

Public Works Programmes and Social Empowerment among Beneficiary Communities in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania

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Abstract

Public Works Programmes (PWPs) have increasingly been recognized as important social protection interventions that contribute not only to employment creation but also to broader social empowerment outcomes. However, empirical evidence on their contribution to social empowerment in rural Tanzania remains limited. This study examined the contribution of Public Works Programmes to social empowerment among beneficiary communities in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. A descriptive research design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted. The study involved 300 household heads selected through simple random sampling for the quantitative component and 10 Public Works Programme beneficiaries purposively selected for qualitative interviews. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data were obtained through document review. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, whereas qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. The findings indicate that respondents perceived Public Works Programmes as contributing to several dimensions of social empowerment, including community participation (78.0%), improved social status of beneficiary households (80.7%), strengthened social networks and support systems (63.5%), and stronger connections with local governance and development initiatives (83.5%). Qualitative findings further indicated that beneficiaries associated programme participation with increased confidence, social recognition, civic engagement, and stronger interpersonal relationships. The study concludes that Public Works Programmes are associated with important dimensions of social empowerment among beneficiary communities, extending beyond their role in providing temporary employment and income support.

Keywords: Public Works Programmes; Social Empowerment; Social Protection; Community Participation; Tanzania.

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1. Introduction

Social empowerment is increasingly recognized as a critical dimension of sustainable development because it enhances individuals' capacity to participate in decision-making processes, access resources, strengthen social networks, and exercise greater control over their lives. In developing countries, public works programmes (PWP) have emerged as important social protection interventions designed not only to alleviate poverty but also to promote broader socioeconomic and empowerment outcomes among vulnerable populations. Typically, these programmes provide temporary employment through labor-intensive community projects while creating public assets that contribute to local development (Dadzie & Ofei-Aboagye, 2021; Loewe & Zintl, 2024).

Public works programmes have been widely utilized across the world as policy mechanisms for addressing unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion among vulnerable populations. A notable example is the implementation of the New Deal initiatives in the United States during the Great Depression of the 1930s, where programmes such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration generated employment opportunities while simultaneously enhancing public infrastructure and promoting community engagement (Hart, 2024). Similarly, several European countries adopted initiatives during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis to cushion vulnerable households against economic shocks and promote social cohesion. Although these programmes contributed to income stabilization and social inclusion, evidence regarding their long-term empowerment outcomes remains inconclusive (Sekulova et al., 2023). In Asia, India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has become one of the largest public works programmes globally, guaranteeing up to 100 days of employment annually to rural households. Studies indicate that the programme has improved women's participation in public affairs, strengthened community engagement, and enhanced household decision-making power, despite implementation challenges such as delayed wage payments and administrative inefficiencies (BAIK, 2024; Singh & Agnihotri, 2024)

In Sub-Saharan Africa, PWPs have become central components of social protection and poverty reduction strategies. Countries such as Ethiopia and South Africa have implemented large-scale public works initiatives aimed at addressing chronic poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) has contributed to improved household resilience, food security, and community participation, while South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) has generated millions of temporary employment opportunities and enhanced social inclusion among marginalized groups (Sibanda, 2021). Nevertheless, scholars continue to debate the extent to which these programmes create lasting social empowerment beyond their immediate income-support functions. Concerns persist regarding the temporary nature of employment, limited skills transfer, and the



sustainability of empowerment gains once programme participation ends (Wang et al., 2023).

Within East Africa, governments have increasingly adopted PWP as mechanisms for addressing rural poverty and vulnerability. Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme and Ethiopia's PSNP have demonstrated positive outcomes in strengthening community participation and improving access to social and economic opportunities (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024; Horas et al., 2026). However, studies conducted in the region suggest that while PWPs contribute significantly to short-term welfare improvements, evidence regarding their influence on social empowerment dimensions such as participation in community governance, leadership development, social capital formation, and self-confidence remains limited (Chilmy et al., 2026; Dadzie & Ofei-Aboagye, 2021; Horas et al., 2026). Consequently, there is a growing need for context-specific studies that assess the social empowerment outcomes of these interventions at the community level.

