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Social Factors Influencing Women's Access to Uwezo Fund in Turbo Constituency, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This study focuses on the social factors influencing Women's access to Uwezo Fund in Turbo Constituency, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Despite the benefits that have come with Uwezo Fund, like the 30% government procurement preference, interest free loan and entrepreneurs' opportunity to expand and start new business for wealth and employment, a significant number of women groups in Turbo Constituency, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya have not been able to access the funds due to unknown factors. Thus, this study comes in to fill this gap the study was guided by Social Capital Theory. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The unit of analysis for this study was the women in the sampled women groups. The target population of the study was 210 women groups, who had either accessed or not accessed Uwezo Fund. A sample size of 126 respondents was drawn using simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Data was collected using interview schedules and focused group discussion. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. Quantitative data collected was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and was presented in form of frequency tables, charts and graphs. The results revealed that age was not a limiting factor as all of the respondents met the lending criteria of 18 years and above, gender was also not a limiting factor as the women under the study noted that they were given priority in accessing the funds, the level of education limited them so much as they were unable to do what was required by Uwezo Fund on their own. Religious affiliations did not limit them as meetings were determined by their days of worship and therefore could schedule depending on when they were available. The results from the study showed that women were not fully satisfied on Uwezo Fund access as social gaps still exist. Therefore, the government should have a clear process to access and expand access to government and Non Governmental Organizations funds.

Keywords: Social factors, women access, Uwezo fund

1. Introduction

Globally, access to financial services varies sharply. Widening access to financial services is still a major policy concern in a lot of states, with so much for the governments to do. In spite of this, most government actions are usually ineffective, hence no productivity. For example, European Union (2000) asserts that women's lives have been deprived for too long in that they don't engage in the perks that come with economic growth and globalization. Not engaging women in decision making mostly leads to wrong pursuits since they are not what the community really needs (World Bank Policy Research Report, 2008).

World Bank Report (2012) states that there is a positive correlation between the amount of money controlled by women in the household through either access to credit facilities or their earnings and an improvement on household livelihoods. Robust evidence shows that, when women have more resources in their hands, it positively impacts the rate of child survival, welfare and education and the opposite occurs when women are not given the ability to get the said resources (UN DESA, 2009). Empirical studies from different countries indicate the evidence of women providing a stronger patronage to overall family welfare. However, there are several constraints such as unfavorable Government policies, legal barriers, and lack of ownership of assets that can be used as collateral and cultural norms that impede women's access to credit. These challenges are compounded by an under-investment in women which restricts economic growth and stifles poverty reduction (Imai et al, 2014).

According to the UN Women Watch Report (2012), in order to mitigate the challenges women face in accessing financial services, there must be an affirmative action on the part of Governments. This will result in coming up with wider policy frameworks that will ensure women are able to access financial services and contribute to economic development that will impact their livelihoods. Several global initiatives have been put in place to include gender in every sector of development and to enable women have the same role as men in engaging in economic activities. Africa still lags behind in global initiatives that have been set up to accelerate efforts in tackling issues of Poverty and gender inequalities. According

to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report,(2002) women in Africa represent about 52% of the total population, do almost 75% of farm work, and bring in 60% to 80% of the food but only get 10% of incomes and own just 1% of Africa's wealth (Negash, 2006). Its evidence that women in Africa work very hard, yet their efforts is little seen.

The government of Kenya has initiated a number of programs to address the issue of access to finances by women such as Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) which is a semi-autonomous Government Agency under the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs established in August 2007 and Uwezo Fund meant for women, youth and persons with disabilities in restoration of faith and hope through socio-economic empowerment strategy created by the government of Kenya under the Ministry of Devolution and Planning (Kiberenge, 2013).

According to the Uwezo Fund Oversight Board (2014), accessibility must be guaranteed at the lowest level of engagement and for the largest category of recipients of the fund. However, in as much as the establishment of the fund is aimed at expanding access to finances to enable generation of gainful self-employment for the youth and women, Turbo Constituency which has the highest population in Uasin Gishu of 210,409 and poverty index of 30.35(Gok, 2010), has a significant number of women groups who have not been able to access the fund. Data obtained from Social Development Department, Turbo Constituency, indicates that Turbo has a total number 210 registered women groups, of which 52.9% of groups have accessed while 47.1% have not been able to access Uwezo Fund.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the factors influencing women's access to Uwezo Fund in Turbo Constituency, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the social factors influencing women's access to Uwezo Fund in Turbo Constituency, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design was appropriate for this study since it sought to collect original data from women in selected women groups in order to get insights on accessibility of Uwezo Fund, without manipulating the variables.

