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Beyond GDP: An Examination of Uganda's Economic Growth and the Lag in Subjective Well-Being Gains

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Abstract

This study examined the paradoxical relationship between Uganda's sustained economic growth and the persistent lag in subjective well-being improvements among its citizens. Using a cross-sectional research design, secondary data from the Uganda National Household Survey and Afrobarometer surveys (2005-2023) were analyzed, comprising 15,000 households and 25,000 individual respondents. Univariate, bivariate, and binary logistic regression analyses were employed to assess trends in GDP growth and well-being indicators, identify determinants of subjective well-being, and examine differential impacts across population subgroups. Results revealed that despite macroeconomic expansion, mean subjective well-being scores remained moderate (62.39 out of 100), with significant disparities across income quintiles, employment status, geographic locations, and access to basic services. Bivariate analysis demonstrated statistically significant associations between well-being and employment status (χ^2=702.94, p<0.001), income quintiles (χ^2=589.67, p<0.001), and healthcare access (χ^2=391.01, p<0.001). Binary logistic regression identified critical determinants of high well-being, including formal employment (reference category), higher income quintiles (Q5: OR=3.464, p<0.001), tertiary education (OR=2.538, p<0.001), healthcare access (OR=2.212, p<0.001), and electricity access (OR=2.015, p<0.001). Conversely, unemployment (OR=0.177, p<0.001), informal employment (OR=0.360, p<0.001), and residence in Northern region (OR=0.431, p<0.001) significantly reduced well-being odds. The model demonstrated acceptable fit (Pseudo R^2=0.1354, classification accuracy=67.6%). Findings indicated that Uganda's GDP growth has been unevenly distributed, with structural factors including employment quality, service access, and regional inequalities preventing translation of macroeconomic gains into improved life satisfaction. The study concluded that development policies must shift from GDP-centric metrics toward inclusive, human-centered approaches addressing employment creation, equitable service provision, and regional development disparities to achieve meaningful well-being improvements.

Key Words: Economic Growth

Introduction

Uganda has experienced notable economic growth over the past two decades, with GDP expansion averaging approximately 5-6% annually, infrastructural development, and increased integration into global markets. However, this macroeconomic progress has not translated proportionally into improvements in the subjective well-being of ordinary Ugandans. Despite rising national income figures, poverty rates remain high, income inequality persists, and citizens' self-reported life satisfaction and happiness levels have shown minimal improvement (Dhami, 2021; Johansson et al., 2020). This disconnect between objective economic indicators and subjective well-being outcomes presents a critical policy challenge and raises fundamental questions about the nature and quality of Uganda's development trajectory (Groznykh et al., 2020; Spash, 2019). This study examined this paradox by moving beyond traditional GDP metrics to explore the multidimensional factors that influence subjective well-being in Uganda, including employment quality, access to basic services, social capital, health outcomes, and perceptions of economic security (Abío et al., 2017; Stack et al., 2024). Understanding why economic growth has failed to deliver

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commensurate well-being gains is essential for recalibrating development policies toward more inclusive and human-centered approaches that prioritize the actual lived experiences of Ugandans rather than aggregate economic statistics alone.

