

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

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This chapter critically reviews literature on erstwhile research available in the scholarship canon related to the foregoing. The researcher began by examining the conceptual framework followed by the theoretical framework and the case studies grounding the research. The researcher crafted the discourse for this study by reviewing past studies. This gave the researcher a vantage point when analysing and discussing the findings.

The research was guided by the social development theoretical approach that emerged out of dissatisfaction of the development model that emphasised on economic growth at the expense of social factors (Kaseke, 1993). Social development draws more attention on the importance of social factors in development processes. Social development is informed by the social work value of human dignity and worth hence believes people are equal hence people should have equal opportunities (Midgley, 1999). Social development also pursues social justice and egalitarian ideals. Social work and social development interlink as they both believe in the improvement of human being realising the need for human rights accessible to all equal interest and social justice hence both seek to empower people (Domineli, 1997). Kaseke (1993) argues how the poor and marginalised groups have been targeted in Zimbabwe to enhance productive capacity the likes of rural poor whose root poverty consists of inadequate land, lack of extension services and lack of access to financial credit.

Social development theoretical optic clearly unravels the research on women's perception on Thrive Microfinance and empowerment as it looks into the social factors of empowerment in the development process and targets both women who are into the agricultural business and other micro businesses. Social development also looks into participation to which the research is concerned about enhancing participation thus critical. The research looks into how microfinance has always taken a financial paradigm that believes provision of economic resources is everything to empowerment yet they are other social factors that could be considered such women's views on microfinance so they have a voice. This is supported by social development that also advocates for the engagement and also decision-making.

The Empowerment theoretical lens ascribes to empowerment as a multi-level construct defined in various ways and has concepts of power (Varekamp, 2009). There is no general consensus on its definition of empowerment. As argued by Chen (2000), empowerment encompass many components such as resources, perceptions, relationships and power. Empowerment is often described as a process, with inputs and outcomes and having different dimensions. These dimensions that are political, social and human, cultural and economic and these are controlled by different power forms power over, power to, power within, power with (Longwe, 1991).

The economic empowerment thrust tends to focus on people's availability of appropriate resources such as capabilities, skills, and income for economic empowerment (Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton and Bird, 2009). The economic empowerment that is mainly centred on the provision of resource is the most common 'Power to' that is power to change and organise as an individual. It makes use of the 'power to' issues of capacity of the individual that is often referred to as the agency. The agency's capacity to utilise resources is regarded as leading to empowerment in this dimension. Hence whether the resource utilisation has not impacted decisions in the home is not an issues, thus it is critical in this study as it unleashes that economic empowerment does not automatically mean empowerment of the person. Hence in the study provision of loans by Thrive and capacity to use them is empowerment for the economic dimension and women 's 'power over' is not of significant.

Social and human empowerment is concerned with people 's control over their own lives and communities (Czuba, 1999). The social and human empowerment is influenced by 'power within' that bring in the individual power to control (Rowland, 1997). The social and human empowerment is critical to this study as it goes further to look into more than just resources but also look into individual control of empowerment. In this regard the social and human empowerment looks into the 'power within' as initiating empowerment. This also echoed by Freire to when he mentions that a person can only be said to be empowered if the individual's empowerment starts within and mentions the power within as more stronger than power to. Power within as critical of how the person view themselves and their capabilities and how they influence outcome. The power within also

influence one's perception of things and outlook. Thus, scholars like Sen (1999), argue that even in the presence of economic empowerment but without power within one is bound to make choices that can disempower them thus, it becomes critical to ensure power within.

It is power within that can foster power over, power to, power with and is defined by Longwe's empowerment as the highest degree of empowerment as it initiates control over matters that concern the person (Longwe, 1991). Friedman (1992) observes that it is during the process of empowerment that people are said to be agents of change based on the premise of the power within that can initiate change. In light of the research it is this power within to which one's perception come from hence critical to the study of women perception on Thrive Microfinance and empowerment as one's individual self-esteem and view of self-reflect on their perception. The power within is reinforced by naïve consciousness theory that speaks to issues of how looks down upon themselves hence critical.

