

## SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS IN IMENTI NORTH SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is essential for achieving gender equality, advancing women's rights, enhancing productivity, and promoting economic diversification, among other positive development outcomes. The general objective of this study was to establish the influence of Socioeconomic determinants on the performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North Sub-County, Kenya. The specific objectives were to examine the effects of educational level, social support systems on the performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North Sub-County. The study was guided by human capital theory, and social capital theory. This study adopted a descriptive research design, targeting 20 women groups in Imenti North Sub-County. The study targeted a population of 120 executive members and 60 project liaison officers from women groups in Imenti North Sub-County, Kenya, totaling 180 respondents, with a census approach due to the manageable population size. Primary data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Instrument validity and reliability were confirmed through a pilot test, with all constructs achieving acceptable reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis analyzed using SPSS Version 28. The study achieved a 93.3% response rate (n = 168). Regression results indicated that the socioeconomic determinants jointly explained 74% of the variation in project performance ( $R^2 = 0.740$ ,  $F = 116.156$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). educational level ( $\beta = 0.278$ ), and social support systems ( $\beta = 0.311$ ) had significant positive effects on performance. The findings suggest that while empowerment projects generate moderate financial outcomes, their strongest impact is reflected in enhanced social capital, leadership capacity, and collective agency among women. The study recommends strengthening inclusive financial mechanisms, expanding capacity-building initiatives, institutionalizing support networks, and implementing culturally responsive strategies to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of women empowerment projects.

**Key Words:** Socioeconomic Determinants, Educational Level, Social Support Systems, Performance, Women Empowerment Projects, Imenti North Sub-County

## Background of the Study

Women's empowerment has emerged as a critical driver of sustainable development, economic growth, and social progress, particularly in developing regions where gender disparities remain pronounced (Kabeer, 2020). The performance of women empowerment projects is shaped by a complex interplay of socioeconomic determinants, which directly impact the effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of these initiatives (Wambui & Ndung'u, 2021). Understanding these factors is essential for enhancing empowerment programs aimed at improving the socioeconomic status and overall well-being of women. This study examines key socioeconomic determinants, including education, and social support, and their role in influencing the success of women empowerment projects within the broader framework of development studies.

Socioeconomic determinants refer to the economic and social conditions that influence individuals' opportunities, access to resources, and overall quality of life (World Bank, 2022). Education, both formal and informal, is another fundamental factor, as it equips women with skills, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial capabilities, enabling them to manage and expand their projects effectively (Njuki et al., 2023). Social support networks, including peer mentorship, women's groups, and community initiatives, play a pivotal role in enhancing resilience and fostering resource-sharing among women in economic ventures (Quisumbing et al., 2021).

The importance of these socioeconomic determinants extends beyond individual empowerment, as they are key drivers of economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. Research has demonstrated that improving women's access to financial services and education contributes to higher household incomes, improved health outcomes, and intergenerational economic mobility (Mbai & Kamau, 2022). A study by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2022) indicates that women-led enterprises contribute nearly 30% to Kenya's GDP, yet they continue to face financial and institutional barriers that limit their growth. The Women Enterprise Fund (WEF, 2023) further reports that women entrepreneurs in rural areas, including Imenti North, receive less than 15% of total microfinance loans, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to bridge these gaps. Addressing these determinants through policy reforms, increased investment in education, and gender-responsive financial policies can significantly improve the performance and sustainability of women empowerment projects (Ngunyi et al., 2020).

From a Development Studies perspective, examining socioeconomic determinants provides insights into the structural challenges that impact the performance of women empowerment projects. A holistic approach is required to not only meet the immediate financial and operational needs of these projects but also tackle the underlying socioeconomic barriers that restrict women's economic participation. By analyzing income levels, education, and access to resources, this study aims to identify pathways for enhancing project effectiveness and resilience (Ouma & Akech, 2021). The findings will contribute to the global discourse on sustainable development, demonstrating how targeted interventions that address these socioeconomic determinants can lead to more inclusive and transformative empowerment outcomes.

This research sought to uncover the nuanced realities that shape the performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North Sub-County. By addressing the socioeconomic barriers that hinder women's full economic participation, this study aims to generate evidence-based recommendations that can inform policy and practice in women's economic empowerment. As the global community continues to prioritize gender equality as a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), studies like this provide critical insights that can drive meaningful change and improve the livelihoods of women and their communities (UNDP, 2023).

## Statement of the Problem

Women's empowerment is globally recognized as a critical pathway to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. However, persistent gender disparities, socioeconomic constraints, and cultural barriers continue to undermine the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives. Globally, women remain 27% less likely than men to access financial services (World Bank, 2023), limiting their ability to invest, build assets, or participate fully in economic development. In Kenya, although women constitute 50.3% of the population, only 29% have access to formal financial services compared to 47% of men (CBK, 2023). This stark financial exclusion restricts women's ability to initiate businesses, attain financial independence, or engage in economic decision-making processes. These disparities are particularly pronounced in rural areas such as Imenti North Sub-County, where access to finance, education, and decision-making spaces remains severely limited.

Recent statistics highlight a living problem in Imenti North: 63% of women in the sub-county lack access to credit, and 58% do not participate in household financial decisions (KNBS, 2022). Although the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) has disbursed over KES 28 billion nationally since 2007, over KES 963.8 Million has been disbursed to Meru County, representing about 3.4% of the total national disbursement, including Imenti North (WEF, 2025). Furthermore, 54% of women entrepreneurs in rural Kenya struggle with loan repayment, indicating that financial access alone is insufficient without capacity-building in areas such as business planning and financial literacy. The gap in service delivery and the underrepresentation of local women in empowerment programs point to structural limitations that must be urgently addressed.

In addition to financial constraints, women in Imenti North face challenges in sustaining entrepreneurial ventures. A report by FSD Kenya (2022) revealed that rural women-led businesses have a 35% higher likelihood of failure than those led by men due to limited working capital, inadequate training, and gendered biases in access to markets. Moreover, 67% of women entrepreneurs in Imenti North operate in the informal sector, characterized by low returns, unstable income, and lack of social protection (KNBS, 2022). These structural barriers diminish the long-term viability of women empowerment projects and highlight the need for more targeted interventions that move beyond access to credit alone.

