



Male Outmigration and Women's Empowerment in Rural Tanzania: Unpacking the Transformation of Household Decision-Making Dynamics in Kondoa District

¹Nyamonge M. Kenya

¹Development and Strategic Studies, Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania. Email: nyamonge@sua.ac.tz

Received: January 05, 2026; Accepted: June 11, 2026; Published: June 18, 2026

Abstract: Rural-urban migration continues to reshape household dynamics across Sub-Saharan Africa, yet empirical evidence on how male outmigration influences left-behind women's decision-making authority remains limited, particularly in Tanzania's semi-arid regions where climatic stress exacerbates livelihood vulnerability. This study examined the implications of male rural-urban migration on left-behind women's participation in household decision-making across 26 villages in Kondoa District, Dodoma Region, Tanzania. Using a mixed-methods convergent parallel design, data were collected from 177 purposively selected left-behind women through semi-structured interviews and from 18 key informants comprising Village Executive Officers and Ward Executive Officers. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to examine associations between migration and decision-making patterns, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo version 12. Findings revealed that pre-migration decision-making was predominantly male-controlled (51%, $n=90$), with only 22% ($n=39$) of women identifying as primary household decision-makers. Post-migration, participation significantly increased, with 92% ($n=163$) of women involved in all or most decisions regarding productive activities and income utilization ($\chi^2=24.67$, $p<0.001$), while 89% ($n=157$) participated in remittance allocation decisions. Thematic analysis indicated enhanced agency, autonomy, and bargaining power, though challenges including limited remittance amounts (Tshs 10,000-20,000/US\$4-8 monthly) and persistent patriarchal norms constrained full empowerment. This study contributes empirically by providing quantitative evidence of decision-making shifts in a climatically vulnerable context, and theoretically by extending the Sustainable Livelihood Approach to illuminate how migration-induced household restructuring transforms women's livelihood outcomes. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions strengthening women's financial literacy and access to productive resources, alongside policies recognizing women's emerging roles in household economic governance.

Keywords: Rural-urban migration; Left-behind women; Household decision-making; Women's empowerment; Sustainable Livelihood Approach

1.0 Background Information

Rural-urban migration constitutes a defining socio-demographic phenomenon of the twenty-first century, particularly across the Global South where rapid urbanization and uneven economic development continue to reshape population distributions and household structures (Todaro & Smith, 2020). This spatial and social process, involving the movement of individuals from rural areas to urban centers for temporary or permanent residence, has emerged as a critical force shaping not only urban labor markets but also the social fabric and economic organization of rural communities of origin (World Bank, 2021). Concurrently, household decision-making, defined as the negotiation and allocation of power over key domestic,

economic, and resource-related choices within families, represents a fundamental dimension of intra-household dynamics that directly influences livelihood outcomes, resource distribution, and individual well-being (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996; Doss, 2013). The intersection of these two phenomena, whereby migration induces shifts in household power relations, carries profound implications for gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable rural development (Deere & León, 2001; Kabeer, 2005).

The significance of examining migration-decision-making linkages cannot be overstated, as household decision-making authority determines access to and control over productive resources, influences investment patterns in children's



education and health, and shapes household food security and nutrition outcomes (Smith *et al.*, 2003; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). In contexts where women's decision-making power is constrained by patriarchal norms, their limited participation in household economic choices has been associated with suboptimal household welfare outcomes, including reduced expenditures on children's education and health (Duflo, 2003; Seymour, 2017). Conversely, evidence suggests that when women exercise greater decision-making authority, households allocate more resources toward child welfare, food security, and long-term livelihood investments (Doss, 2013; Deere & Doss, 2006). Within this context, the feminization of migration, particularly the increasing prevalence of male outmigration from rural areas, has created unprecedented opportunities to examine how the absence of male spouses transforms household power dynamics and women's agency (Jatav *et al.*, 2023; Koirala, 2023).

The empirical literature on migration and women's decision-making has generated mixed findings, reflecting the contextual and multidimensional nature of these relationships. Several studies from South Asia have documented positive associations between male outmigration and women's empowerment, reporting increased decision-making autonomy, greater mobility, and enhanced participation in household economic activities (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Jatav *et al.*, 2023; Koirala, 2023). In Nepal, for instance, Koirala (2023) found that transnational male migration was associated with greater autonomy and strengthened decision-making power among left-behind wives compared to women whose spouses remained at home, while Jatav *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that male-selective outmigration enhanced women's participation in household and economic decision-making in India's Kumaon Himalayas. Similarly, studies from Southeast Asia have highlighted the empowerment potential of male migration, with Wang *et al.* (2020) finding that left-behind women in China experienced increased authority over agricultural and financial decisions in their spouses' absence.

However, contradictory evidence exists, suggesting that the relationship between migration and women's decision-making is neither uniform nor inevitably empowering. In some contexts, male outmigration has intensified women's workload without corresponding increases in decision-making authority, as traditional gender norms persist and women assume additional responsibilities without commensurate power (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Pal & Pal, 2022). In Nepal, Adhikari and Hobley (2015) reported that while women assumed agricultural responsibilities following male migration, they remained excluded from strategic decision-making regarding land sales and major household investments. Similarly, Pal and Pal (2022) documented that left-behind women in India experienced heightened

economic burdens and social isolation without corresponding empowerment gains. These contradictory findings highlight the importance of contextual factors, including cultural norms, institutional frameworks, and household characteristics, in mediating migration's effects on women's agency (Kabeer, 2005).

The theoretical gap in the literature is equally significant. While the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how households deploy diverse assets and strategies, including migration, to achieve livelihood outcomes, its application to analyzing migration's implications for women's decision-making remains underdeveloped (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 2009). The SLA emphasizes that livelihood strategies, including migration, are shaped by institutional structures, social norms, and asset endowments, and that outcomes are determined by the interactions among these elements (Scoones, 2009). However, existing applications of SLA to migration studies have often treated household-level outcomes without adequately disaggregating intra-household dynamics, particularly gender-specific power relations and decision-making processes (Bebbington, 1999; Sall & Diop, 2021). The framework's capacity to illuminate how migration-induced changes in household composition, labor allocation, and resource control translate into women's enhanced or diminished decision-making authority requires further theoretical elaboration and empirical investigation (Mori & Katayama, 2021).

Regionally, the East African context presents a particularly relevant yet underexplored setting for examining these dynamics. Tanzania has experienced significant rural-urban migration, with estimates suggesting that nearly 50% of the population has migrated to urban areas since 1991 (Hirvonen & de Weerd, 2013). In Kondoa District, Dodoma Region, harsh climatic conditions characterized by recurrent and prolonged droughts, combined with poor accessibility and declining agricultural productivity, have driven many rural households to adopt migration as a livelihood strategy (Duda *et al.*, 2018). Despite this context, limited empirical research has systematically examined how male outmigration shapes left-behind women's decision-making authority in Tanzanian rural households. The existing Tanzanian literature has primarily focused on the determinants of migration (Msigwa & Mbongo, 2013), youth migration and poverty reduction (Liviga & Mekacha, 1998), and labor migration patterns (Mbonile, 1996), while the gendered implications for left-behind women's household decision-making roles remain insufficiently explored.

This study aims to address these empirical and theoretical gaps by examining the implications of male rural-urban migration on left-behind women's participation in household decision-making in selected villages of Kondoa District,



Dodoma Region, Tanzania. Specifically, the study investigates: (i) the pre-migration decision-making patterns and the extent to which decisions were male-dominated; (ii) the extent of left-behind women's involvement in decisions regarding productive activities, income utilization, and remittance allocation following their spouses' migration; and (iii) the mechanisms through which male outmigration shapes women's decision-making authority and agency. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (Chambers & Conway, 1992), the study conceptualizes migration as a household livelihood strategy that, through its effects on household composition and resource availability, transforms women's access to and control over livelihood assets and their participation in household decision-making processes.

Henceforth, by providing empirical evidence from a climatically vulnerable and socio-economically marginalized context, this study contributes to the broader literature on migration, gender, and rural development. The findings are expected to inform policy and programming interventions aimed at strengthening women's economic empowerment, enhancing household food security, and promoting sustainable livelihood outcomes in contexts where male outmigration is prevalent. Moreover, the study contributes to theoretical development by extending the Sustainable Livelihood Approach to more systematically incorporate intra-household gender dynamics and decision-making processes, thereby enhancing the framework's analytical power and policy relevance for understanding migration's gendered implications in developing country contexts.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

This study is anchored in the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), a comprehensive analytical framework developed to understand the complexity of livelihood systems and the multiple factors that shape household strategies and outcomes (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998). The SLA emerged from critiques of narrow economic approaches to development that focused predominantly on income and employment, offering instead a holistic perspective that recognizes livelihoods as comprising the capabilities, assets, and activities required for securing a means of living (Carney, 1998; Ellis, 2000). At its core, the SLA emphasizes that livelihood opportunities and constraints are shaped by a dynamic interplay of factors operating at multiple scales, including broader national trends, sectoral policies, institutional structures, and local-level social norms, all of which influence the assets available to individuals and households and their capacity to deploy these assets effectively (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Bebbington, 1999).

