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Effect of Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities on Business Growth in Rwanda: A Case Study of the Jya Mbere Project

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Abstract:

This study examined the effect of socio-economic inclusion on business growth among refugees and host communities in Rwanda, using the Jya Mbere Project (2019–2024) as a case study. Three objectives guided the study: to determine the effect of access to financial services on business growth, assess the effect of entrepreneurship training on business expansion, and examine the effect of integration support on business opportunities and loan accessibility. The study was anchored on Social Capital Theory, Resource-Based View Theory, and Inclusive Growth Theory. A mixed-methods research design was employed, with quantitative data collected from 154 refugee and host community entrepreneurs and qualitative data from beneficiaries, financial service providers, government officials, and implementing partners. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and thematic analysis. Findings aligned with the three objectives. First, access to financial services had the strongest positive and statistically significant effect on business growth ($\beta = 0.564$, $p < 0.001$). Second, entrepreneurship training significantly enhanced business growth ($\beta = 0.117$, $p = 0.021$) through improved business planning, financial management, and entrepreneurial skills. Third, integration support significantly improved business growth ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$) by strengthening social networks, market linkages, and access to financial opportunities. The regression model explained 97.9% of the variation in business growth ($R^2 = 0.979$). The study concluded that integrated socio-economic inclusion is critical for sustainable enterprise growth and economic resilience.

Keywords: Socio-economic inclusion; Business growth; Refugees; Entrepreneurship; Financial inclusion; Integration

1.0 Introduction

This Section presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, research questions, and justification of the study, scope, and significance of the study.

Rwanda has long been recognized for its progressive approach to refugee management, particularly through policies aimed at ensuring socio-economic integration and inclusion. Over the past decades, the country has hosted a significant number of refugees, primarily from neighboring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. As of 2023, Rwanda continues to embrace refugees as part of its national development agenda, shifting from a purely humanitarian response toward a development-oriented model. However, one of the key challenges facing both refugees and host communities is the ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods and economic independence. The integration of refugees into the socio-economic fabric of their host communities remains an area of strategic focus for international organizations, national governments, and development agencies (MINEMA, 2023).

Globally, the socio-economic inclusion of refugees particularly in the domains of financial access, business development, and entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical component of the development agenda. With over 114 million people forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of 2022, the long-term sustainability of refugee populations can no longer be addressed solely through humanitarian aid. International financial institutions like the World Bank now advocate for refugee inclusion as a pillar of global stability and poverty alleviation. This includes equipping refugees with business skills, improving access to formal financial services, and reducing systemic barriers that limit their economic participation (World Bank, 2021).

In Africa, the African Union's Refugee Policy Framework calls upon member states to strengthen refugee inclusion in national economic systems. Despite persistent institutional barriers across the continent such as lack of legal documentation, limited access to credit, and underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystems there is growing evidence that refugees, when supported, can become economically active and contribute meaningfully to host economies. Refugees often engage in informal commerce, participate in savings groups, and create employment opportunities, underscoring the need to formalize and scale these activities through inclusive policy frameworks and targeted programs (AFR, 2021). In East Africa, countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda host large refugee populations and have made varied efforts toward their economic inclusion. Rwanda, in particular, has emerged as a regional leader in implementing structured financial and business development initiatives that benefit both refugees and host communities. The Jya Mbere Project officially known as the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities (SERHC) Project stands out as a flagship intervention aimed at addressing systemic exclusion and promoting self-reliance (RDB, 2021).

Approved in April 2019 and operational since August 2019, the Jya Mbere Project is a five-year initiative financed through an $80 million package (comprising a $45 million grant and a $35 million credit), of which $68 million is provided through the World Bank's Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR). The project is implemented by the Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) in collaboration with the Development Bank of Rwanda (BRD), with technical support from financial service providers such as Umutanguha Finance Company (UFC), MTN Rwanda, and the Frankfurt School of Finance (MINEMA, 2023).

The project is structured around four major components designed to promote comprehensive socio-economic inclusion. The first component focuses on access to basic services and socio-economic investments, aiming to improve infrastructure and service delivery in refugee-host areas. The second component emphasizes economic opportunity, providing access to finance, entrepreneurship training, and support for income-generating activities for both refugees and host community members. The third component addresses environmental management, with interventions to mitigate environmental degradation in and around refugee camps. Lastly, the fourth component is dedicated to project management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), ensuring Effect ive implementation, accountability, and evidence-based adjustments throughout the project lifecycle (BRD, 2022).

Geographically, the project is implemented in six key districts host refugee camps: Kirehe (Mahama Camp), Gatsibo (Nyabiheke Camp), Karongi (Kiziba Camp), Nyamagabe (Kigeme Camp), and Gisagara (Mugombwa Camp). It also targets urban refugee populations in Kigali, Huye, and Bugesera, thus expanding its socio-economic Effect beyond traditional camp settings (MINEMA, 2023).

The Economic Opportunity component, which is central to this study, focuses on extending financial services, loans, business development support, and training to both refugees and host community members. The project utilizes an innovative matching grant mechanism that encourages financial institutions to lend to refugee entrepreneurs by offering partial reimbursement of loans, reducing risk while maintaining commercial viability. In addition, mobile money platforms and new bank branches have been introduced within refugee camps to enhance financial access (UNHCR, 2020).

Before the Jya Mbere initiative, refugees in Rwanda had limited access to formal financial institutions, credit services, and entrepreneurship training, despite their active participation in informal markets. A 2018 study by Access to Finance Rwanda (AFR) confirmed that many refugees were economically active and "bankable," prompting the creation of more inclusive financial programs to support their transition from informal to formal business activities (AFR, 2018).