Despite increasing enrollment in microfinance programs, the actual empowerment outcomes for women remain weak. As Ndwiga et al. (2022) found, only 62.6% of women had autonomy over the use of funds borrowed through microfinance, while just 32.7% had decision-making power over household assets such as land or livestock. This suggests that socio-cultural norms continue to dilute the impact of economic empowerment programs by restricting financial autonomy and leadership opportunities for women, particularly in rural patriarchal contexts.

Kenya's 2010 Constitution and the National Policy on Gender and Development have laid a strong legal foundation for gender equality. However, their implementation at the county level has been inconsistent. In Imenti North, for example, only 24% of women report awareness of their legal rights to property and inheritance (Chisika & Yeom, 2023). This lack of legal literacy prevents women from asserting control over resources or pursuing opportunities that require collateral. Consequently, even well-intended empowerment programs fail to address the deeper structural and normative constraints that shape women's socioeconomic realities.

Although several studies have examined women's empowerment, most existing research has focused either on general empowerment through self-help groups or sector-specific domains such as agriculture. For example, Maina (2021) found that self-help group participation improves household income, while Didana (2021) and Yussuf (2023) emphasized the importance of education, household income, and access to capital in influencing empowerment outcomes. However, there remains a research gap in understanding how multiple socioeconomic determinants, such as education level, and social support systems, collectively affect the performance of women empowerment projects in a localized rural setting like Imenti

North.

This study aims to bridge that gap by conducting a focused, evidence-based analysis of these determinants in Imenti North Sub-County. The findings are expected to contribute not only to academic literature but also to practical policy solutions and program designs that are better aligned with the real needs of rural women. By identifying the factors that influence the success or failure of women empowerment projects, the study seeks to support the development of sustainable, culturally responsive, and locally owned empowerment initiatives in Meru County and beyond.

### **Objective of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to establish the influence of Socioeconomic determinants on performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North Sub-County, Kenya.

The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- i. To assess the effect of educational level on performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya.
- ii. To determine the effect of social support systems on performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Human Capital Theory**

Human Capital Theory (HCT), extensively developed by Becker (1964), posits that investments in education, training, and health enhance an individual's productivity and economic value. The theory argues that human capital, knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through education, is a key determinant of personal and organizational performance. Within women empowerment projects, educational attainment plays a crucial role in equipping women with the skills needed to manage projects, make informed decisions, and engage in leadership roles. Schultz (1961) highlights that education increases cognitive skills, which in turn improves an individual's ability to innovate, solve problems, and effectively utilize available resources. HCT suggests that women with higher educational levels are better positioned to understand project dynamics, access market information, and make strategic decisions that enhance project performance.

Despite its strong emphasis on the economic returns of education, HCT has been critiqued for its narrow focus on individual gains and its assumption that education automatically translates into improved economic outcomes. Blaug (1976) contends that HCT often neglects structural barriers such as gender discrimination, inadequate educational infrastructure, and Socioeconomic inequalities that can hinder the realization of educational benefits, especially for marginalized groups like women. Moreover, HCT does not fully address the non-economic benefits of education, such as increased self-esteem and empowerment, which are critical for holistic development (Mincer, 1974). Despite these critiques, HCT remains relevant for this study as it underscores the link between educational attainment and project success, illustrating how investments in human capital can drive performance improvements in women empowerment initiatives.

#### **Social Capital Theory**

Social Capital Theory (SCT), articulated by scholars such as Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (1995), emphasizes the importance of social networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity in facilitating collective action and resource mobilization. SCT posits that social capital, the

benefits derived from social connections, enhances individuals' and groups' ability to access resources, support, and information. In the context of women empowerment projects, social support systems such as community networks, family ties, and peer groups provide critical resources that are often unavailable through formal means.

Putnam (2000) argues that social capital fosters cooperation and mutual aid, which are essential for successful project implementation and sustainability. Women groups that are embedded in strong social networks can leverage these connections to gain access to financial resources, share knowledge, and build resilience against challenges.

However, SCT has been critiqued for its lack of conceptual clarity and inconsistent definitions across studies. Portes (1998) highlights that social capital can have both positive and negative effects, depending on the nature of the social networks involved. For instance, while strong ties within a group can foster solidarity, they can also lead to exclusion of outsiders and reinforce negative behaviors, such as resistance to change or adherence to restrictive cultural norms. Moreover, SCT often overlooks power imbalances within social networks, which can affect the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Coleman, 1988). Despite these limitations, SCT provides a robust framework for analyzing how social support systems enhance the performance of women empowerment projects by fostering a supportive environment that encourages participation, resource sharing, and community engagement.

### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structured set of broad ideas and principles drawn from relevant fields of inquiry, used to guide the research process (Reichel & Ramey, 2020). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2023), a conceptual framework forms the basic structure of a study, consisting of interrelated independent and dependent variables. Mugenda and Mugenda (2023) describe it as consisting of abstract components that represent the observational, experiential, and analytical aspects of the system being studied. In this study, the independent variables include educational level, and social support systems. These variables are key factors believed to impact the performance of women empowerment projects, which serves as the dependent variable.

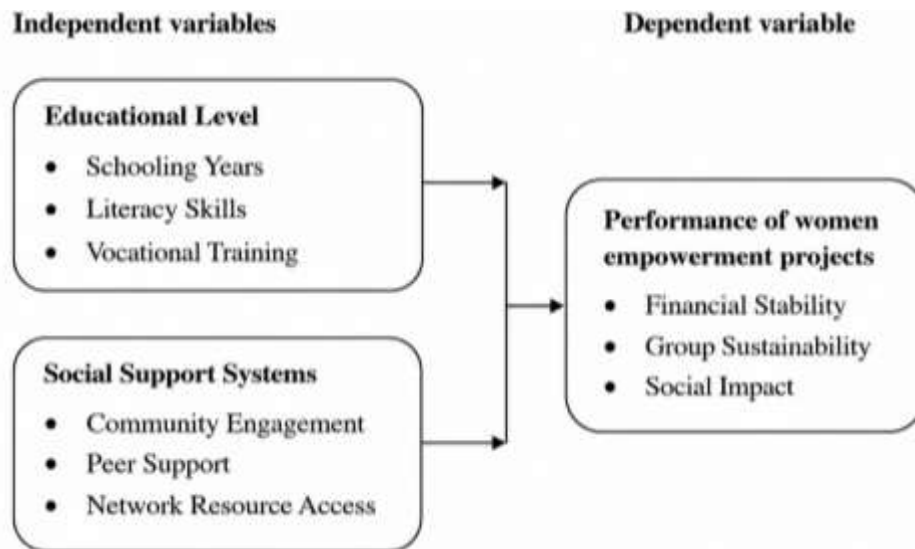


Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

#### Educational Level

Educational level is a pivotal determinant of the performance of women empowerment projects, as it directly influences the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of the women involved. Education enhances women's ability to participate effectively in project activities, make informed decisions, and assume leadership roles. A higher level of education is associated with improved critical thinking, problem-solving, and management skills, all of which are essential

