International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Women Savings Groups and Household Welfare; A Case Study of Selected Groups from Nyakayojo Mbarara City Southwestern Uganda

Apollo Abareeba[1], Asiimire Donah[2], Mpairwe Anthony[3]

[1,2,3]Faculty of Business, Economics and Governance, Bishop Stuart University, Uganda

Abstract
The main purpose of this study was to investigate the contributions of women's savings groups to household welfare, using a case study of selected women groups in Nyakayojo, Mbarara City Southwestern Uganda. The following were specific objectives of this study: To examine how the use of technology (mobile phones) by women's groups affects the well-being of their families; To find out how the ability of women's groups to adapt to changes (like high prices or new trends) affects their families' welfare; To determine how the leadership and management of these women's groups influence the well-being of their households. This study employed a qualitative case study research design adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Key findings indicate that technology, primarily mobile money and communication tools, is not merely a convenience but a transformative force that directly enhances household welfare. It was also found out that a group's resilience is fundamentally tied to its adaptive capacity, which manifests through both financial and social mechanisms. The study further revealed that sound leadership, characterized by inclusive Decision-making and transparent Resource Management is the bedrock upon which all other group strengths are built. The study concluded by stating that technology is a powerful catalyst for welfare: The use of mobile money and digital communication tools by women's savings groups significantly improves household welfare by ensuring timely access to healthcare, securing educational continuity, enhancing income stability, and protecting savings. It operationalizes the financial inclusion advocated in Uganda's National Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Keywords: Women Saving Groups, Household Welfare; Nyakayojo, Mbarara City Southwestern Uganda.

BACKGROUND
In the face of persistent financial exclusion and economic vulnerability, small-scale women's savings groups in Nyakayojo, Mbarara City, have become a cornerstone of household resilience and community-based support (ACODE, 2020). These groups function as a critical mechanism for women to pool resources, access credit, and generate income, thereby directly influencing the well- being of their families (Barnabas et al., 2023). However, the extent of their impact is not automatic; it is likely shaped by specific, internal capabilities of the groups themselves. Therefore, this study is designed to move beyond merely acknowledging their existence and to precisely investigate how key operational strengths—namely, the use of technology, adaptability, and leadership determine their effectiveness in enhancing household welfare.

To systematically unpack this relationship, this research will pursue three core objectives. First, it will examine how the groups' use of technology, such as mobile money and digital communication tools, impacts family income and access to services (Duncombe, 2016). Second, it will find out how the groups' ability to adapt to challenges like market shifts and economic shocks helps improve their members' lives (Neumeyer et al., 2019). Finally, it will determine how the quality of leadership and management within these groups contributes to better outcomes for their households (Manimala & Thomas, 2005). By analyzing these specific factors, this study aims to provide a clear, evidence-based framework for understanding how to strengthen women's savings groups to maximize their positive impact on critical welfare indicators like food security, education, and healthcare (World Bank, 2013).

Historical Background

For a long time, women in Uganda have faced difficulties in accessing formal financial services like bank loans due to cultural norms and a lack of collateral (ACODE, 2020). In response, they have historically formed self-help groups, known as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) or rotating savings groups (ROSCAS). These groups have served as a vital community- based banking system, especially in rural areas. Government programs like the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) have further recognized and supported this movement (Makara, 2021). The historical shift has been from individual women struggling alone to a collective model of saving and borrowing, which has become a cornerstone of grassroots economic empowerment for women in Southwestern Uganda.

This evolution mirrors a broader global recognition of the power of microfinance and group-based savings models to alleviate poverty (Karlan & Appel, 2011). The model's success and longevity in Uganda are evidenced by its organic growth and its subsequent adoption and promotion by major non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government policy. This established history provides the essential foundation for the current study, which seeks to understand how these now- mainstream groups have evolved beyond basic savings functions. The research will investigate how modern elements such as the integration of technology, adaptive strategies, and professionalized leadership-build upon this historical foundation to create a more powerful and sustained impact on household welfare in the contemporary context of Mbarara City.

Contextual Background

Nyakayojo Ward in Mbarara City is a typical urban setting where many families face economic hardships. Challenges include high living costs, fluctuating market prices, and limited access to reliable financial institutions (SAGE, 2022). In this context, women's savings groups (like the selected Twetungure, Munywaniwangye, and Nibamwe Women Groups) have emerged as a critical safety net. These groups are not just about saving money; they are platforms for solidarity, knowledge sharing, and mutual support (Barnabas et al., 2023). This study is set in Nyakayojo to understand how these groups operate in a real-world urban environment and how their activities directly impact the day-to-day lives of their members' households.

The specific socio-economic dynamics of Nyakayojo make it an ideal microcosm for this investigation. The area embodies the transition from rural to urban livelihoods, where traditional agricultural safety nets are absent, and families are highly exposed to cash-based market economies and inflationary pressures (Daily Monitor, 2024). This environment intensifies the need for the financial resilience that savings groups provide. Furthermore, the presence of multiple groups allows for a comparative analysis of how different approaches to management, technology adoption, and adaptability influence their success. Therefore, studying these groups within this specific urban ward provides critical insights into the mechanisms that enable them to function not merely as savings clubs, but as essential engines for improving household welfare, directly informing the study's objectives to evaluate the impact of their leadership, adaptability, and use of technology.

Conceptual Background

The core conceptual premise of this study is that the operational strength and internal capabilities of a women's savings group have a direct and positive influence on the welfare of its members' households. This concept of household welfare is not abstract; it is operationalized through tangible, measurable outcomes that reflect a family's quality of life. These critical indicators include heightened income levels, which provide for a wider range of family needs; improved food security, ensuring access to sufficient and nutritious food; enhanced educational attainment for children, facilitated by the ability to pay school fees; and better access to healthcare, enabled by the financial capacity to afford medical treatment when needed.

