

Assessing The Role Of Government Empowerment Programs Towards Poverty Alleviation In Uganda: A Case Study Of UWEP In Kalangala Town Council.

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Abstract

This study assessed the role of the Uganda Women Empowerment Programme (UWEP) in poverty alleviation among women in Kalangala Town Council. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a correlation research design to investigate the relationship between program interventions and poverty outcomes. Data was collected from a sample of 160 respondents, including beneficiaries, local government officials, civil society representatives, and ministry officials, through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics presented in frequency tables, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The results revealed an overwhelmingly positive perception of UWEP's contribution to poverty alleviation, with 100% of respondents affirming its impact. The program was found to be effective in delivering its core inputs, as all respondents confirmed the provision of start-up capital, business training, and essential tools and machines. However, the study also identified critical impediments to the program's success and sustainability. These included pervasive corruption, with all respondents reporting that officials solicited bribes; stifling bureaucracy (87.5% agreement); significant political interference (87.5% agreement); and a near-unanimous consensus (98.75%) that the program was severely underfunded. A notable weakness was also found in post-establishment support, particularly in market linkages, where a significant minority expressed dissatisfaction. It was concluded that while UWEP successfully established a foundational framework for women's economic empowerment and was widely viewed as a vital poverty alleviation tool, its long-term impact was critically undermined by systemic governance failures and a lack of sustainable post-funding support. The program's initial success in capital and asset transfer was not sufficiently coupled with the mechanisms needed to ensure enterprise longevity and resilience. The study recommended an urgent multi-faceted reform strategy. Key recommendations included the implementation of a robust anti-corruption framework and a streamlined, transparent operational procedure to reduce bureaucracy and political interference. It also advocated for a significant increase in program funding, complemented by diversified partnerships with the private sector and development partners. Furthermore, the study emphasized the need to enhance post-establishment support, particularly through intensified business skills training and proactive market linkage facilitation, and to foster a more integrated, multi-stakeholder collaborative approach to ensure the program's sustainability and maximize its poverty alleviation impact.

Keywords: UWEP, Poverty Alleviation, Women Empowerment, Kalangala District, Corruption, Program Implementation

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Background to study

Poverty remains one of the most profound and persistent challenges facing humanity, a condition characterized not merely by a lack of income but by multidimensional deprivation in health, education, and standard of living (Shamim et al., 2023). According to the World Bank (2023), while global poverty rates have declined over recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic marked a historic reversal, pushing an estimated 70-90 million people into extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$2.15 per day (Kaazara et al., 2023). This has been further exacerbated by conflicts, climate change, and rising food and energy prices. The global development framework, encapsulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has as its primary objective to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" by 2030 (SDG 1). A critical strategy for achieving this goal is the promotion of inclusive economic growth and the implementation of targeted empowerment programs (Kazaara et al., 2024). These programs, which often include components of cash transfers, skills training, and access to capital, are designed to equip the poor with the assets and capabilities needed to break the cycle of poverty. The underlying theory is that by enhancing human capital, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurial capacity, such initiatives can foster sustainable livelihoods and build resilience against economic shocks, thereby moving beneficiaries from dependence to self-sufficiency (World Bank, 2022).

The African continent presents a paradoxical picture of immense economic potential alongside deep-seated and widespread poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is home to a significant proportion of the world's extreme poor, with an estimated 60% of its population living in poverty as measured by the multidimensional poverty index (UNDP, 2022). Despite recording positive economic growth rates in many countries, this growth has often been non-inclusive, failing to generate sufficient employment or to trickle down to the most vulnerable segments of society (Ahumuza et al., 2025). Youth unemployment and underemployment are particularly acute, creating a demographic dividend that risks becoming a demographic time bomb (Arinaitwe J, 2024). In response, African governments and development partners have proliferated a variety of poverty alleviation and empowerment schemes (Christopher & Micheal, 2022). These range from large-scale social safety nets like Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme to youth and women's funds. However, the effectiveness of these programs is often constrained by challenges of poor targeting, inadequate funding, political interference, and a lack of robust monitoring and evaluation systems, which frequently prevent them from achieving their transformative potential (African Development Bank, 2021).