for successful project implementation and sustainability. According to UNESCO (2021), education not only improves individual prospects but also empowers women to engage more actively in community affairs and economic activities. Educational attainment equips women with the tools needed to navigate complex project environments, manage resources efficiently, and drive innovation within their initiatives.

A key construct of educational level is the number of schooling years, which directly reflects the formal education attained by women. The duration of schooling is critical as it correlates with the depth of knowledge and range of skills that women bring to their projects. Longer schooling periods are linked with better literacy and numeracy skills, which are vital for tasks such as budgeting, record-keeping, and communication within projects (Brixiová et al., 2020). Women with extended education are more likely to understand market dynamics and leverage opportunities that can improve project performance.

Literacy skills form another essential aspect of educational level. Literacy encompasses the ability to read, write, and comprehend information, skills that are foundational for effective project participation. Literacy enables women to engage with written materials, understand legal rights, and access critical information that can influence project outcomes. The development of literacy skills among women is directly linked to their empowerment, as it expands their access to learning resources and enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully to their communities (International Labour Organization, 2020). Vocational training focuses on equipping women with specific, market-relevant skills that can directly impact their economic activities. Vocational training provides practical and technical skills that are essential for running and sustaining successful projects, especially in fields such as agriculture, craftwork, and small-scale business management. Studies have shown that women who undergo vocational training are better prepared to engage in income-generating activities, leading to enhanced project outcomes and personal empowerment (UNESCO, 2021). Providing continuous learning opportunities through vocational programs helps bridge skill gaps and adapt to changing market demands.

### **Social Support Systems**

Social support systems encompass the networks, relationships, and community structures that provide emotional, informational, and practical assistance to women involved in empowerment projects. These systems are crucial as they enhance women's confidence, provide a platform for resource sharing, and foster a sense of belonging and mutual aid. Social support systems are often embedded within community groups, family ties, and peer networks that facilitate access to critical resources and information. According to Kim et al. (2020), social capital derived from strong social support systems significantly contributes to the success of women's economic activities by facilitating access to opportunities, markets, and resources that may otherwise be inaccessible. This support enables women to navigate challenges more effectively, enhances their resilience, and improves the overall performance of their projects.

Community engagement is a vital construct of social support systems, reflecting the extent to which women are involved in community activities and networks related to their projects. Engagement within community groups fosters collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a collective approach to problem-solving, all of which are critical for the success of empowerment initiatives. Active community participation helps women build valuable connections, gain access to new opportunities, and leverage collective resources to support their projects (Narayan et al., 2021). Furthermore, community engagement strengthens social cohesion and promotes an inclusive environment that supports women's economic and social advancement. Peer support, another key component of social support systems, involves the practical and emotional assistance that women receive from other women within their groups or networks. Peer support not only provides a safety net during times of challenge but also fosters a sense of solidarity and shared purpose among women, which is essential for sustaining motivation and commitment to their projects. According to Kim et al. (2020), women who

receive peer support are more likely to persevere in their ventures, as the encouragement and guidance from peers provide a boost in confidence and morale, enhancing project performance.

Network resource access refers to the availability of resources, information, and opportunities facilitated by being part of social networks. This construct highlights the importance of social capital in accessing resources that can drive project success, such as training opportunities, market information, and financial support. Effective networking within social support systems enables women to gain insights, share best practices, and connect with stakeholders who can provide valuable assistance to their projects (Narayan et al., 2021). These interactions help women overcome barriers and leverage available resources to improve the performance of their empowerment initiatives.

### **Performance of Women Empowerment Projects**

Performance, as defined by Neely, Gregory, and Platts (2020), refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which an organization or project meets its objectives, encompassing both processes and outcomes. In the context of women empowerment projects, performance reflects the extent to which these initiatives achieve their intended goals of enhancing women's economic and social status, reducing poverty, and contributing to sustainable development. High-performing projects are characterized by effective implementation, long-term sustainability, and measurable impact on participants and communities. Evaluating the performance of women empowerment projects requires assessing various development-focused indicators, such as financial stability, group sustainability, social impact, all of which determine the success of empowerment initiatives in fostering economic independence and gender equality.

From a development perspective, project performance is measured not only by financial outcomes but also by the extent to which the project advances gender equity, improves household livelihoods, and fosters capacity-building (UNDP, 2023). Financial stability is a critical measure of performance, as it indicates whether projects can sustain themselves without external funding. This includes assessing revenue generation, loan repayment rates, and the ability of participants to reinvest in their businesses (Women Enterprise Fund [WEF], 2023). Project sustainability is another key factor, as it determines whether women empowerment initiatives continue to operate effectively beyond their initial funding cycles. Sustainable projects are characterized by effective leadership, resource management, and long-term community engagement, which contribute to their viability and impact (Miedema et al., 2020).

Social impact, a core performance indicator, examines how empowerment projects contribute to gender equality, poverty reduction, and improved decision-making power for women. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2022), empowering women economically leads to increased household income, better educational outcomes for children, and greater community resilience. Additionally, projects that enhance women's leadership roles, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship skills create long-term social benefits by breaking cycles of dependency and marginalization (Quisumbing et al., 2021). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on Gender Equality, emphasize the need for structured interventions that promote economic opportunities for women while addressing structural inequalities (United Nations, 2023).