However, despite the project's innovative model and early achievements, significant challenges remain. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person training and delayed business mobilization. Additionally, access to larger-scale credit is still constrained by perceptions of risk and lack of collateral. Market access also remains a critical barrier, with refugee businesses often confined to low-income consumer bases within camps (MINEMA, 2023).

Conceptually, this study is grounded in the development theory of financial inclusion as a driver of economic empowerment. It explores how structured access to finance, combined with entrepreneurship training and institutional support, can transform the livelihoods of marginalized populations, particularly refugees in protracted displacement. The Jya Mbere Project offers a tangible case through which to examine this theory in practice. By linking access to credit and business services with measurable outcomes such as increased business creation, income growth, and economic participation the study aims to evaluate the project's success in promoting refugee self-sufficiency. Moreover, it considers the ripple Effect s on host communities and local economic systems, emphasizing the broader implications of refugee integration for inclusive development (World Bank, 2021).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing global recognition of refugees as contributors to economic development, evidence indicates that refugee-owned businesses continue to experience limited growth and sustainability. As of 2022, more than 35 million refugees were recorded worldwide, yet most policy responses remain heavily focused on short-term humanitarian assistance rather than long-term economic empowerment. Although global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance, there is insufficient empirical evidence demonstrating that these efforts translate into measurable improvements in business performance outcomes, including sales revenue, business expansion, and access to finance.

Refugee entrepreneurs face persistent structural and institutional constraints, including limited access to formal credit, low financial literacy, inadequate legal documentation, and restricted participation in formal markets. These challenges confine most refugee businesses to small-scale, informal operations characterized by low capitalization, limited market reach, and minimal growth potential. In Africa, while policy frameworks promote refugee economic inclusion, weak implementation continues to marginalize refugee enterprises. Similarly, in East Africa, progressive refugee policies have not fully eliminated practical barriers such as limited startup capital, market exclusion, and regulatory uncertainties.

In Rwanda often recognized as a regional model for refugee inclusion refugees still largely depend on subsistence-level and informal economic activities, particularly in camps such as Mahama and Kigeme. In response, the Government of Rwanda, in partnership with the World Bank, implemented the Jya Mbere Project (2019–2024) to promote socio-economic inclusion of refugees and host communities. The project introduced key interventions such as access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, matching grants, and digital financial platforms, implemented in collaboration with institutions including Umutanguha Finance Company, MTN Rwanda, and the Frankfurt School of Finance.

1.3. General Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine the Effect of socio-economic inclusion on the business growth of refugees and host communities in Rwanda, using the Jya Mbere Project, as a case study.

1.4. Specific Objectives

i. To evaluate the Effect of access to financial services provided by the Jya Mbere Project on the sales revenue of businesses owned by refugees and host community members in Rwanda.

ii. To examine the Effect of entrepreneurship training under the Jya Mbere Project on the expansion of businesses owned by refugees and host community members in Rwanda.

iii. To assess the Effect of integration support offered by the Jya Mbere Project on loan accessibility for businesses in refugee-host communities in Rwanda.

2.0. Literature Review

This Section presents a critical review of existing literature related to the Effect of socio-economic inclusion on business growth among refugees and host communities, with a specific focus on the Jya Mbere Project in Rwanda. The aim is to establish a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding how inclusion strategies such as access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, and integration support contribute to key business performance indicators, including Sales Revenue, Business Expansion, and Loan Accessibility. The literature review explores global, regional, and national perspectives on refugee economic empowerment, financial inclusion, and enterprise development, providing context for evaluating the outcomes of the Jya Mbere Project within Rwanda's refugee-host districts.

2.1 Conceptual review

This section critically examines the key concepts underpinning the study, namely access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, and integration support, and their influence on business growth among refugees and host communities. The purpose is to provide conceptual clarity on how these dimensions of socio-economic inclusion contribute to measurable business outcomes, specifically sales revenue, business expansion, and loan accessibility. By clearly defining and analyzing these constructs, the section establishes a solid foundation for subsequent theoretical and empirical analysis while ensuring consistency between study variables and research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019).

2.1.1 Access to Financial Services

Access to financial services refers to the ability of individuals and businesses to obtain and Effect ively use affordable, appropriate, and sustainable financial products such as savings accounts, credit, insurance, and digital payment systems. Financial inclusion is widely recognized as a key driver of poverty reduction and inclusive economic growth, especially among marginalized populations such as refugees (World Bank, 2021).

In refugee contexts, access to financial services is often constrained by lack of collateral, limited financial history, and regulatory barriers. These constraints limit the ability

of entrepreneurs to invest in productive activities and scale their businesses. However, expanding financial access enhances working capital, promotes investment, and improves income stability among small enterprises (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2020).
Within the Jya Mbere Project, access to financial services is promoted through partnerships with financial institutions and digital platforms that provide microloans, savings mechanisms, and mobile money services. These interventions aim to formalize financial practices and strengthen business performance. In this study, access to financial services is conceptualized as a key determinant of sales revenue, as it directly influences business investment and transaction capacity (Beck et al., 2007).