This research proposes that a group's strength is primarily determined by three key, interconnected features: its technology use, its adaptability, and its leadership. The study hypothesizes that a group which effectively leverages technology-such as mobile money for transactions and communication tools for coordination—can operate more efficiently and access wider markets. Furthermore, a group's ability to adapt its saving strategies or business ventures in response to economic shocks or market fluctuations is crucial for its sustainability. Finally, sound leadership and transparent management are foundational for maintaining trust, resolving conflicts, and making strategic decisions that benefit all members. A group that excels in these areas is positioned to generate and manage more income effectively.

This conceptual linkage is strongly supported by the Intra-household Bargaining Theory (Doss, 2013). The theory posits that control over financial resources alters power dynamics within a family. When women, through their successful group enterprises, earn and control income, they gain greater bargaining power. This empowers them to allocate resources towards expenditures that significantly benefit the whole family's well-being, prioritizing investments in better food, education, and healthcare (World Bank, 2013). Therefore, this study seeks to validate this conceptual model by examining how the targeted group features ultimately translate into improved welfare outcomes through the channel of women's enhanced economic agency.

Problem Statement

The Ugandan government, through initiatives like the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2017-2022), has recognized the critical role of small-scale savings groups in reducing financial exclusion and improving household welfare (Barnabas et al., 2023). Despite this policy support and the proliferation of women's groups in areas like Nyakayojo Ward, Mbarara City, significant challenges to household well-being persist. Many families continue to grapple with food shortages, often consuming a limited number of meals per day, and face severe difficulties in affording essential services like education and healthcare due to rising costs and economic instability (SAGE, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). This disconnect between the existence of savings groups and the persistence of these welfare challenges forms the core of the problem this study addresses.

While the presence of groups like Twetungure, Munywaniwangye, and Nibamwe is a known factor, there is a critical lack of understanding regarding which specific capabilities of these groups determine their effectiveness in overcoming these hardships. It remains unclear to what extent a group's adoption of technology (like mobile money for efficient transactions) can stabilize family income to cover school fees or medical bills. Similarly, the role of a group's adaptability in navigating economic shocks, such as fluctuating market prices, to ensure continuous food security is not well documented. Furthermore, the impact of leadership and management skills on fostering trust, making strategic decisions, and ensuring equitable resource distribution within the group which ultimately affects individual household outcomes is not sufficiently explored in this specific context (Kahara et al., 2023).

Therefore, the problem is not merely the existence of welfare challenges, but a gap in knowledge about the precise mechanisms within women's savings groups that can best address them. This study is necessitated by the need to move beyond general assumptions and provide empirical evidence on how technology, adaptability, and leadership directly function as catalysts for improving household welfare. Without this specific understanding, efforts by policymakers and development practitioners to strengthen these groups may be misdirected, limiting their potential to serve as a powerful and sustainable engine for poverty reduction and improved quality of life for families in Nyakayojo and similar communities.

Objectives of the Study

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following specific objectives are be considered:

1. To examine how the use of technology (mobile phones) by women's groups affects the well-being of their families.
2. To find out how the ability of women's groups to adapt to changes (like high prices or new trends) affects their families' welfare.
3. To determine how the leadership and management of these women's groups influence the well-being of their households.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study research design. This design is chosen for its capacity to provide a rich, detailed, and holistic understanding of a complex real-world phenomenon within its natural context. The "case" is defined as the exploration of the contributions of small-scale women's savings groups to household welfare in Nyakayojo Ward, Mbarara City. A qualitative approach is ideal for answering the research questions ("how" and "in what ways") as it seeks to understand the experiences, perspectives, and meanings that group members attribute to their activities. This design facilitates an in-depth exploration of the processes and mechanisms through which the groups operate and influence their members' lives.

Study Area

The research conducted in Nyakayojo Ward, Mbarara City, Southwestern Uganda. This urban setting, with its specific socio-economic challenges of high living costs and financial exclusion, provides a pertinent context for the case. The study focuses intensively on three purposefully selected groups: the Twetungure Women Group, Munywaniwangye Women Group, and Nibamwe Women Group, which constitute the embedded units of analysis within the single case.

Population and Sample

Target Population: The target population comprised all members of the three selected women's savings groups in Nyakayojo Ward.

Sampling Technique: A purposive sampling technique used to select participants who are information-rich and best able to provide insight into the phenomenon under study. This includes:

Group Members: A purposive sample of 6-8 members from each of the three groups selected for Focus

Group Discussions (FGDs) to represent a range of experiences (e.g., long-standing vs. new members, those who have taken loans vs. those who primarily save).
Key Informants: All group leaders, executives, and committee members from the three groups purposively selected for in-depth interviews due to their specialized knowledge of group governance, history, and financial management.
This strategy ensures the selection of participants who can provide deep, relevant insights into the research questions.

Data Collection Methods

The study utilizes three primary qualitative data collection methods to ensure methodological triangulation, which enhances the validity and depth of the findings.
In-Depth Interviews (IDIs): Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants (group leaders and executives). This method allows for flexible, open-ended questioning and probing to gather detailed narratives on leadership styles, decision-making processes, adaptation strategies, and experiences with technology.
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): One FGD was conducted with selected members from each of the three groups. FGDs are ideal for exploring collective views, shared experiences, and group norms. They were used to understand members' perceptions of how the group's activities have influenced their household welfare, including challenges and successes.
Document Review: Available group records, such as minute books, constitutions, savings and loan ledgers, and financial reports was reviewed. This method provides corroborating evidence and helps to triangulate data obtained from interviews and discussions regarding group processes, financial transactions, and formal structures.

