

# Enhancing Women's Livelihoods through Development Funds: Evidence from Babati District Council, Tanzania

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<p><i>Abstract</i></p> <p><i>This study aimed to assess the impact of Women Development Funds scheme on women's livelihood in Tanzania. A cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentary review from a sample of 85 respondents including, beneficiaries of women development fund loans and key informants. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that women development funds significantly supported the beneficiaries who obtained loans. These beneficiaries were engaged in various small businesses such as tailoring, livestock keeping, and horticulture, leading to increased income and improved livelihoods. Notably the efforts and outcomes of women who received loans from the women development funds contributed to attitudinal change among men, as they recognized women's dual role in household chores and their contribution to household livelihoods, challenging stereotypical gender roles. Despite these positive outcomes, beneficiaries of the loan encountered challenges, including lengthy loan access times, insufficient loan amount, limited entrepreneurship skills, and balancing household and businesses responsibilities. To enhance entrepreneurial success, it is recommended that relevant government institutions increase the loan amount and grace period, provide entrepreneurial skills training, and create a supportive business environment.</i></p>	<p><i>Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)</i></p> <hr/> <p>Vol. 15. Issue 1 (2024) ISSN(p) 0189-5958 ISSN (e) 2814-1091 Home page <a href="https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds">https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds</a></p> <p><b>ARTICLE INFO:</b> <b>Keyword:</b> Women, Development, Fund, empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Gender roles.</p> <p><b>Article History</b> Received 29<sup>th</sup> January 2023 Accepted: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024 DOI: <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v15i1.18">https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v15i1.18</a></p>
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## 1. Introduction

Research has extensively examined income generating activities and entrepreneurship through a gender lens in the Global North, with a particular focus on women (Said & Enslin, 2020). However, the research landscape on the same theme in the Global South is lagging behind when it comes to studying female income generation through women development funds within a gendered framework (Osunmuyiwa & Ahlborg, 2022). In developed countries, the prevailing context shows a narrowing gender gap in entrepreneurial development, largely

attributed to increased educational equity, while in the global south women are still suffering from patriarchal systems (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Almost every country has forecasted a target and is working hard to achieve it as a constituent element of growth and development. Whereas there are many approaches to make it happen, it is generally recognized that one way of moving towards the target is by increasing women participation and empowering them through various ways including provision of loans (Bualiay et al., 2022).

In Africa, the Women Development Fund (WDF) has become one of the most useful financial facility for low-income women who can hardly access loans from formal financial institutions due to lack of typical forms of collateral (Buvinic & O Donnell, 2016). A study by Gupta (2018) indicates that improving women's living standards and empowerment is essential for the growth and development of a nation. As such women are imaginative enough to establish their own endeavour, but they are not able to explore the available opportunities because of socio cultural practices such as male dominance, statuses such as low level of education, limited exposure, poverty, and limited institutional support such as lack of proper government support (Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021).

The Tanzania government in collaboration with donor communities initiated financial rural programmes and finalized microfinance policy in 2000 (Mwita, 2021). This policy recognized the microfinance sector as an essential component of the overall financial sector, aligning with the government financial sector reform policy statement of 1991. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) focusing on assisting disadvantaged individuals, especially women (Kaseva, 2017). Despite of the provision of various loans to support women and other financial agencies such as VICOBA, and SACCOS, women are still lagging behind in meeting their basic needs thus fall victims of sexual harassment and other types of human rights violation influenced by poverty (Mwaipopo & Dauda, 2020).

## **2. Literature Review**

Internationally, financial institutions and donors have given much attention to microfinance as a strategy of reaching women and involving them in the development process (Kinyondo & Magashi, 2019). The microfinance industry has made great steps towards identifying barriers to women's access to financial services and developing ways to overcome those barriers (Hyera, 2022). Microfinance institutions around the world have been quite creative in developing products and services to reduce barriers that face women in accessing financial resource from formal institutions. Such barriers include collateral requirements, salaried guarantor requirements, documentation requirements, cultural barriers, limited mobility and literacy (Nathoo, 2022).

