

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

Page: 01-26

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY, TANZANIA

***Asunta Appolinaly Nombo**

Department of Community Development, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of
Iringa, P.O. Box 200, Iringa, Tanzania.

Article Received: 06 September 2026

***Corresponding Author: Asunta Appolinaly Nombo**

Article Revised: 26 September 2026

Department of Community Development, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Iringa, P.O. Box 200, Iringa, Tanzania.

Published on: 16 October 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.7740>

ABSTRACT

This study assessed community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. The study was guided by three specific objectives focusing on women's social, economic and political empowerment. A mixed-methods approach and cross-sectional research design were employed. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings indicated generally positive community perceptions of women's social empowerment, particularly regarding access to education, participation in decision-making, participation in community groups and awareness of programmes promoting women's rights. Economic empowerment was also positively perceived, especially women's participation in entrepreneurship, income-generating activities, access to credit and financial services, employment, business ownership and economic empowerment programmes. Similarly, respondents generally supported women's participation in local leadership, political decision-making and local government. However, the findings also revealed continuing barriers, including gender norms, traditional expectations, limited financial resources, inadequate access to productive resources and challenges affecting women's meaningful participation and control. The study concludes that community recognition of women's capabilities has improved, but positive perceptions have not yet translated into full and sustained empowerment. The study recommends strengthening gender-responsive

community programmes, women's economic opportunities, leadership capacity, access to financial resources and meaningful participation in decision-making.

KEYWORDS: Women's Empowerment; Community Perceptions; Social Empowerment; Economic Empowerment; Political Empowerment; Iringa Municipality; Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is widely recognized as an important component of sustainable development, social justice, and inclusive community development. It involves women's ability to access resources and opportunities, exercise agency, participate in decision-making, and challenge unequal power relations (Kabeer, 2021; World Bank, 2022; UN Women, 2023). Globally, efforts to promote women's empowerment have focused on improving women's participation in education, employment, leadership, governance, and economic activities. Evidence indicates that greater participation of women in social and economic institutions contributes to inclusive development and reduces gender inequalities (OECD, 2022; Asian Development Bank, 2023).

In Africa, women's empowerment remains a key development priority, particularly in relation to access to resources, economic opportunities, leadership, and participation in community development. Studies indicate that women's participation in community organizations, economic activities, and local governance can strengthen community resilience and promote equitable development (African Development Bank, 2022; Mdee et al., 2022). However, traditional socio-cultural norms and gender inequalities continue to constrain women's participation in decision-making and development processes.

In Tanzania, the government has implemented various policies and programmes to promote gender equality and women's socio-economic and political empowerment. Despite these efforts, cultural beliefs, limited access to resources, and unequal social expectations continue to influence women's participation in development activities (URT, 2021; UNDP, 2023). In urban areas such as Iringa Municipality, women are increasingly participating in small businesses, education, and community development initiatives, although community perceptions of their empowerment may differ according to socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2024).

Understanding community perceptions is therefore important for identifying attitudes, beliefs, and barriers that influence women's participation in socio-economic and political activities.

This study assessed community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania.

1.1 Significance of the Study

The study provides empirical evidence on community perceptions of women's empowerment in Iringa Municipality. The findings are relevant to policymakers, local government authorities, development partners, community leaders, women and community members because they provide information on attitudes and social conditions that may support or constrain women's participation. The study also contributes to academic knowledge on women's empowerment and community development in Tanzania and provides a basis for further research on the relationship between community perceptions and meaningful empowerment.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

2.1.1 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory, associated with Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), views empowerment as a process through which individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives, access resources and opportunities, exercise agency, and participate in decisions affecting their social environment (Zimmerman, 1995). Kabeer (1999) further conceptualizes empowerment through three interconnected elements: resources, agency, and achievements. This perspective is particularly relevant to women's empowerment because access to education, economic resources, leadership opportunities, and decision-making platforms can strengthen women's ability to exercise choice and influence outcomes in their communities.

In this study, Empowerment Theory guided the assessment of women's social, economic, and political empowerment. Social empowerment was reflected in access to education, participation in social groups, and decision-making; economic empowerment in entrepreneurship and access to credit and financial services; and political empowerment in leadership, political decision-making, and local governance. The theory also recognizes that community attitudes and social norms can either create an enabling environment for women's participation or constrain their opportunities through gender stereotypes and restrictive expectations.

Despite the growing empirical literature on women's empowerment, important gaps remain regarding community perceptions of women's empowerment. Existing studies have mainly

examined empowerment outcomes, access to resources, economic participation, decision-making, leadership, or the effectiveness of specific empowerment interventions. However, limited attention has been given to how community members perceive women's empowerment within their local context.

Three gaps are particularly evident. First, many studies have focused on specific interventions, economic activities, agricultural programs, or selected communities rather than examining community perceptions more broadly. Second, existing studies often examine one or two dimensions of empowerment, with limited attention to the combined social, economic, and political dimensions. Third, there is limited context-specific empirical evidence from Iringa Municipality on community perceptions of women's participation in education, social groups, decision-making, entrepreneurship, access to financial resources, political participation, representation, and leadership.

Despite its relevance, the theory has been criticized for placing considerable emphasis on individual agency while giving less attention to structural factors such as unequal power relations, social norms, institutional barriers, and limited access to resources (Cornwall, 2016; Donald et al., 2018). Therefore, this study addressed these gaps by examining community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. Nevertheless, Empowerment Theory remains appropriate for this study because it provides a framework for understanding how community perceptions, resources, agency, and participation may support or constrain women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality.