The SLA's analytical power lies in its recognition that livelihoods are not simply economic phenomena but are embedded in social, cultural, and institutional contexts that determine access to and control over resources (Scoones, 2009). The framework identifies five key components that interact to shape livelihood outcomes: the vulnerability context, livelihood assets (capital assets), transforming structures and processes, livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes (DFID, 1999; Sall & Diop, 2021). The vulnerability context encompasses the external environment in which households operate, including shocks (such as droughts, floods, and economic crises), seasonal variations, and long-term trends (including population growth, climate change, and economic transformation) that affect livelihood options and outcomes (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Ellis, 2000). These contextual factors influence the range of viable livelihood strategies and the sustainability of outcomes.

Central to the SLA framework are the five forms of capital or livelihood assets that households draw upon and combine to pursue their livelihood strategies: human capital, natural capital, financial capital, physical capital, and social capital (DFID, 1999; Scoones, 1998). Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, health status, and labor capacity that enable individuals to pursue diverse livelihood activities and adapt to changing circumstances (Becker, 1964; Sen, 1987). Natural capital comprises the stock of natural resources, including land, water, forests, and biodiversity, that provide the foundation for agricultural production and other resource-based livelihood activities (Pretty *et al.*, 2003). Financial capital encompasses savings, credit access, income flows, and remittances that enable households to invest in productive activities, manage risk, and smooth consumption (Ellis, 2000). Physical capital includes infrastructure, equipment, and technology that support productive activities, such as irrigation systems, transportation networks, communications technology, and productive machinery (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, group memberships, and trust that facilitate cooperation, information sharing, and collective action, as well as provide access to resources and social support (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The SLA emphasizes that access to and effective utilization of these multiple assets determine the range of livelihood strategies available to households and their capacity to achieve positive livelihood outcomes (Carney, 1998; Ellis, 2000).

Access to livelihood assets is often characterized by significant gender disparities, with patriarchal social norms and institutional practices systematically limiting women's ownership, control, and decision-making authority over productive resources compared to men (Agarwal, 1994; Deere & León, 2001; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). These inequalities are manifested in unequal access to land, credit,



education, technology, and social networks, constraining women's capacity to pursue diverse livelihood strategies and achieve sustainable outcomes (Kabeer, 2005; Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2011). Within household decision-making processes, gendered power relations similarly privilege men's authority and control, frequently relegating women to subordinate roles despite their substantial contributions to agricultural production and household provisioning (Doss, 2013; Seymour, 2017). The SLA's recognition of the institutional and social determinants of asset access makes it particularly relevant for analyzing how migration-induced changes in household composition and resource flows may reshape gender relations and women's livelihood outcomes (Bebbington, 1999; Mori & Katayama, 2021).

2.2 Conceptualizing Migration as a Livelihood Strategy

Within the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, migration is recognized as an important livelihood strategy that households may adopt to cope with and adapt to environmental and economic pressures, diversify income sources, and enhance overall livelihood security (Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000). Migration is fundamentally a household-level decision, typically undertaken as a risk-management strategy in response to vulnerability context challenges, including agricultural shocks, income seasonality, and limited local employment opportunities (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Massey *et al.*, 1993). Drawing on the SLA framework, migration can be understood as a mechanism through which households transform their asset portfolio, converting human capital (labor) into financial capital (remittances) and, in some cases, enhancing social capital through networks that facilitate migration and economic integration (de Haan, 1999; Sall & Diop, 2021).

The decision for male household members to migrate to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities is typically motivated by the perceived insufficiency of local livelihood options to meet household needs and aspirations (Todaro & Smith, 2020; Duda *et al.*, 2018). In contexts such as Kondo District, where climatic volatility, declining soil fertility, and recurrent droughts undermine agricultural productivity, migration emerges as a rational household strategy to diversify income sources, reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks, and improve household welfare (Paavola, 2008; Duda *et al.*, 2018). However, the SLA framework also highlights that migration outcomes are shaped by transforming structures and processes, including policies, institutions, and social norms that determine migrant's access to urban labor markets, the terms of their employment, and their capacity to generate and remit income (Bebbington, 1999; Sall & Diop, 2021).

The outmigration of male household members has particularly significant implications for remaining household members, especially women, as it fundamentally restructures household composition, labor allocation, and resource flows (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Jatav *et al.*, 2023). In the absence of spouses, left-behind women often assume increased responsibility for agricultural production, household management, and income generation, effectively absorbing the livelihood functions previously shared with or performed by their migrant husbands (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Koirala, 2023). These expanded responsibilities can be conceptualized within the SLA as changes in the deployment of household labor assets, with women's time allocated increasingly toward productive activities and income generation, in addition to reproductive and caregiving responsibilities (Mori & Katayama, 2021; Pal & Pal, 2022). Simultaneously, remittances received from migrants constitute a significant source of financial capital that can facilitate investment in productive activities, consumption smoothing, and human capital development (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Jatav *et al.*, 2023).

2.3 The SLA, Gender Relations, and Women's Decision-Making

The SLA framework, while originally not explicitly gendered, has been adapted and extended by scholars to analyze the gendered dimensions of livelihoods, including how social norms and institutional structures shape women's differential access to assets, participation in decision-making, and livelihood outcomes (Bebbington, 1999; Mori & Katayama, 2021; Sall & Diop, 2021). A gendered livelihood analysis recognizes that the assets, strategies, and outcomes of household members are not uniformly distributed but reflect and reproduce existing gender hierarchies and power relations (Kabeer, 2005; Doss, 2013). Within this perspective, household decision-making is understood as a contested arena where power relations, bargaining processes, and negotiation dynamics determine women's ability to influence choices about asset allocation, resource use, and livelihood strategies (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996; Doss, 2013).

The SLA provides a particularly useful lens for analyzing how male outmigration may transform women's decision-making authority by altering both the asset base available to households and the institutional and social norms governing intra-household resource allocation and power relations. Specifically, male migration creates conditions that may expand women's agency and decision-making through several mechanisms. First, the physical absence of male spouses creates space for women to assume management and decision-making responsibilities over productive activities and household resources previously controlled by men, potentially enhancing their practical authority and perceived legitimacy as household decision-makers (Desai & Banerji,

2008; Jatav *et al.*, 2023). Second, women's increased control over income generated from agricultural and off-farm activities strengthens their bargaining position within the household and their capacity to make autonomous decisions about resource allocation (Koirala, 2023; Wang *et al.*, 2020). Third, remittances received from migrant spouses can augment women's financial capital and enhance their economic autonomy, even if control over these funds remains contested (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Pal & Pal, 2022).

However, the SLA also cautions that enhanced asset access and decision-making authority for women are not automatic outcomes of male migration, as patriarchal norms, institutional constraints, and the nature of women's increased workloads may limit the transformative potential of these changes (Mori & Katayama, 2021; Sall & Diop, 2021). The persistence of patriarchal social structures and gender norms may constrain women's ability to translate increased responsibilities into sustainable empowerment, as cultural expectations of male authority and female subordination continue to shape household relations (Kabeer, 2005). Moreover, women's expanded workloads resulting from the assumption of male agricultural and economic responsibilities, combined with ongoing reproductive and caregiving obligations, may generate "time poverty" and increased physical and psychological burdens that limit their capacity to participate effectively in decision-making processes and pursue autonomous livelihood strategies (Pal & Pal, 2022; Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). Consequently, the SLA emphasizes that livelihood outcomes are not solely determined by asset access but are mediated by the institutional and structural contexts in which households operate, including gender norms, legal frameworks, and social support systems (Bebbington, 1999; Scoones, 2009).

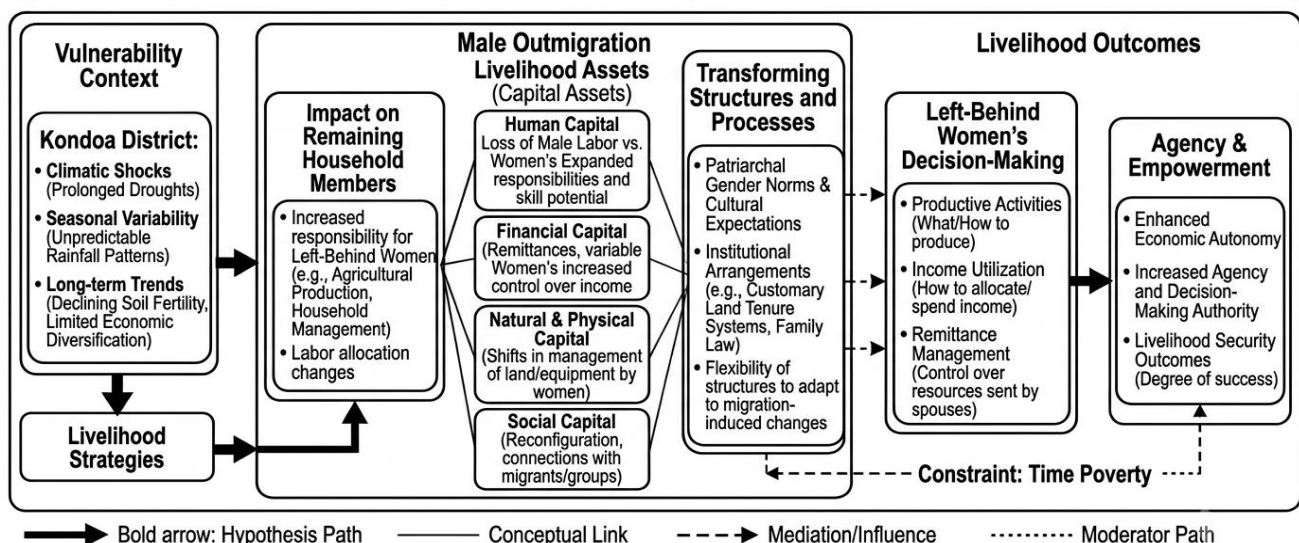
The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 2.1) operationalizes the SLA to examine the implications of male rural-urban migration on left-behind women's participation in household decision-making. The framework identifies the key pathways through which migration transforms women's decision-making authority within the household:

Vulnerability Context: Kondoa District is characterized by climatic shocks (prolonged droughts), seasonal variability (unpredictable rainfall patterns), and long-term trends (declining soil fertility, limited economic diversification), which collectively undermine agricultural productivity and household livelihood security (Duda *et al.*, 2018; Paavola, 2008). This vulnerability context creates pressure on households to adopt migration as a livelihood diversification strategy.

