

**THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS ON POVERTY
REDUCTION IN UGANDA: A CASE STUDY OF UGANDA WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM IN ALEBTONG DISTRICT, UGANDA**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Ameto Jannan, declare that this dissertation is my original work and has never been submitted to any institution for academic publication.

Signature... 

Date... 05/01/2026

Ameto Jannan

APPROVAL

I certify that the candidate has been under my supervision and that the dissertation presented is original and has not been submitted elsewhere for the academic Award.

Signature.....

Date.....

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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to my late grandfather, Rev Timothy Ogwal, who shaped me into the person I am today through constant advice and encouragement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBO	Community Based Organization
EET	Economic Empowerment Theory
FGD:	Focus Group Discussions
FOWODE	Forum for Women in Democracy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDI	In depth interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PDM	Parish Development Model
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PPP	Public Private Partnership
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
UWEP	Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WB	World Bank
WEE	Women Economic Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Economic empowerment programs are essential in promoting social economic transformation. This study investigated how Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) addresses poverty among women in Alebtong District, where approximately 34 percent of women live below the national poverty line (UBOS, 2020). This study employed capability approach and institutionalism theories as its theoretical framework. The study was guided by three key objectives, which included evaluating UWEP's poverty reduction strategies, assessing the effectiveness of UWEP in poverty reduction, and analyzing the evidence-based Practices to improve UWEP implementation. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was employed, incorporating focus group discussions, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The study revealed that UWEP, in Alebtong District, employs multiple strategies to reduce poverty among women. These included: financial support through interest-free credit loans, entrepreneurship development, and enhanced market access. UWEP has demonstrated a generally positive impact by enhancing women's economic empowerment, increasing household incomes, and supporting self-reliance. However, its effectiveness is partly hindered by delays in fund disbursement, weak governance structures, and inconsistent beneficiary participation in planning and decision-making processes. These issues have collectively undermined the program's long-term sustainability and its full potential to reduce poverty. The study suggests that while UWEP has contributed to poverty reduction among women in Alebtong District, its long-term impact depends on improved governance, inclusive decision-making, and streamlined financial disbursement systems. Strengthening these areas is essential to enhancing the program's effectiveness in promoting sustainable women's poverty reduction in Uganda.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Poverty continues to be a widespread global challenge, with billions of people enduring severe economic struggles. World Bank (2024b) reports that 700 million people live in extreme poverty globally, with South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for over 300 million and 290 million of the world's extreme poor, respectively. Khanal (2024) indicates that 712 million people were living in extreme poverty in 2023, representing an increase of 23 million people since 2019. Despite notable reductions in extreme poverty since the 1990s, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed some of this progress, pushing an additional 97 million people into extreme poverty by 2020. If current trends persist, approximately 622 million individuals, equivalent to 7 percent of the global population, are expected to live in extreme poverty by 2030 (Moses et al., 2021). This represents a reduction of about 69 million people escaping extreme poverty from 2024 to 2030, a slower pace compared to the 150 million who exited such conditions between 2013 and 2019 (World Bank, 2024b)

In addition to COVID-19, economic inequality, intensified by globalization and market liberalization, deepens poverty by concentrating wealth among a few (Nolan & Weisstanner, 2022; Onah et al., 2024; Stiglitz, 2016). Other drivers include conflict, which disrupts economies and access to services, and environmental factors like climate change, which impact food security and livelihoods, particularly in the Global South (Twinomugisha & Mushy, 2021). These interconnected factors emphasize the need for comprehensive poverty-reduction strategies addressing both structural and environmental aspects. Poverty is prevalent across sub-Saharan Africa, primarily driven by factors such as economic underdevelopment, poor governance, and insufficient infrastructure (Adeyeye et al., 2023).

In terms of conceptualization, Kharas and Dooley (2021) define poverty as a state where an individual depends on less than \$1.90 a day. They further assert that poverty is a global issue affecting millions of individuals worldwide, where approximately 9 percent of the global population lives in extreme poverty. Poverty is recognized as a multidimensional issue characterized by deprivations across various aspects of life, including health, education, and standards of living (Mekonnen, 2024). The persistence of poverty is influenced by a range of factors, including economic inequality, inadequate access to education, healthcare, and

political instability. For instance, economic disparities contribute to unequal opportunities and limited social mobility, worsening the poverty levels (Mayor, 2015).

On the other hand, economic empowerment is conceptualized as the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity, and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (Eyben, Kabeer, and Cornwall 2008). Economic empowerment enhances women's access to economic resources and opportunities, including employment, financial services, property, and other productive assets, as well as skills development and market information. Women's economic and political empowerment was adopted as one of the strategies for advancing the gender equality agenda at the UN Conference on Women in 1995.

Sub-Saharan Africa faces severe poverty challenges, with approximately 40 percent of the population living below the international poverty line (Addison et al., 2019). This region encounters obstacles such as rapid population growth, limited access to education, healthcare, and frequent political and economic instability. Historical factors, such as colonial legacy and subsequent governance challenges, have impacted economic development and poverty. According to Izom and Kombo (2023), colonial exploitation and post-colonial state failures have extended economic differences. Post-colonial African states have struggled with debts, corruption, and ineffective governance among others, which have decelerated poverty reduction efforts (Collier, 2009).

International efforts to reduce global poverty, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal One, which aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030, along with initiatives by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have specifically targeted poverty alleviation (Crespo et al., 2018). However, progress has been uneven, especially in regions where economic growth has been inconsistent and social inequalities remain deep-rooted (Mahler et al., 2022). Efforts to address poverty levels in Africa include various development programs and initiatives aimed at fostering long-term growth. The African Union's Agenda 2063 seeks to promote inclusive and sustainable development, emphasizing poverty reduction and improved living standards across the continent (Africa, 2017). Additionally, the African Development Bank's poverty reduction strategies focus on addressing the root causes of poverty through economic development and social investments (Adams, 2024). However, Fofana et al. (2023) argue that 55 percent of

African nations are unlikely to achieve the poverty reduction targets outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1) by 2030. They base this argument largely on low levels of economic growth. This situation is manifested by low production of goods and services, limited job creation, poor living standards, low technological advancement, and restricted investment, among other factors, in most African countries. What these scholars do not highlight is how some African resources have continued to be exploited by foreign investors, enriching their countries in the Global North and perpetuating poverty in Africa.

Uganda is not an exception to poverty challenges, both in rural and urban areas. UBOS (2022) indicates that around 21 percent of the Ugandan population lives below the national poverty line. According to the UBOS (2022) report, restricted access to education and healthcare, economic fluctuations, and insufficient infrastructure are the main contributing factors. Moreover, historical political instability, characterized by conflict and authoritarian governance, has intensified economic difficulties and obstructed poverty reduction initiatives (Obasi, 2019). As of 2024, the national poverty rate in Uganda is approximately 21 percent, showing regression in addressing poverty, despite some economic growth (UBOS, 2022). Approximately 27 percent of Ugandans experience multidimensional poverty in terms of access to healthcare, education, and the standards of living (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024).

Women face particular hardships related to poverty in Uganda, which intensify their economic vulnerability, with reports showing that more than 60 percent of women are engaged in informal employment, a sector often lacking job security and benefits (Adeyeye et al., 2023). On the other hand, prevailing cultural and societal norms frequently restrict women's access to education and economic opportunities, thereby widening the gender gap in poverty (Estrada, 2024). Despite projections of a 5.5 percent GDP growth rate for 2024 from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), this growth is unlikely to lead to poverty reduction (IMF, 2024). The uneven distribution of economic growth often leaves marginalized populations, particularly women, without sufficient resources to enhance their living conditions (Aguda, 2024). According to UBOS (2024), women make up 51 percent of the national population, outnumbering men. This statistic emphasizes the critical need to prioritize programs that promote poverty reduction among women in Uganda. Given that poverty tends to affect women more severely due to limited access to education, employment, and resources, it is essential to implement policies that specifically address these inequities (Kabeer, 2021). Furthermore, The World Bank collection of development indicators reported that the percentage of female labour force in Uganda was 49.6 percent in 2022. Unpaid care work is performed by more women 83

percent than men 53 percent, Uganda's unemployment rate was approximately 9.2 percent in 2023 (World Bank, 2024a). Furthermore, many households have remained outside the money economy despite government efforts to supply inputs, extend credit to farmers through funding non-profit associations, and provision of financial education (Munyegera & Matsumoto, 2016). This is primarily because some households, especially those headed by women, lack access to cultivable land (Huang, 2023).

In terms of literacy levels, women continue to lag behind males at 80 percent and 66 percent, respectively (UBOS, 2022). The low literacy rate in Uganda hinders women's equitable access to programs and interventions for service delivery (Datzberger, 2018). Ugandan women, particularly in rural areas, have a high fertility rate of 5 children per woman, which poses challenges for maternal and child health due to limited healthcare access. Low-income families are impacted by this, which makes it more difficult for them to pay for their children's food, education, and care for their families (UBOS, 2022). The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is still higher in women (7.2 percent) than in men, affecting their level of participation in economic activities (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2023). Such gender disparities have further complicated women's ability to benefit from national development efforts, highlighting the need for inclusive poverty reduction strategies that Uganda has sought to pursue.

Since independence, Uganda has continually revised its poverty reduction strategies to align with evolving political, economic, and social priorities, as well as with global frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals (Dikshit & Pandey, 2021). These poverty reduction programs can be understood as economic empowerment initiatives. In Uganda, empowerment started in 1960s when the government implemented state-led agricultural cooperatives designed to empower smallholder farmers (Flygare, 2006). However, these initiatives were severely constrained by political instability and poor management (Mutibwa, 1992), resulting in limited effectiveness in alleviating poverty, especially among women (Eton et al., 2020). The 1970s brought further challenges, as Idi Amin's regime intensified economic instability through the nationalization of businesses, which precipitated a collapse in productivity and a rise in poverty levels (Jamal & Weeks, 1988). State-controlled agricultural policies, including initiatives like the Produce Marketing Board, suffered from widespread corruption and inefficiency (Africa, 1995; Okoth, 1994).

In the 1980s, Uganda adopted Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) guided by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, emphasizing economic liberalization

and privatization (Mugenyi, 1995). While SAPs helped stabilize inflation and attract foreign investment (Hope Sr, 1992), they also led to significant cuts in public spending on essential social services, exacerbating poverty and inequality, particularly among women (Oberdabernig, 2013). This neglect of the poorest segments of society highlighted the limitations of neoliberal economic reforms. In the 1990s, Uganda introduced the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), targeting a reduction in poverty from 56 percent in 1992 to 10 percent by 2017 through an integrated approach combining economic and social strategies (Nakimuli, 2011). However, the plan struggled with implementation challenges and uneven regional impacts (Kjær & Muhumuza, 2009). Initiatives such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) and Universal Primary Education showed partial success but were hampered by insufficient funding and corruption (Bwogi, 2016). Following the year 2000, Uganda's poverty reduction strategies were further influenced by global frameworks like the MDGs, with programs aimed at improving agricultural productivity and addressing socio-economic challenges in conflict-affected regions (Sarah & Ibrahim, 2014). While Uganda's strategies evolved, they continued to reflect significant systemic challenges that hindered sustained progress in poverty reduction (Hickey, 2003)

Since 2014, Uganda has launched several targeted poverty reduction initiatives. The Youth Livelihood Program (YLP) launched in financial year 2013/2014 has effectively provided financial support to unemployed youth, enabling the establishment of small businesses. But, it suffers from limited outreach, resulting in some eligible individuals being unaware of its benefits (Kitambo, 2022; Ocen et al., 2022). The Green Jobs Program launched in 2016 aims to create employment opportunities while promoting environmental sustainability, yet it is hindered by resource constraints and inadequate implementation (MGLSD, 2024). Likewise, the National Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities, initiated in the financial year 2009/2010, is one of the Government's flagship programs that supports Persons with Disabilities with startup capital to initiate income-generating activities for increased household incomes. It has faced difficulties in outreach and execution (MGLSD, 2023). Introduced in 2021, the Parish Development Model (PDM) aims to enhance household incomes through community empowerment, although its effectiveness has yet to be fully evaluated (Kayizzi, 2024). Overall, while these initiatives demonstrate potential in addressing socio-economic challenges, they encounter significant obstacles, including historical and structural factors contributing to poverty and the adverse effects of political interests and corruption (Godfrey & Jun Yu, 2015; Muhumuza, 2007). Moreover, none of these poverty reduction programs focus

on women who suffer disproportionate poverty due to their socio-cultural characteristics in Uganda.

In an attempt to address the above concerning issue, Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) was initiated in 2015. This aimed at offering affordable interest-free credit, entrepreneurship development, and market accessibility to empower women entrepreneurs. These conditions align with national objectives of gender equality and increased economic participation (MGLSD, 2024). The key goals of UWEP are to enhance women's access to financial resources, improve their entrepreneurial skills, and create market linkages for women-owned businesses (FOWODE (2020). Through these efforts, the program seeks to reduce poverty, foster financial inclusion, and address the socio-economic barriers women face, including lack of access to credit, low levels of financial literacy, and limited market access (Dawa et al., 2021). The program also emphasizes the promotion of a savings culture and sustainable business practices among beneficiaries. UWEP operates by using a group-based approach, where women form enterprise groups to access interest-free loans, training in business management, and mentorship. The loans are distributed through local government structures to ensure that rural women have access to such funds. The program also provides business advisory services and links beneficiaries to markets for their products (Kavuma et al., 2022)

In other words, the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) is a cornerstone initiative dedicated to boosting the economic empowerment of women across the country. The program targets women from disadvantaged and underserved backgrounds, enabling them to initiate and manage viable businesses that can generate income and contribute to poverty alleviation (MGLSD, 2017). UWEP aligns with broader national frameworks such as Uganda's Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan (NDP), which prioritize equitable development and the advancement of women.

The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) is a government initiative launched in 2015 under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. It is specifically designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women in Uganda as they engage in economically viable enterprises. These challenges include limited access to affordable credit, which restricts the ability of many women to start or expand businesses; inadequate technical knowledge and entrepreneurial skills, which hinder effective business planning and long-term sustainability; limited access to markets, which reduces potential sales and profitability; and a

general lack of information regarding existing business opportunities, which makes it difficult for women to tap into emerging economic sectors (MGLSD, 2017). In response to these barriers, UWEP seeks to enhance women's participation in business development, thereby enabling them to increase their incomes, improve their livelihood security, and elevate their overall quality of life. The Program emphasizes economic empowerment as a fundamental strategy for achieving social transformation and sustainable poverty reduction.

The overarching goal of UWEP is to economically empower Ugandan women by enhancing their income-generating potential and boosting their contribution to national economic development (MGLSD, 2017). This goal is pursued through a set of interlinked objectives aimed at addressing both individual and systemic constraints that hinder women's economic progress. One key objective of the Program is to strengthen women's capacity for entrepreneurship development. This involves providing tailored training and mentorship that equip women with essential business planning, management, and financial literacy skills. These skills are vital for the establishment, operation, and sustainability of successful enterprises.

Another core objective is to provide affordable credit and facilitate access to other financial services. Through interest-free revolving funds, the Program targets women who are often excluded from formal credit markets due to a lack of collateral or financial history, thereby offering them a viable pathway to capital. UWEP also aims to improve women's access to markets for their products and services. By connecting beneficiaries with both local and broader markets, the Program helps increase their visibility and customer base, thereby enhancing profitability and business growth. Furthermore, the Program promotes access to appropriate technologies for production and value addition. This focus on innovation enables women entrepreneurs to improve the quality and competitiveness of their products, increase efficiency, and tap into higher-value markets. Through these integrated objectives, UWEP contributes significantly to Uganda's broader development agenda by reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and empowering women to take on more prominent economic roles within their communities.