2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.2.1 Community Perceptions on Women's Social Empowerment

Women's social empowerment involves women's access to education and information, participation in decision-making, involvement in social groups and associations, and awareness of their rights and opportunities. Evidence from Tanzania indicates that women's participation in community activities and decision-making can strengthen their voice, confidence, social networks, and engagement in community development (Lecoutere & Chu, 2024; Nuru et al., 2024; Mwalupaso et al., 2025). However, cultural beliefs, gender norms, and community expectations may either support or constrain women's participation (Bhojani et al., 2024). Based on this perspective, the study examined community perceptions of women's social empowerment using three indicators: equal access to education opportunities, participation in decision-making, and participation in social groups and associations.

2.2.2 Community perception on equal access to education opportunities

Education is an important component of women's social empowerment because it enhances knowledge, confidence, decision-making capacity, and access to opportunities. Adam et al. (2026) found that women with higher levels of education were more likely to participate in decision-making in Tanzania. However, Mwalongo and Mwalongo (2018) and Kane et al. (2018) reported that socio-cultural practices, household responsibilities, poverty, and gender norms can constrain girls' and women's access to education. The World Bank (2019) similarly emphasized that equal access to education contributes to women's economic opportunities, decision-making, and broader empowerment. These findings demonstrate the importance of examining community perceptions regarding equal educational opportunities for women and girls.

2.2.3 Community perception on participation in decision-making

Participation in decision-making reflects women's ability to express their views, influence decisions, and contribute to matters affecting their lives and communities. Lecoutere and Chu (2024) and Nuru et al. (2024) found that participatory approaches increased women's involvement in decision-making and strengthened their voice in community affairs. However, Mwahombela (2023), in Kilolo District, found that women's participation in decision-making and leadership was constrained by traditional customs, gender stereotypes, family responsibilities, limited education, and resistance from men. Munissy and Tarimo (2023) also highlighted the importance of women's participation in formal decision-making structures. These findings suggest that community attitudes and social norms may influence the extent to which women are accepted and supported in decision-making processes.

2.2.4 Community perception on participation in social groups and associations

Participation in social groups and associations provides women with opportunities to build social networks, access information, share experiences, and engage in collective activities. Mwalupaso et al. (2025) found that participation in Village Savings and Loan Associations improved women's access to information, social networks, and community engagement. Similarly, Nuru et al. (2024) found that participation in community development activities enhanced women's information sharing and involvement in decision-making. Brody et al. (2015) further demonstrated that women's groups and collective organizations can strengthen social capital, social support, and collective action. These findings indicate that participation in social groups can contribute to women's social empowerment and community engagement.

Overall, previous studies demonstrate the importance of education, decision-making, and participation in social groups in promoting women's social empowerment. However, most studies have focused on women's participation and empowerment outcomes rather than community perceptions of these indicators. This study therefore examined how community members in Iringa Municipality perceive women's access to education, participation in decision-making, and participation in social groups and associations.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates community perceptions on women's social, economic, and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality. The three dimensions were assessed through indicators related to education, decision-making, social participation, economic activities, financial resources, leadership, and political participation. The framework guided the researcher in examining community perceptions of women's empowerment and in organizing the study according to the three specific objectives.

