

# Influence Of Collaboration And Networking In Self-Help Groups On Women Economic Empowerment In Kitui County

Catherine Kisasa Muthonde  
Dr. Daniel Mwendwa Kitonga  
Tangaza University

Prof. Mary Getui  
Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)

**Abstract:** *This study examined the role of networking and collaboration in self-help groups (SHGs) on women's economic empowerment in Kitui County. The research was anchored on Naila Kabeer's (1999) Empowerment Framework as and Herman Daly's Sustainable Development Theory (1996). A sample of 423 SHG members was selected from a target population of 4,531 women. The researcher used questionnaires for data collection. The researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis to examine the relationship between the study variables. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between networking and collaboration with women's economic empowerment,  $r(402) = .56, p < .05$ . The results indicate that an increase in networking and collaboration resulted in a significant increase in women's economic empowerment. Training and exchange programs across SHGs should be prioritized to strengthen networking practices in Kitui County in order to enhance women's economic empowerment in the area. The study adds to the body of knowledge since few studies in Kenya have empirically tested how SHG collaboration influences women's empowerment.*

**Keywords:** *Women's economic empowerment, self-help groups, collaboration, networking*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term "Women's Economic Empowerment" (WEE) describes the initiatives and strategies taken to provide women the ability to control their financial resources and choices, access resources, develop self-confidence, and engage in economic activities (Chemutai 2022; Balasubramanian et al., 2024). It entails assisting women in gaining unrestricted access to, and authority over financial resources in a way that improves their standard of living (Hunt & Samman, 2016). Research has demonstrated that empowering women economically reduces gender inequality and boosts global competitiveness and economic growth. This leads to reduced inequality, faster economic development, improved banking sector performance, higher productivity, and more stable finances (IMF, 2022). Despite global efforts to promote WEE, cases of women's economic disempowerment have continued to persist (England et al., 2020; Yamada, 2024).

Similar trends have been observed in Africa, where Nhleko et al. (2023) identified WEE issues in South Africa,

particularly in the rural areas. Alhassan (2022) also noted that social-cultural concerns in Ghana serve as obstacles to WEE. In the same vein, the World Bank report (2022) revealed inequalities in labor force participation and agricultural land ownership and management in Nigeria. In addition, women were reported to be earning disproportionately less than men in most regions. Furthermore, Kavuma et al. (2022) identified WEE gaps in Uganda regarding involvement of women in economic, social, and political development. Similar to this, Msafiri (2023) observed that Tanzania's gender imbalance prevented women from benefiting from human development, citing instances of female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, and greater unemployment rates for women compared to men. In Kenya, only 29% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are empowered (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2020). Urban women's empowerment was higher at 40% than rural women's at 22%. Women's disempowerment in Kenya is influenced by negative cultural attitudes, norms, and beliefs about the role of gender and gender-based violence (USAID, 2020).

Globally, efforts have been made to address WEE challenges. In India, Navalakshmi and Yoganandham (2024) revealed that empowerment of women is done through SHGs and grassroots socioeconomic development programs. The study established that the SHG programmes enhance women's economic empowerment, knowledge, and decision-making ability. The SHGs nurture the spirit of cooperation among women to enable them to resist gender stereotypes and assert their rights in homes and communities. Similarly, Deepa and Noronha (2024) demonstrated that women's empowerment through SHGs and digital projects is interdependent and complement each other toward goals for social equity and community development.

According to Anand et al. (2019), SHGs act as networking and cooperative platforms enabling women to start small-scale enterprises. SHGs help women to raise money, obtain loans, improve health and nutrition for their families, and participate in group and political leadership. This improvement creates an enabling environment for these women to live their best quality of life and promote sustainable development. Similar observations were made by Watagulu (2025) in Tanzania, who found that the SHGs enabled women to network, collaborate, and affect social and economic changes. They enhance gender equity and social status; financial literacy and independence; access to micro-financing and opportunities to generate income. These opportunities enhance social capital and community empowerment in leadership, decision making; and economic resilience through credit and savings systems.

According to Vundi (2019), white women in SHGs are able to set their own goals for self-determination and life change through networking and collaboration. These include mobilization for credit and savings, gender-related issues and decisions on empowerment. They also support family business activities, creating a safe work environment, and timely access to information relevant to transforming lives.