To realize its mission, UWEP adopts both financial and non-financial strategies. One of the primary interventions is the provision of interest-free, revolving loans to organized women's groups engaged in a variety of sectors such as agriculture, trade, manufacturing, and services

(MGLSD, 2020). These loans, which must be repaid within three years, eliminate traditional lending barriers such as high interest rates and collateral requirements that often exclude women from mainstream financial services. Capacity development is another major strategy. UWEP offers structured training in key areas such as entrepreneurship, business planning, record keeping, and value addition (Ahikire et al., 2018). Women receive this training both before and after receiving funding, ensuring they are equipped to sustain and expand their ventures. The program also offers mentoring through partnerships with NGOs, district officials, and community workers, reinforcing long-term support and practical guidance.

Furthermore, UWEP helps connect women to broader markets through platforms such as trade fairs, exhibitions, and linkages with the private sector. These initiatives enhance the visibility, competitiveness, and profitability of women's products. Additionally, the program incorporates ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, identify challenges, and inform policy direction (MGLSD, 2020). The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) is executed through the established government structures at both the central and local levels. The Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD) serves as the primary agency responsible for policy coordination and implementation, collaborating with key stakeholders such as Parliament, the Office of the Prime Minister, relevant line ministries, the National Women's Council, and local government authorities. Currently, the program operates across 176 local governments nationwide.

Through the program, UWEP had disbursed over UGX 137 billion to more than 21,145 women groups across Uganda by June, 2024. This benefited, over 228,908 women during its first phase from financial year 2015/2016 to 2023/2024 (MGLSD, 2024). Despite the intriguing goals and disbursement of funds, poverty among women in Uganda is still high with 36.4 percent of women living below the national poverty line in Alebtong district (UBOS, 2020). It is against this background; the researcher undertook to evaluate how economic empowerment programs such as UWEP address poverty among women and assesses its effectiveness and the implementation challenges in Alebtong district.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite the many governments economic programs designed to reduce poverty, a large number of women in Uganda still face deep and persistent economic hardship. About 38 percent of women in Uganda live in poverty, compared to 33 percent of men (UBOS, 2021), showing a significant gender gap in economic well-being. In Alebtong District, 36.4 percent of women

live below the national poverty line (UBOS, 2020). Gender disparities in employment, income, and access to financial resources remain prevalent, indicating the inadequacy of existing programs to create meaningful change (Kabeer et al., 2018). Research conducted in Alebtong by Muhanguzi et al. (2023) point out that more than half of the women, 58 percent, lacked access to financial institutions for obtaining credit during a financial crisis due to inaccessibility to collateral security. Only 35 percent of women reported their household's ability to meet their food needs. Approximately 20 percent of the women could no longer cover their household expenses. They further reported that only 4.5 percent of women had sole ownership of land. There was also limited involvement of women in community participation and decision-making.

These figures highlight how previous and current programs have struggled to address the deep-rooted barriers keeping women in poverty. These challenges are particularly severe in Alebtong District, where many women depend on informal and subsistence livelihoods, remain excluded from formal financial systems, and struggle to control productive resources. UWEP was established in 2015 to tackle critical issues such as limited access to credit, entrepreneurial skills, limited market access, and decision-making roles. Despite the intriguing goals and disbursement of funds, poverty among women in Uganda is still high with 36.4 percent of women living below the national poverty line in Alebtong district. Therefore, the study investigated the impact of UWEP on poverty reduction by assessing its poverty reduction initiatives and analyzing the effectiveness as well as the challenges encountered in implementation processes.

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The overall objective of the study was to examine the impact of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) on Poverty Reduction in Alebtong District, Uganda.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- I. To evaluate how Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program addressed poverty among women in Alebtong District, Uganda.
- II. To explore the efficacy of UWEP in reducing poverty among women in Alebtong District, Uganda.
- III. To suggest evidence-based practices to enhance Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program in Alebtong District, Uganda.

1.4 Research Questions

- I. How does the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program address poverty among women in Alebtong District?
- II. How effective is Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program in reducing poverty among women in Alebtong District?
- III. How can UWEP performance be enhanced in Alebtong District?

1.5 The Scope of the Study

1.5.1 Geographical Scope

Alebtong District which was subdivided from Lira District in 2010 is mainly occupied by Langi and a few Kumam and Iteso in the sub-counties of Omoro, Abako and Amugu. Alebtong District shares borders with Amuria, Lira, Dokolo, and Otuke Districts. The research was based on the study of Uganda Women Entrepreneurship program in Alebtong District. The study was conducted in two sub-counties specifically in Aloji and Abia sub-counties as areas of interest. These sub-counties were chosen because they were then implementing the UWEP program. From those two Sub-Counties, six parishes of Amuria, Anara, Akwangkel, Aberidwogo, Abia, and Abangoimany were chosen and seven villages were selected from them for study. However, other sources of information were also obtained from the UWEP focal person and the District leaders responsible for the implementation of the program.

1.5.2 Content scope

The study aimed to examine the Impact Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) on poverty reduction, including its strategies, effectiveness of UWEP in terms of how it is governed, challenges faced during implementation, and broader community implications. It assessed financial aid, training, market access, and explored the governance structure, level of

participation of beneficiaries, using qualitative data to inform recommendations for program and policy improvements.

1.5.3 Time Scope of the Study

This study examined the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) and its impact on poverty reduction among women in Alebtong District from 2016-2025. This period was selected to capture the program's development and implementation phases, including its achievements, challenges, and impacts over time. The focus on this timeframe was to help identify changes and assess how UWEP has addressed the economic barriers faced by women in Alebtong.

1.6 Significance of the Study

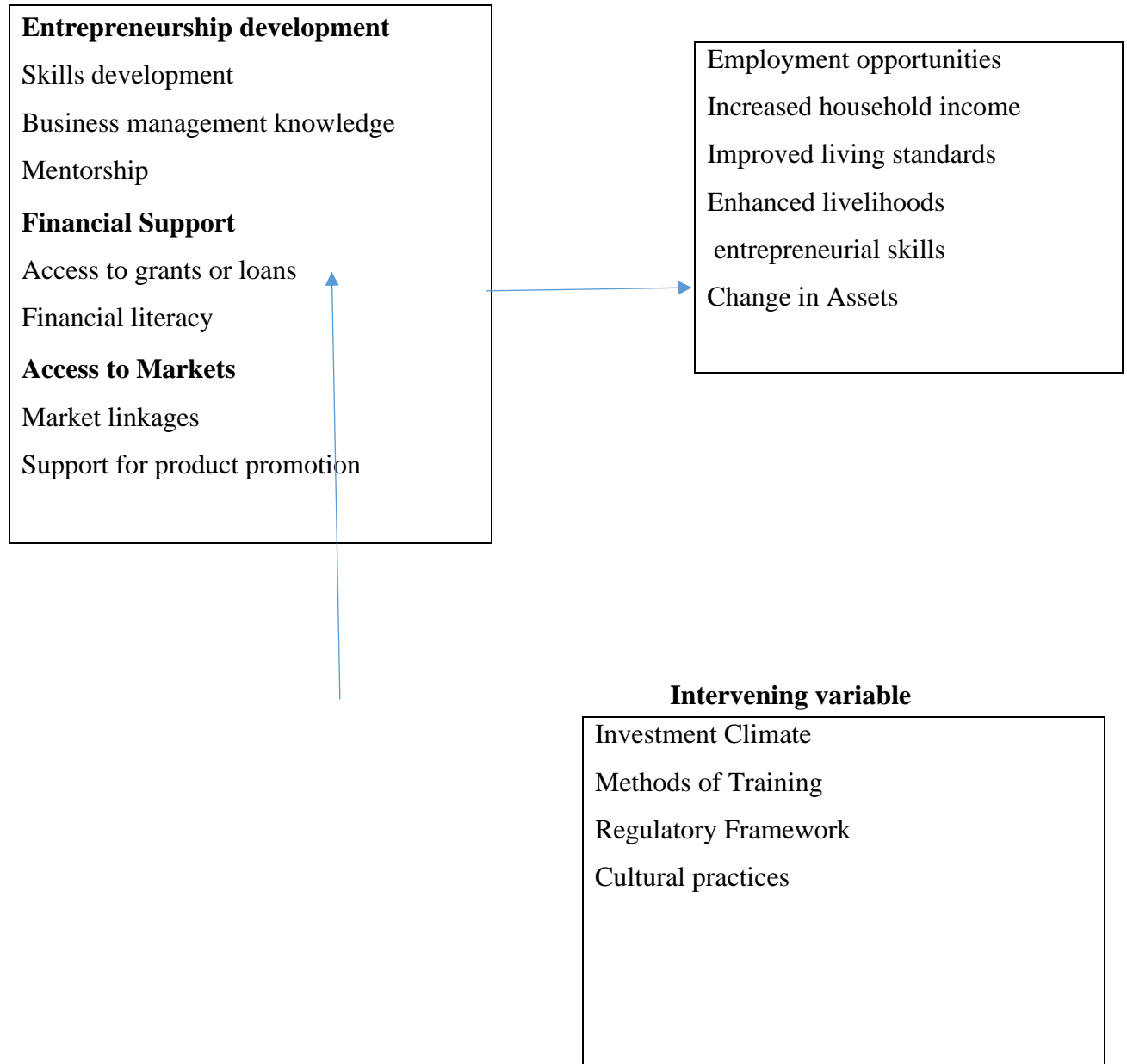
This study has led to an examination of how Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) addresses poverty among women, in Alebtong district, where research has been lacking. By identifying effective strategies, how UWEP is governed, and the challenges faced during implementation, the study might inform policymakers and improve poverty reduction efforts in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number one. It has contributed new data to academic discussions, allowing comparisons with other districts, and has provided practical recommendations for practitioners and community leaders. Ultimately, the findings aimed to elevate the perspectives of marginalized women and strengthen targeted interventions designed to address their specific needs, therefore contributing to their well-being and informing future policy development.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

Economic empowerment Programs (UWEP)

Poverty Reduction

outcomes



Source: Researcher's conceptualization

The conceptual framework demonstrates the relationship between the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) and poverty reduction. It shows how UWEP offers services such as access to credit, entrepreneurial skills development, management skills training, and market access. The effectiveness and delivery of these services impact outcomes for beneficiaries, these include; economic empowerment, job creation, asset accumulation, income growth, improved living standards, and access to essential services like water, energy, and housing. Nonetheless, the relationship between UWEP and poverty reduction is mediated by intervening factors such as training approaches, credit control policies, the regulatory framework, and the investment environment. These elements influence the program's ability to achieve its objectives and deliver sustainable poverty reduction outcomes.

1.8 Theoretical Frameworks

Two theories have been articulated to guide this study. These include Capability Approach and institutional theory. These theories have been used complementary to strengthen the outcome of the study as elaborated below.

First, is the Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen in the 1980s. This theory offers a comprehensive framework for assessing human development by focusing on individuals' capabilities their abilities to achieve the kind of lives they value (Sen, 1999). Sen's theory shifts the focus from traditional income or resource-based measures of poverty to a broader evaluation of well-being, emphasizing that the true measure of poverty is the deprivation of capabilities. In the context of economic empowerment initiatives targeting women, the Capability Approach suggests that poverty alleviation efforts must not only provide financial resources but also enhance individuals' capabilities through education, skills training, and access to essential services. This holistic approach enables beneficiaries to improve their livelihoods and social participation, contributing to sustainable poverty reduction.

The Capability Approach argues that poverty should be understood as a multidimensional issue, where the lack of basic capabilities such as access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities restricts individuals' freedom to lead fulfilling lives. In this framework, financial resources alone are insufficient to lift individuals out of poverty unless they are accompanied by the necessary tools and opportunities to convert those resources into tangible improvements in well-being. For instance, while access to start-up capital is a crucial component of economic empowerment, it must be paired with capacity-building programs that enhance beneficiaries' skills in areas such as financial management, entrepreneurship, and market access. By

integrating these elements, economic empowerment programs can foster the development of a wide range of capabilities, ensuring a more profound and lasting impact on poverty alleviation.

Moreover, the Capability Approach emphasizes the centrality of agency in human development, positing that true empowerment involves enabling individuals to exercise control over their lives and make choices that align with their personal values and goals. Economic empowerment initiatives that focus solely on financial aid may fail to address the deeper needs of the poor if they do not foster autonomy and decision-making skills among participants. Empowering women through financial literacy and vocational training programs equips them with the ability to make informed choices about their lives, leading to improved livelihoods and enhanced well-being. This aligns with Sen's assertion that expanding individuals' freedom to achieve their own aspirations is a key driver of human development.

In addition to its focus on individual capabilities, the Capability Approach also highlights the importance of creating enabling environments that support individuals in utilizing their capabilities effectively. Economic empowerment initiatives must therefore address structural barriers such as gender inequality, social exclusion, and limited access to markets, which disproportionately affect women in many developing countries. By tackling these systemic issues, empowerment programs can help marginalized groups gain access to the resources and opportunities needed to thrive. For instance, initiatives that provide women with both financial resources and the skills to navigate local markets and financial systems are more likely to result in long-term poverty reduction, as they enable participants to sustain and expand their economic activities.

Finally, the Capability Approach encourages policymakers and practitioners to adopt a people centered development framework, where the success of economic empowerment programs is measured not only by increases in income but also by improvements in broader dimensions of well-being, such as health, education, and social inclusion. This approach ensures that economic empowerment initiatives contribute to meaningful and sustainable development by addressing the full spectrum of factors that influence poverty. Therefore, in the context of this study, the Capability Approach provides a robust framework for understanding how economic empowerment initiatives can foster comprehensive human development by expanding the capabilities of women.

The Institutionalism Theory

The second theory is institutionalism theory that suggests how both organizations and individuals' function within broader societal frameworks composed of norms, regulations, and established routines that shape acceptable conduct (Scott, 2004). Within the context of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP), this theoretical lens is valuable for examining how the Alebtong Local Government interprets and enforces policies related to women's empowerment and poverty alleviation. Institutional pressures arising from legal mandates, uncertainty, cultural and professional standards are particularly crucial for understanding how UWEP strives to maintain legitimacy within the local governance structure. The theory provides a useful foundation for analyzing how national-level policies on gender equity and entrepreneurship are localized and embedded in community-level actions, especially as they relate to women's roles in economic development.

Central to institutional theory are the concepts of structural arrangements, societal norms, institutional capacities, and governance mechanisms. These elements shape how public institutions like the Alebtong Local Government respond to and implement development programs such as UWEP. This study will investigate how long-standing institutional practices, including bureaucratic routines and resource management protocols, either promote or constrain the delivery of UWEP (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Similarly, it will explore how legal policies and unwritten cultural rules affect women's access to and engagement with entrepreneurial resources (North, 1990). Furthermore, the concept of institutional capability (Hall & Taylor, 1996) is useful in assessing whether local authorities possess the technical and financial means to effectively support UWEP initiatives. The governance framework, as discussed by Ostrom (1990), will help evaluate transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation in program implementation critical factors for the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

However, institutional theory is not without its criticisms, especially when applied to dynamic and grassroots-based initiatives such as UWEP. One significant limitation is its emphasis on institutional conformity and stability, often at the expense of recognizing local innovation, individual agency, and transformative change (Greenwood et al., 2008). In the context of women's entrepreneurship, this is problematic as success frequently hinges on creative adaptation and resistance to traditional norms that the theory tends to underemphasize. For instance, Baker and Nelson (2005) argue that informal institutions such as family structures,

gendered expectations, and community beliefs can be more influential than formal laws in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes for women. Moreover, the theory's limited capacity to account for institutional fluidity and change is especially apparent in under-resourced districts like Alebtong, where governance is often inconsistent and policy enforcement is weak (Ahl et al., 2023). Thus, while institutional theory offers a valuable macro-level perspective, it should be supplemented with frameworks that better address individual empowerment, contextual dynamics, and the informal institutional forces that significantly impact women's entrepreneurship and poverty reduction. This explains why economic empowerment theory has been incorporated to supplement each other.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section presents the review of literature guided by the study objectives, which were; to evaluate tactics for reducing poverty in Africa, to explore the effectiveness of those programs in poverty reduction, and to identify the main challenges faced during implementation. It starts with the conceptualization poverty, its causes and dimensions as well as the understanding of economic empowerment.

