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Original Article

Village savings associations and household welfare in Kamuli district: A cross-sectional survey study.

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Abstract

Background:

The Ugandan government has implemented various poverty alleviation programs, including National Agricultural Advisory Services, Youth Livelihood Programme, Operation Wealth Creation, Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment, Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, Emyoga, Skilling Uganda, and Parish Development Model, among others, in response to the vice. This study examined the impact of Village Savings Associations on household welfare in Kamuli District.

Methodology:

A cross-sectional survey design was applied to collect data from randomly and purposively selected samples from a population of 150 VSLA members. Additionally, interviews were conducted with key informants, including 4 trainers and 4 local leaders. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed using content analysis.

Results:

Overall, most respondents were females, 69%, whilst males were 31%. Also, 34% were aged between 35-44 years, 21% were aged 25-34 years, 17% were aged 55 years and above, 16% were 45-54 years, and 12% were aged 18-24 years. Findings indicated a moderate but significant positive contribution of savings to household welfare. The study found that savings don't enhance financial security and stability; however, a one-unit increase in savings will lead to a 0.168-unit increase in poverty reduction. Findings further showed that Members are not willing to save with VSLA, and that saving alone may not necessarily foster financial literacy and independence. In addition, saving alone may not consistently facilitate investment in income-generating ventures. However, it increases household income, aids education expenditure, and health expenses.

Conclusion:

Most respondents expressed scepticism regarding the capacity of savings to enhance financial security, stability, and independence.

Recommendation:

A fair and reasonable penalty system should be put in place to promote a more conducive savings environment, and regular training sessions should be held on the benefits and best practices of savings.

Keywords: *Village savings associations, Household welfare, Kamuli district.*
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Background

Household welfare, a measure of living standards, has roots in early economic thought. Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations" (1776) emphasised household income as a key indicator. Later, the development of national income accounts by Simon Kuznets in the 1930s laid the groundwork for modern welfare economics. Amartya Sen's capabilities approach (1980s) expanded the concept, focusing on individuals' abilities to achieve well-being. Contemporary research often incorporates various indicators such as income, education, and health. Understanding household welfare is crucial for policymaking, with scholars like Esther Duflo (2019 Nobel laureate) highlighting its significance in poverty alleviation efforts (Smith, 1776; Sen, 1980; Duflo, 2019).

In ancient Greece, Aristotle argued that poverty was caused by a lack of leisure and opportunity. According to Aristotle, the wealthy were defined by their leisure time and the poor were defined by their lack of free time. As a result, those who are rich could afford more free time because they had better job opportunities and better access to resources like food and water. Thus, they were more likely to have more time to pursue leisure activities, while those who were poor lacked that free time because they were struggling to find food and shelter for their families. For more than two thousand years, this idea has been repeated in different forms in various philosophical and religious texts.

Whilst there are changes in the cost of living and technological advancements like mobile phones, Uganda's poverty line has remained unchanged since 1990. The Development Initiatives' Spotlight on Uganda (2023), which provides data on economic and non-economic measures of poverty at the national and district levels, indicates that some regions, particularly the north and east, have higher poverty rates than others. Buvuma District is also among the poorest Districts despite being in central Uganda, with a poverty rate of 97.1% in 2014 (Development Initiatives, 2023).

Bettger (1977) believes that individuals can get better by being focused and coming up with an easy formula, and this is evidenced by how he came up with steps that led him to be one of the top salespeople. Individuals can become better by making better investment choices, for example, joining a savings group to help them have access to money to be in a position to afford basic needs, as cited by Bradshow (2007).

Additionally, the community development custom rooted in eras of wellbeing and social policy focused on coming up with remedies to solve the paradox of poverty based on individual deficiency theories. In this era, there was a need to push the poor to find some work to do as a self-help strategy to pull themselves out of poverty (Maskovsky, 2001, as cited by Bradshaw, 2007). It is a civic duty to provide a dependable safety net that can aid individuals who are unable to support themselves. The disabled, elderly, children, and even those who are unfortunate are integral parts of every community, and without fault, their unique requirements can be fulfilled through collective efforts. Despite the prevalent societal belief that people are responsible for their own poverty, it is essential to acknowledge and address the need for a safety net for those who cannot fulfil their basic needs; thus, the graduation model also offers ways to reduce poverty as seen in the next paragraph.

VSLAs date back to the 1970s where microfinance in Bangladesh (Yunus, 1970) gave micro loans to poor individuals. VSLAs were pioneered by CARE in 1991 and have been effectively customised by other organisations to more than 5 million poor persons. VSLAs run on the principle that small amounts of money are saved and loaned within a group to make a difference amongst the individuals. They pool their resources together in order to provide each other with small loans to afford basic needs and healthcare. They are self-sustaining, with members making regular savings and repaying loans with interest. This creates a source of capital that the group can use to offer loans to its members. In addition to providing financial services, a platform for social inclusion and economic empowerment is provided. They help to build trust and solidarity among group members and solve problems. They also promote financial independence by giving women the opportunity to participate in making decisions concerning money and have access to credit on equal terms with men.

Uganda, as a country, faces significant poverty challenges. The country continues to experience high levels of poverty, despite enormous efforts (Government of Uganda, 2020). Over the past few decades, VSLAs have gained popularity as an escape strategy to address poverty. MFI's offer monetary services to the underprivileged, including savings and credit, as a means to improve their economic and social well-being (Adams & Alade, 2015).

Kahyarara and Wamala (2018) argue that microfinance facilities in Uganda largely focus on maximising profits and providing loans to enterprises that are both small and medium-sized, and agribusinesses. However, this approach has largely excluded the most vulnerable and marginalised populations. The authors suggest that a shift towards supporting microfinance institutions, particularly those that serve marginalised communities, could promote financial inclusion. Self-help groups possess the potential to promote growth where traditional institutions have failed to reach. This study examined the impact of Village Savings Associations on household welfare in Kamuli District.

Methodology

Research design

The cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data at a specific period from the sample population. The study adapted a triangulation approach (mixed methods approach) that was both quantitative and qualitative for collecting and analysing data.

Study population

The study consisted of 150 members from selected VSLA, 4 VSLA trainers and 4 local leaders in the Kamuli District.