Political empowerment's focus centred on collective change and ability to organise people and mobilise them more of the rights-based approach to empowerment of empowering citizen to claim their entitlement (Watkins, 2004). The political empowerment is controlled by the power with. Power with that brings collective action (Zoe and Baden, 1997). Power with can best be achieved when one has power within however some can be able to attain power with without necessarily attaining power within (Longwe, 1991). However, power with is more effective when they are power within. In this case power with can be attained in group lending where women might borrow loan that can enable their empowerment as women as a group. But the question will always remain to what extent the group will empower the individual.

There is cultural empowerment that can help empower women by addressing power struggles within society. The cultural empowerment is influenced by power over that is power over that entail ability to influence. Power over that has influence to change cultures that might be oppressive or change culture dynamics (Zoe and Baden, 1997). As argued by (Brown, 2011), more

participation of women in micro business can change the culture set roles for women as they can be able to make decisions that affect the home and contribute financially whilst the husband takes care of the family and doing the unproductive work at home. As a group of women in business can help change culture influenced by group action it all goes back to power within as initial step (Longwe, 1991).

The empowerment process explains how the empowerment of the social and human (power within), takes time and can facilitate economic, political, cultural empowerment (Longwe, 1991). It explains how power within is a process and does not emerge overnight and the need for consciousness to be able to achieve it as it influences decisions to which the agency makes. The empowerment process also looks into the achievements attained as a result of empowerment that is the outcome. This is critical to the study as the investigations of women perception on Thrive microfinance can best explain the outcomes of women who are borrowing. Taking a multidimensional approach requires defining empowerment in terms of both individual capacities and collective action to address inequalities that are the causes of poverty (Brown, 2011). A focus on empowerment emphasises that poverty not only is about low incomes, but also emanates from social exclusion and the lack of access to power, voice and security (Brown, 2011).

Social development is more concerned about improving the individual not only from an economic paradigm but examining social factors hence correlating with empowerment theory's multidimensional aspect of looking into social and human empowerment that is power within and cultural dimension power over and political dimension power to (Kaseke, 1993). The social development approach and empowerment theory both focus on how these can impede on development, structural issues, self-esteem and culture thus link in their view of the individual's development, to comprehend that empowerment or development goes beyond issues of resources. Thus, it is critical in the study to acknowledge that it is not always about finance, perceptions also count. As perceptions affect empowerment of women through failure to participate owing to their negative perceptions (Brown, 2011).

Longwe (1991) has explored different empowerment degree in the framework that is the welfare degree of empowerment were minimum is done there is provision of basic need and they are no structural adjustment and the recipient is passive. The access degree of empowerment was the equal access to credit, land and education, the conscientization and awareness degree that institutional and structural issues on discrimination are raised and addressed. The participation and mobilisation were people are fully involved and make decisions that are recognised and the control degree stage that the individual is in control of their lives and make decisions of their lives. As argued by Longwe's framework empowerment might be welfare in nature that does not guarantee much improvement in the life of the individual thus advocates for control degree of empowerment to which the individual has power within.

Gaventa (2003), speaks to issues of power in relation with empowerment. The power cube that express how empowerment may basically be of welfare nature with passive recipients as the hidden power makes decision. Gaventa (2003) identifies the three different types of power forms that are the hidden power, invisible power and the visible power. The visible power is the power that is within the formal rules and structures and the hidden power is the power that controls and influences decision-making and is usually of the powerful people that influence decision in their favour against the less powerful people. The invisible power that is internal that influence people not to question their position of existing power relations. Gaventas also highlights the issue of spaces to which he defines as areas of decision-making to that power operates.