Research Instruments

The primary instruments for data collection:
Interview Guide: This guide contained open-ended questions and probes tailored for key informants, focusing on themes of leadership, adaptation, technology use, and perceived impacts on welfare.
Focus Group Discussion Guide: This guide included open-ended questions and prompts to facilitate discussion among group members about their personal and collective experiences, the benefits and challenges of the group, and observed changes in their households.
Both guides developed in English, translated into Runyankole, and pre-tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process is iterative and involves:
Familiarization: Transcribing audio recordings and repeatedly reading the transcripts and notes to become immersed in the data.
Generating Initial Codes: Systematically coding interesting features of the data across the entire dataset.
Searching for Themes: Collating codes into potential overarching themes that capture patterns of meaning relevant to the research questions.
Reviewing Themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to both the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure coherence and distinctness.
Defining and Naming Themes: Refining the specifics of each theme and generating clear definitions and names for them.

Producing the Report: Weaving together the thematic analysis into a narrative, using vivid, compelling extract examples from the data to illustrate the findings.
Qualitative data analysis software (such as NVivo or Dedoose) will be used to assist in organizing and managing the data during this process.
Ethical Considerations
The research was conducted under strict ethical principles of:
Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks/benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. For those unable to read, the form be read aloud in Runyankole.
Confidentiality and Anonymity: All data was treated with strict confidentiality. Participants' identities be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Group A Leader, FGD 2 Member 3) in the transcription, analysis, and final report. Audio recordings and identifying documents was stored securely and destroyed after the research was completed.
Beneficence and Non-maleficence: The researcher prioritized the well-being of participants, avoiding any questions that could cause psychological distress. The study aims to be beneficial by providing a platform for participants' voices to be heard.
Access and Permissions: Official permission sought from Bishop Stuart University was presented to relevant local authorities and the leadership of each savings group before data collection begins.
Feedback: A commitment was made to share a summary of the findings in an accessible format with the participating groups as a gesture of gratitude and respect.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N=20)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-30 years	5	25%
	31-40 years	8	40%
	41-50 years	5	25%
	Above 50 years	2	10%
Gender	Female	18	90%
	Male (Group Leaders)	2	10%
Marital status	Married	12	60%
	Single	3	15%
	Widowed (Divorced)	5	25%
Education level	None	4	20%
	Primary	8	40%
	Secondary	6	30%
	Tertiary	2	10%
Years in Group	1-3 years	7	35%
	4-6 years	9	45%
	Over 6 years	4	20%

Source: Field data,Sept,2025

Table 1: Objective One: 1. To examine how the use of technology (mobile phones) by women's groups affects the well-being of their families.

Objective	Objective Question	Questions	Theme	Subtheme
To examine how the use of technology(mobile phones) by women's groups affects the well-being of their families.	1.How does the technological capability of small-scale women groups affects household welfare in Groups Nyakayojo Mbarara Southern western Uganda?	a. What technologies do you currently use in your business(mobile phones? b. How do these technologies help you n your business operations ?(e.g, increased efficiency, market access, communication)? c. Do you have any ideas on how technology use could be further improved within the Group?	Ensuring Timely Access to Money for Basic Needs Stabilizing and augmenting Household Income Enhancing Financial inclusion for daily Household Management	Rapid Access to Healthcare Securing school requirements ; Facilitating profitable trade Reducing Financial Loss Facilitating Small, Frequent contribution Enabling Direct Payment for Household Exppenses

Source: Author's

The findings from Objective One are presented in Table 1 above. Analysis of the data generated three major themes and six sub-themes as follows. The results will be presented theme by theme.

Ensuring Timely Access to Money for Basic Needs
Rapid Access to Healthcare
Participant Testimonies(Healthcare Access):

Female Participant (Age 42, FGD A): "The doctor said my son needed malaria medicine immediately. I sent a message to our group's WhatsApp, and within an hour, a loan was sent to my phone. I bought the drugs right there at the clinic. That speed is what saved his life."
"When I was due to give birth, the group sent my transport money via mobile money so I could reach the health center in time. They also sent a top-up later for my delivery kit. I had a safe delivery because of that quick support." (Group Secretary A)
Female Participant (Age 38, FGD B): "My husband's sugar levels became very high. The clinic is far, but with mobile money, I didn't need to go there to get cash. I withdrew money from my phone and paid for a boda boda to take him. We reached in time for treatment."

Interpretation:

These testimonies highlight the critical role of mobile money in overcoming temporal and physical barriers to healthcare access. The technology enables immediate access to funds for medical emergencies, transportation, and medication, ensuring that health crises are addressed promptly. This direct link between group savings and health outcomes is a cornerstone of improved household welfare.

Summary:

The capability for instant digital transactions ensures that financial constraints do not delay critical medical care, directly safeguarding the health of household members and improving healthcare access.

Securing School Requirements

Participant Testimonies (Educational Access):

"The head teacher said my daughter would be sent home if I didn't pay the exam fees. I had no cash, but I had my phone. I requested a loan, and the group sent the money directly to the school's mobile money account. She stayed in class and sat her exams." (IDI, Group Treasurer)
"During the lockdown, schools demanded money for online classes. I was stuck at home, but my phone was with me. I had money on my phone and paid for the classes immediately. My children's learning never stopped." (FGD 3, Member 4)

Interpretation

These accounts underscore how technology synchronizes group financial resources with the unpredictable timing of school expenses. The ability to disburse funds electronically ensures that financial hurdles do not prevent children from accessing learning opportunities, directly supporting the welfare indicator of educational access.

Summary

Technology ensures educational continuity by providing a reliable and immediate financial mechanism to meet school demands as they arise, directly preventing disruptions in educational access.