In Kenya, the National Policy on Women Economic Empowerment 2024 provides the primary policy framework that promotes WEE. In order to attain gender parity and women's empowerment, the policy prioritizes equity, inclusivity, and nondiscrimination (Republic of Kenya, 2024). Other supportive policy frameworks include the Women Economic Empowerment Strategy 2020–2025. It gives recommendations and strategic guidance on how to best assist women in achieving economic empowerment by breaking down gender barriers and reaching a power parity with men (Ministry of Public service and Gender, 2020). There is also the Matrimonial Property Act of 2013, which established a legal framework for the division of property obtained during a marriage following divorce or separation. The establishment of several catalytic funds and programs further improve women's economic empowerment. These include the Uwezo Fund, the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF), and the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF). These programs provide women with access to funding for business and enterprise development, while the access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) program sets aside 30% of government procurement for women, youth, and individuals with disabilities (SNV, 2017; Vision 2030, 2024).

Women SHGs offer a cooperative forum for women to address problems like poverty, gender inequality, and

marginalization in an attempt to optimize the advantages provided by the aforementioned policies. This allows women to become change agents, particularly in the rural areas. By working together, SHGs give women the chance to question gender stereotypes and increase their involvement in the social and economic arenas (Juma 2025). While coming together through their collaboration and networking, women face various challenges such as lack of confidence, inability to make decisions, and poor entrepreneurial skills. These challenges are addressed through training offered through the SHGs (DeGraaph et. al., 2022).

For a very long time, many women in Kitui County have been economically marginalized. The issue persists despite the government and other developmental agencies recognizing the need for their empowerment and having introduced a number of interventions to address the matter (Mukei, 2018). According to a report from the Kitui County Government of 2019, the county's absolute poverty stands at 47.7%, well above the national average of 36.1%. It has also been a locus of violent acts against women; educating women about their legal rights, such as the right to own and possess property, may reduce their vulnerability to oppression and abuse (Muchena & Awuor, 2019). Vundi (2019) studied rural women empowerment in Migwani sub-county of Kitui County and established that women were highly marginalized. According to the survey, Women made up 86% of the area's informal sector, while men accounted for 14%. Also, 21.8% of the women had secondary school education, while 76.9% had primary school education. Men, on the other hand, had 76.9% with secondary school education and 23.1% with primary school education. Majority of women who took part in this survey believed that decision-making training would enhance their economic empowerment. A large number of women, 78.1%, felt that they needed mentorship and training in business skills.

To resolve disempowerment issues, SHGs offer women in Kitui County a viable platform for interacting and collaborating in building synergies and advancing financial inclusion. Though the self-help groups (SHGs) play a key role in economic empowerment of women in Kitui County, disempowerment issues persist. These include cultural trends that have negatively affected the WEE, such as low literacy and gender-based violence (Vundi, 2019; Muchena & Awuor, 2019). Networking and collaboration as a possible solution for women to WEE through SHGs have not been studied in the county. This and the need to contribute to global debates on collective action, empowerment, and sustainable development prompted the need for the present research to investigate the impact of networking and collaboration on women's economic empowerment.

#### A. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The high levels of poverty among women in Kitui County has been a major issue of concern. This is reflects part of wider struggles faced by rural women in the Global South seen through limited access to resources, exclusion from markets, and underutilization of collective action structures like SHGs. Evidence available indicated that women suffer disproportionately from this problem. The County

Government of Kitui (2019) states that the rate of poverty is 47.7%, higher than the national average of about 36.1%. The county is ranked among the ten poorest in Kenya, with an overall poverty rate of 58.3% (KNBS, 2024). The issue of economic disempowerment of women needs to be addressed to avert perpetuation of intergenerational poverty, marginalization from Vision 2030, or deepened gender inequality.

A study by Vundi (2019) highlighted that rural women in Migwani Sub-county faced immense poverty and disempowerment. In a similar vein, Mukei (2018) revealed that WEE posed problems for rural women in Mwingi North Sub-county. Neither study looked at the impact of networking and collaboration among women in SHGs towards enhancing WEE. This study brings a fresh lens by examining networking and collaboration as mechanisms of empowerment within SHGs. The study investigated the impact of networking and cooperation on women via Self-Help Groups. It is anticipated that the study's findings may inform all stakeholders on how networking and collaboration can improve women's economic empowerment through Self-Help Groups. It is also expected that the findings will support Kenya's national development goals, especially SDG 5 on gender equality, and African Union Agenda 2063.