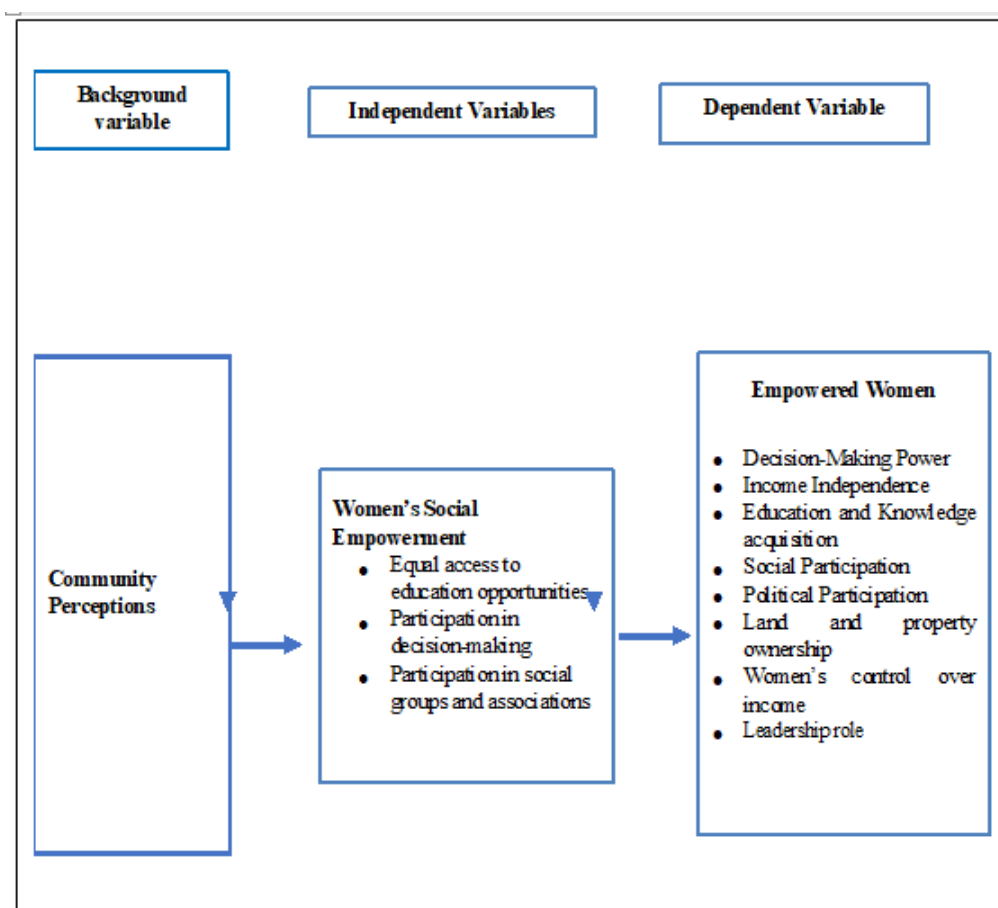


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing community perceptions of women's social empowerment and its indicators. Source: Researcher's construction (2026).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Iringa Municipality, located in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Iringa Municipality is the administrative capital of Iringa Region and is characterized by diverse urban and peri-urban communities and active participation of women in social, economic, and political activities. The municipality covers approximately 331.4 square kilometres and is bordered by Iringa District Council and Kilolo District Council.

According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, Iringa Municipal Council had a population of 202,490, comprising 96,392 males and 106,098 females, with females accounting for approximately 52.4% of the population. The study focused on three wards: Kihesa, Ruaha, and Gangilonga. The respective populations were 22,276, 11,941, and 7,892, with females accounting for 11,956, 6,184, and 3,948, respectively.

The municipality was selected because its socio-economic and demographic diversity provides an appropriate context for examining community perceptions of women's empowerment. The selected wards also provide a setting in which women participate in social groups, economic activities, community decision-making, leadership, and other development activities. These characteristics made Iringa Municipality suitable for assessing community perceptions of women's social, economic, and political empowerment.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

The study employed a mixed-methods approach and a cross-sectional research design. The mixed-methods approach combined quantitative and qualitative data to capture both measurable dimensions and subjective perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment (Fetters et al., 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The cross-sectional design enabled data to be collected at a single point in time to assess existing community perceptions of women's empowerment.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised community members residing in Kihesa, Ruaha, and Gangilonga wards in Iringa Municipality. According to the 2022 Tanzania Population and Housing Census, the three wards had a combined population of 22,088 people. The wards were selected because their diverse social and economic characteristics provided an appropriate context for assessing community perceptions of women's social, economic, and political empowerment.

3.4 Sampling Frame and Sample Size

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, $n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$. Based on a target population of 22,088 and a 10% margin of error, the calculated sample size was 99.55, rounded to 100 respondents. The respondents were proportionally allocated to Kihesa, Ruaha, and Gangilonga wards, resulting in 54, 28, and 18 respondents, respectively. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of the three wards, followed by simple random sampling to select quantitative respondents. For the qualitative component, three key informants were purposively selected based on their knowledge and involvement in women's empowerment and community development. The qualitative information complemented the quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment.

Table 1: Sample size distribution.

Strata	Population	Stratified Sampling ($n_i = (N_i \times S) / N$)	Sample
Kihesa-Semtema A	11,956	$(11,956 \times 100) / 22,088$	54
Ruaha	6,184	$(6,184 \times 100) / 22,088$	28
Gangilonga	3,948	$(3,948 \times 100) / 22,088$	18
Total	22,088		100

Source: Researcher (2026).

3.5 Data Sources and Collection

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 100 community members, of whom 98 returned valid responses, and semi-structured interviews with three purposively selected key informants involved in women's empowerment. The questionnaires captured community perceptions of women's social, economic, and political empowerment, while interviews provided further insights into related challenges and opportunities. Secondary data were obtained through documentary review of academic journals, books, government publications, census reports, policy documents, and relevant organizational reports. These sources provided background information and supported the interpretation of the study findings.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, with SPSS Version 25.0. The data were checked, coded, and organized according to the study objectives. Findings were presented in tables and charts to summarize respondents' characteristics and community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment (Field, 2018).

Qualitative data from three (3) key informants were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, and identification of recurring themes. The findings were organized according to the study objectives and used to complement the quantitative results by providing deeper insights into community perceptions of women's empowerment (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure. (Salleh et al., 2023) In this study, content validity was established through the review of the research instruments by the research supervisors. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were developed based on the study objectives and research questions and were reviewed to assess the clarity, relevance, appropriateness, wording, and coverage of the items and questions. Expert review is an important approach to establishing content validity because it helps determine whether the items adequately represent the content and concepts that the instrument is intended to measure (Jeldres et al., 2023). The supervisors' comments and recommendations were considered and incorporated before the instruments were used for data collection. This process helped to ensure that the instruments adequately covered the key dimensions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment, including women's participation in education, social and economic activities, decision-making, leadership, and political participation. Therefore, the review process enhanced the content validity of the instruments and ensured their suitability for addressing the objectives of the study.