The target population of the study was 210 women groups, who had either accessed or not accessed Uwezo Fund, as at the time of this study and were registered with Social services Department in Turbo Constituency, UasinGishuCounty. The study also elicited responses from the administrative staff of Uwezo Fund in Turbo Constituency. The register of 210 women groups who had either accessed or not accessed Uwezo Fund available at the office of Social Services, UasinGishuCounty, was used as a sampling frame, where the researcher used 10% of the target population to derive at the sample size. The choice of 10% was justified by separate pronouncement of researchers (Yount, 2006) who contend that 10%-30% is considerably representative sample and is viable in social sciences studies.

Purposive sampling was used to select 3 group officials (Chairperson, secretary and the treasurer) and simple random sampling to sample three group members from each of the 21 groups, giving a total of 63 officials and 63 ordinary group members, thus adding up to a sample size of 126 respondents.. In addition, 2 Fund Administrators were purposively sampled; Simple random sampling procedure was done using the lottery technique to select the sample size from the sampled population.

The study used interview schedules and focused group discussions (FGDs).Focus group discussions consisting of 8-10 members was drawn from 2 women groups; one group that had benefited from Uwezo Fund and had accessed Uwezo Fund more times than others, and another group that had not accessed Uwezo Fund was conducted.The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. Quantitative data analysis consists of measuring numerical values from which descriptions such as frequencies and percentages were used. Quantitative data collected was presented in form of tables, charts and graphs with the help Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22. On the other hand, qualitative data was analyzed thematically based on research objectives

3. Results

The study investigated social factors in terms of age, gender, level of education of the respondents, religious affiliation, decision making and their influence on women's access to Uwezo Fund.

3.1. Age and Its Influence on Uwezo Fund Access

The study sought to find out the age of the respondents to ascertain if it had influence on women's access to Uwezo Fund. The results are presented in Table 1 below

Age	Frequency	Percent
Below 30 years	27	25.2
31-40 Years	51	47.7
41-50 years	18	16.8
51- 60 Years	7	6.5
61 years and above	4	3.7
Total	107	100.0

Table 1: Age and Its Influence on Uwezo Fund Access

As depicted from Table 1 the results indicated that most of the respondents 47.7 % (51) were between the ages of 31-40 years, followed by 25.2% (27) who were below 30 years. The study further indicated that 16.8% (18) of the respondents were between 41-50 years, 6.5% (7) were between 51-60 years and 3.7% (4) were 61 years and above.

3.2. Gender and Access to Uwezo Fund

The study sought to investigate if gender can hinder women from accessing Uwezo Fund. The figure 1 below depicts the results;

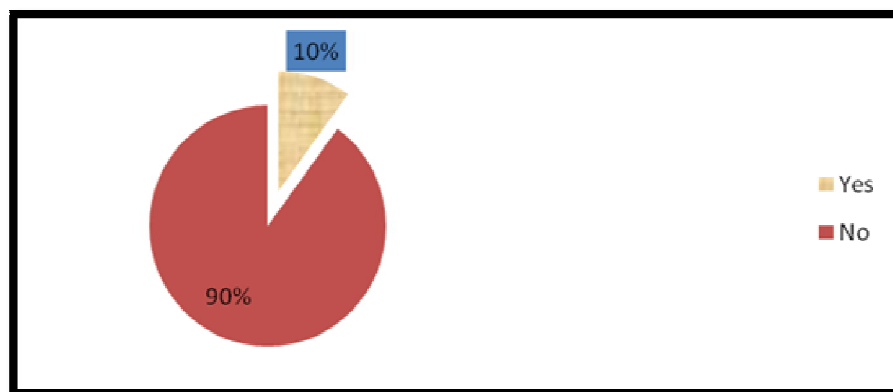


Figure 1: Gender and Access to Uwezo Fund

The results indicated that over 90% (105) of the respondents said that their gender does not hinder access to Uwezo Fund, while the few 10% (2) agreed that gender hindered them from accessing Uwezo Fund. Further results from the focus groups were similar as most of the women noted that they did not have a problem in accessing loans with regard to their gender, noting that this money had been allocated specifically for youth and women and therefore they are being prioritized when it comes to allocation of the money.