As argued by the power cube they are provided and closed space these spaces are controlled by the elite and they might be governed within institutions by international institutes. Invited spaces these are areas to which the public is allowed to participate for the status quo to act like they influence but their opinions are not taken into consideration like the. Claimed or created space this provides space for the powerless to create control without the power holders (Lutrell. *et al.*, 2009). As argued by Gaventas power cube empowerment my just be in name but not practical with the people being empowered not making decisions and other elite people making decisions for them and the people involved might not even participate. Thus in the power

cube Gaventas is advocating for full participation of people involved in empowerment in this case women and allowing them to make decisions and not the decisions made by hidden power 'people of influence' and advocate for conscientization of the 'invisible power' that is the individual power and mind to use created space to question 'invited spaces' that are not bringing out people's issues but are mere display of system so to influence closed space that is the international. The power cube helps in the understanding of how global forces influence marginalisation or enhance empowerment of women.

Alsop *et al.* (2005) aver that the framework speaks to issues of empowerment and recognises the individual as the agency and the opportunity structure as the opportunities availed to the individual that can lead to the empowerment of the individual. It is within this framework that the social, political, economic and psychological are indicators for the agency (World Bank, 2006). The opportunity structure influences the power to which the agency can act. The policies also govern the choice that are available for the agency hence influence the opportunity structure (World Bank, 2006). Both the agency and opportunity structure influence the level of empowerment of the agency thus this is critical as opportunity structures often hinder the empowerment of women especially on inheritance and property rights might hinder access to credit thus making women vulnerable as a result (World Bank, 2006). Thus, the World Bank Empowerment Frameworks speaks to issues of opportunities and barriers that can hinder access to certain opportunities of influence and capacity to make decisions that affect them to which she describes as real empowerment.

Since the ideals of empowerment are to ensure power to the individual or group under oppression or unjust system therefore empowerment should be able to bring about change and just basic to be fully recognised (Lutrella *et al.*, 2009). Thus in terms of microfinance and women empowerment, women are not to be at welfare degree of being passive recipients of empowerment but rather control were they are involved in decision-making and involved that is participation and be able to have power with to collective action and power over to influence economic outcome and power to in terms of capacity and power within as an individual thus the framework is critical in highlighting power structures and their influence in power degree and amount of change

that can be brought as a result of these power dimensions and degrees. Hence the study sought to initiate the empowerment degree of participation and mobilisation degree that facet control in women programs that enable women to make decisions on issues that concern them thus looking into women perception on Thrive Microfinance and women empowerment to enable them have a voice and attribute to decision-making that can be recognised and participation in the programs that concern them.

The discourse around women empowerment originated in the 1970s with women movement and feminist critiques arguing that they were need for women to be involved in development as it also propelled gender equality (Kabeer, 1996). The women in development approach accentuated the role of women in development with the liberal feminist in North America advocating for integration of women in development as women were seen as passive recipients of development, hence it was a corrective measure that could help ensure efficient and effective development. Including women in development not as passive agents but active agents in development would help in development process.

The Women in Development (WID) approach by Boserup focused on the role of women in economic development (Rathgaeber, 1991). It was the first to analyse development by sex and examining how modernisation was growing to overthrow women in economic development with new technologies coming in and men being put at the centre to learning new technologies leaving women behind especially in the agricultural sector yet women contributed greatly in development. It focussed on the contribution of women in the economic sector and how they had failed to be recognised and with most women occupying the least paying jobs (Jacquett, 1982). It advocated for mainstreaming of women in development issues as it recognised that in most development women were lagging behind. It accepted the social relations that existed. The (WID) approach is relevant in the study as it is one of approaches that led to the recognition of women in development and women economic empowerment in the global discourse thus critical to the research as it brings the roots of women empowerment and development origins.

Women in development assumes that women are lagging behind as a result of limited access and control over resources. It also assumes that women are passive recipients of development owing to the limited access and control of resources. WID also recognises insufficient participation of women as the main problem leading to women lagging behind in development (Kabeer, 1996). WID's strength is rooted in its sex disaggregated way of looking into development that can help in identifying the contribution of each sex in development and recognition of which sex is lagging behind. Hence its recognition of women as lagging behind through analysis of sex disaggregated data in development analysis. This recognition of women as lagging behind fostered the need to empower women economically by providing credit schemes and work opportunities (Kabeer, 1996).

