



What works and how it works in women empowerment: Experience from Community Research and Development Services in Monduli District, Arusha, Tanzania

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Abstract: Women's empowerment is a global concern aimed at reducing gender gaps to ensure equality within communities. Despite efforts by governments and organizations to promote gender equality and alleviate poverty, women in pastoralist societies, such as those in Monduli District, Tanzania, continue to face gender-based violence, discrimination in asset ownership, and high poverty levels. This study investigates whether empowerment strategies are inclusive, whether livelihood activities align with community needs, and the observable impacts of these activities. A mixed-methods approach was used, collecting data from 201 survey respondents, eight focus group discussions (FGDs), and six key informants. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including chi-square tests and logistic regression, were applied to quantitative data, complemented by thematic analysis of qualitative data. Results indicate that strategies such as involving government leaders and men, selecting the poorest women, providing training, seed capital, and monitoring significantly enhance project sustainability ($p < 0.05$). Livelihood activities, including goat fattening and selling essential goods, were associated with improved household economic outcomes ($p < 0.01$). The study concludes that context-specific strategies, coupled with training and monitoring, are critical for sustainable women's empowerment. It recommends that governments and organizations conduct community-based research to tailor empowerment strategies to local needs.

Keywords: Women empowerment, empowerment strategies, gender equality, pastoralist communities, Tanzania

1. Background Information

Women's empowerment is a cornerstone of global development, aimed at dismantling social, political, and economic barriers that perpetuate gender inequality, thereby enabling women to make informed choices for the betterment of their families and communities (United Nations, 2021). Patriarchal systems, deeply embedded in many societies, significantly contribute to gender gaps, limiting women's access to resources, decision-making, and opportunities (Wood, 2019). Global efforts to bridge these gaps include interactive educational approaches to foster gender equity (Kollmayer *et al.*, 2016; Stoet & Geary, 2020), enhanced maternal healthcare systems (Heymann *et al.*, 2019), and economic empowerment initiatives to bolster women's contributions to development (Doepke & Tertilt, 2019). Despite these efforts, women in sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania, continue to face significant challenges such as economic deprivation, gender-based violence (GBV), and unequal access to resources, driven by entrenched social

inequalities and poverty (Peterson & Wesley, 2017; IMF, 2024).

In Tanzania, both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have implemented measures to promote gender equality. The government has introduced regulatory frameworks, including policies and special parliamentary seats, to enhance women's representation and rights (Manzanera-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016; Bisanda & Ming, 2019). NGOs complement these efforts by promoting equal access to education, resource ownership, and decision-making, addressing long-standing discrimination in political, economic, and social spheres (Mbilinyi, 2016; Dinani, 2017). Additionally, NGOs focus on improving livelihoods through entrepreneurial training, agricultural productivity enhancements, and climate resilience initiatives (Hossain *et al.*, 2017; Gebisa & Tefera, 2020). However, women in pastoralist communities, such as the Maasai in Monduli District, continue to face severe challenges, including GBV, restricted access to assets like land, and high poverty levels, largely perpetuated by cultural norms and patriarchal



structures (Nyange *et al.*, 2016; Johns *et al.*, 2019; Abraham, 2022). Studies highlight that Maasai women are particularly marginalized, with limited rights to resource ownership, education, and participation in family and community decision-making, compounded by heavy domestic responsibilities (Gonin *et al.*, 2019; Lokia, 2019; Adan, 2023; Cosmas *et al.*, 2022; Lorist *et al.*, 2022; Namer *et al.*, 2024).

The persistence of these challenges raises critical questions about the inclusivity and effectiveness of women's empowerment strategies. Specifically, are the strategies employed inclusive enough to achieve their intended objectives? Do the livelihood activities implemented reflect community needs? And what observable impacts do these activities have on families and communities? This study addresses these questions by examining the empowerment strategies used by Community Research and Development Services (CORDS) in Monduli District, exploring the livelihood activities implemented by empowered women, and assessing their socioeconomic impacts. Grounded in empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995), which emphasizes collective participation and inclusivity, the study evaluates how context-specific strategies can enhance women's economic agency and contribute to sustainable development.