Livelihood Assets: Male outmigration affects multiple forms of household capital. Human capital is impacted by the departure of male labor, increasing women's labor burden while potentially enhancing their skills through expanded responsibilities (Desai & Banerji, 2008). Financial capital may increase through remittances, though amounts vary (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). Physical and natural capital utilization patterns shift as women assume management of agricultural land and equipment (Jatav *et al.*, 2023). Social capital networks may be reconfigured through connections with migrant spouses and among left-behind women's groups (Koirala, 2023).

Transforming Structures and Processes: Patriarchal gender norms, cultural expectations, and institutional arrangements (including customary land tenure systems and family law) mediate the relationship between migration and women's decision-making, either constraining or enabling women's

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework for the Implications of Male Outmigration on Left-Behind Women's Household Decision-Making



*Note: Figure 1 illustrates the application of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) to analyze the pathways through which male rural-urban migration influences left-behind women's participation in household decision-making. The framework depicts the vulnerability context that motivates migration; the livelihood assets affected by migration; the transforming structures and processes mediating outcomes; and the livelihood outcomes, including women's decision-making participation and empowerment.

Source: Authors' conceptualization based on Chambers & Conway (1992), Scoones (1998, 2009), DFID (1999), Kabeer (2005), and other relevant SLA and gender scholars.



increased authority (Kabeer, 2005; Doss, 2013). The extent to which women can translate migration-induced changes into enhanced decision-making power depends on the flexibility of these structures and processes.

Livelihood Strategies: Households adopt migration as a livelihood strategy to diversify income sources, manage risk, and improve economic well-being (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 1998). The implementation of this strategy sets in motion changes in household labor allocation, resource control, and decision-making patterns that directly affect left-behind women's roles and responsibilities.

Livelihood Outcomes: The ultimate outcomes of interest in this study include women's participation in decision-making regarding productive activities (what to produce, how to produce), income utilization (how to allocate and spend income), and remittance management (control over resources sent by spouses) (Jatav *et al.*, 2023; Koirala, 2023). These outcomes reflect the degree to which male migration contributes to women's empowerment, agency, and enhanced livelihood security (Kabeer, 2005; Sen, 1987).

The SLA framework is particularly appropriate for this study because it recognizes that livelihood strategies, including migration, do not operate in isolation but are embedded in social, economic, and institutional contexts that shape their implementation and outcomes (Scoones, 2009). By conceptualizing male outmigration as a livelihood strategy adopted in response to vulnerability context challenges, and by tracing its effects on asset endowments, decision-making patterns, and livelihood outcomes, the framework enables a systematic analysis of the multiple pathways through which migration influences left-behind women's agency and empowerment (Mori & Katayama, 2021; Sall & Diop, 2021). Furthermore, the SLA's emphasis on the role of transforming structures and processes highlights the importance of understanding how patriarchal norms and institutional constraints condition the empowerment potential of male migration, providing a nuanced perspective that avoids either overly optimistic or deterministic accounts of migration's gendered implications (Bebbington, 1999; Kabeer, 2005).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design to examine the implications of male rural-urban migration on left-behind women's participation in household decision-making in Kondoa District, Dodoma Region, Tanzania (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The convergent parallel design involves the simultaneous collection and independent analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration and interpretation of both datasets to provide a comprehensive understanding of the

research phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This design was considered appropriate because it enables the study to capture both the breadth of participation patterns through quantitative measurement and the depth of women's experiences and perspectives through qualitative exploration (Bryman, 2006; Fetters *et al.*, 2013). The mixed-methods approach was particularly valuable for addressing the research objectives as it facilitates triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of conclusions while providing complementary insights that neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches alone could achieve (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Greene *et al.*, 1989).

The quantitative component focused on measuring the extent of left-behind women's participation in household decision-making across different domains (productive activities, income utilization, and remittance management), identifying patterns and associations through statistical analysis. The qualitative component explored women's experiences, perceptions, and narratives regarding how migration has influenced their decision-making roles, agency, and empowerment, providing contextual understanding of the quantitative patterns observed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The integration of both components was achieved through a narrative synthesis in the discussion section, where quantitative findings and qualitative themes were compared, contrasted, and interpreted together to generate holistic conclusions (Fetters *et al.*, 2013; O'Cathain *et al.*, 2010).

3.2 Study Area

Table 3.1: Distribution of Study Villages and Participants by Ward

Ward	Number of Villages	Left-Behind Women (n)	Key Informants (n)
Ward 1	3	20	2
Ward 2	3	19	2
Ward 3	3	18	2
Ward 4	3	21	2
Ward 5	3	22	2
Ward 6	3	20	2
Ward 7	3	18	2
Ward 8	3	19	2
Ward 9	2	20	2
Total	26	177	18

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021

This study was conducted in Kondoa District, Dodoma Region, Tanzania (Table 3.1). The district was purposively selected because it is among the areas most affected by rural-urban migration within Dodoma Region, a phenomenon driven by harsh climatic conditions, recurrent and prolonged droughts, and limited income-generating opportunities from rain-fed agriculture (Duda *et al.*, 2018). Kondoa District is characterized by semi-arid climatic conditions, with erratic and unreliable rainfall patterns that constrain agricultural production and household food security. The district's



predominantly rural population depends on subsistence agriculture, primarily rain-fed farming of cereals (maize, sorghum, millet) and livestock keeping, which are highly vulnerable to climatic variability (Paavola, 2008). Limited infrastructure, poor road access, and inadequate market integration further constrain livelihood options, compelling many rural households to adopt migration as a livelihood diversification strategy (Duda *et al.*, 2018; Msigwa & Mbongo, 2013).

The district's population is predominantly composed of the Wariang'ombe ethnic group, among whom patrilineal kinship systems and patriarchal social norms traditionally govern land inheritance, household authority, and gender relations (URT, 2013). These cultural norms have historically positioned men as household heads and primary decision-makers, while women have been relegated to subordinate roles with limited authority over household resources and strategic decisions (Kabeer, 2005). The interplay of environmental vulnerability, economic marginalization, and patriarchal social structures makes Kondoa District a strategic location for examining how male outmigration influences left-behind women's participation in household decision-making, as migration intersects with existing gender dynamics in potentially transformative ways (Jatav *et al.*, 2023; Koirala, 2023).

The research covered twenty-six (26) villages distributed across nine (9) wards (Table 3.1). The selection of wards and villages was conducted through purposive sampling based on evidence of relatively high rural-urban male migration rates, local leaders' recommendations, and accessibility considerations (Orodho & Kombo, 2002). Within each village, participants were identified through snowball sampling techniques, as detailed in section 3.4.

3.3 Target Population and Sampling

3.3.1 Study Population

The target population for this study comprised all left-behind women in Kondoa District whose husbands had migrated to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities. Left-behind women were defined as women who remained in rural households when their spouses migrated to urban areas for employment or income-generating activities, and who had been separated from their spouses for a minimum of six months at the time of data collection (Hugo, 2000; Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). This definition ensured that participants had sufficient experience with the implications of male migration for household decision-making patterns (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Koirala, 2023). Additionally, local government officials, including Village Executive Officers (VEOs) and Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), constituted key informants due to their knowledge of migration patterns and household dynamics within their jurisdictions.

3.3.2 Sampling Technique

This study employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify and select participants (Table 3.1). Purposive sampling was used to select wards and villages within Kondoa District that exhibited relatively high levels of rural-urban male migration, ensuring the inclusion of respondents with relevant experiences and knowledge related to the phenomenon under investigation (Orodho & Kombo, 2002; Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants or study sites are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics pertinent to the research objectives, enabling researchers to identify and select information-rich cases that can provide detailed insights into the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The key criterion for selection was the prevalence of rural-urban male migration within the villages, as reported by local government authorities and community leaders.

Due to the lack of reliable records on rural-urban migration and the difficulty of systematically identifying left-behind women in the selected villages, the study employed snowball sampling, a form of purposive sampling, to identify eligible participants (Vogt, 1999). Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which initial participants assist the researcher in identifying other eligible participants, who subsequently refer additional respondents, creating a chain of referrals (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Vogt, 1999). Also known as referral or chain sampling, this technique is particularly appropriate for studies involving populations that are difficult to locate or for which no comprehensive sampling frame exists (Patton, 2002; Goodman, 1961). In this study, initial participants were identified through key informants (Village Executive Officers), who provided information about left-behind women in their villages. These initial participants then referred other left-behind women, and the chain continued until data saturation was achieved (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Morse, 2000).