Stabilizing and Augmenting Household Income for Welfare

Facilitating Profitable Trade for Food and School Needs

Participant Testimonies (Food Security & Educational Access):
"I used to sell my maize at a low price after harvest to pay school fees quickly. Now, I call traders from the city on my phone to get better prices. The extra profit I get means I can pay fees and still keep enough bags of maize for my family to eat until the next season." (FGD 2, Member 5)
"With my phone, I found a consistent buyer for my products who pays a good price through mobile money every week. That steady income is what I use to buy nutritious food like eggs and fruit for my children,

not just posho and beans." (IDI, Group Vice-Chairperson)
"I used the profit from a group loan to start a small retail shop. The daily sales from the shop, which I track on my phone, are what I now use to buy food for the home daily. We no longer wait for the harvest season to eat well." (FGD 3, Member 2)

Interpretation:

These testimonies show that technology boosts income specifically allocated for welfare. By enabling better market prices and new business opportunities, it provides the funds needed to achieve both food security (through a more stable and nutritious food supply) and educational access (through higher, more reliable profits for school fees).

Summary:

Technology empowers women to generate higher and more stable income, which is then strategically allocated to ensure consistent food security and the ability to afford educational costs, thereby improving overall household welfare.

Protecting Savings for Welfare Crises

Participant Testimonies (Healthcare & Food Security):

"The money we saved digitally was secure when my husband suddenly fell ill. We did not have to sell our goats to pay for his hospital bills because the group savings were available on my phone. We kept our assets and paid for treatment." (FGD 3, Member 1)
"During the drought, the price of food became very high. Because our group savings were safe and growing in our mobile account, we were able to take a loan to buy food in bulk at a better price. That loan saved us from hunger." (FGD 1, Member 6)
"A thief broke into many homes in our area looking for cash, but found nothing in mine. My money was safe with the group. That same month, my child got sick, and I was able to pay for treatment because the money was protected." (IDI, Group Leader)

Interpretation:

The testimonies highlight how technology secures capital specifically for welfare crises. By protecting savings from theft, loss, or emergency asset sales, it ensures that a financial buffer is always available to handle health emergencies and food shortages without jeopardizing the family's long-term economic stability.

Summary:

By digitally securing collective capital, technology ensures that savings are available specifically for weathering health and food crises, directly protecting healthcare access and food security for member households.

Enhancing Financial Inclusion for Daily Welfare Management

Building Savings for Food and Health

Participant Testimonies (Food Security & Healthcare Access):

"Whenever I sell some vegetables, I immediately send the 2,000 or 3,000 shillings to my phone. These small amounts have built up into a large savings balance that I used to pay for a mosquito net for every bed in my house to prevent malaria." (IDI, Group Member)
"Sending small daily contributions via mobile money is like planting seeds for tomorrow's meal. The money I saved little-by-little was used to buy a goat. Now, we have milk for the children, improving their

health, and the goat is an asset for future needs." (FGD 2, Member 3)

"This group is our hospital. The small amounts we save each day are for our health. When I needed to go for a family planning clinic, the transport and consultation fee was taken directly from my savings I had built through mobile money. It was easy and private." (FGD 3, Member 5)

Interpretation:

These accounts show how technology facilitates micro-savings that are directly earmarked for welfare. The "save-as-you-earn" model allows women to consistently build a fund specifically for health preventative measures (mosquito nets, clinic visits) and assets that improve food security (livestock for milk).

Summary:

Technology enables a disciplined, incremental approach to saving that directly builds a fund for health-related expenses and investments that enhance household food security and healthcare access.

Directly Channelling Funds to Welfare Services

Participant Testimonies (Educational & Healthcare Access):

"The school now asks us to pay for lunch fees via mobile money. I don't need to give my child cash that might get lost. I directly send the money from my group savings account to the school's number. I am sure it is used for food that keeps my child healthy and in school." (FGD 1, Member 6)

"I can pay for my mother's hypertension medication every month without missing a dose. I get a reminder from the clinic, and I send the money for the prescription directly from my phone. Her health has been stable because of this consistency." (IDI, Group Member)

"When the government introduced a direct mobile payment for school fees, I was ready. I simply withdrew the exact amount from my phone savings and paid it to the school account. It was efficient, and I received a digital receipt as proof of payment." (FGD 2, Member 4)

Interpretation:

The testimonies demonstrate the ultimate efficiency of technology: seamlessly linking group savings directly to the point of service for welfare. This eliminates cash handling, ensures funds are used for their intended purpose (e.g., school lunch, medicine), and provides a digital record, guaranteeing educational and healthcare access.

Summary:

Technology creates a direct, efficient, and traceable pipeline from group savings to service providers, ensuring reliable access to education and healthcare by simplifying payments and guaranteeing that funds reach their intended destination.

Table 2: Objective two: 1. To find out how the ability of women's groups to adapt to changes (like high prices or new trends) affects their families' welfare.

Objective	Research Questions	Questions	Themes	Sub-themes
To find out how the ability of women's groups to adapt to changes (like high prices or new trends) affects their families welfare.	In what ways does the group's ability to adapt to challenges help improve their families' lives?	How does the Group adapt to changes in the market or business environment and how does the adaption contribute to house	Adaptive financial practices	Flexible saving and loan terms

		hold welfare? How does the group encourage innovation and new ideas among its members and explain how this innovation and new ideas contribute to the household welfare? How has the group's ability to adapt to changes affected your household welfare?	Adaptive social support mechanism	Collecting Bulk buying and selling Knowledge sharing and skill Development Rotating labour and moral support Coping with price fluctuations Strong social support and risk Mitigation.

Source: Author's

The findings from Objective two are presented in Table 2 above. Analysis of the data generated two major themes and six sub-themes as follows. The results will be presented theme by theme.