The findings contribute to understanding effective empowerment strategies in pastoralist contexts, offering lessons for Tanzania and sub-Saharan Africa. As such, by aligning with SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 5 (Gender Equality), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), the study underscores the importance of partnerships between NGOs and local governments to maximize resource efficiency and sustainability. For instance, collaboration with ward and village authorities can prevent resource duplication, as seen in Tanzania's allocation of funds for women, youth, and people with disabilities through local government authorities (LGAs). This synergy ensures that empowerment initiatives reach underserved groups, accelerating community development.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in empowerment theory, originally developed by Julian Rappaport in the 1980s, which conceptualizes empowerment as a collective process that engages individuals, communities, and institutions to enhance agency and control over life outcomes (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Unlike individualistic approaches, empowerment theory emphasizes collaborative efforts that foster positive change by building on strengths rather than solely addressing deficits (Zimmerman, 2000). The theory's core principles include the inclusion of marginalized groups, promotion of active participation, adoption of a

multidimensional approach (encompassing social, economic, and political dimensions), and the establishment of linkages between individuals and their broader contexts (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). These principles align with the study's objectives to evaluate the inclusivity of empowerment strategies, the alignment of livelihood activities with community needs, and their socioeconomic impacts in Monduli District's pastoralist communities.

Empowerment theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding how collective strategies, such as involving government officials and men, selecting the poorest women, and providing training and seed capital, can address systemic barriers like gender-based violence and resource inequality faced by Maasai women. The theory's focus on participation and inclusivity guides the analysis of how strategies implemented by Community Research and Development Services (CORDS) foster sustainable economic empowerment. For instance, the involvement of local leaders and men reflects the theory's emphasis on engaging institutions and community stakeholders to create enabling environments for change.

However, empowerment theory has limitations that must be acknowledged. Critics note its lack of a clear, universal definition, which can lead to inconsistent application across contexts (Richardson, 2018). Additionally, it may inadvertently reinforce existing power imbalances if not carefully implemented, particularly in patriarchal settings where participation may be superficial or exclude certain groups (Joseph, 2019). Practical application can also be challenging due to cultural and structural barriers, such as those prevalent in pastoralist societies where women's roles are heavily prescribed (Joseph, 2019). Despite these shortcomings, the theory's strengths, its focus on collective action and multidimensional change, make it a valuable lens for assessing women's empowerment in Monduli District, as supported by Joseph (2019).

In this study, empowerment theory was applied to evaluate the extent to which CORDS' strategies incorporated inclusivity, targeted the most marginalized women, and ensured the sustainability of entrepreneurial activities. Specifically, it guided the examination of how participatory approaches (e.g., involving men and government officials) and resource provision (e.g., seed capital and training) empowered women to overcome economic and social constraints. Therefore, by grounding the analysis in this framework, the study highlights how context-specific, collective empowerment strategies can transform the socioeconomic status of pastoralist women, contributing to broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development.



3.0 Methodology

3.1 Description of the Study Area

Monduli District, located in Arusha Region, Tanzania, is bordered to the north by Kenya, to the east by Kilimanjaro Region and Arumeru District, to the south by Manyara Region, and to the west by Ngorongoro and Karatu Districts. The district features flat, hilly plains at 600–1,200 meters altitude, with isolated mountains (Monduli, Lepurko, Loosimingori, and Lengai) reaching up to 2,900 meters. It experiences a semi-arid climate with temperatures ranging from 20 to 30°C and annual precipitation of 400–600 mm, with increasing dry periods due to climate change. The population is sparsely distributed, predominantly comprising the pastoralist Maasai ethnic group. Livestock rearing and agriculture (maize, beans, rice, coffee, and sunflowers) are the primary economic activities, with goats, cattle, and sheep being the main farm animals.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, collecting data at a single point in time to assess the outcomes of women's empowerment initiatives. This design was selected for its effectiveness in evaluating program impacts at a specific moment, as supported by Hall (2008), who notes its utility in measuring outcomes of implemented programs. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to triangulate data, enhance validity, and provide a comprehensive understanding of empowerment strategies, livelihood activities, and their impacts in Monduli District. The quantitative component captured measurable outcomes, such as economic improvements, while the qualitative component explored contextual nuances, such as community perceptions and implementation processes. This approach ensured a robust analysis of what works and how it works in women's empowerment, addressing the study's research questions.