3.3.3 Sample Size Determination

Sample size determination in this study followed the principle of data saturation, a widely recognized criterion in qualitative and mixed-methods research for establishing when sufficient data have been collected to address the research objectives (Morse, 2000; Guest *et al.*, 2006). Data collection continued until the point of saturation was reached, defined as the point at which no new information or themes emerged from the interviews (Guest *et al.*, 2006; Saunders *et al.*, 2018). Saturation was attained after interviewing 177 left-behind women across the 26 villages and 9 wards (Table 3.1). This sample size is consistent with qualitative and mixed-methods studies employing similar research designs and sampling strategies in rural



development and migration research (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Desai & Banerji, 2008; Jatav *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, 18 key informants (2 per ward) were purposively selected, comprising Village Executive Officers and Ward Executive Officers, who provided complementary insights into migration patterns and household decision-making dynamics (Table 3.1).

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

3.4.1 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using three complementary instruments: semi-structured interview guides for left-behind women, key informant interview guides for local government officials, and non-participant observation protocols. The use of multiple instruments was intended to enhance methodological triangulation and improve the credibility and validity of findings by minimizing potential biases and reducing subjectivity in the data collection process (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Left-Behind Women:

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to capture information on: (1) socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their households (age, education, household size, farm size); (2) pre-migration decision-making patterns, including who primarily made household decisions before the spouse migrated; (3) extent of women's involvement in decisions regarding current productive activities and income utilization; and (4) participation in decision-making on remittance use. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in probing responses and exploring emergent themes while ensuring systematic coverage of key research topics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Galletta, 2013). The interview guide was developed in English, translated into Swahili (the national language of Tanzania), and then back-translated to English to ensure semantic equivalence and cultural appropriateness (Brislin, 1970).

Key Informant Interview Guide: An interview guide was developed for key informants (Village Executive Officers and Ward Executive Officers) to gather information on: (1) migration patterns in the village/ward, including the prevalence and destinations of male migrants; (2) observed changes in household decision-making patterns following male migration; (3) community perceptions of women's roles in households with migrant spouses; and (4) institutional support or constraints affecting left-behind women. Key informant interviews provided valuable contextual information and enabled triangulation of findings from left-behind women's interviews (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Non-Participant Observation: Non-participant observation was employed to document observable household dynamics, resource management practices, and community-level activities related to left-behind women's roles in decision-making and livelihood management (Parke & Griffiths, 2008). Observation protocols were used to record information on household composition, division of labor, resource allocation patterns, and women's participation in community activities. Observations were conducted during household visits, at community meetings, and in agricultural fields, providing contextual data that complemented interview findings.

3.4.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted between June and September 2021. Prior to data collection, researchers established contact with local government authorities at the district, ward, and village levels to obtain official permission and introductions to communities. Community entry procedures followed established protocols, including holding introductory meetings with village leaders and community members to explain the study objectives, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Research assistants were recruited and trained in data collection procedures, including interviewing techniques, ethical considerations, and the use of observation protocols.

Interviews with left-behind women were conducted in private settings, either at participants' homes or in community spaces where privacy could be ensured. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in Swahili to facilitate natural communication and participant comfort (Galletta, 2013). With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded to enable accurate transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture observations, contextual details, and non-verbal cues that could enrich data analysis (Patton, 2002). Key informant interviews were conducted at the village or ward government offices and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in Swahili and then translated into English for analysis by professional translators familiar with the local cultural context to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity (Brislin, 1970; Squires, 2009).

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data, particularly socio-demographic characteristics and closed-ended questions on decision-making participation, were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 26. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to characterize the study



population and describe patterns of decision-making participation. These data are presented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 below.

Table 3.2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Left-Behind Women (n=177)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	18-28	28	15.8
	28-45	101	57.1
	45-60	48	27.1
Education Level	No formal education	16	9.0
	Primary education	137	77.4
	Secondary education	20	11.3
	Post-secondary	4	2.3
Household Size	< 5 persons	34	19.2
	5-8 persons	130	73.4
	> 8 persons	13	7.3
	Mean $\pm$ SD	7.0 $\pm$ 2.1 persons	
Farm Size (acres)	No farm/Hired farm	34	19.2
	< 3 acres	77	43.5
	3-5 acres	39	22.0
	> 5 acres	27	15.3
	Mean $\pm$ SD	3.2 $\pm$ 1.8 acres	

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021

Second, chi-square tests of association were conducted to examine relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and women's participation in decision-making across the three domains (productive activities, income utilization, and remittance management). Chi-square tests are appropriate for analyzing associations between categorical variables and were used to test whether socio-demographic factors, such as education and household size, were significantly associated with decision-making participation patterns (Agresti, 2007; Pallant, 2020). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Table 3.3: Pre- and Post-Migration Decision-Making Participation Patterns (n=177)

Decision-Making Domain	Pre-Migration	Post-Migration
Primary Decision-Maker		
Husband	90 (51%)	-
Wife (Left-Behind Women)	39 (22%)	-
Joint decision	48 (27%)	-
Involvement in Productive Activities Decisions		
All/Most decisions	-	163 (92%)
Some/Few decisions	-	10 (6%)
No involvement	-	4 (2%)
Involvement in Income Use Decisions		
All/Most decisions	-	163 (92%)
Some/Few decisions	-	11 (6%)
No involvement	-	3 (2%)
Remittance Use Decisions		
Respondent decides	-	157 (89%)
Spouse decides remotely	-	5 (3%)
Joint decision	-	15 (8%)

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021. χ^2 tests for post-migration decision-making patterns showed significant associations between education and decision-making participation ($\chi^2=8.67$, $p=0.013$) and between farm size and income utilization decisions ($\chi^2=12.34$, $p=0.002$).

Third, inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, were computed to test whether observed differences in decision-making participation between pre- and post-migration patterns were statistically significant (Table 3.3). The results of these analyses are presented in the Results and Discussion section and are integrated with qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how male migration influences women's decision-making authority (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Bryman, 2006).

3.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using thematic and content analysis with the assistance of NVivo version 12 (QSR International, 2018). The analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process. First, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in Swahili, then translated into English by professional translators who were fluent in both Swahili and English and familiar with the cultural context of the study area (Squires, 2009). Second, transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data and identify preliminary patterns. Third, the study employed an emergent coding approach, a process in which coding categories are derived directly from the data during analysis, rather than being predetermined (Blair, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). In this approach, codes are progressively developed as the researcher systematically reviews and interprets the data, allowing themes to emerge inductively from participants' responses (Saldana, 2016).

The coding process involved three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding involved breaking down the data into discrete parts, examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences, with initial codes assigned to meaningful segments of text (Charmaz, 2014). Axial coding involved grouping related open codes into categories and sub-categories and examining relationships among them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Selective coding involved identifying central themes that integrated the categories and provided a coherent narrative of the data (Saldana, 2016). The coding process was iterative, with codes refined and revised as analysis progressed and new insights emerged. Codes were organized into the following thematic areas: pre-migration decision-making patterns, post-migration involvement in productive activities decisions, post-migration involvement in income utilization decisions, remittance use decision-making, factors enabling or constraining women's decision-making, and perceived impacts of increased decision-making



participation on women's empowerment and household welfare.

To enhance analytical rigor and reduce researcher bias, several strategies were employed. Data triangulation involved comparing findings from interviews with left-behind women, key informants, and observational data to verify consistencies and identify contradictions (Patton, 2002; Fetters *et al.*, 2013). Member checking was conducted with a subset of participants (approximately 10% of the sample) to verify the accuracy and completeness of interpretations, enhancing the credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing involved regular discussions with research assistants and colleagues to review coding decisions, interpret findings, and challenge assumptions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Reflexivity was practiced through maintaining a research journal documenting methodological decisions, personal reflections, and emerging interpretations, acknowledging the researcher's positionality and its potential influence on data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5.3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Integration of quantitative and qualitative data was achieved through a narrative synthesis approach, as recommended by Fetters *et al.* (2013) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2017). Quantitative findings on the extent of decision-making participation were used to establish patterns and trends in women's involvement, while qualitative themes provided depth and contextual understanding of how and why these patterns emerged. The integration was conducted at the interpretation stage, where findings from both data strands were compared, contrasted, and synthesized to generate holistic conclusions that go beyond what either approach alone could provide (O'Cathain *et al.*, 2010; Fetters *et al.*, 2013). For instance, the quantitative finding that 92% of women participated in all or most decisions about productive activities was enriched by qualitative narratives explaining how women assumed these roles, the challenges they faced, and the meanings they attached to their new responsibilities. The integrated findings are presented thematically in the Results and Discussion section, with tables and quotes providing complementary evidence for each theme.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

3.6.1 Reliability

Reliability in this mixed-methods study was enhanced through several strategies. For quantitative data, inter-rater reliability was established during data coding, with two trained research assistants independently coding a subset of 20% of the data, achieving 92% agreement (Cohen's Kappa = 0.85). For qualitative data, trustworthiness and dependability were established through rigorous

documentation of the research process, including maintaining a detailed audit trail of data collection, analysis, and interpretation decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple analysts were involved in the coding process, with regular meetings to discuss coding decisions and resolve discrepancies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Additionally, the use of standardized data collection instruments and consistent interviewing protocols enhanced the reliability of data across different settings and participants (Patton, 2002).