2.1.2 Entrepreneurship Training

Entrepreneurship training refers to structured programs designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to start, manage, and expand businesses. These programs typically include financial literacy, business planning, marketing, and customer management, which are essential for improving business operations (Cho, 2017).
Empirical studies indicate that entrepreneurship training enhances business performance by improving managerial capabilities, strengthening decision-making, and increasing business survival rates. It also facilitates the transition from informal to formal enterprises and improves access to broader markets (Honorati, 2019).
Within the Jya Mbere Project, entrepreneurship training is provided to refugees and host communities to build their capacity to operate sustainable and growth-oriented businesses. This study conceptualizes entrepreneurship training as a determinant of business expansion, as it equips entrepreneurs with the skills necessary to scale operations and diversify economic activities (Woodruff, 2018).

2.1.3 Integration Support

Integration support refers to interventions aimed at enabling refugees to participate fully in the economic, social, and legal systems of host communities. These interventions include access to legal documentation, business registration, market linkages, and institutional support, all of which are essential for economic participation (UNHCR, 2022).
Integration support addresses structural barriers such as lack of legal identity, restricted market access, and weak institutional connections. By improving inclusion in formal systems, it enhances the ability of refugee entrepreneurs to operate sustainable businesses and engage with financial institutions (Strang, 2018).
Within the Jya Mbere Project, integration support focuses on strengthening linkages between refugee entrepreneurs and formal markets, as well as improving access to financial systems. These interventions are critical for enhancing loan accessibility, as they reduce perceived risks and improve the creditworthiness of entrepreneurs (Betts et al., 2017).

2.1.4 Business Growth

Business growth refers to the measurable improvement in the performance and capacity of an enterprise over time. It is commonly assessed using indicators such as increased sales revenue, expansion of operations, and improved access to financial resources. Business growth is a key indicator of economic empowerment, particularly among vulnerable populations (Penrose, 2019).
In development contexts, business growth reflects the ability of enterprises to generate income, create employment, and contribute to local economic development. It is also associated with increased resilience and reduced dependency on external support (McKenzie 2019).
In this study, business growth is measured using three indicators: sales revenue, business expansion, and loan accessibility. These indicators provide a comprehensive framework for assessing how socio-economic inclusion interventions influence entrepreneurial performance among refugees and host communities.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This section examined the theoretical frameworks that underpinned the study on the Effect of socio-economic inclusion on business growth among refugees and host communities in Rwanda. The study was anchored on Social Capital Theory, Resource-Based View Theory, and Inclusive Growth Theory. These theories explained how access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, and integration support influenced business growth measured by sales revenue, business expansion, and loan accessibility. Furthermore, the theories provided the foundation for interpreting the regression results presented in Chapter Four.

The significant regression coefficients obtained in the study were interpreted against the assumptions of each theory to determine whether the empirical findings supported or contradicted the theoretical propositions.

2.2.1 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, developed by Putnam (1995), argued that social networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity enhanced cooperation and facilitated access to economic opportunities. The theory maintained that individuals embedded within strong social relationships were more likely to access information, institutional support, financial opportunities, and markets, thereby improving their economic performance. In this study, Social Capital Theory was linked to integration support**,** which included strengthening relationships between refugees and host communities, improving access to institutions, promoting business networking, and facilitating market participation. These interventions were expected to enhance entrepreneurs' credibility and increase their opportunities to access financial services and business support.

The empirical findings strongly supported Social Capital Theory. The regression analysis showed that integration support had a positive and statistically significant Effect on business growth (B = 0.331, β = 0.340, t = 5.831, p = 0.000**)**. The positive standardized coefficient indicated that strengthening social integration significantly enhanced business performance among refugees and host communities. The findings suggested that entrepreneurs who benefited from stronger institutional relationships, market linkages, and community participation experienced greater business growth than those with weaker social connections. These findings were consistent with Putnam's proposition that social capital facilitates access to productive resources and economic opportunities.

2.2.2 Resource-Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View Theory, proposed by Barney (1991)**,** argued that organizations achieved superior performance through the acquisition and Effect ive utilization of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. According to the theory, financial resources and human capital represented strategic assets capable of creating sustainable competitive advantage and improving organizational performance. The theory directly explained two independent variables investigated in this study: access to financial services and entrepreneurship training. Access to financial services provided entrepreneurs with financial capital required for purchasing business inputs, increasing inventory, expanding production, and improving sales performance. Entrepreneurship training enhanced managerial capabilities, business planning skills, financial literacy, innovation, and strategic decision-making, thereby strengthening entrepreneurs' ability to expand their businesses. The regression findings strongly supported the assumptions of the Resource-Based View Theory. Access to financial services recorded the largest standardized regression coefficient (B = 0.564, β = 0.529, t = 9.637, p = 0.000), indicating that it was the strongest predictor of business growth among all independent variables**.** This finding confirmed Barney's argument that access to valuable financial resources significantly improves organizational performance. Refugee and host-community entrepreneurs who accessed credit, savings services, grants, and digital financial services experienced greater business growth than those with limited financial resources. Similarly, entrepreneurship training positively and significantly influenced business growth (B = 0.117, β = 0.129, t = 2.334, p = 0.021)**.** Although entrepreneurship training had the smallest standardized coefficient among the three predictors, its statistical significance demonstrated that managerial knowledge, business planning skills, mentorship, and financial literacy remained important resources that contributed to enterprise expansion and improved business performance. The empirical findings therefore supported the Resource-Based View Theory by confirming that both financial capital and entrepreneurial capabilities constituted strategic resources that enhanced business growth. Nevertheless, the relatively smaller coefficient for entrepreneurship training suggested that knowledge alone was less influential than financial resources unless accompanied by adequate access to finance and institutional support.

