

Exploring the effect of Women empowerment on Sustainable development with Reference to Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) Partners of FVS-Amie des Enfants in Makamba Province

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ABSTRACT

The study set out to explore the effect of women empowerment on sustainable development in Makamba Province. The study used correlational research design and opted the quantitative approach. The study used the population of 192 which gave the sample size of 130 determined using Slovin's formula. The study used survey as data collection techniques and both primary and secondary source(s) of data were used. The quantitative data collected was analysed using SPSS 25.0 version where by Linear regression was used to test the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The results indicate that women empowerment explains 70.7% of the variation in sustainable development ($R^2 = .707$). This meant that 29.3% is explained by other factors not considered in the study. The study concludes that the independent variable does contribute to effective sustainable development. Therefore, women empowerment should be emphasized on to improve sustainable development in Makamba Province.

Keywords : Empowerment, Women empowerment, and Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), an informal microfinance institute which promotes locally self- managed savings and loan associations. VSLA is a complementary to microfinance institutions (where?). MFIs have a conventional belief that credit is the most important service that they can offer, to enable the poor to invest their way out of poverty. On the other hand, VSLA approach believes that what poor people require are the means to build their assets through savings rather than increase their risk exposure by taking out loans (Edengenet, 2016 cited in Beyene, 2018). VSLA as a financing model has been adopted and promoted by different international NGO's to enable members to respond to economic opportunities as well as unforeseen shocks that may typically drive them into a cycle of uncontrollable and un-payable debt (Bamlaku, 2006).

Women make significant contributions every day from bringing an income to her household as an employed wage earner, to creating jobs as an entrepreneur, to taking care of her family and elders (UN Women, 2015). In Makamba, there is women exclusion in leadership of Village savings and loans association. At the beginning, women were 75% and men were 25% in 2014. They are 489 VSLAs with 17,059 members including 10,223 women and 6,836 men. It means that women are 60% and men are 40%. Each VSLA is managed by an Executive committee composed by 5 members elected by other members. Even though men are a minority among VSLA members; they become the majority at the level of the executive committees. Among those 489 VSLA of Makamba province, only 186 are led by women. It means that only 38% of the VSLAs are led by women even if women represent 60% of the members. This situation proves that even if women are majority among the members of the VSLA; they lose control of them because they are not in the decision-making position (ISTEEBU, 2020; FVS-Amade report, 2021). Therefore, this study intends to explore the effect of women empowerment on sustainable development in Makamba Province.

Concept of Women empowerment

Women empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. This entails the idea of women's continued disadvantage compared to men which is apparent in

different economic, socio-cultural and political spheres. Therefore, women empowerment can also be seen as an important process in reaching gender equality, which is understood to mean that the "rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female (Elmuti et al., 2009). According to Eeva (2016), an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth. She can determine her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with an array of options she can pursue. She has control over her own life, both within and outside the home and she has the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally. Gender role expectations are institutionalized through legislative, educational, political and economic systems. Women need to be "empowered" in order to narrow the "gender gap" and to create an equal playing field between women and men before gender equality can be reached and maintained (Barsh et al., 2012).

Also, women empowerment refers to increasing the personal, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment of women and girls concerns women and girls gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. The core of empowerment lies in the ability of a person to control their own destiny. This implies that to be empowered women and girls must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment), but they must also have the agency to use these rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions (such as is provided through leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions) (UNICEF, 2017).

The promise of women empowerment is huge. It matters for inclusive development, for justice, for poverty reduction in the long-term and for economic efficiency. More concretely, women's participation in social, economic and political spheres has a positive impact on economic and human development. It does not only benefit women but also children, the broader community and the nation. In reference to Amartya Sen's capability approach, development is mainly related to individuals' empowerment, both men and women (Verdier-Chouchane & Karagueuzian, 2016).

Empowerment is about having access to socio-economic opportunities so that individuals can make the best choice in line with their talents and goals. Sen (1999) suggested that capabilities and functioning are the most appropriate variables to assess human development. While functioning relates to the things a person may value doing or being such as being adequately nourished, literate or expressing him/herself in public, the concept of capability relates to the ability of a person to achieve different combinations of functioning, reflecting the opportunity or individual freedom (Bérenger and Verdier-Chouchane, 2007).

Sen (1999) insists that women are not passive recipients of welfare. They should have the opportunity to access education and health services, find a decent job, earn an independent income and participate in decision-making within and outside the family. Sen (1999) argues that the agency of women positively affects the well-being of those around them. From this standpoint, individuals' emancipation and empowerment should be considered as the end of development, not as a means to development (Sen, 1999). Defending the idea of universal human rights, he also denounced the lower female-male indicators, including the low sex ratio in some African and Asian countries which reflects gender discrimination and neglect of females' health and education. Gender inequality, often exacerbated by income inequality, hampers women's empowerment. The issue of reducing inequality between rich and poor and between men and women is crucial not only for women's empowerment but also to reduce poverty and include poor people in socio-economic development.

Women's empowerment not only contributes to women's well-being and human rights. It is not only an issue of justice. It is also a prerequisite to development through improved GDP growth, poverty reduction and better access to health and education (International Center for

Research on Women: ICRW, 2011). Based on the World Bank (2012) framework, closing the gender gap in the area of economic opportunities is expected to positively impact development through (i) productivity gains, (ii) intergenerational gains and (iii) better outcomes institutions and policies.

Sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development is based on the concept of development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints), the concept of needs (redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all) and the concept of future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations). The essence of the concept of sustainable development derives from the Triple bottom line concept, which implies the balance between three pillars of sustainability environmental sustainability focused on maintaining the quality of the environment which is necessary for conducting the economic activities and quality of life of people, social sustainability which strives to ensure human rights and equality, preservation of cultural identity, respect for cultural diversity, race and religion, and economic sustainability necessary to maintain the natural, social and human capital required for income and living standards. Complete sustainable development is achieved through a balance between all these pillars, however, the required condition is not easy to achieve, because in the process of achieving its goals each pillar of sustainability must respect the interests of other pillars not to bring them into imbalance. So, while a certain pillar of sustainable development becomes sustainable, others can become unsustainable, especially when it comes to ecological sustainability, on which the overall capacity of development depends (Klarin, 2018).

Two fundamental elements of the concept of sustainable development, i.e. development and sustainability, preceded the creation of the concept itself. According to Sharpley (2000), development and sustainability could be in the juxtaposition, where both could have possible counterproductive effects, while neoclassical economists emphasize that there is no contradiction between sustainability and development (Lele, 1991). Sachs (2010) also suggests how there is no development without sustainability or sustainability without development. The notion of development is related to the past western concept of imperialism and colonialism, and in that period it implied infrastructure development, political power, and economic policy, serving imperialists as an excellent tool for marginalization and diminishing the power of certain countries (Tangi, 2005). Certain authors link the meaning of development to economic development and the term “underdeveloped areas” (later called “Third World Countries”), which US President Harry Truman introduced in the mid-20th century, signifying areas with the significantly lower standard of living than developed areas (Estevo, 2010).

Sustainable development should provide a solution in terms of meeting basic human needs, integrating environmental development and protection, achieving equality, ensuring social self-determination and cultural diversity, and maintaining ecological integrity. Although the concept of sustainable development has undergone certain changes during the past, its fundamental principles and goals have contributed to a more conscious behaviour adapted to the limitations of the environment. This is the reason of adopting the concept in different areas of human activities. Numerous international organizations have been involved in implementation of the concept, while it has found positive implementation locally, but it did not produce significant results on a global scale. This fact proves environmental problems which, 30 years after the introduction of the concept, are still ongoing. Contemporary understanding of the concept of sustainable development is considered through the United Nations Millennium Development Goals focused on a complex global situation, such as population growth, hunger and poverty, wars and political instability, and further degradation of the environment. Many countries are not even close to sustainable development and the gap between developed and underdeveloped countries has deepened. Fundamental constraints of the implementation of the concept of sustainable development are the degree of socio-economic development that many

countries have not yet achieved, associated with a lack of financial resources and technology, but also the diversity of political and economic goals on a global scale (Klarin, 2018).

Achieving sustainable development means not only reconciling economic and environmental sustainability, but also prioritizing social sustainability. The realization of women’s human rights, capabilities and well-being now and in the future requires paying specific attention to the care economy, that is, the provision of care through the family and/or household, markets, the non-profit sector and the public sector and/ or state, especially the “private” domain of non-market or unpaid care work (UN Women, 2014).

Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development

Various scholars found that women play a key role in management, conservation, exploitation and utilization of natural resources as consumers and educators, despite having serious limitations in access and control of these resources. Rural women are the principal agricultural producers, and as such are essential for food security of countries. They are also the ones who work more and earn less, 38% of rural women do not have income of their own (Ortega, 2012). In latin America, women own less than 20% of the land. Data shows that if they were to have the same access as men, agricultural production would increase considerably. Unpaid work for self-consumption is generally done by women, especially the collection of firewood and the fetching of water (ECLAC, 2012).

Therefore, empowering of women and improving their status are essential to realizing the full potential of economic, political, and social development and is an important end itself. Empowering a woman will ensure that her entire family receives better health care and nutrition. This indicates that providing equal access to education, credit, property and employment for women, will ensure economic justice and sustainability for all (Bacha Care Foundation, 2022).

MATERIALS & METHODS

The study applied correlational design and opted quantitative approach. The accessible population of 192 subjects which gave the sample size of 130 was considered. The survey questionnaire was employed in collection of data. The data collected from the field was coded, edited and analysed using inferential statistics. The data was then presented using linear regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linear regression of women empowerment and sustainable development

Table 1. Linear regression results of the study variables

Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.196	.224		-.878	.382
	Women Empowerment	.989	.056	.841	17.556	.000
R=.841 ^a						
R Square=.707						
Adjusted R Square=.704						
F= 308.216						
Sig.= .000 ^b						
a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Development						

Source: Primary data, 2022

The results indicate that women empowerment explains 70.7% of the variation in sustainable development (R Square=.707). This meant that 29.3% are other factors not considered in the study. This was in line with Bacha Care Foundation (2022) that empowering of women and improving their status are essential to realizing the full potential of economic, political, and

social development and is an important end itself. This was also supported with Eeva (2016) who found that an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study indicates that the independent variable does contribute to effective sustainable development. Therefore, women empowerment should be emphasized to improve sustainable development. In line with the findings and conclusions of the study, the following were recommended;

- (i) Women should gain more power and control over their own lives both within and outside the home;
- (ii) There is a need for women to determine their own choices and have access to opportunities and resources;
- (iii) They should be the opportunities for women to access education and health services, and earn an independent income;

AUTHORS' DECLARATION

We declare that this study is our original research by our research team, and we agree to publish it in the journal.

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