An Investigation on the Role of Group Support Programmes as Avenues for Generation of Sustainable Social Capital of Group Members in Kanungu District- Uganda

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Abstract: *The study set out to authenticate the capacity of Group Support Programmes (GSPs) in promoting sustainable social capital of group members that has been hitherto less attended by many scholars. Despite their existence for some good time, academics have not paid adequate attention to the importance of Group Support Programmes in the enhancement of sustainable social capital of group members, specifically in Kanungu District, Uganda. The GSPs aim at fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where members can build meaningful connections, share experiences, and leverage each other's strengths to collectively achieve their goals, thereby enhancing their social capital through active participation and collaboration within the group. Consequently, this study investigates a set of three aspects, viz. the motives for joining these groups, different initiatives by these groups, and the effectiveness of the initiatives in realizing sustainable social capital by group members. The study was grounded in social capital theory, which is rich in social sciences, and an exploratory qualitative study of Group Support Programmes in Kanungu District, Uganda was employed. The selection of Kanungu District and three GSPs (Bataka, Boda, and Artisan Groups) was done purposively, and data were gathered through focus group discussions and unstructured interviews. Data was analyzed through content analysis, establishing the emerging themes that were presented descriptively and with the support of narrations to give authentic value. The study's findings show that Self Help Groups (SHGs) have contributed significantly to the creation of social capital, which is regarded as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development broadly. The current study makes it clear that the GSPs in Kanungu District have played a significant role in the social/cultural, individual, and family empowerment of members, which has been accomplished through a variety of channels, such as social cohesiveness, self-esteem, and teamwork. Therefore, this study suggests that policymakers and Group Support Programs create shared goals because GSPs are a community of interest that believes that collaborating closely to achieve shared goals builds social capital. For a smooth working relationship and problems to be resolved through group action, mutual understanding and cooperation among the members must be further improved. Efforts should be made to create forums and social relationships among non-GSP members in order to support the growth of any trust-based groups or networks.*

Keywords: Group Support Programmes, Social capital, Participation, Collaboration, Mutual Support

1.1 Study Background

Globally, social, economic, and political changes that have taken place involving rural to urban migrations, urbanization, population increase, globalization, technological advancement, and shifts in labour market demands have broken the traditional systems and structures, leading to changes in local

socioeconomic structures and livelihoods of the community. (Nwachukwu et al., (2023). In response to this, governments, civil society organizations, development experts, and bilateral and multilateral development organizations globally have responded by creating different programmes. These initiatives aim to enhance living conditions and improve the general well-being of the community (Gugerty et al., 2019). However, the methods applied in these programs have often failed to produce lasting results. Thus, leading communities to organize themselves in associations and groupings that have devised different strategies to address these changes and challenges for mutual support and enhance their sustainable development and livelihoods.

Group Support Programmes possess distinct characteristics and share philosophies with various community development models. (Kilonzo, 2020; Matunga, 2022). A Group Support Programme is defined as a common, member-based institution that is voluntary and involves individuals coming together to support one another and collaboratively address shared challenges such as discrimination, disadvantage, and other experiences (Shukla, 2024; Matunga &Kantinen, 2023; SHIFT Recovery Community, 2022; Gaas, 2019). Generally small in size, these groups emphasize face-to-face social interactions and personal responsibility (Shukla, 2022; Kanakalatha, 2019). The experience and collective expertise gathered from tackling common issues and utilizing members' skills form the foundation of GSPs' knowledge base. This fosters a trusting environment as they work through development obstacles to support one another. (Kilonzo et al. 2020; Matunga 2022). In Asia, South America, and other African nations, the model is thus applied in a variety of developing countries in areas such as community development, health, and education (Koskenniemi, 2022; Bitney, 2022; Shaari & Waller, 2022; Landstad, Hedlund & Kendall, 2022; Durst & Cangelosi, 2021; Kutyba et al., 2021).