Sample Size Determination

A representative sample of 108 participants was selected from a population of 150 individuals from selected VSLA's, 4 local leaders and 4 VSLA Trainers. The sample size determination was performed using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, which provides guidelines for selecting an appropriate sample size.

Table 1: Sample size distribution and sampling technique

Type of respondents	Population	Sample size	Sampling technique
Members from 5 selected VSLA'S	150	108	Simple random sampling
Local leaders	4	4	Purposive sampling
VSLA Trainers	4	4	Purposive sampling
Total	**159**	**116**	

Source: Primary Data

The study involved 116 participants, comprising 108 members from selected VSLA, 4 local leaders, and 4 VSLA trainers.

Sampling Technique and Procedure

A random selection was used to choose respondents for this study to avoid a biased sample. Additionally, purposive sampling was employed as the second method, which involved selecting 4 key VSLA trainers and 4 local leaders. This technique allowed the identification and selection of individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience regarding the research topic.

Data Collection Methods

The original data collection process involved interacting directly with individuals or sources relevant to the topic. On the other hand, secondary data was gathered by reviewing and analysing existing sources of information. The purpose of utilising secondary data was to extract relevant information about poverty and VSLA's that helped address the questions. By employing both primary and secondary data, the study aimed to gather comprehensive and diverse sources of information. The primary data collection offered unique insights and perspectives directly from the field, while the review of secondary sources provided a broader understanding of the existing knowledge. This study adapted the use of interviews and questionnaire survey methods.

Questionnaire survey

This method involved collecting information from members who are in VSLA in a systematic way. A questionnaire survey was used for this category of respondents to save time because their number is too large to interview, let alone their ability to read and write. The questionnaire was adopted because it helps in the generation of constructive data and makes the results more dependable.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews with key informants were employed as a primary data collection method. The interviews followed a semi-structured format.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire

A large sample of respondents was assessed by using questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of structured questions ranked on the Likert scale. This approach was cost-effective and convenient for respondents, who filled out the questionnaire at their own pace. Using a questionnaire increases the likelihood of obtaining valid information for analysis.

Interview Guide

Creation of this guide facilitated interviews with key respondents. The guide ensured that the questions asked enabled respondents to provide data aligned with the study objectives. Probing techniques were employed to clarify responses. Detailed discussions were held with local leaders about the determinants of poverty. Interviews are essential for obtaining specific information through verbal communication, and they also allow the researcher to address any potential oversights. This guide was used to gather data from local leaders and VSLA trainers.

Observation Checklist

The checklist consisted of indicators such as housing conditions, sanitation, clothing, dietary habits, opportunities and access to social amenities to assess the level and nature of poverty in the selected households. Observations provided a comprehensive evaluation of the situation and verified the information provided by the respondents. This approach offered a more complete picture to complement that obtained from other research instruments.

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Reliability and Validity of Instruments

Data Validity

Data validity ensures that the collected data is accurate, reliable, and can be generalised to other populations. Content validity was assessed using the Content Validity Index (CVI), which allowed raters to individually evaluate the importance of items represented in an instrument. The CVI was assessed using a Likert-type scale with five possible responses. Guidance was sought from supervisors to assess the weight, omissions, wording, and transparency of questions or items in the instrument. 0.7 index, which falls within the accepted statistical range of 0.5 to 1. An instrument was considered valid because the CVI score was equal to or greater than 0.7. This ensured the reliability, accuracy and quality of the data to draw valid assumptions. Instruments that demonstrated a Composite Validity Index (CVI) exceeding 0.7 were considered to fall within acceptable ranges. To assess their reliability, the study employed Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient test. If the resulting values equalled or exceeded 0.7, the items within the instrument were deemed reliable, in accordance with Blackmore (2007). The data collection instruments were designed using straightforward language and provided clear, respondent-friendly instructions. Before implementing them in the field, we conducted a pretest with 21 participants in Kamuli district to ensure their suitability and effectiveness.

Data Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of reliability, indicating the extent to which items in a scale measure the same construct or concept. The recommended level of internal consistency for research instruments is 0.7 or higher (Nunnally, 1978). The pretest data of 21 respondents was analysed using the Cronbach Alpha test, and the coefficient was found to be 0.943 was is higher than 0.7, hence making the instrument reliable.

Quality assurance in qualitative research adhered to the quality criteria established by Creswell (2003), encompassing four key strategies for assessing the quality of qualitative investigations: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. To ensure the trustworthiness of the collected qualitative data, member checking was employed. After conducting interviews, debrief meetings with participants were held to confirm that the data accurately reflected the discussed content. Further, consistency in the data analysis was fortified through triangulation, where two independent researchers performed coding and analysis and compared their findings.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from TU, and this letter was delivered to the Chief Administrative Officer of Kamuli District, and the researcher was granted permission to conduct the study. The purpose was explained, and the researcher ensured that the ethical conduct and protection of their rights of the respondents was upheld. Anonymity and confidentiality were diligently maintained throughout the process of data collection and the handling of responses. Respondents were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that the research posed no direct or indirect threats to their well-being. During the interviews, the researcher made notes of key points as they were discussed. Subsequently, the data underwent coding and analysis and was utilised in the generation of the final report.

Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were input into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for the purpose of data cleaning and error elimination. The responses were coded and organised in tables to facilitate their interpretation. To analyse the data, we employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0 (SPSS), which allowed the study to present the findings and statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages. Descriptive statistics were utilised to analyse the data, in accordance with the methodology outlined by Amin (2005). To investigate relationships and test hypotheses, inferential statistics were applied. This involved using Spearman's correlation coefficient to assess relationships between variables, and multivariate regression was conducted to measure changes in these variables. In the presentation of the findings, both tables and figures were used to visually represent the data. Frequency distribution tables were employed to tabulate data, illustrating the percentages calculated. The quantitative data collected via questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, enabling us to measure and describe the relationships between various variables.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyse qualitative data, content analysis was used to dissect findings derived from interviews with respondents. Content analysis was used to categorise verbal or behavioural data similarities and differences for classification, summarisation, and tabulation, where data were grouped in themes to derive meaning in a systematic and replicable manner as guided by Bell et al. (2018).