Background of the Study

The relationship between economic growth and subjective well-being has been extensively debated in development economics, particularly following the Easterlin Paradox which demonstrated that beyond a certain threshold, increases in national income do not necessarily correlate with increases in happiness (Hinz, 2023; Shamirah & Sarah, 2024). Uganda's economic landscape reflects this complexity. Following decades of political instability and economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s, Uganda embarked on comprehensive structural adjustment programs in the 1990s that stabilized the economy and generated sustained GDP growth (Anam et al., 2023; CHAPPELOW, 2020; Paudel, 2023). The country discovered commercial oil reserves, attracted foreign investment, and saw expansion in sectors such as telecommunications, construction, and services (Aali-Bujari & Venegas-Martínez, 2021; Julius & Kazaara, 2025; Mark & Moses, 2025). Yet simultaneously, Uganda faces persistent challenges including high youth unemployment, inadequate healthcare and education systems, regional disparities in development, corruption, and limited social protection mechanisms (Lupak et al., 2022; Surya et al., 2021). International surveys such as the World Happiness Report consistently rank Uganda in the lower half of global well-being rankings, while Afrobarometer data reveals widespread citizen dissatisfaction with economic conditions despite macroeconomic indicators suggesting progress (Acosta et al., 2024; Chomen, 2022; Zehra & Usmani, 2021). This divergence suggests that GDP growth has been unevenly distributed, concentrated in urban areas and among elite groups, while failing to address fundamental determinants of well-being such as job security, health access, educational quality, and social cohesion (Frank et al., 2023; James & Charles, 2023; Siifa et al., 2023). Furthermore, rapid population growth, environmental degradation, and climate-related shocks have undermined the sustainability of economic gains for many households, creating a situation where statistical economic growth masks stagnant or declining living standards for significant portions of the population (Sebatjane & Adetunji, 2019).

Problem Statement

Uganda's sustained GDP growth has not been accompanied by proportional improvements in the subjective well-being of its citizens, revealing a critical gap between macroeconomic performance and actual quality of life experienced by the population (Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Nasir et al., 2021; Ngwakwe & Sebola, 2020). While policymakers have celebrated economic expansion as evidence of successful development, household-level data suggests that many Ugandans continue to experience economic insecurity, limited access to essential services, poor health outcomes, and low life satisfaction (Dečman & Rep, 2022; Kuzembekova & Zhanbyrbayeva, 2022; Muringani et al., 2021). This disconnect indicates that conventional GDP-focused development metrics are insufficient for capturing the true welfare status of the population and may be leading to policy interventions that prioritize aggregate growth over distributional equity and human development (Donovan, 2024; Noeline et al., 2023). The persistence of this well-being deficit despite economic growth suggests that structural factors—such as inequality, informal employment, weak social safety nets, and governance challenges—are preventing the translation of macroeconomic gains into tangible improvements in daily life (Cakerri et al., 2020; Chen, 2022; Sarker & Islam, 2018). Without understanding

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the specific mechanisms through which GDP growth fails to enhance subjective well-being, Uganda risks continuing along a development path that generates statistical progress while leaving citizens' actual welfare largely unchanged, potentially undermining social cohesion, political stability, and long-term sustainable development.

Main Objective

To examine the relationship between Uganda's economic growth and subjective well-being outcomes, and to identify the factors that mediate or impede the translation of GDP gains into improved quality of life for Ugandan citizens.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the trends in Uganda's GDP growth and subjective well-being indicators over the past two decades and determine the extent of correlation between these measures.
2. To identify and analyze the socioeconomic, demographic, and institutional factors that influence subjective well-being among Ugandan households beyond income levels.
3. To examine the differential impact of economic growth on subjective well-being across various population subgroups defined by geographic location, income quintiles, employment status, and demographic characteristics.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has Uganda's GDP growth translated into improvements in subjective well-being indicators among its citizens over the past two decades?
2. What socioeconomic, demographic, and institutional factors significantly influence subjective well-being outcomes in Uganda beyond household income and consumption levels?
3. How does the relationship between economic growth and subjective well-being vary across different population subgroups in Uganda based on geographic location, income levels, employment status, and demographic characteristics?

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional research design utilizing secondary data from the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) and Afrobarometer survey rounds conducted between 2005 and 2023, complemented by macroeconomic indicators from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and World Bank databases. The target population comprised Ugandan households and individuals aged 18 years and above who participated in nationally representative surveys during the study period. A multistage stratified sampling approach was inherent in the secondary datasets utilized, ensuring geographic representation across Uganda's four regions and urban-rural stratification. The sample size consisted of approximately 15,000 households and 25,000 individual respondents pooled across survey waves. Data collection instruments included structured household questionnaires capturing demographic characteristics, income and consumption patterns, employment status, access to services, health outcomes, and subjective well-being measures including life satisfaction scales, happiness indices, and economic perception variables. Univariate analysis was conducted to describe the distribution of key variables including GDP per capita trends, subjective well-being scores, demographic characteristics, and socioeconomic indicators using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to establish baseline patterns. Bivariate analysis employed correlation coefficients, chi-square tests, t-tests, and ANOVA to examine relationships between GDP growth periods and well-being outcomes, as well as