Capacity-building through skill development is another essential aspect of performance evaluation. Training initiatives aimed at improving women's competencies in business management, financial literacy, and leadership enhance their ability to sustain projects and integrate into the formal economy (Brixiová et al., 2020). Research suggests that projects with a strong focus on education and training are more likely to contribute to women's long-term economic stability and community leadership (Njuki et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the performance of women empowerment projects should be assessed using a development-focused lens, incorporating indicators such as financial sustainability, long-term

viability, and measurable social impact. By aligning project performance with poverty alleviation, gender equity, and economic inclusion, empowerment initiatives can contribute to broader national and global development goals, ensuring that women have access to the resources and opportunities needed to drive sustainable change.

## **Empirical Review**

### **Educational Level and Performance of Women Empowerment Projects**

Khanum, Akter, and Deep (2020) explored the role of education in women's entrepreneurship and empowerment in Barishal, Bangladesh. Their study found that higher levels of education among women entrepreneurs significantly enhanced their business management skills, decision-making abilities, and overall economic participation. Educated women were more likely to access financial resources, network effectively, and adopt innovative approaches in their enterprises, which led to improved empowerment outcomes. The study emphasized the importance of education as a critical factor in equipping women with the knowledge and confidence necessary for entrepreneurship and economic independence.

Choudhry, Abdul Mutalib, and Ismail (2021) conducted a situational analysis of socio-cultural factors affecting women's economic empowerment in Pakistan, focusing on the role of education. They found that educational attainment was a key determinant of women's empowerment, as it directly influenced their employment opportunities and decision-making power within households. Women with higher education levels had better access to formal employment and were more likely to participate in economic activities that challenged traditional gender roles. However, the study also highlighted that despite improvements in educational access, socio-cultural barriers continued to limit the full utilization of educated women in economic spheres.

Rehman, Moazzam, and Ansari (2020) examined the impact of microfinance institutions on women's empowerment in Pakistan and highlighted the role of education. The study found that women with higher educational levels were more adept at utilizing microfinance products effectively, leading to better business outcomes and enhanced empowerment. Education played a significant role in improving women's understanding of financial management, legal rights, and market dynamics, which were essential for the successful operation of their enterprises. The findings suggest that increasing educational opportunities for women can significantly amplify the impact of financial inclusion initiatives.

Atake and Ali (2021) investigated the relationship between women's educational levels and fertility preferences in Sub-Saharan Africa. Their study found that women with higher educational attainment were more likely to make autonomous decisions regarding family planning, which was linked to greater overall empowerment. The research underscored the transformative potential of education in enhancing women's agency and reducing dependency on traditional societal norms that often restrict their empowerment. The findings highlighted that educational programs targeting women could have far-reaching implications for their economic and social empowerment across various dimensions.

### **Social Support Systems and Performance of Women Empowerment Projects**

Njuki et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of gender equality, women's empowerment, and food systems, highlighting the importance of social support systems in advancing women's empowerment. The study emphasizes that effective community engagement and social networks play a crucial role in enhancing women's capacity to participate in economic activities and decision-making processes. Social support systems, including peer support and resource-sharing networks, facilitate women's empowerment by providing access to critical resources, fostering a sense of community, and enhancing resilience against Socioeconomic challenges. The authors argue that cross-contextual typologies of social support systems are essential for understanding the localized impacts of empowerment initiatives, which vary significantly based on cultural and Socioeconomic contexts.

Gilani, Ali, and Ahmad (2020) explored the relationship between microcredit and women's empowerment in Jhelum, Pakistan, focusing on the role of social support from microfinance institutions. The study found that community assistance through microfinance led to enhanced economic participation among women, thereby contributing to their overall empowerment. Social support networks provided by microfinance institutions acted as catalysts for women's economic ventures, allowing them to access financial resources, share knowledge, and build self-confidence. The study underscores the importance of integrating community support structures into financial services to maximize the impact of women's empowerment programs.

Heckert et al. (2021) examined the role of social support systems in a nutrition-sensitive agriculture program in Africa, demonstrating how women's empowerment is linked to improved health and nutrition outcomes. The study found that community-based support networks significantly enhanced women's access to agricultural resources, knowledge, and decision-making platforms. Social support groups enabled women to share experiences, gain critical insights into best practices, and advocate for their rights within their communities. The findings suggest that social support systems are not only essential for economic empowerment but also for broader health and social well-being, as they foster an environment where women can thrive both economically and personally.

Jones et al. (2021) focused on the multidimensional aspects of women's empowerment, including social, economic, and psychological factors. Their research indicated that social support networks significantly influence women's empowerment by enhancing their intrinsic agency, decision-making capabilities, and participation in community activities. The study highlighted that women who actively engage in social networks tend to experience higher levels of empowerment, as these networks provide critical avenues for learning, mentorship, and collective action. However, the study also pointed out that the effectiveness of social support systems can be hindered by socio-cultural barriers that restrict women's freedom to participate fully in community activities.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research design serves as a roadmap for achieving the study's objectives (Cooper & Schindler, 2016). This study adopted a descriptive research design. This design describes the characteristics of the population and it focuses on the 'what' and not of the 'why' of the research subject. Descriptive research presents an opportunity to use both quantitative and qualitative data as a means to reconstruct the 'what is' of a topic. This study focuses on 20 active women groups in Imenti North Sub-County that have received support from the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) to implement empowerment projects (Meru Social Services Office, 2023). These groups were selected based on their availability, funding status, and level of engagement in economic empowerment initiatives to ensure a comprehensive assessment of project performance. Their diverse Socioeconomic backgrounds, spanning rural and peri-urban areas, provide a broad representation of key factors influencing financial accessibility, education levels, and cultural dynamics.

The study focuses on six executive members and two project liaison officers per group, bringing the total target population to 180 respondents. The selection of six executive members is based on organizational management principles, which emphasize diverse leadership structures for effective decision-making (Mintzberg, 1979). This structure includes key roles such as the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and three senior officials, ensuring balanced oversight of financial planning, stakeholder engagement, and governance. Research indicates that small leadership teams of five to seven members optimize efficiency while maintaining functional decision-making flexibility (Tannenbaum et al., 2012).

Additionally, two project liaison officers per group are included to strengthen data triangulation and provide insights into external support mechanisms, resource distribution, and financial access. Their role, as highlighted in project management frameworks (Turner, 2016), is critical

in coordinating project activities, ensuring accountability, and facilitating interactions with stakeholders such as WEF and local government agencies. Table 1 presents the distribution of the target population.

