Stitching towards Empowerment:
Exploring Empowerment of Women in an Embroidery Co-operative in Uganda
A Case Study of Tabiro Ladies’ Club
by
Justine Dol

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Abstract

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Justine Dol                                    Advisor: Dr. Helen Hambly Odame
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In the developing world, women are more likely than men to work in poorly paid occupations in the informal sector. Women are responding to this inequality by joining co-operatives. Women-only co-operatives offer the opportunity for employment and empowerment. A case study approach on an unregistered, women-only handicraft co-operative located in the Mpigi District of Uganda was taken. The epistemological approach used was feminist standpoint, using Rowlands’ theory of empowerment as the analytic lens. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. Key informant interviews, participant observation, and a feedback workshop also occurred. Members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club experienced empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level. Findings were supported by the interviews, key informants, participant observation, and the feedback workshop. Implications for the women include the development of agency, economic benefits, social benefits, and capacity development. Hindrances included economic struggles and being an unregistered co-operative.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Women’s entry into the paid labour force is one of the key advancements of women’s rights and gender equality that occurred in the twentieth century (Aulette, Wittner, & Blakely, 2009). In recent decades, women in paid labour has increased all over the world, with current paid labour force participation ranging from 12% in Saudi Arabia to almost 90% in the United States (Aulette et al., 2009). In Uganda, 68% of women are paid for their labour, of which only 21% is cash payment, the rest is in cash and/or kind (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS), 2007).

Gender inequality in employment is highly prevalent in the developing world; even if women are employed, they are more likely to work in unpaid or poorly paid positions, including family agriculture or the informal sector (Revenga & Shetty, 2012). In Uganda, 75% of women work in agriculture, compared to 68% of men, and 61% of non-agricultural women workers are self-employed (UBoS, 2007). When women in developing countries work in agriculture, they tend to produce crops that are less profitable than crops grown by men (Revenga & Shetty, 2012). When women work in the informal sector, such as a small-scale entrepreneur or retail business, the boundaries between the household and the informal economy are often blurred, as women working at home make their work less visible (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2006).

The lack of access to better paid formal employment and the invisibility of work done in the informal sector not only affects women economically, but also negatively affects their perceptions of themselves and their interactions with other individuals (Majurin, 2010). Yet, “in a context where cultural values constrain women’s ability to make strategic life choices, structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone” (Kabeer, 1999, p.457). One way that women are becoming empowered is through joining co-operatives to gain access to markets
that otherwise would have been denied to them and to gain access to positive personal and social developments. This thesis will explore how members of a women-only handicraft co-operative in Uganda have experienced empowerment.

**Rationale**

With the recent growth of co-operatives in Uganda and the shift from government-controlled co-operatives to individual-owned co-operatives, women are seizing the opportunity to expand into this economic sector, whether or not they register their co-operative groups (ILO, 2012). While the growth of handicraft co-operatives in Uganda is much lower than agriculture or saving and credit co-operatives (SACCOs), it is a very important type to examine as it is pre-dominantly women who work in these co-operatives (Raheim & Bolden, 1995). It is important to explore whether women who participate in the traditionally female occupation of handicraft production experience empowerment similar to the experience of women members of other types of co-operatives (e.g. agricultural co-operatives or SACCOs) (ILO, 2012). Furthermore, by studying an unregistered co-operative, it will add to the discussion around women’s work in the informal sector and the structural inequalities that women face and their response to it.

**Research Goal and Objectives**

The research goal of this study is to understand how women who are part of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative in a rural village in the Mpigi District of Uganda experience empowerment through their involvement in the co-operative. This goal presupposes that women have experienced empowerment with the focus of this study exploring how the process of empowerment is experienced.
Therefore, this research has three main objectives. The first objective is to investigate how women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative have individually experienced empowerment. This is associated with developing self-confidence and a sense of self to act in positive ways in their own lives (Rowlands, 1997). The second objective is to investigate how women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative have collectively experienced empowerment. This is associated with feelings of power related to group decision-making and working collectively (Rowlands, 1997). The third objective is to investigate how women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative have experienced empowerment in their close relationships at home. This is associated with the ability to exercise increased power in their material and household relationships (Rowlands, 1997).

Significance of Study

Unregistered co-operatives have not been studied in the literature as often as registered co-operatives, most likely due to the difficulty of identifying such co-operatives. In East Africa, many co-operatives tend to cater to males, making women an underrepresented group in co-operatives (ILO, 2012). Thus, the lack of research on unregistered co-operatives, particularly women-only groups, creates an opportunity to explore their growing presence in Uganda and their impact on the lives women. Furthermore, by investigating handicraft co-operatives, it allows exploration into whether or not involvement in a female-dominant occupation that does not stray from traditional gender roles can empower women. To extend the available literature on co-operatives in Uganda, this thesis will look specifically at a non-registered women-only handicraft co-operative and how women involved have experienced empowerment.
Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven sections. Chapter One: Introduction, the current section, provided a brief overview of the thesis goals, objectives, and significance of the research. Chapter Two: Literature Review provides background on co-operatives in general and in Uganda specifically. It also defines empowerment and explores previous studies that have examined the relationship between empowerment and women’s groups. Chapter Three: Context of Research provides information on the Mpigi District of Uganda as well as the creation and evolution of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. Chapter Four: Methodology outlines the methods taken to obtain information related to empowerment as experienced by members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. It also outlines the analytic approach taken. Chapter Five: Results outlines the initial findings that emerged at the personal, collective, and relational level of empowerment. Chapter Six: Discussion elaborates on the findings of Chapter Five based on five over-arching themes that emerged across the personal, collective, and relational levels of empowerment. Chapter Seven: Final Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations concludes the thesis by summing up the information found and providing recommendations.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Since the emergence of the feminist movement, discussion around women’s work and women’s empowerment has received much attention due to the unequal economic and social positions that women of developing countries face (Chen, 2008). One avenue that has been suggested to empower women in developing countries includes entry into and involvement in co-operative groups, particularly women-only groups (Flygare, 2006). Co-operatives are defined as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (ILO, 2012, online). In line with 2012 as “the year of the co-operative”, the ability of women-only co-operatives to encourage empowerment is especially important to explore. This chapter outlines the history of co-operatives in Uganda followed by an examination of the empowerment literature.

Gender Inequality in Uganda

Statistically, using the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure “long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living”, Uganda is currently ranked poorly at 161 out of 187 countries with an HDI value of 0.446 (UNDP, 2011, p.1). Looking at women specifically using the Gender Inequality Index (GII) which “reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity”, Uganda has a GII value of 0.577 and is ranked 116 out of 146 countries (UNDP, 2011, p.4). These statistics illustrate that women in Uganda not only face struggles achieving a decent living standard and living a long life but also struggle due to great inequality between men and women.
Women in Africa still live and work in a system that favors men over women, resulting in limited freedom due to social constructions that claim women’s ‘natural inferiority’ as the weaker sex (Hategekimana, 2011). Related to the concept of power, which is the ability to make choices, empowerment is a way to explore how women are experiencing a shift in power relations (Kabeer, 1999). Ugandan women are often disempowered through their limited choice related to decisions of reproductive health or economic activities (Wakoko, 2003). Women experience empowerment as they gain the ability to make choices in areas where they were previously denied agency (Kabeer, 1999). Co-operatives provide the ability to experience empowerment as women improving their economic situation is one of the key components in gaining the ability to exercise control in their lives (Raheim & Bolden, 1995). Further, the social and cooperative aspect of co-operatives adds the benefit of solidarity and unites women working together to gain and question power in a culture where that is not easy to do (ILO, 2012).

**Informal Sector in Uganda**

Gender inequality is especially evident in women’s struggle to obtain employment and generate income. As mentioned previously, women in Uganda who work tend to engage in either unpaid or poorly paid agricultural production or self-employment in the informal sector (Ellis, Manuel, & Blackden, 2006). In sub-Saharan Africa, which is one of the top two regions in the world with employment in the informal sector, women disproportionately make up the majority of informal workers (Chen, 2008). Women in Uganda represent a large portion of the labour force in agriculture, making up 70% of agricultural labour and 60% of subsistence cash crop labour (Ellis et al., 2006). Men, on the other hand, tend to make up a large portion of the formal labour force, holding 61% of the formal sector jobs in industry and services (Ellis et al., 2006). In agricultural production, women are more likely to produce for domestic markets, while men
produce for export, resulting in a smaller, less stable income for women who sell to domestic markets (Chen, 2008). Furthermore, in recent years, agricultural production in Uganda has faced decreases in both productivity and income, which has forced rural and urban women to diversify their livelihoods and engage in alternative income generation to have enough income to sustain themselves and their families (Uganda Ministry of Finance, 2006). Even if women are able to obtain formal work, women end up bearing unequal responsibility for the family, such as paying school fees, buying food and clothing for the entire family, and taking care of the household (Ellis et al., 2006).

As rural areas have limited opportunities of formal employment, many women tend to work in informal jobs that keep them near their home in occupations such as small hold farmers, agricultural day labourers, livestock and poultry rearers, or artisans and weavers (Chen, 2008). This segregation is not limited to developing countries, as even in the United States, women historically have been segregated to jobs in the low-paying sector (Raheim & Bolden, 1995). In general, female entrepreneurship has often gone unnoticed due to its existence primarily in the informal sector (Chen, 2008). This is maintained through the system of patriarchy that has an interest in limiting women’s role to the household.

**Co-operatives**

Co-operatives are a unique enterprise, as they combine economic dimensions with social and psychological dimensions to pursue and produce positive externalities for their members (Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010). Seven principles that co-operatives typically abide by include: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; economic participation of members; autonomy and independence; education, training and information provided to members; co-operation among co-operatives; and having overall concern for the community.
These principles are key to empowering co-operative members as they allow individuals to gain economic, social, and personal benefits through group training, co-operation, and decision-making (ILO, 2012). This makes co-operatives an important avenue through which to gain empowerment.

Co-operatives as businesses tend to fall under one of five categories, though these categories are not always fixed. The first type is consumer co-operatives, such as stores or groups of stores owned by the members who buy goods or services from each other (Flygare, 2006; Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010). The second type is workers’ co-operatives, which are businesses owned and governed by employees (Flygare, 2006). The third type is producer co-operatives, where members work together to grow or make something and the co-operative buys its members’ produce or products to sell (Flygare, 2006). The fourth type is purchasing or shared services co-operatives where businesses join together to enhance their competitive advantage (Flygare, 2006). The fifth type is saving and credit co-operatives (SACCOs), which provide access to saving and credit with lower interest rates than formal banks (Mayoux, 1988). All of these types of co-operatives are known as primary co-operatives, as they are grouped based on economic activity (Kyazze, 2010). Primary co-operatives may come together with other co-operatives to form co-operative unions, where multiple co-operatives work together (Kyazze, 2010).

Women in Co-operatives

Women typically tend to participate in either producer co-operatives in traditional female skill activities’, such as handicrafts or bakery, or in SACCOs, where they are able to access saving and credit services (Mayoux, 1988). Studies around women in co-operatives show some success in terms of women being able to gain income and develop skills, but there have also been
some negatives outcomes as well (Mayoux, 1988). For instance, despite the growth in producer co-operatives in Uganda, especially with handicrafts, most co-operatives in Uganda are still male dominated, with females making up only 24% of co-operative membership in the country (Hartley, 2011). Within handicraft co-operatives, which tend to generate less income than other types of producer co-operatives and do not question the current gender status quo, women tend to make up the majority of workers (Jones, Smiths, & Wills, 2012). Nevertheless, women who work collectively can be recognized on their own terms and develop a voice through their group (Narayan, 2005). The voice that women develop through working together collectively, along with the identity they gain from group membership, can help overcome internalized oppression of power and allows them to work together to slowly overcome and question cultural boundaries that subordinate women (Narayan, 2005). This suggests that women who are involved in co-operatives are experiencing positive social impacts, yet they are still impacted by gender inequalities within the co-operative movement in Uganda.

Co-operatives’ members often benefit from their involvement due to gains in social capital and greater access to economies of scales (ILO, 2012). Worldwide, over 100 million jobs have been created by co-operatives, with the highest number of jobs located in the agricultural sector (Hategekimana, 2011). Women tend to be unrepresented in co-operatives and if they are present, they face gender inequalities due to socio-cultural norms prevalent in many societies (ILO, 2012). Historically, women’s presence in agricultural co-operatives has been limited due to the lack of land ownership and the division of labour in agriculture that favors men over women (ILO, 2012). However, a study found that 59% women in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda who participated in agricultural co-operatives had been able to start other productive activities
after joining co-operatives (ILO, 2012). In general, co-operatives offer economic, social, and political benefits from participation (ILO, 2012).

To illustrate these benefits, the Zvihanaka Farmer’s group, located in Zimbabwe, started as a women’s sewing and knitting club but transitioned to a farmer’s group to reflect their member’s main activity (Karl, 1995). Women within this co-operative were taught improved agricultural production techniques and were provided with inputs such as fertilizer, which allowed the women to increase their production of agricultural products (Karl, 1995). Women also learned how to keep financial accounts for their farms based on training they received from the co-operative (Karl, 1995). Through their involvement in the co-operative, the women gained confidence and felt enabled to assert themselves in their community and within their household (Karl, 1995). Specifically, women felt comfortable asking men to share household responsibilities to increase the amount of time that women have for other activities (Karl, 1995).

Taking a look at co-operatives that developed through outside assistance, two Nutribusiness co-operatives were established in rural Kenya through a partnership between American and Kenyan universities to focus on “activities that address nutritional needs by providing quality foods and food products at affordable prices through small-scale private sector approaches” (Maretzki, 2007, p.327). The universities worked with female subsistence farmers already in worker groups to establish these co-operatives (Maretzki, 2007). It was found that the women benefited from involvement in the Nutribusiness co-operative, as not only did they receive new knowledge and skills, but also their existing local knowledge was valued and incorporated into the co-operatives behavior (Maretzki, 2007). Further, women also gained the confidence to make decisions as a group and accept the outcomes (Maretzki, 2007). These two
examples illustrates that women who are able to participate in co-operatives have increased their ability to make strategic life choices.

Therefore, women who participate in co-operatives, especially women-only co-operatives, can be subversive to the system of patriarchy as they gain increased access to capital and the potential for personal advancement (Raheim & Bolden, 1995). By gaining and participating economically and collectively with other women, it allows women a greater ability to make strategic life choices and question structural inequalities (Kabeer, 1999). However, this may be limited as many women-only co-operatives are in stereotypical female occupations, such as handicrafts, which have narrow markets that may constrain the possibility of economic benefit and visibility (Raheim & Bolden, 1995). Nevertheless, due to the patriarchal system entrenched in rural areas, women are often limited in their ability to outright shift their responsibilities from homemaker and assistant to the husband to formal employment (Flygare, 2006). Thus, handicrafts offer women the ability to work from home, yet participate in an economic activity to generate income (Flygare, 2006). Furthermore, working within a handicraft co-operative offer women the ability to work collectively to gain empowerment and the ability to slowly shift cultural norms that placed them in an inferior position in the first place (Flygare, 2006).

Co-operatives in Uganda

The organization and creation of co-operatives in the colonies of Africa had initially occurred top-down through implementation by governments, rather than from below by local citizens (Flygare, 2006). However, the current co-operative movement has shifted towards new purposes, focusing on economics as well as social dimensions (Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010). In Uganda and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, rural individuals have a history of forming self-help groups and rural co-operatives to aid to each other and the community (Wakoko, 2003).
These groups are based on the premise of sharing resources such as labour and costs, due to rural individual’s lack of access to formal micro-finance or banking institutions (Wakoko, 2003). Co-operative organizations allow communities and individuals to take control of their productive resources and capabilities from which they derive their livelihoods (Wanyma, Develtere, & Pollet, 2009). Group formation and longevity of co-operatives have been found to depend on social solidarity and networking among members (Wakoko, 2003). Through joining together, individuals within the group are able develop strong economies of scales, enhancing their living conditions through increased income (Wanyma et al., 2009).

As globalization and liberalization of the economy increases, the importance of these co-operatives have expanded, focusing on meeting market demands (Wakoko, 2003). Looking specifically at Uganda, the types of co-operatives that make up the majority include: agricultural co-operatives, SACCOs, dairy co-operatives, transport co-operatives, handicraft co-operatives, health co-operatives, and education co-operatives (Kyazze, 2010). Currently in Uganda, the criteria for the registration of primary co-operatives state that there must be a minimum of thirty members and membership should be based on a common bond, such as occupation (Kyazze, 2010). Co-operatives of all types have been praised as a way to alleviate poverty by encouraging partnership among individuals in a community and the building of skills among members (ILO, 2012). However, the history of co-operatives in Uganda has not always been a positive or reliable method of bringing individuals out of poverty. In Uganda, the co-operative movement can be characterized into two eras: state control and liberalization (Wanyma et al., 2009). Uganda followed the unified model that was typical in Anglophone countries during colonization, with the co-operative movement built in a pyramid, with primary co-operatives on
the bottom, unions and federations in the middle, and a single apex body at the top (Wanyma et al., 2009).

Era of State Control

Co-operatives have been observed as far back as the colonial era, where these organizations were formed for the ease of the government, not the betterment of individuals (Wanyma et al., 2009). Prior to colonization, agriculture was the dominant economic activity of both men and women (Wakoko, 2003). In 1913, the co-operative movement was born in Uganda through local Baganda farmers who formed the first Farmer’s Association in the Midwest of the Buganda region (Kyazze, 2010). This was in response to the exploitative marketing systems that limited local farmers solely to the production of cash crops, such as cotton or coffee, and excluded them from processing or marketing, which forced Ugandans to sell at low prices but allowed the government to make high profits (UCA, 2009; Kyazze, 2010). However, the colonial government refused to recognize these co-operatives, as they were seen as subversive, which forced co-operatives to go underground until 1946 when the Co-operative Societies Ordinance was enacted (UCA, 2009). At that time, many co-operative groups viewed this law as an attempt by the government to gain more power and control over their businesses, so they refused to register their co-operatives (UCA, 2009). In 1952, Sir Andrew Cohen, the new Governor in Uganda, addressed this concern and made amendments to the Ordinance that resulted in all existing groups registering by the end of 1959 (UCA, 2009). Additionally, the Co-operative Alliance was created in 1961 to oversee the co-operative movement in Uganda (Kyazze, 2010). By 1962, there were twenty-one registered co-operative unions and 1,662 primary co-operative societies that had memberships of over 252,378 individuals (UCA, 2009).
When Uganda gained independence in 1962, the government encouraged rural development primarily through co-operatives and the creation of the Cooperative Societies Act in the same year (UCA, 2009). The government encouraged the establishment and diversification of co-operatives across the country (Kyazze, 2010). However, the state continued to control these cooperatives, rather than maintaining or creating local ownership, so the growth of co-operatives was linked to government support through assistance and subsidized services (UCA, 2009). For instance, the Uganda government set up Statutory Marketing Boards for cash crops such as coffee and cotton, where co-operatives were made the sole agents from which the government purchased these goods for export (Wanyma et al., 2009). This forced farmers to join co-operatives in order to sell their products, rather than allowing them to join by choice (Wanyma et al., 2009). As such, the poor and women were negatively affected by the lack of input they had in the co-operative development (Wanyma et al., 2009).