Measurement of Research Variables

Questions were developed on ordinal and nominal scales. The questionnaire used the five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree). In analysing the responses from the Likert scale, modes were computed to determine the prevailing thoughts of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

Consent: Participants provided consent by signing a consent form during data collection. Before conducting interviews, respondents received accurate and comprehensive information about the study's objectives. They were not coerced into providing consent or completing the questionnaires.

Confidentiality: The participant's privacy was ensured by securely storing all information collected during the research process, and the researcher had limited access.

Anonymity: Participants' identities were protected, and their personal information was not divulged or made public to safeguard their privacy. Codes were used.

Plagiarism: Proper attribution and authorisation were ensured to avoid plagiarism. Language, ideas, photos, and other content from sources were appropriately paraphrased, cited, and referenced to avoid plagiarism and uphold intellectual and ethical standards. Participation was voluntary, and no one was forced.

Results

Response Rate

Out of the 108 survey questionnaires that were initially distributed to the participants, a total of 100 fully completed questionnaires were collected. The study deemed this number of respondents as adequate, as it resulted in a commendable response rate of 92.5%. According to the recommendations of Taylor-Powell and Hermann in 2000, a response rate of 90.5% and above is considered acceptable. In addition to the quantitative data gathered through the surveys, a significant amount of qualitative information was acquired through interviews. Approximately 75% of Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) trainers and 75% of local leaders were interviewed, which the study found to be a sufficient and representative sample for obtaining qualitative insights.

Description of the studied respondents' characteristics.

This section entails the descriptive statistics about the respondents, that is, gender, age, marital status, educational background, household size, and occupation.

Table 2: Respondent background characteristics

Variable	Percent
Gender (n=100)	
Male	31.0
Female	69.0
Age (n=100)	
18-24 years	12.0
25-34 years	21.0
35-44 years	34.0
45-54 years	16.0
55 years and above	17.0
Education level (n=100)	
No formal education	23.0
Primary Education	49.0
Secondary education	14.0
Tertiary education	14.0
Marital status (n=100)	
Married	76.0
Single	8.0
Divorced	8.0
Widow	8.0
Household size (n=100)	

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1-3	21.0
4-6	57.0
Above 6	22.0
Occupation (n=100)	
Farmer	59.0
Self employed	33.0
Civil servant	8.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 2 indicates the bio data of the respondents, the gender of the group members, with the majority being females at 69%, whilst males are at 31%. This showed that the highest percentage of respondents were females.

In relation to age, the majority (34%) of the respondents are aged between 35-44 years, followed by 21% aged between 25-34 years, 17% aged 55 and above, 16% aged between 45-54 years, and the least were 12% aged between 18-24 years. This indicated that the largest number of respondents were aged between 35 and 44 years.

Most of the respondents attained primary education at 49%, followed by those who had no formal education at 23%, and those who had attained both secondary and tertiary education at 14%, respectively. The highest number of respondents were married at a percentage representation of 79%, while those who were single, divorced, and widows ranked at 8% each.

In relation to household size in Kamuli District, the majority, 57%, had 4-6 household members, 22% had more than 6 household members, and 21% had 1-3 household members. This implies that the majority have many household members, which has kept them in poverty. The results show that 59% were farmers, 33% were self-employed, and 8% were civil servants. This shows that the majority were farmers.

Descriptive statistics on Poverty

The percentage distribution of the respondents' opinions in relation to poverty is interpreted, and the percentages of those who strongly disagree and those who disagree are compared to those who strongly agree and those who agree.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on respondents' opinions regarding Poverty

Statements on Poverty	SD	D	NS	A	SA
I have land for expansion	16.0%	49.0%	9.0%	20.0%	6.0%
I eat three meals a day	21.0%	46.0%	6.0%	24.0%	3.0%
I have access to health care	18.0%	53.0%	5.0%	20.0%	4.0%
I have acquired multiple assets	17.0%	49.0%	10.0%	19.0%	5.0%
I provide quality education for my Children	15.0%	55.0%	8.0%	19.0%	3.0%
My household income has improved	17.0%	52.0%	4.0%	19.0%	8.0%

Source: Field data

The survey results paint a challenging picture for the respondents, with nearly half of them (49%) lacking access to land for expansion due to their concentration in camps, a substantial majority (46%) struggling to secure three meals a day, and a significant majority (53%) facing difficulties in accessing healthcare due to the distance to Health Centre Four. Moreover, the majority (49%) possess only a limited number of assets and are hopeful for future accumulation. Providing quality education to their children is a prevalent issue for most respondents (55%), and a similar majority (55%) indicated that their incomes have not shown any signs of improvement.

These findings underscore the urgent need for support and intervention in these areas and expose critical gaps in reducing poverty in Kamuli District. The findings specifically revealed that there are gaps in the quality of education the children receive, as well as access to health care. To affirm the above findings, key informant respondents had this to say;

"In my situation, the lack of land for expansion has been a

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persistent issue that affects every aspect of our livelihood. We don't have the opportunity to secure more land because we're confined to camps. My family and I dream of having a larger space to cultivate crops and maybe even rear livestock. With more land, we could diversify our sources of food and income, ultimately improving our living conditions and overall quality of life. It's a desire we've held for a long time, and it's disheartening to feel that it remains out of reach" (KII, February, 2024).

Additionally, another key informant respondent had this to say:

"When it comes to securing three meals a day, it's a daily struggle for my family and me. We often find it difficult to ensure that we all have enough to eat. Our meals consist of basic staples, and we sometimes have to make choices between quantity and quality. There have been days when we've had to skip meals to make our resources last longer. It's a constant worry and an ongoing challenge to put nutritious food on the table" (KII, February, 2024).

Another respondent had this to say;

"Accessing healthcare has been a major challenge for my community and me. The health center, located far from our area, is difficult to reach when needed, and the journey is long and arduous. This lack of timely medical care has, at times, put our health at risk. We desperately need a more accessible healthcare solution to ensure the well-being of our community" (KII, February, 2024).