2.1. Dimensions and Causes of Poverty

Poverty lacks a universally accepted definition due to its complex, multidimensional nature, which varies across contexts (Niringiyimana, 2014). The World Bank emphasizes basic survival, offering a universal and measurable framework (Agbo, 2023), yet it neglects the societal contexts of relative deprivation and social exclusion (Maia, 2024). On the other hand, dos Santos (2017), critiques income-based views by emphasizing capability deprivation, a perspective echoed by Alkire et al. (2015) in their advocacy for a multidimensional framework encompassing education, health, and living standards. However, these approaches often underestimate the systemic and generational barriers stressed by Hulme and Shepherd (2003), who emphasize chronic poverty. In contrast, Traditional poverty metrics, such as caloric intake-based income levels (Ravallion, 1998; Tilak, 2002), focus on minimum survival needs (Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2003). However, Jepson et al. (2017) argue that poverty should also consider individuals' capabilities to live fulfilling lives, including access to essential services like clean water and education. Together, these conceptualizations emphasize the complexity of poverty and provoke debate on identifying the most effective and inclusive strategies for addressing it.

Poverty, historically understood in terms of monetary thresholds, has evolved in academic discourse to encompass a broader spectrum of social, economic, and human deprivations. It is now widely recognized as a multidimensional and multi-causal phenomenon that affects populations differently depending on socio-economic, political, and geographic contexts. Scholars such as Sen (1999) contend that poverty involves not only low income but also the deprivation of capabilities, referring to the freedom and means to lead a life one values. This review adopts a systematic approach to examine the dimensions and causes of poverty at four interconnected levels: the global stage, the African continent, the national context of Uganda,

and the sub-national setting of Alebtong District. It draws on empirical evidence and expert analysis to construct a nuanced and context-specific understanding of the issue.

On a global scale, poverty is no longer assessed purely through income metrics. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (Plagerson & Ulriksen) provides a comprehensive measurement that captures deprivations across health, education, and living standards. Current data estimate that over 1.2 billion people live in conditions of multidimensional poverty, predominantly in rural and marginalized areas of developing countries. Amartya Sen's capability approach has been instrumental in reframing poverty as a denial of essential freedoms. His framework highlights how lack of education, inadequate nutrition, and social exclusion undermine human dignity and restrict personal agency. The MPI reflects this perspective by incorporating indicators such as child mortality, years of schooling, and access to electricity, thus offering a more holistic depiction of poverty.

Scholarly literature identifies several interrelated causes of global poverty. Structural inequalities, including disparities in income, gender, and race, compound unequal access to resources and opportunities. Piketty (2014) argues that the unregulated accumulation of wealth among elites exacerbates economic inequality on a global scale. Conflict and displacement further intensify poverty, with countries like Syria and Yemen experiencing severe socio-economic decline due to protracted violence. According to the UNHCR (2023), forced displacement both results from and contributes to poverty by disrupting livelihoods and limiting access to essential services. Environmental and climate shocks, such as floods, droughts, and cyclones, disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, with the World Bank (2023) projecting that climate change could push over 130 million people into poverty by 2030. Moreover, the lack of formal employment opportunities in low-income countries drives many into insecure, low-wage informal work. Thornton (2021) highlights how caste-based exclusion in South Asia restricts access to education and employment, reinforcing generational poverty. Similarly, in Latin America, long-standing inequities in land distribution and educational access continue to sustain poverty cycles (De Ferranti et al., 2004).

Within the African continent, Sub-Saharan Africa remains home to a significant proportion of the global poor. Poverty in the region manifests in diverse and overlapping dimensions. A substantial segment of the population lives on less than \$2.15 per day, while over 280 million people face chronic undernourishment (World Bank, 2023; FAO, 2023). Inadequate access to

safe drinking water and sanitation affects roughly 400 million individuals, and limited access to quality education and healthcare services further undermines human development outcomes. The roots of poverty in Africa are deeply embedded in both historical legacies and contemporary challenges. Colonial-era economic structures, as described by Rodney (1981), prioritized resource extraction over human capital development, resulting in persistent underdevelopment. Weak governance and institutional failure continue to hinder effective public service delivery, with corruption cited as a major impediment by Transparency International (2022). Armed conflict and political instability remain prevalent in regions such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia, where displacement and infrastructure destruction are commonplace. Gender inequality is another significant barrier, as women often lack access to land, education, and financial services, limiting household resilience and economic advancement. Nigeria serves as a salient example; despite its oil wealth, widespread corruption hinders equitable distribution of resources. In contrast, Ethiopia continues to grapple with drought-induced food insecurity, particularly in rural areas.

Nationally, poverty is both monetary and multidimensional. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2021), 20.3 percent of Ugandans live below the national poverty line, with the Northern and Eastern regions bearing the highest burden. Key manifestations of poverty include inadequate income, poor access to quality education and healthcare, high underemployment, and limited ownership of productive assets. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED, 2021) identifies several drivers of poverty. Over 70 percent of Ugandans depend on subsistence agriculture, yet productivity remains low due to erratic rainfall, pest infestations, and limited access to modern farming inputs. Infrastructural deficiencies, particularly in transport and energy, isolate rural communities from markets and services. Uganda's youthful population presents both a challenge and an opportunity; however, the slow pace of job creation has left many young people unemployed or underemployed. Gender-based exclusion further exacerbates poverty, as women face systemic barriers to accessing land, credit, and leadership roles. Regional disparities are evident, with areas such as Karamoja experiencing chronic food insecurity and low school attendance. Urban informal settlements, like Katanga in Kampala, are marked by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and unstable livelihoods (UBOS, 2021; MoFPED, 2021).

According to the District Development Plan (2020/21–2024/25), poverty in Alebtong is characterized by high unemployment rates among youth and women, low agricultural productivity due to poor soils and limited inputs, and inadequate access to education and

healthcare (Alebtong District Local Government, 2020). School dropout rates are high, and healthcare facilities are often understaffed and under-resourced, with long distances and medicine shortages compounding the problem. Gender disparities are particularly acute among female-headed households. The causes of poverty in Alebtong are multifaceted and context-specific. The district is still recovering from the disruption caused by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict, which shattered local economies and social structures (Alebtong District Local Government, 2020). Climate variability, including frequent floods and droughts, further undermines agricultural output and damages infrastructure. Many remote communities become inaccessible during the rainy season, cutting off access to markets and services.

The absence of microfinance institutions limits access to credit, curtailing entrepreneurial activities. Although poverty alleviation programs such as the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) and the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) are in place, their effectiveness has been constrained by weak coordination, corruption, and low levels of community engagement. A 2022 Ministry of Gender assessment revealed that many women's groups under UWEP lacked access to mentorship and marketing opportunities, reducing the program's long-term impact (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2022).

2.2. Economic Empowerment as a Precursor for Poverty Reduction

Before articulating economic empowerment, it is vital that the concept empowerment is understood. Empowerment is concerned with the expansion of freedom of choice and actions and increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affects one's life. Similarly, Kabeer (2001) sees women's empowerment as a process through which women gain the ability to take ownership and control of their lives. Although the process of empowerment depends on women themselves involving consciousness raising, participation, and organizing themselves, it can also be facilitated through education, capacity building, training and other measures. Empowerment may also mean the process of change that gives individuals greater freedom of decision, choice and action. Therefore, a process of economic empowerment for women is dependent upon available resources and whether women have the skills to use them; access to economic opportunities; and control over economic benefits that can be used to achieve positive change. A woman is said to be economically empowered when she has: (i) the ability to succeed and advance economically; and (ii) the power to make decisions and act on economic decisions without interference. Schmitz (2009) defines women's

economic empowerment as the process which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society.

Economic empowerment is thus, a concept that advocates for equipping marginalized groups with the resources, skills, and opportunities needed to improve their economic well-being and achieve financial independence (de Haan & Melesse, 2018; Perezniето & Taylor, 2014). Central to this theory are financial autonomy, access to economic opportunities, and the dismantling of barriers that limit economic participation. It emphasizes self-reliance, sustainable income generation, and skill development as critical strategies for reducing poverty (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Sen, 2000). The theory draws from Sen's Capability Approach, which views poverty as a deprivation of opportunities and capabilities necessary for socioeconomic progress, and Rappaport's emphasis on agency and control in individual and community contexts. Together, these perspectives highlight the importance of enhancing both access to resources and decision-making capacities to foster economic empowerment (Kuklys & Robeyns, 2005; Zippay, 1995).

Key components of the economic empowerment include access to financial resources, the ability to make informed economic decisions, and the promotion of sustainable, independent livelihoods. The economic empowerment also addresses structural inequalities, particularly those related to gender and social exclusion, and their impact on economic participation. By empowering individuals, it aims to generate broader benefits, such as reinvestment in education, health, and community initiatives, thus creating an effect that extends beyond individuals to families and communities (McNeill, 2007; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Women economic empowerment is recognized as one means for reducing poverty and economic growth. Women play a significant role in Ugandan economy, and are highly visible in the micro and small enterprises sub-sector. The majority of them are engaged in small income generating self-employment in agriculture and non-agricultural activities with low prospect for growth. Vandana and Robert (2014) report that as a result of women's wide-ranging responsibilities; productive, domestic and community duties, they are generally involved in a broader range of tasks than men and will therefore require a wider range of technical knowhow on which to draw for their livelihood pursuits.

Clinton (2009) the former president of United States of America addressing the annual meeting of the Clinton Global initiative opines that "women perform 66 percent of the world's work, and produce 50 percent of the food, yet earn only 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent

of the property” The president maintains that whether the case is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, that empowering women would be critical part of the equation. Studies show that women are affected by poverty, susceptible to diseases, prone to discrimination, marginalization and environmental degradation which are all detrimental to women economic empowerment and poverty reduction (Danjuma, Muhammad, & Alkali, 2013). But when they are empowered, these will basically be reduced or completely alienated. The economic empowerment of women is therefore a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth and the achievement of all the millennium development Goals (MDGs). Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments (OECD, 2010).

2.3. Poverty Reduction Programs in Africa

Programs supporting women's entrepreneurship in Africa are instrumental in promoting economic empowerment and reducing poverty among women (Kabeer & Santos, 2017). These programs work to remove barriers that limit women's entrepreneurial capabilities, such as restricted access to financing, inadequate business training, and limited entry to markets (Amrita et al., 2022).

The Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) in Kenya, launched in 2007, is a government initiative providing women entrepreneurs with low-interest loans and business training in collaboration with microfinance institutions to ease capital access and offer technical support (Njuguna, 2016). As of 2022, WEF has benefited over a million women, leading to business growth, improved household incomes, and enhanced financial security (Kigundu & Ndungo, 2023). Despite its positive outcomes in both urban and rural areas, WEF faces issues such as high loan default rates, which are aggravated by factors like market competition, inflation, and administrative obstacles, particularly in remote areas (Ngelechei, 2014). These findings reflect a broader issue where limited financial access remains a significant obstacle for African women entrepreneurs (Medley, 2024). Similarly, South Africa's Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, although primarily focused on youth employment, has helped over 600,000 young women gain employment and entrepreneurship skills, primarily in urban sectors like retail and services. While this program enhances young women's financial independence, its urban-centric approach limits reach in rural regions, exemplifying a common urban-rural divide in African poverty reduction efforts (Surianarain & Urquhart, 2023).

Tanzania's Women Development Fund (WDF) provides microloans and grants to rural women entrepreneurs, with local councils facilitating access in underserved areas. The WDF has helped more than 300,000 women achieve financial stability and investment in sectors such as agriculture, retail, and crafts (Kilonge, 2024). However, inconsistent fund distribution and inadequate monitoring affect the program's sustainability, emphasizing the need for stronger oversight mechanisms to maintain impact in areas with limited market access and infrastructure (Ikasu & Matimbwa, 2019). In Nigeria, The National Women Empowerment Fund (NAWEF), initiated by the Nigerian government in 2017, promotes financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and poverty reduction among women, especially in rural areas. By providing low-interest micro-loans through institutions like the Bank of Industry, NAWEF has improved women's access to credit, encouraging small business growth and economic empowerment. Despite facing challenges such as limited rural reach, sustainability issues, repayment difficulties, and inadequate financial literacy training, NAWEF remains a significant contributor to women's empowerment and poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria (Ayadi, 2022; Olufemi, 2024).

The Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP) in Ethiopia, funded by the World Bank, supports female entrepreneurs by providing microloans, business development services, and technical training for micro and small enterprises (Buehren et al., 2024). The program has improved credit access, business growth, and financial inclusion but faces challenges like loan repayment issues, limited outreach to remote women, and low financial literacy. Sociocultural barriers also limit participation (Alebachew, 2020a). Rwanda's Women Guarantee Fund (WGF) tackles financial access challenges for women without collateral by offering financial guarantees for loan access, especially in sectors like tourism, agriculture, and retail. The program, managed by Rwanda's central bank, has reached nearly 40 percent of women entrepreneurs, yet high interest rates and processing fees deter some participants, reflecting broader trends where traditional financial structures fail to meet women's needs (Kabeer et al., 2012; Mukesha, 2010).

The South African Women Entrepreneurs' Network (SAWEN), founded in 2004 by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), was designed to address the barriers women face in entrepreneurship, such as limited capital access, lack of business skills, and gender discrimination (Molefe, 2019). Through training in areas like financial literacy, leadership, and digital tools, as well as facilitating networking opportunities, SAWEN aims to improve business strategies and profitability, especially in urban areas (Molefe, 2019). However, the program faces challenges in reaching rural women due to poor infrastructure, limited

technology access, and transportation issues (Moetsi, 2021), while SAWEN focuses on basic business skills, there is a gap in more advanced training, such as digital marketing, which is crucial for business sustainability in today's digital economy (UN Women, 2020).

The Women's Entrepreneurship and Livelihoods Program (WELP), established in Ghana through a partnership between the UNDP and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, is designed to promote the economic empowerment of rural women (UNDP, 2024). By providing access to microfinance, business training, and markets, the program aims to reduce poverty and enhance women's financial autonomy. Similar initiatives across Africa have demonstrated positive impacts on income generation and the sustainability of women-led businesses (Abor & Quartey, 2010). However, challenges persist, including irregular loan repayments, which compromise the effectiveness of microfinance schemes (Danaan, 2018), there is a critical need for advanced business skills, particularly in digital marketing and e-commerce, to enable rural women to compete effectively in the digital economy (Heeks & Bukht, 2018; Songwe, 2019). Socio-cultural barriers, such as entrenched gender norms and inadequate family support, further limit the entrepreneurial potential of women in rural settings (Chant, 2014; Kabeer et al., 2012). These challenges reflect broader structural inequalities that hinder women's entrepreneurship across the Global South.

In conclusion, although women entrepreneurship programs have demonstrated considerable potential in alleviating poverty and advancing economic empowerment, systemic challenges have hindered their full effectiveness. To unlock their complete impact, there is a need to adopt long-term, inclusive, and holistic approaches that integrate financial support, technical capacity building, and socio-cultural reforms. Such strategies are crucial for achieving sustainable poverty reduction for women across Africa.

2.4. Effectiveness of Poverty Reduction Strategies among Women in Africa

The effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies in combating poverty in Africa is a complex issue, marked by both achievements and enduring challenges. Key strategies, such as improving access to finance, offering business training, enhancing market access, and addressing socio-cultural barriers, have played significant roles in empowering women and reducing poverty (Buehren et al., 2024; Molefe, 2019). However, these initiatives often encounter substantial structural, cultural, and logistical obstacles that limit their ability to deliver long-term, sustainable impact (Alebachew, 2020b; Molefe, 2019).

Access to financing is a fundamental element of women's economic empowerment, as exemplified by programs such as Kenya's Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) and Nigeria's National Women Empowerment Fund (NAWEF). These initiatives have successfully expanded women's access to credit, particularly in rural areas, resulting in improved household incomes and increased entrepreneurial activities. For instance, WEF beneficiaries reported a 23 percent increase in household incomes (Kigundu & Ndungo, 2023). Nevertheless, challenges persist, especially with high loan default rates due to inflation, competition, and administrative inefficiencies. This situation demonstrates a paradox, although credit access has improved, the lack of complementary support, such as financial literacy and mentorship, prevents many women from effectively managing loans (Ikasu & Matimbwa, 2019). Consequently, the goal of fostering sustainable business growth remains elusive, with women continuing to rely on microloans without achieving long-term financial stability (Ngelechei, 2014).