3.7.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a research instrument in producing similar results under similar conditions (Shodiya & Adekunle, 2022). In this study, reliability was enhanced through the careful development, review, and consistent administration of the research instruments. The questionnaire items were developed to correspond directly with the study objectives and were reviewed by the research supervisors before data collection. The same questionnaire was administered to all selected respondents using the same set of questions and response options. Similarly, the semi-structured interview guide was used consistently with all fourteen (14) key informants, while follow-up questions were asked where clarification was necessary. These procedures enabled the researcher to maintain consistency in the information collected from different participants and reduced variations that could arise from differences in the administration of the instruments. Consequently, the procedures

strengthened the reliability of the data collected for assessing community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality (Saunders et al., 2023).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participants' privacy and dignity. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and the use of the information collected, and their consent was obtained before data collection. Their identities were protected, and the information gathered was used strictly for academic purposes. The researcher also respected participants' cultural values and gender sensitivities throughout the study (Israel & Hay, 2006; NESH, 2016; Saunders et al., 2023).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Overview of Findings

This chapter presents and discusses the findings on community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality. The analysis is based on questionnaire responses from 98 respondents and interviews with three key informants. The findings are presented using frequencies, percentages, tables, and qualitative evidence. The chapter begins with respondents' demographic characteristics, followed by findings on women's social, economic, and political empowerment. The results are discussed in relation to previous empirical studies and relevant literature to address the study objective.

4.2 Demographic Information

The study analyzed 98 valid responses to establish respondents' demographic characteristics. As shown in Table 1, males constituted 57.1% (56) of respondents, while females accounted for 42.9% (42). Regarding age, the largest group was aged 31–40 years (35.7%), followed by 41–50 years (25.5%), 20–30 years (24.5%), and 51–60 years (14.3%). In terms of education, 41.8% held bachelor's degrees, 31.6% had secondary education, 14.3% had postgraduate qualifications, and 12.2% had primary education.

Regarding occupation, self-employed and business respondents accounted for 28.6%, followed by employed respondents (24.5%), farmers (18.4%), students (12.2%), unemployed respondents (10.2%), and those engaged in other activities (6.1%). Concerning marital status, 57.1% were married, 28.6% were single, 8.2% were separated, and 6.1% were widowed. Overall, the respondents represented diverse demographic and socio-economic backgrounds.

This diversity provided perspectives from different age groups, educational levels, occupations, and marital-status categories, supporting the assessment of community perceptions of women's social, economic, and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents. (n=100)

11	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	56	57.1
Female	42	42.9
Total	98	100.0
Age		
20–30 years	24	24.5
31–40 years	35	35.7
41–50 years	25	25.5
51–60 years	14	14.3
Total	98	100.0
Education Level		
Primary Level	12	12.2
Secondary Level	31	31.6
Bachelor's Degree	41	41.8
Postgraduate Level	14	14.3
Total	98	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	28	28.6
Married	56	57.1
Separated	8	8.2
Widowed	6	6.1
Total	98	100.0
Occupation		
Self-employed/Business	28	28.6
Employed	24	24.5
Farmer	18	18.4
Student	12	12.2
Unemployed	10	10.2
Other activities	6	6.1
Total	98	100.0

* Two respondents did not respond

Source: (Field data 2026)

4.3 Community Perceptions on Women's Social Empowerment

4.3.1 Community perceptions on women's equal access to education opportunities

he findings in Table 4.2 indicate that 75.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women have equal access to education opportunities, while 14.3% disagreed or strongly

disagreed and 10.2% remained neutral. This suggests that community perceptions of women's access to education were generally positive in Iringa Municipality.

Key informants supported these findings, explaining that education enhances women's awareness of their rights, confidence, and participation in community activities and decision-making. One Social Welfare Officer noted that education enables women to express their opinions and participate in decisions affecting their communities (SWO, Interview, June 2026). Similarly, the Community Development Officer emphasized that education strengthens women's awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

These findings are consistent with Kabeer (1999), who conceptualized empowerment in terms of resources, agency, and the ability to make choices. Education can contribute to these processes by equipping women with knowledge and skills that support their participation in social and community affairs. Mganga et al. (2021) also identified social independence and decision-making as important aspects of women's empowerment in Tanzania.

Table 3: Respondents' perceptions on women's equal access to education opportunities. (n=100)

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	34	34.7
Agree	40	40.8
Neutral	10	10.2
Disagree	9	9.2
Strongly Disagree	5	5.1
Total	98	100.0

* Two respondents did not respond

Source: (Field data, 2026)

As presented in Table 4.2, 34.7% of respondents strongly agreed and 40.8% agreed that women have equal access to education opportunities. In contrast, 9.2% disagreed, 5.1% strongly disagreed, and 10.2% remained neutral. Overall, 75.5% of respondents expressed positive perceptions of women's equal access to education opportunities, suggesting that the majority viewed educational access favourably in Iringa Municipality.

The qualitative findings supported this result. During interviews conducted in June 2026, the Social Welfare Officer (SWO) explained that education increases women's awareness of their rights and enables them to express their opinions and participate in decisions affecting

their communities. Similarly, the Community Development Officer (CDO) emphasized that education strengthens women's understanding of their rights and responsibilities, while the NGO representative highlighted the importance of education in building women's confidence and encouraging their participation in community activities.

These findings suggest that education is perceived not only as an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills but also as a means of strengthening women's confidence, rights awareness, and participation in community decision-making. The findings are consistent with Kabeer (1999), who conceptualized empowerment in terms of resources, agency, and achievements. Education can contribute to women's empowerment by expanding their knowledge and capacity to make choices. Similarly, Mganga et al. (2021) identified social independence and decision-making as important aspects of women's empowerment in Tanzania.