3.3. Level of Education and Women's Access to Uwezo Fund

The study investigated the level of education attained by the respondents; it was classified into primary level, secondary level and no formal education. Results on the level of education as a factor influencing access to Uwezo Fund are presented in figure 2 below;

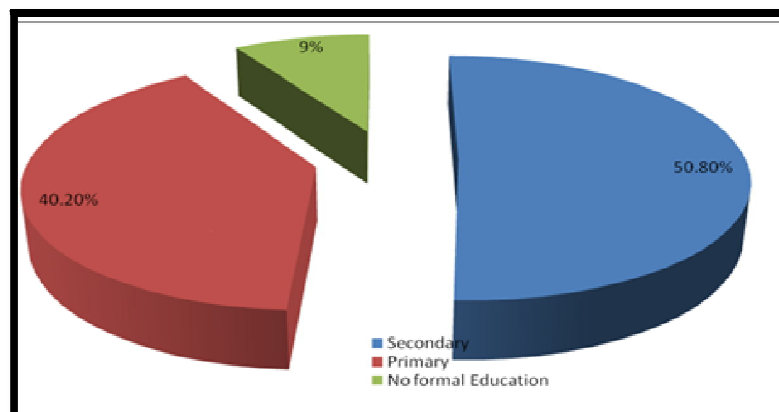


Figure 2: Level of Education of the Respondents

Results indicated that 50.8% (64) of the respondents had reached secondary level, 40.2% (43) were in their primary levels of education and the remaining 9% had no formal education.

3.4. Influence of Religious Affiliation on Access to Uwezo Fund

The study assessed the influence of religion on women's access to Uwezo Fund. Religion was categorized into protestant, catholic, SDA and Muslims. The results are presented in Figure 3 below;

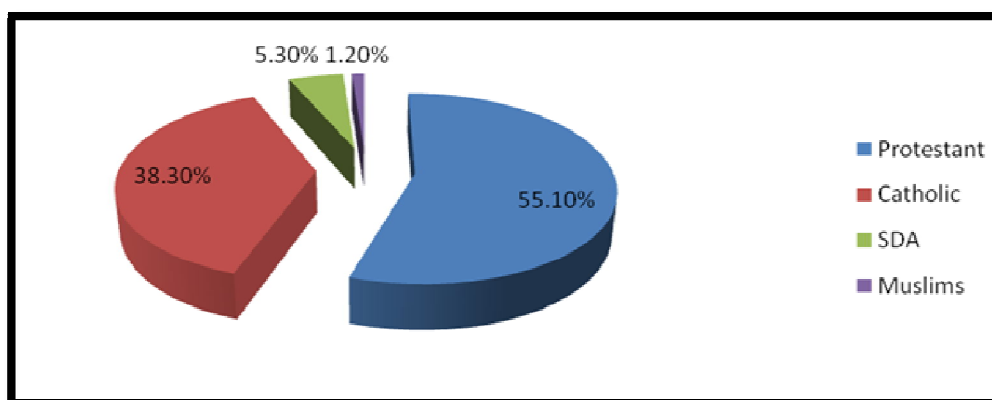


Figure 3: Religious Affiliation

The study revealed that 55.1% of the respondents were in protestant churches, 38.3% were Catholics, 5.3% were SDA's while a small percentage of 1.2% were Muslims. The results showed that most of the respondents were Christians from different denominations implying that their meetings were determined by their days of worship.

3.5. Decision Making

The study assessed on who makes decisions on savings and credit and on the funds received from Uwezo Fund. This was assessed to ascertain if the person making decisions influences in one way or another the access of these funds, figure 4 depicts the results;