Business Training and Capacity Building, poverty reduction programs such as South Africa's SAWEN and Ethiopia's Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP), have been effective in providing women with essential business management skills, including financial literacy and leadership. For instance, Ethiopia's Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP) increased participants' business revenue by 31 percent through training in leadership and financial management (Buehren et al., 2024; Molefe, 2019). However, there are gaps, especially in training related to digital marketing and e-commerce, which are critical in today's digital economy (Guo & Kiratikarnkul, 2024). Furthermore, many programs are focused on urban areas, excluding rural women and exacerbating existing inequalities. This urban-rural divide limits the overall impact of these initiatives, leaving women in remote areas disadvantaged and perpetuating gender disparities (Khethiwe, 2023; Moetsi, 2021).

Market Access Programs such as Ghana's Women Entrepreneurship and Livelihoods Program (WELP) and Tanzania's Women Development Fund (WDF) aim to connect women entrepreneurs to larger, more profitable markets, promoting income diversification and business growth. A case in point is Ghana's Women Entrepreneurship and Livelihoods Program (WELP) which has facilitated market linkages for over 10,000 women, increasing their earnings by 40 percent (Ikasu & Matimbwa, 2019). Although these initiatives have shown positive results, challenges like inadequate infrastructure and logistical barriers in rural areas continue to hinder progress. For instance, in Tanzania, inconsistent fund distribution and poor infrastructure have diminished the WDF's effectiveness in rural regions' growth (Ikasu &

Matimbwa, 2019). These challenges are part of a broader systemic issue where limited transportation and communication infrastructure restrict rural women's ability to fully benefit from such programs (Kigundu & Ndungo, 2023).

Although many programs provide basic financial literacy training, there remains a significant gap in advanced business management education. Many women entrepreneurs lack the skills necessary to handle complex aspects of business operations, such as investment strategies, tax planning, and scalability (Alebachew, 2020b). Without advanced financial and management education, women are more likely to experience financial mismanagement, leading to poor loan repayment rates and business failures (Niklas et al., 2024). Therefore, financial literacy training must evolve to address the broader financial challenges women face in scaling their businesses.

Lack of Continuous Support and Mentorship, One of the key weaknesses of many women's entrepreneurship programs is the absence of ongoing support and mentorship after the initial training phase. A study revealed that 74 percent of women entrepreneurs lacked follow-up support, contributing to financial instability (UN Women, 2020). Mentorship is essential for helping women grow their businesses, overcome market challenges, and ensure long-term success. Without continuous guidance, many women entrepreneurs remain trapped in cycles of debt and financial instability, hindering the scalability and sustainability of their businesses (UN Women, 2020). The lack of ongoing support limits the growth potential of women-led businesses and their ability to thrive in competitive markets (Goldstein et al., 2024).

Socio-cultural barriers remain one of the most persistent obstacles to the effectiveness of women's entrepreneurship programs. Programs such as WEDP in Ethiopia and SAWEN in South Africa have made strides in challenging traditional gender roles and encouraging women's participation in economic activities, but entrenched cultural norms, particularly in rural areas, continue to limit women's entrepreneurial opportunities (Alebachew, 2020b; Molefe, 2019). Deeply rooted gender norms and lack of family support further restrict progress, especially in rural communities where traditional roles are more rigidly enforced (Kabeer & Santos, 2017). This slow societal change underscores the limitations of many programs in overcoming these cultural constraints.

To ensure these programs achieve their intended impact, a more holistic approach is required. This includes integrating advanced business education, enhancing infrastructure, expanding rural outreach, and addressing deeply rooted socio-cultural norms. By adopting long-term,

inclusive strategies, African governments and stakeholders can better support women entrepreneurs and contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation and economic empowerment across the continent.

2.5. Implementation Challenges of Poverty Reduction Initiatives in Africa

Poverty reduction initiatives in Africa face a complex set of challenges that limit their effectiveness. Key issues include governance problems, financial constraints, social and cultural barriers, and reliance on foreign aid (Otoo et al., 2022).

There is broad agreement that governance challenges such as political instability, corruption, and lack of transparency severely hinder poverty reduction efforts. Coccia (2021) and Oatley (2022), emphasize the destabilizing effects of political changes that disrupt or redirect poverty initiatives, while Nwoke et al. (2023) and Hope (2023) discuss how corruption and weak accountability drain resources from intended beneficiaries, eroding both program effectiveness and public trust. Although views converge on the importance of governance improvements, there is divergence regarding the best approach. Towah (2019) argues on the importance of political stability for ensuring policy continuity, which is crucial for sustainable development. Similarly, Efunniyi et al. (2024) agreed that enhancing public financial transparency can improve accountability and foster trust in governance. Klitgaard (2023), advocates for anti-corruption measures to address governance issues, while others, like Masyk et al. (2023), stress the need for strengthening institutional capacity to enhance governance effectiveness. Poor governance is widely recognized as a significant barrier to poverty reduction, with proposed solutions varying between focusing on anti-corruption and institutional capacity-building. These divergent perspectives underscore the complexity of governance and its central role in poverty alleviation efforts.

Financial resources are a critical obstacle to effective poverty reduction initiatives for women in Africa, driven by a combination of structural challenges. African governments struggle to generate adequate domestic revenue due to a large informal economy and inefficient tax systems, which disproportionately affect women, particularly in rural and informal sectors where financial access is already limited (Mnthali, 2024; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024). Moreover, women face systemic financial exclusion, with barriers to credit, land, and other resources, compounded by the lack of gender-sensitive policies (Adera & Abdisa, 2023). Further complicating matters, high public debt burdens limit the funds available for social programs that could empower women (Smith, 2021). On the other hand Chang and Lebdioui

(2020) argue that economic volatility, driven by reliance on commodity exports, destabilizes financial resources for long-term poverty alleviation. Hope (2023) also points that inefficiencies in the allocation of available funds, often due to corruption and weak governance, further diminish the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts. To address these challenges, experts emphasize the need for reforms that prioritize gender-sensitive financial inclusion, improve domestic revenue collection, reduce dependence on foreign aid, and ensure efficient use of public funds to better address the specific needs of women (UNDP, 2021).

Social and cultural barriers, especially gender inequality and limited access to education, are also seen as major obstacles to poverty alleviation. Chatterjee and Dwivedi (2023) point to gender disparities in education, credit, and employment as factors that weaken the impact of poverty programs, particularly in rural areas where women face unique challenges. Von Braun et al. (2021) register limited educational access as a driver of generational poverty, restricting youth employment and mobility. Although the need to address social and cultural barriers is widely recognized, the emphasis on specific interventions differs. Cook and Kabeer (2023) call for gender-sensitive policies to address cultural norms limiting women's economic roles, while Berik (2022) argues on the importance of rural education access in poverty reduction. Patel (2023) suggests a comprehensive approach that includes both gender-sensitive policies and educational reforms. Thus, there is general agreement on the impact of social and cultural factors, though views diverge on whether educational access or gender inclusivity should be the focus.

Dependence on foreign aid and its associated conditionalities presents both financial and institutional challenges. aid conditions often restrict government flexibility to adapt policies to local needs (Lamore & Kotze, 2024; Zhao, 2021) while Uwizeyimana and Mangwanya (2022), suggest that long-term aid dependency erodes local institutional capacity by diverting focus from self-sustaining development. However, opinions vary on whether foreign aid should be considered a short-term solution or a longer-term support mechanism. Maruta et al. (2020) suggest gradually reducing aid dependence while strengthening local capacity, whereas Moyo (2021) advocates for an immediate shift towards locally led strategies. Some view foreign aid as an essential short-term relief measure, asserting that aid conditioned on institution-building can balance immediate support with progress toward self-sufficiency. In short, while aid dependency is broadly viewed as challenging, perspectives vary on whether aid should be phased out gradually or employed strategically to support capacity-building.

Conclusively, the obstacles encountered by poverty reduction initiatives in Africa necessitate comprehensive, region-specific strategies to achieve lasting results (Otoo et al., 2022). Essential elements of these strategies involve governance reforms, such as improving accountability and fostering political stability (Efunniyi et al. (2024), enhancing financial inclusion by increasing credit access, supporting financial literacy, and utilizing digital finance (Mnthali, 2024; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024). Promoting social equity through gender-sensitive policies, educational improvements, and cultural awareness initiatives (Patel, 2023), and reinforcing institutional frameworks by building local capacity and establishing robust monitoring systems. When these elements are integrated and tailored to meet the distinct needs of different regions, they form effective poverty reduction programs that address both structural and cultural challenges, fostering long-term economic resilience and social development across Africa (Lamore & Kotze, 2024; Zhao, 2021)

2.6. Gaps in the Reviewed Literature

Poverty reduction programs play a vital role in Africa's economic progress by addressing challenges like limited funding, insufficient training, and restricted market access (Kabeer & Santos, 2017). Although initiatives such as Kenya's Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) and South Africa's SAWEN have demonstrated success, their relevance to rural districts like Alebtong in Uganda was subject to investigation due to unique challenges such as loan defaults, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers (Ikasu & Matimbwa, 2019; Kigundu & Ndungo, 2023). The methodologies and sample sizes of these studies did not fully capture the dimensions of Uganda's rural settings, particularly regarding the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP).

Although past research has highlighted UWEP's efforts to improve women's access to credit, training, and markets, there is still little understanding of how the program is governed and managed, especially at the local level. Most studies focus on numbers, like how many women received loans, rather than looking at how decisions are made, how the program is monitored, or how well different actors work together. These governance issues matter because they can strongly influence whether the program truly works. This study, therefore, seeks to close that gap by examining how UWEP is structured and run in Alebtong District, and whether its governance systems help or hinder efforts to reduce poverty among women.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology that was used to achieve the objectives. It includes the research approach, research design, study area, and population, along with details on the sample size and selection procedures. Furthermore, it discussed the sources of data and data collection methods, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

3.1. Research Approach

This study employed a Qualitative research approach. This methodological framework aims at understanding phenomena through non-numerical data collection, focusing on meanings, experiences, and interpretations (Oranga & Matere, 2023). On the other hand, Creswell and Poth (2016) elaborate that this type of research focusing on discovering the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of participants, often using techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. This approach was selected because it allowed for a detailed exploration of the governance structures, community engagement, and implementation challenges. Qualitative research enabled an in-depth understanding of the UWEP and its impact on poverty reduction among women entrepreneurs, revealing barriers and opportunities that quantitative data would have missed. Engaging community members fosters ownership and participation. Methods like interviews, focus groups, and field observations allowed thematic analysis of governance structures, ensuring the research remains relevant and responsive to community needs (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 1998).

3.2. Research Design

Research design refers to the framework or blueprint for conducting a research project (Kapur, 2018). It explains the procedures necessary for obtaining the information needed to solve the research problem. For this case, an explanatory case study design was used. A case study design is a research method that involves a detailed investigation of a specific case or a small number of cases to provide rich, detailed awareness into a particular issue, process, or event (Yin, 2018). The explanatory case study research methodology enables researchers to investigate complex issues, revealing perceptions that might have been missed by broader surveys and helping to understand how different variables interact within specific environments (Stake, 1995). When examining the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) and its effects on poverty reduction in Alebtong District, this approach was particularly relevant due

to the area's distinct social, economic, and cultural factors. It allowed for a comprehensive assessment of UWEP's impacts on income and employment and gathers perceptions from stakeholders, including beneficiaries and local leaders (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018).

3.3. Study Area

The study was conducted in Alebtong District, located in northern Uganda. It is approximately 320 kilometres northeast of Kampala, which offers a unique rural setting that was crucial for understanding the impact of UWEP on poverty reduction in less urbanized areas. The district's predominantly agricultural economy provides an ideal environment for examining how small-scale entrepreneurship, particularly among women, can contribute to poverty reduction.

The research specifically focused on two sub-counties of Abia and Aloi because they were among the sub-counties implementing UWEP and where entrepreneurship activities were particularly active. In Abia sub-county, the study concentrated on three parishes of Abia, Aberidwogo, and Abangoimany while in Aloi sub-county, it selected the parishes of Amuria, Akwangkel, and Anara, where women's participation in UWEP was highly notable. The groups selected included Teramot women's catering services in Teramot village and Dot abedo Alebtong women's dance and Drama in Olengo "A" Akwangkel parish, In Anara parish Bed igen women's group in Tecwao village was selected. To-ipur women's hire of tents and chairs in To-ipur village Amuria parish was selected. In Abia sub-county, Can mito note Animal traction in Atwara village Aberidwogo parish, Apungi women's Animal Traction in Apungi village Abia parish and lastly in Abangoimany parish, Ngobadi village, Pit odong imon women's tents and chairs hire was selected.

3.4. Study Population

The study population primarily included women beneficiaries of UWEP from the sub-counties of Abia and Aloi in Alebtong District. This selection was essential, as these women directly experience the program's impact, enabling researchers to gain firsthand information into its effectiveness and the challenges they encounter. In addition, key informants such as official from the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, the District Community Development Office, the District Commercial Office, local community leaders, and UWEP focal persons provided important context and expert knowledge on the program's implementation and its overall impact within the community.

3.5 Sampling Procedure and Size

3.5.1. Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure for this study was a purposive sampling strategy, which targeted participants with direct involvement in UWEP. This approach was well-suited for qualitative research, prioritizing depth of understanding over generalization. Kothari (2004) supports purposive sampling for selecting individuals with relevant knowledge and experience, making women beneficiaries ideal for exploring UWEP's impact on poverty reduction. Patton (2014) emphasizes its flexibility in capturing information-rich cases, ensuring diverse perspectives, including key stakeholders. This study used a purposive sample technique, which allowed the researcher to carefully choose individuals with certain characteristics related to the study aims.

3.5.2. Sample size

Determining an appropriate sample size for studying the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) was essential for effective data collection and analysis. Scholars agree that qualitative research benefits from smaller, targeted samples that focus on depth rather than generalization. Kothari (2004) suggests a manageable yet insightful sample size, while (Creswell & Poth, 2016) recommends 20–30 participants to achieve data saturation. Patton (2022) emphasizes selecting information-rich cases. Morse (2000) further supports this by recommending 30 to 50 interviews to achieve comprehensive exploration and data richness. This range allows for capturing detailed and a detailed perspectives on UWEP's impact while maintaining manageable data. Data saturation in qualitative research helps determine sample size by identifying when no new information, themes, or insights emerge from further data collection. (Ahmed, 2025). The researcher began with a small sample, typically using purposive sampling, and collected data repeatedly from 50 participants while analyzing it for recurring patterns. Data collection continued until no new themes emerged, signaling that saturation has been reached. At this point, the researcher concluded that the sample size was sufficient, as additional data would not add significant value to the analysis.

The sample, composed of various categories of participants selected through purposive sampling, including 01 official from MoGLSD, 01 Senior CDO, 01 District Finance Officer, 04 District elected Leaders from Alebtong District. 01 District Focal Person and 02 Sub-County Focal Persons, 07 Focus Group Discussions FGDs, 04 Women Leaders in the District, 04 Cultural Leaders, and 04 Sub-County leaders, 06 parish chiefs, 03 parish development committees 04 Local council two chair persons, 04 opinion leaders and 04 local council one

chair persons. In total, the sample included 50 participants, which was necessary to achieve the need for comprehensive data collection while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis.

3.6. Data collection Methods.

Data collection entails the organized process of gathering information to validate or challenge specific assertions (Guest et al., 2013). This study utilized both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data was gathered through qualitative techniques, such as key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, which facilitated in-depth understandings and secure data management to achieve reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Secondary data was sourced from a review of relevant literature and online materials, offering additional context and reinforcing the research findings. These data collection methods are explained below.