In Tanzania, public works interventions have largely been implemented through the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), established in 2000 as a flagship social protection programme aimed at improving the welfare of poor and vulnerable households. Through its Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN), TASAF combines cash transfers with labor-intensive public works projects to provide income support while facilitating community development (Green, 2021). The programme has reached millions of beneficiaries across the country and has contributed to infrastructure development, increased household income, and enhanced access to basic services (Mahesh et al., 2023). Beyond their economic and social protection functions, TASAF-supported public works initiatives provide opportunities for beneficiaries to participate in community activities, interact with local institutions, strengthen social networks, and engage in community development processes. These activities may therefore be associated with several dimensions of social empowerment, including community participation, social recognition, social connectedness, civic engagement, and community solidarity. However, empirical evidence on these social empowerment dimensions among beneficiaries in Tanzania remains limited and context-specific. Existing studies have largely concentrated on poverty reduction, income generation, consumption patterns, and household welfare, with comparatively less attention to social empowerment outcomes such as community participation, decision-making, social status, leadership engagement, and social capital formation. (Komba & Kitole, 2025; Rustamova et al., 2025).

Mpwapwa District in Dodoma Region presents a particularly relevant setting for examining the relationship between public works programmes and social empowerment. The district is characterized by recurrent droughts, low agricultural productivity, limited employment opportunities, and persistent rural poverty, making many households dependent on social protection interventions (Mdemu, 2021). Through TASAF-supported public works projects, beneficiaries participate in activities such as rural road



construction, environmental conservation, and community infrastructure development. While these initiatives provide temporary employment and improve local infrastructure, their contribution to social empowerment outcomes remains unclear. Participation in such projects may strengthen social networks, increase confidence in community engagement, enhance participation in local decision-making processes, and promote leadership opportunities among beneficiaries. However, empirical evidence documenting these outcomes within the district remains scarce.

Although a growing body of literature exists on social protection and poverty reduction in Tanzania, previous studies have largely focused on programme implementation, income generation, household welfare, and poverty-related outcomes at national and regional levels. For example, Emmanuel and Hepelwa (2024) examined the effects of integrated conditional cash transfers and public works programmes on household income generation in rural Tanzania, while Javed et al. (2021) focused on social safety nets and poverty alleviation. Khan and Morrissey (2020) investigated household income diversification strategies, and Mhina et al. (2025) examined income from Public Works Programmes and household economic stability. Although these studies provide valuable evidence on the economic and welfare dimensions of social protection interventions, they give comparatively limited attention to the social empowerment experiences of programme beneficiaries.

In particular, limited empirical evidence is available on how participation in Public Works Programmes is associated with social empowerment dimensions such as community participation, social status, social networks and support systems, decision-making capacity, leadership development, engagement with local governance and development initiatives, and community solidarity and cohesion, particularly at the district level. This gap is important because social empowerment represents an important dimension through which public works programmes may contribute to social inclusion, community development, and longer-term poverty reduction. Generating empirical evidence on these outcomes can also provide useful insights for the implementation of Tanzania's National Employment Policy and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Against this background, this study was undertaken to examine the contribution of Public Works Programmes to social empowerment among beneficiary communities in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. Specifically, the study focused on five dimensions of social empowerment: community participation, social status, social networks and support systems, connection to local governance and development initiatives, and community solidarity and cohesion.

1. Methodology

1.1. Study Area Descriptions

The study was carried out in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania, for several compelling reasons. Firstly, the district has been an active beneficiary of the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) programme, which utilizes public works interventions to improve household livelihoods and overall welfare. Rural districts such as Mpwapwa, where a large proportion of residents depend on agriculture and informal economic activities, often rely on public works programmes as important sources of income generation and social empowerment (NBS, 2022)

Secondly, Mpwapwa experiences relatively high levels of poverty, with approximately 65% of its population living below the national poverty threshold, making it a suitable setting for investigating the effects of public works interventions on household welfare outcomes (Mdemu, 2021). Furthermore, the district has benefited from considerable government investment in skills development initiatives implemented through public works programmes, particularly those supported by the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), which seek to strengthen the employability and economic resilience of rural communities (Komba & Kitole, 2025). Taken together, these characteristics make Mpwapwa District a relevant setting for examining social empowerment associated with participation in Public Works Programmes. The implementation of TASAF-supported public works provides opportunities for beneficiaries to interact with other community members, participate in collective activities, engage with local government structures, and contribute to community development initiatives. These features provide an appropriate context for examining beneficiaries' experiences and perceptions regarding the social empowerment dimensions associated with participation in Public Works Programmes.