3.6.2 Validity

Validity was enhanced through the use of multiple strategies. Content validity of the interview guide was established through extensive literature review and peer review by experts in migration studies and gender analysis. The guide was pre-tested with 15 left-behind women in a village outside the study area (not included in the final sample), allowing for refinement of questions to enhance clarity and cultural appropriateness (Galletta, 2013). Criterion validity was addressed through methodological triangulation by comparing findings from different data sources (left-behind women interviews, key informant interviews, observation) to confirm patterns and identify inconsistencies (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Construct validity was enhanced by using multiple indicators for key constructs: decision-making participation was measured through three dimensions (productive activities, income use, remittances) and assessed through both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Doss, 2013; Seymour, 2017). The Mixed Methods Research paradigm was therefore applied to generate a comprehensive, nuanced, and validated understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Official permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Dodoma Regional Administration and the Kondo District Council, and village-level entry was facilitated through consultation with village leaders. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing comprehensive information about the study objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation (World Medical Association, 2013). Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. All interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure confidentiality and reduce discomfort. Participant identifiers were removed from data to ensure anonymity, and data were stored securely with access restricted to the research team. Special attention was given to the potentially sensitive nature of discussing household decision-making and gender relations; researchers employed culturally appropriate



techniques to minimize distress, including using neutral language, avoiding judgmental questions, and providing emotional support when needed (Hennink *et al.*, 2020). Participants were not compensated, but refreshments were provided during interviews, consistent with local norms of hospitality. Ethical protocols ensured that the research was conducted in a manner that respected participants' dignity, rights, and well-being, in compliance with the principles of beneficence, justice, and autonomy (World Medical Association, 2013; Resnik, 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 4.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Left-Behind Women (n=177)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean $\pm$ SD
Age (years)	18-28	28	15.8	38.7 $\pm$ 12.4
	28-45	101	57.1	
	45-60	48	27.1	
	Total	177	100	
Education Level	No formal education	16	9.0	7.0 $\pm$ 2.1
	Primary education	137	77.4	
	Secondary education	20	11.3	
	Post-secondary	4	2.3	
	Total	177	100	
Household Size (persons)	< 5 persons	34	19.2	3.2 $\pm$ 1.8
	5-8 persons	130	73.4	
	> 8 persons	13	7.4	
	Total	177	100	
Farm Size (acres)	No farm/Hired farm	34	19.2	3.2 $\pm$ 1.8
	< 3 acres	77	43.5	
	3-5 acres	39	22.0	
	> 5 acres	27	15.3	
	Total	177	100	

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021

4.1.1 Age Distribution

The age of left-behind women ranged from 20 to 60 years, with a mean age of 38.7 years (SD = 12.4 years). As presented in Table 4.1, the majority of respondents (57.1%, n=101) fell within the 28-45 years age category, which represents the most economically active and productive stage of life. A smaller proportion (27.1%, n=48) were in the 45-60 years category, while 15.8% (n=28) were in the 18-28 years category. This distribution suggests that most left-behind women were within a relatively active and productive phase of their lives, enabling them to engage in various income-generating and subsistence activities to support their households. According to Todaro and Smith (2020), individuals in the productive age group are generally more receptive to acquiring new knowledge and skills, which

enhances their ability to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their productive activities. Similarly, Jatav *et al.* (2023) found that younger left-behind women (25-45 years) demonstrated greater adaptability and capacity to assume new responsibilities in their spouses' absence compared to older women, who faced greater physical constraints and resistance to adopting new livelihood strategies. The age distribution observed in this study indicates that most left-behind women possessed sufficient physical capacity and energy to manage expanded household responsibilities, including agricultural production, livestock management, and income-generating activities. This finding is consistent with observations from Adhikari and Hobley (2015) in Nepal, where younger women more readily assumed agricultural management roles following male migration, while older women struggled to cope with increased labor demands.

4.1.2 Education Level

The findings presented in Table 4.1 reveal that the majority of left-behind women (77.4%, n=137) had attained primary education, while 11.3% (n=20) had secondary education, 2.3% (n=4) had post-secondary education, and 9.0% (n=16) had no formal education. This distribution indicates that most participants possessed basic literacy skills, which may facilitate their engagement in productive activities and ease the challenges associated with managing livelihood responsibilities. As highlighted by Kusmiati *et al.* (2007), Riddell and Song (2017), and Zhao *et al.* (2024), educated individuals are generally more articulate and better able to critically evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of adopting new innovations. Similarly, Mikwamba (2011) argues that literacy enables individuals to read and comprehend important written information, thereby enhancing their ability to access, interpret, and utilize relevant knowledge in their daily lives.

The relatively high proportion of women with primary education (77.4%) in this study is consistent with national trends in Tanzania, where primary education enrollment has increased substantially in recent decades (URT, 2013; World Bank, 2021). In the context of migration and women's empowerment, education serves as a critical enabler that facilitates women's capacity to assume expanded responsibilities, manage household resources, and participate effectively in decision-making processes (Doss, 2013; Kabeer, 2005). Jatav *et al.* (2023) similarly found that educated left-behind women in India demonstrated greater confidence and effectiveness in managing agricultural enterprises and household finances compared to their uneducated counterparts. However, the finding that 9.0% of women had no formal education highlights the persistent educational disadvantage faced by some rural women, which may constrain their ability to fully benefit from enhanced



decision-making opportunities created by male migration. As one participant with no formal education explained:

"I cannot read or write, so when I receive money from my husband, I have to ask neighbors to help me count it or read the messages he sends. This makes me feel dependent and unable to make decisions confidently" (LBW-34, 45 years, Boroboro Village).

This narrative illustrates how educational deficits can undermine women's capacity to exercise independent agency, even when migration creates opportunities for increased decision-making authority.

4.1.3 Household Size

Household size in this study ranged from 2 to 13 persons, with a mean of 7.0 persons (SD = 2.1 persons). As shown in Table 4.1, the majority of households headed by left-behind women (73.4%, n=130) fell within the 5-8 persons category, while 19.2% (n=34) had fewer than 5 persons, and 7.4% (n=13) had more than 8 persons. The average household size of seven persons is substantially higher than the national average household size of 4.6 persons reported in the 2012 Tanzania National Population Census (URT, 2013). This suggests that most households had relatively larger family sizes, which may enhance the availability of family labour for productive activities. Larger household sizes may reduce reliance on hired labour, thereby lowering production costs and alleviating labour constraints associated with male out-migration.

The larger household sizes observed in this study reflect the extended family structures prevalent in rural Tanzania, where multiple generations and extended kin often reside together (URT, 2013). This finding has important implications for women's decision-making roles in the context of male migration. On one hand, larger households may provide additional labour and support for women managing expanded agricultural and domestic responsibilities, potentially reducing the burden of increased workloads (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Desai & Banerji, 2008). On the other hand, larger households may also introduce additional power dynamics and decision-making complexities, particularly when extended family members, such as in-laws or adult children, are present and may contest women's authority (Pal & Pal, 2022). One participant highlighted this complexity:

"I have my mother-in-law living with me, and although my husband is away, she often questions my decisions about what crops to plant or how to spend money. Sometimes I must follow her advice to avoid conflict" (LBW-102, 38 years, Kolo Village).

This narrative illustrates how extended family structures and age hierarchies can mediate the empowerment effects of male migration, with the presence of older in-laws potentially constraining women's decision-making autonomy despite their spouses' absence (Mori & Katayama, 2021).

4.1.4 Farm Size

The findings in Table 4.1 indicate that the majority of households headed by left-behind women (43.5%, n=77) owned less than 3 acres of agricultural land, while 22.0% (n=39) owned 3-5 acres, and only 15.3% (n=27) owned more than 5 acres. Notably, 19.2% (n=34) of the respondents relied on hired farms for agricultural production, indicating that they did not have direct access to land ownership. The mean farm size was 3.2 acres (SD = 1.8 acres). This suggests that most respondents owned relatively small parcels of agricultural land, a situation that may adversely affect household food production and overall food security.

The prevalence of small farm sizes and landlessness (19.2%) among left-behind women is concerning, as access to land is a fundamental determinant of agricultural productivity and household food security in rural Tanzania (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020; Paavola, 2008). The finding that nearly one-fifth of respondents relied on hired farms for production may be attributed to the possibility that some spouses disposed of household land prior to migration in search of better economic opportunities, thereby leaving their families without land assets. Alternatively, customary land tenure systems that favor male inheritance and control of land may have left women with limited or no access to land even before their spouses' migration (Agarwal, 1994; Deere & León, 2001).

The limited access to land observed in this study has significant implications for women's decision-making and empowerment in the context of male migration. Women with smaller landholdings or reliance on hired farms may face greater economic insecurity and reduced capacity to generate independent income, potentially undermining their bargaining power and decision-making authority within the household (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Conversely, women with larger landholdings may have greater scope to engage in productive activities, generate income, and exercise decision-making authority over resource use and agricultural management (Jatav *et al.*, 2023). A chi-square test revealed a significant association between farm size and women's participation in income utilization decisions ($\chi^2=12.34$, $p=0.002$), indicating that women with larger farms were more likely to exercise independent decision-making authority over income generated from agricultural activities. This finding is consistent with research by Seymour (2017) and Doss (2013), which demonstrates that women's control over productive assets, including land, is a critical



determinant of their intra-household bargaining power and decision-making autonomy.

4.2 Pre-Migration Decision-Making Patterns

Table 4.2: Pre-Migration Primary Decision-Maker in the Household

Primary Decision-Maker	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Husband	90	50.8
Wife (Left-Behind Woman)	39	22.0
Joint Decision	48	27.1
Total	177	100.0

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021

Table 4.2 presents the findings on who primarily made household decisions before the spouses migrated in search of better economic opportunities. The results indicate that in the majority of households (50.8%, n=90), husbands were the primary decision-makers prior to migration. Only 22.0% (n=39) of women identified themselves as the main decision-makers, while 27.1% (n=48) reported that decisions were made jointly with their spouses.