4.3.2 Community perception on women's participation in decision making

Table 4: Community perception on women's participation in decision making. (n=100)

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	30	30.6
Agree	43	43.9
Neutral	11	11.2
Disagree	9	9.2
Strongly Disagree	5	5.1
Total	98	100.0

* Two respondents did not respond

Source: (Field data, 2026)

As presented in Table 4.3, 30.6% of respondents strongly agreed and 43.9% agreed that women participate in community decision-making. Together, 74.5% expressed positive perceptions. In contrast, 9.2% disagreed, 5.1% strongly disagreed, and 11.2% remained neutral. These findings indicate that community perceptions of women's participation in decision-making were generally favourable, although views differed among respondents.

The qualitative findings supported the quantitative results. The NGO representative observed that women were increasingly involved in discussions and expressing their opinions before decisions were made. The informant emphasized the contribution of education to women's confidence, stating:

“Compared to the past, women are now more involved in decision-making. Many women participate in discussions and express their opinions before decisions are made. Education has helped women to become more confident in expressing their opinions.” (NGO Representative, Interview, 17 June 2026).

Similarly, the Community Development Officer (CDO) explained that education had increased women’s awareness of their rights and responsibilities, encouraging their participation in community meetings and decisions affecting their families and communities. The Social Welfare Officer (SWO) also noted that education strengthened women’s knowledge and confidence, enabling them to communicate their views and participate more actively in community affairs.

These qualitative responses help explain the positive quantitative findings by highlighting education as a factor that may strengthen women’s confidence and participation. They also suggest that meaningful participation involves more than attending meetings; it requires opportunities to express opinions and contribute to decisions. This interpretation is consistent with Kabeer (1999), who associated empowerment with agency and the ability to make strategic choices. Similarly, Mganga et al. (2021) identified decision-making participation as an important dimension of women’s empowerment in Tanzania.

Nevertheless, the 14.3% of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed, together with the 11.2% who remained neutral, indicate that positive perceptions were not universal. These responses may reflect differences in community experiences, gender norms, unequal power relations, or opportunities for women to influence decisions. However, the descriptive findings do not establish the specific reasons for these differences.

From the perspective of Empowerment Theory, participation in decision-making represents an expression of agency because it provides women with opportunities to communicate their views and influence matters affecting their lives. Overall, the findings address the study objective by showing that community members generally recognized women’s participation in decision-making as an important component of social empowerment in Iringa Municipality.

4.3.3 Community Perceptions of Women's Participation in Community Groups and Associations

Table 5: Respondents on community perception on women's participation in community groups and association. (n=100)

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	41	41.8
Agree	39	39.8
Neutral	8	8.2
Disagree	6	6.1
Strongly Disagree	4	4.1
Total	98	100.0

* Two respondents did not respond

Source: (Field data, 2026)

As presented in Table 4.4, 41.8% of respondents strongly agreed and 39.8% agreed that women's participation in community groups and associations contributes to social empowerment. Together, 81.6% expressed positive perceptions, while 8.2% remained neutral, 6.1% disagreed, and 4.1% strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that most respondents recognized community groups and associations as important spaces for women's social interaction, information sharing, mutual support, and participation in community activities.

The qualitative findings supported these results. The Community Development Officer (CDO) explained that community groups enable women to share ideas, support one another, access information, and develop confidence. The informant stated:

"When women join community groups, they are able to share ideas and support each other. Through these groups, women receive information, learn new things, and sometimes find opportunities that help them become more confident and active in their communities." (CDO, Interview, 16 June 2026).

Similarly, the Social Welfare Officer (SWO) emphasized that group participation allows women to exchange experiences, learn from one another, and become more active in community affairs. The NGO representative added that community groups provide opportunities for women to share information, express their views, and participate in activities affecting their communities. Together, these responses suggest that community groups may strengthen women's confidence, social networks, and engagement in community activities.

These findings are consistent with Nuru et al. (2024), whose study on women's participation in the Kidunda Dam Project in Morogoro, Tanzania, highlighted the contribution of community activities and project committees to information sharing and decision-making. Similarly, Mganga et al. (2021) identified social independence and participation in decision-making as important dimensions of women's empowerment in Tanzania. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2026) also recognizes women's participation in savings and credit groups, religious groups, women's groups, and other community organizations as relevant to collective agency and community engagement.

Nevertheless, the 6.1% who disagreed, 4.1% who strongly disagreed, and 8.2% who remained neutral indicate that perceptions were not entirely uniform. These differences may reflect variations in women's experiences of group participation or the opportunities available to them within different organizations. Membership alone does not guarantee meaningful participation, since women may differ in their opportunities to express opinions, influence decisions, and benefit from group activities.

From the perspective of Empowerment Theory, community groups can provide opportunities for women to develop social networks, access information, build confidence, and exercise agency through collective participation (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Overall, the findings address the study objective by demonstrating that community members generally perceived participation in community groups and associations as an important component of women's social empowerment in Iringa Municipality, particularly when membership is accompanied by meaningful involvement and opportunities to contribute to group decisions.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Community Perceptions on Women's Social Empowerment

The findings indicate that community perceptions of women's social empowerment in Iringa Municipality were generally favorable regarding equal access to education opportunities. As presented in Table 4.2, 75.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women have equal access to education opportunities as men, while 14.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 10.2% remained neutral. These findings suggest that most respondents viewed educational opportunities as an important aspect of women's social empowerment, although perceptions differed among community members.

The qualitative findings further indicated that education was perceived as contributing to women's awareness of their rights, confidence, and participation in community affairs. This interpretation is supported by Baird et al. (2024), whose study of Maasai communities in

Tanzania identified education and women's group membership among the resources associated with women's access to certain household decisions. The findings suggest that education may provide women with knowledge and capabilities that support their participation in social and community life. However, the present study measured community perceptions and therefore does not establish whether women and men actually experience equal educational opportunities.