Uganda's narrative on poverty is one of notable progress mixed with persistent challenges. The country experienced a dramatic reduction in the national poverty headcount from 56.4% in 1992 to 19.7% in 2019 (UBOS, 2021). This success was attributed to sustained economic growth, relative stability, and pro-poor policies. However, this national average masks significant regional disparities and vulnerabilities (Zulaikah & Rebecca, 2023). Poverty remains

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concentrated in rural areas and is particularly acute in the Eastern and Northern regions. Furthermore, the poverty rate has shown signs of stagnation and even a slight increase in recent years, rising to 20.3% in 2023, a trend linked to the economic disruptions of the pandemic and high population growth that outpaces job creation (World Bank, 2023). Recognizing the need for a direct and targeted approach, the Government of Uganda has established several flagship empowerment programs. Key among these is the Uganda Women Empowerment Programme (UWEP), initiated in 2015. UWEP is specifically designed to provide interest-free credit, skills training, and technology to income-generating projects run by women and youth groups (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). The program's objective is to directly address the structural barriers to economic participation faced by these demographics, who are disproportionately affected by poverty (Moses, 2023). The ultimate goal is to increase household incomes and contribute to the national agenda of inclusive development (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2016).

It is within this multi-layered context that this study focuses on the implementation and impact of UWEP in Kalangala Town Council. Kalangala District, located on the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria, presents a unique and compelling case study (Allan et al., 2023). The district's economy is predominantly reliant on fishing and small-scale agriculture, with a recent influx of large-scale oil palm plantations. Despite these economic activities, Kalangala faces distinct challenges, including geographical isolation, limited access to markets and financial services, and environmental degradation. These factors contribute to a complex poverty landscape where communities may be economically active yet remain income-poor and vulnerable (Alex & Julius, 2024). The Uganda Women Empowerment Programme (UWEP), with its mandate to reach the most vulnerable groups, represents a critical intervention in this setting. The program's provision of interest-free capital is theoretically a powerful tool for enabling women and youth in Kalangala to invest in viable enterprises, such as fish processing, retail trade, or tourism-related services, thereby diversifying local economies (Julius et al., 2024). However, the critical question remains: to what extent has this theoretical potential been realized on the ground? A case study of UWEP in Kalangala Town Council is therefore essential to assess the program's practical role in poverty alleviation (David et al., 2023). It seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the program's delivery mechanisms, the suitability of the skills training provided for the local economic context, the sustainability of the enterprises funded, and the tangible impact on the beneficiaries' livelihoods and overall well-being (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). The findings from this micro-level analysis will provide invaluable insights into the real-world efficacy of a national empowerment strategy in a challenging, geographically unique environment, offering lessons for policy refinement and targeted implementation across Uganda.

Problem Statement

Poverty is a serious economic and social problem that afflicts a large proportion of the world's population and manifests itself in diverse forms such as lack of income and productive assets to ensure sustainable livelihoods, chronic hunger and malnutrition, homelessness, lack of durable goods, disease, lack of access to clean water, lack of education,

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low life expectancy, social exclusion and discrimination, high levels of unemployment, high rate of infant and maternal mortality, and lack of participation in decision making (Nelson & Christopher, 2022). Because poverty has deleterious impacts on human well-being, its eradication has been identified as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind (Ayoo, 2021). The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) is an initiative by the Government of the Republic Uganda to improve women's access to financial services, equip them with the skills for enterprise growth, value addition and marketing of their products and services (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). The women are availed with interest-free revolving credit to initiate or strengthen their enterprises since the inception in financial year 2015/2016. Despite all these, women remain poor in the town council. As of last year, 39% of male headed households and 61% of female headed households in Kalangala town council live below \$1.90 per day (MoLG, 2023). This means that either the program is not effectively working or it is facing a number of obstacles. This study therefore, intends to investigate the program for sustainable remedies.

Specific Objectives

- i. To find out the roles of the UWEP in poverty alleviation in Kalangala town council.
- ii. To investigate the challenges that face UWEP in poverty alleviation in Kalangala town council.
- iii. To establish measures of enhancing the UWEP in poverty alleviation in Kalangala town council.

Methodology

The study adopted a research design that was comparative, descriptive, and explanatory in nature. This approach was selected to facilitate the objective, accurate, and economical collection of data, allowing for a thorough examination of the phenomena from multiple analytical angles (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). Data was gathered using a combination of primary and secondary methods to ensure comprehensiveness and triangulation. The primary methods included interviews, which were conducted in both structured and unstructured formats to collect firsthand information and allow for probing to generate deeper insights from respondents (Jallow et al., 2022). Questionnaires, featuring both open and closed-ended questions, were also administered to a wide range of participants to collect diverse and substantial data. Furthermore, focus group discussions comprising groups of five to ten respondents were held to harmonize and enrich the data collected through the other instruments (A. Nafiu et al., 2012). For secondary data, a comprehensive documentary review was undertaken, which involved an in-depth analysis of current laws, policies, proposed bills, and reports from civil society organizations, district and national government bodies, and donor agencies, as well as related publications to provide a robust contextual background for the study.