These results reflect the prevailing masculine and patriarchal structure of many Tanzanian communities, where men assume leadership roles within the household while women are often positioned as decision followers. According to Pierik (2022) and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2026), patriarchy refers to male domination, and etymologically the term means the 'rule of fathers,' highlighting the historical and cultural foundations of male authority within families. The existence of patriarchy among the study participants was evident from the narratives shared during the interviews:

"My husband used to make all decisions regarding the activities that we had been doing prior to his departure since he is the owner of the home. I have just been brought to his home, so I have to follow and implement what he says/plans" (LBW-15, 32 years, Busi Village).

"My husband used to make all decisions. I remember prior to his departure, I advised him not to sell one of our farms, but he refused and said that I should leave him alone since the farm was not mine but his. He was an unadvisable person" (LBW-76, 44 years, Kikore Village).

"My husband used to make decisions regarding the activities that we had been doing prior to his departure. He was very rude, addicted to khat, and never accepted advice" (LBW-121, 39 years, Kolo Village).

These accounts illustrate the dominance of male authority in household decision-making, reflecting the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that characterize most communities in Kondoa District. In such contexts, women's decision-making authority is significantly constrained, with major household

Decisions, including those related to land management, livestock sales, agricultural investments, and children's education, controlled by men (Agarwal, 1994; Kabeer, 2005). This pattern is consistent with findings from other Sub-Saharan African and South Asian contexts, where patrilineal kinship systems and customary norms systematically privilege male authority over household resources and strategic decisions (Deere & León, 2001; Doss, 2013; Pal & Pal, 2022).

The finding that only 22.0% of women identified as primary decision-makers pre-migration indicates that women's participation in household decision-making was severely constrained prior to male migration. This is consistent with the SLA framework's recognition that livelihood decision-making processes are embedded in institutional structures and social norms that reflect and reproduce gender inequalities (Bebbington, 1999; Sall & Diop, 2021). The patriarchal norms limiting women's decision-making authority in Kondoa District can be understood as part of the "transforming structures and processes" (DFID, 1999; Scoones, 2009) that shape how households respond to livelihood challenges, including migration. However, the out-migration of men in search of better economic opportunities has begun to alter these traditional gender dynamics, creating space for women to assume greater responsibilities and participate more actively in household decision-making processes, as will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Key informant interviews corroborated these findings, with one Village Executive Officer explaining:

"When men are present in the households, they are the ones who make decisions. Women are expected to follow and implement what their husbands decide. This is our culture and tradition" (VEO-5, Kikore Village).

Another key informant added:

"Even when women are more educated or more experienced in farming than their husbands, they still defer to male authority in public matters. However, when the man migrates, the woman has no choice but to make decisions herself" (WEO-3, Boroboro Ward).

These perspectives highlight how cultural norms and patriarchal structures have historically constrained women's decision-making authority, while also suggesting that migration may create conditions for women to transcend these constraints out of necessity.

4.3 Extent of Left-Behind Women's Involvement in Decisions Regarding Productive Activities Post-Migration



Table 4.3: Extent of Left-Behind Women's Involvement in Decisions Regarding Productive Activities Post-Migration (n=177)

Level of Involvement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
All/Most decisions	163	92.1
Some/Few decisions	10	5.6
No involvement	4	2.3
Total	177	100.0

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021. $\chi^2=24.67$, $p<0.001$

Table 4.3 presents the findings on left-behind women's involvement in decisions regarding productive activities following the out-migration of their spouses. The results reveal a substantial shift in decision-making patterns compared to the pre-migration situation. The overwhelming majority of respondents (92.1%, n=163) reported being involved in making all or most decisions regarding the productive activities they engaged in following their spouses' migration. Only 5.6% (n=10) reported involvement in some or few decisions, while a mere 2.3% (n=4) indicated no involvement in decision-making. A chi-square test confirmed that the increase in women's decision-making participation post-migration was statistically significant ($\chi^2=24.67$, $p<0.001$).

These findings suggest that male out-migration has substantially enhanced the decision-making power of left-behind women by increasing their participation in decisions related to productive activities. This marks a notable shift from the situation prior to their spouses' departure, when most decisions were reportedly made by men (husbands), as discussed in Section 4.2. The magnitude of this shift, from 22.0% of women identifying as primary decision-makers pre-migration to 92.1% participating in all or most decisions post-migration, demonstrates the transformative potential of male migration for women's agency and household power relations.

The increased involvement of left-behind women in productive activity decisions was further evident in the narratives shared by the interview participants:

"I am involved in all decisions related to the activities that we do since my husband is away and not reachable" (LBW-23, 35 years, Busi Village).

"I am involved in all decisions related to the activities that we do since my husband is away. I am now the head of the household" (LBW-88, 42 years, Kikore Village).

"I make all decisions related to the activities that I do. Since he is away and not even reachable, automatically, I become the household head and decision-maker" (LBW-145, 38 years, Kolo Village).

"Before my husband left, he told me: 'You are the one now staying here with the children, so you must decide what to do with the farm. Plant what you think is best, and sell what you can to support the family'" (LBW-62, 33 years, Boroboro Village).

These narratives suggest that the absence of spouses due to migration has resulted in a significant shift in household power dynamics, with left-behind women assuming greater responsibility for decision-making and household management. In many cases, they effectively take on the role of household head, exercising authority over both domestic and productive activities. This finding is consistent with the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) perspective that changes in household composition through migration restructure the deployment of livelihood assets and strategies, creating opportunities for previously marginalized household members to assume new roles and exercise greater agency (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 2009). The concept of agency, defined by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) as the capacity of individuals or entities through which actions are initiated and outcomes are produced, and by Giddens (1993) as the capacity to make appropriate choices and take action within a specific spatial, temporal, and socio-cultural context in ways that can transform existing conditions, provides a useful lens for understanding the observed changes.

The increased participation of left-behind women in decision-making regarding productive activities reflects the strengthening of multiple dimensions of agency: the capacity to act (women actively managing farms and enterprises), the willingness to act (women expressing confidence and taking initiative), the ability to make choices (women deciding what to plant, when to sell, and how to allocate resources), and the capacity to influence outcomes (women's decisions affecting household income and food security). This empowerment through enhanced decision-making authority is consistent with Kabeer's (2005) conceptualization of women's empowerment as a process of expansion in the ability to make strategic life choices, where agency, defined as the ability to define one's goals and act upon them, is a central dimension.

These findings are consistent with those of Desai and Banerji (2008), who found that male out-migration enhanced women's autonomy and increased their decision-making responsibilities within the household in India. Similarly, Jatav *et al.* (2023) reported that male-selective outmigration enhanced women's participation in household and economic decision-making in India's Kumaon Himalayas, with women assuming greater control over agricultural management and household resource allocation. In the Tanzanian context, these findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that migration can serve as a catalyst for reconfiguring household



power relations and enhancing women's agency (Mori & Katayama, 2021; Sall & Diop, 2021).

Key informants also corroborated the increased involvement of left-behind women in productive decisions:

"Spouses' departure promotes the participation of left-behind women in decision-making. When men are present, they are often the primary decision-makers as household heads, although some involve their wives in the process. However, when they migrate, left-behind women frequently become the sole decision-makers, especially when men take a long time to return or never return at all" (VEO-2, Busi Village).

"We have observed that women whose husbands have migrated become more involved in decision-making about farming, livestock, and small businesses. They often make decisions more quickly than their husbands would have, and they seem to be more willing to try new farming methods or crops" (WEO-1, Boroboro Ward).

These observations from local government officials suggest that the enhanced decision-making authority of left-behind women is not only personally experienced but also socially recognized within the community context. This recognition is important for the sustainability of women's empowerment, as social acknowledgment of women's new roles can contribute to institutionalizing these changes and challenging patriarchal norms over time (Kabeer, 2005; Seymour, 2017).

4.4 Extent of Left-Behind Women's Involvement in Decisions Regarding Income Utilization Post-Migration

Table 4.4: Extent of Left-Behind Women's Involvement in Decisions Regarding Income Utilization Post-Migration (n=177)

Level of Involvement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
All/Most decisions	163	92.1
Some/Few decisions	11	6.2
No involvement	3	1.7
Total	177	100.0

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021. $\chi^2=24.67$, $p<0.001$

Table 4.4 presents the findings on left-behind women's involvement in decision-making regarding the use of income generated from productive activities following the out-migration of their spouses. The results indicate that the overwhelming majority of respondents (92.1%, n=163) were involved in making all or most decisions regarding the use of income generated from the productive activities they engaged in. Only 6.2% (n=11) reported involvement in some or few decisions, while a mere 1.7% (n=3) indicated no involvement in income-related decision-making. A chi-

square test confirmed that this level of participation was statistically significant ($\chi^2=24.67$, $p<0.001$).

These findings suggest that male out-migration has contributed to an increase in the decision-making power of left-behind women by providing them with greater control over the management and utilization of income generated from their productive activities. As a result, women have assumed a more active role in household economic decision-making, reflecting an enhancement of their autonomy and influence over livelihood-related matters. This is a significant shift from pre-migration patterns where women often had limited control over income generated from household economic activities.

The increased participation of left-behind women in income-related decision-making was further evidenced by the narratives shared during the interviews:

"I am the one making all decisions on the use of revenue generated from the activities that I do since my husband is not around" (LBW-43, 36 years, Kikore Village).