3.6.1. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Semi-structured interviews were essential in obtaining detailed perceptions from knowledgeable individuals about the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) in Alebtong District. Using a purposive sampling strategy (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024), the study targeted key stakeholders, including an official from MGLSD, the Senior Community Development Officer, District Finance Officer, District and Sub-County Focal Persons, Women Leaders and Sub-County Leaders. These informants provided important perspectives on the program's implementation, financial management, and socio-cultural influences (Kalu, 2019). The perceptions gathered from these key informants enabled a comprehensive evaluation of UWEP's impact in the district (Gould et al., 2023).

3.6.2. In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

In-depth interviews with women leaders' beneficiaries explored their personal experiences and transformations, focusing on how UWEP has impacted poverty reduction. The flexible, open-ended nature of these interviews allows respondents to freely discuss their experiences, contributing to a rich body of qualitative data (Patton et al., 2017). This method enables the researcher to capture detailed narratives, providing insight into the program's effectiveness from the beneficiaries' perspectives (Hughes, 2016). The in-depth interviews participants included the UWEP group leaders, Cultural leaders, and youth leaders.

3.6.3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The focused group discussions provide qualitative researchers with the chance to systematically and concurrently interview multiple participants gathered together (Babbie, 2020). In this respect, 07 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with each group composed of 10 UWEP beneficiaries were organized from two sub-counties. FGDs encouraged dialogue on shared experiences, collective challenges, and community perceptions of UWEP. This method provided broader awareness into how the program has contributed to poverty reduction in Alebtong District (Boateng, 2012).

3.6.4. Observations

Non-participant observation was used to gain insights into the women's economic activities. Observations included visits to their enterprises, which provided a practical understanding of how participation in UWEP has translated into tangible economic outcomes (Cooper et al., 2004). This approach was complemented by the interview data by offering real-time observations of the beneficiaries' day-to-day business operations, allowing the researcher to witness firsthand the practical effects of the program (Moug, 2007).

3.6.5. Documentary Review

A documentary review was a crucial part of this research, providing essential secondary data that complements interviews and observations. This review analyzed key documents such as UWEP reports, District planning documents, and community development strategies to gain insights into the program's goals, implementation, and outcomes (Silverman & Patterson, 2021). For instance, UWEP reports from the District Focal person offered details on performance and challenges, while district plans highlighted how local governance supports the program. Reviewing these documents enriched the research by offering a comprehensive understanding of UWEP's impact (Bowen, 2009).

3.7. Data Presentation and Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was applied to organize transcriptions into themes related to poverty reduction strategies, effectiveness of UWEP and challenges faced by the program, and gender dynamics. This process identified both commonalities and differences in the participants' experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact (Guest, 2012).

3.8. Data Quality Control Measures

Wang et al. (1995) define data quality control as the assessment and management of data accuracy, consistency, and timeliness, ensuring that data is appropriate for its intended use. A comprehensive review of relevant literature, including a desk review, before collecting primary data in the field was conducted. In qualitative research, they recommend improving reliability and quality through triangulation. Triangulation is a research method that involves using multiple data sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives to enhance the credibility and validity of findings. The researcher also cross verified information from one participant by consulting another, thereby ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data collected. By combining different approaches, researchers can cross-verify results, reduce bias, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Noble & Heale, 2019). This strategy enhanced the trustworthiness and dependability of data collected.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Introduction letter was received from coordinator graduates studies department of political science and public administration Makerere University. Informed consent was obtained by clearly explaining the research objectives, potential benefits, and risks to participants, ensuring transparency and honesty. Confidentiality was maintained by safeguarding participants' personal information and preventing any disclosure that could reveal their identities, thereby fostering trust and obtaining reliable data. Objectivity was upheld by avoiding emotional involvement and personal biases, ensuring that data collection and analysis remain impartial (Guest et al., 2013). Anonymity was ensured by using codes rather than names to identify participants, protecting their identity.

3.10. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Studying the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) presented several challenges which included difficulties in accessing key stakeholders, logistical challenges in remote areas, and participants' reluctance. To address these, researchers had to build strong relationships with local leaders and schedule interviews in advance. Ensuring confidentiality and providing clear explanations also helped overcome participant concerns, while triangulating data sources and validating findings also improved data reliability. Finally, managing resource constraints through effective planning and adherence to the timeline.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH
FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets and discusses the study findings. The presentation and analysis are organized thematically, following the study objectives. The discussion begins with an evaluation of the interventions implemented under UWEP to reduce poverty, assessing the program's overall effectiveness in reducing poverty and Evidence-Based Practices to enhance UWEP impact on Poverty Reduction in Alebtong District. The study findings present a mixed picture. On one side, UWEP has played a role in empowering women and supporting in reducing poverty. On the other side, its impact has been limited due to constraints such as inadequate funding, governance challenges, politicization of the program and cultural constraints. These findings are articulated below

4.1. The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Before presenting the findings, it is essential to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants. This study considered age, gender, marital status, education, and profession as important variables in understanding the impact of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) on poverty reduction in Alebtong District. The details are summarized below.

Table 4.1: The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	10	20
Female	40	80
Age bracket		
18-31	17	34
31-45	25	50
45 -79	08	16
Marital status		
Married	30	60
Single	09	18
Not yet married	03	06
Divorced/separated	08	16
Educational background		
No education	00	00
Primary education	30	60
Secondary education	10	20
Tertiary/University level	10	20
Profession		
Farmers	28	56
Small business	12	24
Professional workers	10	20
Total	50	100

Source: primary data, 2025

The majority of the participants, 80 percent, were female, reflecting the mission of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) on poverty reduction among women. Only 20 percent of the participants were male, who were selected to provide a broader perspective on the program's implementation and impact, particularly from a local government or UWEP coordination viewpoint.

The findings revealed that 50 percent of the participants were aged between 31-45 years, 34 percent were between 18-30 years, and 16 percent were above 45 years. The predominance of

participants in the 31-45 age range is important because this group is highly active in income-generating activities and expected to benefit from entrepreneurship programs. Fewer older participants were found because most of them depend on their children for support.

The study found that 60 percent of the participants were married, which reflects the primary focus on households and family dynamics. The remaining 40 percent were either single, not yet married, or divorced/separated. The high proportion of married participants suggests that UWEP interventions benefit entire households, as spouses often collaborate to improve household income. The divorced participants also acknowledged that the training and financial support provided by UWEP were instrumental in helping them become self-reliant.

Most participants, 60 percent, had only attained primary education, while 20 percent had completed secondary education, and another 20 percent had university degrees. The lower levels of education among many participants indicated the target of UWEP to empower the most vulnerable women and also suggest that UWEP had to invest in extensive training to ensure that beneficiaries could effectively manage their businesses. Those with higher education were more likely to engage in diverse income-generating activities beyond farming.

A majority, 56 percent of the participants, were farmers, 24 percent were engaged in small businesses, and 20 percent were professional workers. This finding emphasizes the importance of UWEP's focus on agriculture and small-scale enterprises as key pathways to economic empowerment and poverty reduction. The professional workers included government officials, who are appointed and elected to deliver services to the people.

4.2. Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program Initiatives to Reduce Poverty in Alebtong District

This section presents the findings on how UWEP addressed poverty among women in Alebtong District. The study investigated and found that UWEP employs a variety of initiatives in its implementation to address poverty. These initiatives include entrepreneurial development, financial support, facilitating women's access to markets for their products and services, and promoting access to appropriate technology and value addition. These initiatives are indicated in the table below

Table 4.2: One showing the UWEP Initiatives

1	Entrepreneurship and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Needs based skills development• Business management knowledge• Capacity building through training and mentorship
2	Financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to grants and interest-free loans• Capital for business startups
3	Access to markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Market linkages• Support for product promotion, e.g., radio talk shows

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Based on the table above, it is important to present and explain the findings in detail. The presentation starts with the analysis of entrepreneurial development.

Entrepreneurial Development

To begin with, the study findings revealed that UWEP has adopted entrepreneurial development as its main strategy for poverty reduction in Alebtong district. The program supports women by helping them form business groups, receive financial literacy and business training, and access mentorship to grow and sustain their enterprises. The goal is not just to give out money, but to build the capacity of women to run their businesses effectively and independently. In Alebtong district, it was established that 98 women benefited from skills development training while 980 women benefited from mentorship based on follow-up support. Indeed, the study findings reveal how 1265 women benefited from business management before disbursement of funds that financed their entrepreneurial projects.

The study findings show that UWEP focuses heavily on business skill development as a key component to reduce poverty among women. The study reveals how business skills development is sustained through forming group enterprises in different ventures. Given that Alebtong District is predominantly rural, the findings revealed that agriculture remains the dominant economic activity with 30 women's groups were reported to be actively involved in

animal traction and livestock farming. Moreover, it was found that 24 women's groups were engaged in produce buying and selling, a practice that not only facilitates farmers' access to markets but also contributes to improved food distribution and community nutrition. Furthermore, event-related enterprises were found common in the area of research. For instance, 14 women's groups were involved in tent and chair hire services, while 20 women groups were engaged in agro-processing and other enterprises. This was justified by a key informant who revealed that;

As UWEP, our goal is to economically empower women by building their capacity to engage in viable group enterprises. In Alebtong District, we have supported the formation of 98 women's groups since 2016 as our strategy to reduce poverty, focusing mainly on agriculture and other income-generating activities. These groups were not just formed randomly; we worked closely with community leaders to identify suitable ventures such as animal traction, produce trade, tent and chair hire, and agro-processing, depending on what was practical and sustainable in each community (KII with District official Alebtong, 2025)

These findings are supported by researchers like Ajani (2024), who explains that developing business skills helps individuals grow and manage their enterprises more effectively. Similarly, Asrol and Ahmad (2018) argue that skill-building encourages entrepreneurial behavior, while the World Bank (2020) notes that such skills increase women's control over resources and help reduce poverty.

In short, UWEP's focus on building women's skills is helping them not only start businesses but also gain confidence, make informed decisions, and work toward long-term economic independence. This approach reflects the principles of capability approach, which emphasizes the importance of giving people the tools they need to take charge of their financial future. Findings indicate that UWEP insists on imparting business management knowledge through training before releasing funds. According to Section 3.1 (vi) of the UWEP Skilling Handbook, all group members must undergo at least three modules of training, covering essential topics like bookkeeping, leadership, financial management, and procurement. These sessions are often delivered in partnership with local artisans, accredited institutions, or business mentors.

In relation to the above, capacity building through mentorship and follow-up support has been a key initiative used by UWEP. Beyond the initial training and fund disbursement, these

support mechanisms have provided continuous guidance, skill reinforcement, and problem-solving assistance to about 980 UWEP beneficiaries. This has enabled women entrepreneurs to enhance their business strategies, improve financial management, and navigate market challenges effectively (MGLSD, 2024). Findings show that out of 7 groups interviewed, 06 testified having received capacity building and mentorship sessions from UWEP focal person after fund disbursement. The implementation of mentorship and follow-up support has involved regular business visits, advisory sessions, and networking opportunities facilitated by experienced mentors, such as District leaders and sub-county leaders. A sub-county chief explained the capacity building and mentorship process, stating that:

We do not just train women and leave them on their own. We make regular visits to their businesses to assess their progress, identify challenges, and provide hands-on solutions. Through one-on-one coaching sessions and peer learning groups, we guide them on business operations, financial planning, and marketing strategies. Follow-ups are done periodically to track business performance, and we also connect them to financial institutions and successful entrepreneurs for further support. (KII with sub-county Official, 2025).

Mentorship has been identified as a key factor in sustaining women-led enterprises. According to Rechter and Avnimelech (2024), mentorship provides ongoing guidance, skill reinforcement, and networking opportunities, which help women navigate business challenges and expand their enterprises. In Kenya, the Women's Enterprise Fund (WEF) includes mentorship as part of its financial support programs, ensuring that women receive continuous advisory services after receiving initial capital (Kigundu & Ndungo, 2023). Likewise, in Ethiopia, the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP) combines mentorship with financial training, leading to improved business performance and income levels (Buehren et al., 2024).

Through targeted training, mentorship, and access to financial resources, the strategy enables women to take control of their economic futures, fostering greater financial independence, sustainable livelihoods, and improved social standing. According to Ubfal et al. (2022) combining entrepreneurship and financial education improves business profits for women. Similarly, Lusardi et al. (2020) noted that women with financial knowledge are more likely to save, budget, and avoid poor financial decisions. Case studies from Rwanda and Bangladesh

also confirm that financial literacy boosts long-term business success among women entrepreneurs (Bhowmik & Islam, 2024; Nsengimana et al., 2017).

Financial Support

In relation to financial support for women, UWEP has the component of financial support as a key strategy to reduce poverty in Alebtong District. Financial support is understood as monetary assistance aimed at reducing financial burdens and promoting long-term economic development, taking forms such as cash transfers, microloans, social welfare programs, and grants (Armendáriz & Morduch, 2010; Devereux, 2001). In relation to UWEP, as at the end of June 2020, the Program had received a cumulative release of UGX 107 billion which is 18.1 percent of the initial Public Investment Plan (PIP) allocation of UGX 585 billion for the first 5 years [FYs 2015/2016 to 2019/2020]. The table below shows the detailed financing and resource allocation for the Program.

Table 4.3: Showing financial resource allocation 2015/2020 financial year

Financial year	PIP Allocation (UGX million)	Budget (UGX million)	Release (UGX million)	Performance Rating
2015/2025	117,000	3,000	2,150	71.7percent
2016/2017	117,000	43,000	24,339	56.6percent
2017/2018	117,000	39,176	30,762	78.5percent
2018/2019	117,000	38,733	33,220	85.8percent
2019/2020	117,000	34,722	16,534	47.6percent
Total	585,000	158,632	107,008	67.5percent

Source: Auditor General Report, 2021.

The program document of December 2015, stipulates that the funds were to be allocated among the three Program Components as follows; Institutional Support with 15 percent, Capacity and Skills Development with 15 percent and Women Enterprise Fund with 70 percent. This was amended to Institutional Support (20 percent), Capacity and Skills Development (10 percent) and Women Enterprise Fund (70 percent) in the revised program document of December 2019. This was done to provide sufficient resources for the training, technical support and supervision of groups.

More findings reveal that the funds allocated to women’s groups are managed as interest-free revolving loans to ensure the sustainability of the Program. In Alebtong District it was

established that UWEP has disbursed UGX 824 million from the national total disbursement of 137 billion shillings from 2016 to 2024. This strategy has translated into tangible outcomes in sub-counties of Alooi and Abia in Alebtong District, where selected women's groups have received financial support to initiate or expand their enterprises. A total of UGX 64,460,000 was distributed to 83 members. For instance, Teramot Women Catering Services received UGX 8,510,000 for a group of 15 members, while Apungi Women's Group received UGX 11,300,000 to support animal traction activities. These funds have enabled women to engage in income-generating ventures ranging from catering to agricultural mechanization and event service provision. This was justified by a key informant who revealed that;

The total funds disbursed to 98 groups as of October, 2024 amount to UGX 824,718,000 million. These funds have been allocated to support women entrepreneurs in key sectors such as agriculture, trade, and services. Our objective is to promote economic empowerment by providing financial assistance that enables sustainable business growth. (KII with District official Alebtong, 2025)

These findings are consistent with Armendáriz and Morduch (2010) argument that access to microfinance, particularly through interest-free loans provides a vital entry point for financially excluded populations to engage in productive economic activities. Similarly, Kabeer (2005) emphasizes that access to financial resources enhances women's agency, enabling them to participate meaningfully in market-based ventures. From a theoretical standpoint, this strategy aligns with the Capability approach, which posits that access to productive resources strengthens women's decision-making power and contributes to poverty reduction.

As a procedure, financial literacy training has to be considered before the disbursement of funds under UWEP. This played an important role in enhancing women's capacity to manage finances and make informed financial decisions. This training equips women entrepreneurs with practical skills in budgeting, bookkeeping, saving, and loan management (MGLSD, 2015). Participants reported that financial literacy has enabled them to effectively allocate resources, maintain accurate financial records, cultivate a culture of saving, and better understand loan repayment processes. For example, during an in-depth interview, a woman leader in Apungi village noted that:

Loan management training enhanced our financial discipline. We were able to save UGX 884,000 for loan repayment promoting our level of transaction with

formal financial institutions such as KCB Bank a behavior that was uncommon before the training. (In-depth Interview with a woman leader Apungi village, 2025).