The data collection instruments deployed were interview guides, questionnaire guides, audio recorders, observation guides, focus group discussion guides, and documentary review guides, all of which were utilized to structure and guide the systematic gathering of information (Sarah et al., 2024). The subsequent data analysis was conducted primarily through qualitative methods, as the study was fundamentally qualitative and aimed at in-depth investigation,

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though statistical figures were also employed to reinforce the findings. The data was analyzed progressively using thematic analysis, a descriptive approach for presenting qualitative data. This method enabled a detailed description of the respondents' views and opinions by defining key themes based on the study objectives and presenting the data accordingly. Quotations were used to capture the authentic voices of the interviewees, while tabulations were applied to summarize and present quantitative data from the questionnaires in a structured, tabular form.

The study population was carefully selected to include individuals with a direct stake and a comprehensive understanding of the topic. It involved officials from Kalangala Town Council, officials from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, representatives from various civil society organizations and their umbrella bodies, academicians, and local beneficiaries, particularly women from the community. A total sample size of 160 respondents was drawn using different sampling techniques to ensure representativeness. Purposive sampling was used to select 30 local government officials, 30 officials from the civil society sector, and 15 academicians, as their expertise was deemed crucial. Meanwhile, 85 women and local community members were sampled using cluster and stratified sampling techniques to capture a diverse range of perspectives from the general populace.

Throughout the research process, stringent ethical considerations were meticulously observed. The researcher sought informed consent from all participants by presenting an introductory letter that clearly outlined the study's purpose and potential consequences and by having them sign a consent form. The principle of objectivity was upheld to ensure the use of factual information without bias, and confidentiality was guaranteed by handling all respondent information with utmost privacy; official permission was also sought before using any data from government institutions. Participants were protected from harm by safeguarding their privacy at all times. The study, however, faced several limitations, including long distances to respondents' locations, which increased logistical costs; this challenge was mitigated by obtaining contacts and emails for follow-up communication. Some respondents were initially hesitant to share crucial information due to fear of repercussions, but the researcher addressed this by clearly explaining the study's purpose and assuring them of confidentiality. Financial constraints were another limitation, which the researcher overcame by lobbying for resources from parents, friends, and relatives.

Results

Table 1 showing the response rate of respondents on whether UWEP contributes towards poverty alleviation among the women in Kalangala town council.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	50	31.25
Strongly agree	110	68.75
Disagree	00	00

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Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 110 respondents strongly agreed that UWEP contributes towards poverty alleviation among the women in Kalangala town council which constituted 68.75%, and those who agreed were 50 respondents constituting 31.25%, none of the respondents was not sure constituting 00% (Nelson et al., 2022). There were no respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This means that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that that UWEP contributes towards poverty alleviation among the women in kalangala town council.

Table 2 showing the response rate of the respondents on whether the women are given financial assistance as start-up capital under UWEP in Kalangala town council

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	15	9.4
Strongly agree	145	90.6
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 145 respondents strongly agreed that the women are given financial assistance as start-up capital under UWEP in Kalangala town council which constituted 90.6%, and those who agreed were 15 respondents constituting 9.6%, none of the respondents was not sure constituting 00%. There were no respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the women are given financial assistance as start-up capital under UWEP in Kalangala town council.

Table 3 showing the response rate of the respondents on whether the women are trained to do small scale businesses for economic empowerment in Kalangala town council

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	140	87.5
Strongly agree	20	12.5
Disagree	00	00

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Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 140 respondents of 160 respondents agreed that the women are trained to do small scale businesses for economic empowerment in Kalangala town council which constituted 87.5%, and those who strongly agreed were 20 out of 160 respondents constituting 12.5%, none of the respondents was not sure constituting 00%. There were no respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents agreed that the women are trained to do small scale businesses for economic empowerment in Kalangala town council.

Table 4 showing the response rate of the respondents on whether the women are given machines & tools to start businesses of their own in Kalangala town council.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	125	78.1
Strongly agree	35	21.9
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 35 respondents out of 160 respondents strongly agreed respondents on whether the women are given machines & tools to start businesses of their own in Kalangala town council which constituted 21.9%, and those who agreed were 125 respondents out of 160 respondents constituting 78.1%, and none of the respondents were not sure constituting 00%. There were no respondents who disagreed constituting 00% (Nelson et al., 2023). While no respondent strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents agreed that respondents on whether the women are given machines & tools to start businesses of their own in Kalangala town council.