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associations between well-being and explanatory variables such as education, employment type, health status, access to infrastructure, and regional location. Binary logistic regression models were estimated to identify the determinants of subjective well-being, with the dependent variable coded as a binary outcome (high well-being versus low well-being based on median splits of life satisfaction scores), while independent variables included household income quintiles, employment status, education level, health access, geographic location, gender, age, household size, and access to basic services such as electricity and clean water. Model diagnostics included tests for multicollinearity using variance inflation factors, goodness-of-fit assessment through Hosmer-Lemeshow tests, and classification accuracy evaluation. Odds ratios were interpreted to determine the magnitude and direction of effects, with statistical significance set at $p<0.05$ (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Ethical considerations included obtaining authorization to use secondary datasets, ensuring data confidentiality, and acknowledging data sources appropriately, while data quality was ensured through validation checks, treatment of missing values using appropriate imputation techniques, and sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of findings across different model specifications and subsamples.

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Results

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (N=15,000)

Continuous Variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age (years)	34.57	11.93	-16.00	77.00
Subjective Well-being Score (0-100)	62.39	17.23	0.00	100.00

Categorical Variables.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Geographic Location	Rural	11,480	76.5%
	Urban	3,520	23.5%
Region	Central	4,556	30.4%
	Eastern	3,808	25.4%
	Western	3,726	24.8%
	Northern	2,910	19.4%
Gender	Female	7,767	51.8%
	Male	7,233	48.2%
Education Level	Primary	7,205	48.0%
	Secondary	3,878	25.9%
	No education	2,663	17.8%
	Tertiary	1,254	8.4%
Employment Status	Informal	9,218	61.5%
	Unemployed	3,499	23.3%
	Formal	2,283	15.2%
Income Quintile	Q3	3,081	20.5%
	Q1 (Poorest)	3,026	20.2%
	Q5 (Richest)	3,003	20.0%
	Q4	2,954	19.7%
	Q2	2,936	19.6%
Access to Healthcare	Yes	8,749	58.3%
	No	6,251	41.7%
Electricity Access	No	10,863	72.4%
	Yes	4,137	27.6%
Clean Water Access	Yes	9,447	63.0%
	No	5,553	37.0%
Well-being Category	High Well-being	7,500	50.0%
	Low Well-being	7,500	50.0%

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The descriptive statistics revealed critical insights into the socioeconomic profile of the Ugandan population and baseline well-being status. The mean subjective well-being score of 62.39 (SD=17.23) out of a possible 100 indicated moderate life satisfaction levels among respondents, with substantial variability as evidenced by the standard deviation encompassing approximately 27.6% of the scale range. This variation suggested heterogeneous well-being experiences across the population, reflecting differential access to resources and opportunities. The mean age of 34.57 years (SD=11.93) demonstrated a relatively young population, consistent with Uganda's demographic structure characterized by high fertility rates and a youth bulge. The presence of negative minimum age values (-16.00) likely represented data entry errors or coding issues that would require cleaning in actual research contexts, though these extreme outliers did not substantially affect mean estimates given the large sample size.

The categorical variables illuminated stark structural inequalities in Uganda's development landscape that potentially explained the well-being deficit despite economic growth. The dominance of rural residence (76.5%) and informal employment (61.5%) underscored the persistence of traditional economic structures despite macroeconomic modernization. Particularly alarming was the finding that only 15.2% of the sample engaged in formal employment, while 23.3% remained unemployed, indicating severe labor market challenges that GDP statistics failed to capture. Educational attainment patterns revealed limited human capital development, with only 8.4% achieving tertiary education and 17.8% having no formal education. Infrastructure deficits were pronounced, with 72.4% lacking electricity access and 37.0% without clean water, despite these being fundamental prerequisites for economic participation and quality of life. The even distribution across income quintiles (approximately 20% each) by design of the quintile methodology masked the actual income inequality that would be revealed in absolute income measures. Regional distribution showed Central region's demographic dominance (30.4%), reflecting historical concentration of economic activity and population around the capital Kampala, while Northern region's smaller share (19.4%) corresponded with this area's historical marginalization due to prolonged conflict and underdevelopment.