Indeed, before release of funds to the Women Groups Accounts, the Groups must be thoroughly trained in bookkeeping, financial management, group dynamics and others as further explained. Training of Women Groups takes the form of hands-on practical experience and is facilitated by accredited Vocational Training Institutions or Local Artisans and Leading Individual Entrepreneurs. At least 80percent of the training time is devoted to practical tasks with clear outputs in accordance with the expected skills levels set for each trade. In addition to the training, the funded women groups handle the day to day running of their group enterprises through the Enterprise Management Committees (EMC), the Procurement Committees (PC) and the Social and Accountability Committees (SAC) that are usually elected at group formation. All the group members are entitled to equal benefits under the Program. The Enterprise management committees have a delegated authority to manage the enterprise on a daily basis on behalf of the groups. Women Group Procurements are guided by the UWEP Procurement Guidelines which are in line with the existing PPDA guidelines and Regulations for Government of Uganda. At the Community level, it was established that women groups are responsible for procurement of their productive assets and tools through the use of community procurement committees. It is this committee which helps to identify service providers, negotiate and recommend to the Enterprise Management the inputs required by the group to implement the women enterprise.

In terms of managing the revolving funds, it is required that Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social development establish UWEP Recovery Fund Account at the Bank of Uganda, where repayments from the district would be deposited. This setup facilitates effective planning, coordination, and management of the revolving funds by the Ministry. Moreover, the Permanent Secretary-MGLSD is responsible for accounting for UWEP funds released to the MGLSD, while the Accounting Officer at the Alebtong Local Government and the beneficiary women groups are responsible for the accountability of funds disbursed to them at the District and community levels. In this respect, the funds disbursed to each Women Group are treated as a revolving Fund to be repaid in accordance with the Financing Agreement between the Alebtong District and the beneficiary Women Group. This process is witnessed by the Resident District Commissioner.

In the same vein, it was further established that the scheduling of the repayment of the loan is based on the Enterprise maturity period and the business plan. Copies of the repayment plans agreed upon between the Alebtong District and Women's Group are submitted to MGLSD. All Women Groups are required to deposit their repayments into the District UWEP Recovery Account and receive a receipt from the district for every instalment made. With the approval of the Accountant General, Alebtong District, like other districts is required to open two special accounts known as the Women Enterprises Account and the UWEP Recovery Account to handle the funding of women groups and repayments respectively. The district maintains a ledger for each women's group for purposes of monitoring and reporting on the repayments to MGLSD. Also, the Alebtong district is supposed to submit financial reports on the status of recoveries of the Revolving Fund to Permanent Secretary Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (PS/MGLSD) on a monthly basis from the planned start of repayments. It is from this that the MGLSD ensures proper planning, coordination and management of the revolving funds.

These findings are supported by Lusardi et al. (2020), who confirm that financial literacy empowers women to budget, save, and access credit, thus improving their financial decision-making capabilities. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2018), in their study found that women with financial literacy training are more likely to maintain business growth and prevent financial mismanagement. Furthermore, evidence from Bangladesh's Grameen Bank model shows that integrating financial education into microfinance programs enables women to transition from subsistence activities to sustainable entrepreneurship (Bhowmik & Islam, 2024). Therefore, when individuals especially women are equipped with knowledge and control over financial resources, they are better positioned to make informed decisions, manage risks, and improve their livelihoods. By imparting financial skills like budgeting, saving, and loan management, the training ensures that women are not just passive recipients of funds, but active agents in their economic journey. In this way, financial literacy becomes more than just a tool it becomes a catalyst for meaningful and lasting empowerment for poverty reduction.

Access to market

Market access was another important initiative that UWEP considered essential in reducing poverty in Uganda. The study findings reveal that market access is the ability of women entrepreneurs to reach buyers and sell their products and services in competitive markets. UWEP documents how this process involves improving linkages to local, regional, and national markets and support for product promotion. In this regard, market access is essential for women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses beyond local markets and maintain sustainable growth. As stipulated in UWEP Program 2015, one of the key objectives is to improve women's access to markets for their products and services. To be sure, section 2.5 of the UWEP program sets specific targets, aiming to have 5,000 women benefit from market access initiatives in the first phase of 2015-2018.

The study findings in Alebtong district, indicate that 24 groups totaling to 360 beneficiaries involved in produce buying and selling have directly benefited from the market access strategy by 2024. As a means of accessing the market, women groups in Alebtong have organized exhibitions, trade fairs, performances, and public procurement processes through which the beneficiaries participate. For example, the Dot Abedo Music, Dance, and Drama (MDD) group, comprising 15 members, narrated having been invited to perform at major events within and beyond the district. The aim was to exhibit their agricultural produce and disseminating information of what they produce. Similarly, the Teramot Women's Catering Group, also with 15 members, would be contracted to provide catering services during official sub-county meetings. These engagements not only increased the groups' income but also highlighted UWEP's success in linking women entrepreneurs directly with buyers and institutions that value and utilize their services. This initiative was echoed by a sub-county leader who shared,

We chose to work with Teramot Women's Catering Group because they have demonstrated quality and reliability. By hiring them for official meetings, we not only receive excellent service but also facilitate market access (KII with sub-county official Alebtong, 2025)

These findings align with Davidson (2018), who argues that participation in community and formal events enhances the visibility of women-led businesses, thereby increasing their market opportunities. Ubfal (2024) further argues that institutional contracts not only legitimize women's enterprises but also support their expansion and credibility. Similarly, Omar et al. (2020) note that robust business networks are essential for promoting knowledge exchange and

entrepreneurial growth. The experience in Alebtong District mirrors these findings, indicating that when women are given access to platforms that connect them with buyers and decision-makers, their confidence and economic outcomes improve significantly. These findings also resonate with the principles of economic empowerment and capability theory, which emphasizes the importance of access to economic resources, markets, and institutional support in enabling women to achieve financial independence. UWEP's market linkage strategy demonstrates how structured access to economic opportunities can strengthen women's autonomy and promote sustained poverty reduction.

Another means of enhancing women's access to markets was the deliberate effort for product promotion. It was established that this strategy played a key role in enabling women entrepreneurs to increase the visibility and competitiveness of their products, which in turn improved business viability and household income. Evidence from the field in Alebtong district reveals how UWEP employed multiple platforms for product promotion. These included radio programs emerging as a particularly effective tool for disseminating market information to beneficiaries. At the national level, UWEP staff from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) reported participation in over 20 radio talk shows and at least 6 television programs by 2024. The program also used print media such as The Independent Magazine and New Vision and social media campaigns to reach a wide demographic. Locally, in Alebtong District, the UWEP focal person reported that the district had conducted four radio talk shows dedicated to UWEP. These programs have featured content on market dynamics, including pricing trends, seasonal product demand, and business opportunities both within and beyond district boundaries. Such programming often includes contributions from trade officers, successful entrepreneurs, and cooperative leaders who offer tailored advice on how to enhance product competitiveness. This outreach has had tangible impacts. During a focus group discussion in Anara Parish, a participant shared her experience of adapting her production schedule based on insights gained from a UWEP-sponsored radio forum:

"Through this radio business forum, I learned that school uniforms are in high demand at the start of each term. Traders and buyers explained when parents usually purchase uniforms, so I adjusted my production schedule. Now, I sew more uniforms before schools reopen, and my sales have increased." (FGD, Bedigen tailoring group, Anara Parish, 2025)

The above finding is consistent with Delovieres et al. (2025), who emphasize the value of strategic information channels especially radio and community-based communication in enhancing entrepreneurs' understanding of market opportunities. Ubfal (2024) also underscores the significance of accessible media in enabling rural women to compete effectively by responding to real-time market signals. Therefore, the increased access to information, strengthens women's agency and economic autonomy. In the context of poverty reduction, product promotion through radio and media platforms serves as a mechanism to boost income-generating potential, enabling women to make better business decisions, improve sales, and invest in household welfare.

4.3. The Efficacy of UWEP in Poverty Reduction among Women in Alebtong District, Uganda

Findings from Alebtong District show that the success of UWEP largely depends on how it is governed, how funds are disbursed, and how much say beneficiaries have in the decisions that affect them. In practice, the program runs through several layers from national ministries to district and sub-county offices but gaps in coordination and limited decision-making power at the local level have made service delivery less effective. When it comes to finances, the process of disbursing funds through multiple offices often causes long delays. This has been especially problematic for women running seasonal businesses, like farming, who rely on timely support. On the ground, women's involvement in decision-making is uneven. Some groups actively participate in planning their projects, while others say they are simply told what to do by the technocrats and politicians, with little room to contribute their own ideas. Overall, these challenges in leadership, funding, and participation are key to understanding what helps or hinders UWEP's ability to truly empower women and reduce poverty in the district. These issues are discussed below

The Governance structure of UWEP and its Effectiveness

To begin with, governance structure of UWEP is central to the success and sustainability of poverty reduction programs. When governance is marked by clear accountability, transparency, fair distribution of resources, and inclusive engagement of all stakeholders, it lays a strong foundation for effective service delivery. These qualities enable programs to respond better to local needs and produce more lasting results. In the case of UWEP, the program was managed through a multi-level institutional setup that brings together national, district, and community actors. Its effectiveness can be understood by examining three important aspects which include;

how clearly roles and responsibilities are defined, how well different stakeholders coordinate their efforts, and how decision-making power is shared across levels. These factors directly influence the program functions, and how sustainable its outcomes will be over time.

In terms of roles and responsibilities among implementing actors, it was found out that this governance aspect was a foundational aspect of effective UWEP program governance. Research findings show that the governance structure of UWEP involves several layers of actors, with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) acting as the central coordinating body. The Ministry sets policy, issues guidelines, and provides national-level monitoring. At the district and sub-county levels, UWEP committees identify and vet potential beneficiary groups. Community Development Officers (CDOs) are tasked with mobilization, training, and monitoring, while the Uganda Microfinance Support Centre (UMSC) facilitates fund disbursement and financial literacy training.

However, In Alebtong District, UWEP faces challenges due to unclear roles, largely because the program lacks separate structures at the district level. Instead, it operates within the broader government framework, where personnel are tasked with multiple roles. For example, Community Development Officers (CDOs) also serve as the UWEP focal persons, blending community development duties with program coordination. While this arrangement may appear efficient, it creates confusion, especially when the responsibilities of CDOs overlap with those of other local actors, such as the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) and sub-county UWEP committees.

As a Community Development Officer who also serves as the UWEP focal person, it's challenging to manage the multiple roles. Since there is no dedicated structure for UWEP at the district level, my responsibilities often overlap with those of other local actors, like the CAOs and the sub-county UWEP committees. This creates confusion, causes delays in decision-making, and sometimes leads to repeated efforts, which in turn affects the overall effectiveness of the program. (In-depth interview with CDO Abia sub county, 2025)

These observations align with literature suggesting that separate, specialized structures are key to effective program implementation. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015) argue that successful social protection programs in sub-Saharan Africa rely on clear, decentralized governance systems with well-defined responsibilities at each level of implementation. Furthermore, Grindle (2007) emphasizes that effective governance outcomes depend not only on the presence of institutions but also on the clarity and predictability of roles and

responsibilities among stakeholders. From the perspective of institutional theory, which highlights that organizational behavior and outcomes are shaped by formal rules and defined roles, the experience in Alebtong illustrates that UWEP's effectiveness depends not only on strong policies but also on ensuring that roles are clearly communicated and understood at the grassroots level.

The second aspect with governance effectiveness is coordination among stakeholders in UWEP. The UWEP program is built on a collaborative approach that brings together actors from national ministries, district offices, sub-county officials, financial institutions, and community structures. In theory, tools like joint planning meetings, shared reports, and integrated monitoring systems are meant to keep everyone aligned and informed, ensuring that services reach women in a timely and effective way. In Alebtong District, poor coordination among departments like Community Development, Commercial, and Production has made it difficult to implement UWEP smoothly. Findings show that in Aloi Sub-County, women's groups faced delays in getting funds and irregular training, mainly because key departments and financial institutions were not working closely together. These gaps in communication and planning have slowed progress and weakened support for women-led projects, showing the urgent need for better teamwork and clearer roles within the district.

The above arguments is supported by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015) who warn that even well-designed programs can falter if local-level coordination is weak. From the perspective of institutional theory, which emphasizes both formal systems and day-to-day practices, Alebtong's experience reveals that gaps in communication and unclear responsibilities can hold back progress of poverty reduction programs.

The third aspect with governance question of UWEP was about power dynamics and decision-making authority. Power distribution within UWEP's governance system influenced how effectively the program was implemented at the local level. While strategic control remained with the MGLSD, operational responsibilities were largely delegated to district and sub-county actors such as CDOs, UWEP Focal Persons, and Sub-County Technical Planning Committees.

In Alebtong District, findings reveal that although local actors were closest to the beneficiaries and possessed contextual knowledge of community needs, their decision-making power was often limited. For instance, CDOs in sub-counties of Aloi and Abia reported that they were responsible for mobilizing women's groups, guiding proposal development, and monitoring progress, yet they had little say over final fund approval or adjustments to project guidelines.

Aloi UWEP focal person expressed frustration that proposals vetted at the sub county level sometimes faced delays at the district level due to rigid bureaucratic processes or unclear lines of authority. To be sure, local UWEP committees indicated they were not always consulted on key decisions affecting the groups they oversee. One participant in Aloi Sub-county shared that;

We often receive directives from the district without prior consultation, even on matters that require local input. This top-down decision-making structure has occasionally led to delays in project approvals, reduced local ownership, and limited the program's adaptability to on-the-ground realities. (In-depth interview with woman leader dot Abedo Group, Akwangkel parish, January, 2025)

These experiences in Alebtong are consistent with broader critiques of centralized governance in poverty reduction programs. As Grindle (2007) notes, excessive centralization can limit flexibility and responsiveness at the point of service delivery. Likewise, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015) argue that effective decentralization where local actors are empowered with both responsibility and authority is key to achieving more responsive and sustainable poverty reduction initiatives. From an institutional theory perspective, the balance of formal authority and informal practices is critical. In Alebtong, the limited autonomy of local actors limits their ability to adapt the program to local realities, weakening program effectiveness and slowing progress toward women's economic empowerment.

Participation of Beneficiaries in key Decision-making

Beneficiary participation in decision-making is a central pillar of inclusive development program. Within the UWEP, the extent to which women are involved in shaping the projects they benefit from is essential to understanding the program's impact on poverty reduction. In Alebtong District, however, findings suggest that beneficiary participation remains limited, particularly beyond the initial stages of program implementation. While UWEP includes sensitization sessions where women are introduced to the program's goals and requirements, these meetings are often one-directional and focus on compliance rather than collaboration. Findings indicate that out of 07 Women's groups interviewed from Aloi and Abia sub-counties, 03 women groups revealed that they were largely informed about pre-set guidelines, timelines, and approved business categories, with little room to influence major decisions. For instance,

in Aloi Sub-county, women reported being told which projects were advisable without much opportunity to challenge or adapt those suggestions.

It was only in Can mitonote women's group in Abia Sub- County who was allowed to propose Animal traction project based on local demand, and this proposal was accepted. Nevertheless, such cases were the exception. In most other instances, technical officers advised women toward produce buying and tailoring ventures, options seen as easier to monitor or "less risky." Decisions related to fund release and monitoring were also described as non-participatory. Women said that once business plans were approved, they had no control over how and when funds were released, nor were they consulted about timelines or follow-up support. A group leader in Pit odong imon women's group lamented that;

They listen to us during meetings, but decisions are already made. It feels like we are just following instructions. We were told money was coming, we waited, and no one to consult. (In-depth interview with a group leader abangoimany Parish, 2025).