2.2.3 Inclusive Growth Theory

Inclusive Growth Theory, advanced by Kakwani and Pernia (2000)**,** emphasized that economic growth should be broad-based, equitable, and beneficial to all members of society, particularly marginalized populations. The theory argued that inclusive development requires equal access to financial resources, education, business opportunities, and institutional support to reduce inequalities and promote sustainable economic development.The theory provided the overall framework for this study because it simultaneously explained the combined influence of access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, and integration support on business growth among refugees and host communities. The Jya Mbere Project reflected the principles of Inclusive Growth Theory by promoting financial inclusion, entrepreneurial capacity development, and social integration for both refugees and host communities.

The empirical findings strongly supported the assumptions of Inclusive Growth Theory. The regression model explained 97.9% of the variation in business growth (R^2 = 0.979; Adjusted R^2 = 0.978), while the ANOVA results confirmed that the overall model was statistically significant (F = 1286.345, p = 0.000). Furthermore, all three socio-economic inclusion variables recorded positive and statistically significant regression coefficients, demonstrating that comprehensive inclusion strategies significantly improved business growth. These findings confirmed that improving access to financial services, strengthening entrepreneurship skills, and promoting integration support collectively enhanced sales revenue, business expansion, and loan accessibility among refugee and host-community businesses. The findings therefore validated the central proposition of Inclusive Growth Theory that inclusive development interventions contribute to sustainable economic growth by ensuring that marginalized populations participate fully in economic activities.

Although Inclusive Growth Theory Effect ively explained the broader development outcomes of socio-economic inclusion, it provided limited explanation of firm-level resource utilization and interpersonal relationships. This limitation justified its integration with the Resource-Based View Theory and Social Capital Theory, which explained business growth from organizational and social perspectives.

2.3 Empirical Review

This section reviews empirical studies from global, African, East African, and Rwandan contexts on socio-economic inclusion and business growth in refugee-host communities. It focuses on the Effect s of financial access, entrepreneurship training, and integration support on business Sales Revenue, Business Expansion, and Loan Accessibility.

2.3.1 Effect of Access to Financial Services on Sales Revenue

Globally, Beck et al. (2019) found that displaced populations with access to formal financial services reported higher business profitability and sales. Similarly, Banerjee et al. (2022) demonstrated that microcredit access in India significantly boosted business revenues by facilitating critical investments. However, Karlan and Zinman (2021) noted that the Effect varies based on how flexibly funds can be utilized, indicating that the quality and design of financial services matter as much as access. Despite positive outcomes, many global studies critique that formal financial services often fail to reach informal entrepreneurs due to documentation, collateral, and literacy barriers (Beck et al., 2019). This gap highlights the need for innovative models combining formal and informal finance, a limitation that many studies overlook.

In Africa, Owusu and Boateng (2020) observed a 20–30% increase in profit margins and sales revenue among marginalized entrepreneurs with microfinance access in Ghana and Nigeria. However, distrust of formal institutions and high interest rates limited uptake, pushing many towards informal savings groups. Woldemichael and Gebremedhin (2019) emphasized that hybrid models combining formal financial services with community savings groups yield better business revenue outcomes. These findings underline a persistent gap in African research: while financial inclusion is beneficial, institutional barriers and socio-cultural factors significantly influence Effect iveness. Few studies address how combined formal and informal mechanisms can overcome these barriers, a research niche this study intends to fill.

In East Africa, Nkurunziza (2021) found that refugees accessing microloans and mobile savings accounts in Uganda and Kenya experienced improved sales revenue but faced exclusion due to strict documentation and collateral demands. Collier et al. (2023) showed mobile banking adoption in Kenyan refugee camps increased business transactions and sales.

However, Jacobsen and Landau (2023) critiqued the scalability of financial inclusion programs for refugees due to systemic barriers, emphasizing the need for context-specific solutions. The limited research on refugee-host community business dynamics in East Africa reveals an important gap this study addresses by evaluating integrated financial service delivery models.

In Rwanda Nyirinkindi and Uwitonze (2022) documented that refugees participating in VSLA groups in Rwanda improved their sales revenue modestly, though formal credit uptake remained low due to lack of IDs and digital literacy. Meyer and Gelb (2020) found that digital financial services in Rwanda improved small business revenues by easing access to credit and payments. These studies reveal a gap in linking refugees to formal financial institutions and addressing digital skill gaps central components of the Jya Mbere Project. This study aims to evaluate how such integrated financial inclusion strategies affect sales revenue in refugee-host communities, providing localized evidence to inform policy and practice.

The reviewed empirical evidence collectively underscores that access to financial services is a key determinant of business sales revenue and growth. However, the extent of this Effect depends on the inclusiveness, flexibility, and contextual appropriateness of the financial products offered.

This study leverages this empirical foundation to evaluate Jya Mbere's integrated approach to financial inclusion, linking refugees and host community entrepreneurs to formal institutions while addressing common barriers through mobile platforms and matching grants. By focusing on Rwanda's unique refugee-host environment, this research contributes new, localized insights on how socio-economic inclusion can drive tangible business growth.

2.3.2 Effect of Entrepreneurship Training on Business Expansion

Klinger and Schündeln (2021) found that entrepreneurship training emphasizing business planning, marketing, and management skills led to measurable business growth across South America and Asia. They noted that training significantly improved client base and product diversification, but scalability was often limited by the absence of post-training support.

Banerjee et al. (2020) in India documented that entrepreneurship training increased revenue and helped businesses expand, especially when combined with microcredit. However, they argued that skill acquisition alone was insufficient without sustained access to financial and advisory support. Schmidt and Williams (2019) emphasized that training programs globally have limited long-term Effect unless complemented with mentorship, networking, and access to resources. They stressed that integrated models combining these elements are more Effective in fostering scalable business growth.