## B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of networking and collaboration in self-help groups on women's economic empowerment in Kitui County.

## C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of the study are expected to be beneficial to the Ministry of Public Service, Youth, and Gender Affairs, in conjunction with other stakeholders to develop policies that may help in long-term gender equity mainstreaming, institutional strengthening, or structural policy reforms that would promote women's empowerment both locally and nationally. The study's findings might also assist SHG leadership in choosing strategies to empower women in their management of the SHGs. The results may help the development organizations that support women's empowerment through Self-Help Groups when developing their intervention initiatives. Women members of SHGs may also benefit from the study's findings. This is because their views will be gathered and disseminated to policymakers, development organizations, and leaders, who will subsequently design better policies and strategies to improve their empowerment through the SHGs.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers from around the world have studied how networking and collaboration in SHGs affect women's economic empowerment. For instance, in a literature review, Pierotti et al. (2023) investigated the role that men play in empowering women economically. While some of the studied literature showed how involving men had negative impacts

that led to a reduction in women's autonomy, others showed that support from men may enhance women's empowerment. The study concluded that more has to be done to overcome men's resistance by finding ways to convince them to recognize and respect their wives' rights. The researchers might have made biased observations in an attempt to come to a consensus, which could have resulted in incorrect conclusions. The current study used a descriptive research methodology in order to address these issues.

In another study, Pathania (2019) investigated the role that SHGs play in women's social and economic empowerment in India. The researcher gathered primary data from 49 randomly selected SHG women. The study found that women who joined SHGs, were able to network and receive support from colleague members and support organizations. The empowering support they received may be categorized as psychological, relational, managerial, financial, and political. The study found that the support enhanced the women's social and political capabilities and encourages them to take part in domestic decision-making. The study used a small sample thus limiting the generalizability of the results to larger populations outside the study area, a methodological gap that the current study addressed by using a sufficient sample.

Purnamawati and Utama (2019) carried out a comprehensive literature review on gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia. The study examined the type of support the women's SHGs need to effectively empower women. Researchers found a plethora of stakeholders (including community members and NGOs) working together to assist women through SHGs. This assistance helped the women in overcoming discrimination and oppression in the sociocultural, political, economic, and legal arenas. The study further found that members of SHGs gained from mutual support and that empowering women will better society as a whole. The study was a literature review carried out outside the Kenyan context while the current study used a descriptive research methodology to compare results in Kenyan context.

In Tanzania, McCarthy and Krause (2024) evaluated the impact of a comprehensive programme on social and economic empowerment of women. Using a sample of 681 and a baseline of 787 pastoralist women from 15 villages in Northern Tanzania, the programme initiated discussions on women's rights. This focused on microcredit groups, livestock management, nutrition education, water improvements, and business skills training. Young women proved more empowered than older ones with regard to belonging to more groups, control over their income, access to credit, and participation in household decision-making. The study did not focus specifically on women SHGs but on vulnerable community members who were being supported in through a multidimensional program. The current study focused on women SHGs in Kitui County addressing the gap.

The process of raising children until they become independent members of society involves a wide range of activities that nourish, nurture, and socialize the child. A training and consultancy firm in Kenya, SP Training and Consulting, conducted a study to assess the socio-economic empowerment of women through SHGs. Primary data was collected from 108 members of SHGs in Kibra, Nairobi

County, Kenya. The findings of the study reveal that vulnerable women can network and gain assistance through Self-Help Groups, thus allowing them to receive credit from savings that SHG members have pooled together. The study revealed how networking and teamwork enabled the participants to obtain support from their colleagues, community, and support groups. Their confidence and decision-making ability increased as a result. It further found that women's empowerment and income diversification positively affected local economies.

Comparing the results with the current study was important because the study was carried out among disadvantaged women in the urban Kibra slum, whose social and economic circumstances may differ from those in Kitui County. The current study was important in providing insights from rural Kenyan SHG networking and collaboration which has remained understudied, particularly in relation to women's economic empowerment.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section describes the theoretical foundations that informed this study.