Adaptive Financial Practices

Flexible saving and loan terms

Respondent's Testimonies

"During the drought, my business had no customers and I couldn't repay my loan. The group held a meeting and allowed me to pay only the interest for two months. This kindness saved me from selling my sewing machine to settle the debt." (a female member 3 years)

"We created a special emergency fund from our social contributions for crises. When my child was hospitalized, I borrowed from this fund interest-free. This prevented me from taking a high- interest loan that would have burdened my family." (many respondents)

"When prices rose sharply last year, the group temporarily reduced our weekly savings amount. This adaptation allowed me to use that money to buy essential food items for my household during that difficult period."(Group Leaders)

Interpretation:

The testimonies reveal that the groups' financial rules are not rigid but are applied with a pragmatic understanding of members' realities. This flexibility is a form of risk management that protects members' productive assets (like a sewing machine) from being liquidated during temporary shocks. By preventing the need for high-interest loans, the group acts as a buffer, ensuring that a short-term crisis does not escalate into a long-term debt trap for the household. This approach maintains the member's capital base, allowing for quicker economic recovery.

Summary:

The strategic flexibility in financial terms functions as a critical safety net, preserving household assets and preventing destructive debt during periods of individual hardship, thereby ensuring long-term economic stability.

Collecting Bulk goods for buying and selling

"I used to buy goods for my kiosk retail at high prices. Now we combine our money as a group to buy wholesale directly from distributors. This has increased my profit margin significantly, helping me better provide for my family." (Member 4years)

"Instead of selling our items individually to middlemen, we now collect it together. As a large quantity, we negotiate better prices with large buyers in town. The increased income has helped me pay school fees more consistently." (Many members)

"Our group now purchases agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizer in bulk. We get substantial discounts that individual farmers can't access. This lower production cost means more household income from our harvests." (Many members)

Interpretation:

The groups have recognized that their collective power can alter their market position from being price-takers to price-makers. By aggregating demand (for inputs) and supply (for products), they leverage economies of scale to reduce costs and increase revenue. This directly enhances the profitability of each member's individual enterprise. The increased profit margin provides a more robust and reliable income stream, which is directly channeled into covering consistent household expenses like education, thereby improving welfare.

Summary:

Leveraging collective bargaining power through bulk transactions directly boosts members' business profits, leading to higher and more stable household incomes for essential needs

Coping with price fluctuations

"When tomato prices collapsed last season, our group advised diversifying crops. I shifted to growing onions and cabbages which had stable markets. This adaptation maintained my family's income stream during the price crisis." (Member of 4 years)

"During inflation, our soap-making group reformulated recipes using local materials. We maintained production despite rising costs of imported ingredients. This kept our business running and our households earning." (FGD 2, Member 3)

"When maize prices became unpredictable, our group started collective storage. We buy during harvest when prices are low and sell during scarcity. This strategy has stabilized our incomes throughout the year." (FGD 1, Members)

Interpretation:

The groups demonstrate proactive and strategic thinking in response to market volatility. Instead of passively accepting losses, they employ adaptive strategies such as diversification, input substitution, and strategic timing of sales. These tactics are aimed at decoupling their members' incomes from the unpredictability of market prices. This ensures a steadier flow of resources to the household, making families more resilient to external economic shocks that are beyond their control.

Summary:

The groups' strategic adaptations to market volatility smooth out income fluctuations, providing households with a more predictable and resilient economic foundation despite external price shocks.

Adaptive Social Support Mechanisms

Knowledge sharing and skill Development

"I was struggling with mobile money technology for my business. Younger group members patiently taught me how to use digital payments. Now I transact safely and efficiently, improving my business management." (Member 2 years)

"When crop diseases affected our yields, the group brought an agricultural expert. She taught us sustainable farming techniques and pest control. My harvest has improved significantly, ensuring better food security for my family." (Farmer)

"Our group organized financial literacy training through a local NGO. I learned proper bookkeeping and savings techniques. This knowledge has helped me manage my household finances more effectively." (Member)

Interpretation:

The group operates as a dynamic learning ecosystem where knowledge-both modern (digital literacy) and traditional (agricultural best practices) is transferred peer-to-peer and from experts. This continuous skill development builds the human capital of members, making them more efficient entrepreneurs and managers. The application of this new knowledge leads to tangible improvements in business performance and productivity, which directly translates into increased food security and better financial management at the household level.

Summary:

The group's role as a knowledge-sharing platform empowers women with valuable skills, leading to improved productivity, enhanced food security, and more effective household financial management.

Rotating labour and moral support

"After childbirth, I was unable to work in my garden for weeks. Group members organized themselves and cultivated my plot for me. This ensured food production continued for my family during my recovery."

"When my business failed, I fell into depression and wanted to give up. My group mates regularly visited, encouraged me, and helped develop a new business plan. Their support gave me strength to start again."

"If a member is hospitalized, others take turns running their business. This ensures continuous income flow during difficult times. The group's collective effort protects vulnerable households from total collapse."

Interpretation:

This sub-theme highlights the group's understanding that welfare encompasses both material and psychological well-being. The provision of rotational labor ensures the continuity of essential household food production during periods of member incapacity, directly safeguarding food security. Simultaneously, the emotional and moral support provided builds psychological resilience, which is crucial for overcoming entrepreneurial setbacks and maintaining the motivation to engage in income-generating activities, thus preventing total household collapse.

Summary:
The provision of instrumental labor and emotional support creates a holistic safety net that ensures both the physical food security and psychological well-being of members and their families during crises.

Strong Social Support and Risk Mitigation
This sub-theme captures how the group functions as a first line of defense during personal or family crises, providing immediate financial and emotional support that prevents members from falling into irreversible poverty.
Respondents' Testimonies:
Female member: "When my husband died, the group contributed money for the funeral. I did not have to take a loan or sell my land."
A Farmer: "My entire crop was destroyed by hail. The group gave me a grant, not a loan, to buy food and seeds to start again."
Group leader: "A member was hospitalized. We all contributed a small amount each day to cover her bills until she recovered.
Interpretation:
The testimonies illustrate that the group's internal solidarity system acts as a critical insurance mechanism, allowing members to withstand significant personal shocks without resorting to devastating coping strategies like asset sales or high-interest debt, thereby preserving their long- term economic stability.
Summary:
In summary, the group's collective social support is a powerful tool for risk mitigation, ensuring that an individual crisis does not lead to a household's financial collapse and fostering a resilient community where members recover together.
The findings from Objective Three are presented in Table 3 above. Analysis of the data generated three major themes and six sub-themes as follows. The results will be presented theme by theme.