Table 5 showing the response rate of the respondents on whether UWEP officials help women to look for good market of their goods in Kalangala town council.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	105	65.6
Strongly agree	25	15.6

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Disagree	15	9.4
Strongly disagree	10	6.25
Not sure	05	3.1
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 105 respondents out of 160 respondents agreed UWEP officials help women to look for good market of their goods in Kalangala town council which constituted 65.6%, and those who strongly agreed were 25 respondents out of 160 respondents constituting 15.6%, and 05 of the respondents were not sure constituting 3.1%. There were 15 respondents who disagreed constituting 9.4%. While 10 respondent strongly disagreed constituting 6.25%. This meant that the majority of the respondents agreed that UWEP officials help women to look for good market of their goods in Kalangala town council.

Table 6 showing the response rate of respondents on whether corruption as the main obstacle to the success of the program as civil servants and SACCO leaders solicited bribes from beneficiaries of the programme

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	50	31.25
Strongly agree	110	68.75
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 115 respondents out of 160 respondents strongly agreed corruption as the main obstacle to the success of the program as civil servants and SACCO leaders solicit bribes from beneficiaries of the programme which constituted 68.75%, and those who agreed were 50 respondents constituting 31.25%, 00 of the respondents were not sure constituting 00%. There were 00 respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While also 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed corruption as the main obstacle to the success of the program as civil servants and SACCO leaders solicit bribes from beneficiaries of the programme.

Table 7 showing the response rate on whether there is bureaucracy in the program which severely affects the program success.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	25	15.6

Strongly agree	115	71.9
Disagree	10	6.25
Strongly disagree	10	6.25
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 115 out of 160 respondents strongly agreed that there is bureaucracy in the program which severely affects the program success which constituted 71.9%, and those who agreed were 25 respondents constituting 15.6%, and 00 of the respondents were not sure constituting 00%. There were 10 respondents who disagreed constituting 6.25%. While 10 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 6.25%. This meant that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed there is bureaucracy in the program which severely affects the program success.

Table 8 showing the response rate on whether the UWEP program is under-funded which adversely affects the success of the program in Kalangala town council.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	148	92.5
Strongly agree	10	6.25
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	02	1.25
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 148 out of 160 respondents agreed that UWEP program is under-funded which adversely affects the success of the program in Kalangala town council which constituted 92.5%, and those who strongly agreed were 10 respondents constituting 6.25%, and only 02 of the respondents were not sure constituting 1.25%. There were 00 respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents agreed that UWEP program is under-funded which adversely affects the success of the program in Kalangala town council.

Table 9 showing the response rate of respondents on whether there is political interference in the program which severely affects the program success.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	115	71.9

Strongly agree	25	15.6
Disagree	10	6.25
Strongly disagree	10	6.25
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 115 of 160 respondents agreed that there is political interference in the program which severely affects the program success which constituted 71.9%, and those who strongly agreed were 25 respondents constituting 15.6%, 00 of the respondents were not sure constituting 00%. There were 10 respondents who disagreed constituting 6.25%. While 10 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 6.25%. This meant that the majority of the respondents agreed that there is political interference in the program which severely affects the program success.

Table 10 showing response rate on whether there is need for effective collaborations with all the stakeholders in their community to maximize their efforts

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	150	93.75
Agree	10	6.25
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 150 out of 160 respondents strongly agreed that there is need for effective collaborations with all the stakeholders in their community to maximize their efforts which constituted 93.75%, and those who agreed were 10 respondents constituting 6.25%, and 00 of the respondents was not sure constituting 00%. There were 00 respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that there is need for effective collaborations with all the stakeholders in their community to maximize their efforts.

Table 11 showing the response rate on whether there is need for more funding towards the UWEP program maximize their impact

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	05	3.1
Strongly agree	155	96.9

Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 155 out of 160 respondents strongly agreed that there is need for more funding towards the UWEP program maximize their impact which constituted 96.9%, and those who agreed were 05 respondents constituting 3.1%, and 00 of the respondents was not sure constituting 00%. There were 00 respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that there is need for more funding towards the UWEP program maximize their impact.

Table 12 showing the response rate on whether there is need to fight corruption that is affecting the enrolment of the beneficiaries leaving out many.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	90	55
Strongly agree	70	45
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 90 respondents agreed that there is need to fight corruption that is affecting the enrolment of the beneficiaries leaving out many which constituted 45%, and those who strongly agreed were 70 respondents constituting 55%, and 00 of the respondents were not sure constituting 00%. There were 00 respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents agreed that there is need to fight corruption that is affecting the enrolment of the beneficiaries leaving out many.

Table 13 showing the response rate on whether there is need for intensified training and skilling of the beneficiaries of the UWEP program to maximize the program’s impact

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	100	62.5
Agree	60	37.5
Disagree	00	00



Strongly disagree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Total response	160	100%

Source: primary source (2024).