In Uganda, rural communities have made strides in forming their Group Support Programmes, which include: clan-based GSPs, women's GSPs, youth GSPs, farmers' cooperatives, and microfinance associations to foster development among others. These groups have increased economic opportunities and activities for women and youths, hence, enhancing their livelihoods while empowering them to manage better shocks that threaten their asset base (Otim & Mwesigwa, 2022; Tusasiirwe & Waller, 2022; Nozomi & Cornhiel, 2022; Hedlund & Kendall, 2022; Biney, 2022; Abdulai & Fuseini, 2022; Dulhunty, 2022; Schönwiese & Wegscheider, 2021; Afeamekpor et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). They are also seen as strong rural microfinance systems, and over time, they have gained recognition as vital conduits for the development of social capital. Despite being viable systems of microfinancing and channels of information of social capital, *(a value that is derived from positive connections and relationships between people, acting as an asset that enables cooperation and collective action- a 'hidden value')*. (Chetty et al. 2022), So far, there has been no serious attempt to enhance their role in sustainable development. Therefore, this study is to be reviewed as a humble effort to elucidate how these groups are a medium of sustainable social capital for their members.

1.2 Statement of the Problem
Group life is unavoidable for human beings simply because of the fact that man is a social animal. Because man has recognized this reality since the dawn of social life, groups of various kinds and characteristics have developed alongside human social existence. Based on their capacity to take advantage of the vast opportunities that have been made available to them, it is widely acknowledged as an unbiased evaluation that Group Support Programs have been making a significant contribution to the creation of sustainable community development among rural residents. This contention has been

satisfactorily proved by the experts and academicians through their empirical investigations (Otim & Mwesigwa, 2022; Kakembo, 2022; Kutyba et al., 2021; Akanji and Kamya, 2020; Namirembe et al., 2022; Kalibwami et al., 2021) as well as by regular people, who have shown a greater readiness and inclination to participate actively and join their own GSPs at their doorstep. However, this study builds on research which argues so far there has been no serious attempt on Group Support Programmes' effective contribution to sustainable social capital of their members in Kanungu District-Uganda, which is treated as a pre-condition for the attainment of sustainable livelihoods of community in a comprehensive sense and in turn helps to bring community development.

1.3 Study Objective
The main objective of this study is to investigate the role of Group Support Programmes as avenues for the generation of sustainable social capital of Group Members in Kanungu District, Uganda. In trying to address this objective, three questions are answered, viz.: (i) What makes people join Group Support Programmes in Kanungu District, Uganda? (ii) How do Group Support Programmes contribute to the sustainable social capital of the members? (iii)What sustainable social capital have been realized by group members from Group Support Programmes in Kanungu District, Uganda?

1.4 Literature Review
In this section, theoretical review and empirical literature are presented.
1.4.1 Theoretical Framework
Social capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) guided the study. The theory posits that social relationships are valuable resources that can be leveraged for individual and collective benefits. It highlights how social networks of relationships, trust, and shared norms within a group can facilitate cooperation, access to resources, and the achievement of common goals. In summary, the central thesis of social capital theory is the assertion that social relationships are valuable resources that can lead to community development as members commit themselves to each other and strengthen the social fabric. This is achieved through face-to-face interactions, which are an essential characteristic of Group Support Programmes (GSPs) in Kanungu District, Uganda. The theory plays a crucial role in the formation, functioning, and sustainability of GSPs, since these groups are platforms for building and improving sustainable social capital, leading to enhanced collective action, access to resources, and improved livelihood in general. Social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily, and this has been proved by this study that coming together as a group has shed off fears of many who would not have made it in terms of development if they had traded it alone. The theory relates to the study because of its importance in providing a valuable framework for understanding the role of social relationships in the functioning and sustainability of GSPS, and in understanding their role in generating social capital for their members.

1.4.2 Empirical Review
Across the world, there is a great amount written on the role or function of Group Support Programmes to sustainable livelihoods in general. Most of the literature has dealt with the role of these groups, enabling women to access finances, and by this, they have been able to have skills and knowledge on how to run their groups and how to enhance their businesses and economic activities. According to Mehta and Singh (2020), Rajeev et al. (2020), Padsumbia et al. (2024), Mahato and Jha (2024), and Debanjana and Indrajit (2024), for example, self-help groups help members develop their communication skills and boost their self-confidence through frequent interactions with other group members and outside facilitators. Members' self-confidence is frequently boosted by the experience of being a part of a group