When Idi Amin came to power in 1971 and declared an ‘economic war’, the economy reached a stand-still and the demand for agriculture crops that co-operatives produced was so low that farmers could not afford to grow them anymore (UCA, 2009). Essentially, the lack of rule of law and insecurity of the future destroyed the productivity of the whole economy, including co-operatives (Kyazze, 2010). During this time period, many co-operatives were negatively affected or collapsed, such as the Uganda Cooperative Central Union and the Cooperative Bank (Kyazze, 2010). This was partly due to the fact that membership was forced, rather than chosen, which decreased the desire of individuals to maintain the co-operatives once they started to falter. Nevertheless, a positive switch occurred for co-operatives as civil servants and wage earners realized that they could form co-operative savings and credit societies as a way to create access to capital that banks could no longer provide (UCA, 2009). Thus, co-operative
involvement increased to 3,054 in 1978 from 2,500 in 1971 due to the growth in SACCOs while involvement in many other types of co-operatives fell (UCA, 2009).

Between 1980 and 1985, Milton Obote ruled Uganda and reverted to using co-operatives to encourage development, but too much government involvement again limited the growth of co-operatives (UCA, 2009). Not surprisingly, this resulted in the continued failure of the co-operative movement due to state control limiting performance and the ability of co-operatives to respond to the market needs. Because co-operatives were controlled by the government, not by the individual members within, their productivity was limited and they experienced increased inequality (Wanyma et al., 2009). The lack of membership control, which is one aspect of what defines a co-operative, severely limited the potential growth of co-operatives during this time period. Due to the top down control of co-operatives during this time, there was little focus or acknowledgement of the role of women in co-operatives.

Era of Liberalization

In 1986, when Yoweri Museveni came to power, there was hope that the government would restore autonomy to co-operatives instead of continuing the failing trend of government involvement (Wanyma et al., 2009). Due to the liberalization push that emerged at this time, the Ugandan government was indeed forced to withdraw their involvement in the 1990s (Wanyma et al., 2009). This was related to the Ugandan government’s new focus on restructuring the economy to be based on macro-economic stabilization through structural adjustment with the goal of high yet sustainable economic growth (Flygare, 2006). The Ugandan government also restructured legal framework to give co-operatives autonomy to operate in the emerging market economy (Wanyma et al., 2009). However, the previous history of excessive government involvement limited the ability of the co-operative movement to take advantage of the new
opportunities available to them in the liberalization policies (UCA, 2009). This resulted in another decline in Uganda’s co-operatives due the removal of the government support that co-operatives had come to depend on. This collapse ushered in a new era of co-operative development in the 1990’s.

The new era for co-operatives in Uganda is significantly less researched than the first era but there is considerable hope for co-operatives to alleviate poverty (Wanyma et al., 2009). This new era shifted to match the market’s focus on efficiency and competitive pricing, rather than ownership or monopoly control (Wanyma et al., 2009). This was evident in agricultural production as individuals in co-operatives now had to compete equally with all other producers with no extra benefits from involvement in the co-operative (Wanyma et al., 2009). This essentially forced co-operatives to transform in order to survive, even when they were on the verge of collapse as they were in Uganda (Wanyma et al., 2009). During the 1990’s and 2000’s, agricultural co-operatives experienced a decline, while financial co-operatives grew, thanks to the liberalization policies (Kyazze, 2010). There were only 554 co-operatives in 1995 but a decade later this number had grown to 7,476, showing evidence of the growth of these financial organizations (Wanyma et al., 2009). After the removal of state involvement, many co-operative unions also collapsed, yet evidence shows that more bottom-up, consensual networking between individuals was occurring, encouraging co-operatives to work together to reach market needs, rather than using top-down, government control (Wanyma et al., 2009).

Perhaps one of the more important changes to co-operatives in Uganda was that they diversified from a sole focus on agricultural products to other initiatives that were more in demand, including manufacture co-operatives and SACCOS (Wanyma et al., 2009). While the volume of agriculture produce handled by co-operatives declined to 1% in 2006 from 22% in
1992, there was a significant rise in export through multinational companies from fourteen to 83% over the same period (Kyazze, 2010). This reflects the increasing globalization and liberalization that the world was experiencing. It is thought that the future of Uganda’s socio-economic development will in part depend on how well co-operatives create employment opportunities in rural areas (UCA, 2009).

Due to decentralization, the Ugandan government is currently responsible for the registration of co-operatives but supervision and monitoring of co-operatives are the responsibility of local government (Kyazze, 2010). Agricultural co-operatives make up 55% of registered co-operatives, followed by SACCOs at 23%, multi-purpose co-operatives at 6% and other co-operatives (consumer, handicraft, etc.) at 16% (Kyazze 2010). Of the 6,496 registered co-operatives in 2009, 501 were multi-purpose co-operatives and 18 were active handicraft groups (Kyazze, 2010). However, a large section of the co-operative sector tends to operate outside this unified model due to the perception that co-operative unions and the apex organization are less than useful (Wanyma et al., 2009). In 2008, there were 10,641 primary co-operatives but only 20%, or 2,181 were estimated to be active (Pollet, 2009). There is difficulty in finding specific numbers of active co-operatives in Uganda as many registered co-operatives are no longer active and many active co-operatives are not registered (Flygare, 2006). Overall, Uganda’s co-operative sector can be seen to be starting again, due to the failures and struggles that mark its history (Wanyma et al., 2009).

Not surprisingly, most research has been conducted on co-operatives that have been registered with the government of Uganda, due to the ease of identifying these co-operative groups (Wanyma et al., 2009). Also, previous research primarily focused on either agricultural co-operatives, as Uganda is primarily an agricultural country, or SACCOs due to their large and
growing presence in the country (Wanmya et al., 2009). Yet, aside from the growth of SACCOs, co-operatives have been venturing into other ‘non-traditional’ sectors and many have diversified to respond to members’ needs and market demands (Wanmya et al., 2009). The lack of focus on other types of co-operatives, particularly smaller, rural community co-operatives that remain unregistered, creates an opportunity to explore their growing presence in Uganda as it is unfolding. Despite the growth in the co-operative movement, many co-operative organizations still tend to operate out of the registered system because they do not see registration as useful or are unable to reach town to register their group (Wanyma et al., 2009). Thus, the exploration of an unregistered production co-operative can provide a glimpse into an under-researched area.

Co-operatives in East Africa tend to cater towards male heads of households due to structural inequalities, such as ownership of land, education, division of labour, and stereotypes of gender roles (ILO, 2012). Therefore, women tend to be under-represented in co-operatives. Most women-only co-operatives in Uganda are production co-operatives for non-industrial products, such as handicrafts (Katusiime, 1988). Handicraft co-operatives show different outcomes, as they may offer women the ability to participate economically from home, yet “many handicraft co-operatives have failed economically and folded up once outside support was withdrawn” (Mayoux, 1992, p.92). However, previously single-product co-operatives have diversified beyond just handicrafts, which increase the likelihood of co-operatives’ ability to traverse the gap of inequality between men and women through the empowerment of women and strengthen the likelihood of success of the co-operative (Jones et al., 2012). Furthermore, emerging co-operatives focus on the development of the individual and the collective interest of members, not just economic engagement, providing additional benefits to members (Wanyma et al., 2009). One such benefit for women-only co-operatives is the ability to work together with
other women to generate income, increasing their ability to make strategic life choices independent of their husbands thereby reducing their dependency on their husbands. In the long run, this empowerment could potentially allow for a questioning of cultural inequalities and norms.

**Empowerment**

The shift in the co-operative movement to establishing smaller, rural co-operatives not only benefits individuals working together as an organization but also provides access to empowerment for individuals. Just as top-down co-operatives were unsuccessful, top-down attempts at empowerment cannot be effective, nor can empowerment be imposed on individuals by outsiders (Rowlands, 1995). The empowerment approach originated through Third World feminist and grassroots organizations, with the goal to recognize how women become self-reliant, rather than comparing their position to men (Shetty, 1991). The feminist perspective has looked at the dynamics of oppression and is interested in both the dynamics of oppression from the outside as well as internalized oppression that each individual may experience (Rowlands, 1995).

No single definition or measurement of empowerment is recognized or is applicable in all contexts, yet several features are considered valid, including that empowerment is an ongoing, context-specific process occurring on a continuum (Shetty, 1991). The ability of women to join and work together in a co-operative provides the ‘core’ of the empowerment process, where the “transformation of the individual or group is the ‘key’ that opens ‘locks’ on the empowerment door; and the circumstances that appear to encourage or inhibit the process” (Rowlands, 1997, p.111). A circular relationship exists where participation in a group feeds back into the process of personal empowerment, and vice versa (Rowlands, 1997). This interconnection between the
levels of empowerment are important to explore as studies have shown that just because women are empowered in one area, such as their personal lives, does not mean they experience empowerment in another, such as their relationships at home or within social groups (Hategekimana, 2011).

In development literature, empowerment is often a contentious term. The most commonly accepted definition of empowerment is the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 2001, p.437). It is typically marginalized individuals who experience empowerment, as to become empowered one must have been in a position of disempowerment in the first place (Kabeer, 1999). While development discourse focuses on the empowerment of women, other marginalized groups can experience the transition from disempowerment to empowerment. For instance, African American men are a devalued group in Western society, facing overrepresentation in negative positions, such as prisons, and underrepresentation in successful positions, such as post-secondary education facilities (Bernard, 1999). Yet, a study in Canada and the United Kingdom using participatory methodology with black men of African descent found that black men have challenged these negative stereotypes associated with them through resistance and redefining what success means for them (Bernard, 1999).

To understand the concept of empowerment, it is important to look at the root concept of power and how relationships of power are defined and change, resulting in expansion of people’s ability. One theorist who looked at the relation of power and empowerment is Jo Rowlands (1995; 1997), who examined four types of power: power over, power to, power with, and power from within. ‘Power over’ is where some people have control over others, whether perceived or actual; ‘power to’ is generative or productive power to create outcomes without control; ‘power
with’ is group power, where the outcome is with a number of individuals and the whole is viewed as greater than the sum of individuals; and ‘power from within’ is when self-acceptance and self-respect occurs, resulting in respect and acceptance of others (Rowlands, 1995; 1997).

Analysis of empowerment must occur across these varying levels of power, as empowerment is not an isolated experience but interacts across and between levels (Rowlands, 1997).

Traditional development discourse often defines empowerment solely as ‘power over’, with the goal to ‘empower’ women to participate in the economic system in a particular society through bestowing it on women by outside sources (Rowlands, 1997). However, in the case of co-operatives, where women join together on their own or through an NGO, empowerment as a process is more likely to occur through the other three main avenues of power (Rowlands, 1997). For instance, in co-operatives, women work together to set the collective agenda, related to ‘power to’ and ‘power with’. This results in ‘power from within’ as women gain self-respect and self-esteem through their ability to make decisions within the group (Rowlands, 1997). Thus, empowerment must be not only about “bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it” but also about the process where people come to believe in themselves and are able to make decisions (Rowlands, 1997, p.13).

In specific reference to the importance of the frequently ignored ‘power from within’, people who are systematically denied power in the dominant society tend to internalize messages of inferiority and may even come to believe it to be true (Rowlands, 1995). Thus, empowerment must not only increase the ability of individuals to gain greater access to things previously denied to them, such as economic resources, but also must allow individuals to perceive themselves as able to enter that space, making the psychological and social aspect of empowerment essential (Rowlands, 1995).
Co-operatives offer a unique opportunity to explore different levels of empowerment, as by their very nature, they operate at the collective level, while also playing a role in relational and personal dimensions of its members. Rowlands (1997) observed in her research on women’s groups in Honduras that empowerment occurs at three levels with a strong interaction between the levels: the personal, the relational, and the collective level. The personal level involves “developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression” (Rowlands, 1995, p.103). The collective level involves “individuals working together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have done alone” (Rowlands, 1995, p.103). The relational level is related to the household and familial relationships and involves “developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it” (Rowlands, 1995, p.103). The empowerment process is complex and interactions between the various levels are dynamic (Rowlands, 1997).

Each level of empowerment has different interacting concepts that relate to the process of empowerment in a particular context. Rowlands (1997) defines each of the three levels to have some “core values”, which are concepts that occur as a result of the transformation of the individual or the group. Rowlands (1997) also states that it is the action, or “change”, that comes from the core values which is significant, such that empowerment does not solely equal self-confidence but what happens as a result of having self-confidence. The empowerment process is dynamic, where outcomes and processes form a feedback loop, encouraging and strengthening each other (Rowlands, 1997). “Inhibiting factors” and “encouraging factors” are circumstances that either impede or advance empowerment, respectively, further impacting this dynamic process. Each level of empowerment interacts with the other levels but also has different themes within each of the above-mentioned categories. Rowlands (1997) acknowledges that
measurement of empowerment using this theory is context specific and themes will vary in different situations.

**Personal Level of Empowerment**

Looking specifically at the personal level, some of the core values Rowlands (1997) identified through her research on women’s groups in Honduras include: self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of agency, and dignity. Empowerment at the personal level goes beyond just these core values, as the changes that occur in women’s lives are significant in that it is an action, or outcome, of the core values, reflecting empowerment being lived out. For instance, if individuals view themselves as capable and able to make a valuable contribution, individuals are more likely to take an active role in the organization (Spreitzer, 1995). Alternatively, individuals with low self-esteem are unlikely to be active participants in the organization, which re-enforces low self-esteem (Spreitzer, 1995). Some of the changes Rowlands (1997) identified were an increased ability to make and express ideas, an increased ability to obtain and control resources, and an increased sense that things are possible. These core values and changes can be limited by inhibiting factors, such as lack of control over time, male control over income, or active opposition by the partner (Rowlands, 1997). In contrast, core values and changes can be advanced through encouraging factors such as engaging in activity outside the house, being part of a group and participating in its activities, developing friendships, and having the ability to share problems and support (Rowlands, 1997).

Other studies have found similar values associated with empowerment at the personal level, as co-operative membership allows women to be supported to gain confidence and skills through education and through the ability to participate in the decision making process of the group (ILO, 2012). Schein (2003) conducted group interviews with fifty-seven women in
Nicaragua who were members of work-related groups, such as micro-credit lending groups, unions, or work co-operatives, and found that many women reported a more positive attitude towards themselves and greater self-confidence as a result of their involvement in the group. Weide & Waslander (2007), looking specifically at women who were involved in receiving micro-credit loans in groups, found that the women scored higher on measurements of happiness, lack of loneliness, power, and self-esteem compared to women not involved in micro-credit projects. Jones et al. (2012) explored women who were involved in sixteen collective fair-trade enterprises across Africa, Asia, and South America and found that women were able to increase their savings as well as diversify their income through involvement in the enterprises, which is very important when markets are irregular and proved to be an encouraging factor. Ferguson and Kepe (2011) studied women in the Manyakabi Area Cooperative Enterprise, a mixed-gendered agricultural co-operative in south-western Uganda, and found that women who were active in the co-operative reported greater independence, higher status, and gained leadership and business skills, which improving their coping strategies. As individuals come to believe themselves capable, they may act in ways that reflect that belief, furthering their positive perceptions of themselves and creating a positive cycle of empowerment.

The personal level of empowerment reflects the ‘power from within’ that Rowlands (1995) identifies as necessary for individuals to reach the point where they see options that are available to them and are willing to break down internalized oppression. The personal level also recognizes that “just because people have objective power does not mean that they will feel empowered or will act” (Narayan, 2005, p.21). Empowerment cannot be limited to just the measurement of internal perceptions or external changes that result, but rather empowerment is the interplay between those two aspects, impacted by inhibiting and encouraging factors that
limit or advance the process. Furthermore, empowerment cannot just be measured at the personal level, as the empowerment process is an interaction of different elements.

**Collective Level of Empowerment**

The collective level is close to the personal level as it is hard to be empowered at the group level if one does not feel empowered at the individual level (Rowlands, 1997). The collective level illustrates the importance of social relationships, as participation in the group enhances personal empowerment and personal empowerment enhances participation in the group. Rowlands (1997) identified the core values of collective empowerment as group identity, a sense of collective agency, group dignity, and self-organization. The changes that Rowlands (1997) identified included the ability to organize around their own needs, the ability to respond collectively to events outside the group, and increased access to resources. Some of the inhibiting factors that Rowlands (1997) identified as a hindrance to collective empowerment were dependency of ‘key’ individuals, a lack of cohesion in the local community, and active opposition. On the other hand, encouraging factors that advance collective empowerment included animators from within group, development of leadership, respect, and tackling ‘conflict’ within the group (Rowlands, 1997).

Illustrating the core values of collective empowerment, Schein (2003) explored how female members of work-related groups viewed the meaning of their group membership through self-reported changes as a result of their membership. Schein (2003) found that many women felt more capable and confident of their ability to do things on their own due to their membership. One of the benefits of working in a group, particularly in handicrafts, is that women can meet and converse and the group can provide an avenue through which affiliation and identity beyond familial roles can exist (Le Mare, 2012). Schein (2003) found that women involved in work-
related groups no longer felt marginalized, as they had financial and emotional support, they had
developed organizing and technical skills, and they gain awareness around rights and protection.
Schein (2003) also found that many women felt freer to talk about their experiences and share
their opinions with others based on their increased feelings of capability. Likewise, in a case
study in Ghana, Cheston and Kuhn (n.d.) found that through group-based lending, women gained
experience in decision-making and influencing others in the group. Working together as a group
also makes individual women’s work more visible, as they link women who do similar work,
resulting in the women gaining social skills and forming alliances and networks (Le Mare, 2012).

Co-operatives encourage women to develop decision-making skills through democratic
governance that encourages participation of all individuals involved (ILO, 2012). Mayoux
(1992), who looked at a tailoring co-operative in Nicaragua, found that women who participated
in co-operatives benefited from the training and group decision-making, as well as the widening
of friendships and support networks. Ferguson and Kepe’s (2011) analysis of a mixed
agricultural co-operative in southwestern Uganda found that women, since being involved in the
coopervative, had a stronger voice in the community and had been able to demand respect from
business partners and wholesalers, as well as their male partners. Furthermore, the women
involved in the agricultural co-operative were able to ‘learn by doing’, where farmers shared and
managed skills through trust-based relationships, which was especially important for women
who typically had less access to resources and training (Ferguson & Kepe, 2011). The
cooperation that co-operatives require help members respond to various challenges they face,
such as the internal support that the co-operative can provide members who face difficulty
(Ferguson & Kepe, 2011). Thus, the value of group identity and collective agency can result in
the ability to respond collectively as a group, leading to empowerment at the collective level.
Empowerment at the collective level feeds back into the other levels of empowerment.