Similarly, another respondent had this to say;

"As for owning assets, I only have a few items, like a small radio. My hope, like others in the survey, is to accumulate more assets in the future. I see my neighbours with solar panels, bicycles, motorcycles, and other valuable possessions, and it motivates me to work towards a better quality of life for my family. We're eager to improve our standard of living and provide a more secure future for our children. It's a goal that keeps us focused on making the most of our limited resources" (KII, February, 2024).

Descriptive statistics on VSLA.

In this section, the descriptive statistics of the contribution of savings, loans, and entrepreneurship to poverty were presented. In this segment, descriptive statistics on savings, loans, and entrepreneurship are presented in the table below.

Descriptive statistics of respondents' opinions on VS

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of respondents' opinions on VS

Statements on VS (Savings)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
People save willingly with VS groups	29.0%	39.0%	5.0%	21.0%	6.0%
I can easily access my savings in case of Emergencies	33.0%	37.0%	5.0%	19.0%	6.0%
I have more than one source of Income	36.0%	32.0%	6.0%	20.0%	6.0%
I save money regularly	25.0%	44.0%	5.0%	19.0%	7.0%
Is your household income sufficient to meet all basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, education, and sanitation)	24.0%	42.0%	8.0%	16.0%	10.0%
Did you start any income generation Activity as a result of participating in the savings group?	22.0%	47.0%	3.0%	18.0%	10.0%
The interest rate is favourable	17.0%	42.0%	4.0%	25.0%	12.0%
Members access loans whenever they Want	21.0%	35.0%	3.0%	28.0%	13.0%
I took a loan to start or expand my Businesses	17.0%	44.0%	2.0%	28.0%	9.0%
I took out a loan for house improvement	17.0%	33.0%	9.0%	31.0%	10.0%
The loan repayment rate is low	6.0%	29.0%	4.0%	39.0%	22.0%
I received entrepreneurship training	10.0%	41.0%	19.0%	22.0%	8.0%
I operate a small business	19.0%	40.0%	10.0%	21.0%	10.0%

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I believe Entrepreneurship creates Jobs	20.0%	40.0%	3.0%	27.0%	10.0%
I have a backyard garden	22.0%	37.0%	11.0%	20.0%	10.0%

Source: Field data (2024)

The results in the Table regarding people's willingness to save with VSLA groups show that 29% strongly disagreed, 39% disagreed, 5% were not sure, 21% agreed, and 6% strongly agreed. These results denote that the majority, 39% of respondents, disagreed on the matters regarding people saving willingly. The qualitative findings revealed that certain key informants held the view that members might not be ready to adhere to the requirements established by the VSLA. Additionally, some members, although willing to save, encountered difficulties in doing so, as evidenced by the following quotations: As per Key Respondent D, who serves as the chairperson of one of the villages, asserted that;

"Some members would like to save with the VSLA, but they are obligated to pay membership fees and face substantial fines if they fail to repay loans promptly. This compels some of them to resort to saving in small containers at home, banks, or other groups with more favourable conditions, as participation in the VSLA is not mandatory" (KII D, February 2024).

The previous response indicates that within VSLA groups, there is a significant emphasis on implementing internal controls that assess the potential, dedication, and diligence of prospective members both prior to and after their admission. This rigorous approach is intended to identify and exclude individuals who may default on their obligations, ultimately ensuring the ongoing and seamless operation of the groups. The perspective conveyed above contrasts with the viewpoint of another Key Informant, who happens to be a Trainer for these VSLA groups. This trainer emphasised that;

"Members are educated about the savings culture, and joining the VSLA is entirely voluntary. Many members are eager to save, although some face challenges due to limited income sources. For instance, I encountered a group member who expressed curiosity about VSLA operations; she received training but couldn't commence saving because she lacked a stable income. Therefore, the willingness of individuals to save should be evaluated with consideration for various factors, such as attendance at training sessions" (KII B, February, 2024).

The aforementioned responses highlight the varied perspectives among members regarding their willingness to save, which can potentially impact the initiatives aimed at enhancing household well-being. This underscores the importance of the Government of Uganda placing greater emphasis on training programs to shift attitudes and perceptions among members regarding savings.

Furthermore, the results regarding the statement I easily access my savings in case of emergencies " show that 33% strongly disagreed, 37% disagreed, 5% were not sure, 19% agreed, and 6% strongly disagreed that people are willing to save with VSLA. This implies that the majority (37%) of the members disagreed that people save willingly with VSLA. One of the key informants noted;

"In my view, while saving is undoubtedly important for financial security and preparedness, it may not always guarantee a swift solution when emergencies arise. Emergencies can be unpredictable and often require immediate access to funds that might exceed what individual savings can provide. For instance, consider a sudden medical emergency where hospital bills need to be paid urgently. Relying solely on personal savings might not be sufficient, especially when medical expenses can be exorbitant. In such situations, having access to other financial resources, such as insurance or a support network, can be equally or even more crucial than personal savings. Furthermore, emergencies can come in various forms – natural disasters, unexpected job loss, or unforeseen family crises. Each of these scenarios may demand a different response, and it's unrealistic to expect that saving alone can adequately address all of them. Therefore, while saving is an essential financial habit, it should be complemented with a well-rounded approach to emergency preparedness that includes multiple strategies beyond just personal savings" (KII A, February 2024).

Additionally, the results in Table 4 on the statement that I have more than one source of income revealed that 33 (33%) strongly disagreed, 37 (37%) disagreed, 5 (5%) were not sure, 19 (19%) agreed, and 6 (6%) strongly agreed that savings provide financial stability. This shows that the majority (37%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Conversely, Key Respondent C said, " Well, I have a somewhat different perspective. I understand that life on the island can be tough, but having multiple income sources has been a lifeline for many of us here. For instance, my family relies on fishing, farming, and some small trade within the camp. These income sources, while they may not always provide large sums, collectively help us maintain a sense of financial stability. It's like a safety net. When one source faces challenges, the others often help us bridge the gap. So, in my experience, I would have to disagree with the findings, at least from my personal standpoint" (KII C, February, 2024).