and constantly engaging with other women who share similar viewpoints. There was observed positive behavior change, especially in their political participation and enhancement of public accountability. Their attendance at the groups' regular meetings has led these women to be more likely to attend village council meetings. (AI-Kubati and Selvaratnam, 2023; Arora and Chawla, 2023). Together with increased self-confidence, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have enabled women to speak with a collective voice, which has further energized them to advocate for causes and demand their rights and respect. This was emphasized by Lamzahong and Kumar (2024) educated that women belonging to SHGs engage in collective actions to demand their rights or stand against social norms, discrimination, and enable members to address issues like gender inequality, domestic violence, and other forms of social exclusion. This is corroborated by Jollystar (2022), who claimed in her research on Village Community Banks (VICOBA) and development in Tanzania that these networks offer members personal advantages like self-worth, autonomy, and confidence in addition to a forum for group action. These organizations stimulate a movement in which women come together, collaborate, and create hope for their communities and themselves. However, empirical research by Anand et al. (2020) suggests that women jointly design and achieve the change they desire when they have the power of hope.

Besides, Cabot, et al., (2021)'s, review on *'Building Resilience through Self Help Groups: Evidence Review: The Resilience Evaluation, Analysis, and Learning (REAL) Award*", summarize the current understanding of the relationships between resilience and psychosocial factors through the lens of self-help groups, which have more psychosocial advantages, especially social capital and women's empowerment. According to the study, these psychological elements have improved the ability of participants and their households to withstand shocks and stressors. Through the development of social capital, GSP has helped members defend themselves from health-related risks and, in the event of an epidemic, find protection and prevention (Barrios et al., 2020; Fraser and Aldrich, 2020; Borgonovi and Andrieu, 2020; Behera, 2021; Bai et al., 2020).

In addition, Group Support Programmes are supportive in social capital interventions. Behera (2021) in his research on the "*Role of social capital in disaster risk management: Theoretical Perspective in special Reference to Odisha"*, concluded that, where needed, social capital interventions through SHGs in a variety of domains have proved relevant. SHGs' social capital has been crucial in effectively avoiding and controlling infections and viruses in the health sector, one of these crucial industries. As an illustration, Behera J.K. argues that during the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the 2014 Ebola virus disease outbreak, and the 2015 Zika virus-caused widespread epidemic, GSPs used their social capital to raise awareness of preventive measures and, most importantly, to help people stay calm and at peace. Additionally, he argues that social capital in SHGs in some areas has been crucial in prevention and control measures by implementing COVID-19 protocol and guidelines and raising awareness of them so that others can follow them precisely to keep themselves safe and enable others to be safe. Ibid. As a result, SHGs are crucial to social transformation. Not only do these groups alter the external appearance of a town or culture, but they also alter social institutions and the beliefs of the populace.

According to Nicholas (2021), the study explains that SHGs have a comparative advantage over delivering interventions directly to individuals because of the social capital (resources of trust and reciprocity) created through regular group interactions, even though the potential cost savings may spark interest in SHG-routed development through collective action as a social capital. This is due to the fact

that SHGs with large social capital reserves have been observed to act collectively to seek public goods for the members' benefit. Furthermore, according to Mitra et al. (2020), groups with greater social capital are better able to manage norms or discipline "deviant" behavior, which is why information transmission through GSPs has accelerated behavior change.

Other studies, like those of Raj & Shareen (2022) on *collective action and community development: Evidence from Self-Help Groups in Rural India,* discovered that the SHGs enabled women to take part in civic activities and family decision-making through group action. According to Walter, de Boef et al. (2021), social capital that is produced inside GSPs is being utilized more and more as a basis for projects that aim to promote the sustainable development of group members. He used the contribution of SHGs to the social capital assets of the members of the group. He notes that participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) frequently results in (i) the development of mostly horizontal (or "bridging") ties or bonds between individual actors and (ii) the construction and linkage of social relations outside of the group. He goes on to add that social capital among group members and groups creates collective savings and loan activities in SHGs, as well as a shared reality. He explained that other community or group initiatives can be funded with the social capital that the GSPs' horizontal structure and collective activities generate. Crucially, Chandrashekar and Likesh (2020) contend that social capital and collective agency created by SHGs have given individuals instrumental and intrinsic agency, allowing women to start influencing their own and their households' decision-making.