It is in these community organizations where members grow social capital, which is the networks and norms that allow people to act collectively and to “learn to create, change, bargain, and control the institutional settings of their organization” (Titeca & Vervisch, 2008, p.2206). The collective level of empowerment can be argued to reflect the ‘power with’ that Rowlands (1995) identified, as women are able to work together to obtain a goal and gain ability and skills through working with other members of the community. For instance, in the Nabuka Dairy Co-operative in Mukono, Uganda, some of the tangible benefits members reported included cash credit and access to a stable market, while some of the intangible benefits included gaining knowledge from other members and access to education through the co-operative (Flygare, 2006). What is interesting is that rural co-operatives have been found to continue, particularly women co-operatives, even if they are earning little or no money due to the social benefits they receive (Mayoux, 1992). This illustrates the importance of the social and collective benefits that co-operatives can provide women beyond just economic rewards (Mayoux, 1992).

**Relational Level of Empowerment**

At the relational level, Rowlands (1997) found that empowerment is strongly related to the personal level, where self-confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to negotiate or communicate resulted in a sense of empowerment in relationships. Mayoux (1992) found that women who participated in a tailoring co-operative initially reported having joint-decision making ability in the household, yet further research found great variability in the meaning of that response, where men still tended to control decision-making. Thus, empowerment at the relational level, as Rowlands (1997) found in her initial study, is the hardest to define and measure, particularly if the women in the co-operative are single or separated. Although married
women may have access to resources from their husbands that single individuals lack, they may be less likely to make or participate in household decisions (Wakoko, 2003). Thus, both married and single women face challenges in their household situation related to empowerment.

Despite the difficulty, studying empowerment at the relational level is essential, as the household is where gender discrimination and inequality is rooted. Women may appear to have rights to family resources, yet women’s ability to exercise those rights is limited by culture and context (Deshmukh-Ranadive & Murphy, 2005). Women often experience disempowerment through cultural norms that limit women to the caring and rearing of children while being seen as assistants to their husbands not equals (Deshmukh-Ranadive & Murphy, 2005). In Uganda, households are characterized by gender and age divisions, with power favoring males, particularly in relation to access and use of resources (Wakoko, 2003).

The core values Rowlands (1997) identified include the ability to negotiate, communicate, and defend yourself and your rights within the relationship. The changes that resulted from the core values at this level were increased control of personal circumstances and assets, such as income, use of time, and ability to attend meetings, as well as the increased capacity to make one’s own choices (Rowlands, 1997). Control over assets typically means a woman’s ability to claim ownership over productive assets, such as animals or land, and having the power to control their share of household income (Golla et al., 2011). Some of the inhibiting factors that limited empowerment at this level included male violence, cultural expectations of women, male control over income, and dependency of women on men (Rowlands, 1997). Some encouraging factors that increased empowerment at this level included knowledge of women’s rights, sharing problems with other women, ending isolation, and participation in groups (Rowlands, 1997).
It is argued that women gain greater decision-making ability with an increase in their income and access to financial resources, which should relate to being able to gain equality between partners to participate in household decisions (Kabeer, 2001). However, that is not always the case, as decision-making in households often is influenced by the bargaining power between members of the household (Kabeer, 2001). This is based on perceived significance of an individual’s contribution to household income, alternative options available should household cooperation break down, and the ability of some members to exercise coercion or violence over other members (Kabeer, 1994). Sen and Sen (1985, as cited in Kabeer, 1994, p.119) argued that “as long as women’s claims to the household resources continue to be exercised through men (husbands or sons), their contribution disappears without a trace, as it were, into the household.”

Gaining access to information, however, has been found to be a source of power to women, as women who are illiterate or lack access to knowledge are easily oppressed (Deshmukh-Ranadive & Murphy, 2005).

Le Mare (2012) examined empowerment in women handicraft producers in the Fair Trade movement in Bangladesh and found that women were more involved in family decisions, particularly related to use of their own income and the education of their children. Women believed this increased power in decision making within the household was related to their increased income and their ability to discuss and learn from the group itself and the women involved (Le Mare, 2012). Jones et al. (2012) studied women who were involved in sixteen collective fair-trade enterprises across Africa, Asia, and South America and found that women who were involved in these collective enterprise earned enough income to sustain their livelihoods and improve their standard of living. However, they also found that if there was male dominance in the household, women’s income may be seized, thus increased income had little
Empowerment at the relational level can be associated with Rowlands (1995) ‘power to’ as gaining empowerment at this level is associated with gaining some productive power to create outcomes without control. For instance, an increase in income is related to gaining power in personal circumstances through women being able to have an independent income and thus not rely on external sources to provide for themselves or their families (Rowlands, 1997). It is not a surprise that limiting factors include the lack of control over assets as access to resources is not enough if women do not have the ability to use them as they wish (Cheston & Kuhn, n.d.). It is important to examine how women’s participation in the co-operative influences personal relationships as empirical research has found that when a woman’s income increases, she is more likely to spend it on the household, increasing the welfare of the whole family (Cheston & Kuhn, n.d.; Kabeer, 1994). Yet, income may not be in itself an end feature of empowerment, since women making money does not automatically equal empowerment, but it may act as a catalyst for the empowerment process at the close relationship level (Malhorta & Schular, 2005). Thus, with women’s lives intimately tied to the household, empowerment at the relational level is an important aspect of empowerment.

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 2.1 shows the conceptual framework that is based on Rowlands (1997) theory of individual, collective, and relational empowerment. As the figure illustrates, there is a feedback loop between core values and changes that occur at each level of empowerment, which are positively impacted by encouraging factors and negatively impacted by inhibiting factors. There is also an interaction between the personal, collective, and relational levels of empowerment. What is important to note from this conception is that there is no point at which ‘empowerment’
ends. Rather, it is a continuous feedback loop. This conceptual framework will form the basis of explaining the findings during the feedback workshop. Essentially, this conceptual framework illustrates the lens through which this study will take a critical, feminist standpoint perspective based on an analysis of empowerment of women in a women’s handicraft co-operative.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

**Summary**

As the history of co-operatives in Uganda suggests, they did not have an easy battle during the era of state control and liberalization. Nevertheless, now that state control has been
curbed, the presence and strength of co-operatives is growing and diversifying, making them an important area of study, particularly for women who can use co-operatives to gain empowerment in their lives. However, as Narayan (2005, p.45) states “a women is empowered, or not, relative to her previous status and relative to others in her reference group.” Thus, it will be important to look at how women experience empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational levels as defined by Rowlands.
Chapter Three: Context of Research

Introduction

This section provides background on the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative, specifically the geographical area, the historical origin through Uganda Venture, and practices as a co-operative. This section begins with an overview of Uganda.

Uganda

Uganda, located in East Africa, has an approximate population of 35 million people spread across 241,038 squared kilometers (World Factbook, 2012). Life expectancy in Uganda is 53.45 years with almost 50% of the population under 14 years of age (World Factbook, 2012). Approximately 13% of the population lives in urban areas, with the remaining 87% living in rural areas (World Factbook, 2012). The official language is English but many people speak Luganda, the predominant local language (World Factbook, 2012). Approximately 42% of individuals identify themselves as Roman Catholic, with another 42% identifying as Protestant and 12% as Muslim (World Factbook, 2012).

Due to the large number of people living in rural areas combined with the abundance of fertile soil and regular rainfall during the two rainy seasons, the primary employment in Uganda is agriculture, with 82% of its population depending on it for their livelihood (World Factbook, 2012). 35% of the total population currently lives under the poverty line and in rural Uganda, this number increases to 48% (World Factbook, 2012). Of agricultural labour, women make up 70%, putting them at a disadvantage to men in terms of their ability to break out of the cycle of poverty and to increase their income (Ellis et al., 2006). Individuals who diversify to livestock holdings, non-farm self-employment, or food crop production typically increase their income.
(Ellis & Bahigwa, 2003). It is evident that becoming less reliant on agriculture can increase well-being and income by diversifying income sources (Ellis & Bahigwa, 2003). This is evident as even thought 84% of women in agriculture, only 41% get paid cash (UBoS, 2007). As Sen (1999, as cited in Schein, 2003) points out: enhancing the ability and agency of women to participate economically can enhance the economic and social conditions of society over all. Having women participate in the economy can be a method of bringing Uganda further out of poverty and into a better economic position.

**Tabiro, Mpiigi District, Uganda**

Mpiigi District is located in central Uganda and measures 1,541 squared kilometers (Mpiigi District Local Government, 2012). Of the total 188,201 individuals that make up the working age population (14 to 64 years of age), 95,813 are women, yet the labour force participation rate is only 52% for women, compared to 66% for men (UBoS, 2002a). This is below the national average of 81% for women and 95% for men (UBoS, 2007). According to the latest census in 2002, almost 25% of the working population in Mpiigi District works in subsistence agriculture (UBoS, 2002a). Mpiigi District is tied in second place for the highest amount of female-headed households in the country at 29%, with an average household size of 4.6 people (UBoS, 2002b).

Tabiro Village, where the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is based, is a rural village located in Mpiigi District, four kilometers off the main Kampala-Masaka highway. Mpiigi District is made up of one county, Mawokota, which is divided into seven sub-counties (Mpiigi District Local
Tabiro is one of the 60 villages that make up Kamengo sub-county (Mpigi District Local Government, 2012). Figure 3.1 illustrates the location.

Figure 3.1: Mpigi District, Uganda

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1 Despite attempts to find census data for the Mpigi District, it is not available. The latest census occurred in 2002 and findings were not broken up by Districts. All relevant data from the 2002 Census was provided in this section.
According to the Co-operative Officer in Mpigi District, there are 27 registered co-operatives in the District, with three co-operatives in the process of registration. Of those registered co-operatives, only four are women-only co-operatives. The primary types of co-operatives in Mpigi District are SACCOs and agricultural co-operatives, with only two registered co-operatives involved in handicraft production. Of the two, one is a mixed gender group and the other is a women-only group. Average membership of most co-operatives in Mpigi District is 65 members, suggesting that approximately 1,755 individuals in Mpigi District are part of a registered co-operative. Benefits of having a registered co-operative include gaining access to a bank account, access to credit facilities from financial organizations, and access to training in financial statement and accounting.

Currently in Uganda, the criteria for the registration of primary co-operatives include that groups must have a minimum of 30 members and membership should be based on a common bond, such as occupation (Kyazze, 2010). Tabiro Ladies’ Club is currently operating as an unregistered co-operative as they have yet to begin the process of registration with the District. It is unclear how many unregistered co-operatives exist in the area, as they are much more difficult to track. However in Tabiro, there was only one other active primary unregistered co-operative discovered during the process of interviews called Togetherness Fellows Club. The Togetherness Fellows Club, which had been in operation for seven years, is a mixed production co-operative that engages in activities such as agriculture, catering, and savings. Some members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club belong to this co-operative, which includes 25 women and 6 men. The Togetherness Fellows Club is currently in the process of registration with the District. Some women also mentioned involvement in other clubs but whether they operated as co-operatives was not discovered.
Despite the benefits of registration, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club remains unregistered due to influence by the Director, David\textsuperscript{2}, of the local NGO, Tabiro Children’s Home, that Uganda Venture partners with and from which the Tabiro Ladies’ Club originated. The male Director of Tabiro Children’s Home suggested that since the Tabiro Ladies’ Club initially began as a project between Uganda Venture, the Canadian NGO, and Tabiro Children’s Home, they do not need to register as a separate co-operative with the District. However, the female Chairperson of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club and wife of the Director stated that they can benefit from registration with the District. Due to this conflict of interests, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club remains unregistered, which reflects the strength of patriarchy and power that exist in the culture.

**History of Uganda Venture in Tabiro**

NGOs have a unique opportunity to encourage empowerment of women-only groups by being able to provide an emphasis on personal awareness and capacity development (Couglin & Thomas, 2002). However, outside assistance must be in the form of a facilitator or helper, as anything more invasive can limit the empowerment of people involved (Rowlands, 1997). Power cannot be given, it must come from within – thus, NGOs must be careful that they do not take a ‘power over’ approach (Rowlands, 1997). Nevertheless, grassroots NGOs, such as the one that assisted with the development of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, often have an advantage in promoting strategies that enhance women’s empowerment through having less top-down governance and having greater face-to-face involvement with the individuals they are working with (Kabeer, 1994).

Uganda Venture, a project of the Navigators of Canada, is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and begun working in the community of Tabiro in 2006. Every year since, Uganda Venture has

\footnote{Pseudonyms used throughout this paper}
brought a team of approximately 12 individuals from Canada to Uganda to work in the community on various projects, including building dormitories for orphans, building schools and homes, holding an HIV/AIDS awareness day, and participating in community days. They are able to do these activities through the partnership they have with Tabiro Children’s Home, a registered NGO based in Tabiro, Uganda. One volunteer, Sarah, who was heavily involved on the Canadian side and had been to Tabiro many times, saw an embroidery piece while traveling in South Africa. Sarah brought the piece with her on one of her trips to Tabiro in January 2009. Sarah showed Grace, the wife of the Director of Tabiro Children’s Home, the piece of embroidery and shared with her that perhaps it was something that Grace and the women in the community could do as a project of Uganda Venture. Grace was pleased with this opportunity because she had wanted an avenue through which she could involve ladies in the community in the development that Uganda Venture was bringing to the area.

When Sarah returned in May 2009 with the Uganda Venture team, she brought supplies to make embroideries and discovered that Grace had found ten women initially interested in learning to make embroideries. Sarah and other group members from Canada met with them every day for five weeks, teaching them different embroidery stitches out of an embroidery book. Many of previous ongoing projects in the community developed through discussion between the male leaders of the community and the male leader of Uganda Venture, Anthony. This was the first female-focused project of Uganda Venture. Sarah, aware that she was only present in Tabiro for a short period of time, ensured that the ladies of the original group were trained in basic embroidery stitches and left the rest up to the ladies. In the fall when her husband visited Tabiro, he brought back some of the work that the ladies had created. Originally, from the perspective of Uganda Venture, this was a project to engage the female population of the community, so for the
first two years Uganda Venture brought over all the supplies needed to make the embroiderries and purchased all of the completed embroiderries. Upon realizing the depth that the co-operative was developing in the following years, Uganda Venture began shifting away from providing financial support and encouraged local ownership and sustainability. Withdrawal of financial support occurred in 2011, which allowed the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to officially begin operating as a true co-operative, with the women taking control of the co-operative fully.

Prior to the research period, the researcher spent three weeks as a volunteer with Uganda Venture in 2009 and six weeks in 2011. This volunteer experience provided first-hand knowledge about the origins of the co-operative as well as the change which occurred in 2011 that led to the reduction of funding support from Uganda Venture. The influence of this prior experience will be discussed further in the methodology chapter of the thesis.

Tabiro Ladies’ Club Co-operative

When the Tabiro Ladies’ Club originated, they created a constitution, with the motto of ‘a friend in need’. They outlined nine aims and goal, including:

1. To improve and promote the education standards in the ladies’ homes and the community at large
2. To promote teamwork, transparency and co-operation among members
3. To help one another in times of joy and sorrow
4. To improve on the ladies’ income and economic status in order to meet their basic needs (education, treatment, shelter, clothing, feeding and acquiring lands)
5. To improve and ensure that ladies are self-reliant and employed
6. To promote ladies’ life skills (e.g. creativity, community, self-esteem, decision making)
7. To impart knowledge and skills in handwork to ladies’ family members, especially girls
8. To eradicate poverty and illiteracy in the ladies’ homes and family members

9. To gain popularity in other countries, that is, Canada

From the initial ten members, the group grew to 80 members the following year. The initial members became teachers who were responsible for teaching new members how to make embroideries. The members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club would buy the necessary materials from the co-operative to make their own embroidery designs and bring the completed piece back to the co-operative to sell. Prior to 2011, Uganda Venture would take the embroideries and send money back to Uganda, sometimes months later, resulting in women having to wait several months for income from their products. During the first two years, the women were making approximately 200,000 Ugandan Shilling per piece, or approximately $75 Canadian.

When Uganda Venture came to Uganda in 2011, there was a change in the interaction between Uganda Venture and Tabiro Ladies’ Club. Uganda Venture realized that the way they had been financially supporting the co-operative would not make it sustainable in the long term. Thus, they began to encourage the co-operative to find markets within Uganda for their products. Additionally, Uganda Venture realized that the high prices at which they were buying the embroidery pieces were not sustainable if they were to sell these products in local markets. Uganda Venture discussed and encouraged the women to lower their prices to meet market demand. This had a negative effect on the co-operative; many women dropped out of the group when they ceased to obtain the high prices they expected. It was unknown what, if any, impact this had on both the women remaining in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, as well as those who left the co-operative. For instance, a piece of embroidery that would have sold for 200,000 Ugandan Shillings ($75) in the first two years of the co-operative is currently selling for 40,000 Ugandan Shillings.
Shillings ($20). The initial overpayment for the embroidery was an acknowledged mistake by Uganda Venture and was partly due to the fact that Uganda Venture did not initially see this project turning into an independent co-operative. This, combined with a lack of awareness of fair market value for the embroidery products in Uganda, led to the necessary price decrease.

With this shift in the co-operative, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club decided to hire a business manager to help them find markets; however, as of August 2012, they had yet to find markets for their embroidery products. It is important to take into account the influential role that men can often play in women’s groups, as men often take the role of management or leadership, which can decrease the empowerment that women experience through collective action (Hambly, 2002). For instance, in the Siaya District of Kenya, Hambly (2002) found that in 33 agroforestry women’s groups, there was an average of 25% male membership. While the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is strictly a women-only co-operative, the fact that they hired a male business manager to help them increase their presence in the Ugandan craft market is interesting. Particularly since participant observation revealed that the business manager was never present at their monthly purchasing meetings. In fact, he was only seen once during research period in 2012, as he was away in Kenya previously and he was not seen interacting with the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as a group. Yet, despite the setback of a current lack of market for their embroidery products, the women have not given up.

**Current Practices of the Co-operative**

The Tabiro Ladies’ Club meets monthly on the last Monday of each month to buy products that the women have made. They all agree on a price, based on the quality and size, to buy the women’s products. They have expanded their product base to include making weaved mats and baskets in addition to embroidery pieces. However, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club had
temporarily stopped buying embroidery products from members as they cannot locate a market for them. As such, many members, but not all, have shifted to making mats and baskets instead. The income from mats and baskets is significantly lower than what they were receiving from the embroideries. For baskets, women can receive anywhere from 3,000 Ugandan Shillings ($1) to 7,000 Ugandan Shillings ($3). Likewise for mats, women can receive anywhere from 20,000 Ugandan Shillings ($9) to 30,000 Ugandan Shillings ($13). Some members of the Club reported only selling to the Tabiro Ladies’ Club every few months because of the length of time it takes to produce these products. Nevertheless, some women have switched to making baskets and mats because they can generate income through selling to local markets. Overall, the income women received from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club had significantly decreased over the past year.

In response to the decrease in income from handicraft products, the co-operative has attempted a move to become a multi-purpose co-operative. They have recently planted flowers as a co-operative, which were still growing and had yet to yield the first crop during the research period. This shift to planting flowers was based on an idea from one of the members in the co-operative. Members of the co-operative were able to obtain some seeds from the co-operative if they had a garden in which to plant flowers. There was also a communal flower garden that the co-operative was planting and harvesting together. The women were hopeful that this will increase their income and sustain their co-operative.