In addition, another respondent had this to say: "Certainly living on Kamuli Island, especially in the camps, can be quite challenging. While it's true that we have various income sources like fishing and farming, they're often unpredictable. The prices of fish keep fluctuating, and our

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crops are susceptible to weather conditions. So, there's a level of financial instability that comes with relying on these sources. Many of us have experienced the reality that having multiple sources of income doesn't always equate to financial stability" (KII A, February, 2024).

More so, results on the statement that I save money regularly show that 25 (25%) strongly disagree, 44 (44%) disagree, 5 (5%) were not sure, 19 (19%) agree, and 7 (7%) strongly agree that they save money regularly. This implies that the majority (44%) of the members disagreed that they save money each time they meet.

"Savings act as a form of collateral when applying for loans with a minimum interest rate of 1% per week. To illustrate, a member with a total savings of 100,000/= can potentially access a loan of up to 300,000/=. This incentivises members who aspire to secure larger loans to increase their savings; therefore, the more you save on every weekly sitting, the higher your chances of getting access to the funds you require for your chosen purposes" (KII B, February, 2024).

The earlier response emphasises that savings play a crucial role in determining the borrowing capacity within VSLA groups. This underscores the importance of actively promoting VSLA group membership throughout the district and encouraging existing members to boost their savings. Such efforts can significantly enhance the financial well-being and prospects of all participants.

Furthermore, the findings presented in Table 4 show findings on the statement " Is your household income sufficient to meet all basic needs revealed that 24% strongly disagree, 42% disagree, 8% were not sure, 16% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed that saving aids education and health expenses. This implies that the majority, 42% of the members, disagreed that members are in a position to provide their households with basic needs. One of the key informants noted, "While I wholeheartedly believe in the importance of saving money, it's become increasingly challenging to rely solely on personal savings to meet the ever-growing costs of education and healthcare. Take education, for instance; tuition fees seem to rise every year, and it's difficult to keep pace with those increases through savings alone. Additionally, health expenses can be incredibly unpredictable, and even a well-padded savings account may not suffice in the face of a major medical crisis. In such cases, insurance or other financial resources become essential. While saving is undoubtedly a valuable financial habit, it's essential to acknowledge its limitations when it comes to these specific expenses" (KII B, February 2024).

On the contrary, another respondent stated that: "In my personal experience, diligent savings have proven to be a lifeline when it comes to managing these critical aspects of life. Education expenses for my children, for instance, are significant, and without the savings I've accumulated over the years, I'd be facing substantial debt or struggling to provide quality education for them. Similarly, health emergencies can be financially draining, but having a well-maintained savings fund has given me peace of mind and the ability to handle unexpected medical bills without undue stress. For me, saving has truly been a reliable financial tool for ensuring the well-being and prospects of my family" (KII C, February, 2024).

The data presented in the statement the interest rate is favorable revealed that opinions on the favorability of the interest rate were diverse among respondents. Specifically, 17% strongly disagreed, 42% disagreed, 4% were uncertain, 25% agreed, and 12% strongly agreed that the interest rate is favourable. Notably, the majority (42%) expressed disagreement with the idea that the interest rate is favourable, while 25% of the surveyed individuals believed that the interest rate is indeed favourable. Key Informant E, during the interview, aligned with the majority perspective by stating, "I believe the interest rate is quite high. It can be a burden for some members, especially those who take larger loans. Because cases are usually brought to me concerning members who fail to clear up their loans. This involves selling their belongings, like household staff, where I have to witness to clear off the loans they owe to the group" (KII E, February, 2024).

Additionally, the findings in Table 4 reveal a wide range of perspectives regarding the ease of members accessing loans. Specifically, 12% strongly disagreed, 35% disagreed, 3% were uncertain, 28% agreed, and 13% strongly agreed with the notion that members can access loans easily. It's noteworthy that the majority (35%) disagreed with the idea that the interest rate is favourable, while 28% of the surveyed individuals believed that members can easily access loans when needed. For instance, Key Informant F, during the interview, expressed his view by stating that;

"In my experience, members generally find it quite straightforward to obtain loans. The VSLA group has streamlined the process, and as long as they meet the requirements, members can usually access loans without too much hassle" (KII F, February, 2024)

Moreover, data illustrating the opinions of survey respondents regarding whether they took a loan to start or expand a business revealed that 17% strongly disagreed, 44% disagreed, 2% were uncertain, 28% agreed, and 9% strongly agreed with the concept that loans are taken to fund startups or expand businesses. It is worth highlighting that the largest proportion of respondents (44%) expressed a negative stance on the notion that obtaining loans enhances business expansion. A key informant had this to say;

"Members do take loans to initiate or expand business ventures within the camp, contributing to the economic sustainability of families. These loans are characterised by their small, short-term nature and low-interest rates, making them accessible to self-employed individuals or members interested in launching businesses with minimal capital requirements or small-scale enterprises with a limited number of employees. These loans typically range from 50,000 to 3,000,000 Ugandan Shillings and are

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intended for business establishment" (KII A, February, 2024).

The findings provide additional insights into the respondents' perspectives on taking loans to improve their houses. Specifically, it reveals that 16% strongly disagreed, 39% disagreed, 3% were unsure, 31% agreed, and 11% strongly agreed to having improved their houses. It's noteworthy that a significant majority (39%) of respondents disagreed that they took loans to improve their houses. A respondent had this to say;

"There are group members who used loans to purchase solar panels for lighting. In our communities, access to reliable electricity is a big challenge, and many households rely on kerosene lamps for lighting, which pose both safety and health hazards. Recognizing this need for better lighting, some members decided to take loans from the VSLA group to invest in solar panels" (KII C, February, 2024).

With loans, members were able to acquire the necessary solar equipment, some cemented their houses, others bought iron sheets to construct and roof their houses, which significantly improved the quality of life for their families. Solar panels provided a safer, more sustainable, and cost-effective source of lighting. Moreover, it has positive implications for the children's education, as they could now study in the evenings without straining their eyes. In this case, the loan from the VSLA group directly contributed to an improvement in housing conditions by providing a clean and reliable source of lighting.

Table 4 provides additional insights into survey participants' perceptions of the loan application process. Specifically, the data indicate that 17 individuals (17%) strongly disagreed, 33 individuals (33%) disagreed, 9 individuals (9%) were uncertain, 31 individuals (31%) agreed, and 10 individuals (10%) strongly agreed with the idea that the loan application process is straightforward. Notably, a substantial majority (33%) of respondents expressed the belief that the process is indeed complicated, while 31% held the view that it is not.