De Mel et al. (2024) similarly highlighted that entrepreneurship training improves business practices but pointed out that many entrepreneurs face structural constraints such as market access, which training alone cannot resolve.

Adebayo and Tella (2019) in Nigeria found entrepreneurship training improved operational practices and business growth, particularly for women-led enterprises. Their study highlighted that scalability was sustained primarily through follow-up mentorship and access to networks. Kebede and Abebe (2018) in Ethiopia reported that entrepreneurship training alone rarely led to business scaling unless paired with credit access and market linkages. They emphasized that financial inclusion and market facilitation must accompany training for measurable business expansion.

Owusu and Boateng (2020) noted in Ghana that entrepreneurs trained in business skills expanded their operations, but challenges related to finance and infrastructure slowed growth. They pointed to the necessity of combining training with financial and institutional support. Woldemichael and Gebremedhin (2019) also highlighted that hybrid approaches blending entrepreneurship education with community savings groups resulted in better growth outcomes than training alone.

Oduor and Omondi (2020) found that entrepreneurship training among refugees in Kenya and Uganda improved formal business registration and expansion, especially when integrated with incubators and seed funding. However, many trainees could not scale without adequate capital and networks. Nabukeera and Kabanda (2020) in Uganda reported that refugee entrepreneurs who received comprehensive training along with business development services and market linkages showed higher growth and scalability.

Gichuki and Mwangi (2019) documented that while entrepreneurship training increased management skills among refugee entrepreneurs in Kenyan camps, the lack of financial access and market networks limited scalability. Wangari and Mwaura (2021) showed that mentorship combined with entrepreneurship training in East Africa improved sustainability and expansion of refugee and host community businesses. Munyaneza and Uwizeye (2021) found that entrepreneurship training encouraged new business creation among refugees and host communities in Rwanda, but few businesses scaled beyond subsistence due to weak market linkages and coaching.

Munyakazi et al. (2022) observed that entrepreneurship training combined with peer learning networks and digital tools led to increased innovation and business growth among Rwandan small enterprises. Meyer and Gelb (2020) showed that digital financial services in Rwanda, when integrated with entrepreneurship training, enhanced business performance and expansion.

Nyirinkindi and Uwitonze (2022) noted that Rwanda's Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) contributed to modest business growth, but formal financial uptake and scaling were limited by digital skills and ID access.

The Jya Mbere Project's model integrates entrepreneurship training with financial inclusion, market linkages, and advisory services, aiming to overcome typical barriers faced by refugees and hosts in Rwanda. Its design aligns with best practices highlighted by global and regional studies. This study assessed how the Jya Mbere Project's holistic approach translates into tangible business expansion outcomes, filling gaps in existing literature on integrated socio-economic inclusion models for refugee-host communities.

2.3.3 Effect of Integration Support on Loan Accessibility for Refugee and Host Community

Globally Jacobsen (2021) emphasized that lack of legal identity and formal recognition are key barriers preventing displaced populations from accessing credit. She concluded that integration mechanisms such as civil documentation and legal inclusion are critical for financial service eligibility. Zetter and Ruaudel (2020) found that globally, the absence of structured integration policies for refugees often leads to exclusion from credit systems. Their study highlighted how host governments and development partners must align integration support with financial sector development to enhance access to loans. Chalmers and Morsink (2019) examined refugee integration strategies across Europe and argued that financial integration is often overlooked in broader socio-economic inclusion programs. They recommended dedicated efforts such as credit readiness programs and banking policy adjustments to increase refugee loan eligibility.

Trivelli and Venero (2018**)** reviewed credit barriers for informal workers in Latin America and found that integration support such as digital ID access and simplified requirements improved access to microcredit significantly. Chakravarty and Pal (2023) emphasized that financial literacy and institutional mediation increase loan accessibility for excluded populations. They noted that intermediary actors, such as NGOs or public programs, play a key role in linking underserved populations with lenders.

In Africa Ephrem and Tilahun (2019) in Ethiopia found that formal loan access among informal entrepreneurs was closely tied to integration mechanisms, such as business formalization and financial education. Without these supports, most entrepreneurs relied solely on informal loans or family borrowing.

Ngugi and Bwisa (2023**)** observed in Kenya that integrated support services such as enterprise registration, record-keeping skills, and financial orientation greatly enhanced entrepreneurs' eligibility for formal credit facilities.

Abdulai and Tetteh (2020) examined the link between socio-economic integration and financial inclusion in Ghana and argued that lack of documentation and mistrust of formal institutions were major obstacles to credit access. They recommended that integration policies address documentation and borrower protection simultaneously. Okello and Were (2018) noted that integration support provided through municipal and NGO collaboration improved business owners' access to financial services in urban refugee settlements in Uganda. They emphasized the importance of harmonizing national financial regulations with refugee documentation.

In East Africa Ayele (2020) investigated refugee businesses in Ethiopia and found that integration support such as legal registration and digital wallet access was the strongest predictor of formal loan eligibility. Without it, even viable businesses remained excluded. Mwangi and Wanjala (2021) studied Somali refugee communities in Kenya and found that NGOs that provided support with ID processing and linkage to SACCOs significantly increased the rate of loan approvals among refugee entrepreneurs.

