



EFFECTS OF MICROFINANCE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SEMI-RURAL AREAS-BURUNDI. (CASE STUDY OF AFADE, CIBITOKÉ-DISTRICT)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to analyse the effects of microfinance products and services on the empowerment of women in semi-rural areas in Burundi. The specific objectives of the study were to assess the products and services offered by microfinance institutions in Burundi; to analyse the level of women empowerment by microfinance products and lastly to find out the relationship between microfinance products and women empowerment in Burundi. The study adopted the exploratory correlation research design. The study population was a group of rural women members of AFADE microfinance in Cibitoke-District. The probability sampling with simple random sampling was employed to collect data from the population of the study. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Data were entered into statistical packages for social science (SPSS), analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results were presented in the frequency table and percentage. The results from the findings revealed that according to the first objective stated micro-credits and micro-savings were the main products offered by AFADE microfinance in Cibitoke district, findings also showed that microfinance products and services contribute in the empowerment of rural women by increasing their self-confidence, participation in the household decision-making, increase in the ownership of assets and the like, although the ANOVA test showed that there was no significant relationship between those products offered and women empowerment. Based on the results the study concluded that microfinance products and services do contribute to the empowerment of rural women members of AFADE microfinance in Cibitoke District and study recommended to microfinance institutions in Burundi to diversify products and services offered to their customers especially to women.

Key words: Microfinance, Empowerment, Women Empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations reported in 2019 that women constitute to 50.4% of the world population, despite their density, women remain the poorest of the poor. Many developing countries especially in Africa, rural financial programmes have been largely designed, crafted and implemented with the male head of household as the intended client and fail to recognize that women are active, productive and engaged economic agents with their own financial needs and constraints. Women constitute approximately half of the rural labour force and, while not always counted, they are economically active in each sub-sector of the rural economy. Even though millions of women throughout the world contribute to national agricultural output and family food security, detailed studies from Latin America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa consistently indicate that rural women are more likely to be credit constrained than men of equivalent socio-economic conditions (Fletschner, 2009)

Microfinance services have been and increasingly become a popular intervention against poverty in developing countries, generally targeting poor women. It has been considered an effective vehicle for women's empowerment, the argument behind Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) targeting women is that women are good credit risk, are less likely to misuse the loan, and are more likely to share the benefits with others in their household, especially their children. Furthermore, it is argued that women's increasing role in the household economy will lead to their empowerment (Hunt, 2002). Muhammad Yunus introduced the concept of microfinance in Bangladesh in 1976, he started the Grameen Bank model where small loans were provided to the poor for small-scale self-employment activities, the target clients were mostly men with smaller groups of women. However, when repayment record from men was less than for women, the major concern shifting the focus to women. Later in 1980s, women role in the development process was recognized and the

number of women clients increased to 90%. Because women repayment record was better than of men and provision of resources to women increases multiple development benefit as they spend most of their incomes on the wellbeing of their families (De Aghion, 2005).

In Africa, larger chunk of Micro & Small Enterprises (MSMEs, including Agric-SMEs) are owned by women. According to the World Bank, 58% of all MSMEs in Africa are women-owned. However, "Women-led Micro-Enterprises (W-MSME) are deemed 34% less profitable than men" the report concluded. Similar studies done by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), an international entrepreneurship research think tank, had same results. This is partly due to the fact that, women enterprises are overly concentrated at less capital-intensive ventures and are also less diversified. Social inequality, lack to access to finance & Technology and lack of access to Businesses Development Services and capacity Building Services remain as challenges to women-led enterprises in Africa (Darko, 2021)