Moreover, on GSPs and sustainable social support and protection of their members, Mourão and Brown, (2022) from their study on *Black Lives Matters Coverage: How Protest News Frames and Attitudinal Change Affect Social Media Engagement,* believed that organizing big groups of people into small, homogeneous groups and having them gather once a week to discuss their experiences, worries, and ideas causes members' attitudes to shift, allowing them to reach their full potential as bestowed by God. These groups provide social support, particularly during life transitions, Kumar (2020) emphasized. The groups are regarded as "shock-absorbing" tools in this sense, with members providing mutual support to one another when needed.

Numerous studies in Uganda on GSPs have focused mainly on women and youth empowerment, which ascertains a paucity of information on the role of GSPs in enhancing the sustainable social capital of group members in Uganda. Therefore, this study aimed at examining what members of these groups experience, the meaning and evaluations they up and make, and how they make interpretations in relation to the social capital contributed to them by these groups in the study area. The paper sets out to research these groups as a medium of social capital and support in a promise to gain further insights into the dynamics of these groupings. Building on the overarching goal of examining how GSPs contribute to the development of members' sustainable social assets in the study area, the study is a valuable resource for policymakers, the government, and non-governmental organizations. They will all be able to create a system that will improve Group Support Programs and make their operations run more smoothly.

1.5 Research Methodology

Study area: The study was conducted in Kanungu district-Uganda. This district was created by the sixth parliament of Uganda in July 2001 and became one of the 135 districts of Uganda, East Africa. Africa. (Chief Administrative Office, 2022). The district is located in Southwestern Uganda between 29050'E

and 0045'S of the Equator, bordered by Rukungiri district to the north and east, Kabale district to the southeast, Kisoro district to the southwest, and The Democratic Republic of Congo to the west and it is approximately 420 kilometres (260Ml) by road, southwest of Kampala, Uganda's capital. The central coordinates of the district are 0057'S,29°47'E.' Administratively, the district is comprised of 18 Sub-counties, 9 Town Councils, 102 parishes, and 524 villages, and its headquarters are located in Kanungu town council. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, in 2020, Kanungu District had a population of 293,537,300 people, with 142,947 (48.7%) males and 150,590 (51.3%) females. The urban population was 51,694 (17%) (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2022). The Bakiga are the dominant ethnic group, followed by the Bafumbira, with a few Banyabutumbi (Uganda National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Economically, the district relies on commerce/trade, agriculture, the tourism industry, and services. Like most other districts in Uganda, the district's economy is based primarily on agriculture. Sufficient produce for domestic consumption and surplus sales is made possible by the healthy climate and fertile soils. Since the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is home to the majority of the world's mountain gorilla population, the district also benefits from tourism. (Wikipedia. Org). The selection of Kanungu District was not accidental. Geographically, Kanungu is a rural district and thus considered a hard-to-reach area, with little known about its sustainable development. The researcher was also interested in Kanungu because it is a heterogeneous district comprising different ethnic groups representing various livelihood sources and coping strategies to overcome sustainable development challenges. This was also in view of the concentration of communities' experience, knowledge, and practices of the Group Support Programmes' contribution to sustainable development. Furthermore, Kanungu District has a long history in GSPs, and there are a variety of GSPs which include *Bataka* groups, *boda boda* groups, clan groupings, organic farmers groups, *Bamukaka* groups, Artisan groups, youth groups, widows and widowers groups, and some of them are exclusively for women, youth, and others are mixed groups. Therefore, the researcher aimed to elucidate these groups by examining the experience, the meaning, the evaluation, and interpretation of group members to their lives in relation to the role of GSPs in enhancing their sustainable social capital, thus contributing to the literature.

Research design and sampling procedure: This study employed an explorative research design and qualitative approach. Three Group Support Programmes (*Bakata, Boda*, and Artisans groups) as representations, and 5 local leaders and 5 experts were purposively selected. Also, data was solicited from snowball-selected 23 group members to form a total sample of 33 participants and 3 Focus Group Discussions with group leaders. Additionally, this study used a variety of data collection techniques, including primary and secondary methodologies. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used to gather primary data, and official documentation, literature, and research reports pertaining to the study's pertinent topic were used to gather secondary data to supplement primary data. The study uses qualitative content analysis (QCA) from focus groups, in-depth interviews, and documentaries. The data is presented using a descriptive technique that includes authentic and useful information as well as a rich narrative depiction of the data.