The observed top-down structure of UWEP implementation in Alebtong aligns with Mansuri and Rao (2013), who argue that community-based programs tend to be more successful when beneficiaries actively shape and manage interventions, rather than being passive recipients of externally planned services. Similarly, Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) argue that for participation to be meaningful, it must extend beyond consultation and involve actual influence over decision-making processes. In the UWEP context, however, procedural participation where women are involved only in preliminary activities overshadows substantive participation, where they could contribute to planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Moreover, the procedures of financial disbursement to beneficiaries and its outcome from UWEP has not been effective. The flow of funds from the central government to the women's groups plays a pivotal role in shaping the program's overall success. The structure, speed, and adequacy of these financial channels directly influence not only the timely availability of resources but also the degree of empowerment and long-term sustainability achieved by the beneficiaries. A critical aspect of UWEP is the process by which funds are allocated and distributed to beneficiaries. It was established that the fund flow follows a multi-level structure, starting from the central government and ending in the bank accounts of the individual groups.

However, delays between the approval and actual disbursement of funds reduced the program's effectiveness, especially for businesses with time-sensitive needs, such as those in agriculture.

The report from UWEP focal person Alebtong District on October, 2024 confirmed that over UGX 126 million recovered and deposited into the UWEP account had not yet been disbursed to intended recipients. Despite successful recovery efforts, the redistribution process remained stagnant, illustrating systemic delays in fund circulation. This delay in the disbursement process highlights the weakness in the fund flow system. Prolonged processing times reduce the usefulness of the funds, especially for ventures that rely on specific seasons. One of the participants commented that;

“The delay in receiving UWEP funds has frustrated many women's groups in our area. Some of them applied and got approval, but waited over a year without any money. By the time the funds come, the planting season is already gone, and the business plans are no longer viable. This discourages the women and affects the success of their projects.”(In-depth interview with LCI Chairperson, Apungi village, Abia parish, 2025)

The findings align with Mayoux (2001) who confirms that inefficiencies in fund recovery and redistribution severely compromise the developmental outcomes of public microfinance programs, particularly among rural women. Cheston and Kuhn (2002) also stress the importance of aligning financial support with seasonal agricultural cycles to optimize outcomes for rural entrepreneurs. Moreover, World Bank (2014) notes that institutional bottlenecks and weak accountability systems are key barriers to the effectiveness of revolving fund schemes in Africa. As Kabeer (2005) highlights, access to credit alone is insufficient for economic empowerment unless coupled with timely delivery and supportive infrastructure. These delays also challenge the core principles of economic empowerment, which stress the importance of timely access to resources to facilitate meaningful participation in economic activities. Empowerment requires that women have the financial resources they need at the right time to make decisions and act on their goals. Delayed funds undermine this process by reducing the relevance and responsiveness of the program to local needs. In terms of poverty reduction, delays in fund disbursement limit the program's ability to support long-term, sustainable economic development.

Another important aspect detected during the fieldwork was the adequacy of the funds allocated to the beneficiary groups. It was established that UWEP typically provided between UGX 3 million and UGX 12.5 million per group, depending on variables such as the group's size and

the nature of the proposed activities. While these amounts may appear substantial, many women's groups report that they are insufficient for establishing and maintaining viable businesses, particularly those requiring capital-intensive resources or benefiting a large number of members. More field data from Akwangkel teramot women catering group indicated that the funds they received were inadequate to meet the essential needs of their enterprises. For instance, they had planned to establish a catering service with 1000 chairs, but we were allocated only UGX 8 million sufficient to purchase just 250 chairs and cover minimal startup expenses. Similarly, one beneficiary lamented that;

Can-mito-note Animal traction with 14 members intended to purchase 28 oxen and 14 ox ploughs to be shared among members. However, we received only UGX 9 million, which fell short of covering the required expenses (FGD, Can mito note women's group Aberidwogo parish, Atwara Village, January 2025).

These findings align with Ledgerwood (1999), who emphasizes that timely access to sufficient capital is vital for the success of small businesses, particularly for women in rural settings. Similarly, Mayoux (2001) argues that, without sufficient financial resources, women's entrepreneurial ventures remain at the subsistence level and seldom scale into transformative enterprises. From a theoretical perspective, these challenges undermine the core principles of economic empowerment that underpin UWEP. True empowerment demands that women have the necessary resources and control to engage in meaningful and sustainable economic activities. Insufficient or irregularly distributed funds diminish this control and limit the transformative potential of entrepreneurship. About poverty reduction, the inability of women's businesses to expand or even survive due to insufficient capital means that UWEP may risk becoming a short-term aid initiative rather than a sustainable tool for long-term poverty alleviation.

Furthermore, interest rates and revolving fund was a fundamental component of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) whose efficiency was questioned. Although officially promoted as interest-free, a service fee of 5–10 percent was typically levied to cover administrative costs, effectively acting as a disguised form of interest. Beneficiaries are expected to repay the funds within one to two years, but the success of this system largely hinges on the consistency and efficiency of loan recovery.

This highlights systemic challenges within UWEP's repayment framework. Poor institutional support particularly the lack of continuous training and follow-up contributes to weak business

outcomes and, consequently, low repayment rates. These findings align with development finance literature. Khandker (2005) stresses that for revolving funds to be sustainable, they must be accompanied by non-financial support like mentorship and market access. Similarly, Hulme and Mosley (1996) argue that in the absence of such structures, small loans are unlikely to produce meaningful long-term benefits or repayment compliance.

From a theoretical lens, the revolving fund's underperformance undermines key pillars of capability theory, particularly capacity building and financial autonomy. When women lack the skills and institutional backing to succeed in their enterprises, their potential to use microfinance as a tool for escaping poverty diminishes. As a result, UWEP's broader goal of reducing poverty through sustainable economic engagement is weakened. Strengthening business support systems, enhancing financial literacy, and ensuring consistent follow-up are therefore essential steps to improve fund recovery, promote empowerment, and safeguard the long-term impact of the program.

The capacity building and skills development in poverty reduction

According to section 2.5 of the UWEP program document, 10,000 women were supposed to receive funds under the skills and capacity development component by 2019/2020. From the review of the progress reports and the UWEP Master Schedule, I noted that only 4,185 women were financed through the skills and capacity development component, achieving only 42 percent of the target country wide. Furthermore, the UWEP Program document, 2015 stipulates the funding allocation criteria for the three Program Components, namely, Institutional Support (15 percent), Capacity and Skills Development (15percent) and Women Enterprise Fund (70 percent). This allocation criteria was amended in the revised Program document, 2019, to imply Institutional Support (20 percent), Capacity and Skills Development (10 percent) and Women Enterprise Fund (70 percent). However, from the review of the UWEP phase 1 report of June 2020, the capacity and skills development component was allocated only UGX.2,375,827,784, which is equivalent to 2.2 percent in the first five years of implementation instead of UGX.15,224,495,407 required.

During the interviews with the study participants, it was established that the under allocation of funds to the capacity and skills development component was attributed to non-prioritization of the component; the failure to develop specific forms for the capacity building fund; and the failure to provide sufficient information about the component to the women groups to enable them apply for the capacity/skills funds as stated in the UWEP Progress report of October,

2017. Similarly, the UWEP “End of Phase1 report, 2020” also indicated that limited uptake of capacity and skills development component in part resulted from the limited popularization of this component amongst beneficiaries and the fact that funds accessed under this component must be paid back by the women beneficiaries. This requirement deterred the women groups from applying for these funds.

Interviews with focal point persons and women groups in Alebtong district revealed that they were not receiving as many applications from women under the capacity and skills development component due to the requirement for the women groups to pay back the funds. The groups instead preferred a component where all funds were directed to starting up an enterprise (WEF). This subsequently resulted in low applications for the capacity and skills development component. Further clarification sought from the women groups visited showed that none of the groups had applied to benefit from UWEP through the capacity and skills development component. In their response, participants argued that that they were not aware that they could benefit from the capacity and skills development component. This resulted from inadequate sensitization from district and sub county officials about the capacity and skills development component.

The researcher further noted that there was a lack of detailed training programs for women groups in the different subcounties of Alebtong district to ensure all aspects of the training are covered. The CDOs interviewed availed no training programs and reports following the trainings. In addition, an interview with Management of UWEP revealed that UWEP training officers did not regularly supervise the trainings delivered by the district/municipality officials to ensure the trainings delivered are of the required quality. Management explained that UWEP did not have enough capacity in terms of staff and funding to fully supervise such trainings. It should be noted that the failure to achieve the planned targets and capacity and skills development may impact the Program’ s ability to achieve its objective of empowering women with skills to start and manage enterprises and consequently reduce poverty among them.

To get more clarifications on why the capacity training was ineffective, Alebtong district management explained that according to the program guidelines, Skills and Capacity Development Funds have been part of the revolving funds which beneficiaries were expected to borrow and pay back just like is the case with WEF. However, it was established that the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development was in the process of seeking approval from Cabinet to amend the Program implementation guidelines with a view to have funds under

the component managed at the MGLSD. This would enable the Ministry to carry out adequate skills development for all women beneficiaries under the Program. Under the current arrangement, the Ministry had sensitized both LGs and Women Beneficiaries on the importance of this component however majority of the women continue to prefer Women Enterprise Fund to skills and capacity development. In the next section, I argue the evidence-based Practices of improving UWEP as a means of reducing poverty in Uganda

4.4. Evidence-Based Practices to enhance UWEP impact on Poverty Reduction in Alebtong District

Having analyzed the UWEP poverty reduction initiatives and its effectiveness, this study presents evidence based practices for UWEP to reduce poverty among women in Uganda. To start with ways of enhancing financial sustainability and operational efficiency, the study participants noted that UWEP needs to prioritize ring-fencing operational funds and adopting disbursement schedules aligned with the agricultural and trading calendars of the target communities. The study participants explained how ring-fencing ensures that administrative and capacity-building costs are protected from budget cuts, allowing for consistent program support and supervision. This is especially important in rural districts like Alebtong, where transportation, coordination meetings, and training workshops require predictable logistical support.

Additionally, it was noted that introducing fiscal calendars by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), in collaboration with MoGLSD and district finance departments would enhance the efficacy of UWEP in poverty reduction processes. The study participants highlight how these fiscal calendars that aligns fund disbursement with peak agricultural seasons are very critical. For instance, one of the FGDs noted as follows:

If planting typically occurs between March and May, funds intended to support agri-businesses should be disbursed by February at the latest. This will enable women farmers and entrepreneurs to purchase seeds, tools, and raw materials in time to maximize productivity (FGD, Alebtong, 2025).

To operationalize the above, it was established that a digital fund-tracking system could be introduced at the sub-county level to monitor disbursement timelines and flag delays. This system would mirror Rwanda's approach, where the integration of e-government platforms in women's empowerment programs has improved financial transparency and delivery speed (UN Women, 2020). If this approach is well implemented, it would reduce the persistent inadequacy of operational funding and the untimely disbursement of financial resources which is a critical barrier to the effective implementation of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP). As the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD, 2021) highlights, implementers at both national and local levels frequently experience financial shortfalls, resulting in disrupted service delivery and reduced outreach.

In relation to the above, financial restructuring through streamlined budgeting and quarterly fund disbursement would enhance the quality of finance disbursed in UWEP. This model was applied in Kenya's Women Enterprise Fund (WEF). Initially plagued by low uptake due to complex access procedures and inconsistent funding cycles, the WEF underwent financial restructuring that introduced streamlined budgeting and quarterly fund disbursement schedules. This reform, along with decentralized financial management, contributed to a substantial increase in loan disbursement rates and improved satisfaction among women entrepreneurs in Kenya (WEF, 2021). A comparative study by Gichuki, Njeru, and Tirimba (2014) also confirms that timely credit access was a key determinant of business performance among Kenyan women entrepreneurs.

Further, cooperative funding was found viable alternative to support UWEP role in poverty reduction. This approach can learn from the Indian Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) which adopted a cooperative funding model where timely access to credit is assured through local financial cooperatives. This approach allowed rural women to invest in seasonal businesses such as weaving, vegetable farming, and food vending without waiting for top-down government processes (Chen, 2005).

In addition to the above, the governance challenge can be reduced through improving inter-agency coordination, transparency and enforcement of UWEP initiatives. The study findings

reveal that this can start with the establishment of UWEP District Coordination Committees (UDCCs). This approach would reduce the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) fragmented communication and institutional overlap, which significantly undermines the efficiency and coherence of service delivery. To support the above, Transparency International Uganda (2020) highlights that the various institutions involved in UWEP often work in isolation, leading to duplicated efforts and inefficient use of resources. Francis and James (2003) similarly note that poor coordination among central ministries, local governments, and implementing partners compromises program effectiveness. The lack of a harmonized framework for planning, implementation, and monitoring results in inconsistencies in resource distribution and delivery of services at the community level.

Research by Muhumuza (2012) demonstrates that effective coordination requires joint planning sessions, integrated budgeting, and regular review meetings involving both central and local actors. These mechanisms foster transparency, accountability, and collective decision-making. Additionally, Community-Driven Development (CDD) models emphasize decentralized accountability and local ownership, empowering communities to articulate their own needs, oversee implementation, and monitor results. This participatory approach strengthens program responsiveness and ensures that development efforts are sustainable. These committees should include representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD), the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), sub-county and district officials, as well as beneficiary representatives. The UDCCs should function under clearly defined Terms of Reference (ToRs), which specify their roles, responsibilities, reporting structures, and frequency of meetings. The ToRs should institutionalize joint planning and budgeting, promote regular progress reviews and feedback mechanisms, hold all stakeholders accountable, and ensure that the perspectives of women beneficiaries are reflected in decision-making processes. This strategy is expected to promote greater coherence, transparency, and stakeholder ownership, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and delivery of UWEP services.

To be effective in coordination and transparency initiatives among UWEP initiatives, lessons can be learned from Rwanda. In Rwanda, evidence demonstrates that digital tools and technology driven transparency mechanisms can significantly mitigate corruption in public programs. For instance, the *Ejo Heza* platform in Rwanda, which integrates digital monitoring and reporting systems, has strengthened fund traceability and improved accountability in women's financial programs (UN Women, 2020). The platform allows for real-time tracking

of disbursed funds and beneficiary feedback, thus minimizing opportunities for diversion or misuse. Indeed, one of the key informant had this to say:

To strengthen transparency and curb corruption within UWEP, it is recommended that fund disbursement be digitized through mobile platforms equipped with integrated audit trails. These platforms should enable real-time monitoring and verification of transactions, thereby creating a tamper-proof digital footprint for every disbursement. In addition to digitization, regular independent audits should be instituted to assess compliance with financial management standards and detect irregularities (KII, Alebtong, 2025).

In addition to the above, the study participants suggested community-level social accountability tools such as community scorecards to enhance grassroots oversight. These tools allow beneficiaries to rate the quality and fairness of services received, provide feedback, and hold program implementers accountable through structured dialogue sessions. Collectively, these measures are expected to foster transparency, reduce corruption risks, and improve public confidence in UWEP's operations.

Also, Women's participation in the decision-making processes of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) has been found to enhance participatory decision-making in UWEP. Therefore, this study argues that sub-county UWEP Forums be institutionalized. These forums would serve as platforms where beneficiaries, especially women, are actively involved in co-designing project plans. These forums would allow women to contribute their ideas and feedback, ensuring that the initiatives reflect their needs and priorities. Furthermore, the forums should be equipped with regular feedback channels, allowing beneficiaries to monitor the implementation of projects and suggest adjustments if necessary. By institutionalizing these forums, UWEP can foster a more inclusive and participatory decision-making process, ensuring that the voices of women beneficiaries are not only heard but also integrated into the program's overall framework. This approach is expected to increase community ownership, improve the relevance of the interventions, and enhance the long term sustainability of the program.

Evidence from international best practices demonstrates that participatory decision-making can significantly improve the relevance, sustainability, and accountability of community programs. Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) emphasize that involving beneficiaries in planning, implementation, and monitoring leads to more effective outcomes, as the programs better

reflect local needs and realities. One notable example is Participatory Budgeting (PB) in Brazil, where community members are directly involved in deciding how public funds are allocated and used. Avritzer (2009) highlights that PB fosters a sense of ownership, promotes transparency, and encourages local accountability by empowering citizens to shape decisions that directly affect their lives. This participatory approach has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of social programs and build stronger community cohesion.