3.3 Sampling Procedure, Methods, and Tools for Data Collection

The study targeted women participating in empowerment programs implemented by Community Research and Development Services (CORDS). Purposive sampling was used to select 402 women involved in these programs, ensuring relevance to the study's objectives. The sample size for the survey was calculated using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size
- N = population size (402)

- e = margin error (commonly set at 5% = 0.05)

$$n = \frac{402}{1 + 402(0.05)^2} = 201$$

A simple random sampling technique was applied to select 201 respondents for the survey, ensuring representativeness within the purposively selected group.

For qualitative data, purposive sampling was used to select participants for eight focus group discussions (FGDs), comprising six women-only groups and two men-only groups, each with 6–8 participants. Women were selected based on their leadership roles or peer mentorship within empowerment groups active for at least two years, ensuring rich insights into sustained outcomes. Men were included to provide perspectives on the household-level impacts of women's empowerment, particularly economic contributions. Six key informants were purposively selected, including project monitoring and evaluation personnel, project coordinators, field staff, community development officers at the ward level, village executive officers, and village chairpersons. These informants provided in-depth information on empowerment strategies, livelihood activities, and community impacts.

Data collection tools included a structured survey questionnaire for quantitative data, capturing demographic details, participation in empowerment activities, and economic outcomes. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview guides for key informants and FGD checklists tailored to the study's objectives. With participants' consent, interviews and FGDs were recorded using tape recorders and smartphones for accuracy, supplemented by field diaries to note key observations. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, summarized empowerment strategies, livelihood activities, and their impacts. Inferential statistical analyses were employed to test hypotheses and establish relationships:

- **Chi-square tests** examined associations between empowerment strategies (e.g., men's involvement, seed capital provision) and outcomes (e.g., household economic improvement).



- **Logistic regression** assessed the impact of specific strategies on the likelihood of achieving outcomes, such as Let Y be the binary outcome variable:
Y=1 if the household experienced a successful empowerment outcome (e.g., improved housing condition),
Y=0 otherwise.

Then, the logistic regression model is given by:

$$\log \left(\frac{P(Y=1)}{1 - P(Y=1)} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Predictor Variable (X _i)	Description
X ₁	Involvement of government leaders (1 = yes, 0 = no)
X ₂	Involvement of men in the program (1 = yes, 0 = no)
X ₃	Targeting of poorest women (1 = yes, 0 = no)
X ₄	Access to seed capital (1 = yes, 0 = no)
X ₅	Received training (1 = yes, 0 = no)
X ₆	Monitoring and follow-up visits (1 = yes, 0 = no)

β_0 is the intercept,

β_i are the coefficients estimating the log odds of empowerment outcome for each predictor,

ϵ is the error term.

- **Microsoft Excel** was used to generate visual representations (e.g., bar charts) of key findings.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework:

- Familiarization with the Data:** Transcribing recordings and repeatedly reading transcripts to identify initial patterns.
- Generating Initial Codes:** Labeling meaningful data segments aligned with the study's objectives.
- Searching for Themes:** Grouping codes into broader themes reflecting empowerment processes and impacts.
- Reviewing Themes:** Comparing themes with coded data to ensure accuracy and coherence.
- Defining and Naming Themes:** Clearly defining each theme's scope and relevance to research questions.
- Writing Up:** Presenting findings with narrative explanations linking themes to the study's objectives.