In the future, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club has plans to expand into making soap, candles, envelopes, charcoal, and possibly even rearing fish. This shift in production to a multitude of products reflects the inability to find markets for handicrafts, as well as that some women were not talented in making embroideries. Furthermore, planting flowers and rearing fish reflects the local market. Making soap, candles, envelopes and charcoal is related to the idea that it can ease
their daily life, as the ladies within the co-operative plan to purchase the items from the co-operative, instead of purchasing those items at a store, as well as selling them to local stores. Overall, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is experiencing difficulty in breaking into the saturated craft market, despite having a unique product that has yet to be sold in Ugandan craft markets. While they are still hopeful they will find a market, they have also begun to expand into different income-generating activities to sustain themselves as a co-operative in the meantime.

**Organization of Tabiro Ladies’ Club**

To become a member of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, there is an initial membership fee of 30,000 Uganda Shillings ($13) and an annual membership renewal fee of 20,000 Ugandan Shillings ($9) due in the fourth month of the year. Each woman must pay 800 Ugandan Shillings (30 cents) per month to contribute to a central fund. From each product that the co-operative sells, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club keeps a percentage to increase the money that the co-operative has in their Club account. For instance, if the co-operative decides a product could sell for 30,000 Ugandan Shillings ($13), the co-operative would keep 5,000 Ugandan Shilling ($2) for the central fund and 5,000 Ugandan Shillings ($2) for the business manager, leaving 20,000 Ugandan Shilling ($9) for the woman who made the product.

Each woman who is a member of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club has the right to participate in all activities of the Club, belong to the club registry, and is eligible to obtain loans and benefit from the funds collected as the group. If a member fails to attend monthly meetings twice in a row, they must pay a fine of 500 Shillings (20 cents). If absences continue, the woman would be removed from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. The rules and regulations that members must follow and abide by include: being God fearing; being punctual and regular in meetings, which begin at 2:00pm and end by 5:00pm; respect one another; avoid rumors; keep secrets of the Club; and be
disciplined. All members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club make up the General Assembly, which is the decision-making body on matters related to the operation of the Club. Elections take place every two years to decide which women will hold executive positions. The executive, which will be discussed further later, is the policy-making organism of the Club and is responsible for obtaining funds for the Club and recruiting new members.

The Tabiro Ladies’ Club also provides loans to its members from the money it receives from membership fees and the central fund. The loans are for six months at 10% interest. The loan is paid back monthly, with the first month given as a grace period and payment occurring over the remaining five months. However, due to the decrease in markets for their products, loans have not been available in the past year as the co-operative lacks capital. Nevertheless, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club maintained its initiative to provide financial gifts to women in the co-operative who experience a death in the family or another financial emergency. If a member of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is in need financially, such as a death in the family or if they are celebrating a child’s graduation from university, the members of the Club pool additional resources together, aside from what is required, to support the woman in need. According to the Tabiro Ladies’ Club constitution, each woman who experiences a loss of life or celebration shall receive 30,000 Ugandan Shillings ($13) from members. The final financial benefit of membership is that at the end of each year, members who have paid all necessary fees shall receive a monetary share from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club account.

The Tabiro Ladies’ Club has an executive body that is elected by the members every two years on the fourth month of the year. There are six executive positions: chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, secretary, mobilizer, and trainer. The responsibilities of the chairperson include: being the head of the club; presiding over executive meetings; chairing all monthly
meetings; and being a signatory to the Club Bank account. The vice-chairperson is deputized by
the chairperson and performs assigned duties by the Chairperson. The secretary maintains
records of the general and executive meetings; keeps an up-to-date register of all Club members;
and is a co-signatory to the Clubs account. The treasurer is responsible for all financial records
and accounts of the Club; receiving and recording all member fees, subscriptions, donations,
grants and other funds the Club may receive; complying budgets and financial statements of the
Club; and is a co-signatory of the Club’s account. The treasurer is also responsible for depositing
all money received on behalf of the Club and must deposit any amount of 30,000 Ugandan
Shillings ($13) or more within five working days of receiving it. The mobilizer is responsible for
informing all the women if there is a change in meeting time or if they need to schedule another
meeting. The head trainer is responsible for training new members in specific skills and
overseeing other trainers within the Club. The Club has different trainers for the different
products – one for embroideries and another for making mats. All authority to spend any funds
the Club receives rests on the signatories and the executive as a whole.

Summary

In summary, the women of Tabiro and surrounding villages have little access to formal
employment and are likely to engage primarily in agricultural production, resulting in a low
income. As a solution, some women joined the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to create handicraft products
to sell while it was still partnered with Uganda Venture. The women who have stayed with it
despite the struggles that have occurred for this co-operative have gained important skills
through working together. Despite its struggles as a new co-operative, it still has the ability to
empower women as there are limited options for alternative forms of employment in the area.
Based on the above summary of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, they engage in the seven principles
which define co-operatives, including: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; members participate economically; the co-operative is autonomous and independent; education, training and information provided to members; there is co-operation among co-operatives; and overall has concern for community (Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010).
Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides an explanation of the methods used in data collection and analysis. The chapter defines the methodology used to explore how women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have experienced empowerment through involvement in the co-operative. A mixed-methods approach was used to obtain the research goal and objectives.

Epistemology

The epistemological approach taken for this research was based on feminist standpoint perspective, which explores the way gender does and ought to influence ways of knowing and obtaining knowledge (Anderson, 2011). Feminist epistemology identifies ways that conventional ways of obtaining knowledge have disadvantaged women and works to create new ways of obtaining information to overcome these disadvantages (Anderson, 2011). The roots of standpoint epistemology can be linked back to Hegel’s insights into the slave/master relationship and how the views from the slave’s perspective differ from the master’s (Harding, 1993). Following this concept, Marx and Engels also made the link between different standpoints, where the lives of proletarians offer a different viewpoint to the class system than the bourgeois (Harding, 1993). It was during the 1970’s that feminists began discussing the clear connection between Marxist analysis and the structural relationship that exist between men and women in the production of knowledge (Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 2003). Therefore, similar to how Marx used the proletariat’s struggle to question bourgeois ideology, feminist standpoint can lead to understanding related to patriarchal institutions and ideologies that affect women (Hartsock, 2003).
Feminist epistemology argues that traditional ways of knowing tends to disadvantage women by excluding them as sources of knowledge and by creating theories that render women’s work invisible or that maintains women’s subordination in social hierarchies (Anderson, 2011). It is this devalue or ignoring of the experiences or lives of marginalized individuals that has excluded women from the ability to produce knowledge (Harding, 1993). The central concept of feminist epistemology is that of a “situated knower” and therefore situated knowledge, which is “knowledge that reflects the particular perspectives of the subject” (Anderson, 2011, online). Essentially, what is known and the way it is known, is argued to be based on an individual’s situation and only individuals within that situation can truly know and provide knowledge (Anderson, 2011).

Situated knowledge is argued to go against conventional scientific practices, as knowledge is supposed to “break free of – to transcend – their original ties to local, historical interests, values, and agendas” (Harding, 1993, p.50). Standpoint epistemologists argue that it is not necessarily needed, and instead focus on doing two things. First, they “start through from marginalized lives”, which involves starting from the perspective of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy to see relations between individuals and the world become visible (Harding, 1993). Secondly, they “take everyday life as problematic”, which means recognizing that in societies that are divided by race, class, or gender, individuals on the top of the social hierarchy have the ability to influence and control the relations between individuals and their world (Harding, 1993). It is women’s ability to articulate a standpoint based on the sexual division of labour that can open eyes to the unequal social relations that exist (Hartsock, 2003).

For this research, the epistemological approach will take the form of feminist standpoint. Feminist standpoint theory “claims an epistemic privilege over the character of gender relations,
and of social and psychological phenomena in which gender is implicated, on behalf of the standpoint of women” (Anderson, 2011, online). Feminist standpoint “expresses women’s experiences at a particular time and place, located within a particular set of social relations” (Hartsock, 2003, p.304). Using this perspective, it is important to represent the experiences of women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as they see it and provide the information back to the Club to give them the opportunity to extend their empowerment further. At the same time, the feminist standpoint identified in this study is also supported by the researcher’s own prior experience of living and connection gained with the community by volunteering with the Tabiro Ladies’ Club in 2009 and 2011. As discussed in Chapter Three, the researcher acknowledges that her perspective was influenced by having prior interactions with the community as well as with Uganda Venture. It was this past exposure and recognition of the experiences of Tabiro Ladies’ Club that influenced the researcher to propose this study.

Case Study

A case study approach will be used to explore how members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club have experienced empowerment due to their involvement in the co-operative. A case study is being used because, as mentioned above, there has been little research conducted on women-only handicraft co-operative groups, allowing this approach to provide valuable insights. Furthermore, Tabiro Ladies’ Club offers a unique case as it was originally started through a NGO without the intention of starting a co-operative. As Yin (1994) states, case studies offers the ability to understand complex and unique phenomena, such as the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. Therefore, instead of exploring multiple co-operatives, focusing on a case study allows a greater, deeper understanding of the benefits of women-only co-operatives.
The benefit of using a case study approach, instead of a non-case study approach is that it allows for comparison of within-case variation, that is, within the co-operative, rather than between co-operatives themselves (Gerring, 2007). By its nature, non-case study approaches are typically quantitative, as they attempt to incorporate many cases into one analysis (Gerring, 2007). On the other hand, case study research focuses on a single unit of analysis and can use both quantitative and qualitative methods (Gerring, 2007). Based on these differences, case studies, compared to non-case studies are able to: generate hypotheses, compared to testing hypothesis; provide internal validity, compared to external validity; provide insight to causal mechanisms, compared to causal effects; provide deeper analysis, compared to broad; and provide the use of heterogeneous, not homogenous, populations (Gerring, 2007). For this specific research, the reason case study was chosen was based on its ability to provide insight into causal mechanisms. Specifically, how involvement in a women-only co-operatives leads to experiences of empowerment. It was also chosen based on its use of a heterogeneous population, as the impact that involvement in a co-operative can vary significant across and between regions.

A case study is able to explore contemporary events when behaviors cannot be manipulated, by asking a “how” or “why” questions (Yin, 1994). This thesis will take the approach of single-case, embedded case study, as it will focus on the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as the single case, while exploring empowerment at the personal, relational, and collective level. The case study approach, while not able to provide statistical generalization, will be able to provide analytic generalization (Yin, 1994). As such, the previously mentioned theory by Rowlands (1997) will be used as a template and lens through which to analyze the results. By using a pre-existing theory to analyze this case study, it will allow generalization to the theory of empowerment used.
Data Acquisition Method

The methods used to acquire data include semi-structured interviews with members of the co-operative, a feedback workshop held with members of the co-operative, key informant interviews, and participant observation. Using multiple data sources allows for triangulation of results, which is important in qualitative research to increase validity and reliability.

Sample

The population of interest includes members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative, which operates out of the rural village of Tabiro, located in the Mpigi District of Uganda. The total population of the co-operative is currently 30 active members and all the women agreed to be interviewed, making the total sample $n = 30$. All women who were present at any of the meetings or gatherings between May 2012 and August 2012 were interviewed. To provide some background on the women involved in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, Table 4.1 lists some of the basic demographics of the women in the co-operative and Table 4.2, located in Appendix 1, illustrates the demographics of education, religion, primary occupation, and relationship status.

Table 4.1: Summary of Members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>$m$</th>
<th>$sd$</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of involvement (months)</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<td>No. of children away at school</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club through a translator (see Appendix 2). Each interview included a set of open-ended qualitative
questions about the woman’s experience within the co-operative and how it has affected or influenced her life. Interviewees were prompted with additional questions based on their responses. Closed-ended quantitative questions were also included as part of the interview process regarding their income generating activities, their family structure, demographic information, and ownership of assets. Interviews are important to case study research as it allows respondents to provide facts as well as opinions, yet the focused semi-structured interviews allowed the discussion to focus on the issues at hand (Yin, 1994).

The interview questions were developed prior to interviews commencing, but the interview process allowed for evolution as interviews progressed to include additional questions based on early findings. Since the semi-structured interviews were conducted through a translator, all responses were translated on the spot and then were transcribed from the audio-recorded interviews at a later time. Interviews had an $m$ time of 41:92, ranging from 26:40 to 57:41, with $sd$ of 7:24. Interviews were conducted at times that were convenient for the women and occurred either while the women were in Tabiro after a meeting or at their homes at a pre-determined time.

Feedback Workshop

At the end of the research period, a feedback workshop was held to provide members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club with information from the study and to obtain their feedback on the findings. All members were invited to attend the meeting through the mobilizer. Lunch was provided at the meeting for all women who attended. Women were also provided with 1kg of sugar each for their participation in the semi-structured interviews which was distributed at the end of feedback workshop. The meeting was attended by $n = 27$ members, including two women who had not been interviewed prior to the feedback group. Three women who had been
interviewed were not present at the workshop. The discussion in the feedback workshop lasted a total of one hour and 48 minutes.

The findings based on the semi-structured interviews of 28 women were presented to the group through the translator. Each level of empowerment was defined and explained with information provided first on the personal level, followed by the collective level, and lastly, the relational level. The primary levels within each of the sub-categories of empowerment of core values, changes, encouraging factors, and inhibiting factors were presented to the women. After sub-category findings were presented, the women were asked if they agreed with these categories and whether any key concepts or ideas were missing that they believed should be present. At the beginning of the workshop, only a few of the more outspoken women provided feedback but as the discussion went on, most women began providing feedback. Discussion that arose during the feedback was based on questions that still existed upon analysis. It was also used as a tool to validate interpretation. Using this tool helped create triangulation to increase the validity and reliability of the findings.

**Key Informant Interviews**

Key informant interviews were conducted with five key informants that were associated with the origination and maintenance of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, including representatives from Uganda Venture, as well as the Mpigi District Co-operative Officer and the Tabiro Ladies’ Club chairperson. Most interviews were conducted prior to the semi-structured interviews commencing, mostly due to convenience as the key informant interviews were meant to provide additional support to findings, rather than to shape the research itself. After the semi-structured interviews were coded and data was analyzed, the key informant interviews were analyzed in a similar way based on the themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews. The key
informant interviews collaborated the findings as well as provided background information on the Tabiro Ladies’ Club that informed Chapter 3. Key informant interviews add to the strength of the case study because they can provide valuable insights into details and history of the co-operative, as well as supporting evidence provided by other sources (Yin, 1994).

The key informant interviews lasted an $m$ time of 17:64, ranging from 10:05 to 26:49, with an $sd$ of 5:89. Key informants included:

Key Informant #1: Uganda Venture Creator, Anthony
Key Informant #2: Uganda Venture volunteer who help with the start-up of the co-operative, Sarah
Key Informant #3: Uganda Venture volunteer who worked with the co-operative early on, Bethany
Key Informant #4: Tabiro Ladies’ Club chairperson and originator, Grace
Key Informant #5: Co-operative Officer of the Mpigi District

Participant Observation

Participant observation occurred between April 27 and July 31, 2012 while the researcher primarily lived in the village of Tabiro. Participant observation goes beyond just passive observation, as the researcher is included in the events being studied (Yin, 1994). In this case, participant observation included living in the village where the ladies met and lived. While the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative officially met only once per month, most members met at least once per week for English class taught by the researcher to increase the chance to observe the women more than once per month. Additionally, during community days that occurred while Uganda Venture volunteers were present, members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club were observed during their interactions with locals and Canadian volunteers. Field notes were taken based on
observations of empowerment. Research studies conducted on Uganda related to co-operatives or women’s empowerment were also reviewed to inform the study.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis was completed on the open-ended questions of the semi-structured interviews using *a priori* coding. Selective coding was used based on Rowlands’ concepts of personal, collective, and relational empowerment (Strauss & Corben, 1998). As described in Section 2, Rowlands (1997) identified three levels of empowerment, with each having core values, changes, inhibiting factors, and encouraging factors. The key themes within each sub-category that Rowlands (1997) identified through analyzing women’s groups in Honduras were used as a basis for coding. Emerging themes were also added based on responses received from women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. This method was supported by Rowlands (1997) as she mentioned that empowerment is context specific and additions and subtractions of themes are needed based on different contexts.

After all interviews were transcribed, initial coding was completed based on Rowlands’ (1997) three levels of empowerment: personal, collective, and relational empowerment. Each interview was reviewed and comments made by respondents were placed into which level of empowerment it appeared to initially represent. Comments could be placed into more than one aspect of empowerment if it appeared to represent both levels but often was only placed in one category. After interview responses were initially coded into one of the three levels of empowerment, the transcribed interviews were again reviewed with movement occurring between the levels, if necessary.

Once all useable responses were coded into each level of empowerment, the levels were looked at individually. Within each level, all responses were initially given a ‘code’ of whether
the statement reflected a core value, a change, an encouraging factor, or an inhibiting factor. Each response was also given an initial sub-category theme based on Rowlands’ (1997) findings and any emerging themes that developed. Once all the responses were initially coded, they were sorted based on their code and each response was verified against other responses within the same category theme to ensure consistency. If responses matched code and sub-category, they remained in that classification. However, if responses seemed to fit in a different sub-category and/or code better, they were re-classified. This resulted in several emerging themes for each code at the different levels of empowerment, yet several of Rowlands’ (1997) initial themes were also identified and used. Frequencies are reported to illustrate how often each woman identified each theme and summary percentages are also reported to illustrate how many of the group identified that theme.

For the key informant interviews, the same method was used to code responses and identify level of empowerment and the sub-category themes within each level of empowerment. For the feedback workshop, discussion was based around the sub-categories and provided further insight into the themes. Some participants brought up points that related to previous levels as they got increasingly comfortable within the workshop.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Non-parametric (descriptive) and frequency statistics were used on the quantitative responses obtained in the semi-structured interviews using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics include mean and standard deviation to describe the different variables associated with background demographics. Many of the closed ended questions were used to generate demographic information on members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, such as religion, age, level of education, primary occupation, and household structure.
Additionally, based on the themes identified through the qualitative data collection and analysis, the data was quantified to explore frequencies and percentages of themes using SPSS. The primary quantitative analysis used was frequency statistics to describe how often each respondent identified each theme within the sub-category. Percentages were also used to determine how many women identified with each theme. Other quantitative data analysis included correlational analysis to measure the strength and direction of a relationship between the sub-categories of core values, changes, encouraging factors, and inhibiting factors within each and across the personal and collective empowerment levels. Pearson product-moment correlational coefficient, \( r \), was used for the test of correlation. The independent \( t \)-test was also used to determine if there was a significant difference between executive members and non-executive members in their responses in core values, changes, encouraging factors, and inhibiting factors at the personal and collective levels.

**Limitations of Research**

One limitation was the researcher’s lack of knowledge of Luganda, the first language of the co-operative members, and the resulting need for a translator. Although many women knew some English, the English used in the semi-structured interviews was beyond many of the respondents’ comprehension. This forced a reliance on a translator to conduct the interviews. The translator was selected because of her familiarity to the women being interviewed to make respondents comfortable, yet also was someone who was distant enough from the co-operative to assure confidentiality of responses. While the translator was informed of the importance of translating accurately, the differences in the languages occasionally resulted in miscommunication or misunderstanding by respondents or the translator. Due to this, many probing questions were asked to reach an understanding of the question desired and the translator
occasionally provided examples to clarify. Occasionally, the translator would summarize a
woman’s answer instead of directly translating it if the respondent did not pause to allow for
direct translation. Nevertheless, the translation was necessary for the research and all attempts
were made to ensure accuracy of translation.