The findings can also be understood in relation to women's participation in decision-making. Lecoutere and Chu (2024), in their study of rural south-west Tanzania, examined how participatory decision-making approaches related to women's empowerment and control over resources. Their findings highlight the importance of women's involvement in decisions affecting their lives. In the current study, the positive perceptions of women's participation in decision-making similarly suggest that community members recognize women's involvement in community affairs as an important aspect of social empowerment. Nevertheless, the neutral and negative responses indicate that perceptions of women's participation are not uniform.

Participation in community groups and associations also emerged as an important indicator of women's social empowerment. Baird et al. (2024) identified women's group membership as one of the resources associated with access to some household decisions in Maasai communities. Similarly, Nuru et al. (2024) examined women's participation in the Kidunda Dam Project in Tanzania, focusing on decision-making and community engagement. These studies provide relevant context for interpreting the present findings, in which 81.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in community groups and associations contributes to women's social empowerment. The qualitative responses also highlighted information sharing, mutual support, confidence building, and opportunities to express opinions as perceived benefits of group participation.

Across the three indicators, participation in community groups and associations recorded the highest positive response (81.6%), followed by equal access to education opportunities (75.5%) and participation in decision-making (74.5%). This pattern suggests that respondents were particularly positive about the contribution of community groups to women's social empowerment. However, these percentages represent perceptions of different indicators and do not establish that group participation has a greater effect on empowerment than education or decision-making.

Overall, the findings indicate that community members generally perceived education opportunities, participation in decision-making, and involvement in community groups as important aspects of women's social empowerment in Iringa Municipality. The recent studies

discussed above provide supporting context for understanding the relationship between women's resources, collective participation, and decision-making. However, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of community perceptions rather than proof that all women experience equal access, meaningful participation, or the same level of empowerment.

6. CONCLUSION

This study assessed community perceptions of women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality. The study was guided by three specific objectives, which focused on social, economic, and political empowerment. A mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative information was obtained from 98 respondents through structured questionnaires, while qualitative information was obtained from 14 key informants through semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative information was analyzed thematically.

The first objective examined community perceptions of women's social empowerment. The findings indicated that community members generally had positive perceptions of women's access to education, participation in decision-making, participation in community groups and associations, and awareness of programs promoting women's rights. These findings show that women's social participation and recognition within the community have improved. However, some respondents continued to express neutral or negative perceptions, indicating that social and gender-related barriers remain present.

The second objective focused on community perceptions of women's economic empowerment. The findings indicated generally strong support for women's involvement in entrepreneurship, income-generating activities, access to credit and financial services, employment, business ownership, control over financial resources, and economic empowerment programs. The findings also indicated that women's participation in economic activities is increasingly recognized within the community. At the same time, access to adequate financial resources, productive assets, business capital, skills, and other economic opportunities remains a challenge for some women.

The third objective examined community perceptions of women's political empowerment. The findings showed generally positive perceptions of women's participation in local leadership, equal opportunities in political decision-making, representation in local government, and community support for women taking leadership roles. For example, 78.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women's participation in local leadership improves community development, while 10.2% remained neutral and 11.2% disagreed or

strongly disagreed with the statement. This indicates that although the majority of respondents held positive perceptions, some respondents did not share the same view. Community members generally recognized women's ability to contribute to governance and development decisions. However, the presence of neutral and negative responses suggests that support for women's political participation was not completely uniform, particularly regarding women occupying leadership and decision-making positions.

The study found generally positive community perceptions of women's empowerment across the three dimensions of social, economic, and political empowerment. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents recognized women's participation in social groups, economic activities, and political leadership as important aspects of women's empowerment. For example, 81.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women's participation in community groups and associations contributes to social empowerment, 85.8% agreed or strongly agreed that women's involvement in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities contributes to economic empowerment, and 78.6% agreed or strongly agreed that women's participation in local leadership improves community development. These findings suggest that community perceptions of women's empowerment were generally positive across the three dimensions, although the presence of neutral and negative responses indicates that positive perceptions were not shared by all respondents.

The study concludes that community perceptions of women's empowerment in Iringa Municipality were generally positive across the three dimensions of social, economic, and political empowerment, although the level of agreement varied across the indicators. The conclusions are drawn from the findings of the three specific objectives, which examined community perceptions of women's social empowerment, economic empowerment, and political empowerment.

First objective, which examined community perceptions of women's social empowerment, the findings indicate that respondents generally recognized women's participation in social activities and access to social opportunities as important aspects of empowerment. For example, 81.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women's participation in community groups and associations contributes to women's social empowerment. This suggests that community groups and associations are perceived as providing women with opportunities to interact with others, exchange information, build social networks, participate in collective activities, and engage in community decision-making. However, the presence of neutral and negative responses indicates that this perception was not shared by all respondents. The study therefore concludes that women's social empowerment is generally

positively perceived, although the findings do not suggest that all women experience the same level of social participation or influence.