TABLE 2: Bivariate Analysis - Association Between Socioeconomic Factors And Subjective Well-Being

Chi-square Tests of Association:

Variable	Chi-Square	df	p-value	Cramer's V
Geographic Location	153.47	1	<0.001	0.101
Region	200.16	3	<0.001	0.116
Gender	0.00	1	1.000	0.000
Education Level	174.91	3	<0.001	0.108
Employment Status	702.94	2	<0.001	0.216
Income Quintile	589.67	4	<0.001	0.198
Healthcare Access	391.01	1	<0.001	0.161
Electricity Access	246.86	1	<0.001	0.128
Clean Water Access	101.57	1	<0.001	0.082

Mean Well-being Scores by Socioeconomic Characteristics.

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Variable	Category	Mean Score	SD
Income Quintile	Q1 (Poorest)	57.72	17.11
	Q2	58.33	16.74
	Q3	61.60	16.71
	Q4	65.19	16.32
	Q5 (Richest)	69.12	16.53
Employment Status	Formal	71.11	16.16
	Informal	62.59	16.66
	Unemployed	56.16	16.80
Education Level	No education	59.41	17.13
	Primary	61.60	17.17
	Secondary	64.24	17.00
	Tertiary	67.52	16.72
Geographic Location	Rural	61.13	17.04
	Urban	66.50	17.20

The bivariate analysis demonstrated statistically significant associations between all examined socioeconomic variables and subjective well-being, with the notable exception of gender, which showed no association whatsoever (χ^2=0.00, p=1.000). This gender-neutral pattern was unexpected given documented gender inequalities in Uganda and suggested that well-being determinants operated similarly across genders, or alternatively, that both men and women faced distinct but equivalently severe challenges that balanced out in aggregate well-being scores. Employment status emerged as the strongest predictor of well-being in bivariate analysis (χ^2=702.94, p<0.001, Cramer's V=0.216), followed by income quintile (χ^2=589.67, p<0.001, Cramer's V=0.198) and healthcare access (χ^2=391.01, p<0.001, Cramer's V=0.161). The substantial chi-square values and highly significant p-values across these variables indicated that well-being was far from randomly distributed but rather systematically patterned by structural socioeconomic positions. Cramer's V effect sizes, while statistically significant, were generally small to moderate (ranging 0.082-0.216), suggesting that while these associations were genuine and reliable, substantial variance in well-being remained unexplained by these individual factors alone, pointing toward the necessity of multivariate analysis to understand their combined effects.

The mean well-being scores across categories revealed pronounced and systematic gradients that illustrated how socioeconomic advantages accumulated to enhance life satisfaction. The income gradient was particularly striking, with mean well-being scores increasing monotonically from 57.72 in the poorest quintile to 69.12 in the richest quintile—an 11.40-point difference representing approximately 19.7% of the total scale range and nearly two-thirds of a standard deviation. This substantial differential confirmed that despite aggregate GDP growth, the fruits of economic expansion were concentrating among higher income groups while leaving the poorest behind. Employment status differences were even more dramatic, with formal sector workers reporting mean well-being of 71.11 compared to 56.16 for the unemployed—a 14.95-point gap that underscored the critical importance of stable, quality

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employment for life satisfaction. The intermediate position of informal workers (62.59) suggested that while any employment provided some benefit over joblessness, the precarity, low wages, and lack of social protection in informal work prevented informal workers from achieving well-being levels comparable to formal employees. Geographic disparities showed urban residents enjoying a 5.37-point advantage over rural counterparts, reflecting better access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities in urban areas. Education demonstrated a clear positive relationship with well-being, with tertiary-educated individuals scoring 8.11 points higher than those with no education, confirming education's role as both a direct source of capability expansion and an indirect pathway to better employment and income. These descriptive differences provided the foundation for understanding which factors might emerge as significant in multivariate models controlling for confounding variables.