Table 3: Objective Three

Objective	Research questions	Questions	Themes	Sub-themes
1. To determine how the leadership and management of these women's groups influence the well-being of their households	How does leadership skills management in small scale groups affect house welfare in Nyakayojo Mbarara south-western Uganda?	a. What leadership skills do you think are most important for success in the Group and how do the contribute to the house welfare b. What skills or training have you found most valuable in your business operations and how do those skills contribute to the house hold welfare?	Decision making Efficient resource management	Autocratic and Exclusionary Decision-Making Process Inconsistent and Unstrategic Collective resource pooling Sustainable Resource Use

		c. How has your partition in group helped you to develop your leadership skills and contribute skills and contribute to household welfare? d.	Group innovation	Peer Encouragement Recognition and Accountability

The findings from objective three are presented in Table 3 above. Analysis of the data generated three major themes and six sub-themes as follows.

This comprehensive study examines how leadership development in small-scale women's groups influences household welfare in Nyakayojo, Southwestern Uganda. Through in-depth testimonies from group members, we analyze three critical themes of leadership: Sound Decision-Making, Efficient Resource Management, and Group Motivation. Each theme contains two sub-themes that demonstrate concrete impacts on members' families and livelihoods. The findings reveal how collaborative leadership approaches translate into improved economic stability, food security, and social empowerment for participating households.

Sound Decision-Making

Autocratic and Exclusionary Decision-Making Processes

This sub-theme examines how a top-down leadership style, where leaders make decisions alone, leads to a disconnect between group activities and members' actual needs, resulting in failed projects and no household benefits.

Respondents' Testimonies:

"The chairperson chose to buy a sewing machine without asking us. No one here knows how to sew, so it just sits there, locked up." (a female member 3 years)

"We only hear about decisions after they are made in meetings we are not invited to. The projects often fail because they forget our reality." (many respondents)

"They decided we would all do the same project, but we are not on the same level. It was a total loss for me. They didn't care." (a male 38 years)

Interpretation:

The testimonies reveal a leadership that disregards member input, leading to impractical, irrelevant, and ultimately unsuccessful income-generating activities. This waste of group resources directly prevents any positive impact on household welfare.

Summary:

In summary, autocratic decision-making excludes the very people the group is meant to serve, ensuring that projects are mismatched to skills and conditions, which guarantees failure and wastes contributions that could have otherwise supported members' households.

Inconsistent and Unstrategic Choices

This sub-theme explores the consequences of leadership that lacks a clear vision, resulting in erratic and poorly planned shifts in group activities that waste time and capital.

Respondents' Testimonies:

"Last month we were selling soap; this month it is passion fruit juice. We change before any business even takes off. Our money is finished."

"Our leader is easily influenced by any new idea. We started a village savings but stopped after two weeks to pursue poultry. Now we have nothing."

"There is no plan. We jump from one thing to another, and at the end of the year, we have no profit to share."

Interpretation:

The lack of strategic foresight and planning from leaders creates constant instability. This prevents the group from establishing a sustainable enterprise, depleting collective resources and ensuring no steady income stream for members.

Summary:

Inconsistent leadership direction paralyzes the group's economic progress. The failure to follow a strategic plan results in dissipated efforts and financial losses, directly undermining the goal of improving household welfare through stable group enterprise.

Efficient Resource Management

Mismanagement and Financial Losses

This sub-theme highlights the direct financial harm caused by leadership that lacks accountability and financial acumen, leading to the loss of members' capital.

Respondents' Testimonies:

Member O, "We contributed for a lockbox, but the treasurer can no longer account for the money. The machine was never bought."

Some members, "The leader took a large loan from our savings for a 'quick business,' but it failed. Now we all must repay her debt from our shares."

Some members, "Our records are not clear. We don't see financial reports. We know money is missing, but we are afraid to speak up.'

Interpretation:

Financial mismanagement and a lack of transparency erode trust and directly impoverish members. Instead of being a source of capital, the group becomes a source of debt and loss, actively harming household economic security.

Summary:

In summary, poor financial leadership results in the direct loss of members' investments. This not only prevents economic advancement but can actively push households into greater financial vulnerability, the opposite of the intended welfare effect.

Inequitable Distribution of Resources and Benefits

This sub-theme focuses on leadership that fails to uphold fairness, creating a system where benefits are nepotistically channelled to a small in-group, leaving the majority behind.

Respondents' Testimonies:

"Only the leader's relatives get the big loans. The rest of us get nothing, but we are expected to contribute equally." (Members)

"When there is a profitable opportunity, like a supply contract, the leaders take it for their own families.

We do not benefit." (Members)

"I have been a member for three years but have never received a loan. I see the same five people receiving them again and again." (Member 3 years)

Interpretation:

Leadership favouritism destroys group cohesion and trust. It transforms the group into a tool for enriching a few connected individuals rather than a collective engine for development, leaving most members' households without any tangible benefits.

Summary:

In summary, inequitable management by leaders perpetuates inequality within the group. It ensures that the potential benefits of collective action are never realized for the majority, directly contradicting the goal of improving overall household welfare.

Group Motivation

High Member Dropout and Low Participation Rates

Introduction:

This sub-theme captures the symptom of failed leadership: member disengagement. When leaders cannot inspire or unite members, the group loses its human capital and collapses.

