



## Influencing Factors and Sustainability of Women Groups' Income Generating Projects in Rumbek, South Sudan

**Authors:** <sup>1</sup>Mary Nyanajiek Mayang, <sup>2</sup>Rose Mugiira and <sup>3</sup>Felistus Mwikali Patrick  
<sup>1,2&3</sup>The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. **Website:** [www.cuea.edu](http://www.cuea.edu)

**Corresponding author:** Mary Nyanajiek Mayang. **Email:** [mnyanajiek@gmail.com](mailto:mnyanajiek@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** *This article delves into a comprehensive analysis of the factors that influence the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan, building upon the insights derived from the study. Anchored in the Empowerment Theory and the Theory of Change, the study adopts a descriptive research design; blending qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The study adopted stratified and purposive sampling techniques to select a sample of 108 participants drawn from women groups' income-generating projects, complemented by insights from 28 key informants comprising of microfinance institutions, NGOs and local government officials. From the study findings, key factors were found to be significantly affecting the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in this region. Socio-cultural factors identified include entrenched cultural norms, domestic role expectations, and limited access to education and credit. Economic aspects highlighted the role of microfinance institutions in bridging financial gaps and also emphasize the need for enhanced access to affordable financing options for women entrepreneurs. Extreme weather conditions, such as floods and droughts, as well as access to robust transportation and communication infrastructure were identified as significant variables affecting the viability of women's income-generating projects. The study accentuates the impact of political will, local laws and regulations in South Sudan on women's income-generating projects. More so, the burden of high taxes, inefficiency of government resources and services as a hurdle that diminishes the disposable income available to women for reinvesting in their businesses, thereby impeding growth and expansion. It was concluded that, geo-environmental, political, socio-cultural and economic factors significantly affected the viability of women's income-generating projects. The study recommends that, regulators should encourage the government to review and adjust laws and regulations that pose challenges for women involved in income-generating projects. It was also recommended that microfinance institutions and banks should increase access to affordable financing options for women entrepreneurs through microfinance institutions. Furthermore, it was recommended that, the local and national government should take a leading role in infrastructure development and environmental conservation in the region. Above all, political from both local and National governments in supporting women entrepreneurs is recommended.*

**Key words:** *Influencing Factors, Sustainability, Women Groups, Income Generating Projects*

## **1.1 Study background**

Women's income-generating projects play a vital role in fostering economic empowerment and poverty alleviation in various communities around the world. These initiatives empower women to become financially self-sufficient, reduce gender disparities, and contribute to the overall development of their societies. In Rumbek, South Sudan, where socio-economic challenges abound, women's income-generating projects hold particular significance. However, the sustainability of such projects in this region is subject to a complex interplay of factors, encompassing socio-cultural, economic, political, and geo-environmental dimensions.

Sustainable development, a global imperative, necessitates attention to gender-specific issues and economic empowerment. According to UN Women (2019), economic empowerment of women is fundamental to achieving gender equality and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Rumbek, a region grappling with ongoing challenges stemming from conflict and instability, these projects provide a glimmer of hope for women seeking financial autonomy and a means to support their families. Nevertheless, the effectiveness and continuity of these initiatives remain precarious due to multifaceted influences that demand in-depth exploration and understanding.

This article stems from a rigorous study conducted in Rumbek, South Sudan, aiming to analyze the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in this context. Drawing inspiration from the Empowerment Theory and the Theory of Change, our research seeks to unravel the factors that shape the prospects of these projects in Rumbek. To offer a comprehensive perspective, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights from interviews with key informants, including representatives from microfinance institutions (MFIs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local government officials, with quantitative data collected from women's groups engaged in income-generating activities.

While literature on women's economic empowerment and income-generating projects is abundant, this study contributes a unique focus on the specific challenges faced by women in Rumbek, South Sudan, a region characterized by socio-cultural norms, economic limitations, political instability, and geo-environmental constraints. Our investigation identifies critical issues that impede project sustainability. These include deeply ingrained cultural norms that prioritize domestic responsibilities over paid work, limited access to education, training, and credit opportunities, as well as the volatile political climate since 2017 that deters women from engaging in income-generating activities.

In addition to these challenges, the economic dimension of the study reveals the role of microfinance institutions in addressing financial gaps but also underscores the need for increased access to affordable financing options tailored for women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, our exploration of political factors highlights the importance of regulatory reforms to encourage women's active participation in income-generating projects. Finally, we delve into geo-environmental factors, emphasizing the significant impact of extreme weather conditions and inadequate transportation and communication infrastructure on project sustainability.

This article aspires to shed light on the critical factors influencing the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan. By presenting a holistic analysis grounded in

empirical data, we aim to provide insights that can inform policies and interventions aimed at bolstering the economic empowerment of women in this region. In the following sections, we will delve into the findings of our study, offering practical recommendations to address these challenges and promote the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek. Through this research, we hope to contribute to the broader discourse on women's economic empowerment and sustainable development in conflict-affected regions.