In Sub Saharan Africa, women are widely supported by donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments, which is viewed as a positive approach for economic development and empowering women (Paul, 2017). Providing credit to women is believed to have the potential to advance entire families and communities out of poverty. Granting women with access to microfinance financial resources and services such as supporting their entrepreneurial activities, s can significantly contribute to enhancing their ability to work independently and hence reduce their vulnerability to poverty (Neogi et al, 2017).

Tanzania established Women Development Fund (WDF) to safeguard women economic growth and entrepreneurship (Amos & Lutego, 2022). Types of activities funded by WDF

include production of various food and cash crops, small agro-industries, poultry, piggery, diary keeping, tailoring, farming activities, and other small business such as kiosk, wood, charcoal selling, and food vendors (Laurent et al., 2023). WDF is managed through groups, Ward and District committees, whereas at the district loan committee under the chair ship of District Executive Director are the responsible organ to assess and provide loans. This committee has final decision on loan approval (Makungu, 2020).

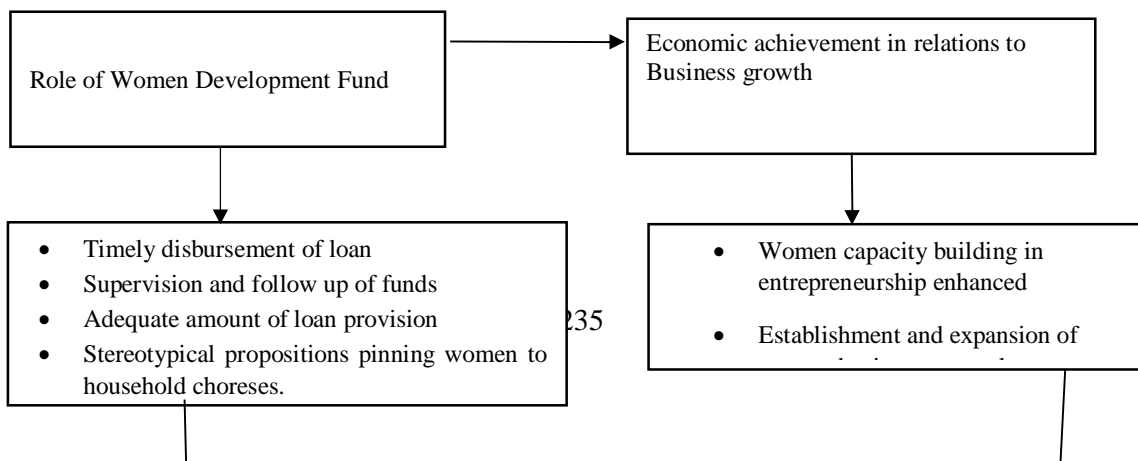
Literature review show different studies conducted on women economic empowerment through soft loans and credits. They include; Huis et al., 2017; Swalehe, 2020, Welwel, 2022). It is worth noting that limited research are available concerning contribution of Women Development Fund in particular on improving women livelihood and their families. This indicates a gap in understanding the specific dynamics and challenges faced by WDF beneficiaries within the contexts of their families and communities. Therefore, the study investigated the impact of WDF to the improvement of women livelihood in Tanzania with a focus in Babati District.

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frame work of this study as shown in fig 1 is modified from Odhiambo(2014) and Asongu and Odhiambo(2020). It provides a conceptual structure for understanding the relationships and processes involved in accessing capital, business performance, and livelihood improvement for women entrepreneurs. The framework is based on several key assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that if women form groups with the objective of accessing capital loans and utilize that capital by conducting entrepreneurial activities they will generate income which in turn will improve their livelihoods. The framework further assumes that if women willingly change their mindset, perceptions, and performance of their businesses they will be able to save income they generated.