1.6 Results, Analysis, and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Participants:

This section discusses the participant's gender, age, level of education, occupation, position, location, marital status, and years of membership. These attributes were relevant to the study since they have a bearing on the participants' provision of information that is valid, reliable, and relevant to the study. This data is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Common characteristics of the study Participants

S/N	Characteristics	
1	Age	23to 45 were predominant, and a few were 50 years to 84years
2	Sex	There was equal representation of both sexes
3	Education	Predominantly Primary, secondary, and a few diploma few degree holders
4	Occupation	Predominantly non-formal and a few formal (Many in agriculture, very few small businesses)
5	Position	Few LC1, LC3, and CDO teachers
6	Marital Status	Predominantly married or have a family, very few widows& widowers
7	Location	Predominantly rural and a few Peri-urban
8	Members per Association	18 members to 113 members
9	Years of membership	8 years and above

Source: Field Data, 2023

The concept of Group Support Programmes and Common characteristics of the selected GSPs in Kanungu District

Group Support refers to a variety of groups with different forms and institutional structures, which can complicate definitions. In Western contexts, a group may consist of individuals who gather to provide and receive support for shared issues (Reeder & Desi, 2023; Jibom et al., 2024). In contrast, in India, this term often describes financial cooperatives or self-help groups (SHGs) Gugerty et al., 2019). For this study, these entities are referred to as Group Support Programmes (GSPs).

According to the participants in the study, Group Support Programs in Kanungu District are communal establishments created by individuals who share a geographic location as well as similar social and other life circumstances. There are semi-formal and informal groupings among them. Since this study focused on the latter, these groups behave less formally; specifically, their power is shared among all members of the group, which calls for a more cooperative strategy that involves negotiation rather than command and control. In Kanungu district, the selected semi-formal GSPs are registered at the Sub-County or district levels with written constitutions and regulations. Despite regulations and constitutions, trust was the most crucial tool for holding leaders and members accountable and increasing members' dedication to the group's operations. This study was interested in such semi-formal groups to explore their role in the sustainable social capital of their members. *(Distinct in-depth Interview, CDO and from GSPs' Documents in the Sub County Office, May 2023).*

It was found that the selected GSPs' naming and governance were some of the traits that Group support programmes possess in the study area. These identify them and make them unique and distinguished from other GSPs. Naming was either done by the group members or members mandated their leaders to suggest names, and the rest were satisfied with the proposed names. As illustrated by one participant:

> *…. you know our group is a little bit big (64 members) making a decision in such a group is not easy, there was a long argument among the members, each member wanted to give his/ her name which took us long so we decided to mandate the leaders to do it and at the end, we are happy about the name (in-depth interview, Mzee Kamugisha, Set A-D of Kashojwa Parish, 14 May 2023)*

Governance was rotational, and decision-making was participatory, meaning all members had an equal chance to participate in the decision-making on matters concerning their GSPS. Regarding joining and exiting the group was voluntary for members, as many members joined these groups with the motive of socialization and having where they socially belonged for social support, as explained by a participant:

> *I joined this GSP since 2012. Before joining this GSP, I was having a hard time providing my four children, who were in primary school at the time, with basic social services. It was incredibly challenging for me to support my family adequately as the woman in charge of our household. But now that I've joined the club, I'm in a better position to give my kids at least the basics, like paying for their schooling, getting them nice clothes, and providing for their daily meals. By making a financial contribution, I can also take part in community social events like weddings, funerals, and other social ceremonies. This is because I was able to create an income-generating activity thanks to a soft loan I received from the group (In-depth interview with an elderly male, Set I–L, Maronko, May 2023).*

While a monthly contribution as a membership gesture was common to all the selected GSPs. The contribution comes at every meeting, which is once a month, either at an agreed place like a church, a school hall, or in a home of a member.

The role of Group Support Programmes in enhancing the Sustainable Social Capital of group members

Social support is provided for any social problem that might happen to a group member. In this study, social problems are linked to health issues like illnesses, memorial service plans like weddings and funerals, and any other benefits that have been agreed upon. The organization is somewhat in favor of education as well. Through the prism of the social cohesiveness topic and its subthemes, the study examines the sustainable social capital that GSP members have accumulated. These are discussed systematically in the following sections.