In Burundian society, a big number of population lives in rural areas, as indicated in the National Plan for Agricultural Investment (PNIA, 2012 - 2017), agriculture is the main activity for 90% of the population. With 12 million inhabitants, of which women constitute 50.7% (World Bank, 2018). Women, particularly in the rural areas, are most often involved in unpaid and undocumented household, agricultural production of non-cash crops, and care work and men are seen to be traditionally engaged in activities that can provide financial benefits. With globalisation, women's involvement in women farmers' associations, VSLA's and small cooperatives has provided spaces for women's personal and economic growth (USAID, 2017). The Burundi National Inclusion survey conducted in 2012 shows that knowledge of the financial services is more widespread among men than women and much more in urban areas than in rural areas. Women, particularly in the rural areas, are most often involved in unpaid and

undocumented household, agricultural production of non-cash crops, and care work (Basse, 2017)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Microfinance is the provision of financial services to low-income clients, including consumers and the self-employed, who traditionally lack access to banking and related services (Kavitha, 2012). He stated it also as the provision of small loans (microcredit) to poor people to help them engage in productive activities or grow very small businesses. The term may also include a broader range of services, including credit, savings, and insurance. Microfinance institutions play an important social and economic role as they allow the underprivileged and low-income households, who have received short-term loans to participate to the local economy, increase their autonomy and strive for household financial stability (Marguerite, 2000).

The word empowerment does not even translate literally into many languages. Yet most of us know empowerment when we see it. One loan officer at Sinapi Aba in Ghana defined empowerment as “enabling each person reach his or her God-given potential (Biney-Assan, 2007). According to UNIFEM, 2007 empowerment is “gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power”; developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life are important elements of women’s empowerment.

Microfinance Products and Services

The microfinance products are broadly classified into two namely financial products and non-financial products. The financial products includes loan, savings, leasing, insurance, fund transfer, pension remittance, etc. (Ijaiya M. , 2010); (Muiruri, 2014). The non- financial services includes capacity building services to poor entrepreneurs, management and vocational skills training, consultancy and advisory services, marketing assistance, information, technological development and transfer, and business linkage promotion. They also include other social services like literacy

training and in innumeracy training, nutrition and self-esteem classes, public health, civic education and disasters victims. (Poverty Outreach Working Group, 2006); (Asiana & Osei, 2007)).

Financial Products

The financial microfinance products include micro-lending; micro-saving; micro-insurance; micro-leasing; money-transfer; etc.

Micro-lending : The traditional microfinance institution product is the financial product most especially the micro-lending provided in form of short term working capital with repayment period between three months and one year. This product is easy to deliver, monitor and multiply The short term working capital also known as microcredit comes in different forms such as Income Generation Loan (IGL) used for income generation and asset development with a repayment fund of 50weeks paid in weekly; Mid Term Loan, the same as Income Generation Loan which is available at the middle (week 25) of IGL with 50weeks repayment but paid weekly. The other type of short term loan is the emergency loan for health, funerals, hospitalization, education, etc. and repayment is between 20weeks and 40weeks. The individual loan with repayment of 1 to 2 years is also used for income generation and asset development. All these loans carry different degree of interest rates (Rhyne, 2001).

Micro saving : The micro-saving products allow the poor entrepreneurs to save and retain money in the institution for future use or for unexpected costs or as a guarantee against their outstanding loan. This product allows their client to borrow from the institution for a variety of purposes such as meeting health challenges, business, education and other household emergencies; micro-saving in MFIs provide four purposes first, as a demonstration of discipline and commitment to the institution; secondly, as a guarantee against outstanding loans; thirdly as a financial asset the poor can accumulate against emergencies and long-term needs; and fourthly, as a source of loan capital for the

institution directly or indirectly (Edgemon & Barton, 1998)

Micro insurance : allows their clients to pool risk by collecting relatively small premiums from a large population and funding relatively large payment to the small portion of that population that suffered losses from specific risk events (Rhyne, 2001). These events are common causes of decline in the poor entrepreneur business and this includes death, health challenges, property and disability. The micro-insurance product provide succor to clients since they can draw from their premium to mitigate these calamities and focus on their core businesses. Studies showed that the poor entrepreneur that are around the poverty line are vulnerable to shocks such as illness of a wage earner, health, theft or other natural disasters. These disasters provide huge claim on the financial resources of the family, and absence of micro-insurance may drive the family much deeper into poverty that it can take years to recover (Churchill, 2000) .

