal savings, ability to acquire household assets, increased self-confidence and independence and strengthened social networks among female headed households.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to female headed household entrepreneurs; therefore, the findings may not be generalized to all women entrepreneurs in Uganda. The study relied on questionnaire data, which may be influenced by respondents' perceptions and self-reporting bias

Recommendation

Financial institutions should support female-headed household entrepreneurs to access affordable loans for expanding their businesses. This can be achieved through group lending, financial literacy training, flexible repayment arrangements, and reducing stringent requirements that limit women's access to credit.

The municipal administration, particularly through the Community Development Department, should strengthen entrepreneurship training and business development support for female-headed households. Regular professional development workshops should be organized to improve women's skills in business planning, financial management, marketing, and assessment of entrepreneurial activities.

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List of abbreviations

BSU – Bishop Stuart University

BSU REC – Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee

CVI – Content Validity Index

DfID – Department for International Development

FHHs – Female-headed households

LC1 – Local Council 1

SD – Standard deviation

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Source of funding

The study received no external funding.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

Data availability

Data is available upon request from the author

Author contributions

CP: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing original draft.

AA: data curation, validation, supervision.

FT: supervision, validation

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Author biography

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Florence Tutaryebwa: research supervisor at Bishop Stuart University.

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