1.2. Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed to examine the contribution of Public Works Programmes (PWP) to social empowerment among beneficiary communities in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to describe beneficiaries' perceptions and experiences regarding different dimensions of social empowerment associated with participation in PWP. The study did not seek to establish a causal effect of programme participation on social empowerment.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires to assess respondents' perceptions



across key dimensions of social empowerment, namely community participation, social status, social networks and support systems, connection with local governance and development initiatives, and community solidarity and cohesion. Qualitative data were collected through interviews to obtain detailed accounts of beneficiaries' experiences and perceptions regarding their participation in Public Works Programmes and associated social empowerment outcomes.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled the study to provide both numerical descriptions and contextual explanations of the social empowerment experiences reported by beneficiaries. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted in terms of reported perceptions, experiences, and patterns rather than causal effects

1.3. Target Population

The target population comprised household heads from households participating in the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) public works component in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. Household heads were selected as the primary quantitative respondents because they were considered to have relevant knowledge and experience regarding household participation in Public Works Programmes and their associated social empowerment experiences. According to NBS (2022), Mpwapwa District comprises approximately 1,200 households, which constituted the study population from which the sample was drawn.

For the qualitative component, participants were selected from among beneficiaries who had direct experience of participating in Public Works Programmes and were considered able to provide detailed information on their experiences and perceptions regarding social empowerment. The qualitative participants provided contextual information that complemented the quantitative findings, particularly in relation to community participation, social relationships, social recognition, engagement with local governance, and community cooperation.

1.4. Sample Size

For the quantitative component, the sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for a known population. The study population consisted of approximately 1,200 households participating in the Public Works Programmes in Mpwapwa District. Using a 5% acceptable sampling error, the calculated sample size was 300 household heads. Thus, 300 household heads constituted the quantitative sample for the study.

The quantitative sample was distributed across the identified programme beneficiary households in the study area, and individual household heads were selected using simple random sampling. The sample was intended to capture diverse experiences and perceptions of social empowerment among Public Works Programme beneficiaries.. The formula is represented as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:

n -The sample size

N- The population size is 1200 households participating in the programme constituted the study population

e - The acceptable sampling error =0.05

$$n = \frac{1200}{1 + 1200(0.05)^2}$$

Thus, sample size (n) = 300

1.5. Qualitative Participants and Sampling

For the qualitative component, ten participants were purposively selected from among beneficiaries of Public Works Programmes in Mpwapwa District. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who had direct experience of participating in the programme and were able to provide detailed information on their experiences and perceptions concerning social empowerment. The participants provided qualitative information on community participation, social relationships, confidence, social recognition, engagement with local governance structures, and community cooperation.

The qualitative participants complemented the 300 household heads included in the quantitative component by providing in-depth accounts of beneficiaries' experiences. Interviews continued until sufficient information had been obtained to address the qualitative aspects of the study. To protect participants' confidentiality, the qualitative findings are presented using identifiers such as Respondent A, Respondent B, and Respondent C rather than participants' names.

1.6. Sampling Procedure

The study employed different sampling procedures for the quantitative and qualitative components. For the quantitative component, simple random sampling was used to select 300 household heads from the identified population of approximately 1,200 households participating in Public Works Programmes. This approach provided



each eligible household head with an equal opportunity of being selected and helped to obtain a broad range of beneficiary experiences and perceptions regarding social empowerment.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience with Public Works Programmes and could provide detailed information relevant to the study objectives. The qualitative participants were selected based on their experience and ability to provide information concerning the five dimensions of social empowerment examined in the study: community participation, social status, social networks and support systems, connection to local governance and development initiatives, and community solidarity and cohesion.

1.7. Data Collection Methods

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. For the quantitative component, structured questionnaires were administered to 300 household heads selected from households participating in Public Works Programmes in Mpwapwa District. The questionnaire focused on five key dimensions of social empowerment: community participation, social status, social networks and support systems, connection with local governance and development initiatives, and community solidarity and cohesion. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to these dimensions.

For the qualitative component, in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected Public Works Programme beneficiaries who had direct experience of programme participation. The interviews explored beneficiaries' experiences and perceptions concerning community participation, social relationships, confidence, social recognition, engagement with local governance structures, and community cooperation. The qualitative interviews provided contextual explanations for the patterns observed in the quantitative findings.

Secondary data were obtained through a review of relevant academic literature, government documents, programme reports, and other publications relating to Public Works Programmes, social protection, community participation, and social empowerment. The integration of quantitative, qualitative, and secondary information provided contextual support for interpreting the study findings.