Micro leasing : Micro-leasing is another financial product on the menu list of MFIs. The institution uses this product to raise fund for clients that want finance for capital equipment. This product allows the institution to go into long-term finance and also provide finance for short and medium term capital for fixed assets (like equipment, agricultural machinery or vehicles) especially for those that cannot pay at full costs or even meet down payment and lease terms. There are three types of lease namely: capital or finance lease (or full payer lease), operating lease and hire-purchase lease. The finance lease is a medium – term lease agreement between the lessee (user of the asset) and the lessor (owner of the asset or provider of the finance i.e. the microfinance institution). The lessee ensures that the lease payment during the primary period covers the full cost of the asset and a finance charge (to give the lessee a suitable return on the investment). Finance leases are also known as full-payment leases, since payment term amortize the lessee's total purchase costs. The client (lessee) makes a down payment up to 30percent of the cost

of the assets to the institution (lessor), and the institution buys the asset for the clients. The operating lease is a short-term cancelable lease between the lessor and the lessee. The lease term does not cover most of the useful economic life of the asset. The lessee is responsible for the upkeep, insurance, servicing and maintenance of the asset (Olowe, 1997).

Non-Financial Products

The non-financial products of MFIs have also been effective in improving the MFIs outreach and growth. For instance, social services like the support for disasters victims, vocational skills trainings, and economic services like capacity building for poor entrepreneurs, business development services, etc have all strengthened and sustained the organization. For instance, the business development services provided by MFIs in Ghana boost the growth of their MSEs in terms of the competitiveness of the enterprises, financial services and ability of clients to repay loans. (See Asiama & Osei, 2007). Besides, Poverty Outreach Working Group (2006) also pointed out that some MFIs provide non- financial products to the very poor members to strengthen their livelihoods. Thus, non-financial products have enhanced the growth and sustainability of their institutions. These non – financial products include enterprise and financial management, functional literacy, gender sensitization, capacity building, social empowerments, health care services, advocacy and local governance, etc.. (Ijaiya, 2016) .

Reasons why Should Microfinance Target Women

Many women in developing countries do not have access to the traditional financial services due to the fact that they are very poor and therefore do not satisfy the demands of the traditional banks such as collateral, saving with these banks before securing a loan etc. Also, women are not able to access the traditional banks due to prevailing cultural practises (for instance in some societies women are not allowed to own property which can be used as collateral in accessing loans) and high illiteracy rate. There is therefore the need to target

women if they are to be empowered to be involved in the development process. Various rationals have been propounded as to why premium should be placed on increasing women's access to microfinance services. These are explained below:

Gender and Development

It has been realised through research by the World Bank, UNDP, UNIFEM that gender inequalities in developing countries serve as a deterrent to economic growth and development. The general consensus is that improved gender equality is of enormous importance to any development strategy. Many donor agencies have therefore resorted to microfinance as a development strategy since it has a direct relationship with poverty alleviation and women (Kuhn, 2002). As argued by Cheston and Kuhn (2002) "by giving women access to working capital and training, microfinance helps mobilise women's productive capacity to alleviate poverty and maximize economic growth".

Women Are the Poorest of the Poor

It has been generally argued that women form a larger proportion of the world's poorest population. For instance, according to the 1995 Human Development report, the UN reported that of the 1.3 million people living on less than \$1 a day, 70% were women. In addition to this, women constitute a higher percentage of those in the lower paid, unorganised informal sector of most developing economies. There is therefore the need to give priority to women in the access of financial services since they are most disadvantaged in the society if we are to go by these statistics. It is worth noting that women are not always poor but due to weaker basis of their entitlement they tend to be more vulnerable and may therefore have fewer options in terms of escape. If women are given financial assistance to involve themselves in income generating activities through microfinance, their vulnerability to poverty reduces

Women Spend More of Their Income on Their Families

It is generally believed that women spend more of their income on their household than their male

counterparts. Therefore, if women are given financial assistance which helps them improve upon their income levels, the likelihood of the welfare of their family being improved is assured. Various studies have shown that improvement in the income of women have multiplier effects. For instance, according to Women's Entrepreneurship Development Trust Fund (WEDTF) in Zanzibar-Tanzania, increased in women's income is channelled to their children's education, diet, health care and clothing. However, it must be noted that not all women will invest in their families with increases in their income levels (Kuhn, 2002).