However, WID failed to recognise the social and cultural aspects that affect women participation hence lagging behind in development (Kabeer, 1996). The WID approach was mainly centred on promoting women involvement in the economic sector that it failed to comprehend the social and cultural issues that affect women participation such as the gender roles that affect participation that saw WID bringing in less progress in development (Kabeer, 1996). The WID approach influences the study as, it advocates for provision of credit schemes, opportunities as part of making women access resources and have control over as solution to women's lagging behind in development. This correlates with the study as it examines, into women's perceptions on credit schemes and empowerment focusing on Thrive Microfinance. The study focuses on women's perceptions on economic empowerment to which WID approach advocates for and how it can be fully realised. The study also seeks to solve the problem highlighted by the WID approach of insufficient participation by looking into what women think about credit schemes so as to initiate active participation of women. However, the study also goes on to look further beyond WID approach as it looks into social and cultural issues that is gender roles influence in economic empowerment of women. In as much as the study is led by the WID approach it has influences of the GAD approach.

The Women and Development (WAD) approach was more focused on both men and women in development stressing that women's role in development



so as men had failed to be recognised due to inequalities and class at international level were men from the Global South have failed to be recognised in terms of their contribution due to inequality at international level. It also stresses that for the same reason that men from the global south had failed to be recognise is that same reason that women had failed to be recognised as their contribution was suited to support the unequal structural system. Blames women 's failure to fully be integrated to international inequality.

The WAD approach believed women 's disempowerment was vested in structural systems in society. The WAD approach focussed on the global level how inequality at global level between north and south had affected the family level with women being looked down upon. WAD advocates for equality at international level as the solution to ending women and men disempowerment. It also looks into how international laws and policies affect and have contributed to women disempowerment. Looks into the different systems and technologies like industrialisation that has saw more men than women in industries attributed to women disempowerment in development. The WAD had its weakness as it failed to look into class based on gender and its contribution. WAD is critical to the study as it highlight different law as and policies and how they affect women participation in development like inheritance laws, land ownership laws and how international institutes COMESA has a bearing in women participation. The issue of land ownership that is mainly restricted to males affect collateral of women hence affect their participation in economic development.

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach came as a result of frustration and lack of progress of the WID approach owing to oversight of social and cultural issues that affect women in development. The GAD approach focused on socially constructed differences of men and women roles and responsibilities. It looks into the social organisation and how role is assigned by gender. Considers the contribution of women within and outside the household. Believes the government should help in the emancipation of women and that women are not passive recipients of economic development. Advocates for women legal rights to inheritance, land ownership that ensures

women empowerment. Focuses also on how patriarchy affects women's involvement in development. Questions underlying assumptions on social, political and economic structures. The GAD approach will be reviewed on its intuition of government role in developing women, legal rights that can ensure collateral security thus empowering women.

The GAD approach assumes that imbalance of power between men and women as the cause of disempowerment of women in development. It also highlights how social institutions like family and communities are dominated with systems like patriarchy, inheritance laws that foster imbalance of women and men also influence role and responsibilities of men and women that in turn affect women participation (Kabeer, 1996). They also highlight how these systems like patriarchy influence the roles of women that is often unpaid work and foster the non-recognition of the household work women are involved in and recognise male's role and responsibility hence women subordination to men.

The GAD approach advocate for equal power of women and men as solution to women 's exclusion in development. Advocates for gender equality and equity in development. GAD's strength is centred on the ability of the approach to look into sociocultural impediments to women in development and also examines both men and women's attribution to development. It examines how women can be empowered by looking first at the systems in their society that affect them. It appreciates the triple roles of women and how it affects their contribution in development. The GAD approach influences the study on socio-cultural issues where women 's perceptions on credit schemes are guided by culture, participation is guided by system and the triples roles and responsibilities. The GAD approach influence provides a guideline on women perception given the social cultural environment and systems like patriarchy how they affect women participation in credit schemes, how roles and responsibilities ascribed to women affect their participation as it becomes a burden also highlights reasons behind women's lack of collateral security owing to laws in place that bring imbalance between men and women in society thus is key to the study.