1.8. Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, to summarize respondents' perceptions regarding the identified dimensions of social empowerment. The analysis focused on community participation, social status, social networks and support systems, connection with local governance and development initiatives, and community solidarity and cohesion. The findings were presented in tables and interpreted according to the proportions of respondents who strongly disagreed, disagreed, remained neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed with the respective statements.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed using content analysis. Responses were organized into themes corresponding to the major dimensions of social empowerment examined in the quantitative component. The qualitative findings were used to provide contextual explanations and illustrative accounts of beneficiaries' experiences and perceptions. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled triangulation of evidence concerning social empowerment associated with participation in Public Works Programmes.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, ethical considerations were given priority. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the data to be collected, and their rights as participants, including the right to participate voluntarily and to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection after they had been adequately informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and the nature of their participation.

Confidentiality and privacy were maintained throughout the study by anonymizing the information collected and securely storing the research data. Participants were assured that the information they provided would be used strictly for research purposes and would not be disclosed in a manner that could identify them. In reporting the qualitative findings, participants were identified using codes such as Respondent A, Respondent B, and Respondent C rather than their names.

The study adhered to applicable institutional and regulatory ethical guidelines governing research involving human participants. Necessary permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant authorities in Mpwapwa District. The researchers also ensured that participation did not expose respondents to unnecessary harm,



disadvantage, or penalty and that participants' rights, dignity, privacy, and confidentiality were respected throughout the research process.

2. Results and discussion

2.1. Descriptive Results on Public Works Programmes and Social Empowerment among Beneficiary Households

The findings (Table 1.) indicate that Public Works Programmes (PWP) have contributed significantly to various dimensions of social empowerment among beneficiary households. Social empowerment encompasses increased participation in community activities, strengthened social relationships, enhanced social status, improved engagement with governance structures, and greater community cohesion. The results suggest that most respondents perceived PWPs as important mechanisms for promoting social inclusion and strengthening community interactions.

Table 1:
Social Empowerment and Inclusivity

Statement	Strong disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strong Agree
Providing opportunities for community participation.	12 (4.1%)	15 (5.2%)	37 (12.8%)	84 (29.0%)	142 (49.0%)
Public Works Programmes have led to an improvement in the social status of households	0 (0.0%)	21 (7.2%)	35 (12.1%)	123 (42.4%)	111 (38.3%)
Social networks and support systems have been strengthened	0 (0.0%)	29 (10.0%)	77 (26.6%)	129 (44.5%)	55 (19.0%)
Households participate in Public Works Programmes are better connected to local governance and development initiatives.	9 (3.1%)	4 (1.4%)	35 (12.1%)	115 (39.7%)	127 (43.8%)
Public Works Programmes foster greater community solidarity and cohesion.	6 (2.1%)	54 (18.6%)	102 (35.2%)	105 (36.2%)	23 (7.9%)

These results are discussed as follows:

3.1.1 Community participation



The findings indicate that respondents perceived Public Works Programmes as providing opportunities for community participation. As shown in Table 1, 78.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that PWPs provide opportunities for community participation, while 9.3% disagreed and 12.8% remained neutral. This finding suggests that participation in PWPs provides beneficiaries with opportunities to engage in collective activities and community development initiatives.

These findings are consistent with studies conducted in several developing countries that have demonstrated the role of public works programmes in enhancing civic engagement and social participation. For instance, Oguntona et al.(2023) and Vosloo (2021) observed that public works programmes in Southern Africa promoted community involvement by encouraging beneficiaries to participate in local development projects. Similarly, Beierl(2022) noted that labor-intensive public works programmes create opportunities for community members to engage in productive activities that strengthen local participation and social inclusion.

3.1.2 Social status

The results further revealed that 80.7% of respondents perceived an improvement in the social status of beneficiary households following their participation in PWPs, while 7.2% disagreed and 12.1% remained neutral, while only 7.2% disagreed and 12.1% were neutral. This finding suggests that beneficiaries associate participation in PWPs with increased community recognition and social standing.

This finding aligns with the work of Rustamova et al. (2025), who argued that social protection interventions, including public works programmes, contribute to social inclusion by improving beneficiaries' standing within society. Likewise, Byaruhanga and Debesay (2021) found that social protection programmes often enhance beneficiaries' self-esteem, dignity, and social recognition, thereby improving their social status within communities.