Efficiency and Sustainability

Those who proposed the need to target women give the reasons that women have good repayment records and are also cooperative. It is generally believed that as compared to men, women have better repayment rates. In order for the microfinance institution to be efficient and sustainable it must have lower arrears and loan loss rates. Therefore, if microfinance institutions are to be sustainable, they must target women since they tend to be mostly cooperative and have good repayment records (Kuhn, 2002). In addition "the need to target women are of the view that there is the need to stimulate women's economic activity as a hitherto underutilized resource for economic growth" (Mayoux, 2002).

Women's Rights Perspective

Equal access to financial resources by women is a human rights issue. In order to reduce women's poverty, they must have access to credit, therefore a variety of human rights instruments have laid emphasis on this. For instance, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) address women's access to financial resources. It has therefore become incumbent on governments to meet women's rights (Kuhn, 2002).

Empowering Women

Finally, it is assumed that if women have access to microfinance it will serve as an effective means to their empowerment. This is due to the fact that if

financial resources are put in the hands of women through microfinance institutions, it will help level the playing field and promote gender equality (Kuhn, 2002).

Empirical Studies

Different studies have been conducted to explore the relationship of microfinance products and services and women empowerment, The study in this area is yet inconclusive, many evaluations of MFIs have shown that microfinance services have a positive impact on women;

Mahmud (2003) found that microcredit programme participation has only a limited effect in increasing women's access to choice-enhancing resources, but has a much stronger effect in increasing women's ability to exercise agency in intra-household processes. Consequently, program participation is able to increase women's welfare and possibility to reduce male bias in welfare outcomes, particularly in poor households. It is believed that providing women with the proper resources, they have the power to help the whole family and entire communities escape poverty. Providing access to finance for entrepreneurial activities, microfinance services can significantly increased women ability and capacity to work independently which reduce their vulnerability to poverty (Wrigley, 2011).

Kabeer, 2005 stated that 'it becomes apparent that while access to finance services can and does make vital contributions to the economic productivity and social well-being of poor women and their households, through financial services, women have greater potential to increase their earnings, which fosters internal attitudes (self-reliance, self-confidence and self-worth) which can translate into

external changes (greater bargaining power within the household and leadership in the community). Microfinance services that foster group formation and self-management by women have additional potential to empower women through exposure to new ideas, mutual support, fostering an identity beyond the family and the opportunity to cultivate leadership roles and responsibilities. Social empowerment includes freedom of movement, lack of discrimination against daughters, commitment to educating daughters, participation in domestic decision making, control over sexual relations, ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, control over spouse selection and marriage timing and freedom from violence (Kabeer, 2005).

Becchetti and Castriota (2011) analyses the effectiveness of MFIs as a recovery tool after a natural disaster. In their paper they examine the contribution of MFIs loans in helping people who were hit by tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004. They found that loans obtained from the MFI after the catastrophic event have a positive and significant effect on the change in real income and in weekly worked hours, and that the impact on performance variables is significantly stronger for damaged than non damaged borrowers. Their study provides a strong evidence for effectiveness of MFIs as recovery tool (Hermes & Lensink, 2011)

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework shows the relationship between the independent variables, extraneous variables and dependent variables influence of rural women empowerment by microfinance products and services.