As argued by IFAD (2009), around the 1970s more focus was put towards accessing credit to women but with the rise of microfinance the discourse changed to sustainability, interest and desirability of mobilising savings. Hence the increase in the global establishment of microfinance institutions that empower women from impoverishment. Following Yunus, Grameen Model of Bangladesh that was used in the alleviation of poverty and has been used by several organisations and microfinance institutions to empower women in different nations. As argued by the Micro credit summit (2007), there are about 3 300 micro-finance institutions with about 133 million clients and 93 million of them being poor when they started borrowing with 85percent consisting of women being the poorest. As argued by AFI (2009), Microfinance helps in empowering of impoverished women by providing financial resources, skills training, savings loans to mention but a few.

Empowerment of women through microfinance is critical in promoting decent work agenda, the role of work in bringing about gender equality, inclusion and sustainable development (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2007). As argued by International Financial Inclusion Research, financial inclusion of women increases the Gross Domestic Product by 2 percent to 3 percent in some cases. Golden (2014) observes that 70 percent of women small to medium enterprises are either financially unserved or underserved (Golden, 2014). Women have limited access to financial service and credit and consist of a greater proportion of people with unbanked money yet are the majority with informal economy. Hence targeting women makes sense in public policy (AFI, 2009).

Numerous studies have been conducted in Africa with particular regard to women empowerment and microfinances. As argued by Tisdell (2002), 21 out of 28 nations in sub-Saharan Africa did not grant equal capacity under the law to capacitate women with men that affected women participation into the economy. The study also revealed that married women had more legal restrictions than unmarried women this was attributed to the socio-cultural environment thus limiting women participation in microfinance. As argued by UNDP Human Development Report (2016), Sub-Saharan Africa loses

about 95 billion owing to issues of gender inequality that affect women participation in the economy hence disempowering women.

Generally African women are faced with numerous challenges that impede on their participation in development. These numerous challenges that include cultural systems, laws that influenced by these systems and resources (Kabeer 1996). All these make the journey of empowerment tough and uneasy hence critical as tackling one of the issue without tackling all issues that is culture, resources and systems leads to no fruition and zero progress in terms of women participation in development. Hence little has been achieved in women empowerment owing to failure to comprehend all sectors that is social, cultural and economic aspects of empowerment that is the area of interest to the study of looking into perceptions that are inclusive of economic, cultural and social aspects of women empowerment.

A negative relationship has been highlighted between participation in micro-finance and women empowerment as women report high workloads hence it becomes a burden. As argued by Harris (2000), participation in microfinance institutions take more of their time such that they have less time at home, so these women reported to be feeling less empowered as they would spend less time with their children. Women perceived microfinance institutions as burdensome and feeling less empowered by them as they took most of their time. Most women highlighted that microfinance institutions would require them to attend weekly meetings and that meant more commitment thus time consuming and burdensome (Brown, 2011). As argued by Kabeer (1996), GAD approach also highlights how the triples roles of women that is production, reproduction and community work have become a burden for women involved in productive work hence often affect women participation in development work. The GAD approach highlights how women are often excluded in development owing to the burdens reproductive and community roles and responsibilities assigned to them thus involvement in productive work becomes impossible.

The Mahontany transnational theory advocates for economic and social justice of women from diverse backgrounds and realises that they have different experiences as a result. The theory acknowledges the role played by

experience hence understands women's different perception based on the different experience and different environment (geo-political environment), (Kaplan and Grewal, 1999). Mahontany takes cognisance of individual effect to the collective, local, national up to international level. Appreciates the role that experience play in advocacy. The theory by Mahontany best explains different women perceptions in the economic empowerment as they are influenced by different social, economic and political backgrounds to which they live in (Brown, 2011).