#### NAILA KABEER'S (1999) EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

According to Naila Kabeer (1999), the ability to make decisions is a key component of empowerment to demonstrate authority. Empowerment entails a transformational process which consists of three elements namely; resources (preconditions), agency (process), and achievements (outcomes). In a broad sense, resources are things that can be obtained from the the family, the community, and the state. They consist of what is already available, expectations, and what can be claimed and obtained in the future. Agency comprises the ability of a person to set and accomplish goals. It is operationalized through decision-making and is perceived as the inner power. It may also involve negotiating and bargaining. This can be practiced individually or through a formally or unofficially organized group. Combining agency and resources provides ability or possibility to get desired outcomes. Accordingly, empowerment is viewed as a dynamic process that helps women to obtain resources. The resources give them a voice to express their preferences and make decisions that help them achieve their goals (Yount, 2017).

A number of researchers have used the framework to quantify women's empowerment. The framework has also served as a point of reference in numerous studies on women's empowerment (Priya et al., 2021). In a study that investigated gender equality and women's empowerment, Yount et al. (2019) used the framework and found that although women make up two-thirds of the workforce in global health, they are underrepresented in leadership roles. The theory was considered appropriate in this study because it assisted the researcher in addressing the important areas of networks and collaboration. This was done within the dimensions of resources (pre-conditions), agency (process), and

achievements (outcomes), despite a scarcity of literature showing demonstrating its application in SHGs.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Sustainable development theory was developed by Herman Daly in 1996. Herman opined that striking a balance between social justice, environmental preservation, and economic growth is essential to ensuring long-term sustainability. Three fundamental ideas form the basis of the hypothesis. These regulations guarantee that economic endeavours, like self-help groups (SHGs), advance gender equality and sustainable community development in addition to enhancing financial stability. The theory states that for underrepresented groups, like women, to achieve true economic success, they must have equal access to resources and be involved in financial decision-making. This encourages inclusive growth by enabling women to significantly contribute to social and economic advancement, gender equality is emphasised as a crucial element of sustainable development (Duflo, 2012).

Studies have indicated that women who possess financial autonomy and decision-making skills invest more in healthcare, education, and business growth. In the end, this allows them to enhance the well-being of their communities and households (Kabeer, 2005). Access to financing significantly enhanced women's business endeavours and financial stability, according to Banerjee et al. (2019), who applied the theory to analyse microfinance programmes in India. Similarly, Okoji and Oyewale (2019) investigated the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Nigeria and concluded that SHGs were crucial for increasing women's leadership involvement, financial literacy, and savings. Access to a variety of financial products and services that financial institutions and other relevant parties may be able to provide to women is a crucial aspect of their economic empowerment in Kenya (Muthengi, 2022).

In a similar vein, SHGs help rural communities become financially included so that they can become economically viable in the long run (Mwangi & Wanjiru, 2021). Using the theory, the researcher investigated how SHGs could empower women and help achieve gender equality. By networking and cooperating, women can increase their economic empowerment, accelerate the end of poverty, foster inclusive economic growth, and advance sustainable development generally. The theory enabled the researcher to provide policy recommendations for enhancing inclusive economic growth by shedding light on the efficacy and sustainability of SHG-driven economic empowerment.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology adopted in undertaking the research.

#### A. RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher employed a descriptive study design to investigate the impact of networking and collaboration within Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's economic

empowerment in Kitui County. Without considering any causal relationship, this enabled the researcher to gather quantitative data on the variables under investigation (Siedlecki, 2020). Using this method, the researcher was able to collect relevant data and carry out the required analysis to answer the research question.

## B. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher collected data from SHG members using questionnaires. This method was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain sufficient data from a large sample of participants. The questionnaires also gave participants ample time to go through the questions and provide pertinent responses (Kothari, 2008). The questionnaire comprised four sections with items on a 5-point Likert type scale. Section I collected demographic information; Section II collected data on the impact of collaboration and networking on women economic empowerment, and Section III collected data on women's economic empowerment in Kitui County. Since the questionnaire was unstandardized, the researcher subjected it to an appropriate validation process through piloting.

## C. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLE SIZE

This sub-section discusses the study's sampling technique and the sample size.

### a. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The researcher used both purposive and random sampling to choose Kitui County and study participants. Purposeful sampling enabled the researcher to obtain key information from key stakeholders while random sampling gave all women members of the SHGs equal chance to take part in the study. Simple random sampling technique was also used to select SHG members from the several SHGs in the county.