Strengthened Unity and Support

The participants of this study believe that the success of a group or community depends on how connected its members are and their willingness to participate in all the projects and activities of their Group Support Programme (GSP). This study defines social cohesion as a sense of unity among GSP members, which drives them to work together towards common goals. There was a consensus among the members, who perceive themselves as one entity with shared values, beliefs, life experiences, circumstances, pressing life issues, common needs, and purposes, and who are willing and able to work cooperatively. This implies that people often choose to join others who share mutual interests and concerns, which, to a large extent, relieves individuals of burdens they feel unable to overcome or achieve on their own. The study acknowledges that unity fosters the sharing of ideas, which, in turn, helps individuals to chart their development path.

Furthermore, the study results indicate that through social cohesion, members have created a stable and peaceful society where individuals feel secure and supported by their Group Support Programmes. This peaceful environment has strengthened personal bonds, which, in turn, have helped members to commit themselves to the objectives of their GSPs, leading to contentment and satisfaction. Through this sense of community, members have gained emotional strength, respect, and support, which enables them to feel protected and secure. These psychosocial factors have enhanced the resilience of members and their households in the face of shocks and stresses. Therefore, it can be concluded that the social protection

gained by GSP members is essential to their sustainable self-gratification, which is one of the reasons people join Group Support Programmes.

The majority of participants appreciated the assistance they received from GSPs during times of need, which has strengthened their bonds and eased their burdens. This suggests that social cohesion in GSPs not only serves as a unifying factor but also helps members feel a sense of worth as human beings. In this sense, these groups are viewed as "shock-absorber" systems, with members helping one another out when needed.

Moreover, the study established that the benefits of social cohesion have enabled members to take collective action more easily, thus promoting community well-being and sustainable development. Through collective action, members have gained social recognition and have embraced social responsibility, particularly in addressing common challenges such as isolation, demand for their rights, combating climate change, and protecting the environment, factors that hinder community development. Consequently, members volunteer to work on community infrastructure projects, which facilitate the movement of products and businesses, connect them with other communities, and generate income through transportation. This implies that GSPs are foundational in building a cohesive and collaborative community of responsible individuals.

Reduction in Inequality and Bringing Social Justice in the Community
Based on research findings, it was discovered that GSPs have consolidated plurality among the members by helping to reduce socioeconomic inequality disparities and fractures in the community. This has been achieved through the use of their components, which are a sense of belonging, linking together individuals' freedom, and seeking social justice and fair treatment of individuals. These have facilitated inclusion, which means creating a welcoming environment, as most of the participants intimated that they formerly were segregated in society. However, with the GSP event, they now feel accepted and valued, and they have equal access to opportunities and resources, regardless of their background, status, religion, education, gender, and age. This implies that GSPs are effective in reducing inequality, bringing together different people to feel one and work for social justice, thus resulting in the self-satisfaction of an individual and healthier achievement of GSP's objectives.

Bringing Justice in the Community
The results of the study disclose that conflict and misunderstandings are part and parcel of any community and a group of people, and it is hard to find zero skirmishes. When these happen, the society or group looks for ways of solving them so that there is no damage to trust and relationships between members. The studied GSPs understand that bringing social justice is their moral and ethical conduct for the less privileged segments in their community, and it is part of their responsibility to bring justice. The study results show that justice is done in the interest of an individual and the group. This has facilitated sustainable growth and social security for individual and their groups. Therefore, while using their social capital resource, GSPs were able to address conflicts constructively. Through dialogue and mediation, individuals' conflicts can be resolved. This indicates that GSPs are helpful to members as a springboard, enlivening strength, openness, trust, and comfort that are essential for members' development.

Furthermore, the study found that GPS helps in eradicating social fractures and inconsistencies, and they have connected everyone through its common rules for resolving all conflicts easily. This has made a significant contribution to the transformation of social behaviour in some individuals within and outside their GSPs. According to the findings above, the possibility of cost savings may stimulate interest in

Group Support Programs. These programs generate social capital, or the resources of trust and reciprocity, through regular group interactions. It is clear that these programs' dissemination of information results in a quicker change in behavior because groups with higher social capital are better able to regulate norms or sanction "deviant" behavior. The realization of social behaviour transformation of individuals in the study area is proof that GSPs have contributed to members' sustainable social assets.