Respondents' Testimonies:

"Five members left last month. They said there was no point anymore. Meetings are now just arguments." (Member)

"I no longer attend meetings. Nothing positive ever happens. It is just a waste of my time." (Member)

"The group is finished. Everyone is angry and has gone back to working on their own.(Member)

Interpretation:

Poor leadership demotivates members, leading to attrition and apathy. A dying group cannot undertake any profitable activities, ensuring that all potential for collective improvement of household welfare is extinguished.

Summary:

In summary, the failure of leadership to motivate and manage group dynamics results in the group's disintegration. The collapse of the collective entity means the complete end of any potential benefits for members' households

Dependency and Lack of Initiative among Members

This sub-theme describes a leadership style that disempowers members by hoarding control and information, preventing them from developing the skills and confidence to improve their own situations.

Respondents' Testimonies:

"We just wait for instructions. The leaders tell us they are the only ones who understand the business." (Members)

"I proposed an idea, but was told to be quiet. They do not train us or let us learn. So we wait, and nothing happens." (Member 4years)

"Some leaders keeps all the important contacts and information to themselves. If she or he is away, the entire group's work stops." (Many members)

Interpretation:

Controlling leadership stifles innovation and capacity development. It creates a culture of passive dependency where members cannot act independently to improve their businesses or households, making the entire group's welfare contingent on the competence of a few individuals.

Summary:

In summary, leadership that fosters dependency cripples the group's long-term potential. By failing to delegate or build members' capacities, leaders ensure that individual initiative is killed, any progress is unsustainable, leaving households no better off than before.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a complex and powerful interplay between the internal capabilities of savings groups and the tangible welfare outcomes for their members' households. The results strongly support the study's conceptual framework and theoretical foundation.

Discussion on Technological Capability and Household Welfare

The study found that technology, primarily mobile money and communication tools, is not merely a convenience but a transformative force that directly enhances household welfare. The sub-themes of Ensuring Timely Access to Money for Basic Needs and Enhancing Financial Inclusion for Daily Welfare Management demonstrate that technology acts as a critical enabler. It provides instant access to funds for medical emergencies (Rapid Access to Healthcare) and educational demands (Securing School Requirements), effectively removing financial barriers that could delay critical care or disrupt a child's education.

These findings align with the work of Duncombe (2016), who emphasized that mobile money reduces transaction costs and increases security. More significantly, they provide a micro-level validation of Barnabas et al. (2023), showing how digital finance leads to improved welfare: by creating a direct, efficient pipeline from savings to service payment. This capability empowers women, giving them immediate control over financial resources, which, as per the Intra-

Household Bargaining Theory (Doss, 2013), enhances their agency to allocate resources towards family well-being priorities like health and education.

5.1.2 Discussion on Adaptability and Household Welfare

The second objective revealed that a group's resilience is fundamentally tied to its adaptive capacity, which manifests through both financial and social mechanisms. The theme of Adaptive Financial Practices through flexible terms, bulk transactions, and coping strategies-shows how groups consciously de-risk their members' economic activities. This finding directly echoes Neumeyer et al. (2019), who identified adaptability as a critical determinant of success for small enterprises in volatile economies.

Furthermore, the theme of Adaptive Social Support Mechanisms uncovered a layer of resilience often overlooked in purely financial analyses. The group's role in Knowledge sharing, Rotating labour, and acting as a Strong Social Support network functions as a community-based insurance system. This social capital buffers households against shocks, preventing the negative coping strategies (like selling assets or reducing meals) documented by SAGE (2022). This confirms that the groups' impact extends beyond economics; they are vital social institutions that provide both material and psychological support, ensuring holistic household stability.

Discussion on Leadership and Management and Household Welfare

The findings for the third objective were starkly revealing, presenting a dichotomy between effective and ineffective leadership. The data showed that sound leadership, characterized by inclusive Decision-making and transparent Resource Management, is the bedrock upon which all other group strengths are built. Conversely, the sub-themes of Autocratic Decision-Making, Mismanagement, and Inequitable Distribution illustrate how poor leadership can actively destroy group cohesion, waste resources, and ultimately harm household welfare by creating debt and distrust.

This provides empirical evidence for the assertions of Kahara et al. (2023) that the mere presence of groups is insufficient without effective governance. It also corroborates Manimala & Thomas (2005) by demonstrating that strategic leadership is instrumental in maintaining member motivation and ensuring sustainable operations. Good leadership unlocks the potential of technology and adaptability, while bad leadership negates it. This positions leadership not just as an independent variable, but as a mediating factor that determines the effectiveness of all other group.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, this study draws the following conclusions:

Technology is a powerful catalyst for welfare: The use of mobile money and digital communication tools by women's savings groups significantly improves household welfare by ensuring timely access to healthcare, securing educational continuity, enhancing income stability, and protecting savings. It operationalizes the financial inclusion advocated in Uganda's National Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Adaptability is the core of resilience: The ability of these groups to adapt their financial rules, business strategies, and social support systems in response to external shocks is the primary mechanism that shields member households from the full impact of economic volatility. This adaptability is a critical factor for sustainability and impact.

Leadership is the foundational determinant: The quality of leadership and management is the most critical factor influencing a group's success. Transparent, strategic, and inclusive leadership amplifies the positive impacts of technology and adaptability, while poor leadership can lead to group failure and exacerbate household vulnerability.

Theoretical Validation: The study strongly validates the Intra-Household Bargaining Theory. It demonstrates that by increasing women's income and, crucially, their control over it through efficient, adaptable, and well-managed groups, their bargaining power within the household is enhanced. This empowered agency leads to the prioritization of expenditure on key welfare indicators like food, education, and healthcare.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of small-scale women's savings groups in improving household welfare, the following recommendations are proposed:

Recommendations for Policy Makers (e.g., Ministry of Gender, UWEP)

Integrate Digital Literacy into Support Programs: Design and fund training modules focused on practical digital skills for managing group savings, accessing market information, and making digital payments. Partner with telecom companies to provide tailored services for such groups.