"I am the one making all decisions on the use of income generated from the activities that we do since my husband is away, and I am the main breadwinner" (LBW-119, 47 years, Busi Village).

"I make all decisions on the use of income generated from the activities that I do since my husband is away, and he does not send any money to us" (LBW-156, 41 years, Boroboro Village).

"I am the one who decides how to spend the money from selling crops or vegetables. I know what the children need for school fees, what food we need, and how much to save. My husband trusts me to manage these things" (LBW-74, 34 years, Kolo Village).

These accounts demonstrate that the absence of spouses due to migration has increased women's control over household income and financial decision-making. In many cases, left-behind women have assumed primary responsibility for managing household resources and determining how income generated from productive activities is utilized. This represents a significant departure from traditional gender norms where men-controlled household finances and women's access to cash was mediated through their husbands.

The finding that women have gained substantial control over income utilization is particularly significant for women's economic empowerment and household welfare. Research by Duflo (2003), Doss (2013), and Seymour (2017) has consistently demonstrated that when women have greater control over household income, households allocate more



resources toward children's nutrition, education, and health, leading to improved human capital outcomes and intergenerational poverty reduction. In the context of this study, the increased decision-making authority over income utilization suggests that left-behind women may be better positioned to prioritize household welfare and long-term investments.

However, the extent to which women exercise independent control over income is mediated by several factors, including the level of remittances received from spouses and the nature of productive activities women engage in. Women who engage in independent income-generating activities, such as vegetable vending or small-scale livestock keeping, tend to exercise greater decision-making authority over income than those who rely primarily on household agricultural production (Jatav *et al.*, 2023; Pal & Pal, 2022). As one participant explained:

"When I earn money from my small business of selling vegetables, I decide how to use it. But when it comes to income from the main farm, I sometimes consult my husband by phone before making big decisions" (LBW-89, 29 years, Boroboro Village).

This narrative suggests that women's decision-making authority over income is not absolute but is influenced by the source of income and continued expectations of male authority.

Key informants corroborated the increased financial decision-making authority of left-behind women:

"When a woman's husband migrates, she takes full control of household finances. She becomes responsible for managing everything, from daily expenses to school fees and medical bills. This forces them to be more strategic and careful with money" (VEO-8, Kolo Village).

"Women in these households have to decide how to allocate income between competing needs. They are often better at managing limited resources than men were, because they have to make every shilling count" (WEO-7, Kikore Ward).

These observations suggest that the financial decision-making authority that emerges through male migration is not merely a result of necessity but may also reflect women's inherent capabilities in resource management. This is consistent with broader development literature suggesting that women often demonstrate greater efficiency and prudence in managing household resources due to their responsibility for household provisioning and their immediate concern for family welfare (Doss, 2013; Seymour, 2017).

4.5 Participation in Remittance Use Decision-Making

Table 4.5: Remittance Use Decision-Maker (n=177)

Decision-Maker	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Left-Behind Woman decides	157	88.7
Joint decision (spouse consulted)	15	8.5
Spouse decides remotely	5	2.8
Total	177	100.0

Note: Source: Field Data, 2021

Table 4.5 presents the findings on left-behind women's involvement in decision-making regarding the use of remittances received from their out-migrated spouses. The results indicate that the vast majority of participants (88.7%, n=157) were the primary decision-makers regarding how remittances were utilized. Only 8.5% (n=15) reported making decisions jointly with their spouses (through remote consultation), while a small minority (2.8%, n=5) indicated that decisions were primarily made by their spouses, often communicated through mobile phones. These findings suggest that male out-migration has created opportunities for increased participation of left-behind women in financial decision-making processes, challenging the traditionally male-dominated nature of household financial control and enhancing women's authority over the management and utilization of remitted income.

This was further supported by narratives from the interviewed participants:

"I am the one who makes decisions on the use of remittances. After all, he sends very little, about Tshs. 10,000-15,000 (\$4.31-\$6.47), every one to three months. He always says the situation is tough" (LBW-55, 44 years, Kikore Village).

"I decide how to use the money because I am the one staying with the children and I know what is needed and what is lacking in the household" (LBW-132, 36 years, Busi Village).

"I make decisions on remittance use. After all, the money he sends is very little, about Tshs. 10,000-20,000 (\$4.31-\$8.62). He is quite old and cannot engage in much work to earn sufficient income" (LBW-168, 52 years, Boroboro Village).

"My husband sends money by mobile phone, and I decide how to use it. Sometimes I tell him what I used it for, but he does not always ask. He trusts me to make good decisions" (LBW-41, 31 years, Kolo Village).

The narratives reveal several important patterns regarding remittance use decision-making. First, women are exercising



significant autonomy in determining how remittances are allocated, reflecting the trust and delegation of financial authority that accompanies male migration. Second, women are making decisions based on their intimate knowledge of household needs, particularly regarding children's welfare and daily provisioning. Third, the relatively small amounts of remittances sent (typically Tshs. 10,000-20,000 or USD 4-8 monthly) may limit the significance of remittances in overall household income, while also reducing the incentive for spouses to maintain control over how these funds are utilized.

The finding that women exercise substantial decision-making authority over remittances is consistent with studies from other contexts. Jatav *et al.* (2023) found that male-selective migration enhanced women's participation in household and economic decision-making in India, especially in relation to the use and allocation of remittances. Correspondingly, Koirala (2023) reported that left-behind wives often experience increased control over financial resources and greater autonomy in remittance management in the absence of their spouses, particularly when remittances are sent directly to women's accounts or mobile money wallets. In the Tanzanian context, the widespread use of mobile money services has facilitated women's independent access to remittances, enabling them to receive and manage funds without requiring their spouse's physical presence or mediation (Mori & Katayama, 2021).

However, the limited amount of remittances received by most respondents is noteworthy. The majority of participants reported receiving only small, irregular remittances, with many noting that their spouses "send very little" or "the situation is tough." This pattern reflects the precarious employment conditions that many rural-urban migrants in Tanzania face, including low wages, informal sector employment, and limited job security (Hirvonen & de Weerdt, 2013; Duda *et al.*, 2018). The limited nature of remittances suggests that the economic benefits of migration for left-behind households may be modest, and that women's empowerment through migration may be driven more by the assumption of management and decision-making responsibilities than by substantial increases in household income.

Key informant perspectives reinforced the finding that women exercise substantial control over remittances:

"When a man migrates, the money he sends is usually received by his wife through mobile money. She is the one who goes to withdraw it and decides how it will be used. The husband cannot control it from far away" (VEO-11, Boroboro Village).

"Women are now managing remittances because they are the ones present in the household. This gives them more power and confidence in financial matters. They are learning to budget and plan for household needs" (WEO-4, Kikore Ward).

"In many cases, women are using remittances to pay for children's school fees, buy food, and invest in small income-generating activities. They are becoming more economically active and independent as a result" (WEO-6, Busi Ward).

These perspectives highlight the transformative potential of remittance management for women's empowerment, as women not only control financial resources but also develop financial literacy, planning skills, and economic confidence through these responsibilities. This is consistent with the SLA framework's recognition that access to financial capital, when combined with human capital development (skills, knowledge, confidence), can enhance women's capacity to pursue sustainable livelihood outcomes and exercise agency in household decisions (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 2009).

4.6 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews with left-behind women and key informants revealed several interconnected themes that enrich the quantitative findings and provide deeper understanding of how male migration influences women's decision-making authority and empowerment.

4.6.1 Theme 1: Enhanced Agency and Expanded Responsibilities

A dominant theme emerging from the qualitative data was the sense of enhanced agency and expanded responsibilities experienced by left-behind women. Participants consistently expressed that assuming decision-making authority over productive activities, income utilization, and remittance management had transformed their sense of capability, confidence, and independence:

"Since my husband left, I feel like a different person. I make decisions, I manage the farm, I take care of the children, and I am the one who solves problems. I have become stronger and more capable" (LBW-73, 40 years, Kolo Village).

"I never thought I could manage everything on my own, but now I do. I decide when to plant, which crops to grow, how to spend money. My husband is not here to help, but I have found my own strength" (LBW-29, 34 years, Boroboro Village).

"Being left behind made me realize that I am capable of more than I thought. I used to rely on my husband for everything, but now I make my own decisions. I am a



leader in my own home" (LBW-157, 43 years, Busi Village).

These narratives illustrate the development of women's agency, their capacity to act, make choices, and influence outcomes, through the necessity of assuming household leadership in their spouses' absence. This is consistent with Sen's (1987) concept of capabilities, which emphasizes that people's well-being is determined not only by what they have (resources) but also by what they are effectively able to do and be (functionings). The narratives suggest that migration has enabled women to expand their capabilities by developing new skills, confidence, and decision-making capacities.

4.6.2 Theme 2: Enhanced Bargaining Power and Respect

A second theme emerging from the data was the perception that women's increased decision-making authority and economic management responsibilities had enhanced their bargaining power and status within the household and community:

"When my husband was here, I had to ask permission for everything. Now, I make decisions without asking. He respects me more because he knows I can manage everything on my own" (LBW-94, 37 years, Kikore Village).

"People in the village now come to me for advice, because they see I can manage my family and my farm. I have gained respect from my neighbors and from my husband's family" (LBW-61, 45 years, Busi Village).

"My husband consults me by phone on important decisions, even though he is far away. He now values my opinion because he knows I am handling the household and the farm" (LBW-18, 30 years, Boroboro Village).