Second objective, which examined community perceptions of women's economic empowerment, the findings show consistently positive perceptions across the economic empowerment indicators. 85.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women's involvement in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities contributes to economic empowerment, while 83.7% expressed agreement regarding women's access to credit and financial services. Similarly, 82.6% agreed or strongly agreed that women's employment and contribution to household income contribute to economic empowerment, and the same proportion recognized the contribution of women's business ownership. In addition, 75.5% agreed or strongly agreed that women's control over financial resources is an important aspect of economic empowerment, while 82.6% perceived economic empowerment programs as contributing to women's economic empowerment. These findings indicate that respondents generally associated women's economic empowerment with participation in income-generating activities, employment, business ownership, access to financial services, economic programs, and control over financial resources. However, the comparatively lower level of agreement concerning control over financial resources (75.5%) suggests that recognition of women's participation in economic activities does not necessarily extend to the same degree to their control over financial resources and decisions concerning their use.

Third objective, which examined community perceptions of women's political empowerment, the findings also indicate generally positive perceptions of women's participation in leadership and decision-making. For example, 78.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women's participation in local leadership improves community development. This suggests that most respondents recognized women's participation in local leadership as relevant to community development and political empowerment. Nevertheless, 10.2% remained neutral and 11.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that positive perceptions were not universal. The study therefore concludes that women's political empowerment is generally positively perceived among community members, while some respondents do not express agreement with the contribution of women's participation in local leadership.

The findings across the three specific objectives suggest that community perceptions of women's empowerment in Iringa Municipality are generally positive. The highest level of agreement was observed in relation to women's involvement in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities (85.8%), while the lowest among the reported indicators was associated

with women's control over financial resources (75.5%). This pattern suggests that community members generally recognize women's participation in social, economic, and political activities as important aspects of empowerment, but perceptions are relatively less strong regarding women's control over financial resources. Therefore, the study concludes that women's empowerment should be understood not only in terms of participation and access to opportunities but also in terms of women's ability to exercise control and influence over resources and decisions affecting their lives help to shorten and combine summary and conclusions to come up with conclusion on my article.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Recommendations for Action

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following actions to strengthen women's socio-economic and political empowerment in Iringa Municipality.

1. Strengthening Gender-Responsive Community Programs

The Ministry responsible for Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, in collaboration with Iringa Municipal Council, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders, should strengthen gender-responsive programmes that promote women's participation in community groups, associations, and other community structures. This recommendation is supported by the finding that 81.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in community groups and associations contributes to women's social empowerment. Programmes should therefore go beyond increasing women's membership and ensure meaningful participation through information sharing, confidence building, access to opportunities, and involvement in group decision-making. Men and other community members should also be engaged in promoting supportive attitudes towards women's participation in community development.

2. Improving Women's Economic Opportunities and Control over Resources

Iringa Municipal Council, financial institutions, NGOs, and development partners should strengthen interventions that improve women's access to affordable credit, savings facilities, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, markets, and productive resources. This recommendation is informed by the finding that 75.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that control over financial resources is an important aspect of women's economic empowerment. Interventions should not focus solely on increasing women's income but should also promote their participation in decisions concerning savings, expenditure, investment, and the use of financial resources. This would support women's economic

independence and strengthen their capacity to make decisions about resources affecting their lives.

3. Strengthening Women's Leadership and Meaningful Participation in Decision-Making

Iringa Municipal Council, ward authorities, civil society organizations, and development partners should strengthen leadership training, civic education, mentorship, and governance programs that promote women's participation in leadership and decision-making. The study's findings indicate generally positive perceptions of women's participation in community decision-making. However, meaningful participation requires more than representation in leadership positions; women should have opportunities to express their views, contribute proposals, influence decisions, and participate in implementing decisions affecting their communities. Leadership initiatives should therefore strengthen women's confidence, communication skills, knowledge of governance processes, and capacity to exercise leadership responsibilities.

7.2 Recommendations for Further Studies

1. Community Perceptions of Women's Empowerment

Further studies should examine community perceptions of women's empowerment across different social and cultural contexts. Particular attention should be given to the factors shaping community attitudes towards women's social, economic, and political participation. Such studies would expand the evidence on how community perceptions influence the recognition and acceptance of women's participation in community affairs.

2. Women's Lived Experiences of Empowerment

Further research should explore women's own experiences of empowerment to complement the community perceptions examined in the present study. Studies could investigate women's experiences of household decision-making, control over income and property, participation in community activities, access to economic opportunities, and involvement in leadership. This would help establish whether positive community perceptions correspond with women's actual experiences.

3. The Role of Men in Women's Empowerment

Further studies should investigate how men's attitudes and involvement influence women's empowerment. Particular attention could be given to attitudes towards women's economic independence, property ownership, control over household resources, decision-making, and political leadership. Such research could help explain how relationships between women and

men support or constrain women's ability to participate in social, economic, and political activities.

4. Longitudinal Perspectives on Women's Empowerment

Longitudinal studies should examine how community perceptions of women's empowerment change over time. Such research could assess changes in attitudes towards women's access to resources, decision-making, community participation, and leadership. This would provide a better understanding of whether changes in community perceptions are sustained over time.

5. Community Perceptions and Meaningful Empowerment Outcomes

Further research should investigate the relationship between positive community perceptions and women's actual experiences of empowerment. Particular attention should be given to whether favourable perceptions correspond with improvements in women's agency, control over resources, decision-making power, leadership, and influence within households and community institutions. This would help clarify the extent to which community recognition of women's empowerment corresponds with substantive improvements in women's lives.

8. LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study encountered several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings.

Geographical Scope: The study was conducted in Kihesa, Ruaha, and Gangilonga wards in Iringa Municipality. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent community perceptions in other wards or regions of Tanzania, where social, economic, and cultural conditions may differ.