Another limitation was the evolution of interview questions and concepts related to
empowerment. As questions predominantly pertained to women’s involvement in the co-
operative, comments around their family situation at home were rarely made. Thus, measurement
of relational empowerment proved to be more difficult during the semi-structured interviews.
The relational level of empowerment referred to partner relationships, which proved difficult to
explore as more than half of the women in the co-operative were single, widowed, or separated.
Nevertheless, some comments on the relational level of empowerment were made during the
feedback workshop, bolstering the findings from the semi-structured interviews.

A third limitation of this research was the time of data collection. May 2012 marked three
years since the co-operative had officially started making embroideries to sell as a co-operative
and one year since Uganda Venture had withdrawn financial support. Thus, the interviews with
the women of the co-operative were conducted in a time of flux of their co-operative, which may
not have necessarily allowed for long-term changes to take place. Nevertheless, it was still
important to look at this co-operative and how members have experienced empowerment, as
empowerment is not a final end point, but a process. Despite the co-operative being at its
beginning stages, it was still important to explore how a new co-operative offers opportunities of
empowerment in a rural setting where such opportunities were previously lacking.

A fourth limitation was regarding the ethics procedure at the University of Guelph. Several
months prior to leaving for my research in Uganda, I obtained ethics approval through the
University of Guelph to conduct my research. Once in Uganda, I had to make some slight adjustments to my questionnaire as I realized that what I wanted to ask would not translate well into the local language. I also changed the term of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club from a self-help group to a co-operative. This decision was based on a more accurate classification of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club according to their stated regulations. When I re-submitted my changes to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Guelph, I was told that these changes were considered a “new” study and therefore, I had to make a new submission. This feedback from REB resulted in having to halt the research while in the field until I had final approval. This was a strong limitation on the research process because I spent over a month in the country during which time I was not able to continue my research. This may have introduced limitations in terms of keeping in contact with respondents and having sufficient time to spend in data acquisition.

A final limitation of the study was related to being an outsider as a researcher and the power relations that exist between the researcher and the interviewee. It was important to acknowledge that the researcher’s perspective is influenced by her positionality as a young, white, female, middle class Canadian (Mullings, 1999). To combat this, the research approach of participant observation and living in the same village of interviewees throughout the interview process was included. This allowed regular interaction with the women to develop relationships. Furthermore, as it was the researcher’s third time since 2009 interacting with the women of the co-operative and living in the village, some of the members had become familiar with her. Based on this, it had hopefully diminished the perception of unequal power between the researcher and interviewees (Mullings, 1999). Finally, by presenting the information back to the women during the feedback group, it ultimately left the power with the women to agree or disagree with the
researcher’s findings, reducing the writing of the ‘other’ that can occur in cross-cultural research (Mullings, 1999).

**Summary**

Overall, 30 women who are members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative were interviewed. These semi-structured interviews provided most of the qualitative and quantitative results to answer the research objectives. The interviews were translated and then transcribed, from which analysis was conducted on the qualitative responses using primarily *a priori* codes developed by Rowlands (1997) and emerging themes. Quantitative responses were analyzed primarily through descriptive and frequency statistics. Information provided through the key informant interviews, the feedback workshop, and the participant observation collaborate the findings from these interviews.
Chapter Five: Results

Introduction

This chapter describes the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis outlined in the previous chapter. The results from the analysis assisted in identifying core values, changes, encouraging factors, and inhibiting factors of empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level. At each level, key themes were identified. Again, the core values refer to transformation of the individual, group, or relationship whereas changes are the actions that arise from the core qualities (Rowlands, 1997). For instance, personal empowerment is not self-confidence alone but what actions occur as a result of having that self-confidence (Rowlands, 1997). Encouraging factors are the circumstances that enhance the core values and likelihood of change occurring, whereas the inhibiting factors include circumstances that limit growth in the core values and discourage change from occurring (Rowlands, 1997). It is important to understand that analysis at one level is not enough as interactions occur across the three levels.

Personal Empowerment

The qualitative semi-structured interviews lent themselves strongly towards the personal level of empowerment, as most members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club identified ways that their involvement in the co-operative had impacted them personally. This level of empowerment is related to how individuals perceive themselves and how they are empowered to act in their own lives. Table 5.1 describes the frequency of responses provided by women related to empowerment at the personal level.
The foundation of personal empowerment is the psychological and psychosocial processes and changes that have occurred due to women’s involvement in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. The core values influence and are influenced by the changes that women experience in their personal lives. Table 5.2 summarizes the frequency for identified themes of core values and changes and the percentage of women that identified that theme at least once.

Table 5.2: Core Values and Changes at the Personal Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions*</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of agency</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining/control resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe things are possible</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn, analyze and act</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate/influence space</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize own time</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make/ express ideas/opinions</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversify income</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In the following tables frequency of mentions or responses refers to the number of respondents who mention the item. The Percentage is the proportion of all respondents who mentioned the item at least once.
Based on the frequency of responses, the primary core values that women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club experienced were perseverance and an increased sense of agency. One woman gave the following example to explain why she remained part of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club despite the current challenges, showing evidence of perseverance:

The reason why [I] am still part, [if that] for example, if you are a farmer, you plant tomatoes. Sometimes it comes when it is a season, when the tomatoes are many, when you are going to get a lot of money. And there is a time when … maybe drought comes, and the tomatoes they don’t grow. They just become stunted and you just lose [the crop]. So you have to expect that time also, even if you are starting a business, [it] doesn’t mean that all the time, you will be gaining, gaining [and] you won’t see the losses. So even if it is dry season, I am still hoping that it will go and the other season will also come.

Several of the women expressed similar sentiments, with a third of women mentioning wanting to persevere with the co-operative twice or more throughout the interview. Happiness, another key core value, emerged from the interviews as a prevalent theme that the women discussed. For instance, one woman stated:

I am very happy and for me, I am coming from very far. Whenever I come back, I have to board a boda-boda [motorcycle taxi] and pay 2,000 Ugandan Shillings a day. So I come when [because] I am happy, I love what I am coming for.

As Table 5.2 illustrates, all members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club reported some changes at the personal level. The greatest change at the personal level was the increased ability to obtain and control resources as all but two women mentioned this. Frequent examples women gave included being able to pay for their children’s school fees and pay for necessities at home. Furthermore, 80% of women who reported being able to obtain or control resources at a greater extent due to their involvement, mentioned it two or more times throughout the interview. Another change that women mentioned, although at a lower rate of response, included an increased ability to learn, analyze and act, which included the ability to learn how to make embroideries, being able to see what other women are doing for their embroideries, and using that knowledge to improve on
their own products. Women also mentioned they felt an increased sense that things were possible.

Encouraging factors positively influence core values and changes, whereas inhibiting factors negatively influence core values and changes. Table 5.3 illustrates the encouraging factors and inhibiting factors associated with membership in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club.

Table 5.3: Encouraging and Inhibiting Factors at the Personal Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Empowerment</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of a group and participating in its activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining knowledge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate income</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End isolation/gain friendships</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining support</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop leadership skills</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No discrimination</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibiting factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income from Club</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of markets for products</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency on external organizations for support</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health problems</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distance from Club</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not mentioned in this chart for inhibiting factors are: distrust within group, active opposition by husband, and lack of English skills, as they were only mentioned by one individual.

As Table 5.3 illustrates, the women reported that they felt some encouraging factors that influenced empowerment at the personal level. The primary encouraging factors that enhanced the likelihood of change and strengthened core values for members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club were tied between being part of a group and participating in its activities, and gaining knowledge,
which included general knowledge, developing English skills, and gaining handicraft skills. For instance, one woman stated:

What makes me happy, [is that we now know] what we never knew, like education, even making the stitches or making mats. They are some things I never knew, but now I have learnt [how to do them]. I am happy about that because we are hoping we can learn how to make soap, candles, even charcoal. We wanted even to keep fish, to doing fishing, as a group also.

In relation to the encouraging factor of being part of the co-operative, most women reported the activities that they participated in as part of the Club as a benefit, such as embroidery, making mats or baskets, and planting the flowers. Closely following those two key encouraging factors, women also regularly mentioned the importance of the ability to generate income.

Contrary to the encouraging factors, the primary inhibiting factors that negatively impacted changes and core values were related to a lack of markets for products and low income from the co-operative. An interesting result was the dependency on external support. Many women expressed hope that Uganda Venture would help find markets for them, due to the loss of the market that relied on the NGO and the resulting loss of income from their products. In reference to the lack of market for their products, one woman stated:

…the problem is, you may try to do that work, or to fix up your time such that you get time to do the embroidery and baskets, or other things that will sell in the Club. But reach there [at the Club] after finishing it…you don’t gain as you expected. Yet, you didn’t have the time yet you just [made time] to do that. And then taking it there, there is no market for what you’ve made. So that discourages us also.

Another woman stated in reference to the low income that members receive from the Club:

For me, the problem was money. Money was the biggest problem I had faced in this group. Because we used to get a big amount of money but right now, we are getting very little, little money.

In reference to the low income from the co-operative combined with the fees that members are supposed to bring to the Club every month, a third woman stated:
The problem I have seen, like you can spend the whole year [without] getting anything from the Ladies’ Club. Yet you have to bring the little, little money we are suppose to pay [each month]. So you’re not getting any income from the Ladies’ [Club] but you have to get your money from somewhere else – from your pocket, from your business – and then take that. So that is a problem to me.

In order to support these findings obtained from interviews with women in the co-operative, it is important to look at the responses of the key informants and the feedback group. The responses from key informant interviews support the findings in the interviews. At the personal level, the core value that most key informants identified in the women was sense of agency and the change was an increased sense that things were possible. The key informants also identified that generating income was an encouraging factor and that the decrease in income from the club was an inhibiting factor.

When the results were presented to the women during the feedback group, they all agreed that the themes identified under changes, core values, encouraging factors and inhibiting factors were accurate of their group. One additional core value they suggested was self-control, in terms of behavior and their interactions with others, particularly “bearing with each other’s weaknesses.” One inhibiting factor that sparked a lot of discussion was around the idea of dependency on external support. They agreed that some of the women in the group still expected the high price they received while Uganda Venture was buying their products. The group discussed how it was good not to depend on external support. One interesting statement that came up was that one woman said:

Again on this point, they should drop [depending on external support] because we are Ugandans. And if you start a business, you don’t have to wait for those white people to come and buy your things. We are Ugandan, we are supposed to sell things to Ugandans, such that we get what we get and then we get the profits out that. It could be small but we have to go with that.
When the co-operative was asked why they feel they have this dependency, one response was that it could be because they do not trust each other. It was stated that some women might think their products are still being sold at high prices but they are only receiving a low price, insinuating that someone within the co-operative is keeping their profits. What was also interesting was that the women did not seem to disagree that they could be the ones to find markets for their products, yet they also seemed content to rely on an outsider to find markets for them. One member stated: “even if the person is out of the group or in the group, as long as they can get a market and sell their products, no problem”.

**Collective Empowerment**

As the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is a co-operative and the women work together to sustain the group, collective empowerment is another strong avenue that women who participate can experience empowerment. Collective empowerment refers to how individuals experience empowerment by virtue of their membership within the group (Rowlands, 1997). Table 5.4 illustrates the frequency responses at the collective level of empowerment.

**Table 5.4: Summary of Collective Empowerment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective Empowerment</th>
<th>Core Value n =30</th>
<th>Changes n =30</th>
<th>Encouraging Factor n =30</th>
<th>Inhibiting Factor n =30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sd</td>
<td>(1.60)</td>
<td>(2.49)</td>
<td>(4.04)</td>
<td>(3.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding core values and changes that occur at the collective level, Table 5.5 illustrates the frequency of responses women gave for the core values and changes and the percentage of women that identified that theme at least once.

Table 5.5: Core Values and Changes at Collective Level of Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value</th>
<th>Frequency of mention</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of collective agency</td>
<td>10 12 8</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Identity</td>
<td>18 8 4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>20 7 3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operation</td>
<td>22 6 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widening of support network</td>
<td>11 6 13</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value through membership</td>
<td>22 6 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase access to resources</td>
<td>26 3 1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strongest core value was a sense of collective agency at 67%, which refers to how the group has taken ownership of the co-operative. For instance, one woman stated:

*We want to develop ourselves as a group, because we were badly off, we didn’t have money, we didn’t have anything… Even the kids used to suffer [from the lack] of school fees, but right now, we can get that little money and we can pay the school fees, buying things at home. So I want the group to grow so that we can get that development.*

The most frequent change that members identified was the widening of support networks at 63%, followed by gaining value through group membership and increased access to resources. For instance, this statement reflects many made by women in the Club:

*Whenever you get a problem, they [The Tabiro Ladies’ Club] come together and they help you, like bringing some food to you and comforting you. And even giving you money, because they put a standard that everyone who loses [someone] or gets a problem, every member is suppose to pay 30,000/- . So even that, the contribution they make, the comforting they do, bringing the food, so it also encourages me to stay in the group.*
Some women also commented that: “I never had friends like that [before joining the Club]” or “[before joining the Ladies’ Club] we didn’t have any group, which can unite us”, illustrating the changes related to increased value through being part of the Club and the importance of friendships that develop through being involved in the Club.

The primary encouraging factors and inhibiting factors related to collective empowerment is illustrated in Table 5.6 located in Appendix 3. For the encouraging factors, the most frequently reported theme was in reference to the growth in friendships. One woman stated:

Being in the Ladies’ [Club], it has increased my hope because even there are some women who are coming from far, like Kikunyu. They come from far and they are also single mothers, but they have been able to stand and support their children. So whenever I see those people who can make it in life, I am like ‘also, I can do it, I can reach there. Because I have seen my friends and we are in the same club’.

Another woman, in reference to peer skills training, stated:

I am happy because right now I am acquiring wisdom from that [club], because I never knew very many things, but I have seen that it is really wisdom from this group [that I am gaining].

Another stated:

I have learnt how to stitch [embroideries]. I never knew how to stitch. I never knew how to make baskets, right now I have learnt. I never knew how to plant flowers, I have learnt also about flowers. Even learning English. I love that very much.

On the other hand, a common sentiment for the inhibiting factors among the ladies was that when they lost the market, it negatively affected them. For instance, one woman stated: “from the first time, we used to get a lot of money. Right now, we don’t get some good money because of market problems.” As a result of this inhibiting factor, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club switched to making and purchasing mats and baskets to sell locally, which helped some women. However, women who only make embroideries were not helped: “being for me that I am just dealing with stitching, I don’t make baskets or mats, so the income, it is not really good as per now.” Other
inhibiting factors related to the Club as income included an attitude of dependency and lack of capital in the Club. The attitude of dependency is an important inhibiting factor, as it limits the growth possible in the Club. For instance, one woman stated: “it is my prayer that you [Uganda Venture] can bring more markets for the mats, for whatever we are doing, for the baskets, for the mat, we need more markets”. Another stated: “my prayer is that you do research about the markets for us.” The lack of commitment by members typically referred to members dropping involvement in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club due to the decrease in income they received for their embroideries. One woman stated:

Some [women] they left the group, because I think the stitching they used to do, they used to get a lot of money. But when the money decreased, I think some they were discouraged and they decided to disappear.

Looking at responses from key informants, they support the findings from the interviews. Changes identified by key informants were gaining value through group membership and widening of support networks and the core value identified was the one most frequently mentioned by the women themselves: a sense of collective agency. The key informants also mentioned a variety of encouraging factors that the women identified, such as peer skills training, generating income, and group decision-making. The strongest inhibiting factor mentioned by key informants was the loss of foreign markets for their products.

When the women were presented with the findings during the feedback group, they agreed with what was presented above for the changes and core values. They mentioned some specifics, such as being able to get loans from the Ladies’ Club or getting the materials from the Club, which falls under increased access to resources. The women also agreed on the themes identified for encouraging and inhibiting factors. When discussing
the inhibiting factors, they laughed and asked whether groups in Canada experienced these issues, such as rumors. One issue that was discussed more in-depth was not sharing ideas or opinions, or as they termed it: ‘unopenness’. One woman stated:

Being unopen, we may come as a group and discuss some issues, like we are going to plant flowers on such and such a day. Yet someone knows, ‘me, I won’t be around’. But she doesn’t tell anyone, she just keeps quiet. But when that day comes, she doesn’t show up. So that is unopenness.

Links between Personal and Collective Empowerment

Previous studies have shown that links between the personal and collective level of empowerment exist, where experiencing empowerment on one level can positively affect empowerment at another (Rowlands, 1997; Kabeer, 1994). In this study, it was found that there was a weak positive correlation between changes at the personal level and changes at the collective level, \( r(28) = .37, p < .05 \). However, there was no correlation between core values at the personal and collective level, \( r(28) = .26, n.s. \) There were no significant interactions between relational levels of empowerment to either the personal level or collective level for core values or changes.

An interesting finding when analyzing differences between the frequency of reported inhibiting and encouraging factors among executive and non-executive members, there was a significant effect, \( t(28) = -3.70, p < 0.5 \), where executive members reported significantly more inhibiting factors that non-executive members. All other analysis of the interviews showed no significant difference in responses between executive and non-executive members at either the personal or collective level.

One theme that arose during the feedback group and was observed during participant observation was related to their confidence, both as individuals and as a group. For instance, in speaking for the group during the feedback workshop, one woman said that they feel more
confident to attend educational group meetings they are invited to by individuals outside their group. This was observed during the research period, as some members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club would attend the English classes on a regular basis, even though some women had mentioned in the interviews that before they had been fearful to speak English to white people. In terms of collective confidence, a prime example is the comedy skit that the Tabiro Ladies’ Club put on during the community day in May. During the community day, over 200 people came from Tabiro and surrounding villages where certain groups perform and dance as part of celebrating the Uganda Venture volunteer team leaving shortly. In previous years, Tabiro Ladies’ Club performed a traditional dance but this year, they instead chose to perform a comedy skit, where they dressed up in non-traditional outfits with bras overtop of their outfits or wearing men’s clothes. Whenever this dance was talked about it, it elicited a lot of laughter out of the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club. It illustrates how the women are more confident acting in non-traditional ways as a group, showing signs of empowerment and the ability to act in ways that previously they would not have felt comfortable doing so.

**Relational Empowerment**

Similar to what Rowlands (1997) found in women groups in Honduras, there was a discrepancy between what women initially said in interviews and what was found upon deeper analysis. In this case, during the feedback workshop, the women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club provided a slightly deeper insight than was found during the semi-structured interviews. This could have arisen as questions related to household situations were not explicitly asked in the interviews aside from how decisions were made in the household. Difficulty in studying relational empowerment for women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is also partly related to the fact that 61% of women involved in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club were separated, widowed, or never
married. Table 5.7 illustrates the summary of findings at the relational level based on the semi-structured interviews.