Increase in Self- Self-Self-assurance and Self-worth among GSP Members
The research results demonstrate that GSP gives space for members to be heard and treated. This has boosted their willingness to do more for themselves and their GSP. The study unearthed that the space created by GSP has empowered each member to be rotational, responsible, and socially accepted. This has not only contributed to their well-being but also to the GSP's prosperity and improved their self-worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem. This demonstrates that participants in group support programs are cognizant of the program's non-financial advantages, like increased self-esteem and social standing. This results from their active involvement and rotation of duties required by GSPs in the study region, which has enhanced their capacity to voice their opinions both inside and beyond the country, thereby promoting their mobility. An implication of this is that Group Support Programmes have the intrinsic responsibility of gluing people together, and they do this, they achieve diversified opportunities.

 Additionally, the bonding found in the sampled groups has helped members to gain self-confidence and self-esteem, which makes them take up responsibilities not only in their groups but even in the community. This study asserts that when GSPs improve low-income earners' members as they learn to control their savings and family resources, they gain confidence and power to control, hence contributing to solving their household emergencies. The study exposes that this could not have been achieved if Group Support Programs had not created room for socialization among the members, which is one of the strong results of cohesion for sustainable social assets.

This study recognized the underlying reason socialization helps members to discover their hidden talents and gifts, and that individual members on their own cannot solve common problems such as poverty, grief, and diseases single-handedly. They can only solve these problems with people they trust, feel they belong to, and understand. Therefore, most of the members' GSP becomes a building block in times of stress and risk. These results support the idea that GSPs can help members and their households become more resilient by enabling significant improvements in members' psychological outcomes. They have been shown to improve overall resilience to covariate and idiosyncratic shocks to differing degrees. This implies that GSPs, to their members, build one's self-confidence and self-worth because the weakness and abilities of one is hidden and covered by others in a group.

Intensification of Social Interaction and Personal Relationships
The study established that GSP has been at the forefront of building members' social networks. The study learned that through their meetings, organizing, and lobbying, they can build social networks. First of all, these GSPs are made up of people from different walks of life, caliber, and positions. Moreover, these have facilitated other members by networking, communicating knowledge/ideas, sharing market and production information, engaging in informative discussions, and accessing government developmental programs. According to the study's findings, many participants now turn to these Group Support Programs as a knowledge base where they may ask questions and get assistance from those who possess the information they lack. This means GSPs, to many of their members, have been effective in expanding their social and personal relationships for themselves and their community's sustainable development.

1.7 Conclusion

There is little doubt that Group Support Programmes (GSPs) offer a wide range of opportunities for members, fostering both individual and collective growth. These groups provide vital support for the growth and enhancement of social capital among the members and a platform for empowerment, inclusion, social cohesion, social networks, and addressing social issues collectively, ultimately leading to stronger, more resilient individuals and communities. The social cohesion that exists within GSPs facilitates increased self-esteem and confidence among members. This improvement has been translated into healthier relationships and a sense of belonging within the community. Moreover, these groups are mediators in conflicts arising from prejudices and isolations; therefore, the solutions reached result in enhanced social justice and harmony. The mutual acceptance attained by members encourages openness and significantly contributes to the success of the Group Support Programmes. The social network that allows members to share ideas and cope with challenges enables members to meet their basic life needs and thus supports community sustainable development.

1.8 Recommendations

I. Recommendations for Government and Policy MakerS

    a) **Formalization of GSPs:** Policymakers should work towards formalizing more Group Support Programmes, as many currently operate informally. This process would help them form larger bodies, enabling better resource allocation and management.

    b) **Institutional Support:** The government should institutionalize GSPs to create useful institutions where more vulnerable poor can be mobilized effectively and resources allocation mainstreamed into socio-economic development initiatives. Additionally, the government extends support to these GSPs that will not overturn and compromise the rationale for setting up people's initiatives, such as GSPs, but set up strategies that will move the initiatives to greater heights.

    c) **Guidelines for Civil Society Organizations:** Policymakers should establish regulations for civil society organizations, ensuring they positively influence the operations of self-help initiatives like GSPs.

II. Recommendations for Group Support Programmes

    a) Members' mutual understanding and cooperation should be further strengthened to facilitate productive working relationships and handle issues together.

    b) When forming groups that address the structural and social disparities within the community, a favorable and equitable policy environment should be present.

    c) Social capital is multifaceted; hence, groups' activities move beyond the social agenda to address certain economic and human issues and demands.

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