The modified framework emphasizes the importance of capacity building in entrepreneurship skills to enable women access and effectively utilize the credit they obtain. The gained skills can help women to access various networks that are essential for conducting their businesses. As such this will lead to the establishment of viable and profitable enterprises, increased income hence improvement of living standards. This assumption aligns with the findings of Krieger et al., (2022) that women’s participation in networks is often limited to family members within the home, while their male counterparts tend to engage with external networks.

Finally the framework acknowledges the significance of empowering women entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and opportunities to expand their networks beyond household boundaries. By accessing professional networks and establishing connections outside their immediate circles, women can tap into valuable resources, knowledge, and support that can contribute to the success and growth of their businesses hence improve their personal livelihood and of their families.



**Fig 1: A conceptual Frame work of WDF contribution in Improving Livelihoods**  
(Modified from Odhiambo(2014) and Asongu & Odhiambo (2020).

### **3. Materials and methods**

The study was based on empirical fieldwork that utilized qualitative case study design. This design was employed to explore various issues relevant to the study from multiple perspectives. The study was conducted in four villages: Dareda Kati, Hayesam, Bermi, and Rudie, located in the Dareda ward of Babati District. Babati District is one of the five districts in the Manyara region. These villages were selected because they exhibit a prevailing male dominance in decision-making processes and resource ownership and utilization. Additionally, the district is a home to several women's groups engaged in income generating activities in the informal sector, making them the targeted beneficiaries of loans from the (WDF). Importantly, the majority of these women have limited access to loans and credit from other microfinance institutions.

The study population involved all women groups and individuals who were the beneficiaries of the WDF in the four selected villages and key informants. The selection of wards was done purposefully because the wards have more women who were the beneficiaries of WDF loans compared to other wards in the district. The study participants involved, women entrepreneurs in all four villages and Key informants such as District Executive Director, Women Development Fund coordinator, District Community Development Officer, District Planning Officer/Economist and District Treasurer, Ward Community Development Officer, Councilors and Village Executive Officers. While the selection of key informants was done purposefully in consultation with local government authorities, women beneficiaries were selected randomly among those found in the business centers basing on their willingness to participate in the study. The study sample comprised of 85 respondents out of whom ten (10) were key informants and 75 were women beneficiaries.

Both primary and secondary data were collected. The study used conversational interviews in the form of FGD and KIIs, and documentary reviews like government documents, scholarly books, recent dissertations, journal article, magazines, and newspapers relevant to the topic under study. Data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 25 computer programme to generate descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were put into small themes and summarized into short texts. Whereas analysis was done using content analysis procedure to supplement information obtained from quantitative data.

### **4. Results and discussions**

#### **4.1 Respondents demographic and socio economic characteristics**

According to Collins (2016), age and sex are fundamental characteristics that influence individuals' decision-making abilities and their capacity for independent action, making them crucial in understanding a population. Table 1 reveals that approximately 69.4% of the respondents fell within the age group of 20-54, while those aged 55 and above accounted for 30.4%. This suggests that women at their old ages are less likely to engage in loan programmes compared to those in their middle ages. The findings highlight the importance of fostering entrepreneurship among young and productive individuals, as it can improve their living standards and benefit their communities. This aligns with a study by Munoz Boudet et al., (2018), which found that poverty rates for women surpass those of men by 69 percent during their prime childbearing years and again for women aged 75 and above.

The level of education of the respondents was investigated and found out that the beneficiaries' experiences and education level have imperative impact to their business. When the respondent's level of education was examined, the findings as shown in Table 1, slightly more than half 56% and 24% have secondary and first degree, respectively. In contrast, the remaining 13.3% and 6.7 % of respondents have primary and vocational education, respectively. This means that majority of them have enough skills and could understand how to utilize the economic importance of loans and microfinance services. These results concurs with the study by (Mahmood et al., 2021; Boldureanu, et al; 2020) concluded that the level of education of an entrepreneur is related to the success of their business.