**Table 1: Target Population**

| Target Category                 | Target Population |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Women groups' executive members | 120               |
| Women groups' liaison officers  | 60                |
| Total                           | 180               |

**Source:** Meru Social Services Office (2023)

Given the relatively small size of the target population, this study adopts a census approach, meaning that all 180 identified respondents were included in the research. A census is particularly suitable for populations of less than 200 individuals, as it ensures comprehensive data collection and eliminates sampling bias (Cooper & Schindler, 2013).

The study utilized semi-structured questionnaires and interview guides to collect primary data, allowing for systematic data collection while capturing in-depth insights into the study variables. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis and presented in prose form. Quantitative data on the other hand was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 28. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse quantitative data. Descriptive statistics included percentages, frequency distribution, mean (a measure of dispersion), and standard deviation. Regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient analysis were used for inferential data analysis.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study targeted 180 respondents, out of which 168 successfully completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 93.3%. This rate is considered excellent, since Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) recommend that a response rate of 50% is adequate, 60% is good, and 70% and above is very good for data analysis. The high response rate can be attributed to the drop-and-pick-later method, the use of local mobilizers for follow-up, and the relevance of the study to the respondents. This level of participation enhances the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings, while minimizing the risk of non-response bias.

### Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

This section presents the descriptive analysis of the study variables in line with the specific objectives of the research.

#### Educational Level

Educational level was measured using six statements aimed at assessing the influence of education on women's empowerment and project performance in Imenti North Sub-County. Respondents rated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the six items.

**Table2: Descriptive Statistics for Educational Level**

| Statement   | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|---|-------|----------------|
| Higher educational levels improve women's entrepreneurial skills    | 4.244 | 0.670          |
| Education enhances women's decision-making abilities                | 4.030 | 0.642          |
| Educated women have better access to financial resources            | 3.935 | 0.820          |
| Education helps women adopt innovative approaches in their projects | 3.994 | 0.762          |
| Training and mentorship complement educational attainment           | 4.238 | 0.612          |
| Education challenges socio-cultural norms that restrict women       | 3.696 | 0.846          |
| Aggregate Score   | 4.023 | 0.725          |

The results indicate that respondents strongly agreed that education plays a vital role in

women's empowerment. The statement *Higher educational levels improve women's entrepreneurial skills* recorded the highest mean ( $M = 4.244$ ,  $SD = 0.670$ ), reflecting widespread recognition that education enhances business acumen and management capacity. The relatively low standard deviation ( $SD = 0.670$ ) indicates strong consensus among respondents, suggesting that perceptions regarding the value of education in entrepreneurship are highly aligned. Similarly, *Training and mentorship complement educational attainment* was highly rated ( $M = 4.238$ ,  $SD = 0.612$ ). The  $SD$  of  $0.612$ , which is the lowest among the items, demonstrates very high agreement and minimal dispersion in responses. This indicates that respondents consistently view continuous learning and mentorship as essential reinforcements of formal education. The strong clustering of responses around the mean suggests a shared understanding of the importance of capacity-building structures.

Respondents also strongly agreed that education enhances decision-making abilities ( $M = 4.030$ ,  $SD = 0.642$ ). The relatively low  $SD$  shows consistent perceptions that education strengthens autonomy and strategic thinking. Likewise, the statement that education supports innovation in project management ( $M = 3.994$ ,  $SD = 0.762$ ) recorded strong agreement, though the slightly higher  $SD$  suggests somewhat greater variation in how respondents perceive innovation outcomes. This may indicate differences in exposure to innovative practices across groups. Moderate to strong agreement was observed for *Educated women have better access to financial resources* ( $M = 3.935$ ,  $SD = 0.820$ ). The higher  $SD$  of  $0.820$  indicates more variability in responses, suggesting that while many women perceive a link between education and financial access, this relationship may not be uniformly experienced. Structural constraints such as collateral requirements or institutional bias may still limit access despite educational attainment.

Similarly, *Education challenges socio-cultural norms that restrict women* recorded a mean of  $3.696$  ( $SD = 0.846$ ). Although respondents generally agreed, the relatively higher  $SD$  reflects greater dispersion in perceptions. This suggests that while education is seen as a transformative force, its ability to dismantle entrenched cultural norms may vary depending on household dynamics, community context, and patriarchal structures. The aggregate score ( $M = 4.023$ ,  $SD = 0.725$ ) demonstrates that, overall, respondents perceived education as a critical driver of empowerment and project performance. The moderate-to-low  $SD$  indicates relatively strong consensus across respondents, reinforcing the view that education, particularly when complemented by training and mentorship, plays a central and widely acknowledged role in enhancing women's empowerment outcomes.

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the transformative role of education. Khanum, Akter, and Deep (2020) and Rehman, Moazzam, and Ansari (2020) highlighted that education enhances entrepreneurial skills, financial management, and empowerment outcomes among women. Choudhry, Abdul Mutalib, and Ismail (2021) further noted that educational attainment strengthens decision-making and employment opportunities, allowing women to challenge traditional gender roles. The strong agreement on the importance of training and mentorship resonates with Atake and Ali (2021), who showed that education empowers women to make autonomous decisions, including in family planning, thereby increasing agency. The recognition that education helps challenge socio-cultural norms also aligns with Choudhry et al. (2021) and Njuki et al. (2023), who argued that empowerment interventions must leverage education to shift deep-rooted cultural attitudes.

### Social Support Systems

Social support systems were measured using six statements designed to assess the role of networks, mentorship, and community engagement in supporting women's empowerment projects. Respondents rated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ( $1 = Strongly Disagree$ ,  $5 = Strongly Agree$ ). Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of the six items.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Social Support Systems**

| Statement   | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|---|-------|----------------|
| Social support networks enhance women's capacity in managing projects           | 4.054 | 0.728          |
| Community engagement improves women's participation in economic activities      | 4.232 | 0.638          |
| Peer support and resource-sharing networks facilitate project success           | 3.946 | 0.720          |
| Access to mentors and role models boosts women's confidence in entrepreneurship | 4.065 | 0.727          |
| Social support systems improve resilience against Socioeconomic challenges      | 4.220 | 0.583          |
| Women benefit from knowledge sharing within their social networks               | 4.232 | 0.647          |
| Aggregate Score   | 4.125 | 0.674          |

The results indicate that respondents strongly agreed that social support systems play a central role in enhancing the performance of women empowerment projects. The statement *Community engagement improves women's participation in economic activities* recorded a high mean ( $M = 4.232$ ,  $SD = 0.638$ ). The relatively low standard deviation indicates strong agreement among respondents, suggesting that perceptions regarding the importance of community engagement are highly consistent across groups. Similarly, *Women benefit from knowledge sharing within their social networks* recorded an identical mean ( $M = 4.232$ ,  $SD = 0.647$ ). The SD value shows minimal dispersion, indicating that respondents uniformly recognize the value of peer learning, information exchange, and collective experience in strengthening women's projects. This strong clustering around the mean suggests that knowledge-sharing practices are widely embedded within the women groups studied.