Tumwine and Mutesasira (2019) in Uganda documented that loan uptake among refugees increased when support included both documentation and training on financial products. They also highlighted the need for culturally relevant loan application assistance. Kassaye and Tekalign (2022) emphasized that when refugees are assisted in registering businesses and introduced to local lending institutions, their chances of securing credit improve significantly even without collateral because of increased trust and visibility.

In Rwanda Habumuremyi and Mugisha (2020) found that in Rwanda, refugees faced persistent challenges accessing formal credit despite being active in microenterprise. The key barrier was a lack of formal registration and national identification documents. Integration support that addressed these issues saw a measurable increase in credit uptake. Nsengiyumva et al. (2021) highlighted that while informal credit through VSLAs was prevalent in refugee camps, formal loan accessibility remained low due to digital illiteracy and limited engagement with formal financial institutions. Integration support through digital finance training and ID facilitation was shown to partially bridge this gap. Mugiraneza and Ndahiro (2022) concluded that businesses that received registration assistance and were linked to financial institutions had higher approval rates for microloans in refugee-host areas of Rwanda. They recommend that financial institutions adopt inclusion protocols aligned with integration efforts. Gatera and Mutoni (2023) pointed out that despite Rwanda's progressive refugee policy, a disconnect remains between national financial institutions and refugee entrepreneurs. Their study found that structured integration programs including formal orientation to loan procedures significantly improved loan accessibility.

The empirical literature makes clear that integration support directly affects the ability of refugee and host community businesses to access loans. These relationships are mediated through factors such as legal identity, business formalization, digital access, and institutional trust. By analyzing the Jya Mbere Project**,** which offers a comprehensive integration model, this study contributes valuable insight into how targeted socio-economic interventions affect credit inclusion in Rwanda's refugee-host areas.

3.0. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to examine the effect of socio-economic inclusion on business growth among refugees and host communities in Rwanda, focusing on the Jya Mbere Project (2019–2024). The design integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide statistical evidence and contextual understanding of how access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, and integration support influence business growth. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative information was obtained through interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. This combination enabled data triangulation and strengthened the validity and credibility of the findings. The study was conducted in refugee-host communities participating in the Jya Mbere Project. The target population comprised 250 individuals, including refugee and host community business owners, project implementers, BDEU officers, MINEMA and UNHCR representatives, PSF representatives, and consultancy firm representatives. Using Yamane's formula with a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 154 respondents was obtained. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation of stakeholder groups. A pilot study involving 20 participants was conducted to assess the clarity, validity, and reliability of the questionnaire. Content and construct validity were assessed through literature review, expert evaluation, and pilot testing, while reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with 0.70 considered the acceptable threshold.

The regression model included three independent variables and one dependent variable. Access to financial services (X_1) was measured by loans and grants, savings opportunities, and access to formal banks. Entrepreneurship training (X_2) was measured by business skills training, marketing and product development, and mentorship and coaching. Integration support (X_3) was measured by business registration support, joint activities, and business plan development. Business growth (Y), the dependent variable, was measured through sales revenue, business expansion, and loan accessibility. The relationship was expressed as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$.

Data were cleaned, coded, tabulated, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, ANOVA, and R^2 were used for quantitative analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Diagnostic tests assessed normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, and outliers. Hypotheses were tested at a 5% significance level. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure data management were maintained throughout the study.

4.0. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings

This Section presents the discussions of the empirical findings of the study. It presents the descriptive statistics the study examined the Effect of socio-economic inclusion on the business growth of refugees and host communities in Rwanda, using the Jya Mbere Project, as a case study. Descriptive statistics was adopted to analyses means and standard deviation behavior while inferential analysis was to assess the Effect of Socio- Economic Inclusion on business Growth. Hence, (154) respondents were simply considered and empirical results were arranged according to the study objectives.

Table 4. 1: Processing Summary

			Cases			
Gender	Valid		Missing		Total	
N	Percent		N	Percent	N	Percent
Male	83	100.0%	0	0.0%	83	100.0%
Female	71	100.0%	0	0.0%	71	100.0%

Source: Field data 2026

According to table 41 of the case processing summary showed that the size of our data were 154 respondents where 83 were male and 71 respondents were females and there were no missing data.

Table 4. 2: Respondent View on Effect of access to financial services on business sales revenue

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The loan I received through the Jya Mbere Project helped increase my business sales revenue.	154	4.01	1.108
Grants provided by the project enabled me to purchase more stock or inputs that improved sales.	154	4.03	.986
Access to savings opportunities has strengthened my business cash flow and boosted sales.	154	4.04	.928

Opening an account with a formal bank improved my ability to manage business transactions.	154	4.06	.912
Access to affordable credit improved my ability to attract new customers.	154	4.07	.971
Overall, access to financial services has contributed to an increase in my monthly sales revenue.	154	4.08	.974
Digital financial services from the project made it easier to receive payments from customers.	154	4.11	.981
The financial products offered were suitable for the needs of my business.	154	4.12	1.012
Valid N (listwise)	154		

Source: Field data 2026

Table 4.2 presents respondents' views on the effect of access to financial services on business sales revenue. The results show high mean scores ranging from 4.01 to 4.12, indicating general agreement that financial services provided through the Jya Mbere Project contributed positively to business growth. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement that financial products offered were suitable for business needs (M = 4.12), suggesting that the support was relevant to beneficiaries' financial requirements. The findings may be explained by challenges faced by refugee and host community entrepreneurs, including limited start-up capital, inadequate working capital, and difficulties accessing formal financial institutions. Loans, savings opportunities, grants, and digital financial services helped reduce these barriers and supported investment in stock, business expansion, and daily operations. Digital financial services also improved business transactions and customer payments (M = 4.11). These findings are consistent with the Resource-Based View Theory, which emphasizes the importance of valuable resources, including financial resources, in improving business performance. They also agree with Beck et al. (2019), who found that financial inclusion improves enterprise performance through increased access to capital. Overall, the findings indicate that financial inclusion was an important factor in improving business sales revenue. Programs should therefore strengthen affordable financial services, financial literacy, digital payment systems, and follow-up support to promote sustainable business growth.