The response of sampled women on their marital status and family size is shown in Table 1. The finding reveals that 74.6% of sampled women were married and 12.0 % were widowed. The remaining 10.7 % and 2.7 were divorced and single respectively. In an in depth interview it was revealed that married women were more confident, happy, and doing better in terms of businesses and returning loans compared to other categories. The reasons explained to this success was that their partners were shouldering the business thus they were able to return the loans in time. This concurs with the study by Ravina-Ripoll et al., (2022) which indicated that married people have a higher perception of contentment in conducting business compared to other categories.

The study also found that widows were also doing well in business and loan payment. This is because WDF has make women more economically active and enhance them in decision making in their families. This finding corresponds with that of Acheampong (2018) that female-led families are more likely to have better returns to microfinance than their male counterparts. This is because when women are free from male dominance they are able to plan their priorities and conduct well its implementation. Women generally have the capacity to manage the businesses opting to use microfinance services, which are then reflected in business returns.

The family structure, size, and support have important implications for women's enterprise development. The presence of supportive family members can positively impact women's motivation and success in business, while conflicting work and family responsibilities can pose challenges. Understanding and addressing these dynamics is crucial for promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment (Said & Enslin, 2020). Regarding family size, the study revealed that the majority 65.3% of the surveyed women had family size of between 4-8 members during the time of survey. About 16 percent had 4-6 family members and 10 percent had family size of 4-10 members with majority being those in marital wedlock. It was revealed that their big families also play role in conducting the business. This coincide with the study by Shackeel et al., (2020) that when women receive support from their family members, it can have a positive influence on their motivation and success in business. Such women maintain household-related norms such as being caregivers, but they strengthen spousal support in their business ventures, they conform to societal norms and expectations by ensuring that they gain support from their family to counteract opposition and challenges they faced in business.

**Table 1: Respondents demographic and socio-economic profiles.**

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Age	20-34	20	26.7
	35-54	32	42.7
	55-64	13	17.3
	65+	10	13.3
Total		75	100
Marital status	Single	2	2.6
	Married	56	74.7
	Widowed	9	12.0
	Divorced	8	10.7
Total		75	100
Level of Education	Primary level	5	6.7
	Secondary level	42	56
	Post-secondary	15	20
	Bachelor degree	13	17.3
Total		75	100
Family size	4-6	16	21.3
	4-8	49	65.3
	4-10	10	13.4
		75	100

**Source: Field study findings, (2023)**

#### **4.1 Procedure to obtain loan from Women Development Fund**

According to the Women Development Fund (WDF) guidelines of 2018, accessing the WDF required forming a group of five women with low incomes and being self-employed or working in the informal sector. The guidelines specified that the loan should be offered to potential beneficiaries within three months from the day of receiving the application and the beneficiaries were expected to receive basic training and guidance on conducting business and repaying the loan (Mtenga, 2018).

However, during the implementation of the WDF programme, the study discovered that none of the groups were able to access the loan within the prescribed timeframe despite meeting the conditions outlined in the guidelines. According to the respondents, it took up to six months or more to receive the loan from the time of application. For instance, 34.7% of the respondents received the loan after six months, while 21.3% received it after eight months. Approximately 20% received the loan within ten months, 16% within one year, and 8% received it after one year (Table 2).

These findings reveal that the loan provision guidelines were not adhered to at the local government level, which hindered the effective performance of businesses and loan repayment. During the focus group discussions, respondents expressed their opinion that the loan amount, procedures, repayment period, and interest rates did not allow them adequate time to run profitable businesses, especially for those who relied solely on the WDF without having their own capital. This situation negatively affected the income generation and loan repayment performance of women. Furthermore, the study identified lack of adequate entrepreneurship skills, which were sometimes provided at a cost that the women could not afford. This findings coincide with Garg and Agarwal (2017) that women entrepreneurs

always suffer from inadequate and inappropriate finance resources, unable to acquire finance from external sources due to absence of accurate collateral as women have less or no property and bank balance in their names.