## **1.2 Theoretical review**

The theoretical foundation of this study draws from the Empowerment Theory and the Theory of Change. These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics surrounding the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan. The Empowerment Theory, which underpins this study, emphasizes the multifaceted process of empowering individuals and communities to take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and enhance their socio-economic well-being (Zimmerman, 1995). Within the context of women's income-generating projects, this theory highlights the importance of enabling women to access resources, develop skills, and exercise agency over their economic activities (Author, Year). Empowerment, in this context, involves not only economic aspects but also encompasses socio-cultural, political, and psychological dimensions (Kabeer, 2021). In the analysis of socio-cultural factors affecting the sustainability of women's income-generating projects, the Empowerment Theory provides insights into the role of cultural norms and expectations in shaping women's agency and decision-making (Rowlands, 1997). It guides the exploration of how these norms influence women's priorities and choices, especially in the context of domestic and care-giving responsibilities versus paid work (Alsop & Bertelsen, 2019).

The Theory of Change complements the Empowerment Theory by offering a structured approach to understanding how specific interventions or actions can lead to desired outcomes (Anderson, 2021). In the context of this study, it serves as a guide for assessing the impact of various factors on the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan. Analyzing the political factors affecting sustainability, the Theory of Change assists in identifying causal relationships between political instability and women's engagement in income-generating activities (Mayne & Johnson, 2015). It enables us to explore how changes in political circumstances can trigger shifts in women's participation and project sustainability. Likewise, when examining geo-environmental factors, the Theory of Change aids in recognizing the causal links between environmental conditions and the viability of women's projects. It facilitates an understanding of how factors such as extreme weather and limited infrastructure can directly influence project sustainability (Mayne & Johnson, 2015).

## **1.3 Methodology**

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to investigate the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan, with a particular focus on examining the factors influencing their sustainability. The study population consisted of women participating in income-generating projects, key informants from microfinance institutions (MFIs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local government officials in the Rumbek region. To ensure a

comprehensive understanding of the factors at play, both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for this study. The initial target population comprised 150 women engaged in income-generating projects and 36 key informants. From this population, a sample size of 108 respondents was selected. Among the women's income-generating groups, 84 participants returned completed questionnaires. Additionally, 28 key informants participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data collection methods included the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

**Questionnaires:** Questionnaires were administered to the women participating in income-generating projects. The questionnaires encompassed a mix of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items. These instruments were designed to gather quantitative data on socio-cultural, economic, political, and geo-environmental factors affecting the sustainability of their projects. The questionnaires were distributed in person, and participants' responses were recorded.

**Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including representatives from microfinance institutions (MFIs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local government officials. These interviews aimed to collect qualitative insights and expert opinions regarding the factors influencing project sustainability. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of participants, allowing for accurate transcription and subsequent thematic analysis.

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using statistical software, such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were conducted to summarize and explore relationships among variables related to project sustainability. Qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews underwent thematic analysis, following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012). This approach involved an iterative process of data familiarization, coding, and constant comparison to identify and interpret themes and patterns related to socio-cultural, economic, political, and geo-environmental factors affecting the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. Ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the relevant institutional review board to safeguard the rights and welfare of all participants involved in the study.

#### **1.4 Major findings**

The study conducted in Rumbek has yielded significant insights into the multifaceted factors influencing the sustainability of women's income-generating projects. The findings are summarized into four key categories: socio-cultural, economic, political, and geo-environmental factors.

##### ***Socio-cultural Factors and Sustainability***

The research underscores the pervasive influence of socio-cultural norms and taboos on women's opportunities for education, career development, and financial independence. These barriers hinder their engagement in income-generating activities, perpetuating cycles of poverty. It is evident that empowering women through education and training is pivotal in enabling them to break free from these constraints. Furthermore, the study highlights the prevailing cultural expectations that often compel women in Rumbek to prioritize domestic and caregiving roles over paid employment. This,

coupled with limited access to education, training, and credit, poses formidable challenges to their economic independence.

### ***Economic Factors and Sustainability***

The study emphasizes the role of microfinance institutions in providing essential financial services to individuals who lack access to conventional banking. Nevertheless, women in Rumbek encounter obstacles, notably high interest rates, when attempting to access funds for business initiation or expansion. Notably, the lack of startup capital emerges as a significant impediment for aspiring female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the study reveals that women entrepreneurs in the region have not yet harnessed the full potential of support networks, including business associations and mentorship programs, which offer valuable resources and networking opportunities within their respective industries.

### ***Political Factors and Sustainability***

The turbulent political landscape in Rumbek since 2017 has added another layer of complexity to the challenges faced by women striving to establish and manage businesses. The study accentuates the impact of political will, local laws and regulations in South Sudan on women's income-generating projects, often presenting hurdles that need to be navigated. Additionally, the burden of high taxes diminishes the disposable income available to women for reinvesting in their businesses, thereby impeding growth and expansion. The research also highlights the inefficiency of government resources and services, which are not effectively tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs.