This mixed-methods analysis ensured a robust integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, addressing potential biases and enhancing the reliability of conclusions. Limitations, such as the cross-sectional design's inability to capture long-term impacts and potential recall bias in

qualitative responses, were mitigated through triangulation and rigorous data collection protocols.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical clearance was secured through institutional protocols at CORDS and Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA). Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly observed to protect respondents' identities and data integrity.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses findings aligned with the study's objectives: identifying empowerment strategies that improve women's economic situation, exploring implemented livelihood activities, and assessing their impacts on families in Monduli District. The mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative data (analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics) with qualitative insights (analyzed thematically), providing a comprehensive understanding of what works and how it works in women's empowerment.

4.1 Empowerment Strategies to Improve Women's Economic Situation

Empowerment strategies are deliberate techniques designed to foster personal and economic growth, tailored to cultural, social, and economic contexts (Anderson, 2024; Purnamawati & Utama, 2019). Table 1 outlines five key strategies employed by Community Research and Development Services (CORDS) and their expected outcomes, which were tested using inferential statistics to validate their effectiveness.

Table 1: Empowerment Strategies and Expected Outcomes

SN	Strategies	Expected Outcomes
1	Involvement of government officials	Community awareness, acceptability, project sustainability
2	Men's involvement	Increased awareness, support, reduced GBV, business knowledge
3	Selecting the poorest women	Enhanced trust, visibility of economic change, empowerment of vulnerable groups
4	Capacity building and monitoring	Improved fund utilization, business skills, climate resilience, positive community impact
5	Seed capital provision	Increased business impact, social capital, ownership, sustainability

4.1.1 Involvement of Government Officials

Involving local government officials (e.g., ward and village leaders) ensured project awareness and sustainability. A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 12.45$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed a significant association between government involvement and



community trust in the project. This result indicates that government involvement significantly enhances community acceptance ($p < 0.001$). A key informant emphasized:

"Before introducing the project, we ensure government authorities are aware, allowing them to introduce us to the community. Their presence in activities fosters trust and supports monitoring." (Key Informant 1, CORDS, July 2024)

This aligns with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and literature highlighting that local leader involvement prevents resource duplication and enhances project sustainability (Jesse & Bengesi, 2018; Tirado & Hernández, 2018; Atanga, 2020). Government participation also facilitates knowledge sharing with other stakeholders, strengthening community development initiatives.

4.1.2 Involvement of Men

Including men in the empowerment process reduced resistance and fostered support, critical in patriarchal Maasai communities where women face heavy domestic responsibilities (e.g., childcare, fetching water, milking). A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 15.32$, $p < 0.001$) showed a significant association between men's involvement and women's ability to engage in livelihood activities without conflict. Qualitative findings supported this:

"Engaging in this business has changed our husbands' minds. When they hear about CORDS, they encourage us to attend." (Women FGD 3, July 2024)

Men's FGDs revealed their awareness of women's extensive duties, underscoring the need for their support:

"Women handle milking, cooking, fetching water 17–27 km away, and building houses. If they fail, they face punishment." (Men FGD1, July 2024)

Involving men aligns with empowerment theory's emphasis on collective participation (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) and literature advocating men as allies in gender equity (Al Hakim *et al.*, 2022; Fielding-Miller *et al.*, 2020). Men's support also reduced GBV and enhanced family decision-making:

"Our husbands appreciate CORDS' efforts. We now make decisions together." (Women FGD2, July 2024)

This strategy mitigates resistance, as noted by Teye *et al.* (2023), and fosters family unity (Nazneen *et al.*, 2019; Obayelu & Chime, 2020).