### Table 5.7: Summary of Relational Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value</th>
<th>Changes</th>
<th>Encouraging Factor</th>
<th>Inhibiting Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 30$</td>
<td>$n = 30$</td>
<td>$n = 30$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$sd$</td>
<td>(.69)</td>
<td>(1.74)</td>
<td>(1.64)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to look at the different responses between the interviews and feedback group, Table 5.8 summarizes the core value and changes for relational empowerment from the semi-structured interviews.

### Table 5.8: Core Values and Changes at the Relational Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make decisions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to negotiate</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for household needs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start another business</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club reported for core values that they had the ability to make decisions and the ability to negotiate. Taking a closer look, of the seventeen women who
were separated, widowed, or single, 57% belonged to a female-headed household. A common statement when asked about the decision-making in the female-headed household was that:

I make my decisions. I am living alone, I am the oldest. There is no husband. I am the one to look after myself. So no can say what I am doing. I am the person who decides.

Only one woman reported belonging to a male-headed household, nine women reported making joint decisions, and seven women made decisions with other family members, such as children or sisters. During the feedback group, the women seemed to go back and forth, saying that some woman are able to negotiate in their household with their husbands, some do not, showing evidence that relations vary greatly within the group.

The greatest change in close relationships as identified by the women was the increased ability of women to be able to pay for household needs. Many women reported being able to pay for their children’s school fees or pay for necessities at home due to money they received from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club for their products. For instance, one woman stated:

My life has changed because last time [before the Club], those days, I didn’t have money. But right now, I am even having peace of mind. I am not worried about money: ‘where am I going to get the money? Where am I going to get money to pay the school fees, to buy the necessities at home’... So even if they tell a child, ‘go back and get the school fees’, I am not worried. I know that I can get the money and get the money to pay back the school.

What is interesting is that during the feedback workshop, the women shared that they do not necessarily tell their husband the full amount that they received from the Club. The reasons that women gave for this were that “things concerning money in the home, it isn’t easy, we don’t negotiate about the money” and that “husbands don’t care about the children, like buying clothes...or clothes for ladies.” The women explained that if they did not keep money aside, they would not be able to buy necessities that husbands are unwilling to pay for, such as goods for herself, or to make up for a husband’s delay in
paying things, such as school fees. Another important reason given was that husbands are sometimes unwilling or unable to help the wife’s family if they have a time of need, so if a woman kept money aside, she would have some money in such a situation.

The other change that some women mentioned was the ability to start another business suggesting that women are able to diversify their income. These women reported being able to purchase animals with the income they generated from their involvement in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club or engage in better income-generating farming, such as planting ginger. When asked, 73% of women reported owning animals, 15 had a mean of 1.80 pigs (sd = 1.01), 12 women own a mean of 1.42 cows (sd = .52), 11 women own a mean of 21.55 chickens (sd = 38.46), four women own a mean of 1.50 goats (sd = .58), and two women own 2 sheep (sd = 0.00). One woman stated:

I can get the money from the Ladies’ Club and buy then a pig or a cow. I take care of it, I do the grazing and look after it. And then after I sell it, I can get the money and be able to pay the school fees and even to buy the necessities at home.

This was supported in the feedback group, as women mentioned being able to purchase a goat or cow to sell in the future for profit from what she kept back from her husband.

Table 5.9 illustrates the encouraging and inhibiting factors of relational empowerment.

Table 5.9: Encouraging and Inhibiting Factors at the Relational Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Empowerment</th>
<th>Frequency of mentions (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encouraging Factors</strong></td>
<td>n =30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing home decision-making</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate income</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from partner</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inhibiting Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in income</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for household</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from partner</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the encouraging factors that facilitated relational empowerment was sharing household decision-making. In relation to household decision-making, women who share decision making with their husband reported that:

We sit together with my husband, and we decide what to do with the money. We sit together and then we discuss. We may say, ‘let’s buy this, let’s do this, let’s take the money to the school’. So we do like that.

This theme was also found in female-headed households as women reported making decision with other family members, such as sisters or children. For instance, one woman explained: “I sit with my children, and we decide to do with the money. We go and buy the books, go and pay the school fees. Like that.” Other encouraging factors included generating independent income, gaining peer support, and having support from partners. In relation to peer support, one woman stated:

Coming together [as a group] because I can go [to the meeting] from home when I am not very happy, like I have gotten some misunderstanding with my husband. Sometimes, you know that when you’ve gotten some misunderstandings, you sometimes decide to do things in your own way. You decide like ‘me, I am going to do like this’. But when I go there and discuss the issues with other ladies, they advise me and say, ‘no don’t do that, do like this, you handle him like this’. So it has also helped me and I enjoy it.

Inhibiting factors included having sole responsibility for the household due to lack of having a partner, lack of support from partner if he was around, a decrease in the income from the Club, and male control over decision making. While being a female-headed household may mean greater ability to make decisions, it also means sole responsibility of the household. One woman stated:

In my family, I am not well-off. I am sick and I have to care of the children. And my mother, she is also weak, weak and I am the one to take care of her.

Another woman said the decrease in income from the Club had a negative effect on her relationship with her husband:
But right now, being that the money decreased [from the Ladies’ Club], we don’t do that [decide together]… We have five children, one is away and where she is, they are ones supporting her [together], educating her. But these four ones [that live at home], each of them, we share them [the children], one has to cater for two [regarding] their school fees. So as per now, we don’t come together and decide what to do with money issues.

Women agreed with the encouraging and inhibiting factors identified during the feedback group. An inhibiting factor that was mentioned in the feedback group but not during the semi-structured interviews was that the relationships women have with their husbands were impacted by the poor behavior of husbands. In the feedback group, women mentioned that they had to deal with husbands who beat them, or who were drunk or deceitful. Some women reported that their husband would sell a jointly purchased item, such as a goat or cow, and keep the profits for themselves. Other women reported that their husbands had left them for other women, saying:

You can start with the husband when you are very poor. You start in a very bad situation, even without a mattress, and you start up like that. You are faithful to them, you do what you are suppose to as a wife at home. But when it comes to a time when you’ve gotten money, he just gets another woman and even chases you out of home. Even if you’ve done everything, he chases you away and brings another woman.

Summary

In summary, this chapter identified the key themes within each level of empowered. Within the personal level of empowerment, women identified key core values as perseverance, happiness, and an increased sense of agency, and key changes as the increased ability to obtain and control resources and the increased ability to learn, analyze, and act. Important encouraging factors identified at the personal level included being part of a group and gaining knowledge, whereas inhibiting factors identified included the lack the markets and the low income they receive from the co-operative. Switching over to the collective level, women identified the key
core value as the sense of collective agency and the key change as the widening of support networks. The primary encouraging factors were related to the growth in friendships and peer skill training, whereas the primary inhibiting factors were the loss of market for their embroideries, attitude of dependency, and a lack of capital within the co-operative. Between the collective and personal level of empowerment, it was found that there was weak positive correlation between changes at the personal level and changes at the collective level. Finally, the key core values identified at the relational level included the ability to make decisions and negotiate within the household, whereas key changes included the ability to pay for household needs and to diversify their income. The primary encouraging factors at the relational level included sharing household decision making, whether that is with the husband or another family member, whereas inhibiting factors included having sole responsibility for the household if single or a lack of support from partner if married, a decrease in income from the co-operative, and male control over decision making. Each women experienced empowerment differently depending on her life situation prior to joining the co-operative, yet there were noticeable themes identified. Overall, through triangulation that supports the findings, all methods of data generally agreed with the key themes of empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level.
Chapter Six: Discussion

Introduction

Empowerment is a process that individuals and groups experience differently based on their life experience and history (Rowlands, 1997). Therefore, it cannot be conclusively stated whether women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club are ‘empowered’ or ‘disempowered’, as there is no point at which the process of empowerment ends. Women have experienced clear shifts of power, as well as some ways that power has not yet shifted. The women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have clearly gained an “expansion in [their] ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 2001, p.437).

Rowlands’ (1997) theory of empowerment was applied and adapted to this study to identify ways that women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club experienced empowerment. The research objectives of this study were three-fold: to investigate how women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have experienced empowerment (1) at the personal level, (2) as a collective group, and (3) in their close relationships. Women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club experienced empowerment in their lives due to their involvement in the co-operative at each of the three levels. It would be possible to discuss the personal, collective, and relational levels independently, yet the empowerment process is dynamic, where outcomes and processes form a feedback loop, encouraging each other, and interacting between and across the three levels (Rowlands, 1997). Thus, to avoid extensive repetition in the discussion of empowerment for women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club, the rest of this chapter will focus on the themes that emerged across the three levels.
Development of Agency

One of the highly prevalent themes that can be seen across all three levels of empowerment relates to the development of human agency within the women. Human agency refers to how individuals influence and control the events that occur in their lives through their involvement in shaping the outcome (Bandura, 2000). Albert Bandura (2000), a key social-cognitive theorist on human agency, suggests that individuals can have or experience agency at the personal, proxy, and collective level. Human agency is most commonly discussed at the personal level, with individuals engaging in direct activities that influence events in their lives based on cognitive, motivational, and choice processes (Bandura, 2000). However, in certain situations, individuals may not have the ability to act due to social or cultural constraints, which may force individuals to seek security and action through the use of proxy agency (Bandura, 2000). This involves seeking out people who have influence to act on their behalf to create outcomes that individuals’ desire (Bandura, 2000). Proxy agency differs from collective agency, as collective agency involves working with other individuals to obtain what individuals cannot do alone, rather than relying solely on outside assistance (Bandura, 2000). Based on the findings from this research, it can be argued that the women of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have developed a sense of human agency at the individual and collective level, as well as through proxy agency.

Evidence of women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club exercising personal human agency can be seen at the personal level of empowerment, as women reported a shift in perceptions of themselves and their access to and use of power. All of the core values identified by the women at the personal level indicate a greater sense of agency, which reflects the growth in women’s self-efficacy and positive attitude towards their life situation. Self-efficacy, coined by psychologist Albert Bandura, is central to the concept of human agency and is defined as
“people’s beliefs that they can produce desired effects by their actions, influence the choices they make, their aspirations, level of effort and perseverance, resilience to adversity, and vulnerability to stress and depression” (1998, as cited in Narayan, 2005, p.20). 93% of women in the co-operative expressed perseverance, a sense of agency, happiness, self-confidence and/or self-esteem as a core value at the personal level, illustrating examples of self-efficacy and a sense of agency. This sense of agency reflects growths in their ‘power from within’ as women are shifting in their attitude that they are indeed able to control the outcomes of their lives. Outsiders have also noted this increase in agency, as the key informants working with the women noticed the sense of personal agency and the increased belief in the women have around things that are possible. Evidence from the findings suggest that the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club believe themselves capable of participating in and gaining from their involvement in the co-operative, thus they continue to engage with the co-operative to improve their life situation.

Growth in women’s self-efficacy and personal human agency can be also seen in that over half of the women reported the ability to share ideas and opinions as an encouraging factor at the collective level, which reflects the growing confidence they have gained at the personal level. This finding reflects that self-efficacy is largely a cognitive process, as outward behavior is influenced by one’s thought process and internal appraisal of one’s own capabilities (Bandura, 1989). The women gaining a sense of agency at the personal level is reflected in their outward behavior, such as women sharing their opinion in the group because they increasingly believe their opinion is valuable and worth sharing. This finding is further supported as over a third of the women reported that they experienced a change at the personal level where they now felt the increased ability to participate and influence spaces. This is supported in the literature, as Schein
(2003) found in her study with women in Nicaragua, that involvement in work-related groups was associated with more positive attitude towards themselves and higher self-confidence.

Self-efficacy plays a role in influencing the choice of behavior and activities engaged in by an individual, as well as determining how long a person will persist when facing obstacles (Bandura, 1989). If people believe that they are capable, they will engage in that specific behavior; however, if they feel incompetent, they will avoid it (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy strongly influences the motivation of individuals, particularly in their perseverance in the face of obstacles. This is supported in the findings related to the members of the co-operative, as perseverance was the strongest core value mentioned at the personal level with more than half of the women identifying it. Likewise, 40% of women mentioned experiencing an increased sense that things are possible due to their involvement in the co-operative. What is interesting is that members reported other women dropped out the Tabiro Ladies’ Club when there was a decrease in money, yet the women who remained have strengthened their self-efficacy and agency. This suggests that continued involvement in the co-operative can play a role in helping women deepen their self-efficacy over time. The fact that these 30 members remained in the co-operative despite the challenges over the past year adds support to the idea that the women are developing a sense of self-efficacy and agency at the personal level, as they are coming together to face obstacles and they believe that the challenges can be overcome.

One way members believe that the obstacles the co-operative faces can be overcome is through the use of a proxy agent. The concept of proxy agency is relevant in the current analysis, as women in Ugandan culture typically face social norms that enforce negative perception of themselves and their ability to act in certain situations. For instance, the women of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have developed the belief they can act in ways to control their own lives, yet as
members of an unregistered co-operative, they focus on the use of an outside individual or organization to help them in areas they cannot access on their own. Specifically, members expressed a desire for Uganda Venture to continue to help them find markets for their products. This could be occurring if the women recognize that as an international NGO, Uganda Venture may have more influence in entering the local tourist market than a non-registered co-operative and offers them the possibility of entry in the foreign markets.

Furthermore, as Uganda is a patriarchal culture, men do not typically interact with women as equals, putting a women-only co-operative at a disadvantage in terms of approaching local businesses to sell their products. Recognizing this inequality, the co-operative has hired a male business manager to help get their products into markets, which is an attempt at using a different proxy agency to enter the tourist market. However, during the research period, the business manager was not seen to interact with the co-operative at all, which calls into question of the usefulness of him as a proxy agent. Yet, until the patriarchal culture has shifted enough that women can and do successfully interact with men as equals, the use of proxy agency might be of assistance to the co-operative to help obtain the outcomes the women desire.

It is important that the Tabiro Ladies’ Club does not rely solely on proxy agency without playing a role in the process of reaching markets, as this could limit their belief in themselves to do the work without outside assistance, decreasing their empowerment. Across the personal and collective levels of empowerment, an inhibiting factor identified was a dependency on external organizations for support. It is important that outside assistance in the form of proxy agency is in the form of a facilitator or helper in order to encourage the empowerment of individuals involved, as the process of empowerment can be severely hindered if the proxy agent takes the position of ‘power over’ the co-operative (Rowlands, 1997). This is particularly important as
neither the interviews nor the feedback group provided evidence that the women have developed a sense of agency in this area. In fact, when they were asked during the feedback group if anyone in the group had tried to approach markets to sell their products, there was a period of long laughter, followed by an explanation that some women had sold directly to other foreign tourists associated with a Catholic organization. There was no mention of approaching larger buyers. The role that proxy agency plays in women’s empowerment is a tentative one, as cultural barriers may limit women’s ability to create change and outcomes themselves, but reliance on outsiders is not necessarily beneficial towards empowerment either.

Finally, in terms of collective human agency, this was present in the ways that the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club are working together and gaining collective empowerment. At the collective level, women reported feeling a sense of collective agency, where they are responsible and able as a group to control their lives and the direction of the group. Collective human agency involves people’s shared belief in their collective efficacy which influences how the group uses their resources and “their staying power when collective efforts fail to produce quick results or [they] meet forcible oppositions” (Bandura, 2000, p.76). Schein (2003), who explored women work groups in Nicaragua, found that many women felt more capable and confident of their ability to do things on their own due to their group involvement. This has been found to occur in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club both through the group’s initiative of financially helping members when they are in need and informally as friendships have grown and strengthened through involvement in the co-operative. Many of the members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club reported that benefits arose from group membership, such as working together to provide each other with support that they could not have obtained without being involved in the co-operative.
The Tabiro Ladies’ Club has developed a strong sense of collective agency as 67% of women reported a sense of collective agency. They also mentioned a desire for perseverance, having a hope for the future, and gaining value through membership at the collective level. This provides evidence of the women’s desire for the Club to have staying power, as previous studies have found that “the higher the perceived collective efficacy, the higher the groups’ motivational investment in their undertakings, [and] the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments and setbacks…” (Bandura, 2000, p.78). This is evident in how current members of the group have stuck with the co-operative despite losing the market for their embroideries a year ago. It is also evident in their ability to develop and respond with new ideas to generate income, such as making baskets and mats, and even planting flowers. The women of the co-operative do not seem to be discouraged, despite the inhibiting factors of a loss of market and income, as two-thirds of the members still identified a hope for the future as they seek to diversify ways the co-operative can generate an income.

Overall, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club offers women the ability to gain a sense of agency, both at the personal and collective level. Developing a sense of agency has strengthened their experiences of empowerment by providing them a greater sense of their ‘power from within’. ‘Power from within’, as Rowlands (1997) describes it, is when self-acceptance and self-respect occurs, resulting in respect and acceptance of others. This is seen in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club members as their sense of agency and self-efficacy is strong, shown through their belief that they are capable of maintaining this co-operative despite the setbacks. They also see themselves as individuals capable of participating and benefiting from this co-operative. Empowerment must not only increase the ability of individuals to gain greater access to things, such as economic resources, previously denied to them, but also must allow individuals to perceive themselves as
able to enter that space (Rowlands, 1995). It appears that the Tabiro Ladies’ Club co-operative is doing just that.

**Economic Benefits**

A second key theme that was evident across all three levels of empowerment was the importance and benefits of generating income that involvement in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club provided. At both the personal and collective levels, women reported an increased ability to obtain and control resources as an encouraging factor. This indicates that members of the co-operative are experiencing an increase in ‘power to’, as women are able to gain financial and material resources through their involvement and are using their resources as they desire. The importance of co-operatives providing a diversified income was also found by Jones et al. (2012) in women involved in collective fair-trade enterprises. Income may not be in itself an end feature of empowerment, as a woman gaining an income does not automatically equal empowerment, but it may act as a catalyst for the empowerment process (Malhorta & Schular, 2005). Since the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is a production co-operative, its main objective is to generate income for its members, and thus the economic benefits are an important area to analyze.

The generation of income is particularly influential at the relational level of empowerment as women’s right to access family resources is limited by cultural norms. As the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club stated during the feedback group, equality in their martial relationships does not necessarily exist. The women discussed that poor behavior of their husbands negatively impacted them, such as husbands being physically abusive towards them or selling mutually owned resources without sharing the profits. Thus, gaining their own income has increased their experience of empowerment, as women are now able to have some control in this aspect of their lives. As such, 80% of women stated that they have been able to either pay for
household needs and/or start another income-generating project due to their involvement in the co-operative. This change at the relational level of empowerment suggests the importance of the co-operative for its members, as they are gaining empowerment in an area where they previously had little power, as well as gaining confidence and strength to speak up regarding these inequalities within the group setting.

Even among married women, experiences of empowerment due to involvement in the co-operative varied. Over three-quarters of women who were married reported experiencing a greater ability to make decisions and negotiate within the household in the interviews. Yet in the feedback group, some women disclosed their strategy of only sharing a portion of the income they made from the Club with their husbands. Perhaps their ability to control income generated is related to this behavior, rather than actually gaining empowerment within the household. This is related to acts of human agency, as women proved they have the ability to control their situation by withholding money to pay for their own needs, recognizing the fact that their husbands are not always reliable for providing them assistance. This finding is inconsistent with Deshmukh-Ranadive & Murphy (2005) who suggest that married women’s ability to exercise their rights within the household are limited by culture and context. Rather, women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club are acting with agency related to income generation and usage as they find ways that control income received from the co-operative.