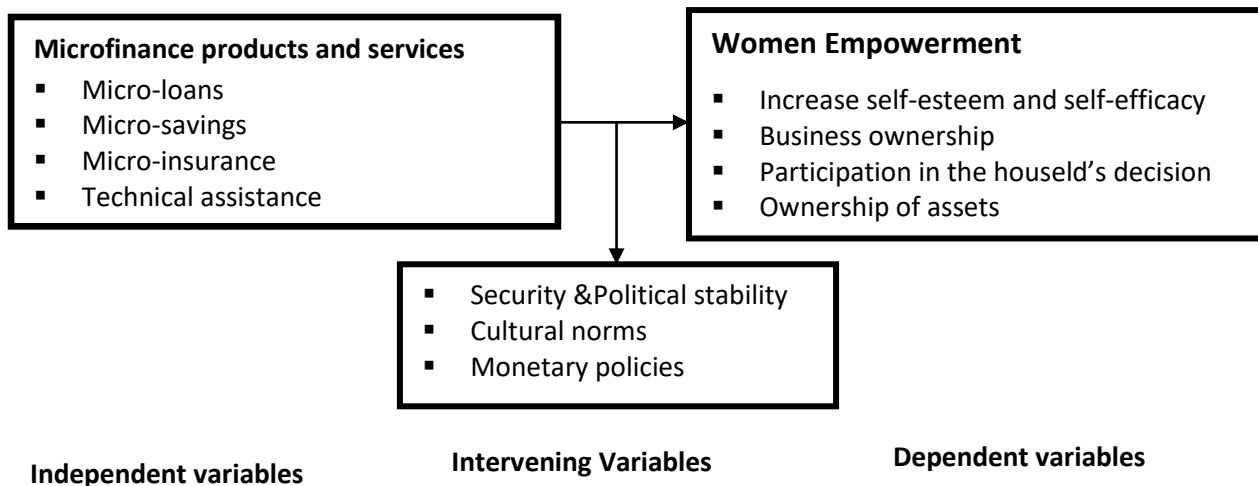


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study included both quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of using both methods is to be able to examine further into the dataset to understand its meaning and to use one method to verify findings from other method (Creswell, 2007). Since the main purpose of the study was to investigate whether there is correlation between microfinance products and services and rural women empowerment in Burundi, the study adopted the exploratory correlation research design. The exploratory correlation method is used to investigate, the degree of association between two variables (Arikunto, 2007). The aim of correlation research is to identify variables that have some sort of relationship to the extent that a change in one creates some change in the other.

Population of the study and Sampling technique

The population of the study was a group of rural-woman members of AFADE microfinance in Cibitoke district. The researcher worked with a population of a 100 rural women members of AFADE, the probability sampling with simple random sampling was employed; all participants had equal probability to be selected from the population, the solving formula ($n = N / (1 + N e^2)$) was used to calculate the sample, after computerizing the sample size

was 80. Questionnaires were used since the study was concerned with variables that should not be directly observed such as views, opinions perceptions and feelings of the respondents. The questionnaires were administered randomly to the target population. This means the entire group of rural women members of AFADE microfinance had an equal chance of being picked. The researcher had sought the help of field assistants who would assist her in the administering of the questionnaires to the target population. This was done through face to face administering of the questionnaires.

Data analysis Procedures

The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. After organizing collecting data, edit and code, quantitative data were analysed using statistical packages for social science (SPSS) and was analysed using descriptive statistics and the analysis of variance. The package was used to determine frequencies in order to discover the degree of occurrence to each variable. The outputs were presented in frequency, percentage tables and graphs. The data that was collected through the questionnaires as set out in the research methodology was analyzed using statistical such as descriptive statistics, which summarize data from a sample using indexes such as the mean or standard deviation, and inferential statistics, which draw conclusions from data that are subject to random

variation (e.g., observational errors, sampling variation). Linear regression which is a linear approach to modelling the relationship between a scalar response (dependent variable) and one or more explanatory variables (or independent variables) was used by the researcher in analysing the relationship between the microfinance services and rural women empowerment in Burundi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Products offered by AFADE microfinance

The respondent's response related to products and services offered by AFADE microfinance is shown in the figure below:

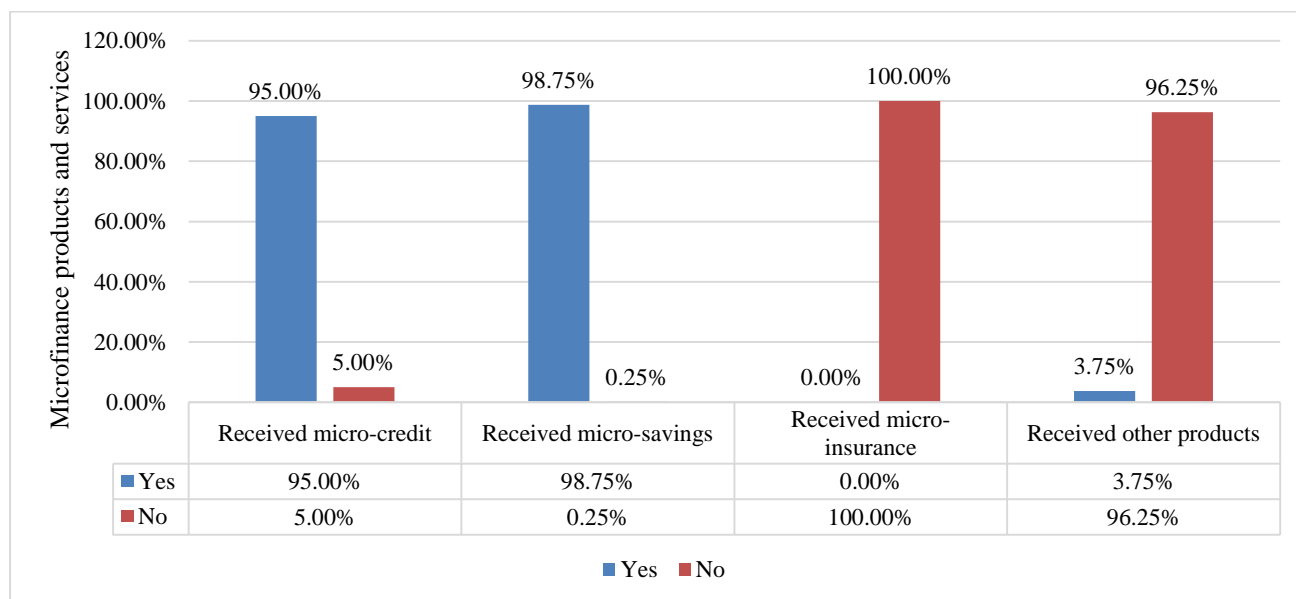


Figure 2: Microfinance products and services

The findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents have accepted that they receive micro-credit (95%) and micro-savings (98.75%). However, none of them said that they have received micro-insurance while only 3.75% have received other products. The education of entrepreneurs can impact the path to business success; it aids the process of building absorptive capacity of managers such as confidence, psychology, knowledge and skills. Educated people are creative and innovative and they are always looking for something unique to fulfil a need or want (Chowdhury *et al*, 2013). One of the success factors in small business is the education level of the owner, which can assist the business to survive and manage a complex environment and maintain

the profitability of the business (Radipere & Dhlwayo, 2014).

Micro-credits and micro-savings are mostly requested by the poor; firstly the microsaving products allow the poor entrepreneurs to save and retain money in the institution for future use or for unexpected costs or as a guarantee against their outstanding loan. This product allows their client to borrow from the institution for a variety of purposes such as meeting health challenges, business, education and other household emergencies (Edgcomb & Barton, 1998). Microfinance institution are not only concerned with the provision of credit facilities but also involved in business training such as basic accounting, bookkeeping, introducing their clients to new business opportunities and the like. This in a

way has helped in the business management and development of the women clients by helping them diversify their products, increase the supply and quality of the products they offer for sale (Skarlatos, 2004).

Level of women empowerment

The percentage of the factors influencing women empowerment through microfinance was represented in the table below:

Table 1: Women empowerment in microfinance among members of AFADE

Characteristics	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Self-confidence increased	0%	80 (100%)	0%	0%	2.000	0.0000
Household-income increased	0%	52 (65%)	28 (35%)	0%	2.350	0.4800
Contributing to household decisions	0%	80 (100%)	0%	0%	2.000	0.0000
Assuring the education of our children	0%	68 (85%)	12 (15%)	0%	2.150	.3593
Access easily healthcare	0%	47(48.75%)	33 (41.25%)	0%	2.413	.4954
Accumulate savings	45 (58.75%)	0%	35 (41.25%)	0%	1.625	0.9329
Undertaking income-generation activities	60 (75%)	0%	20 (25%)	0%	1.500	0.8715
Buy consumer durables	53 (66.25%)	0%	27 (33.75%)	0%	1.675	0.9517

Source: Field data, 2021

The Table 1 revealed the findings of the women empowerment in microfinance among the target members of AFADE. All the respondents (100%) strongly agreed that microfinance help them to be self-confident and contributing to the household decision. Majority of them strongly agreed that microfinance help them to increase their household-income (65%), to assure their children education (85%) and access healthcare easily (48.75%), while 35%, 15% and 41.25% have disagreed on it. Most of the participants also agreed that microfinance help them to accumulate the higher level of savings (68.75%), undertake income-generation activities (75%) and buy durable consumers (66.25%).