#### **4.2 Duration of Business Operations**

Understanding the duration of business operations among WDF beneficiaries is essential for assessing the impact and effectiveness of the fund in achieving its objectives. The findings indicate that the duration of business operations among WDF beneficiaries varied significantly. Some businesses thrived and operated successfully for an extended period, while others faced challenges and were not able to sustain for a long time (Table 2). The results shows that about 48% of respondents had been operating their business for more than ten years, whereas 26.7% of the respondents their business had been in operation for five to ten years, and 25.3% had been in business operation for a period of below five years. These findings suggests that the beneficiaries with a longer tenure have overcome the initial business challenges, established a stable customer base, and developed effective strategies for growth and resilience. Such longevity not only ensures the economic empowerment of women but also contributes to the overall socio-economic development of communities by creating employment opportunities and fostering local economic growth. These findings are in line with previous empirical findings, that performance of a group is determined by a group's cohesion which is achieved through time and process (Forsyth, 2021).

Moreover, through in-depth interview, the study established the type of business conducted and revealed diverse sectors of business. They include services sector (food vending, hair dressing salons, and groceries) (32%). The horticulture sector (vegetable and gardening) accounted for 30.7% of the sampled enterprises. The proportion engaged in retail trade sector was 21.3%, whereas 14.7% of the surveyed women were engaged in livestock and poultry keeping. Those who practiced manufacturing sector accounted for 1.3% as shown in Table 3. In terms of business performance the results showed that out of 18 groups initially funded by WDF, 8 (44.4%) groups were progressing well with the business. About 7 (38.9%) groups were only surviving but not doing well while 3 (16.6 %) groups were reported to collapse.

The collapse of groups was due to lack of skills on conducting business, ineffective continuous follow-up from WDF coordinators, local government officers and agencies responsible on the evaluation of growth and performance of such businesses. The cooperation, level of understanding and interest of the group members on their businesses was also reported to be contributing to not doing well in business and the business collapse as well (Table 2). This aligns with the findings by Bui et al, (2021), who identified various constraints that impede the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Tanzania. They include: inadequate business training; insufficient capital; competition; anti-entrepreneurial culture; and bureaucratic procedures in business registration.

**Table 2: Respondents business characteristics**

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Business duration	Below 5 years	19	25.3
	5-10 years	20	26.7
	10 years and above	36	48.0
Type of business	Service sector	24	32.0
	Horticulture	23	30.7
	Retail trade	16	21.3
	Livestock and Poultry keeping	11	14.7
	Manufacturing	1	1.3
Status of the group	Doing well in business	8	44.4
	Only surviving but not doing well	7	38.9
	Collapsed	3	16.7

**Source: Field study findings, (2023)**

#### **4.3 Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through skills development programmes**

The Women Development Fund (WDF) plays a significant role in empowering women entrepreneurs through its business skill development programme. The study revealed that more than half of the respondents (61.4%) affirmed to have received some skill development programmes through WDF as shown in Table 5. They include simple book keeping, financial management, savings, and entrepreneurship development. About 33.3% of the respondents acknowledged to receive training on savings which helped them to make saving for better management of their business development. Only 5.3% of respondents did not get any training from the scheme although they received loan. Generally all participants who attended the training reported significant improvements in various business management areas, such as financial literacy, marketing strategies, operational efficiency, and customer relations (Table 3)



**Table 3: Business skill development programme by WDF**

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Responses		Frequency	Percent
Entrepreneurship skill development		46	61.4
Training on Savings		25	33.3
Not received any training		4	5.3
Total		75	100