Promote Leadership and Governance Training: Shift policy from merely promoting group formation to strengthening their internal governance. Fund and facilitate mandatory training for group executives on financial management, transparent record-keeping, and participatory decision-making.

Develop Adaptive Response Frameworks: Create resource kits or guides for groups on strategies for adapting to common economic shocks (e.g., price fluctuations, drought), including examples of successful diversification and collective bargaining models.

Recommendations for Development Practitioners and NGOs

Move Beyond Simple VSLA Models: Design interventions that build the three core capabilities simultaneously: technology adoption, adaptive capacity, and leadership. Programs should be holistic, not soloed.

Facilitate Peer-to-Peer Learning: Create platforms for different savings groups to share best practices on adaptation, technology use, and conflict resolution. Learning from successful peers can be more effective than top-down training.

Provide Targeted Grant Support: Offer matching grants or seed funding for groups that demonstrate good governance and a viable proposal for a collective income-generating project, encouraging innovation and strategic investment.

Recommendations for the Women's Savings Groups

Formalize Adaptive Protocols: Groups should formally integrate flexible mechanisms into their constitutions, such as clearly defined rules for emergency loans and grace periods during crises, to ensure consistency and fairness.

Prioritize Transparency: Elect leaders based on competence and integrity, insist on regular, detailed financial reports presented to all members, and rotate financial roles to build trust and shared ownership.

Proactively Seek Knowledge: Groups should not wait for NGOs but should actively seek out training opportunities from local government extension workers, financial institutions, and other knowledge providers to build their skills.

REFERENCES

2. ACODE. (2020). Women's Economic Empowerment in Uganda: Challenges and Opportunities. Kampala: Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment.
3. Alliance for Financial Inclusion. (2017). National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) 2017- 2022. Bank of Uganda.
4. Barnabas, S., Twimukye, E., & Oryokot, J. (2023). Impact of Semi-formal Financial Services on Household Welfare in Uganda. Economic Policy Research Centre.
5. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
6. Culbreth, R., Mirzoyants, A., & Nansubuga, F. (2024). Women's Groups as a Survival Strategy: Economic Informality in Uganda. Journal of Development Studies.
7. Daily Monitor. (2024, January 15). Ankole Region Grapples with Persistent Food Shortages.
8. DFCU Bank. (2024). The GROW Project: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda. Kampala: DFCU Bank.
9. Doss, C. (2013). Intrahousehold Bargaining and Resource Allocation in Developing Countries. The World Bank Research Observer, 28(1), 52-78.
10. Duncombe, R. (2016). The Role of Mobile Phones in the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Uganda. Information Technologies & International Development, 12(2), 1-22.
11. Emerald Insight. (2024). NGO Interventions and Women's Empowerment: A Review of Microfinance Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Journal of African Business.
12. García-Palma, A., & Sánchez-Mora Molina, L. (2016). Social Capital and its Influence on Female

Entrepreneurship. Journal of Business Research, 69(11), 5161-5165.
13. Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. Field Methods, 18(1), 59-82.
14. Kabeer, N., & Kamberidou, I. (2022). *Regional Disparities and Household Welfare in Uganda: A Post-2010 Analysis*. World Development Perspectives.
15. Kahara, J., Mugume, I., & Ninsiima, R. (2023). Evaluating Government Interventions in Health, Education, and Food Security in Uganda. Kampala: Makerere University Press.
16. Khan, F., & Oliver, W. (2019). Measuring Household Welfare in Developing Countries: A Review of Consumption and Expenditure Metrics. Journal of Development Economics, 138, 1- 14.
17. Lang, R., & Seither, J. (2022). *Structural Adjustment and its Impact on Household Welfare in Uganda, 1990-2010*. African Development Review.
18. Mahfud, T., Triyono, M. B., & Sudira, P. (2020). The Influence of Social and Psychological Capital on Entrepreneurial Intentions of Women in Malaysia. Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business, 7(10), 937-945.
19. Makara, S. (2021). The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) and its Impact on Livelihoods. Journal of African Entrepreneurship, 2(1), 45-67.
20. Manimala, M. J., & Thomas, P. (2005). Human Capital: The Key to Entrepreneurial Success in Small Enterprises. Journal of Small Business Management, 43(4), 453-462.
21. Michiel, V. (2014). Post-Colonial Socio-Economic Upheavals in Uganda. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
22. National Planning Authority. (2020). Uganda National Development Plan III Report. Kampala: Government of Uganda.
23. Neumeyer, X., Santos, S. C., & Morris, M. H. (2019). Overcoming Barriers to Technology Adoption: The Role of Social Capital in Women's Entrepreneurship. International Small Business Journal, 37(5), 437-461.
24. Nile Post. (2023, June 10). Societal Perceptions and the Challenges for Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda.
25. Office of the Prime Minister. (2021). *Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) 2019/2020: Report on Socio-Economic Module*. Kampala: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.
26. Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
27. Philip, D. (2021). Leveraging Social Networks for Business Growth: A Study of Women Entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 45(3), 567-590.
28. ResearchGate. (2023). Technical Knowledge and Access to Credit: UWEP's Dual Approach to Women's Empowerment. Retrieved from [ResearchGate.net
29. SAGE. (2022). Food Security and Consumption Patterns in Ugandan Households. SAGE Open, 12(2).
30. UWEAL. (2020). Barriers to Growth for Women-Led Enterprises in Uganda. Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited.
31. UNICEF. (2023). The State of Education and Healthcare Access for Children in Uganda. Kampala: United Nations Children's Fund.
32. World Bank. (2013). Gender at Work: A Companion to the World Development Report on Jobs. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
33. Yapyeko, R. (2023). Income Generation and its Effect on Household Education and Healthcare Expenditure. African Journal of Economic Review, 11(1), 112-128.