The statement *Social support systems improve resilience against socioeconomic challenges* recorded a high mean ( $M = 4.220$ ,  $SD = 0.583$ ), with the lowest SD among all items in this construct. The very low dispersion reflects exceptionally strong consensus that social networks act as buffers against financial instability, market risks, and social pressures. This suggests that resilience-building through collective structures is not only acknowledged but consistently experienced across respondents. Similarly, *Access to mentors and role models boosts women's confidence in entrepreneurship* recorded strong agreement ( $M = 4.065$ ,  $SD = 0.727$ ). Although the mean remains high, the slightly higher SD indicates moderate variability in experiences. This suggests that while mentorship is generally valued, access to role models may not be equally distributed among all groups, reflecting potential disparities in exposure to leadership or external support systems.

The lowest mean, though still reflecting agreement, was recorded for *Peer support and resource-sharing networks facilitate project success* ( $M = 3.946$ ,  $SD = 0.720$ ). The moderate SD indicates some divergence in perception, implying that while peer networks are beneficial, their effectiveness may vary depending on group cohesion, resource availability, or leadership structures. This variation suggests that not all peer networks operate at the same level of strength or sustainability.

The aggregate score ( $M = 4.125$ ,  $SD = 0.674$ ) indicates overall strong agreement that social support systems significantly contribute to project performance. The relatively low SD demonstrates broad consensus among respondents, confirming that social capital, community engagement, and mentorship structures are widely perceived as critical drivers of women's empowerment outcomes in Imenti North Sub-County. These findings resonate with Njuki et al. (2023), who emphasized that social support networks and community engagement enhance women's participation in economic activities and decision-making. Similarly, Gilani, Ali, and Ahmad (2020) found that community-based assistance through microfinance programs strengthens women's economic ventures, echoing respondents' emphasis on knowledge sharing and mentorship.

The results are further supported by Heckert et al. (2021), who linked social support to

improved resilience and nutrition outcomes, demonstrating the broad role of networks beyond purely economic empowerment. Likewise, Jones et al. (2021) observed that women who actively engage in social networks experience higher levels of empowerment due to increased confidence, access to resources, and collective action. Thus, the study confirms that social support systems are not only enablers of project success but also act as protective mechanisms that enhance women's resilience against socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

### Performance of Women Empowerment Projects

This section aims to gather information on the performance of women empowerment projects, focusing on financial stability, group sustainability, and social impact. The performance of women empowerment projects was measured across three indicators: financial stability (income growth rate), group sustainability (duration of project existence), and social impact (level of social benefits experienced). These indicators provide a composite view of how well women empowerment initiatives contribute to economic progress, group continuity, and social transformation.

#### Financial Stability

Financial stability was measured using respondents' reported income growth rate since joining their respective empowerment projects. Table 4 summarizes the findings.

**Table 4: Income Growth Rate of Projects**

| Income Growth Rate | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| 0–10%              | 59        | 35.1    |
| 11–20%             | 54        | 32.1    |
| 21–50%             | 44        | 26.2    |
| 51–70%             | 6         | 3.6     |
| Above 70%          | 5         | 3.0     |
| Total              | 168       | 100.0   |

The majority of projects achieved modest financial outcomes, with 67.2% of respondents reporting income growth rates below 20%. Only a small proportion (6.6%) reported growth above 50%, indicating that while empowerment projects generate income, they rarely achieve high levels of profitability. This suggests that most projects are subsistence-oriented and serve as supplementary rather than primary sources of household income.

These results reflect broader evidence from rural economies. FSD Kenya (2021) reported that women-owned enterprises in rural Kenya often struggle to achieve significant income growth due to constraints such as lack of credit, high production costs, and limited market access. Similarly, Ndwiga, Ondieki-Mwaura, and Karugu (2024) found that while microfinance initiatives improved women's household contributions, income increases were modest, often undermined by systemic barriers such as restricted autonomy and limited entrepreneurial support.

#### Group Sustainability

Group sustainability was measured by the duration of project existence, as shown in Table 4.9.

**Table 5: Duration of Project Existence**

| Duration           | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| Less than 2 years  | 35        | 20.8    |
| 3–5 years          | 70        | 41.7    |
| 5–7 years          | 44        | 26.2    |
| 7–10 years         | 16        | 9.5     |
| More than 10 years | 3         | 1.8     |
| Total              | 168       | 100.0   |

Most empowerment projects were relatively young and short-lived: 62.5% had operated for

fewer than five years, while only 11.3% had lasted beyond seven years. This distribution points to challenges in maintaining long-term project sustainability, suggesting that many initiatives face operational or financial pressures that limit their continuity. This finding is consistent with Yussuf (2023), who noted that rural women’s projects often struggle with sustainability due to structural barriers such as inadequate capital, gender biases, and lack of technology adoption. It also echoes FSD Kenya (2021), which highlighted high failure rates among women-owned enterprises in rural Kenya, largely due to limited institutional support. The short lifespan of many projects underscores the need for policies and programs that strengthen women’s capacity for long-term planning, market expansion, and resilience-building.