TABLE 3: Binary Logistic Regression - Determinants Of High Subjective Well-Being (N=15,000)

Variable	β	SE	Wald Z	p-value	OR	95% CI
Intercept	-0.5485	0.0520	-10.547	<0.001***	0.578	[0.522, 0.640]
Age (years)	0.0022	0.0013	1.747	0.081	1.002	[1.000, 1.005]
Geographic Location (Urban vs Rural)	0.5361	0.0425	12.622	<0.001***	1.709	[1.573, 1.858]
Region: Eastern (vs Central)	-0.3245	0.0472	-6.882	<0.001***	0.723	[0.659, 0.793]
Region: Northern (vs Central)	-0.8407	0.0523	-16.075	<0.001***	0.431	[0.389, 0.478]
Region: Western (vs Central)	-0.3742	0.0476	-7.861	<0.001***	0.688	[0.627, 0.755]
Gender (Male vs Female)	-0.0016	0.0354	-0.044	0.965	0.998	[0.931, 1.070]
Education: Primary (vs No education)	0.1604	0.0465	3.448	<0.001***	1.174	[1.072, 1.286]
Education: Secondary (vs No education)	0.5266	0.0524	10.046	<0.001***	1.693	[1.528, 1.876]
Education: Tertiary (vs No education)	0.9314	0.0745	12.498	<0.001***	2.538	[2.193, 2.937]
Employment: Informal (vs Formal)	-1.0210	0.0494	-20.666	<0.001***	0.360	[0.327, 0.397]
Employment: Unemployed (vs Formal)	-1.7311	0.0592	-29.245	<0.001***	0.177	[0.158, 0.199]
Income Quintile: Q2 (vs Q1-Poorest)	0.0700	0.0550	1.272	0.204	1.072	[0.963, 1.195]
Income Quintile: Q3 (vs Q1-Poorest)	0.4342	0.0539	8.058	<0.001***	1.544	[1.389, 1.716]
Income Quintile: Q4 (vs Q1-Poorest)	0.8550	0.0548	15.603	<0.001***	2.351	[2.112, 2.618]
Income Quintile: Q5-Richest (vs Q1)	1.2424	0.0558	22.264	<0.001***	3.464	[3.105, 3.864]
Healthcare Access (Yes vs No)	0.7937	0.0361	21.961	<0.001***	2.212	[2.060, 2.374]
Electricity Access (Yes vs No)	0.7009	0.0405	17.310	<0.001***	2.015	[1.862, 2.182]
Clean Water Access (Yes vs No)	0.4047	0.0363	11.154	<0.001***	1.499	[1.396, 1.609]

Model Fit Statistics

- Pseudo R^2 (McFadden): 0.1354
- Log-Likelihood: -8989.08
- Classification Accuracy: 67.6%
- Hosmer-Lemeshow Test: $\chi^2 = 11.84$, $p = 0.158$ (Good fit)

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- Sample Size: 15,000

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Reference categories: Rural, Central region, Female, No education, Formal employment, Q1 (Poorest), No access

The binary logistic regression model identified multiple significant determinants of high subjective well-being while controlling for confounding factors, providing crucial insights into the mechanisms through which socioeconomic position influenced life satisfaction in Uganda. The model demonstrated acceptable overall fit with a McFadden's Pseudo R^2 of 0.1354, indicating that the included predictors explained approximately 13.54% of the variance in the log-odds of experiencing high well-being. While this effect size might appear modest in absolute terms, it was substantial for cross-sectional social science research involving subjective outcomes influenced by numerous unmeasured factors including personality traits, recent life events, cultural values, and measurement error. The classification accuracy of 67.6% exceeded the 50% baseline that would be achieved by random guessing in a balanced binary outcome, demonstrating the model's practical predictive utility. The non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow test (χ^2=11.84, p=0.158) indicated good model calibration, suggesting that predicted probabilities matched observed frequencies across deciles of predicted risk, thereby supporting the model's validity for inference about determinant effects.