### ***Geo-environmental Factors and Sustainability***

Extreme weather conditions, such as floods and droughts, are identified as significant variables affecting the viability of women's income-generating projects. Access to robust transportation and communication infrastructure emerges as critical factors for women entrepreneurs, enabling them to connect with markets, suppliers, and customers, and efficiently manage their businesses. The findings underscore the pivotal role that well-developed road and communication networks play in sustaining women's income-generating endeavors.

## **1.5 Conclusions**

The study underscores the paramount role of socio-cultural factors in influencing the sustainability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan. The findings reveal that deeply entrenched cultural norms and taboos have a profound impact, limiting women's access to education, career opportunities, and financial independence. These factors act as formidable barriers to women's economic empowerment and the longevity of their projects. However, it is evident from our research that education and training emerge as potent tools capable of breaking the cycle of poverty that ensnares many women. As a result, the study concludes that addressing and challenging these cultural expectations and traditions, while simultaneously expanding access to education, training, and credit opportunities, is of paramount importance in enhancing the sustainability of women's income-generating projects.

Within the realm of economic factors, our research highlights their significant role in determining the success and sustainability of women's income-generating projects. Access to microfinance institutions

emerges as a pivotal factor, facilitating the provision of financial services to women who often lack access to traditional banking services. However, the study reveals challenges associated with high interest rates and limited access to start-up capital, which hinder the progress of women entrepreneurs. Consequently, we conclude that fostering accessible and affordable financial resources, complemented by robust support networks, is essential to overcoming these financial barriers and ensuring the long-term viability of women's businesses.

Political instability, notably since 2017, surfaces as a critical challenge profoundly affecting the viability of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek. Our research identifies regulatory hurdles stemming from South Sudan's laws and regulations and high tax burdens as factors that impede business growth, limiting disposable income. Thus, the study underscores the urgency of political will in initiating and sustaining political stability, regulatory reforms, and targeted government resources as essential components in creating an enabling environment that empowers and supports women entrepreneurs in sustaining their income-generating projects.

The research shines a spotlight on the substantial influence of geo-environmental factors on the sustainability of women's income-generating projects. Extreme weather conditions, including floods and droughts, loom as significant threats to project continuity. Moreover, access to adequate transportation and communication infrastructure emerges as a pivotal requirement for efficient business management. Therefore, the study concludes that strategic investments in resilient infrastructure, disaster preparedness measures, and improved connectivity are imperative actions to mitigate environmental risks and ensure the long-term success and resilience of women's income-generating projects.

In sum, our comprehensive analysis of these socio-cultural, economic, political, and geo-environmental factors underscores their intricate interplay in shaping the sustainability landscape of women's income-generating projects in Rumbek, South Sudan. As we conclude, we emphasize the imperative nature of targeted interventions and policy reforms that address these multifaceted challenges. By doing so, we can pave the way for a future where women in Rumbek have increased opportunities for economic empowerment, breaking free from the shackles of poverty and achieving lasting success in their income-generating endeavors.

## **1.6 Recommendations**

### ***Socio-cultural factors and sustainability of women income generating projects***

The NGOs, should implement programs that promote women's education and training in areas such as financial management, marketing, and entrepreneurship. The administration of women income-generating projects should conduct community sensitization campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and the valuable role women play in income-generating projects. The government of Lakes State and stakeholders should develop targeted programs and initiatives that provide access to funding and resources for women's groups involved in income-generating activities.

***Economic factors and sustainability of women income generating projects***

Microfinance institutions and banks should expand their efforts to provide affordable financing options tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs. The government of Lakes State should prioritize providing training and support programs on financial management and planning specifically designed for women entrepreneurs. Successful women entrepreneurs should actively advocate for the development of support networks, such as business associations or mentorship programs, to provide resources and facilitate connections within the industry.

***Political factors and sustainability of women income generating projects***

The government of Lakes State, including local and national authorities, should prioritize efforts to ensure stability and peace in Rumbek and other regions. Regulators and policymakers should conduct a thorough review of existing laws and regulations that pose challenges to women's income-generating projects. Political leaders should have a political will to initiate processes which have a positive impact on women entrepreneurs in the region and beyond. The government of Lakes State should allocate resources and services specifically targeted towards women entrepreneurs, including access to training, business development support, and financial resources.

***Geo-environmental factors and sustainability of women income generating projects***

The government of Lakes State especially the Ministry of Infrastructures should invest in the development of transportation and communication infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and reliable internet connectivity. The government of Lakes State and stakeholders should actively promote the use of technologies and innovations that can help women entrepreneurs adapt to extreme weather conditions such as floods and droughts. The government Lakes Sate and stakeholders should collaborate to develop comprehensive disaster management plans and mitigation strategies that specifically address the impact of extreme weather events on women's income-generating projects.

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