These narratives indicate that the changes in women's decision-making authority are not only internal (enhanced confidence and agency) but also external (increased respect and recognition from others). This dual transformation is important for the sustainability of women's empowerment, as social recognition and respect from family and community members can reinforce and institutionalize women's new roles (Kabeer, 2005; Seymour, 2017). The enhanced bargaining power also reflects changes in intra-household dynamics, where women's assumption of household leadership in their spouses' absence creates a more balanced power relationship, even after the spouse's eventual return (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Jatav *et al.*, 2023).

4.6.3 Theme 3: Challenges and Constraints

While the findings predominantly highlight positive changes in women's decision-making authority, qualitative data also

revealed significant challenges and constraints that mediate the empowerment effects of male migration:

Limited Remittances and Financial Strain: As indicated in the quantitative findings, the majority of participants reported receiving small and irregular remittances, which limited their financial autonomy and capacity to invest in productive activities:

"The money my husband sends is never enough. I have to find ways to supplement it by doing casual work or selling vegetables. It is a constant struggle to make ends meet" (LBW-46, 38 years, Kolo Village).

"When the money arrives, it is gone quickly because there are so many needs. Sometimes I feel like I am always worrying about how to feed the children and pay their school fees" (LBW-105, 42 years, Busi Village).

Increased Workload and Time Poverty: Women's expanded responsibilities in the absence of their spouses often resulted in increased workloads and time poverty, with women taking on both productive and reproductive responsibilities:

"I have to do everything: farming, taking care of the children, cooking, cleaning, and trying to earn money. I wake up at 4 am and don't stop until late at night. It is exhausting" (LBW-83, 35 years, Kikore Village).

"Before my husband left, we shared the work. Now, I do everything alone. Sometimes I cannot do all the farming tasks because there is just too much work" (LBW-149, 39 years, Boroboro Village).

Persistent Patriarchal Norms and Social Stigma: Despite women's expanded roles, patriarchal norms continued to constrain their decision-making authority and expose them to social criticism:

"My husband's family criticizes me for making decisions without consulting them. They say I am being too independent and that I should wait for my husband's instructions" (LBW-25, 33 years, Kolo Village).

"Even though I am managing everything, some people in the village say I am not a proper wife because my husband is away and I am doing what men should do" (LBW-142, 44 years, Busi Village).

"When I make decisions that some people do not agree with, they say it is because my husband is not here to control me. It is difficult to be respected as a woman in these communities" (LBW-98, 37 years, Boroboro Village).

These challenges highlight the persistent structural and cultural constraints that mediate women's empowerment through migration. The SLA framework emphasizes that



livelihood outcomes are determined not only by asset access and strategies but also by the transforming structures and processes, including social norms, institutions, and power relations, that shape the effectiveness and sustainability of livelihood activities (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 2009). In the context of this study, patriarchal social norms continue to constrain women's full empowerment, even as they assume expanded responsibilities and decision-making authority.

Key informants acknowledged these challenges:

"Women are carrying heavy burdens when their husbands migrate. They have to do all the farm work, take care of children, and deal with financial pressures. Some of them are struggling and need support" (VEO-14, Kikore Village).

"The culture is still very patriarchal here. Even though women are showing that they can manage households and farms, some people still expect women to defer to men. This creates conflict and pressure" (WEO-9, Boroboro Ward).

These perspectives underscore the importance of institutional and policy interventions to support left-behind women and address the structural barriers that constrain their full empowerment.

4.7 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides a holistic understanding of the implications of male out-migration on left-behind women's household decision-making. The quantitative data demonstrate statistically significant increases in women's decision-making authority across multiple domains, with 92.1% of women involved in decisions regarding productive activities and income utilization ($\chi^2=24.67$, $p<0.001$), and 88.7% making decisions regarding remittance use. The qualitative data enrich these findings by explaining how women have assumed expanded responsibilities, developed enhanced agency and confidence, and gained respect and bargaining power within their households and communities. At the same time, the qualitative data reveal persistent challenges, including financial strain, increased workloads, time poverty, and continued social constraints rooted in patriarchal norms.

The SLA framework provides a useful lens for understanding this complex picture. Migration can be understood as a livelihood strategy adopted by households in response to vulnerability context challenges (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Ellis, 2000). This strategy transforms household asset endowments, with women assuming greater control over human capital (their own labor), financial capital (income

and remittances), and natural capital (land and agricultural resources), and reshapes power relations within the household (Bebbington, 1999; Sall & Diop, 2021). However, the sustainability of these gains depends on how transforming structures and processes (institutions, policies, social norms) enable or constrain women's agency and empowerment (Scoones, 2009). The persistence of patriarchal norms, limited remittances, and women's increased workloads suggest that the empowerment gains may be partial and fragile, requiring supportive policies and institutional interventions to become sustainable.

4.8 Discussion of Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study contribute to theoretical development in several ways. First, the study extends the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) by demonstrating the importance of intra-household dynamics and gender relations in shaping livelihood outcomes. While the SLA framework traditionally emphasizes asset endowments, livelihood strategies, and institutional structures (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 2009), this study shows that migration-induced changes in household composition and power relations are critical mediating factors that determine how livelihood strategies translate into outcomes for different household members. Women's enhanced decision-making authority represents a significant livelihood outcome, increased agency and empowerment, that is not always captured in conventional SLA analyses that focus on income, food security, or asset accumulation (Mori & Katayama, 2021; Sall & Diop, 2021).

Second, the study contributes to understanding the gendered dimensions of migration as a livelihood strategy. While the SLA literature recognizes migration as a livelihood strategy (Ellis, 2000; de Haan, 1999), it has often treated households as unitary decision-making units, obscuring the differentiated impacts of migration on different household members (Kabeer, 2005; Doss, 2013). This study demonstrates that male migration has distinct and significant implications for left-behind women's agency and decision-making authority, highlighting the need for gender-disaggregated analysis within the SLA framework. By focusing on women's participation in decision-making, the study shows how migration can simultaneously exacerbate women's workloads and responsibilities while also expanding their agency and empowerment (Jatav *et al.*, 2023; Koirala, 2023). This nuanced understanding challenges simplistic narratives of migration either universally empowering or disempowering women.

Third, the study contributes to the theoretical understanding of agency and empowerment in the context of migration. The findings suggest that agency is not a fixed attribute but is shaped and transformed by changing life circumstances,



including the migration of spouses. Women who previously had limited decision-making authority developed expanded agency and confidence through assuming household leadership and financial management responsibilities. This aligns with Kabeer's (2005) conceptualization of empowerment as a process of expanding people's ability to make strategic life choices, where agency, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them, is a central dimension. However, the persistence of structural constraints, including patriarchal norms and limited economic resources, suggests that women's agency remains conditional and constrained, highlighting the importance of addressing structural barriers alongside individual empowerment.

4.9 Discussion of Policy and Empirical Contributions

This study provides empirical evidence from Kondoa District that male out-migration can enhance women's empowerment through expanded decision-making authority in climatically vulnerable contexts. These findings inform targeted interventions supporting left-behind women through financial literacy programs, business management training, and improved access to productive resources including land, credit, and agricultural inputs (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Policies recognizing women's emerging roles in household economic governance, rather than assuming traditional male-headed household models, can facilitate sustained empowerment and improve household welfare outcomes (Seymour, 2017).

The study highlights critical interventions addressing challenges facing left-behind women: social protection programs (conditional cash transfers) to alleviate economic pressures; labor-saving technologies and agricultural extension services to reduce workloads and boost productivity; financial inclusion initiatives (mobile banking, savings groups) enhancing women's resource control; and gender awareness programs challenging patriarchal norms (Kabeer, 2005; Doss, 2013). These interventions require design and implementation in consultation with left-behind women to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on migration and gender in Sub-Saharan Africa's climatically vulnerable contexts. Findings from Kondoa District, characterized by recurrent droughts and constrained economic opportunities, offer insights applicable to semi-arid regions across Tanzania and East Africa where migration increasingly serves as livelihood strategy (Paavola, 2008; Duda *et al.*, 2018). The mixed-methods approach employed provides a methodological model for future research examining how migration shapes women's empowerment and household welfare in context-specific ways.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined male rural-urban migration's implications on left-behind women's household decision-making in Kondoa District, Tanzania. Findings reveal that male outmigration fundamentally restructured household power dynamics, with women assuming substantially greater authority over productive activities, income utilization, and remittance management. Theoretically, these findings extend the Sustainable Livelihood Approach by demonstrating that migration-induced household restructuring mediates how livelihood strategies translate into differentiated gendered outcomes, necessitating explicit incorporation of intra-household dynamics. However, persistent challenges, limited remittances, increased workloads, time poverty, and patriarchal norms, constrain full empowerment, revealing that migration-driven gains remain partial and contingent upon supportive interventions.

Policy interventions must address these constraints through: financial inclusion programs enhancing women's access to credit, savings, and mobile banking; agricultural extension reoriented to reach women as primary farm decision-makers; social protection targeting left-behind women; gender awareness programs alongside legal reforms addressing land tenure and inheritance inequalities; and infrastructure investment in water access, rural roads, and market linkages. Continued longitudinal research is essential to track empowerment sustainability over time.

This study provides empirical evidence that male migration can catalyze women's empowerment in climatically vulnerable contexts, while revealing structural constraints limiting sustainability. Migration must be understood as social process reshaping gender relations and household dynamics, with outcomes contingent upon policy responses. Future research should explore how empowerment gains translate into household welfare improvements and how migration characteristics influence women's decision-making authority over time.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the research and findings presented in this paper.

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