Table 4. 3: Respondent View on Effect of entrepreneurship training on the expansion of businesses

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The business skills training I received improved how I manage my business operations.	154	4.03	1.090
Marketing and product development training enabled me to attract new customers.	154	4.04	.928
Training helped me understand how to plan and control business expenses.	154	4.05	.979
I improved the quality of my products or services because of the training.	154	4.08	.904
Because of the entrepreneurship training, my business has grown in size or capacity.	154	4.09	.959
Overall, entrepreneurship training contributed to the expansion of my business.	154	4.10	.962

Mentorship and coaching have guided me in making better business decisions.	154	4.13	.968
The training helped me introduce new products or expand existing ones.	154	4.15	.995
Valid N (listwise)	154		

Source: Field data 2026

Table 4.3 presents respondents' views on the effect of entrepreneurship training on business expansion. The findings show high mean scores ranging from 4.03 to 4.15, indicating that respondents generally agreed that training provided through the Jya Mbere Project contributed positively to business expansion. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement that training helped respondents introduce new products or expand existing ones (M = 4.15). This suggests that the training improved entrepreneurs' ability to identify market opportunities, develop products, and respond to customer needs. Mentorship and coaching also recorded a high mean score (M = 4.13), indicating that continuous guidance supported better business decisions. The findings may be explained by challenges such as limited business knowledge, weak management skills, and inadequate marketing capacity among refugee and host community entrepreneurs. Training in business planning, financial management, marketing, product development, and customer management helped address these gaps and improve business operations. The findings support Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that investment in knowledge and skills improves productivity and economic performance. They are also consistent with McKenzie and Woodruff (2017), who found that business training can improve business practices and performance among small enterprises. Overall, entrepreneurship training significantly contributed to business expansion. Future programmes should strengthen practical training, mentorship, monitoring, and follow-up support to promote sustainable business growth.

Table 4.4 : Respondent View on Effect of integration support offered on loan accessibility for businesses

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Participating in joint activities improved my networking with financial institutions.	154	3.97	1.019
The project helped me secure legal documents needed for loan applications.	154	4.02	.993
Support in obtaining business registration increased my chances of accessing a loan.	154	4.06	.975
Joint meetings with host communities and partners increased my understanding of loan requirements.	154	4.08	.863
The project improved my knowledge about credit processes and interest rates.	154	4.11	.904
Integration activities have made it easier for me to access loans for business purposes.	154	4.12	.907
Training in business plan development helped me prepare stronger loan applications.	154	4.15	.913
Integration support increased my confidence to approach banks and MFIs for a loan.	154	4.18	.904
Valid N (listwise)	154		

Source: Field data 2026

Table 4.4 presents respondents' views on the effect of integration support on loan accessibility for businesses. The findings show high mean scores ranging from 3.97 to 4.18, indicating general agreement that integration support provided through the Jya Mbere Project improved beneficiaries' ability to access business loans. The highest mean score was recorded for increased confidence to approach banks and microfinance institutions (MFIs) for loans (M = 4.18). This was followed by training in business plan development, which helped respondents prepare stronger loan applications (M = 4.15), and integration activities that facilitated access to business loans (M = 4.12). The lowest mean score was recorded for joint activities improving networking with financial institutions (M = 3.97), although respondents still agreed with the statement.

These findings may be attributed to project interventions such as business registration support, legal documentation, business planning, financial literacy training, and engagement with financial institutions. These activities improved beneficiaries' understanding of loan requirements and credit processes, increasing their readiness to seek financing. The findings support Financial Inclusion Theory, which emphasizes that improved access to financial services promotes economic participation and entrepreneurship. They also agree with previous studies showing that financial literacy and institutional support can improve credit access among vulnerable entrepreneurs. Overall, integration support contributed positively to loan accessibility and strengthened the growth potential of businesses owned by refugees and host community members.

Table 4. 1: Respondent View on Overall Effect of Socio-Economic Inclusion on Business Growth

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Socio-economic inclusion initiatives have improved my overall business performance.	154	4.01	1.026
My sales revenue increased as a result of the support received from the Jya Mbere Project.	154	4.02	.946
My business has expanded in size, products, or customers due to project interventions.	154	4.03	.914
The project strengthened my business resilience during economic challenges.	154	4.05	.955
I have better access to credit facilities compared to before the project.	154	4.06	.876
Overall, socio-economic inclusion has contributed to sustainable business growth.	154	4.08	.953
Training and financial support helped me compete better in the local market.	154	4.10	.955
Interactions with host and refugee communities improved me business opportunities.	154	4.13	.948
Valid N (listwise)	**154**		