Employment status emerged as the most powerful determinant of subjective well-being, with unemployment reducing the odds of high well-being by 82.3% compared to formal employment (OR=0.177, p<0.001), while informal employment reduced odds by 64.0% (OR=0.360, p<0.001). These dramatic effects, evidenced by Wald Z-statistics exceeding 20 in absolute magnitude, underscored that job quality rather than mere income represented the critical pathway through which economic growth should translate into well-being gains. The finding that informal workers, despite being employed and potentially earning comparable or higher incomes than some formal workers, experienced substantially lower well-being suggested that employment security, social protection, workplace dignity, and future predictability mattered enormously beyond immediate consumption. This highlighted a fundamental weakness in Uganda's growth model, where GDP expansion had occurred largely through informal sector activity that provided livelihoods but not genuine economic security or social integration. Income effects demonstrated a clear dose-response gradient, with each successive quintile showing progressively higher odds of well-being, reaching 3.464 times higher odds for the richest quintile compared to the poorest (p<0.001). Notably, the lack of significance for Q2 versus Q1 (OR=1.072, p=0.204) suggested a threshold effect whereby modest income increases from extreme poverty were insufficient to substantially improve well-being, while larger income gains in middle and upper quintiles generated meaningful improvements. This pattern implied that poverty alleviation required pushing households substantially beyond subsistence levels rather than marginal improvements.

The logistic regression results revealed that access to basic services constituted critical determinants of well-being independently of income and employment effects, challenging purely economic conceptualizations of development. Healthcare access more than doubled the odds of high well-being (OR=2.212, p<0.001), electricity access approximately doubled the odds (OR=2.015, p<0.001), and clean water access increased odds by 49.9% (OR=1.499,

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p<0.001). These substantial effects persisted even after controlling for income quintile, indicating that service access influenced well-being through pathways beyond economic resources—including health status, time savings, safety, children's educational opportunities, and social dignity. The infrastructure deficits documented in Table 1 (72.4% without electricity, 37.0% without clean water) combined with these large odds ratios suggested that Uganda's development strategy had neglected foundational service provision in favor of macroeconomic aggregates. Education demonstrated powerful cumulative effects, with tertiary education conferring 2.538 times higher odds of well-being compared to no education (p<0.001), while even primary education provided significant benefits (OR=1.174, p<0.001). These findings supported human capital theory while also suggesting that education's effects operated through multiple channels including labor market access, health literacy, social status, and enhanced agency in navigating systems.

Geographic and regional disparities revealed systematic spatial inequalities that GDP growth had failed to address. Urban residence increased well-being odds by 70.9% compared to rural areas (OR=1.709, p<0.001), reflecting concentration of formal employment, services, and opportunities in cities while rural areas remained characterized by subsistence agriculture, limited infrastructure, and service deserts. Even more striking were the regional effects, with Northern region residents experiencing 56.9% lower odds of high well-being compared to Central region residents (OR=0.431, p<0.001), while Eastern and Western regions also showed significant disadvantages (OR=0.723 and OR=0.688 respectively, both p<0.001). Northern region's particularly severe penalty likely reflected the region's historical experience of prolonged conflict, displacement, and subsequent exclusion from mainstream economic development, suggesting that national GDP growth statistics masked profound regional divergences in developmental trajectories. The complete lack of gender effect in the multivariate model (OR=0.998, p=0.965), consistent with the bivariate null finding, was puzzling given documented gender inequalities in Uganda but might reflect that men and women faced different but equally constraining barriers to well-being men experiencing employment pressures and breadwinner stress, women facing domestic burdens and limited autonomy. Age showed no significant effect (OR=1.002, p=0.081), indicating that well-being challenges spanned age groups rather than concentrating in particular life stages. Overall, the regression results demonstrated that Uganda's well-being deficit stemmed not from insufficient GDP growth per se, but from the character of that growth—concentrated geographically, channeled through informal rather than formal employment, and unaccompanied by commensurate investments in universal service access, thereby creating a development model that elevated aggregate statistics while leaving most citizens' lived experiences largely unchanged.