The above figure depicts that 100 respondents out of 160 strongly agreed that there is need for intensified training and skilling of the beneficiaries of the UWEP program to maximize the program’s impact which constituted 62.5%, and those who agreed were 60 respondents constituting 37.5%, and none of the respondents was not sure constituting 00%. There were 00 respondents who disagreed constituting 00%. While 00 respondents strongly disagreed constituting 00%. This meant that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that there is need for intensified training and skilling of the beneficiaries of the UWEP program to maximize the program’s impact.

Conclusions

It was concluded that UWEP was perceived as a vital and positive force in poverty alleviation, with all 160 respondents (100%) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the program contributes towards improving the lives of women. This strong endorsement was rooted in the program's effective delivery of core inputs. The vast majority of respondents confirmed that women received critical support, including financial assistance as start-up capital (100% agreement), training for small-scale businesses (100% agreement), and essential machines and tools (100% agreement). This demonstrated that the program's foundational mechanisms for economic empowerment were successfully reaching beneficiaries and were widely acknowledged as a direct response to poverty.

However, the study concluded that this initial success was severely undermined by significant operational and structural obstacles that threatened the program's long-term sustainability and impact. A critical weakness was identified in the area of post-establishment support, particularly market linkages. While a majority still believed UWEP officials helped women find markets for their goods, a notable and significant minority of 15.6% either disagreed, strongly disagreed, or were unsure, indicating a clear gap in this crucial area that could lead to business failure despite initial setup. More alarmingly, the data led to the resounding conclusion that corruption was a primary obstacle to the program's success, with all respondents (100%) affirming that civil servants and SACCO leaders solicited bribes from beneficiaries. This was compounded by widespread agreement on the stifling effects of bureaucracy (87.5% agreement) and political interference (87.5% agreement), which were seen as distorting the program's objectives and excluding genuine beneficiaries. Furthermore, an overwhelming 98.75% of respondents agreed that the program was severely underfunded, a factor that directly limited its reach and scale.

In light of these findings, the study concluded with a clear and urgent consensus on the necessary path forward for UWEP. Respondents overwhelmingly advocated for a multi-pronged reform strategy. There was near-unanimous

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agreement (100%) on the need for a substantial increase in funding to maximize the program's impact. Intensified training and skilling for beneficiaries was also strongly recommended (100% agreement) to ensure the sustainability of the businesses created. A robust fight against corruption was deemed essential, with all respondents (100%) calling for measures to curb the practices that were excluding many potential beneficiaries. Finally, there was an almost unanimous call (100% agreement) for more effective collaboration with all community stakeholders, suggesting that a more integrated, multi-sectoral approach is required to holistically address the complex challenge of poverty and ensure that the positive contributions of UWEP can be fully realized and sustained in Kalangala Town Council.

Recommendations

An immediate and robust anti-corruption framework must be implemented. This should include the establishment of a transparent, publicly accessible beneficiary selection and fund-disbursement system. All allocation records should be displayed on public notice boards and shared via local radio to ensure community oversight. Furthermore, a dedicated, independent and easily accessible grievance redress mechanism, such as a toll-free hotline, should be established for beneficiaries to report incidents of bribery and corruption by officials and SACCO leaders without fear of reprisal. The program must enforce strict disciplinary actions against any individual found soliciting bribes to serve as a deterrent.

UWEP's operational guidelines should be critically reviewed and simplified to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that delay service delivery and create opportunities for rent-seeking. The program management should work to insulate the project from political manipulation by reinforcing technical, needs-based criteria for beneficiary selection and resource allocation. Clear communication should be disseminated to all stakeholders, emphasizing that the program is a right-based government initiative, not a political favour, thereby safeguarding its integrity and ensuring it reaches the intended target group.

Given the near-unanimous agreement on underfunding, advocating for a substantial increase in the budgetary allocation for UWEP from both central and local government is paramount. Additionally, the program should actively seek and facilitate partnerships with the private sector, international development partners, and local financial institutions to create a complementary funding pool. This could take the form of matching grants or low-interest loan schemes that can top-up the UWEP start-up capital, enabling women to establish more substantial and sustainable enterprises.

Moving beyond providing start-up capital and tools, UWEP must institutionalize robust business development services. This includes intensifying training in advanced business management, financial literacy, and value addition for local products like fish and agricultural produce. Crucially, the program should take a proactive role in facilitating

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market access by helping groups secure contracts with local institutions (schools, hotels), creating a collective marketing platform for UWEP products, and linking beneficiaries to larger distributors and exporters to ensure a steady demand for their goods and services.

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