Women have indicated that their involvement in Microfinance is empowering (Brown, 2011). In a study conducted by Sebstad and Chen (1996), in Hospes (2004), women confessed to being empowered with the involvement in microfinance. They also confessed that their self-esteem changed, they now also had power to control and make decisions in the household. They also confessed to their recognition in community and also participation within the community. In the summaries of thirty-two researches and evaluation reports found out women were being empowered by micro-lending, especially in Asian nations. However, in Africa there was less empowerment but had positive household income (Sebastad and Chen 1996 cited in Lont and Hospes, 2004).

The Social feminist theory ascribes to capitalism's role in the oppression of women. Women are not able to be free due to financial dependence. As argued by Buchanan (2011), the theory believes women's liberation can best be achieved by working to end economic and cultural sources of oppression. Women are subjects to male capitalism due to uneven balance of wealth. Sexism gender division of labour affects women hence leading to the oppression of women. The theory ascribes to women empowerment as key to liberation from dependence to males. Hence the theory is critical to the study as it support empowerment of women.

In one of the researches that were conducted by IFAD (2009), they realised that women were in need of loans. As argued by IFAD (2009), women were in need of small loans that could enable them to invest into income generating projects and the loans had to be paid as soon as they were given in terms of weekly. They indicated that women needed small loans for their business that can help the conduct their small business as they had time constraints

because of unproductive work and these small loans were issued because women have aversive risk. Yunus also in his research for the Grameen model, started by issuing small loans to the poor as little as USD\$27 to the women who were making bamboo stools and it is with these little loans that they were able to come out of poverty (Yunus, 1999). Thus, indicating how loans can help women in coming out of poverty.

As argued by the United Nations (2017), about 2 billion people are excluded from access to financial service this also affect access to food and health and with 90 percent of the less financially excluded being from the less developed nation and often seeking finance from informal sector with high interest rates hence the need for financial inclusion for women that has low interest rates. Otero and Rhyne (1994), women's non-involvement in microfinance institutions is prompted by high interest rates of loans. High interest loans that make it difficult for women to repay the loans. In a study that was conducted on women they indicated that high interest of loans and collateral security had prompted their financial exclusion. As argued by Yunus (1999), Grameen model research the women could not produce a lot of stools because of the high rates to which the money was charging her thus indicating the effect of interests' rate on women involvement in microfinance

Women 's views of microfinance institutions on women empowerment are critical due to the multi-dimensional nature of empowerment. Women's perceptions have always been left out in most researches that concern women empowerment and microfinance as a financial approach has always led the researches with impact and challenges viewed from a financial lens hence neglecting women perceptions (Brown, 2011). In the few researches conducted that indicate women perceptions for example the study by Kasynathan of the women of Hunt in Brown (2011), have shown that women value the business trainings conducted than the financial ability to contribute to household as the training provide literacy that have enabled them to access other services and places that were not accessible due to illiteracy and failure to understand. The group structure in trainings have made women to actively participate in community and local political process. Thus, preferential to skills than financial aid to which most microfinance institutions are more

inclined hence the need to look into women perception on Thrive Microfinance and empowerment so their voice and real concerns are heard.

Microfinance has impacted greatly in women 's lives both positively and negatively. Most researches have indicated that women have benefited from microfinance institutions. Women who have participated in microfinance institutions by borrowing loans have managed to change their lives owing to the loans borrowed and this has made a difference to poor women. A good example can be drawn from the case of Thurman (2007), in Ukraine were a poor woman who could not afford to send her child to school borrowed money from a microfinance institution after hearing about the opening of a microfinance, so she could open a business of school supplies and later after some years was successful and was able to open 8 more stalls that employ 8-12 people.

Women involved in microfinance institution have shown a high level of personal empowerment. As argued by Kato and Kratzer (2013), on both qualitative and quantitative study conducted in Tanzania on women personal empowerment to which members of a microfinance institutions were evaluated on self- esteem, self-efficacy. Resulted indicated high levels of self- esteem and self-efficacy compared to the comparison group that are non-members. This was further supported by an in-depth interview conducted with these women were they highlighted that participation in microfinance made them stronger and more respected in communities that they live in. A similar study that was conducted in Sri Lanka on women psychological empowerment of women living below the poverty datum line who had been enrolled in microfinance indicated the same results of high personal empowerment as they were assessed on ability to control beliefs affecting them as a way of measuring personal empowerment (Hansen, 2015).