The findings in Table 4 further show a wide range of perspectives, revealing that the rate at which members pay back is low. Specifically, 6% strongly disagreed, 29% disagreed, 4% were uncertain, 39% agreed, and 22% strongly agreed with the notion that members can access loans easily. It's noteworthy that the majority (39%) disagreed with the idea that the interest rate is favourable, while 22% of the surveyed individuals believed that members can easily access loans when needed. A key informant who noted that;

"Businesses use loans to manage their day-to-day operations. In this community, these loans help cover operational expenses until earnings reach a certain level. When members have good credit and a solid business plan, VSLAs offer short-term financial support for businesses to start and grow" (KII F, February, 2024).

The comment provided by Key Informant F underscores the significance of small loans in facilitating their daily business operations. Within this camp, small businesses often rely on these loans to cover their operational expenses until their earnings reach a sustainable level.

When members have a commendable credit history and a well-structured business plan, VSLAs extend financial support, which enables businesses to establish themselves and flourish. This highlights the pivotal role that loans play in fostering business growth by ensuring the smooth management of essential operational costs. Another respondent has this to say;

"Obtaining a loan involves a meticulous process in which members are required to establish a clear repayment strategy. Within the VSLA (Village Savings and Loan Association), a thorough assessment is conducted by reviewing members' passbooks, examining their total share contributions, and assessing their previous repayment history. This comprehensive evaluation aims to determine the borrowers' capacity to repay the loan effectively. This system underscores the importance of due diligence among camp residents" (KII C, February, 2024).

More results in Table 4 further highlight the statement on whether members received entrepreneurship training. To be specific, the data show that 10 individuals (10%) strongly disagreed, 41 individuals (41%) disagreed, 19 individuals (19%) were uncertain, 22 individuals (22%) agreed, and 8 individuals (8%) strongly agreed that members have received entrepreneurship training. It's worth noting that a significant majority (41%) of respondents held the opinion that the members did not receive the training, while 22% believed that members indeed received entrepreneurship training. Key Informant E, in his interview, expressed disagreement with the statement, stating that;

"From my perspective, it appears that most members have not received entrepreneurship training. I've interacted with several members who lack fundamental business knowledge and skills, which suggests a gap in training." (KII E, February, 2024)

On the other hand, Key Informant D shared a different perspective and had this to say;

"I've observed that a significant number of members have indeed received entrepreneurship training. They seem better equipped with business skills and strategies, and it reflects positively in their businesses' operations and growth. This is evidenced by the small businesses they've started, especially those who didn't have them before; for example, some of them sell charcoal, pancakes, vegetable stalls, fish stalls, and some sell fried cassava, among others" (KII D, February, 2024).

In addition, the findings in Table 4 on the statement I operate a small business revealed that 22% strongly disagreed, 47% disagreed, 3% were not sure, 18% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed that saving increases working capital. This implies that the majority, 47% of the members, disagreed that savings provide capital for the members. According to a key informant, B, who serves as a trainer, members

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predominantly initiate and manage their businesses with limited resources. They are responsible for bearing all the risks and rewards associated with their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Additionally, this perspective was corroborated by another key informant, reinforcing the idea that members commonly engage in various income-generating activities such as pancake selling, operating small restaurants, vending vegetables, running retail shops, and making chapattis to augment their earnings. This signifies that a portion of the members have proactively taken the initiative to establish small businesses, aiming to improve their household welfare and ultimately alleviate poverty. In contrast to the prevailing statistics and key informant accounts, one respondent voiced a different perspective. This individual disagreed with the assertion that members have ventured into income-generating activities. Their explanation revolved around the idea that while members may aspire to start businesses, their savings capacity is often insufficient to secure the necessary loans for business initiation. Additionally, they pointed out that those who have managed to kickstart their businesses often face significant challenges. This respondent emphasised,

"Many of the businesses that have been started don't even make it through the first year, and sadly, some of the entrepreneurs do not survive the early stages. It's a harsh reality" (KII A, February, 2024).

Table 4 further reveals findings on a wide range of perspectives regarding how entrepreneurship creates employment. Exclusively, 20% strongly disagreed, 40% disagreed, 3% were uncertain, 27% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed that entrepreneurship creates employment. It's worthy to note that the majority (40%) disagreed with the idea that entrepreneurship creates employment, while 27% of the surveyed individuals believed that members who have started businesses have actually employed other people. The responses from qualitative data seem to indicate that the majority of members experience the problem of inadequate capital to start and run some entrepreneurship on a larger scale, where they can ably provide jobs for other people within the community. A key informant noted that;

"The major challenge faced by members to start any business is a lack of enough capital to start; these people are innovative and knowledgeable, but the capacity to start a business is still quite challenging" (KII B, February, 2024).

It was also highlighted by one of the Key informant C that;

"Some members who are into farming especially those that into palm tree farming are the ones who occasionally give jobs to some members to help them in planting these trees, and this isn't sustainable because it happens once in a while and most of them prefer to work with the oil palm project directly, since their pay is way better" (KII C, February, 2024).

Table 4 offers further insights into whether survey participants have backyard gardens. To be explicit, the data show that 22 individuals (22%) strongly disagreed, 37 individuals (37%) disagreed, 11 individuals (11%) were uncertain, 20 individuals (20%) agreed, and 10 individuals (10%) strongly agreed that members have received entrepreneurship training. It's worth noting that a significant majority (37%) of respondents held the opinion that most members don't have backyard gardens; only a few do. A key respondent who is a trainer had this to say;

"As the trainer for these group members, I've had the opportunity to provide them with comprehensive training on backyard gardening techniques. It's been a rewarding experience to see them absorb this knowledge and become equipped to cultivate their own vegetables. However, in practice, I've noticed that only a select few have taken the initiative to implement what they've learned. Some members have demonstrated creativity by planting vegetables in bottles or repurposed plastics, while those with larger backyard spaces have also embraced the concept and initiated planting. It's heartening to witness these efforts and the enthusiasm they bring, but it's evident that there's still room for more members to put their training into action. With continued support and encouragement, I believe we can inspire even more of our members to cultivate their own backyard gardens for sustainable food production" (KII C, February, 2024).