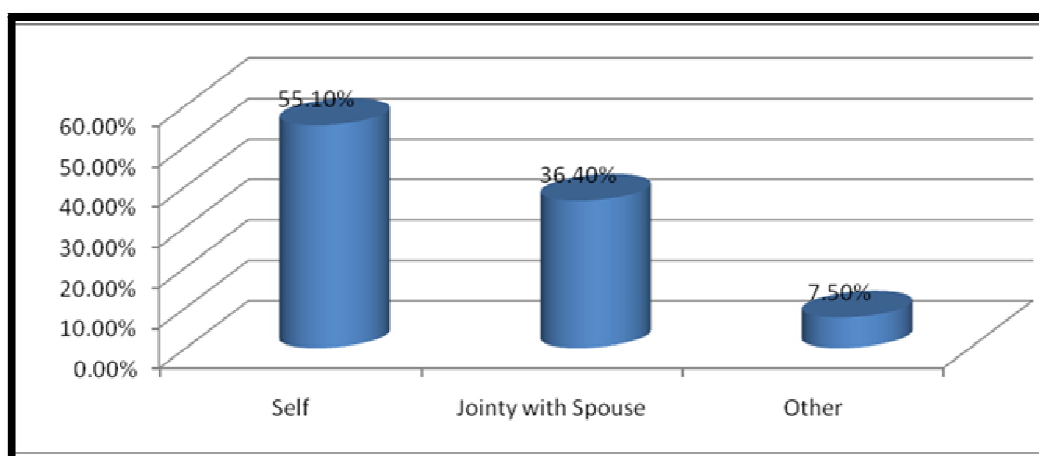


Figure 4: Decision Making

The study revealed that 55.1% (59) of the respondents did their own decisions with regard to access to Uwezo Fund, 36.40% (8) did them jointly with their spouses, while 7.5% (8) noted that they sought advice from other people who included relatives and friends. Results from the Focus Group Discussions also noted that most of the women made their own decisions while a few made them jointly with the spouses, those who were single and widowed had no choice other than to make their decisions alone.

4. Discussion

The study established that the respondents were within the eligible age of above 18 years. This was a good result because according to the Uwezo Fund policies, only persons above 18 years were eligible to be given loans. The study further found out that 47.7% (51) of the respondents were between 31-40 years. This meant that the researcher interacted so much with women in this age category, it also implied that the respondents in that age category still met the eligibility criteria to access loans from Uwezo Fund. The increase in number of women accessing Uwezo Funds can be explained in by the rise in unemployment in Kenya. The results also indicated that 6.5% (7) of the respondents were between 51-60 years. These results indicated that the women groups distributed well their members in all age categories,

though they were few, they were in a position to access Uwezo Fund while a small number 3.7% (4) of respondents between 61 years and above were also eligible in accessing Uwezo Funds.

The results differ according to Staw (2013), who states that at the start of any business age is not a decisive factor, but with enough training and preparation, the earlier someone starts business the better. Staw (2013) also notes that age is related to business success if it includes both chronological age and entrepreneurial age. This means that the older an entrepreneur is, the more experienced one is. Age thus implies extensive experience. A recent baseline survey of small businesses showed that female ownership, informality and sole proprietorship have negative effects on the ability to generate revenue. Such ability, however, increases with the entrepreneur's age, educational achievement and membership in business support groups (Kimuyu, 2008).

In regard to gender, majority of the respondents said that their gender did not hinder access to Uwezo Fund simply because Uwezo Fund were purely for youth, women and PWDs while a few who agreed noted that they were not so much trusted on matters regarding to loans and others noted that their spouses denied them a chance to access Uwezo Funds. Further results from the focus groups were similar as most of the women noted that they did not have a problem in accessing loans with regard to their gender, noting that this money had been allocated specifically for youth and women and therefore they are being prioritized when it comes to allocation of the money.

This implied that women in this study were not hindered in any way in accessing Uwezo Funds. This disagrees with Fletshner (2009) who states that the female gender is far much regarded as weak and cannot handle financial matters. Fletshner, further states that women's access to financial resources is limited by biased lending practices that emerge when financial institutions in the area consider them smaller, less experienced and therefore less attractive clients, or when institutions lack the knowledge to offer products tailored to women's preferences and constraints (Fletshner, 2009). According to Buvinic & Berger (1990), women are frequently discriminated against in formal credit markets in developing countries. The belief in discrimination against women in formal credit markets, often based upon the limited number of women borrowers in the market, is perceived as an outcome of lenders' rejection of women's applications for loan contract which is not true according to women accessing Uwezo Fund in this study.

On level of education, over half of the respondents had reached secondary level, in this case the women perceived that this level of education allowed them to apply for the money themselves without any assistance, they were also able to write and give all the requirements needed by Uwezo Fund including writing simple proposals without much difficulties. Those that were in their primary levels of education, did not find difficulties in applying for the funds they needed from Uwezo Fund, the little knowledge they had largely assisted them.

The respondents, who had no formal education passed through challenges while accessing Uwezo Fund as they needed some little education to append signatures, go through Uwezo Fund trainings and to write proposals for themselves to access the funds, however they spend time and money seeking such services elsewhere in order to access the funds. Access to Uwezo Fund needs a lot of knowledge and awareness of funds and from the results on the level of education, there is a clear indication even from the FGD that the women were having a problem in accessing these funds especially those who were illiterate due to language barrier. Most of the women in the FGDs noted a lot of difficulties in interpreting what they were being taught in Uwezo Fund trainings, others noted that they had difficulties in reading the handouts given to them on Uwezo Fund and therefore it became a challenge for them even to access funds. These are all important as they affect the process of accessing the Uwezo Fund. Educating women is a key source of support for gender equality and long-term economic growth.