4.1.3 Selecting Women from the Poorest Families

Targeting the poorest women, identified through hamlet leaders and village meetings, enhanced community trust and project visibility. A logistic regression model assessed whether this strategy predicted economic improvement (e.g., ability to purchase household necessities):

Table 2: Logistic Regression Results on Poorest Selection and Economic Improvement

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
Poorest Selection	2.15	0.69	0.002	8.58
Constant	-1.23	0.47	0.008	-

The odds ratio (0.58) indicates that selecting the poorest women increases the likelihood of economic improvement by over eight times. A key informant noted:

"We select the poorest women through hamlet leaders and verify their status in village meetings, ensuring inclusivity and community trust." (Key Informant 1, CORDS, July 2024)

This approach aligns with empowerment theory's focus on marginalized groups (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) and literature suggesting that empowering vulnerable populations enhances visibility, reduces stigma, and fosters mutual support (United Nations, 2020; Gupta *et al.*, 2020; Toljaga-Nikolić *et al.*, 2020).

4.1.4 Capacity Building and Monitoring

Training in business planning, financial literacy, and group dynamics, coupled with regular monitoring, ensured effective fund utilization and business success. A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 10.87$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed a significant association between training and profit generation. Women in FGDs highlighted the training's impact:

"We were taught to identify community needs, write business plans, and manage finances. This gave us confidence to succeed." (Women FGD1, July 2024)

A key informant added:

"We provide skills in income-generating activities and financial literacy, helping women select manageable businesses that align with their lifestyle." (Key Informant 1, CORDS, July 2024)

Monitoring ensured accountability, as supported by Akhigbe & McNulty (2011), who note that monitoring enhances business efficiency. This strategy enabled women to explore

market opportunities and sustain businesses (Maksum *et al.*, 2020; Nahwera *et al.*, 2022).

4.1.5 Provision of Seed Capital

Seed capital provision enabled women to initiate businesses, with profits reinvested to sustain operations. A logistic regression model (Table 3) showed that seed capital significantly predicted sustained business operations:

Table 3: Logistic Regression Results on Seed Capital and Sustained Business Operations

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
Seed Capital	1.98	0.69	0.004	7.24
Constant	-0.89	0.46	0.055	-

The odds ratio suggests that seed capital increases the likelihood of sustained businesses by over seven times. A key informant explained:

"We provide seed capital and monitor progress monthly. When a group generates profit close to the capital, we transfer it to another group." (Key Informant 3, CORDS, July 2024)

Close monitoring ensured proper fund use, aligning with Akhigbe & McNulty (2011), who emphasize monitoring's role in maximizing project impact. This strategy fostered sustainability by creating a revolving fund model.

4.2 Implemented Livelihood Activities

Quantitative data (Figure 1) showed women engaged in individual businesses, such as selling soft drinks, sugar, bedsheets, petrol, and utensils, selected based on community demand. A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 9.76$, $p < 0.045$) indicated a significant association between business type and economic improvement. Goat fattening and petrol sales were particularly effective. Qualitative findings highlighted group businesses, notably goat fattening, supported by training and spousal assistance:

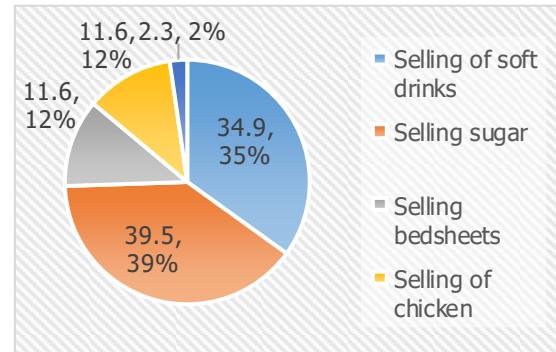
"Training, husbands' support, and seed capital gave us confidence to do goat fattening, contributing to family welfare." (Women FGD4, July 2024)

Men's involvement facilitated cooperation, as husbands provided financial and advisory support (Bapolisi *et al.*, 2024). Women also reported:

"My husband respects me now because I contribute to family needs through petrol sales." (Women FGD3, July 2024)

These findings align with Bello *et al.* (2019), who note that men's engagement enhances women's confidence and economic contributions.