3.1.3. Social networks and support systems

Regarding social networks and support systems, 63.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their social relationships had been strengthened through participation in PWPs, while 10.0% disagreed and 26.6% remained neutral. The finding suggests that participation in collective public works activities provides opportunities for beneficiaries to interact, develop relationships, and establish or strengthen community support mechanisms.

The results corroborate findings by Adato and Haddad (2002), who reported that participation in social protection programmes enhances social capital by strengthening interpersonal relationships and community support networks. Similarly, Ibrahim et al. (2026) emphasized that social interactions fostered through collective activities



contribute to the development of bonding and bridging social capital, which are essential for community resilience and social empowerment.

3.1.4 Connection to local governance

A notable finding is that 83.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that households participating in PWP were better connected to local governance and development initiatives, while 4.5% disagreed and 12.1% remained neutral. This finding suggests that participation in PWP may provide opportunities for beneficiaries to interact with local government structures, community leaders, and development processes.

The finding is consistent with the observations of Ibrahim (2023), who argued that public employment programmes can strengthen citizen-state relationships by increasing interaction between beneficiaries and local government institutions. Similarly, Karunarathne and Sampath (2025) reported that well-designed public works programmes facilitate community participation in local governance and improve beneficiaries' awareness of development initiatives.

3.1.5 Community Solidarity and Cohesion

The study also examined respondents' perceptions of community solidarity and cohesion. The findings show that 44.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that PWP foster greater community solidarity and cohesion, while 20.7% disagreed and 35.2% remained neutral. The relatively high proportion of neutral responses suggests that perceptions regarding community cohesion were more varied than those relating to other dimensions of social empowerment.

The positive perception of enhanced community solidarity can be explained by the collaborative nature of public works activities, which encourage collective action toward common community goals. These findings are in line with those of Orazani et al. (2023), who argued that participation in collective community activities strengthens trust, reciprocity, and social cohesion. Similarly, Sonke et al. (2025) and Clark (2021) found that public works programmes contribute to community cohesion by creating shared experiences and fostering cooperation among participants. However, the relatively large neutral response may indicate that the extent to which cohesion is strengthened depends on local contexts, implementation approaches, and existing community dynamics.

3.2 Qualitative Findings on Social Empowerment Associated with Participation in Public Works Programmes

Qualitative evidence from the interviews complemented the quantitative findings by providing contextual accounts of beneficiaries' experiences and perceptions of social empowerment as here under.

One respondent explained:

“Public Works Programmes provide a platform for people to engage in meaningful community activities. When we participate, we not only contribute to our community but also gain new skills that improve our personal lives. It brings us together as a community, and that’s very empowering.” (Respondent A, Mpwapwa District, 10 March 2025).

This testimony illustrates beneficiaries' perceptions that participation in PWPs extends beyond temporary employment and provides opportunities for social interaction, community participation, and capacity development. The survey results reinforce this perspective, with nearly half of the respondents (49.0%) strongly agreeing that Public Works Programmes play a critical role in promoting social empowerment among beneficiary households and communities.

-Moreover, when asked about the benefits of social participation, Respondent B stated:

“I have gained confidence and respect within my community by taking part in public works. Before, I felt like an outsider, but now, I feel valued, and my opinions matter during community meetings” (Respondent B, Mpwapwa District, 11th March 2025).

This finding is supported by Sibanda (2021), who found that South Africa’s Expanded Public Works Programme significantly enhanced the confidence and community participation of disadvantaged women and youth, reinforcing the view that Public Works Programmes promote social inclusion and empowerment. Similarly, Mahato and Jha (2024) reported that participation in structured programmes, such as self-help groups, improves not only economic outcomes but also psychological empowerment, self-esteem, and self-worth.

Regarding the contribution of Public Works Programmes on the social status of households in Mpwapwa District, 80.7% of respondents (combining those who agreed and strongly agreed) acknowledged that these programmes have improved their social status. Notably, 38.3% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, suggesting that participation in Public Works Programmes has contributed to enhancing the social standing and recognition of beneficiary households within their communities.

-Respondent C shared:

“Since I became involved in Public Works Programmes, my standing in the community has changed. People see me differently now because I am contributing to

something important, and this has boosted my status within my family and peers.” (Respondent C, Mpwapwa District, 13th March 2025).