Even though women being able to provide an additional source of income to the household should, theoretically, result in greater bargaining power and equality between the spouses, evidence from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club suggest that this may not always be the case. This is contrary the findings of Le Mare (2012) who found that women handicraft producers became more involved in family decisions. Rather, it seems that husbands of women in the
Tabiro Ladies’ Club tend to maintain dominance of income and use of household resources, especially since the co-operative is still just an additional source of income and does not replace any of the women’s main sources of income. This could explain the discrepancy with the Le Mare (2012) findings, as the women Le Mare’s study reported an increased income due to their involvement, whereas the women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have had a recent decrease in income.

Nevertheless, women’s perceived financial contribution may be related to greater empowerment as their ‘visible’ work can increase their bargaining power (Kabeer, 1994). Perhaps if the co-operative could offer a significant, regular income to its members, women’s involvement in the co-operative might be able to influence and shift household equality as the women obtain enough independent income to demand such equality. Until that shift occurs within the household, the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club are using the income they do receive in their own in ways that allows them to take control of their lives. Specifically, in the feedback group, the women mentioned that they were able to use money from the co-operative to buy items that their husbands have not previously helped them with, such as buying clothes for the children, shoes or bras.

On the other hand, women who are single, separated or widowed stated that they often struggled financially to pay for their children’s school fees and necessities at home. Generating additional income from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club has helped lessen the burden on these women by allowing them to pay for necessities, as they do not have any financial support from a partner. During the feedback group, some women explained that when women separated from their husbands, it was likely due to the fact that their husbands’ left them for another woman once their household had gained some money, leaving the women with nothing but the responsibility
of their children. Thus, women’s ability to make strategic life choices due to involvement in the co-operative can be linked to her ability to generate additional income and increases in her ability to meet basic needs.

Another economic benefit noted at the personal and relational level associated with income generated from selling products to the Tabiro Ladies’ Club was the ability to diversify sources of income or start another business. Many women reported being able to purchase animals, both during interviews and the feedback group, which they would rear over a period of time and sell for a higher price later. This allows women to further increase their income and pay for necessities, such as children’s school fees. This behavior is especially beneficial, as the income they receive from the co-operative had declined due to the loss of their market. If the women are able to gain enough profit from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to purchase an animal, they could multiple their financial gain, helping to sustain themselves over time. Additionally, some women reported being able to diversify their crops into higher income generating crops, such as ginger. This is important as ginger is typically a male-dominated crop, as it is more expensive to start and maintain, yet produces a greater profit than typical-female farmed products, such as beans. Thus, if women are able to diversify into this crop, they are again able to increase their income.

The fact that women are using the money that they received from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to further increase their access to financial resources provides evidence that they are gaining a sense of empowerment. Not only are they gaining financial benefits directly from the co-operative but also they are using that money to further increase their income in diversified ways. Members are protecting themselves against the shock of a decrease in capital from the co-operative. Gaining economic benefits is helping the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club gain power,
particularly in terms of ‘power to’. As Rowlands (1997) defines it, ‘power to’ is a type of generative or productive power to create outcomes without control. This was seen in the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club as they gained the ability to generate an income, both within the co-operative and outside, without diminishing anyone else’s power. Overall, the co-operative is providing members the ability to generate an income, which is playing a significant role in the empowerment process of these women.

Social Benefits

Another important theme that cuts across the levels of empowerment included the social benefits that arose from group membership, such as solidarity and co-operation among members. At the personal level of empowerment, women expressed how important being part of a group was in terms of participating in its activities and gaining friendships, which reflects the ‘power with’ as women are able to work together to obtain more than they could have alone. Also at the personal level, women reported encouraging factors to be ending isolation and gaining friends, and obtaining support through involvement in the co-operative. Women in Tabiro Ladies’ Club have increased their social capital through working together to make decisions within the co-operative, as well as working together on projects, such as the flower planting project. Social capital was found to be a strong encouraging factor at the personal level with the skills transferable beyond the co-operative, where working collaboratively with other women provides encouragement at the individual level. This is supported by Le Mare’s (2012) findings with women working in handicrafts who were able to obtain an affiliation and identity beyond familial roles due to meeting and working together.

At the collective level of empowerment, many women reported a sense of collective agency as a core value, reflecting that members see the value in acting together to have
ownership over the group. Working collectively within the co-operative has provided individual benefits, including the ability to obtain resources to pay school fees or buy things at home through maintaining and strengthening the co-operative as a whole. Women are able to gain some power in this social situation, even if they struggle to gain power in their homes, as husbands have little to no power over the group, allowing women’s self-confidence to grow as they act in solidarity with other members (Gordon, 1996). Women are developing the confidence and skills in themselves as individuals and through the group, which is helping to break down the internalized oppression that is a result of a patriarchal culture. Women in the co-operative reported at the collective level of empowerment that they obtain an identity through the group, which illustrates the important role that the co-operative is playing in its members’ lives.

To dig a little deeper into the social benefits that the co-operative provides its members, it is important to understand why groups emerge in the first place. Typically, groups come together for one of two reasons: to react to a situation or to actively manage resources or increase benefits (March & Taqqu, 1986). Based on the discussion with key informants and with the members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, it can be argued that the co-operative has engaged in both active and reactive strategies to develop solidarity and provide social benefits to its members.

On one hand, reactive or defensive associations or groups involve relationships that develop based on shared deprivations where women rally together to help meet needs (March & Taqqu, 1986). Working in a group allows women to meet together and converse, gaining an affiliation and identity beyond just familial roles (Le Mare, 2012). This behavior can be seen in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as almost two-thirds of women mentioned the collective benefit of gaining an increased support network, where the women can rely on one another as needs arise in their lives. It is even outlined in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club constitution that they must offer
30,000 Ugandan Shillings ($13) to each member when they reach a time of crisis, such as death, or time of celebration, such as graduation of a child. Further, the strongest encouraging factor at the collective level was the development of friendships within the group at an almost three-quarter response rate, suggesting that a strong benefit to involvement in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club was the joining together with other women in the community. Even at the personal level, many of the encouraging factors were related to social benefits, including ending isolation, obtaining support, and the fact that there was no discrimination among members. Overall, there are several benefits that the co-operative offers in terms of reactive benefits based on the deprivation and struggle that women collectively yet individually experience in the community.

On the other hand, active group associations tend to focus on creating solidarity through an organized attempt to manage resources and strategies to overcome challenges (March & Taqqu, 1986). This can be seen in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as its main objective as a co-operative is to create income-generating projects for its members through embroideries, baskets, mats, and even flowers. March and Teqqu (1986, p.47) stated that “women who work in the same occupation or economic activity often co-operate to meet explicitly economic needs and in the process expand their effectiveness and influences.” Further, through the training and leadership that occurs through the co-operative, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club can be argued to be actively creating strategies for women to gain empowerment through skill development and decision-making power. This is seen as important to members as over half of members stated an encouraging factor was that women within the group were leaders and almost a quarter were encouraged that the co-operative focused on the development of leaders. Women also expressed that being in the group had allowed them to gain some ‘power to’ engage in peer training of skills, where women who already are in the group are responsible for training other women.
Therefore, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club also operates as an active group, as its main focus is on generating income for its member through production of handicrafts and through the development of female leaders.

As the collective level of empowerment involves working with other individuals, it is not a surprise that many of the findings support that women have experienced an increased social benefits and an increase in their ‘power with’. The ability to work with other women who are in a similar situation has allowed friendships to grow, as many women reported the benefits of being able to work with other women and gain support from them. By being able to share ideas, opinions, and make decisions as a group, they are exercising their ‘power with’. Rowlands (1997) suggests that ‘power with’ is a collective power, where the focus is on the outcome with the group, where the group is more important than the sum of individuals. This was evident in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as the members desire to continue with the co-operative due to the social benefits they received, despite the fact that they are struggling to find a market and do not receive as much individual financial income as they did before. Overall, whether the Tabiro Ladies’ Club exists as a reactive or active group, it has been found to provide significant social benefits to its members, increasing their empowerment through collectively and collaboratively working together.

**Capacity Development**

Another key theme that emerged across the three levels of empowerment was the development of capacity within the women of the co-operative. Capacity can be defined as the “organizational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable … individuals … to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time” (Bolger, 2000, p.2). Women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have gained capacity through their involvement with the co-
operative, both as a result of group membership and their association with Uganda Venture. Through its involvement, Uganda Venture can be seen as assisting in capacity development of members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. Capacity development, in this context, can be defined as the approaches, strategies, and methodologies used by external stakeholders that aim to improve performance at the individual, collective, and system levels (Bolger, 2000).

A struggle for women-only groups can sometimes be linked to a lack of education or inadequate business and technical skills (Gordon, 1996). As a women’s handicraft co-operative in particular, there are questions of whether it can adequately address issues related to gender inequality and the subordination of women, as it does not challenge traditional norms (Gordon, 1996). It could also be argued that developing skills related to embroidery or basket weaving put demands on women’s time without offering them skills or rewards in a tangible way that are associated with higher incomes, such as business skills (Gordon, 1996). However, some women in the co-operative stated that an important change in their life was the increased ability to learn, analyze and act when it came to learning how to make embroideries, being able to see what other women are creating, and using that knowledge to improve on their own skills. Other women stated that it was a benefit to be able to work on their products at home, as it gives them something to do to generate an income during time when they were previously not economically productive.

While handicraft production does not question traditional norms, it is offering women the capacity to generate an income in a physically remote area where such options are very limited to women. As stated previously, the generation of income has provided some empowerment to women, as it is not always possible to shift cultural norms quickly. To work around the patriarchal norms, “women may find it strategic to avoid or diffuse potentially conflictual
situations with men because they recognize that the rules of the game are loaded against them…” (Kabeer, 1994, p.227). Through a slow process, women may be able to question traditional norms as they increasingly experience empowerment at the various levels. Due to the patriarchal system in rural areas, women are limited in their ability to shift responsibilities completely from the household to formal employment, thus handicraft can offer an in-between, where women can work from home yet generate an independent income. Empowerment is a process that takes times, as does the shifting of traditional cultural norms.

To help develop capacity in women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, Uganda Venture has attempted to help them develop skills, such as learning English, which the women reported as an encouraging factor that helped them develop self-confidence. Women reported having developed the confidence to speak to volunteers associated with Uganda Venture due to the development of English skills they have experienced. Specifically, an encouraging factor at the personal level that 87% of women reported was the ability to gain knowledge, including general knowledge, English skills, and handicraft skills. Beyond developing skills for themselves, 67% of members liked that it was their peers who were teaching them new skills. Approximately half of the women reported an encouraging factor to be that leadership came from the women within the club and that there were women who were animators, or encouragers, within the group. This suggest that the role Uganda Venture played in capacity development was successful, as initially volunteers taught original members of the co-operative how to stitch, and since then, the women have been responsible for passing on that knowledge to other women. Furthermore, Ferguson and Kepe (2011) support this finding, as they examined women in an agricultural co-operative in Uganda and found that women had similarly gained leadership and business skills due to their involvement in the co-operative.
It is important for support organizations such as Uganda Venture to encourage the women to have their own goals (Rowlands, 1998). This can be seen to have occurred through the co-operatives entry into flowers as an income generating project for their co-operative. Uganda Venture did not play a role in this idea as it was the women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club who decided to branch beyond handicraft production into agricultural production. Thus, through encouraging the women to take ownership of the co-operative, members have developed leadership skills at the personal and collective level. Co-operatives in general encourage women to develop skills, particularly related to developing the capacity to make decisions and take a leadership role, due to the democratic governance structure that encourages the participation of all individuals (ILO, 2012). Overall, members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club have experienced growth in their capacity through involvement with the co-operative, both developing skills through involvement and through capacity development assistance provided by Uganda Venture. Importantly, this is supported from previous research by Le Mare (2012) and Schein (2003) who found that women involved in work-related groups were able to develop capacity related to skills and confidence to express themselves and their ideas.

Hindrances towards Empowerment

Despite the positive themes that emerged related to empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational levels, members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club still experienced significant factors that hinder their progress towards empowerment. Two of the most significant hindrances discussed here are related to the economic struggles associated with the loss of markets the co-operative experienced in the past year and their continued struggled to be recognized as a women-only co-operative in a patriarchal society.
Economic Struggles

The greatest inhibiting factor mentioned at all three levels of empowerment by members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club was the decrease in income due to the loss of markets that the co-operative experienced when Uganda Venture removed their financial support. Despite the fact that Uganda Venture encouraged them to find local markets and the use of a business manager to do so, Tabiro Ladies’ Club had yet to find a market for their embroidery products. The co-operative had recently stopped purchasing embroideries from its members, which resulted in a decreased income for its members. It also resulted in a drop in membership within the co-operative, as some members left the co-operative after they experienced the decrease in income. Although the co-operative had begun purchasing mats and baskets from its members, the income that members received from these products was significantly lower than the prices they received for their embroidery products. As a production co-operative, one of its major objectives is to provide its members with a source of income, yet the co-operative was struggling to do so.

This financial struggle is compounded by the fact that members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club face the entrenched system of patriarchy within Africa and the exploitative sexual division of labour. Patriarchy desires to keep women in the home, working (for free) primarily as mothers and caregivers, which is influenced by a lack of available employment options and low pay offered by the traditional economic system (Gordon, 1996). In such systems in Africa, women can lose everything in a situation of divorce or separation, as men’s responsibility for providing support to his wife or children is not clearly defined or enforced (Gordon, 1996). Women in Tabiro Ladies’ Club identified this issue, as some of the women were separated from their former husbands and were struggling to cover the costs associated with raising children alone. The money that they had received from the co-operative helped them meet those needs, yet with
the decrease in income, they were again struggling to meet those needs. Other women identified that they worked ‘with’ their husband on their mutual land for agricultural purposes, yet did not have equal access to the income generated from that, noting that they were able to use the income generated from the co-operative as their own income. Thus, the ability to gain income independent of their husbands through the co-operative had been empowering for them. Yet, the decrease in income from the co-operative had been a struggle as women are no longer able to pay for those items they had been able to pay for at the beginning of the co-operative, creating a disempowering effect.

Women, in their pursuit of empowerment within their households and marriages, struggle against the system of patriarchy that limit women’s access to the resources of their household or joint assets through marriage (Gordon, 1996). Yet, members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club had been responding to this inequality by not informing their husband of the full amount they received for a product. This allowed them to make financial spending decisions as they arose, independent from their husband, to avoid conflict from asking their husband for money to help the wife’s family in need. This is a form of empowerment as the women were refusing to accept the feeling of helplessness in terms of access to resources, but instead were acting in a way that could reduce their dependency on their husbands. However, the lack of income from the co-operative had forced women again to rely on their husbands, which put a stop to their ability to act in this empowering way.

Even though all the women interviewed reported that they participated in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, no one said it was their primary source of income. Rather, most women considered agriculture (77%) or trade (13%) their primary occupation. This could be related to the fact that the women had recently experienced a decrease in income from the co-operative. Most likely,
however, income from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club was always an addition to their primary income, as previous payment from the co-operative was unreliable in timing, occurring once or twice a year, rather than monthly. The fact that most women in the co-operative considered agriculture or trade their primary occupation could have helped limit the negative impact that the loss of income had on the woman due to having other sources of income. However, as mentioned above, just because a woman works in agriculture does not necessarily mean she has control over the income received if she works with her husband. Thus, the decrease in income can be more associated with the disempowering effect of a decrease in woman’s access to her own money, rather than a loss of primary income.

In effect, many women reported that the decrease in income had negatively impacted them across all three levels of empowerment, suggesting that the income generated from the co-operative was very important to them. Again, this could be related to the fact that income generated from the Tabiro Ladies’ Club was obtained independently of their husbands, if women were married, allowing all women the ability to use it the way they desire. Overall, one of the greatest limitations of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club was its current lack of markets for the products that its members produce, and therefore, its lack of ability to provide the economic benefits its members knew to be associated with involvement in it. Losing independent income was a strong factor that limited the ability of the members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club to experience empowerment.

**Operating as an Unregistered, Informal Co-operative**

A second significant hindrance to the empowerment of members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club is the fact that the co-operative remains unregistered despite acting as a co-operative for the past three years. As a result, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club remains in the informal sector, which offers
them little security as individuals or as a co-operative. This was partly due to the influence of Tabiro Children’s Home, the on-the-ground partner organization that helped Uganda Venture initially launch the Tabiro Ladies’ Club. Tabiro Children’s Home seemed uninterested in providing assistance to build the capacity in the women to run the co-operative alone and recommended against registering with the local District. By registering their co-operative, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club could gain legal recognition as a co-operative. This would allow them to gain legitimate authority and make their work more visible in the public sphere (March & Taqqu, 1986). March and Taqqu (1986) suggest that active women’s informal groups that organize themselves around a common purpose, with a structured hierarchy, lends itself towards formalization. Thus, Tabiro Ladies’ Club is in a good position to become registered and would benefit from that registration, yet they have not done so.

Associated with being an unregistered co-operative operating in the informal sector, it was found that many of the women reported an attitude of dependency, which further hindered women’s empowerment. For instance, members seem yet unable to break free from internalized patriarchy, as the female members of the co-operative depend on a male business manager or the male leaders of the NGOs to find markets for them. As Rowlands (1997) states, some organizations may have little interest in the empowerment of women, particularly if it requires a shift in power by the organizations leaders, which can be seen in Tabiro Children’s Home. However, it is the responsibility of the support organizations, such as Uganda Venture, to encourage questioning the assumptions that women have to challenge their ‘internalized oppression’ and acceptance of inequality (Rowlands, 1998).

One way this questioning of assumptions occurred was through the feedback group, as there was significant discussion around the idea of a need for an outsider to find markets for their
products. The women in the co-operative still expressed a desire for partnership with Uganda Venture, which can be beneficial if Uganda Venture remains in a supporting, or ally, role. For instance, if Uganda Venture remains in solidarity with the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, they need to ensure that they leave the women in charge but can provide support where they can, such as working alongside the women to find local markets for their products. Furthermore, the partnership that Uganda Venture has with Tabiro Children’s Home could be used to work at ‘undoing’ structures that ignore women’s empowerment or work to disempower women (Rowlands, 1998). Overall, by continuing to operate as it is currently, Tabiro Ladies’ Club will continue to struggle to find markets.

**Conceptual Framework: Revisited**

As was described in Chapter 2 and illustrated in Figure 2.1, the conceptual framework used in this research was based on Rowlands (1997) theory of individual, collective, and relational empowerment. It was hypothesized that there would be a feedback loop between core values and changes that occur at each level of empowerment, which are positively impacted by encouraging factors and negatively impacted by inhibiting factors. This was clearly supported at each level of empowerment, as members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club identified factors that positively influenced their ability to experience empowerment at each level, as well as factors that negatively impacted them. Furthermore, at each level, specific core values and changes were found to influence each other. It can also be noted that while some of these concepts overlapped across the levels, each level also had their unique factors.