Some findings contrary to other researches have reported that they are increased domestic violence amongst female microfinance borrowers (Kim *et al.*, 2007). Domestic violence amongst female borrowers is being instigated by man perceived emasculation, ego, low self-esteem and the exchange of gender roles with the wife now bringing in more money squabbles arise (Leach and Sitaram, 2002 in Bretton, 2015). This might be attributed to the fact that man

might be left out in these microfinance programs hence frustration (Bretton, 2015). Thus, it is critical to consider the multidimensional aspect of women empowerment through microfinance institutions as it affects families' issues. Hence impacting negatively on marriages.

Some scholars also have supported the idea that microfinance have impacted negatively instead of positively in the lives of the poor. This was highlighted by the researches in Malawi where women took loans from a microfinance institution upon following the loans using gender empowerment indicator and managerial control of loan as an indicator they realised that most women had no control over the loan and the activities to which the loan funded and to those that had participated particularly the married ones in how they had used their loan money they had little or no control of the money thus disempowering (Goertz and Gupta 1994, in Kabeer 2000). Hence microfinance institutions can be disempowering for women rather than empowering. In a similar study in another location in Malawi by Diane and Zeller (2001), the study highlighted that microfinance access to services protects the poor against fluctuating income, death, ill health and emergency expenditure but has no significant effect on household income. Despite the claim that microfinance is the best way of alleviating poverty (Johnson and Rogaly, 1997) argue that the poorest become worse off and they become more vulnerable to high risks hence disempowerment.

In one of the studies conducted by International Fund for Agriculture Development IFAD (2009), group lending system was recommended for women as it enable power with and as a way of averting risk. According IFAD (2009), group lending reduces cost and increase empowerment of women through group-based delivery. The use of group lending that in some studies, have led to revolution and challenge of cultural system women began to unite and voice out through group that had been united through borrowing. The argument is that they is more comfort in numbers and the teamwork to which different members of the group display often push the group lending to be effective. The issue of different strengths can assist the group even in the way business is done and the combined ideas of the team surpass that of the individual thus more effective.



In one of the studies by International Fund for Agriculture Development IFAD (2009), savings scheme was recommended. Savings schemes were recommended as they would help women avert risk and be able to accumulate asserts. The idea behind the saving scheme was to try mitigate risk in cases were business could lapse, be affected by weather or business money could be stolen to mention but a few risks that could be encountered in business the savings would work as more of insurance to help the women to be able to bounce back in business (IFAD, 2009). The savings would also help women to accumulate asserts that can help as collateral in the event they decide to take big loans from banks hence could have something to fall back on. The savings were also meant to increase financial management in the home thus playing a role that goes beyond impacting in business (economic empowerment), but also in the home (social and human empowerment) (IFAD, 2009).

In one the studies conducted in Aga Khan of Rural Support Programme by Harper (1995), on micro-enterprises, the study reviewed that out of the 31 loan takers only seven loans were controlled by women and the other 16 were controlled by men. The other eight women did not know that loans were taken they had not been involved in the process. They were misuse of the loans by the men (Harper, 1995). A similar trend had also been reported in Sudan and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee with women complaining that they did not have personal income and how they relied on friends for repayment of loans thus indicating how women empowerment programme through micro lending might fell to impact and empower women and their contribution to increase poverty and vulnerability if social aspects are not fully considered (Hulme, 1996).

In Bangladesh in one of the studies conducted by Goetz and Sengpta on microfinance and women empowerment. The study revealed that out of 275 women that had borrowed loans only 17, 8 percent had control over the loan. In a similar case in Samajtantik Chhantra Front in Bangladesh 68 percent of the loans had been used by the husbands except a few who were first time lenders (Basnet 1995). These studies also indicated that they were a significant decrease in women's empowerment across household and the reason for this discovery were unclear (Zaidi *et al.*, 2007).