Kabeer, 2005 have identified empowerment of women in many aspects; economically; socially and

politically. Economic empowerment of women is recognized as women's control, access to credit, contribution to family support and increased household ownership of properties and assets. Women's access to savings and credit gives them a greater economic role in decision making through their decision about savings and credit. Women control over decisions regarding credit and savings could benefit men through preventing leakage of household income to unproductive and harmful projects. Social empowerment of women includes freedom of movement, lack of discrimination against daughters, commitment to educating daughters, participation in domestic decision making, freedom from violence.

Relationship between microfinance products and Women empowerment

Table 2: Correlations between the participants Microfinance products and service and women empowerment members of AFADE

		Microfinance	Empowering
Microfinance	Pearson Correlation	1	.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.565
	N	80	80
Empowering	Pearson Correlation	.065	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.565	
	N	80	80

Source: Field data, 2021.

The Table above shows that there was no statistically significant between the women's microfinance products and women empowerment ($r=0.065$, $p=0.565$). About the relationship between

women empowerment and microfinance products and service, one-way ANOVA test revealed that there was no such relationship between the means values of the two variables ($F=0.335$) (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Relationship between the women's microfinance products and service vs women empowerment

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.025	1	.025	.335	.565 ^b
	Residual	5.856	78	.075		
	Total	5.881	79			

Source: Field data, 2021.

- a. Dependent Variable: Empowering
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Microfinance

Mayoux, 2005 argued with the idea that it is not automatic that once a woman joins microfinance institution it will lead to the individual's economic empowerment. There are certain instances where the monies that have been accessed by these women have been misappropriated and it becomes difficult for these women to repay leading to a situation where they become overburdened/worse off as a result of the debt; "the evidence therefore indicates that the contributions of micro-finance to women's empowerment cannot be assumed and the current complacency in this regard is misplaced". Beside these some husbands are also not comfortable with their wives having some source of income since they are afraid that these women will throw their weights about in the house. In certain situations whilst some husbands will

welcome the independence of their wives since they will not always come to them for money, others will not be so enthused about it for fear that their wives will not accord them the necessary respect.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to assess the effects of microfinance products and services on the empowerment of women in semi-areas in Burundi. The first objective was to find out the products and services offered by microfinance institutions in Burundi and the findings revealed that products and services offered by the microfinance institution in the field of the study were mainly micro-credits and micro-savings others products were not frequent, this confirmed the hypothesis stated by the

researcher related to no diversification of products and services offered by MFIs in Burundi. The second objective of the study was to find out the level of rural women empowerment by microfinance products and services in Burundi, the findings indicated that microfinance products and services have a positive effect on the improvement of life of women beneficiaries, the products and services offered contribute to the increase of their self-esteem, it also enhance the women participation in the households decision making, accumulation of savings, and many others benefits. Nevertheless the findings revealed a negative correlation between microfinance products and women empowerment in the area of the study, the ANOVA test shows that there was no statistical significant between the two variables of the study.

Based on the results the researcher recommended the microfinance Sector in Burundi to improve

products and services offered to their customers especially to rural women; also to extend their services to remote area in the country. Rural women should believe in themselves, in their talents and their inner capabilities, with self-confidence, courage and consistency they can perform more and be the entrepreneurs for the development of their communities. Lastly the recommendations are made to the society in general and particularly to husbands and fathers to support and allow girls and women to have access to the education and in the participation of financial increase of their households and communities. Future researcher should search on the comparison between individual and group microfinance products in the empowerment of women and the barriers which prevent women to participate in microfinance activities to get a real understanding.

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