Figure 1: Individual Entrepreneurial Activities Performed by Women



4.3 Impact of Women's Empowerment

The empowerment program significantly improved household living conditions. A logistic regression model tested the impact of participation on replacing grass roofs with iron sheets:

Table 4: Logistic Regression Results on Empowerment Participation and Improved Housing

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
Empowerment Participation	2.34	0.68	0.001	10.39
Constant	-1.45	0.49	0.004	-

The odds ratio (10.39) indicates that participation increases the likelihood of improved housing by over ten times. FGDs confirmed:

"We replaced grass roofs with iron sheets, bought clothes, uniforms, and food. We live in 'government houses' now." (Women FGD 3, July 2024)

Group businesses fostered unity, with women contributing profits to support each other's housing improvements. Empowerment also enhanced decision-making and reduced GBV:

"My husband no longer sees me as a child but a partner. He's close to me now." (Women FGD3, July 2024)

These outcomes align with empowerment theory's focus on multidimensional change (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) and literature showing empowerment's role in improving family welfare and social status (Nadim & Nurlukman, 2017; Abdelmohsen *et al.*, 2019; Habib *et al.*, 2019). Women's aspirations, such as buying a group vehicle, reflect increased confidence and long-term vision.



5.0 Limitations

The cross-sectional design limits insights into long-term impacts, and self-reported data may introduce recall bias. These were mitigated through triangulation and rigorous data collection protocols. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to assess sustained outcomes.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the critical importance of tailoring empowerment strategies to the specific social, cultural, and economic contexts of pastoralist communities, such as the Maasai in Monduli District, to achieve sustainable women's empowerment. The research demonstrates that involving local government officials, engaging men, targeting the poorest women, providing training and seed capital, and implementing robust monitoring significantly enhance project outcomes, as evidenced by statistical analyses showing improved economic conditions and project sustainability. Involving government officials fosters community trust and prevents resource duplication, ensuring efficient use of resources. Engaging men reduces gender-based violence and promotes shared decision-making, creating synergy within families and enhancing women's agency in household and community matters. Targeting the poorest women ensures inclusivity, amplifying visible economic impacts, such as increased household income, which supports broader community development. The provision of training and seed capital, coupled with close monitoring, enables women to establish sustainable livelihoods, such as goat fattening and retail, which have led to tangible improvements in housing, education access, and family unity. These outcomes underscore the power of participatory, context-sensitive approaches in empowering marginalized women, offering a replicable model for addressing poverty and gender inequality in similar pastoralist settings.

6.2 Recommendations

To maximize the impact and scalability of women's empowerment programs in pastoralist communities like the Maasai in Monduli District, stakeholders must adopt inclusive, context-specific, and participatory approaches that address the unique social, cultural, and economic challenges faced by women. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for governments, NGOs, and community leaders to design and implement sustainable empowerment initiatives that reduce poverty, enhance gender equality, and foster community development. Each recommendation is grounded in the study's findings, which demonstrated the effectiveness of strategies such as involving government officials, engaging men, targeting the poorest women, providing training and seed capital, and implementing robust monitoring.

The first recommendation is to conduct thorough community assessments to understand the economic, social, cultural, and educational contexts of pastoralist communities before designing empowerment programs. In Monduli District, where women face constraints like limited access to resources and heavy domestic responsibilities, such assessments ensure that selected livelihood activities, such as goat fattening or selling essential goods, are feasible and resonate with local needs. For example, women in the study chose goat fattening because it aligned with the pastoralist lifestyle and leveraged existing skills in livestock management. Assessments should involve engaging with community members, including women, men, and elders, to identify viable income-generating activities and anticipate cultural barriers, such as restrictions on women's mobility. As such, by tailoring interventions to local realities, stakeholders can avoid imposing unsuitable activities that may disrupt household dynamics or fail to gain traction, ensuring that empowerment efforts are both practical and impactful.