**Social Impact**

The social benefits of women empowerment projects were assessed through respondents’ perceptions of their projects’ contribution to gender equality, leadership, and social transformation. Results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Level of Social Impact Experienced**

| Social Impact Level | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| Low                 | 32        | 19.0    |
| Moderate            | 47        | 28.0    |
| Significant         | 49        | 29.2    |
| High                | 32        | 19.0    |
| Transformational    | 8         | 4.8     |
| Total               | 168       | 100.0   |

Respondents reported that their projects generated moderate to significant social benefits, with 57.2% of respondents indicating impacts at these levels. However, only 4.8% rated their impact as transformational, highlighting that while projects improve social cohesion, confidence, and participation in leadership, they often stop short of driving systemic social change. These results resonate with findings from Heckert et al. (2021), who showed that social support systems linked to empowerment programs enhance women’s resilience and community well-being but often lack transformative reach. Similarly, Jones et al. (2021) emphasized that participation in social networks enhances decision-making and leadership but is constrained by cultural and structural barriers.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

**Educational Level**

The findings revealed that education plays a significant role in improving the performance of women empowerment projects in Imenti North Sub-County. Women with higher education levels demonstrated better financial literacy, leadership skills, record-keeping, and project management abilities. Educated members were also more confident in proposal writing, accessing external funding, and adopting digital financial tools such as mobile money. However, low literacy levels among some members created dependency, slowed decision-making, and limited effective management of projects. Respondents further identified gaps in financial management, marketing, and technology adoption as barriers to project growth. To address these challenges, women groups relied on peer learning, mentorship, and NGO-supported training programs. Overall, the findings show that education enhances innovation, accountability, and entrepreneurial capacity, thereby contributing positively to project success.

**Social Support Systems**

The study established that social support systems are critical to the success and sustainability of women empowerment projects. Respondents emphasized that peer support, community engagement, and collective action provided emotional encouragement, financial solidarity, and practical assistance during difficult times. Social cohesion within groups strengthened trust, accountability, and commitment among members. Community organizations such as churches,

NGOs, and local government agencies also supported projects through training, grants, and market linkages. However, challenges such as leadership conflicts, mistrust, and unequal participation occasionally weakened group stability. The findings indicate that women empowerment is strongly rooted in social connectedness, mentorship, and supportive networks, which enhance resilience, resource sharing, and project continuity.

### Performance of Women Empowerment Projects

#### Financial Stability

The findings showed that women empowerment projects had contributed to modest income improvement among participants through activities such as agribusiness, poultry farming, and table banking. Despite these gains, financial growth remained limited and unstable due to challenges such as inadequate capital, poor market access, and fluctuating input prices. Respondents noted that lack of reliable financing and market linkages constrained profitability and expansion of projects. As a result, many projects remained at subsistence level and were vulnerable to external economic shocks.

#### Group Sustainability

The study found that the sustainability of many women empowerment projects remained fragile. Some projects collapsed due to financial difficulties, poor management, and internal conflicts. However, groups that demonstrated strong cohesion, adaptability, and continuous savings practices were more likely to survive and initiate new ventures after setbacks. Respondents viewed sustainability in terms of long-term group unity, continued member participation, and the ability to reinvest profits into new activities. The findings therefore suggest that strong teamwork and adaptive learning are essential for sustaining empowerment initiatives.

#### Social Impact

The projects generated significant social benefits for women and their communities. Respondents reported increased confidence, improved decision-making power at household level, stronger leadership participation, and enhanced community solidarity. Women noted that participation in groups enabled them to express themselves more confidently in public and support one another socially and economically. Peer mentorship, knowledge sharing, and collective advocacy were identified as effective strategies for strengthening social impact. Although financial outcomes were moderate, the projects had a strong positive influence on women’s empowerment, leadership, and social cohesion.

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to establish the degree of association between each independent variable and project performance.

**Table 7: Correlation Matrix**

| Variable               | Project Performance   | Educational Level | Social Support Systems |
|------------------------|---|-------------------|------------------------|
| Project Performance    | Pearson Correlation 1<br>Sig. (2-tailed)<br>N 168           |                   |                        |
| Educational Level      | Pearson Correlation .701**<br>Sig. (2-tailed) .000<br>N 168 | 1                 |                        |
| Social Support Systems | Pearson Correlation .729**<br>Sig. (2-tailed) .000<br>N 168 | .403              | 1                      |
|                        |   | 168               | 168                    |

Note: \*\*p < 0.05

A strong positive correlation was observed between educational level and project performance

( $r = .701$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that women with higher education levels demonstrated stronger decision-making, managerial skills, and ability to adopt innovative practices, which translated into more successful empowerment projects. This finding mirrors Anwar and Malik (2020), who found that higher education among rural women in Pakistan enhanced their entrepreneurial performance through improved resource management and confidence. Similarly, Ghouse et al. (2021) reported that women entrepreneurs with higher education were more likely to innovate and sustain their businesses in India, reinforcing the transformative role of education in project outcomes.

Social support systems had the strongest positive correlation with project performance ( $r = .729$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This demonstrates that networks, mentorship, and community-based collaborations were the most critical enablers of empowerment success. Groups with stronger peer-to-peer support and access to community resources were more resilient, better able to manage risks, and more likely to achieve sustainability. This finding resonates with Al-Dajani et al. (2020), who emphasized that women entrepreneurs in the Middle East relied heavily on family and social networks for financial and emotional support to sustain their ventures. Likewise, Chinomona and Sandada (2021) in Zimbabwe found that women's cooperative networks significantly enhanced project growth, providing both resource sharing and social encouragement.

### Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of the independent variables, educational level, social support systems, on the performance of women empowerment projects. While correlation analysis establishes association, regression provides insight into the relative contribution of each factor while controlling for others. This makes it possible to identify which variables are most influential in shaping project outcomes.

**Table 8: Regression Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .860 <sup>a</sup> | .740           | .731                    | 0.389                      |

The regression model recorded a very high explanatory power with  $R^2 = 0.740$ , meaning that 74% of the variance in project performance is explained by the four predictors combined. This suggests that project outcomes in Imenti North are not random but are heavily shaped by women's access to finance, their education levels. The Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.731$  further indicates that the model maintains its explanatory power even after correcting for the number of predictors. In other words, the predictors are not artificially inflating the results; they genuinely provide a strong fit to the data. The standard error of estimate (0.389) is low, confirming that predicted values of project performance are close to actual observed outcomes.

These results point to a robust and reliable model that captures the main determinants of empowerment project performance. In practical terms, this means that interventions targeting the four predictors could significantly improve the success rates of women empowerment initiatives. Similar findings were observed in Brixiova and Kangoye (2020), who found that entrepreneurial outcomes among African women were strongly explained by a mix of education, and social networks, with  $R^2$  values above 0.70 in comparable regression models.