Haki *et al.* (2021) argue that in Africa private domestic savings are low the continent is under-banked. This has seen women in rural areas failing to access financial institutions leading to internal savings and lending schemes empowering women as microfinance programmes (Kabonga *et al.*, 2020). Access to microfinance is assumed to associated with positive improvements in the welfare of women especially poor rural women with limited resources to sustain their families (Katsande-Ncube and Chenge 2023). Internal savings and lending schemes have emerged as a cushioning strategy for women empowering them with purchasing power in rural areas accessing lending schemes with minimum collateral security. Microfinance and women empowerment programmes such as ISALS have provided safe places for members to deposit cash, provide loans to obtain emergency aid (Pamuk *et al.*, 2022). Women's empowerment has been realised through microfinance programmes that supports women accessing financing of various businesses outside the financial systems that require documentation and collateral security.

The involvement of women in ISALS has been viewed as a strategy towards enhancing women's ownership of assets, facilitating their engagement in household decision-making (Ashe and Neilan 2014). The microfinance programmes have been viewed as a strategy of enhancing spending of families on education and health welfare of households while improving the participation of women outside the domestic spheres (Tura *et al.*, 2020). Zaaman (2000) observes how in Burundi ISALS have been a vehicle towards social and economic change as it has increased their household income while changing their public participation. The microfinance programmes have increased women's empowerment by reducing their domestication through the increase of their public participation. Omondi and Jagongo (2018) are of the view that in Kenya microfinance programmes have transformed the lives of women through giving women who had not previously occupied community leadership to acquire positions as savings groups' managers increasing their confidence in public participation. The participation of women in public spaces empowers them to address the household power dynamics by giving them purchasing power.

Nasong'o and Osoro (2019) argue how ISALS have become a women's empowerment strategy in Kenya with most women using them to balance their businesses and create socio-economic stability within the households. Kirimi *et al.* (2019) argue that in Kenya households reported that there was transformation of livelihoods through ISALS leading sustainable rural lives. In Zambia women's empowerment has been achieved through ISALS by providing wealth and the financial preparedness to meet the needs of expecting mothers in rural areas (Lee *et al.*, 2021). The women in various regions of Africa have used microfinance programmes as empowerment strategies to increase their financial independence. Maffioli *et al.* (2021) observe how in Zambia ISALS are a promising microfinance empowerment intervention that has assisted rural women by increasing financial resources and financial preparedness. Ouma (2022) is of the view that the proceeds of ISALS are often used by caregivers' households in single-parent homes to pay school fees and uniforms. Microfinance programmes have become a strategy for financial empowerment in Africa.

Kabonga and Zvokuomba (2020) argue that microfinance programmes enable all women as it provides a chance for the women to access financing for their small enterprises. Chibanda *et al.* (2024) alludes that in Zimbabwe microfinance programmes have empowered women and provided them with social security. Chineka and Mtetwa (2022) alludes that microfinance programmes have been identified as a women's empowerment strategy to improve the autonomy of women recognising the household power dynamics. The microfinance programmes have allowed the rural women to develop financial security to deal with the household power dynamics of access to income. Ndhlovu and Mudzingwa (2022) argue how the microfinance programmes have provided a platform for women's empowerment without prejudice in Zimbabwe as there is inclusion of all women without discrimination.

In addition, Chitema and Chitongo (2020) alludes that microfinance programmes have been formalised to help women deal with the societal constraints and social norms that make it difficult for them to leave their domestic roles for public roles. Women have been empowered by microfinance programmes to reduce their domestication and participate in

the public sphere without causing gender-based violence. Kabonga *et al.* (2021) argue how microfinance programmes have become a strategy to address empowerment problems in Zimbabwe contributing towards financial well-being of women. Masuku *et al.* (2023) argues that microfinance programmes have provided a transformation of women's lives through providing them with stability outside their traditional roles.

This chapter has reviewed literature pertinent to the study. The researcher focused on literature from former research in line with the objectives of the study. The researcher also focused on case studies from some nations in relation to the subject matter of the study. The following chapter will present the research methodology that was used by the researcher in the study.