**Source: Field study findings, 2023**

#### **4.4 Fostering Women’s Financial Resilience-The Transformative Impact of WDF Loans**

The findings in Table 4 indicate that the respondents fell into two categories: those with initial capital (88%) and those without (12%). Among those with initial capital, subgroups were formed based on the amount of capital they had before accessing the loan. Respondents with initial capital of 50,000-100,000 Tshs (34.7%) were able to raise their capital to 200,000 Tshs and above after receiving the WDF loan. Those with initial capital of 101,000-200,000 Tshs (26%) increased their capital to 300,000 Tshs and above after obtaining the loan. Respondents with an initial capital of 301,000 Tshs (9.3%) experienced a capital gain of more than 500,000 Tshs. Lastly, those with initial capital of 400,000 (9.4%) generated 1,000,000 Tshs and above in the span of one year. Among the respondents without initial capital (12%), the loan amount received from WDF was 50,000 Tshs. Within the same period, this group was able to generate capital ranging from 100,000 Tshs to 200,000 Tshs. The findings suggest that WDF loans have a positive impact on capital generation and business status. The loans enable women entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and increase their capital significantly. For those with initial capital, the loan acts as a catalyst for further capital growth. For those without initial capital, the loan serves as the primary source of capital, enabling them to establish their businesses and generate income.

**Table 4. Capital before and after loan**

Amount in Tshs	Description	Frequency	Percent
Capital before obtaining WDF loan	Capital after obtaining WDF loan		
No capital	500-100,000	9	12.0
50,000-100,000	200,000 and above	26	34.7
101,000-200,000	300,000and above	15	20.0
201,000-300,000	400,000 and above	11	14.6
301,000-4000	500,000 and above	7	9.3
400,000 and above	1,000,000 and above	7	9.4
Total		75	100.0

**Source: Field study findings, 2023**

The implication of the findings in Table 4 is that WDF loans contributed to increase capital for majority of the beneficiaries including those who had no capital before getting a loan. This means that WDF loans made impact in livelihood of women through business performance. Beneficiaries mentioned to manage meeting some basic family needs such as meals, school fees, clothing, and health service payment depending on the type of business. The key to all these

success stories as mentioned by the key informant is the trust established among group members and between the groups which is the constituent part of social capital. Thus, it can confidently be argued that these findings concurs with the study by (Kirori, 2015) who asserted that social capital contributes to wellbeing or livelihood improvement. Social capital is about community networks, norms, and trust among the people.

The findings were also supported by men who were found around WDF beneficiaries' business centers. Men acknowledged the contribution made by women beneficiaries to their families through support they got from WDF. They have the opinion that apart from their daily responsibilities women are capable when they trust each other and work together as a team.

One man who was the husband to one of WDF beneficiary women had this to say;

*"The WDF has opened the doors for my wife's business aspirations, allowing her to contribute to our family income and improve livelihood. Her success has shattered gender stereotype, and unveil the untapped potential of women in business. I now understand the importance of equal opportunities for women and the significant contributions they make to their families and society as a whole. Through her involvement, I have witnessed the positive impact of women supporting each other and collaborating, which has inspired me to be a more engaged partner in our family livelihood improvement. "*

#### **4.5 Improving Livelihoods of Beneficiaries through the Women Development Fund**

This study wanted to establish whether Women Development Fund (WDF) impacted the livelihoods of its beneficiaries. The respondents acknowledged to have accrued and enjoyed various benefits resulting from the loan/micro credit from WDF scheme. Findings show that 26.7% admitted that the loan enabled or boosted their capital and resulted to capital growth hence increased their family food intake such that the number of meals per day increased from 2 to 3, improved components of meals taken such as addition of fruits, spices and vegetables among respondents as shown in Table 5. These results concurs with the studies by (Welwel, 2022 ; Malamsha, 2023) that WDF loan given to women's group has improved household welfare by increasing the number of meals in families with some additional vegetables and fruits, WDF microcredits have a significant positive impact on household well-being, particularly with respect to settlement and children's education.

It was further revealed that the proportion that confessed to expand their business, increase their customers, and employ more workers were 24.0 % of the beneficiaries. These were mainly those who had their initial capital before receiving WDF loan and used to top up in the already existed capital for business. About 21.3% of the respondents managed to rehabilitate and/or construct their houses, increase household assets such as furniture, and able to meet basic family requirements. Those who were able to increase their family income and other basic needs constituted 16.0% of the respondents. The percentage mentioned to increase their business items/products/services were 12%. The implication of this findings is that the overall loans provided to the beneficiaries moderately improved family consumption, increased fixed assets size, increased income, and increased the type of products/services offered to customers, number of workers, profits, and the amount of saving. This findings concurs with (Fenton et al., 2017), that despite its challenges, microfinance is making significant contributions to improve the livelihoods of disadvantaged rural communities. Table 5 show summary of the results.