Reliance on Self-Reported Data: The study relied on questionnaire responses and interviews to assess community perceptions of women's empowerment. Respondents' answers may have been influenced by personal experiences, social expectations, or their willingness to express their views on gender equality. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect reported perceptions rather than direct measurements of women's actual empowerment.

Sample Size and Representation: The quantitative analysis was based on 98 valid questionnaire responses, supplemented by interviews with three key informants. Although these data provided useful insights into community perceptions, the sample may not capture the full diversity of views within Iringa Municipality. The qualitative findings, in particular, provide contextual insights rather than representing all community experiences.

Cross-Sectional Research Design: The study used a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a particular period. Therefore, it could not establish how community perceptions of women's

empowerment change over time or determine whether changes in perceptions lead to improvements in women's social, economic, and political participation.

Despite these limitations, the study provides useful evidence of community perceptions of women's empowerment in the selected wards of Iringa Municipality. The findings offer a basis for further research involving broader geographical coverage, larger and more diverse samples, and longitudinal or complementary methods to deepen understanding of women's empowerment.

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher acknowledges the contribution of the University of Iringa, Iringa Municipal Council, the community members, and the key informants who participated in this study on women's socio-economic and political empowerment. Their cooperation and provision of information on community perceptions, women's participation, and empowerment made the completion of this research possible.

REFERENCES

1. Baird, T. D., Woodhouse, E., McCabe, J. T., Barnes, P, Terta, F., & Runda, N. (2024). New pathways for women's empowerment in pastoralist Maasai households, Tanzania. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 109, Article 103333.
2. Bhojani, A., Alsager, A., McCann, J. K., Joachim, D., Kabati, M., & Jeong, J. (2024). "If my wife earns more than me, she will force me to do what she wants": Women's economic empowerment and family caregiving dynamics in Tanzania. *World Development*
3. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
4. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
5. Donald, A., Koolwal, G., Annan, J., Falb, K., & Goldstein, M. (2018). *Power as agency: A critical reflection on the measurement of women's empowerment in the development sector*. World Development.
6. Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs: Principles and practices. *Health Services Research*, 48(6pt2), 2134–2156.

7. Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
8. Lecoutere, E., & Chu, L. (2024). Supporting women's empowerment by changing intra-household decision-making: A mixed-methods analysis of a field experiment in rural south-west Tanzania. *Development Policy Review*, 42(3), e12758.
9. Lecoutere, E., & Chu, L. (2024). Supporting women's empowerment by changing intra-household decision-making: A mixed-methods analysis of a field experiment in rural south-west Tanzania. *Development Policy Review*, 42(3), e12758.
10. Mdee, A., Chagula, G., & Rwehumbiza, A. (2022). Women's access to resources and wellbeing in Tanzania. *World Development Perspectives*, 26, 100412.
11. Mganga, A. E., Renju, J., Todd, J., Mahande, M. J., & Vyas, S. (2021). Development of a women's empowerment index for Tanzania from the demographic and health surveys of 2004–05, 2010, and 2015–16. *Emerging Themes in Epidemiology*, 18, Article 13
12. Mwalupaso, G. E., Geng, X., & Yasin, S. I. (2025). *Financial inclusion for sustainable agriculture: Pathways among smallholder women farmers in rural Zambia*. PLoS One, 20(7), e0326980.
13. Nabimanya, B., Mayanja, E., Kyarikunda, M., Nkamusiima, D., Kagarura, W. R., Kiwuwa-Muyingo, S., & Kadengye, D. T. (2025). Factors associated with women's economic, personal and socio-cultural empowerment: Analysis of 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey. *BMC Women's Health*, 25, Article 538.
14. NESH (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees). (2016). *Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, law and the humanities*. Oslo: NESH.
15. Nuru, J., Massoi, L. W., & Fundi, S. S. (2024). From victims to beneficiaries: Empowerment and participation of women in the Kidunda Dam Project in Morogoro, Tanzania. *Journal of Policy and Leadership*, 11(1), 71–88.
16. OECD. (2022). [Title of OECD report on women's decision-making and welfare outcomes].
17. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2022). *Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls: DAC guidance for development partners*. OECD Publishing.
18. Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 569–579.

19. Salleh, K. M., Sulaiman, N. L., & Gloeckner, G. (2023). Exploring test concept and measurement through validity and reliability process in TVET research: Guideline for the novice researcher. *Journal of Technical Education and Training*.
20. Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.
21. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Pearson Education.
22. Shodiya, O. A., & Adekunle, T. A. (2022). Reliability of research instruments in management sciences research: An explanatory perspective. *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization and Management Series*.
23. UN Women. (2023). *Progress on the sustainable development goals: The gender snapshot 2023*. New York, NY: UN Women.
24. UN Women. (2023). *Women in local government and community development: Global evidence review*. UN Women.
25. UN Women. (2024). *Progress on the sustainable development goals: Gender snapshot 2024*. UN Women.
26. UN Women. (2024). *Women's leadership and community participation report*. New York, NY: UN Women.
27. UNDP. (2023). *Gender social norms index 2023 report*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme.
28. United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI): Breaking down gender biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality*. United Nations Development Programme.
29. United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Human development report 2023: Gender equality and economic opportunity*. New York, NY: UNDP.
30. World Bank. (2022). *Women, business and the law 2022*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
31. World Bank. (2023). *Women, business and the law 2023*. World Bank Group.
32. Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). *Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis*. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology* (pp. 43–63). Springer.