Source: Field data 2026

Table 4.5 presents respondents' views on the overall effect of socio-economic inclusion on business growth. The findings show high mean scores ranging from 4.01 to 4.13, indicating that respondents generally agreed that socio-economic inclusion initiatives under the Jya Mbere Project were positively associated with business growth. The high level of agreement suggests that financial services, entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and integration support were perceived as helpful in addressing barriers faced by refugee and host community entrepreneurs, including limited access to finance, inadequate business skills, weak market networks, and integration challenges. These interventions were also associated with improved business knowledge, access to resources, market participation, and business resilience. The findings are supported by the Resource-Based View Theory, which emphasizes that valuable resources such as financial capital, knowledge, and social networks can contribute to improved business performance. They are also consistent with previous studies showing positive relationships between financial inclusion, entrepreneurship training, social networks, and enterprise growth. However, the findings should not be interpreted as definitive proof that the Jya Mbere Project caused business growth, because the study was based primarily on respondents' perceptions and statistical associations rather than an experimental or longitudinal design. The results therefore provide evidence of a positive relationship between socio-economic inclusion and business growth. From a policy and project management perspective, future programmes should combine financial support, skills development, integration activities, monitoring, and follow-up to strengthen sustainable business outcomes.

Table 4. 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.989[a]	.979	.978	.169	1.120

Source: Field data 2026

According to Table 4.6, the regression model produced an R Square (R^2) value of 0.979. This means that access to financial services, entrepreneurship training, and integration support jointly explained 97.9% of the observed variation in business growth among refugee and host community entrepreneurs under the Jya Mbere Project. The remaining 2.1% represents variation in business growth associated with factors not included in the model and random error. Therefore, the model has very strong explanatory power within the study sample. However, R^2 does not mean that the three predictors caused 97.9% of business growth. It only indicates how much variation in the observed business growth scores can be statistically accounted for by the predictors included in the regression model. The high R^2 should therefore be interpreted cautiously and considered alongside other results, including regression coefficients, significance levels, and diagnostic tests. Multicollinearity and other regression assumptions should also be assessed to determine whether the model provides a reliable explanation of the observed relationships.

Table 4. 7: Coefficients regression results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-.055	.062		-.880	.380
Access to Financial Services	.564	.059	.529	9.637	.000
Entrepreneurship Training	.117	.050	.129	2.334	.021
Integration support offered	.331	.057	.340	5.831	.000

Source: Field data 2026

Table 4.12 presents the regression coefficients showing the individual contribution of each socio-economic inclusion variable to business growth. The results show that all three variables had positive and statistically significant relationships with business growth. Access to financial services had the strongest relationship ($\beta = 0.564, p < 0.001$), followed by integration support ($\beta = 0.331, p < 0.001$) and entrepreneurship training ($\beta = 0.117, p = 0.021$). The coefficients indicate that, holding other variables constant, higher levels of each socio-economic inclusion factor were associated with higher business growth. Access to financial services was the strongest predictor, suggesting that improved access to credit, savings, and digital financial services was associated with better business outcomes. This finding supports the Resource-Based View Theory, which emphasizes the importance of financial resources in business performance, and is consistent with Beck et al. (2019). Integration support was also significantly associated with business growth. Activities that strengthened relationships between refugee and host communities, improved market linkages, and connected entrepreneurs with support institutions may have enhanced access to business opportunities. This finding supports the importance of social networks and institutional support in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship training had the smallest coefficient but remained statistically significant. This suggests that stronger business skills, financial management, innovation, and decision-making were associated with improved business growth. The finding is consistent with Human Capital Theory and Banerjee et al. (2020). Since all p-values were below 0.05, the three null hypotheses were rejected. Overall, the results provide evidence of significant positive statistical relationships between the three socio-economic inclusion variables and business growth. However, the coefficients should not be interpreted as definitive proof of causality because the study design does not establish causal effects.

5.0. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study concludes that socio-economic inclusion was positively and significantly associated with business growth among refugee and host community entrepreneurs under the Jya Mbere Project. The findings addressed all three study objectives. Access to financial services had the strongest relationship with business growth ($\beta = 0.564$, $p < 0.001$), followed by integration support ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$) and entrepreneurship training ($\beta = 0.117$, $p = 0.021$). These results indicate that access to financial resources, business skills, and social networks were important factors associated with improved business performance.

The study further concludes that the three dimensions of socio-economic inclusion complemented each other in supporting business development. Financial services provided access to resources for business activities, entrepreneurship training strengthened business knowledge and management skills, while integration support enhanced social networks, market opportunities, and institutional connections.

Overall, the findings provide strong statistical evidence of a positive relationship between socio-economic inclusion and business growth. The high explanatory power of the regression model further demonstrates the relevance of the selected inclusion factors in explaining variations in business growth. However, these findings should be interpreted as statistical relationships rather than definitive proof of causality.

In conclusion, socio-economic inclusion represents an important pathway for strengthening business performance, self-reliance, and economic participation among refugees and host communities in Rwanda. The study demonstrates that combining financial access, entrepreneurship capacity, and social integration provides a stronger foundation for sustainable business development and inclusive economic participation.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following actions to strengthen socio-economic inclusion and sustainable business growth among refugees and host communities in Rwanda.

1. Government of Rwanda should expand affordable financial services, entrepreneurship programmes, and coordination among institutions supporting refugee economic empowerment.
2. MINEMA should strengthen economic integration through business registration, legal documentation, entrepreneurship opportunities, and linkages between refugees, host communities, financial institutions, and markets.
3. Financial institutions should provide refugee-friendly financial products, including low-collateral loans, affordable savings services, flexible repayment arrangements, and financial literacy support.
4. Development partners should expand practical entrepreneurship training, mentorship, coaching, business advisory services, market linkages, and digital financial literacy.
5. Entrepreneurs should participate actively in training and financial literacy programmes, maintain proper financial records, use digital financial services, and strengthen business networks.

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