Table 4 offers further insights into whether survey participants know that entrepreneurship provides skills and knowledge. The data show that 18 individuals (18%) strongly disagreed, 39 individuals (39%) disagreed, 9 individuals (9%) were not sure, 25 individuals (25%) agreed, and 9 individuals (9%) strongly agreed that members have received entrepreneurship skills and knowledge. It's worth noting that a significant majority (41%) of respondents held the opinion that the members did not receive the training, while 22% believed that members indeed received entrepreneurship training. The key respondents had the following to say;

"As a trainer, I have noticed that there is indeed a range of awareness among our group members regarding the benefits of entrepreneurship training. Some individuals actively seek out and embrace the training programs we offer, recognising the value of acquiring new skills and knowledge. For them, entrepreneurship is a path to personal and professional growth. However, I've also encountered participants who initially held doubts about whether entrepreneurship could provide them with valuable skills and knowledge. Through our training sessions, I've witnessed a transformation in their understanding as they realise the practical skills and knowledge they gain, which empowers them to pursue entrepreneurial ventures with confidence" (Key Informant A).

In addition, another key informant had the following to say;

"As a local leader, I've had the opportunity to engage with members of our community on various topics, including entrepreneurship. There's a spectrum of awareness among our residents. Some individuals are proactive in seeking out entrepreneurship training and are keenly aware of the skills and knowledge it can offer. On the other hand, I've encountered community members who are less informed about these opportunities. They may not fully grasp the potential benefits of entrepreneurship in terms of skill development and knowledge acquisition. As a leader, part of my role is to bridge this awareness gap by promoting and facilitating access to entrepreneurship training, ensuring that more of our residents can benefit from the valuable skills and knowledge it provides" (Key informant D).

VSLA and Household Welfare: Inferential Statistics

This section presents correlation results testing the significance of the contribution of savings to poverty in Kamuli District. This will be followed by regression results testing the effect of VSLA on Poverty. The inferential statistics will be presented according to the study objectives, starting with the contribution of savings on poverty, followed by the contribution of loans, and lastly the contribution of entrepreneurship, as well as the multiple regression of the three factors on poverty.

Correlation analysis between Savings and Household welfare

To establish whether there was a relationship between savings and poverty reduction, a correlation analysis was performed.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation coefficient of the contribution of savings to poverty

		Savings	Household welfare
Savings	Pearson Correlation	1	.450(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Poverty	Pearson Correlation	.450(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The Pearson correlation coefficient testing the significance between savings and poverty was 0.450 and positive, which indicated a moderate positive significance between savings and poverty. The p-value for the Pearson coefficient ($p = 0.000$), which is less than 5% significancy. This result, therefore, implied a significant positive relationship between savings and poverty. The analysis went further to establish the significance and magnitude of the effect of savings on poverty.

Table 6: Regression results for the effect of savings on household welfare.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.450(a)	.202	.194	.81266

a Predictors: (Constant), savings on household welfare

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	16.399	1	16.399	24.831	.000(a)
	Residual	64.721	98	.660		
	Total	81.120	99			

a Predictors: (Constant), savings on Household welfare
b Dependent Variable: Household welfare

Coefficients(a)

Mode l		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	1.585	.186		8.516	.000
	savings	.347	.070	.450	4.983	.000

a Dependent Variable: Household welfare

The coefficient of determination (Adjusted R^2) was 0.194, indicating that Savings explain 19.4% of the variation in poverty in Kamuli District. Notably, there is an 80.6% variation in poverty, which can be explained by other factors besides the contribution of savings.
Regarding the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results, the p-value for the F-statistic was 0.000, which is less than 5% significant level, indicating that the regression model, which was fitted to predict the effect of savings on poverty, was statistically significant. Hence, the alternate hypothesis that "there is a significant contribution of savings on improving household welfare" was accepted. In terms of magnitude of effect, the standardized beta coefficients were 0.450, indicating that saving dimensions such as regular savings, accumulated shares, people saving willingly, and having more than one income source would improve household welfare by 45%.

Discussion

The study found that savings don't enhance financial security and stability; however, a one-unit increase in savings will lead to a 0.168-unit increase in poverty reduction. The second level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which revolves around the need for security and safety, disagrees with the findings because this level entails the desire to achieve a sense of stability and protection from various uncertainties, dangers, and fears, among other concerns. In this context, the act of saving money plays a crucial role in providing individuals with financial security, guarding them against unforeseen circumstances, and helping them withstand financial adversities, such as unexpected income shocks (Ruberton et al., 2016). Additionally, Jayasinghe et al. (2020) notes the presence of financial security measures can contribute to an enhanced sense of financial well-being, which in turn reduces the poverty levels of individuals. In essence, when individuals feel financially secure and protected, it can lead to greater life satisfaction, a better quality of life, and a higher sense of well-being (Chipunza et al., 2023). More so, Brooks (2022) asserts that mastering the art of safeguarding your financial stability is a crucial life skill. It doesn't require extraordinary intelligence; rather, it calls for an understanding of some basic principles, the development of a strategic approach, and a willingness to stick to it. Keep in mind that the returns on your investments are never guaranteed. Just like in other aspects of life, if you diligently plan for financial security and remain open to making necessary adjustments along the way, you can mitigate concerns about the eventual outcome.
The study found that Members are not willing to save with VSLA. This is not in agreement with Hugh et al (2007), who note that since joining the group is self-selected, whereby no member is forced to join the VSLA, their findings disagree with the study results that members are unwilling to save with their groups. Additionally, according to Banerjee et al. (2012), VSLA plays a crucial role in instilling a savings culture within its member groups. Their research findings indicated that individuals who participated in these groups and actively saved were in a more advantageous financial position compared to non-members. This was primarily because their household income had improved. A comparative analysis of the monthly family income and consumption expenditure between group members and non-members revealed a noteworthy increase in the average monthly family income and consumption expenditure, considering current prices. Particularly significant was the financial progress observed among group members who had initiated small businesses following their association with the group.
The research outcomes indicated that saving alone may not necessarily foster financial literacy and independence. However, in contrast, Marsden et al. (2020) argued in their study that savings groups play a pivotal role in advancing financial inclusion and empowerment. This perspective differs from the findings of the study. Moreover, these groups serve as a platform for participants to unlearn, relearn, and acquire various life skills and dynamics. Members can initiate small businesses and practice savings within these groups. Furthermore, Masuda (2021), in his research, highlights that group members gain valuable skills

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and knowledge that aid them in improving their financial management, thereby achieving greater independence. This contributes to the maturation of financial resilience and stability among the members, facilitated by access to financial education and resources.