**Table 9: ANOVA Results**

| Model      | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Regression | 92.461         | 2   | 23.115      | 116.156 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 32.457         | 165 | 0.199       |         |                   |
| Total      | 124.918        | 167 |             |         |                   |

The ANOVA test shows that the model is highly statistically significant ( $F(4,163) = 116.156$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the set of predictors collectively explain a large portion of the variation in project performance, and the probability of this relationship occurring by chance

is less than 0.1%. The relatively large F-value (116.156) compared to the residual mean square underscores that the predictors have a much stronger effect on project performance than unexplained variance (error).

This finding is consistent with Adebayo and Olagunju (2021), who demonstrated that regression models explaining women's empowerment projects in Nigeria had significant F-ratios, confirming that social and economic determinants are critical predictors of success. Similarly, Nyasha and Odhiambo (2020) found that in Sub-Saharan Africa, structural factors such as education and financial inclusion strongly and significantly explained variations in women's entrepreneurial performance, validating the importance of testing overall model significance through ANOVA.

**Table 10: Regression Coefficients**

| Variable               | B     | Std. Error | Beta | t    | Sig. |
|------------------------|-------|------------|------|------|------|
| (Constant)             | 0.982 | 0.211      | -    | 4.65 | .000 |
| Educational Level      | 0.278 | 0.049      | .341 | 5.67 | .000 |
| Social Support Systems | 0.311 | 0.057      | .364 | 5.47 | .000 |

Education demonstrated a strong positive predictive effect on project performance ( $\beta = .278$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that higher education levels among women increase their capacity to manage projects, make strategic decisions, and innovate, thereby improving project outcomes. Education equips women with essential skills in financial literacy, record-keeping, and market analysis, which are critical for sustaining empowerment projects. These results echo Musah and Kong (2021), who found that education significantly improved women entrepreneurs' ability to access markets and adapt to business challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mensah and Dzokoto (2020) similarly reported that educated women entrepreneurs in Ghana exhibited higher resilience and growth in their enterprises than their less-educated counterparts.

Social support systems emerged as the strongest positive predictor of project performance ( $\beta = .311$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This highlights that women's empowerment initiatives are most successful where peer support, mentorship, and community solidarity exist. Groups with stronger social capital not only access more resources but also demonstrate greater resilience against challenges such as market shocks and financial shortfalls. This finding resonates with Amorós et al. (2021), who found that social networks were central to women entrepreneurs' success in Latin America, particularly by reducing isolation and providing moral and material support. Similarly, Neneh (2022) emphasized that peer collaboration among women entrepreneurs in South Africa was a stronger driver of business sustainability.

The fitted Regression Equation was;

$$\text{Project Performance} = 0.982 + 0.256X_1 + 0.278X_2 + 0.311X_3 - 0.229X_4$$

Where:  $X_1$  = Educational Level  $X_2$  = Social Support Systems

## Conclusions

Education emerged as a powerful enabler of empowerment. Women with higher education levels demonstrated stronger leadership, resource management, and decision-making capacity, enabling their groups to plan effectively and pursue innovative ventures. However, gaps in literacy and practical business skills among some members limited efficiency, highlighting the importance of continuous training and mentorship to complement formal education and strengthen project management.

Social support systems proved to be the strongest driver of project success. Group solidarity, peer networks, and community engagement provided resilience, encouragement, and access to resources that sustained initiatives even in the face of financial and cultural barriers. At the same time, cultural norms presented a dual influence. While restrictive traditions and patriarchal attitudes constrained women's participation and access to resources, positive

practices such as communal labor and mutual aid reinforced solidarity and collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

### **Educational Level**

There is a need to strengthen education and training opportunities for women participating in empowerment projects. Formal education enhances leadership and management skills, but many women in rural areas have limited educational attainment. County governments, NGOs, and local training institutions should provide targeted adult literacy and vocational training programs to bridge these gaps. In addition to formal learning, mentorship and peer learning systems should be institutionalized. Women with higher education levels or prior entrepreneurial experience can serve as trainers and role models for others, creating a culture of continuous knowledge sharing within groups. This approach would ensure that even members with limited schooling benefit from practical skills and exposure to innovative practices. Specialized training in business development, marketing, and technology adoption is also recommended. Many women identified challenges in accessing larger markets, branding their products, and adopting digital tools. Short courses and workshops tailored to these areas would enhance competitiveness and enable projects to move beyond subsistence-level operations.

### **Social Support Systems**

Given their central role in sustaining empowerment projects, social support systems should be intentionally strengthened and formalized. Women's groups should be supported to establish stronger governance structures that promote transparency, accountability, and conflict resolution. This would minimize disputes that undermine cohesion and ensure that collective trust remains intact. Community partnerships should also be deepened. Churches, NGOs, and local government offices can be encouraged to provide consistent training, small grants, and linkages to markets. Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms at the sub-county level, where women's groups engage with policymakers, donors, and private sector actors, would create opportunities for scaling projects and integrating women into broader value chains. Finally, mentorship programs that connect rural women with successful entrepreneurs within and outside Meru County should be prioritized. Such networks would expose women to new ideas, broaden their horizons, and reduce the isolation often experienced in rural contexts. Building alliances across groups could also create economies of scale in production and marketing.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to knowledge by providing context-specific empirical evidence on how multiple socioeconomic determinants jointly influence the performance of women empowerment projects in a rural Kenyan setting. While previous studies have largely examined education, social support systems, independently, this study integrates these variables within a single analytical framework and demonstrates their combined effect on project performance. By applying a quantitative regression model within Imenti North Sub-County, the study moves beyond general empowerment discourse to establish the relative strength and direction of each determinant in shaping financial sustainability, group resilience, and social impact. The findings therefore extend existing literature by offering localized, multi-variable evidence that informs policy design, culturally responsive programming, and sustainability strategies for women empowerment initiatives in similar rural contexts.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

While this study explained 74% of the variation in the performance of women empowerment projects through educational level, social support systems, a remaining 26% was left unexplained. This indicates that other factors beyond the scope of the current research may also play a significant role in influencing project outcomes. Future studies should therefore explore additional determinants such as government policy support, market linkages, technology

adoption, leadership styles, and household dynamics to capture a more comprehensive picture. Longitudinal and comparative studies across different counties could also provide deeper insights into sustainability trends and contextual variations.

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