**Table 5: Beneficiaries livelihood improvement through WDF**

Item	Frequency	Percent
Boosted their capital and resulted to capital growth, increased their family food intake	20	26.7
Increased customers, expand business and employ more workers	18	24.0
Managed to rehabilitate/construct houses, increase household assets and able to meet basic family requirements	16	21.3
Increased household/family income, savings and basic needs	12	16.0
Increased the business items/products/services	9	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field study findings, 2023**

These findings are further supported by the husband of one WDF beneficiary woman at Dareda Kati village who her wife owns a glossary and food vending point. He had this to say;

*“I have witnessed firsthand transformative impact of WDF on my wife’s entrepreneurial journey. Through her business, she has not only brought financial stability to our family but has also inspired our family with her determination and success. Her participation in the WDF programmes has allowed her to flourish as a business woman, and her achievement have challenged my own perceptions of traditional gender roles, I am grateful for the funds support in nurturing her talents and providing opportunities for her to contribute to our family’s well-being. Her entrepreneurship has truly enriched our lives, and I am proud of her as she continues to make a difference.*

#### **4.6 Challenges Faced by Women Development Fund Beneficiaries**

One of the prominent challenges reported by the respondents was the delay in receiving loans as planned. This delay affected the beneficiaries’ ability to start or expand their businesses within the desired timeframe. The responsible authority (Local government) were not making significant efforts to ensure timely loan disbursement in accordance with regulations. This lack of oversight and follow-up created additional challenges for the beneficiaries, contributing to delays and potential financial difficulties in repaying the loans.

Another encounter reported respondents was that many beneficiaries, especially those who had no initial capital to start their businesses, expressed that the amount of loan provided by the WDF were insufficient to establish sustainable businesses to generate the desired profits. This together with the delay in the provision of entrepreneurship training before loan disbursement resulted into poor performance in their businesses. Another defies mentioned was unreliable market for their products, including intense competition hence struggle for the markets. Those who were engaged in agriculture faced weather-related challenges, such as unpredictable weather conditions that affected production and harvesting trends. These challenges affects the production and harvesting trend which in a way affect them to meet

loan repayment calendar.

Moreover factors such as limited mobility, lack of support from family and society, and misuse of funds for unintended purposes were identified as significant challenges for women entrepreneurs. These factors hindered the beneficiaries' ability to effectively utilize the loans and achieve business success. Some women were also reported to undertake projects that are not able to generate profits within the grace period thus lost the capital and fail to repay the loan. This results concurs with the study by (Nkwabi et al., 2020) that the major challenges facing petty business women are inadequate capital, high competition, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and loan diversion.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study concluded that women development fund has significantly improved the livelihoods of women and their households. The beneficiaries of the fund were able to generate income leading to improved living conditions and empowerment at the individual, household, and community level. Some beneficiaries used the loans to expand their existing businesses, resulting in increased income, while others were able to meet their basic family needs. The attitudes of men towards women in business also changed, as they recognized women's dual role in household chores and their contribution to household livelihoods, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Despite the positive impact, the beneficiaries faced several challenges. These included lengthy loan access process, high interest rates for women, insufficient loan amounts, limited entrepreneurship skills, and poor business performance due to a lack of management skills. Additionally, women's dual responsibilities, balancing household chores and business activities, posed difficulties to their entrepreneurial success.

## **6. Recommendations**

The study recommends providing entrepreneurship skills training to beneficiaries, increasing loan amounts and grace periods, ensuring a supportive business environment, facilitating timely access to loan through efficient coordination, and offering training on financial management and business skills. These recommendation aims to empower women entrepreneurs, improve their business performance, and ultimately contribute to the overall improvement of their livelihoods and economic well-being.

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