The results suggest that saving alone may not consistently facilitate investment in income-generating ventures. In contrast, Karlan et al. (2012) and Maganga (2020) in their research highlighted that members often utilise their savings to initiate business enterprises. Similarly, as cited by Maganga (2020), findings from Anyango's study in 2005 indicated that saving played a role in elevating members' income levels, leading to increased asset accumulation. Additionally, Odokonyero (2012) uncovered that VSLAs had a positive impact on the well-being of households within the groups. This influence was observed in the provision of essential needs and the establishment of small businesses by group members.

The study revealed that savings do increase household income, aid education expenditure, and health expenses. These findings concur with Hardi (2019), who found that VSLA members had lower medical expenditures, which reduced health expenses, and also being part of a VSLA improved the education of school-going children, hence reducing the rate of dropping out of school within families.

Conclusion

The findings pertaining to the perception of savings among members of Village Savings and Loan Associations in Kamuli District provide a critical starting point for our analysis. Contrary to the expectations set by individual theory, a significant portion of respondents expressed scepticism regarding the capacity of savings to enhance financial security, stability, and independence. This divergence from conventional wisdom underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the role of savings in low-resource communities. It suggests that while savings are undoubtedly a fundamental financial practice, their impact on various aspects of well-being depends on a multitude of factors, including the local context, access to alternative financial instruments, and the prevailing socioeconomic conditions.

Furthermore, the study revealed that a substantial proportion of respondents disagreed with the idea that people willingly save within the VSLA framework. This finding highlights a critical area for exploration and intervention. It suggests that the VSLA model, while celebrated for its potential to foster financial inclusion, may face challenges in effectively engaging and retaining members. The imposition of heavy fines for loan defaults emerged as a significant deterrent for some individuals, prompting them to seek alternative savings mechanisms. This underscores the importance of striking a balance between risk management within VSLAs and the need to encourage member participation through less punitive measures. It also calls for a deeper examination of the motivations and barriers that influence individuals' decisions to save within these groups.

On the brighter side, the study's quantitative analysis demonstrated a moderate positive correlation between savings and household welfare improvement. This empirical evidence challenges the scepticism expressed by some respondents and highlights the tangible impact that savings can have on improving household welfare. It suggests that, at least in the context of Kamuli District, an increase in savings is associated with a corresponding increase in household welfare. This finding reinforces the importance of savings as a tool for economic empowerment, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

The qualitative insights from key informants provided a more granular understanding of the mechanisms through which savings contribute to household welfare improvement. Members' ability to leverage their accumulated savings as collateral for loans within VSLAs emerged as a crucial factor. This practice not only enables members to access much-needed capital for income-generating activities but also incentivises them to save diligently. These findings align with previous research that has emphasised the role of savings as a gateway to financial inclusion and entrepreneurship.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives within VSLA groups. While some members are proactive in utilising their savings to initiate small businesses and investments, others may face challenges related to limited income sources. This underscores the need for tailored interventions that address the unique circumstances and aspirations of VSLA members. Financial literacy programs and targeted training can play a pivotal role in bridging knowledge gaps and empowering members to make informed decisions regarding their savings and investments.

In conclusion, this study provides a multifaceted view of the relationship between savings and household welfare improvement in Kamuli District. It challenges conventional assumptions about the universality of savings' impact on financial security and willingness to save within VSLAs. Nevertheless, it offers empirical evidence of the positive correlation between savings and household welfare improvement, highlighting the potential of savings as a means of economic empowerment. The study underscores the importance of context-specific interventions, inclusive financial education, and innovative approaches to balance risk management and member engagement within VSLAs.

Recommendation

It is crucial to focus on enhancing financial literacy and education among the members of VSLAs in Kamuli District. Providing regular training sessions on the benefits and best practices of savings to help members better understand how saving leads to improved household income, financial security, and independence.

VSLAs should reconsider the punitive fines imposed on members who fail to repay their loans promptly. Excessive fines can discourage members from saving and seeking loans within the VSLAs. A fair and reasonable penalty system should be put in place to promote a more conducive savings environment.

VSLA trainers and leaders should actively promote the benefits of savings, especially in terms of using savings to invest in income-generating activities. Members should be educated on how savings can lead to start-up capital for small businesses, which can contribute to improved household income.

Encourage members to diversify their savings methods. While VSLAs provide one avenue for savings, members should also be aware of and encouraged to explore other savings options, such as formal banking and investment opportunities that can complement their VSLA savings.

Strengthening the Link between Savings and Investment: Focus on strengthening the link between savings and investment in income-generating activities. Encourage members to use their savings to create sustainable businesses and livelihoods, which can significantly impact poverty reduction.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the impact of savings on household income, education, health, and household welfare improvement. Regular assessments can help in making data-driven decisions to improve the effectiveness of VSLAs.

Policy and Government Support: Advocate for policies that support and promote savings, particularly within the context of VSLAs. Government agencies should recognise the role of these groups in household welfare improvement and provide the necessary support and incentives.

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List of abbreviations

BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere.
CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
ERP	Economic Recovery Program
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KII	Key informant interview
LSGs	Learning and Saving Groups
MFBs	Microfinance Banks

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MFIs	Microfinance Institutions
NDP	National Development Plan
SCSs	Savings and Credit Schemes
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SILCs	Savings Internal Lending Communities
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loan Associations

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Author contributions
AW- Developed and investigated the study.
MS- Supervised the study.
SK- Supervised the study.

Data availability
Data is available upon request.

Informed consent
Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

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