### b. SAMPLE SIZE

The researcher determined the sample size using Yamane's formula, which is displayed below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n= sample size

N= Total population

e= Error tolerance (0.05)

Thus:

$$n = \frac{4531}{1+4531(0.05)^2} = 368, \text{ which is rounded up to}$$

370

This indicates that out of the 4531 target population, 370 women members of the SHGs were selected using simple random sampling. The researcher increased the sample size by 5% to account for any non response that might occur as a result of inconsistent or missing data. This takes into account that non response of less than 20% might not jeopardize the

results' validity (Nunan et al., 2017). As a result, 423 women members were sampled. The researcher accessed the SHGs members through their group leaders.

## D. DATA COLLECTION

An introductory letter that was provided by the university to carry out this research. The researcher applied for a research permit from NACOSTI to carry out the study in Kitui County. After obtaining the permit, the researcher went to the Kitui County Commissioner's office to get permission to conduct the study within the county. The researcher then got in touch with the targeted SHGs to arrange meetings at convenient times so that the study could be carried out. The researcher hired and trained five research assistants to help with the administration of questionnaires. The assistants explained to the participants how they should complete the questionnaires and that completing them was completely voluntary. The assistants also obtained consent from the participants prior to filling the questionnaires. The research assistants thereafter collected the completed questionnaires the next phase of data analysis. The researcher kept a log of questionnaires to monitor the response rate.

## E. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted data cleaning by discarding questionnaires that were not properly completed. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations were used to describe the data. Inferential analysis, which included correlation and simple linear regression were used to ascertain the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. A linear regression model was developed to explain how the independent variable affected women's economic empowerment.

For the pilot study, the researcher used 23 participants from three SHGs in Kitui County. The sample size comprised 5% of the main study sample which was in line with Mugenda & Mugenda's (1999) suggestion that 1% to 10% of the sample size is adequate for a pilot. Participants in the pilot trial were excluded from the main study. The researcher established the validity and reliability of the data collection tools through the pilot study (Malmqvist et al., 2019). As a result, the researcher was able to modify the instruments before they were utilized to collect data for the primary study. The pilot study also enabled the researcher to calculate how long it would take to complete the questionnaire thus helping to better plan and organize the study's logistics.

## F. VALIDITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher appropriately validated the questionnaire ahead of the main study. In order to ascertain if the items on the questionnaire accurately reflect the topic being studied, the researcher assessed the content validity of the questionnaire by sharing it with experts (Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020). The researcher also sent the questionnaire to the university supervisors for assessment to ensure that it met face and content validity requirements. Conducting the pilot study also aided in the process as the researcher discussed the findings

with the supervisors for additional guidance on how to enhance the instruments' validity. As a result, the researcher added incorporated the remarks and suggestions to improve the validity of the instruments.

G. RELIABILITY RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Through the pilot study, the researcher was able to determine study instruments reliability. The researcher evaluated the instruments' reliability by computing Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The instruments' sufficient reliability was shown by the obtained coefficient value of 0.8 which was considered appropriate as suggested by Raharjanti et al. (2022).

V. FINDINGS

This section presents the research results.

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

This subsection section, presents the background information of the respondents in terms of age bracket. The information is presented in Table 4.1.

	Frequency	Percent
18-25	55	13.7
26-30	73	18.2
31-35	73	18.2
36-40	30	7.5
41 and above	171	42.5
Total	402	100.0

Table 1: Respondents' Age Category

Table 1 shows that out of the 402 respondents, a majority 171(42.5%) were aged 41 years and above. The age categories of 26-30 and 31-35 years tied at 73 (18.2%), while the 18-25 age category comprised 55 respondents (13.7%). The 36-30 age category had the least respondents 30 (7.5%). Thus there were more older members of the SHGs compared to the younger ones.

The researcher also assessed respondents' marital status as presented in Table 2.

	Frequency	Percent
Married	175	43.5
Widowed	102	25.4
Single	42	10.4
Divorced	55	13.7
Separated	28	7.0
Total	402	100.0

Table 2: Respondents Marital Status

Table 2 shows that out of the 402 respondents, a majority 175(43.5%) were married. This was followed by 102 (25.4%) who were widowed. The rest were 55(13.7%) divorced, 42 (10.4%) single, and 28(7.0%) separated.

The researcher also collected data on the respondents' highest level of education and the results were as shown in Table 3.

	Frequency	Percent
Secondary	171	42.5
College	58	14.4
University	173	43.0
Total	402	100.0

Table 3: Respondents Highest Level of Education Completed

Table 3 shows that a majority of the respondents, 173(43.0%) had university level of education. This was followed by 171(42.5%) who had secondary level of education, and 58(14.4%) who had college level of education. This shows that the education levels of the respondents were predominantly university and secondary, with 43.0% and 42.5% respectively.