It was also hypothesized that there would be an interaction between the personal, collective, and relational levels of empowerment. This was also clearly supported, as there were several overarching themes that were found at each level of empowerment, including the development of
agency, economic benefits, social benefits, capacity development, and hindrances towards empowerment. Like the conceptual framework suggests, there is no point at which ‘empowerment’ is reached. Rather, it is a continuous feedback loop. Therefore, based on the findings, it can be suggested that the proposed conceptual framework adequately accounts for the empowerment that members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club experienced. Overall, by the fact that Rowlands’ theory encourages modifications based on specific contexts, despite being a decade old, can still be an important tool used to examine women’s empowerment in co-operative or work-related groups.

Summary

In conclusion, there are several key themes of empowerment that emerged from the findings that were found across the personal, collective, and relational levels of empowerment. First, the women seemed to have increased their awareness of their human agency, which is their ability to act in the world. This has occurred at the personal level, as a group, and even within their marital relationships, as women gain confidence. Secondly, the women have gained economic benefits from being able to generate an income independently from their husbands, yet the recent decrease in income can be argued to be limiting this aspect of empowerment. Thirdly, the social benefits that the co-operative provided was a strong aspect of empowerment, as the women were working collectively to improve their lives, which translated into greater confidence and skills in their personal and relational lives. Fourthly, the women had been able to gain capacity through their involvement in the co-operative, both through peer skills training and outsider assistance in capacity development. However, the hindrance associated with being an unregistered co-operative can limit the women’s ability to truly experience full empowerment, as they remain under external organizations, rather than being able to stand as a formal co-operative
on their own. Overall, the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club had experienced growth in their empowerment through their involvement in the co-operative. By being aware of the hindrances towards empowerment and addressing them, the co-operative could continue to help its members experience empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level.
Chapter Seven: Final Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings from this research related to how women in the Tabiro Ladies’ Club experience empowerment. It also provides some recommendations for the co-operative, the organizations working with them, and general policy recommendations. Finally, suggestions for future research will be made.

Final Summary and Conclusions

As stated in the literature, empowerment is a process, not an end point. Therefore, we cannot conclusively say that women who belong to Tabiro Ladies’ Club are empowered. Nevertheless, the findings do point to the fact that women of the co-operative are experiencing empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level. There are also several overarching themes that emerge across the various levels of empowerment.

First, at the personal level of empowerment, the findings suggest that members of the co-operative have experienced empowerment related to their increased self-efficacy and the positive ways they now perceive themselves as well as their abilities to act in their own lives. Most women reported positive perceptions of themselves due to their involvement, such as a sense of agency, happiness, self-confidence and self-esteem. These core values influence and are influenced by the changes at the personal level, which were identified as the ability to obtain resources independently from their husbands; the ability to learn, analyze, and act; the ability to participate and influences spaces; and the belief that things are possible for them. These changes and core values represent ways that women are experiencing empowerment at the personal level. They are influenced positively through encouraging factors such as the ability to be part of the
Tabiro Ladies’ Club with the friendships and support it provides; the ability to generate an income; and to gain knowledge related to skill development and English. However, the factors that are limiting empowerment at the personal level include the low income members received for their products and the lack of markets.

At the collective level, the findings also suggested that members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club were experiencing empowerment as a group by virtue of their membership within the co-operative. The core values that the women mentioned experiencing at the collective level included gaining a sense of collective agency and a group identity as they took ownership of the group. These core values were influenced by the changes they had experienced at the collective level, including a widening of support networks, increased access to resources, and gaining value through their membership. The primary encouraging factor that added to the above process of empowerment was friendship and interactions that occur within the group. For instance, peer skills training and sharing ideas and opinions within the group was identified as being important to the women, as the women learned from each other and interacted with each other as equals. Similar to the factors that inhibit empowerment from occurring at the personal level, at the collective level many women reported the loss of markets, an attitude of dependency by members, and a lack of capital within the co-operative as struggles they faced. These factors inhibit the empowering ability of the co-operative at a collective level as it limited the ability of the co-operative to act as a cohesive unit beyond just the development of skills as well as decreased the income-generating aspect of the co-operative.

Finally, empowerment at the relational level varied among members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, as the group was very diverse, with over half of the members being single, divorced, or widowed. Women who fell into this category often reported making decisions by
themselves, as they do not have a husband to make decisions with. Also, some women reported making decisions with other family members. For members who were married, most expressed that they were able to negotiate and make decisions with their husbands, despite raising the concern that sometimes their husbands were physically abusive or stole from them by selling jointly owned animals or products. The core values that reflected growth in women’s relational empowerment included the ability to make decisions and the ability to negotiate within their household. The changes that resulted from and strengthened the core values included the ability to pay for household needs and to start another business.

In examining relational empowerment, the feedback group provided some interesting insight into how the women acted in ways to gain power within the household that was not discovered during the interviews. Specifically, some women reported that they would keep some money back from their husband to pay for necessities within the household. This can be argued to reflect empowerment at the relational level as the women were acting in a way to influence their position within their household, despite the cultural norms that maintain male domination within the household. Thus, empowerment at the relational level was positively influenced by factors such as the ability to generate an income independent from their husband and having peer support. Factors that limited empowerment occurring at this level were associated with the women recently experiencing a decrease in income from the loss of markets for their products. For women who are not married, an inhibiting factor was having the sole responsibility for their household, whereas for women who are married, they were inhibited when they experienced a lack of support from their partner.

Overall, it can be said that women who belonged to the Tabiro Ladies’ Club were experiencing empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational levels. Participating in this
women-only co-operative had allowed the women to gain a sense of agency, both at the personal and collective level, where they felt they had the self-efficacy to control their lives. Furthermore, it had provided women access to financial capital and social benefits, where they had gained an income independent from their husbands and had learnt to work with other women from the community who came from different backgrounds. Women had also gained capacity in terms of the development of skills related to handicraft production, English, and working with other individuals in a decision-making role. Thus, being part of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club offered opportunities for empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level.

However, since the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is a relatively new co-operative, the co-operative did have some aspects that hindered the possibility of empowerment for its members. For instance, the recent loss of market for their embroidery products and the resulting decrease in income for members’ products significantly inhibited empowerment across all three levels. It reduced women’s bargaining power within their household and women’s ability to pay for necessities. It had also decreased the ability of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to act as a co-operative as it no longer had a market to sell to and it was limited in its ability to provide loans and assistance to its members due to a lack of internal capital. Another hindrance was the fact that the co-operative remains unregistered despite its existence and operation over the last three years. This negatively impacted the Tabiro Ladies’ Club as it forced them to rely on outside assistance, either from an international NGO or male with authority, as a female informal co-operative has little power in a patriarchal culture such as Uganda.

Overall, the analysis of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club provides analytic support for the argument that women-only handicraft co-operatives can provide empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level. Unregistered co-operatives, especially women-only handicraft co-
operatives, are very under-studied in the co-operative literature. Therefore, these findings add significantly to the discussion around co-operatives and their impact on women by providing a glimpse into how one women-only handicraft co-operative has positively impacted its members through gains in empowerment. Despite all the benefits and advances the members have made, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club still struggles against the gender inequalities in the co-operative movement in Uganda and work still needs to be done.

**Recommendations**

Key recommendations from the findings are as follows. Recommendations suggested for the co-operative and the organizations that work with them will be shared with Uganda Venture. Since Uganda Venture returns to Uganda each year, they will have the opportunity to share the recommendations with Tabiro Children’s Home and the Tabiro Ladies’ Club directly.

**For the Tabiro Ladies’ Club**

The first recommendation for the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is to register as a formal co-operative recognized within their District. By registering the co-operative, it would help legitimize the work that they are doing by no longer operating in the informal sector by allowing them to move into the formal sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, much employment occurs in the informal sector, yet this provides little security and a lower income than employment in the formal sector (Chen, 2008). Thus, by registering their co-operative, the members of Tabiro Ladies’ Club have the opportunity to enter into the formal sector of employment by becoming a legally recognized organization. Jones et al. (2012) found that when women were organized into recognized collective enterprises, this provided additional social and economic benefits to its members through being able to sell products on favorable terms with buyers. While the co-
operative itself may not be able to offer job security, the co-operative may be able to demand higher prices for their products in markets as a registered co-operative, compared to an unregistered group.

A second recommendation for the Tabiro Ladies’ Club is to actively seek out markets for their handicraft products using the leadership that already exists within the co-operative, rather than predominately relying on outside assistance. While it may help to have assistance through Uganda Venture or their male business manager, it is also important the women gain the capacity to reach markets themselves. It would be important for the members of the co-operative, or even just the executive members, to work closely with external support to find markets, such as going with them to markets to meet with potential buyers. By engaging in this type of behavior, it will increase the self-efficacy of these members and increased their capacity and confidence to approach prospective buyers without external assistance. The benefit this offers is that it allows the co-operative to increase and expand their potential buyer pool without having to wait until Uganda Venture volunteers from Canada visit or when the business manager is around.

A third recommendation is to continue to diversify their portfolio of products, perhaps branching into more male-dominated occupations or fields, such as planting ginger. The women within the group recognized that having ginger as a crop yields high income, yet instead of planting ginger, the co-operative chose to plant flowers. It was explained that one member of the co-operative had previously planted flowers and would be willing to provide seeds and teach the other women how to take care of flowers. Despite the fact that most women already know how to take care of ginger, they did not choose to plant that high-yield crop on their shared plot of land. Perhaps in the future, the women could engage in income-generating projects that yield greater rewards, branching away from traditionally female-dominated activities.
Partner Organizations of Tabiro Ladies’ Club

In line with the first recommendation for the Tabiro Ladies’ Club, a recommendation for Uganda Venture is to encourage the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to register with Mpigi District as their own co-operative. Likewise, for Tabiro Children’s Home, the recommendation is to allow the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to distance itself as a sub-project of their organization and encourage the Tabiro Ladies’ Club registration with the local government. Again, this will allow the Tabiro Ladies’ Club to enter into the formal economic system by being a recognized co-operative, which provides them legitimization and the ability to demand greater prices for their products. It is important that policy makers and people in leadership roles engage in the process of women’s empowerment, as without it, women will continue to struggle against the gender inequalities that limit them economically and socially.

A second recommendation for Uganda Venture is to increasingly build the capacity of the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club by continuing to provide them with skills and tools to govern themselves. By increasing the capacity of the women within the co-operative, it can help the community to a greater extent as well, as the women use their increased capacity to spread knowledge to other members of the community, as illustrated through women within the co-operative teaching new members the embroidery skills. By helping to develop capacity in the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club, Uganda Venture will be able to help provide long-lasting changes to this community. Specifically, through training women in skill development and English, women gain in these skills and are able to pass it onto their children, creating generational changes.

A third recommendation for Uganda Venture is to focus on women’s empowerment as part of their objectives within the community they are working in. This would involve helping to
break down the stereotypes surrounding women’s inferior status within the community and within households. As an outsider, they have a unique opportunity to bring in different ideas and force a questioning of patriarchal norms. This would be especially relevant in regards to Tabiro Children’s Home, which continues to see Tabiro Ladies’ Club as an inferior organization to theirs, rather than an equal organization that they can partner with to bring greater change to the community. By helping break down the stereotype of gender inequality, it would go beyond just the members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club but could begin to change the mindset of the community through the larger impact that Tabiro Children’s Home has on this region.

General Recommendations

As this evidence shows, women-only co-operatives may empower women as an income-generating project. The Ugandan government and governments all over the world should recognize the opportunity that co-operatives provide, not only in terms of generating income and adding to the economy overall, but also in terms increasing gender equality. The need to recognize and strengthen co-operative organizations, particularly in rural areas for development, should occur. Uganda is currently ranked 116 out of 146 countries in the Gender Inequality Index, suggesting that Uganda has a long way to go to obtain gender equality in reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity (UNDP, 2011). Therefore, if Uganda encourages the development and creation of women-only co-operatives, it may be the first step in increasing the gender equality across the country.

For development practitioners, the effectiveness of the co-operative behavior of co-operatives is a key aspect of community development that should be taken into account and used for finding what works in collaboration with community members. Whether using an existing co-operative organization or helping to establish a new one, the benefits that co-operative
organizations offer go beyond just the original intention. Specifically, the Tabiro Ladies’ Club started mainly as an embroidery project yet it has expanded to become a multi-product co-operative where the women have benefitted economically as well as socially. Furthermore, they have experienced empowerment at the personal, collective, and relational level of their lives yet this was never the original intention of the co-operative. Therefore, co-operative organizations offer an important opportunity when planning a collaborative community development project.

**Future Research**

This research has aimed to provide insight into the role that informal women-only co-operative can play in women’s empowerment. There has been relatively little research conducted on this area, as many co-operatives cater more so to males. As such, much of the current literature on co-operatives in Uganda has focused on agricultural co-operatives or SACCOs, rather than handicraft co-operatives. Thus, by conducting a case study on a women-only handicraft co-operative in Uganda, it allowed a glimpse into how co-operatives can impact women in a positive manner. As this case study was meant to provide analytic generalization to Rowlands’ theory of empowerment, rather than statistical generalization to handicraft co-operatives in general, additional research needs to be conducted to further support these findings.

A suggestion for future research would be to explore the relationship of empowerment in other handicraft co-operatives in Uganda. Visiting the tourist shops and markets within Uganda provides evidence that there are many women handicraft co-operatives that exist in the country. By exploring how women in other handicraft co-operatives are empowered, whether they are registered with their local government or not, will be able to provide stronger evidence of the role that these co-operatives can play in women’s empowerment. This is especially important as
Another suggestion for future research would be to look at the long-term effects of women working in co-operatives on culture in Africa and other developing countries. Do co-operatives really offer a way for gender inequality to be questioned and changed? Importantly, do the increased workloads that women experience from creating handicrafts in addition to their daily household work further or hinder empowerment? Further, does the low value of handicrafts really offer women the ability to question gender stereotypes within their community? It would be important to examine the community in which these co-operatives operate to see whether any shifts in community or family behavior actually occur as a result of women’s empowerment in co-operatives.

A third suggestion for future research is to develop a concept and measurement of women’s empowerment that is mutually agreed upon and is able to measure all aspects of empowerment. Currently, the research on women’s empowerment is very disjointed and it is difficult to compare findings across studies due to the use of different definitions and measurements. By creating a commonly accepted definition and a way of measuring empowerment, it can strengthen the discussion around women’s empowerment and work. Without a common measurement, it is difficult to argue and promote women’s empowerment in developing countries. While it is important to recognize that empowerment means different things for different people depending on their context, having a skeleton theory and measurement tools would help researchers to find out exactly what empowerment is in each of these contexts.

A final suggestion for future research is to explore a deeper extent of non-monetary benefits associated with co-operatives. Much of the previous research has focused on the
economic benefits and economic empowerment that individuals received due to involvement in the co-operative. However, as these findings have pointed out, the women of Tabiro Ladies’ Club have experienced many additional benefits. This is especially evident as the co-operative has continued despite the recent loss of market in the past year. Exploring more deeply into the specific non-financial benefits co-operatives can offer individuals, women in particular, it would provide greater insight into the usefulness of co-operatives in terms of long-term community and personal development.
References


Cheston, S. & Kuhn, L. (n.d). Empowering women through microfinance. Women’s Opportunity Fund, UNIFEM.

Couglin, J. H. & Thomas, A. R. (2002). The rise of women entrepreneurs: People, processes and


Le Mare, A. (2012). ‘Show the world to women and they can do it’: Southern Fair Trade Enterprises as agents of empowerment. *Gender and Development*, 20, 95-109.


Appendix 1

Table 4.2: Demographics on Members of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 6 or below</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed primary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed some secondary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spiritual Belief</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born again/Christian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Occupation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owning own business</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal husbandry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Martial Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, monogamous</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, polygamous</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/Divorced</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
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</table>
## Appendix 2
### Stitching Towards Empowerment Questionnaire

#### Section A

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Can you tell me how you came to find out about and join the Tabiro Ladies’ Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Can you describe what activities you participate in as part of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club? (i.e. embroidery, flowers, getting loans, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Can you please explain why you part of the Tabiro Ladies’ Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Can you tell me some positive benefits you receive from your involvement with the Tabiro Ladies’ Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How has your involvement affected your income?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a.</td>
<td>How has your involvement affected your relationship with other women in the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b.</td>
<td>How has your involvement affected your relationship with other women in the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>How has your involvement affected how you feel about yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How has your life changed from before you were involved until now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>What is your favorite part about the Ladies’ Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Have you experienced any negative impacts due to your involvement with the Tabiro Ladies’ Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Is there anything you would like to see the Tabiro Ladies’ Club do in the future?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. Are you part of any other co-operatives like the Tabiro Ladies’ Club? Please describe.

**Section B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What community do you live in?:</th>
<th>2. What year were you born in?:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. What is the highest level of schooling you completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Do you have a religion or spiritual belief?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- Born-again (Christian)
- Catholic
- Muslim
- None
- Other

5. What do you do as your primary way to earn an income?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Do you have any other sources of income?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. How much of your income comes from your involvement in the Tabiro Ladies’?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. <em>If makes an income, ask this question.</em> With the money you receive from your products, what do you spend your money on?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- Buy food for family
- Buy clothing for children or family members
- Buy clothing for myself
- Pay school expenses for children
- Pay health-related costs
- Buy items for house
- Re-invest in my products
- Save
- Other
- Specify:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. Do you have individual savings?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Yes
10. Do you have a bank account?  
   - Yes, with husband [ ]  
   - Yes, by myself [ ]  
   - No [ ]

11. Are you married? If yes, please describe your relationship.  
   - Single [ ]  
   - Married with spouse permanently in the home [ ]  
   - Married with spouse migrant [ ]  
   - Married (polygamous) [ ]  
   - Separated/Divorced [ ]  
   - Widowed [ ]  
   - Other [ ]

12. What is your husband’s occupation? (ask only if married)  

13a. How many people are part of your household on a daily basis?  

13b. Do you have any children that are away for school? How many?  

13c. What is the age and sex of each member?  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________

14a. Can you describe how decisions about spending money are made in your household?  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________

14b. How do you believe decisions should be made in your household?  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________  
   ________________________________________________

15. Do you or your husband own the land you live on?  
   - Yes, myself [ ]  
   - Yes, my husband [ ]  
   - Yes, my husband and I [ ]
16. Do you or your husband rent any additional land?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, myself</th>
<th>Yes, my husband</th>
<th>Yes, my husband and I</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17. Do you own animals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, by myself</th>
<th>Yes, with my husband</th>
<th>What kind?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

20. Do you own a mobile phone or active SIM card?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sole ownership of a mobile phone</th>
<th>Shared ownership of a mobile phone</th>
<th>Own active SIM card but no mobile phone</th>
<th>No active SIM card or mobile phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Last Thoughts**

24. Is there anything else you would like to add?

| ____________________________________________ | ____________________________________________ | ____________________________________________ |
|___________________________________________|___________________________________________|___________________________________________|
Table 5.6: Encouraging and Inhibiting Factors at the Collective Level

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<td>Friendship within group</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Hope for the future</td>
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<td>Peer training of skills</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Generate income</td>
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<td>Development of leaders</td>
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<td>Difference of opinions</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not mentioned in this chart for inhibiting factors are the responses of death and distrust within group as they were only mentioned by one individual.