Therefore according to this study, the women who had no formal education were hindered from accessing Uwezo Fund, though they got assistance from other sources they spend a lot in getting it, those who had some extent of education were lucky as they could do most of the requirements alone and therefore had more opportunities of accessing the funds. Other studies also show evidence supporting a positive and significant relationship between the level of general education and performance of businesses, whether performance is measured as growth, profits or earning power of the entrepreneur (Dickson, Solomon, Weaver, 2008). According to (Thapa, 2007), education level determines usage of credit positively or negatively. However it disagreed with Irwin (2006) where education appears to make little difference to sources of finance, except that those educated (only) to A levels seem more likely to use friends and family and to remortgage their home (Irwin, 2006). Also Minniti and Bygrave (2003) stated that people with more education are not necessarily more successful.

In regard to religious affiliations most of the respondents were Christians from different denominations. Since religion would influence perceptions and behaviors on certain phenomenon especially with regard to development, the women in this study were positively influenced by their religion, in that their various denominations encouraged them in matters of development. The findings in this study conform to proverbs 12:11 in the bible which encourages Christians to work hard to have abundant food "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense." Also the findings are in agreement with Ter Haar and Ellis (2006) who claims that religious beliefs provide moral guidance and encourage people to improve their lives. Religion may also influence providers of development efforts. For example, many international development organizations, such as World Vision and Catholic Relief Services, are Christian organizations. The microfinance industry is no exception. Several Christian organizations, such as Opportunity International and Vision Fund, are actively involved in advancing the microfinance industry. Christian related MFIs provide poor families and micro-entrepreneurs with banking services, such as loans and saving facilities. In their study Christian related institutions do their work in terms of encouragement and motivation to achieve the desires of their lives. In this study the religious institutions in which the respondents attended encouraged them to join women groups and be

determined to achieve their goals. However, the few Muslim women respondents indicated that their religion did not encourage or motivate them in accessing Uwezo Fund.

On decision making, majority of the respondents did their own decisions with regard to access of Uwezo Fund, those who made decisions alone noted that at one point it was hard to ascertain if they were really on the right side. Others did them jointly with their spouses, they agreed that this was very convenient for them as their spouses would help them in case of any default, while a few noted that they sought advice from other people who included relatives and friends, this group also noted that they liked the ideas of other people as it brought worthwhile contributions especially on how to access the money from Uwezo Fund. This agreed with Focus Group Discussions which noted that most of the women made their own decisions while a few made them jointly with the spouses, those who were single and widowed had no choice other than to make their decisions alone.

This aspect of decision making could in one way or another influence women's access to Uwezo Fund. Those who involved their spouses on decision making noted that the spouses assists them in making decision and again to assist them when they get short of money in repayment of the loan. Most of them were encouraged by their spouses to join groups which enabled them access the loans from Uwezo Fund. The results did not conform with those of Batliwala and Dhanraj (2007) in an Indian case study which reported that men resentfully perceived women handling money as a source of humiliation as in this study the women spouses indicated that they were greatly assisted by their spouses on decisions about accessed funds.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that the respondents in the age categories still met the eligibility criteria of 18 years and above to access loans from Uwezo Fund. With regard to gender, the study found that women in this study were not hindered in any way in accessing Uwezo Funds. It was revealed that female gender was most considered while allocating those funds. On the level of education, the women who had no formal education were hindered from accessing Uwezo Fund, though they got assistance from other sources they spend a lot in getting it, those who had some extent of education were lucky as they could do most of the requirements alone and therefore had more opportunities of accessing the funds. Religious affiliations in which the respondents attended encouraged them to access the funds. However, the few Muslim women respondents indicated that their religion did not encourage or motivate them in accessing Uwezo Fund.

The study established that limited decision making had a positive influence for ease of access to fund by women. It was further revealed that most of the respondents did their own decisions with regard to access to Uwezo Fund. Other women made decisions jointly with their spouses, they agreed that this was very convenient for them as their spouses would help them in case of any default, while others noted that they sought advice from other people who included relatives and friends, this group also noted that they liked the ideas of other people as it brought worthwhile contributions especially on how to access Uwezo Fund.

6. Recommendation

The study recommended that due to the social gaps that still exist in accessing Uwezo fund, for instance the study revealed that there were very few Muslim women who accessed the Uwezo Fund. Therefore, the government should have a clear process to access and expand access to government and Non Governmental Organizations funds. Also there is need to do a further study on the factors influencing Muslim women in accessing development funds.

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