The second recommendation emphasizes the inclusion of men and local government officials from the outset to build community acceptance and ensure long-term sustainability. In patriarchal settings like Monduli, where men traditionally hold decision-making power, engaging them through sensitization campaigns can reduce resistance and foster support for women's economic activities. The study showed that involving men led to reduced gender-based violence and increased spousal cooperation, with husbands encouraging their wives to participate in empowerment programs. For instance, women reported that their husbands began sharing financial responsibilities after understanding the benefits of businesses like petrol sales. Similarly, involving local government officials, such as ward and village leaders, builds trust and ensures alignment with existing community development plans, preventing resource duplication. Sensitization efforts should include workshops that highlight how women's empowerment contributes to family welfare, encouraging men to view their wives as partners rather than subordinates, thus fostering harmony and shared decision-making.

Third, targeting the poorest women through transparent, community-driven selection processes is critical to promote equity and maximize impact. In Monduli, selecting the most vulnerable women ensured that empowerment benefits reached those with the greatest need, enhancing visibility and community trust. For example, women from the poorest households, who previously lacked access to programs like TASAF, were able to transform their lives by starting businesses that improved housing and supported children's education. Community leaders, such as hamlet and village officials, should facilitate open meetings to verify selections, ensuring fairness and inclusivity. This approach not only



empowers the most marginalized but also inspires other community members by demonstrating tangible economic progress, such as replacing grass roofs with iron sheets, which women in the study described as living in “government houses.”

Fourth, stakeholders should prioritize ongoing training in business skills, financial literacy, and market analysis, tailored to the pastoralist lifestyle, to sustain and scale women’s businesses. In Monduli, training enabled women to develop business plans and manage finances, empowering them to run successful enterprises like goat fattening without conflicting with domestic duties. For instance, women learned to identify community demands, such as the need for petrol or household goods, which increased their business success. Training programs should be delivered in accessible formats, considering low literacy levels, and include practical components like group exercises to foster collaboration. Continuous training ensures that women can adapt to changing market conditions and scale their businesses, maintaining economic independence even after initial support ends.

Fifth, implementing robust monitoring systems is essential to ensure that seed capital and other resources are used effectively and to address challenges promptly. The study’s revolving fund model, where seed capital was transferred to new groups once profits were generated, demonstrated the importance of close supervision through monthly check-ins and visits. For example, regular monitoring ensured that women used funds for intended businesses, such as buying goats, and helped identify issues like market access barriers. Stakeholders should establish clear monitoring protocols, including progress reports and community feedback sessions, to maintain accountability and adapt interventions as needed. This approach not only enhances project outcomes but also builds women’s confidence by providing ongoing support and guidance.

Finally, fostering partnerships between NGOs and local governments is crucial to streamline resources, avoid duplication, and amplify the reach of empowerment programs. In Monduli, collaboration with local authorities ensured that CORDS’ initiatives complemented existing government efforts, maximizing impact. For instance, government officials facilitated community introductions and monitored progress, ensuring sustainability after project completion. Stakeholders should formalize these partnerships through agreements that outline roles, responsibilities, and resource-sharing mechanisms. Such collaborations can extend empowerment programs to other villages, scaling benefits like improved household income and reduced gender-based violence across larger regions. As such, by working together, NGOs and governments can create a

supportive ecosystem that empowers women while fostering broader community development.

These recommendations collectively aim to create inclusive, sustainable, and scalable empowerment programs that address the unique challenges faced by pastoralist women in Monduli and similar contexts. Consequently, by prioritizing community-driven approaches, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous support, these strategies can reduce poverty, enhance gender equality, and empower women to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities. Future initiatives should build on these lessons, incorporating longitudinal evaluations to assess long-term impacts and refine strategies for even greater effectiveness.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

I hereby declare 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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