The researcher also assessed the respondents' major occupation as presented in Table 4.

	Frequency	Percent
Farming	128	31.8
Casual labour	77	19.2
Employed other	162	40.3
Total	402	100.0

Table 4: Respondents Major Occupation

From table 4, a majority 162(40.3%) of the respondents were employed. This was followed by 128 (31.8%) who were farmers, 77(19.2%) who were casual laborers, and 35(8.7%) who were in other occupations. Thus, employment was the most common occupation, followed by farming, casual labor, and other jobs.

B. CORRELATION

The objective of the research was to determine the impact of networking and collaboration in self-help groups on women's economic empowerment in Kitui County. The researcher carried out Pearson product moment correlation test whose results as shown in Table 5.

	WEE
Networking and Collaboration	.56**
	Sig. (2-tailed)
	.00
	N
	402

Table 5: Correlation Between Collaboration-Network and Empowerment

The results presented in Table 5, show that there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between networking and collaboration with women economic empowerment,  $r(402) = .56, p < .05$ . These results indicate that an increase in networking and collaboration resulted in a significant increase in women economic empowerment. This shows that networking and collaboration was significantly correlated to women economic empowerment.

C. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The researcher carried out regression analysis to establish the predictive values for women economic empowerment from collaboration and networking as shown in Table 6.

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F	P(Model)
Constant	2.25	2.70	—	0.83	.41	.56	.31	.31	180.32	<.001
Collaboration-networking	1.21	0.09	.56	13.43	<.001					

Table 6: Regression Coefficients for Prediction of Women Economic Empowerment from Collaboration and Networking

The results in Table 6 show that R square value for the model was .31 indicating that 31% of the variance in women economic empowerment among the SHG members in Kitui County, Kenya was influenced by networking and collaboration.

The prediction equation for the model is indicated below:

$$\hat{Y} = 2.25 + 1.21X + \hat{\epsilon}$$

Where  $\hat{Y}$  = Predicted Women Economic Empowerment;  $X$  = Networking and collaboration, and  $\hat{\epsilon}$  = standard error. The model however has limitations since 69% of variance is not explained. This suggests that there are several other factors beyond networking and collaboration that shape women's economic empowerment.

#### D. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The study's goal was to ascertain how networking and cooperation within Self-Help Groups (SHGs) affected the economic empowerment of women in Kitui County, Kenya. The results showed a strong relationship between networking and collaboration and women's economic empowerment. These findings are consistent with those of Pathania (2019), who found that by joining Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Indian women network and get assistance from peers and support groups. The results are also consistent with those of Purnamawati and Utama (2019), who found that by collaborating with a range of stakeholders, including nongovernmental organisations and community members, through SHGs, women in Indonesia can overcome oppression and discrimination in the socio, cultural, political, legal, and economic spheres.

Similarly, the results agree with Were (2021) who found that through SHGs, vulnerable women are able to network and receive support that enable them to access credit from savings pooled together from SHG's members. The study found that the support and collaboration received from peers, the community and support organization improved members' confidence and enhanced their decision-making ability which translated to a positive boost of the local economy by empowering women economically and diversifying their income sources.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

The study findings have established that collaboration and networking significantly impact women's economic empowerment among women SHG members in Kitui County, Kenya. The results indicate that an increase in networking and collaboration resulted in a significant improvement in women's economic empowerment. Therefore, the study concludes that engaging in networking and collaboration

among women SHGs in Kitui County Kenya enhanced the women's economic empowerment.

#### VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations based on the study findings.

##### A. PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings have established that collaboration and networking significantly correlated to women economic empowerment among women SHG members in Kitui County, Kenya. The study thus recommends that training and exchange programs across SHGs should be prioritized to strengthen networking practices in Kitui County in order to enhance women's economic empowerment in the area. The government in conjunction with other stakeholders should use the findings to develop policies that support Kenya's national development goals, especially SDG 5 on gender equality, and African Union Agenda 2063.

##### B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should be done in other counties to establish if similar findings will be obtained notwithstanding the different social economic and environmental situations. Researcher should also conduct further research to establish what other factors impact on women economic empowerment. The further studies should also consider using other designs including longitudinal, mixed-methods, or comparative designs that would capture complexity over time and across contexts.

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