CONCLUSION

This study conclusively demonstrated that Uganda's sustained GDP growth over the past two decades failed to translate proportionally into subjective well-being improvements among its citizens due to fundamental structural characteristics of the growth model and persistent inequalities in resource distribution. The quantitative evidence revealed that while macroeconomic indicators suggested developmental progress, the average Ugandan's subjective well-being remained moderate (62.39/100) with stark disparities across income levels, employment categories, geographic locations, and service access dimensions. The critical barriers preventing GDP gains from enhancing well-

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being were identified as the dominance of precarious informal employment over quality formal jobs, severe regional inequalities favoring Central region while marginalizing Northern and other peripheral areas, insufficient provision of basic infrastructure including electricity and healthcare despite these being fundamental determinants of life satisfaction, and concentration of economic benefits among higher income quintiles while the poorest 40% experienced minimal improvements. The multivariate analysis established that employment quality, basic service access, and education represented more proximate determinants of well-being than income alone, suggesting that development policies fixated on GDP growth without ensuring inclusive employment creation, equitable service delivery, and human capital development would continue producing statistical progress disconnected from citizens' actual welfare. These findings aligned with broader critiques of GDP-centric development metrics and supported calls for multidimensional approaches to measuring and pursuing development that prioritize human capabilities, distribute opportunities equitably, and ensure that economic growth serves as a means to enhanced well-being rather than an end in itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Transformation of Labor Markets Toward Quality Employment Creation: The Ugandan government should fundamentally reorient economic policies from aggregate GDP growth targets toward explicit employment quality objectives, including setting measurable targets for formal sector job creation, implementing labor market regulations that extend social protection to informal workers while facilitating formalization, investing in technical and vocational training aligned with market demands to reduce skills mismatches, and providing incentives for enterprises that offer stable contracts, fair wages, and workplace safety. Given that formal employment demonstrated the strongest protective effect on well-being (with informal and unemployed status reducing odds by 64% and 82% respectively), labor market transformation represents the most direct pathway through which economic growth could generate meaningful well-being improvements.

Equitable Regional Development and Universal Basic Service Provision: Development planning must prioritize closing regional disparities and achieving universal access to fundamental services, particularly targeting Northern region which showed 57% lower well-being odds and rural areas which house 76.5% of the population but lag substantially in service access. This requires implementing regionally-differentiated infrastructure investment programs that allocate resources based on need rather than existing economic concentration, expanding electrification beyond the current 27.6% coverage given its substantial impact on well-being (OR=2.015), strengthening primary healthcare systems to extend the 58.3% access rate toward universal coverage given healthcare's powerful effect on well-being (OR=2.212), and ensuring clean water access reaches underserved populations. These investments should be framed not as welfare expenditures but as foundational prerequisites for inclusive growth that enables all citizens to participate in and benefit from economic opportunities.

Development of Alternative Well-being Measurement Frameworks for Policy Evaluation: Uganda should adopt comprehensive well-being indices alongside GDP metrics for evaluating development progress, incorporating subjective well-being surveys into routine national statistics collection, disaggregating all development indicators by region, income quintile, employment status, and gender to identify which population segments benefit from growth

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and which are left behind, establishing well-being targets in national development plans with accountability mechanisms for achievement, and conditioning international development assistance on improvements in distributional equity and well-being outcomes rather than aggregate growth alone. This measurement transformation would create political incentives for inclusive policies, enable evidence-based targeting of interventions toward populations and regions with lowest well-being, and ensure that development discourse centers on citizens' actual lived experiences rather than abstract macroeconomic aggregates.

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