Lastly, training in business skills and market access was a major for women entrepreneurs under the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP). Modalities how to train and enhance skills would be very paramount. Research from the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD, 2021) highlights that many women participating in UWEP struggle to effectively manage and grow their businesses due to insufficient entrepreneurial training and limited access to markets. This gap in business acumen affects the ability of women to handle financial management, marketing, and other essential aspects of running a successful business. In addition, limited market access constrains the reach of their businesses and hinders their ability to scale or sustain operations. These challenges create barriers to the long-term success of women entrepreneurs, ultimately undermining the program's goal of poverty reduction and economic empowerment. Therefore, the study participants explained:

To strengthen the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP), modular training packages be embedded within the program, specifically focusing on areas such as enterprise development, value addition, and cooperative formation. These training modules should aim to address gaps in essential skills, including financial management, marketing, and business planning, thus preparing women to handle the complexities of entrepreneurship (KII Alebtong district, 2025).

Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to connect these women's businesses to key value chain actors, such as suppliers, distributors, and other stakeholders within their industries. By linking women entrepreneurs with value chain actors, the program can facilitate improved market access and enable them to enhance their product offerings. An example of a successful initiative in this area comes from Kenya's Women Enterprise Fund (WEF), which integrates training on critical business skills such as financial literacy, marketing, and business management. The impact of this training has been profound, with studies showing that it significantly improves both loan repayment rates and the overall viability of businesses owned

by women (WEF, 2021; Gichuki et al., 2014). The Women Enterprise Fund's approach goes beyond just financial support, recognizing that entrepreneurial success depends on a blend of financial knowledge, market strategies, and strong management skills. This model has proven effective in equipping women with the necessary tools to overcome challenges, improve business performance, and navigate complex markets.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented and analyzed the contribution of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) to women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction in Alebtong District. It also examined the program's areas of effectiveness and the key challenges that affect its implementation and sustainability. The strength of this study lies in the fact that data were collected from both beneficiaries and key informants, which enhanced the reliability and credibility of the findings. Overall, UWEP's integrated approach through entrepreneurship training, financial support, and market access has enabled many women to establish and grow small enterprises, improve their income levels, and enhance household welfare. These outcomes reflect Uganda's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to gender equality and poverty reduction.

The program demonstrated that when women are equipped with business management skills, mentorship, and access to capital, they become more self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to community development. However, the study also revealed critical challenges that limited UWEP's full potential. Weak governance structures, delayed financial disbursement, low levels of beneficiary participation in decision-making, and inadequate capacity-building support remain major constraints. The absence of dedicated coordination structures at the district level and insufficient follow-up mechanisms have reduced the efficiency and accountability of program implementation. Furthermore, limited market access and poor loan recovery systems have slowed down progress toward achieving sustainable economic empowerment.

Nonetheless, the study confirms that UWEP has made a positive contribution to improving the livelihoods of women in Alebtong District. The program's interventions particularly grants, interest-free loans, and training have strengthened women's entrepreneurial abilities and enhanced their economic independence.

To bridge existing gap, UWEP should address the identified challenges particularly those related to governance, funding, and participation which will be vital in ensuring that the

program achieves its intended objectives and contributes more effectively to the empowerment and improved living standards of women in Uganda. there is a need to improve funding mechanisms, enhance training in business and financial management, and address governance and cultural challenges. Strengthening collaboration between UWEP, local governments, and other development partners would also enhance sustainability, reduce loan default rates, and promote women's long-term economic empowerment in Alebtong District.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes and concludes the study findings. It also offers recommendations based on the results and identifies areas for further research. The findings are presented according to the study's core themes, which include the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) initiatives, its effectiveness, and the evidence-based practices to enhance UWEP. The chapter starts with a summary of the findings, as discussed below.

5.1 Summary

The study evaluated the initiatives employed under UWEP to facilitate poverty reduction among women in Alebtong District. The findings indicated that UWEP's poverty reduction strategies in Alebtong District center on several key components, which include; entrepreneurship development, market access, training, management and coordination. Providing interest-free loans has enabled women to establish and grow businesses, particularly in agriculture, trade, and manufacturing, resulting in improved household incomes and job creation. Entrepreneurship development initiatives, including training and capacity-building programs, have equipped women with essential business management skills. Enhanced market access has been facilitated through networking and value addition, allowing women to sell their products at competitive prices. While the program's management and coordination have been crucial in ensuring proper fund allocation, challenges such as delays in disbursement remain. Furthermore, the integration of appropriate technology has contributed to increased productivity and efficiency, especially in agriculture. These strategies collectively foster sustainable business growth and poverty reduction, although improvements in coordination, timely fund disbursement, and access to relevant technologies are necessary to fully realize their potential.

The study explored the effectiveness of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) in alleviating poverty among women in Alebtong District. The findings indicated that UWEP's poverty reduction strategies, such as interest-free credit, entrepreneurship development, improved market access, and technology adoption, have significantly contributed to enhancing women's livelihoods. Access to credit has enabled many women to start or expand businesses in agriculture, trade, and manufacturing, leading to increased household income and employment opportunities. Capacity-building initiatives and entrepreneurship training have

equipped beneficiaries with essential business management skills, while market access interventions have enabled women to sell their products more competitively.

However, findings from Alebtong District also reveal that the success of UWEP is closely linked to governance structures, financial disbursement processes, and the level of beneficiary involvement in decision-making. The program operates through multiple administrative layers from national to district and sub-county levels, which has sometimes led to coordination challenges and limited decision-making authority at the local level. Delays in disbursing funds, especially through these multiple channels, have negatively affected women engaged in seasonal businesses like farming, where timely support is crucial. Additionally, while some women's groups are actively engaged in planning their projects, others report limited participation, with decisions often directed by technocrats and political leaders.

The research findings revealed that the effective implementation of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) requires some practices namely, fiscal calendars, specific trainings in financial literacy and community-based scorecards to enhance the governance and coordination of UWEP.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that UWEP has employed various initiatives to reduce poverty among women in Alebtong District, primarily through financial assistance, technical support, and capacity-building initiatives. By providing women entrepreneurs with capital, the program has facilitated the establishment of income-generating activities, contributing to improved household livelihoods and economic empowerment. However, while these strategies have yielded positive outcomes, their effectiveness has been constrained by gaps in training, market access, and program sustainability.

The main finding of the study, based on the overall objective, indicates that UWEP has had a positive impact on poverty reduction by enhancing women's economic participation and self-reliance. Many beneficiaries have been able to start and expand businesses, leading to improved income levels and financial stability. However, despite these achievements, challenges related to inadequate business training, limited access to broader markets, and weak follow-up mechanisms have hindered the program's full potential in fostering long-term economic resilience.

The findings reveal that the effectiveness of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) in Alebtong District is largely determined by three key factors namely, governance

structures, beneficiary participation, and fund disbursement channels. Weak coordination among national, district, and sub-county levels, coupled with limited autonomy at the local level, has affected the program's responsiveness and service delivery. Additionally, while some women actively participate in planning their projects, others experience exclusion, which undermines ownership and sustainability. Delays in fund disbursement caused by bureaucratic procedures across multiple administrative layers have also hindered the success of time-sensitive businesses. Overall, improving coordination, promoting inclusive decision-making, and streamlining the disbursement process are essential to enhancing the program's effectiveness in reducing poverty and empowering women in Alebtong District.

5.3 Recommendations

There is a critical need for the MoLSD to strengthen the UWEP coordination and governance structures. This requires clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved from national ministries to district and sub-county authorities.

UWEP should consider adopting digital payment systems, mobile banking solutions, and decentralized financial management at the district level. Streamlining these processes would minimize administrative hurdles and ensure that women receive timely support to grow their businesses.

Active involvement of women beneficiaries in all stages of the project cycle is critical. From planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation, women should have a voice in shaping the interventions that affect their livelihoods. Participatory approaches not only foster a greater sense of ownership and commitment but also promote transparency and innovation at the grassroots level. Establishing inclusive decision-making mechanisms will ensure that UWEP is more aligned with the actual needs of its target population.

The study also emphasizes the importance of expanding and improving training and capacity-building initiatives. While some training is already in place, it often lacks depth and continuity. It is therefore recommended that UWEP provide more comprehensive sessions on financial literacy, business planning, recordkeeping, and entrepreneurial development. These should be supported by regular follow-ups and mentorship programs to help beneficiaries apply what they have learned in practical, sustainable ways.

Another area of improvement lies in facilitating market access and technology adoption. Many women face challenges in reaching larger or more profitable markets, which limits their income potential. UWEP can support value addition, product branding, and participation in trade fairs

to increase visibility and competitiveness. Additionally, providing access to modern, appropriate technologies especially for those in agriculture would significantly improve productivity and business growth.

The government should consider increasing budgetary support for UWEP and ensure that both operational and project funds are released on time. Adequate funding alongside accountability and supervision is essential to deliver meaningful outcomes.

Areas for further research

The enforcement mechanisms of UWEP in Uganda

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: WORK PLAN 2024/2025

S/NO	ACTIVITIES	PERIOD
1	Research proposal writing	May- December, 2024
2	Data Collection,	January, 2025
3	Data analysis and interpretation of findings	February-March, 2025
4	Submission of the first draft for approval	March, 2025
5	Final Dissertation	May-June 2025

Appendix 2: Budget Estimates

S/No	ACTIVITY/ITEM	QTY	UNIT COST	AMOUNT	REMARKS
01	Stationary/secretarial			500,000/=	
02	Transport and Feeding			2,000,000/=	
03	Accommodations	30 days	50,000/=	1500,000/=	
04	Data collection			3,000,000/=	
05	Research Assistant	01 Person	30,000	900,000/=	
06	Miscellaneous			500,000/=	
07	Total			8400,0000=	

Appendix 3: Research Tools

Interview and FGD guides for respondents.

I am Ameto Jannan, a masters student at Makerere University in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, at college of Humanities and social sciences. As one of the fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Masters of Arts in Public Administration and Management, I am conducting a research on the topic “**The Influence of economic empowerment programs on poverty reduction in Uganda: A case study of Uganda women entrepreneurship program in Alebtong district, Uganda**” The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) on Poverty Reduction in Alebtong District, Uganda. I wish to ask you a few questions related to your experiences with UWEP and its impact. Please note that the information provided will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. You are free not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with and may terminate your participation at any stage of the interview. If you need more information about the study, you may contact my university supervisor and course coordinator: **Dr. Niringiyimana Julius, Tel: +256 782005731**

Preliminaries

Date of Interview:

subcounty:

() Abia

() Aloi

Parish:.....

Village:.....

Name of the women's group or organization_____

Key Informant Interview Guide for the appointed and elected leaders

A. Strategies of UWEP in Poverty Reduction

1. What strategies does UWEP prioritize to reduce poverty among women?
2. How these strategies are aligned with the district’s poverty alleviation goals?

3. What innovative approaches has UWEP introduced to support women's economic empowerment?
4. How are UWEP strategies monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness?

B. Effectiveness of UWEP Strategies on Poverty Reduction

1. How do you evaluate the success of UWEP strategies in poverty reduction?
2. What feedback have beneficiaries shared about the effectiveness of UWEP initiatives?
3. Are there any indicators used to assess UWEP's impact on poverty?
4. How does your office address gaps in the effectiveness of UWEP strategies?
5. Compare the situation of women before UWEP and now? Probe about income, food security, credit access, employment opportunities

C. Challenges Faced by UWEP in Poverty Reduction

1. What are the challenges that were faced during implementation of UWEP programs? And how were there addressed? Probe challenges of implementers and women themselves example Finance, Governance, cultural rigidity?
2. How does the district government assist UWEP in overcoming these challenges?
3. Are there structural issues within UWEP that hinder its performance?
4. What role do external factors, such as funding or cultural norms, play in these challenges?

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Women beneficiaries

A. Strategies of UWEP in Poverty Reduction

1. What strategies have been implemented by UWEP in addressing women's needs?
2. Do you think UWEP would have you used different strategies? If yes why?
3. Are there specific initiatives by UWEP that have significantly supported your business growth?
4. Do you do think UWEP strategies can continue even after UWEP? Explain your answer

B. Effectiveness of UWEP Strategies on Poverty Reduction

1. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of UWEP's initiatives in reducing poverty?
2. What changes have you experienced because of UWEP's interventions?
3. Are there any areas where UWEP strategies could be improved to enhance effectiveness?
4. How do you see UWEP contributing to poverty reduction in the future?

C. Challenges Faced by UWEP in Poverty Reduction

1. What challenges do women encounter when accessing UWEP resources?
2. Are there specific cultural or societal barriers affecting your participation in UWEP?
3. How do financial or logistical issues impact your ability to benefit from UWEP?
4. What challenges should UWEP address to improve its impact on women's lives?

In-depth Interview Guide to Women leaders

A. Strategies of UWEP in Poverty Reduction

1. Explain how UWEP implemented its programs?
2. What are some of the strategies used in the implementation of UWEP?
3. Please explain some of the strategies that you think worked well, than others, and those that you think did not work well.
4. What recommendations would you make to improve the strategies implemented by UWEP?

B. Effectiveness of UWEP Strategies on Poverty Reduction

1. Do you think the way UWEP was implemented improved performance of the project? Explain the answer?
2. Compare the situation of women before UWEP, during UWEP, and after UWEP?
3. What specific challenges reduce the effectiveness of UWEP initiatives?
4. How would you suggest UWEP improve to achieve better results in poverty reduction?

C. Challenges Faced by UWEP in Poverty Reduction

1. What challenges do you see women facing in accessing UWEP resources?
2. How do cultural attitudes impact women's engagement with UWEP?
3. What additional support do you think is needed to overcome these challenges?

Appendix 4: Consent Form for Respondents

Introduction

I am Ameto Jannan, a student at Makerere University. I am conducting a study about the Impact of Uganda Women Entrepreneurship on Poverty Reduction in Alebtong. The study is being conducted purely for academic purposes in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of a Master of Arts in Public Administration and Management. The interview will seek for information on the study and the information provided will be accorded utmost confidentiality. Please feel free to ask any questions during the discussion. Thank you for your cooperation.

Study Purpose

To examine the impact of Uganda Women Entrepreneurship (UWEP) on poverty reduction among women in Alebtong District by conducting in-depth interviews with selected women beneficiaries and key informant interviews with district officials.

Study Procedures

By agreeing to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an interview with a trained interviewer. It will take about 40 minutes for you to complete answering the questions or discussion session. Your responses will be recorded confidentially. The interview will focus on your opinions, experiences, and knowledge regarding the impact of UWEP on poverty reduction, the challenges faced by women beneficiaries, and the effectiveness of UWEP strategies. All information provided will be kept confidential.

Benefits

Your participation will contribute valuable insights that may help improve the living conditions of women facing poverty challenges in Alebtong District.

Risks

There are no risks involved in this study, as it is intended solely for academic purposes. You are free to answer only those questions you feel comfortable with. If you experience any discomfort during the interview, you may request a break of 20-30 minutes.

Rights to Refusal or Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to participate or withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may opt to answer some or all of the questions posed.

Confidentiality

The results of this study will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Your identity will be protected to the fullest extent allowed by law. Neither your name nor any personal details will appear on the coded forms. However, your title may be used when quoting specific information from your responses. All paper records will be stored securely, and electronic data will be password protected. The interviewer has explained this information to you and is available to answer any questions. For further inquiries, you may contact **Dr. Niringiyimana Julius, Tel: +256 782005731.**

Statement of Consent/Assent

Mr. Jannan Ameto has explained how the interview will be conducted, including the risks, benefits, and your rights related to this study. You understand that your decision to participate will not affect your normal duties. Your identity will be protected, although your title may be used. You are aware that you can withdraw at any time. By signing this form, you do not surrender any of your legal rights; you merely indicate that you have been informed about the research study and voluntarily agree to participate. A copy of this form will be provided to you.

Signature of Participant: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Interviewer: _____

Date: _____