This finding is consistent with the study by Emmanuel and Hepelwa (2024), who concluded that integrated public works and conditional cash transfer programmes in rural Tanzania not only increased household income but also strengthened social capital and enhanced households' visibility within their communities. Similarly, Rustamova et al.(2025) emphasized the dual benefits of public employment schemes in Asia, highlighting that they contribute not only to economic gains but also to improved social respect, dignity, and social inclusion.

Respondent D elaborated further:

“I believe that these programmes allow individuals to prove their worth. Through consistent participation, one earns respect from the community, and this leads to improved relationships with local leaders and neighbors.” (Respondent D, Mpwapwa District, 12th March 2025).

The strengthening of social networks and support systems was another important social empowerment outcome reported by beneficiaries. A significant 63.5% of respondents (combined agree and strongly agree) affirmed that their social networks had been strengthened due to their involvement in such programmes. Respondent E observed:

“Being part of the Public Works Programmes has allowed me to meet people from different backgrounds, and now we are able to help each other when needed. It has improved not only my relationships but also my access to various resources and opportunities.” (Respondent E, Mpwapwa District, 12th March 2025).

This aligns with the work of Burchi and Roscioli (2022), who demonstrated that social protection programmes like Malawi’s MASAF can strengthen social cohesion and mutual support networks, especially among smallholder communities. Khan and Morrissey (2020) also found that income-diversifying activities, often facilitated by public schemes, indirectly promote social integration and reduce marginalization.

-Similarly, Respondent F noted:

“Through these programmes, I have made valuable connections with people who share the same concerns about our community. We now work together to address issues that matter to us all, such as improving local education and sanitation.” (Respondent F, Mpwapwa District, 11th March 2025).

When assessing the connection between households and local governance or development initiatives, 83.5% of the respondents (combined agree and strongly agree)

felt that participation in Public Works Programmes facilitated better connections to local governance and development activities. Respondent G emphasized this by stating:

“Public Works Programmes have made me more aware of local governance issues. I now feel connected to the decisions that affect my community, and I have a greater understanding of the development plans for the area.” (Respondent G, Mpwapwa District, 9th March 2025).

This finding is comparable to Rugeiyamu et al. (2021) who found that social spending schemes and public service initiatives in Tanzania increased citizen engagement with local governance structures. Sagiv et al. (2022) also emphasize the importance of employment policies that create civic engagement avenues, especially for women.

-Respondent H further stated:

“These programmes have helped me engage more actively in community development. I have learned how local decisions are made and now participate in meetings and discussions that shape the future of my village.” (Respondent H, Mpwapwa District, 10th March 2025).

Finally, when asked about the role of Public Works Programmes in fostering community solidarity and cohesion, 44.1% of respondents (combined agree and strongly agree) agreed that these initiatives helped bring people together, particularly in terms of building stronger bonds and working towards common goals.

-Respondent I shared:

“I have witnessed firsthand how Public Works Programmes unite our community. People from different ethnic groups and backgrounds now work together, and we have become more cohesive in addressing the challenges we face.” (Respondent I, Mpwapwa District, 7th March 2025).

-Respondent J added:

“These programmes provide a chance to show that we care about our community's well-being. Everyone's contribution counts, and this has promoted unity and cooperation, especially when working on shared objectives like road construction and clean-up campaigns.” (Respondent J, Mpwapwa District, 9th March 2025).

This is reinforced by the work of Mhina et al.(2025) who emphasized the role of labor-intensive public works in Sub-Saharan Africa in promoting not just employment but also social integration and cooperation across community lines. Moreover, Slavich et al.(2022) found that well-being systems, especially during crises like COVID-19, play a crucial role in strengthening community resilience and social cohesion.

3. Conclusion

The study concludes that participation in Public Works Programmes is associated with several dimensions of social empowerment among beneficiary communities in Mpwapwa District. The findings indicate that beneficiaries perceive PWPs as providing opportunities for community participation, improving social recognition and status, strengthening social networks and support systems, enhancing connections with local governance and development initiatives, and promoting community solidarity and cohesion. These findings suggest that PWPs extend beyond their role in providing temporary employment and income support and may provide important platforms for social inclusion and community engagement.

To strengthen the social empowerment potential of Public Works Programmes, policymakers and programme implementers should integrate employment opportunities with capacity building, leadership development, community mobilization, and stronger linkages with local governance structures. Such approaches may enhance beneficiaries' participation and social inclusion. Future research should employ longitudinal, comparative, or quasi-experimental approaches to further examine changes in social empowerment outcomes and establish whether observed changes can be attributed to programme participation.

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