Empowering Change through Gender Capacity-Building and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Performance at Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation Kenya

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Abstract: *This study examined the influence of gender capacity-building practices on the performance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs at the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation in Nairobi, Kenya. Anchored on Gender Role Theory and Feminist Theory, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, targeting 136 staff members. Qualitative insights were obtained from 35 respondents through key informant interviews, while quantitative data were collected via structured questionnaires from all 136 participants using a census sampling approach. Data were analyzed thematically for qualitative responses and statistically using SPSS for quantitative data. Findings revealed that gender-responsive practices significantly enhanced CSR performance, explaining 96.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.966$, $p = 0.000$). Among the predictors, gender-focused capacity-building had the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.612$, $p = 0.000$), demonstrating that equipping staff with gender-related skills and knowledge directly improves CSR outcomes. Other factors, including financial inclusion ($\beta = 0.233$, $p = 0.011$) and gender-focused technological innovations ($\beta = 0.145$, $p = 0.000$), also contributed positively, while gender representation in leadership showed no statistically significant effect. The study concluded that CSR effectiveness is maximized when gender capacity-building is inclusive, measurable, and aligned with community needs. It recommended the strategic integration of gender-focused training, systematic monitoring, and policy reinforcement to strengthen CSR program performance at the Foundation.*

Keywords: *Empowering, Change, Gender Capacity-Building, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Performance, Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation and Kenya*

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1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a strategic tool for businesses worldwide seeking to maximize shareholder value, enhance organizational reputation, and gain competitive advantage (Salam & Jahed, 2023). Beyond profitability, CSR encompasses ethical, legal, and economic responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of managing relationships with multiple stakeholders, including employees, communities, and governments (Fontoura & Coelho, 2022). Yet, the effectiveness of CSR programs often depends on their inclusivity, particularly regarding gender. Studies indicate that CSR initiatives fail to achieve their intended impact when they do not integrate gender-responsive practices that address the distinct social and economic challenges faced by men and women (Guelich & Guelich, 2024). For

instance, in the Maldives, firms with only 13% female representation on boards demonstrated weak links between diversity-driven CSR activities and financial performance due to tokenism and underrepresentation in leadership (Naeem et al., 2021).

Globally, gender-sensitive CSR has become a critical focus, aligning with international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment (Ballados & Guevarra, 2020). Multinational corporations have integrated gender-responsive capacity-building programs to enhance workforce diversity, foster innovation, and improve social cohesion (Yadav, Tiwari, Sharma & Ali, 2023). In the United States, transformative programs such as Procter & Gamble's "Share the Care" initiative provide equal parental leave irrespective of gender, promoting workplace inclusivity and redefining caregiving roles (Sankhe, 2024; Zhang, 2021). Similarly, Salesforce's efforts to close the gender pay gap demonstrate how gender-responsive policies in CSR can advance equity while enhancing organizational performance. In emerging economies, initiatives like Hindustan Unilever's Project Shakthi in India empower rural women entrepreneurs through capacity-building and market access, creating economic opportunities while expanding company reach (Fernandes & Shailashree, 2022; Yadav et al., 2023). Programs such as Infosys Women in Tech further exemplify the role of gender-focused capacity-building in addressing underrepresentation in STEM fields, highlighting the critical link between skills development and CSR effectiveness (Gupta, 2025).

In Europe, regulatory frameworks reinforce gender-responsive CSR practices. Norway mandates 40% female representation on publicly listed boards, setting an international benchmark for corporate inclusivity and fostering culturally transformative leadership practices (Hulkkonen, 2024). Sweden integrates gender equality into national CSR reporting, compelling firms to transparently disclose gender-focused initiatives and outcomes, thereby stimulating competitive improvements in inclusivity (Hytönen, 2025; Lincoln, 2023). These policies illustrate how institutional support and accountability mechanisms enhance the impact of gender-sensitive capacity-building on CSR performance.

In Africa, gender-responsive CSR has gained momentum, aligned with continental frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, which prioritizes inclusivity and gender equality for sustainable development (Cole, 2023; Engel, 2021). Rwanda exemplifies this approach, with women holding over 60% of parliamentary seats and corporate programs providing vocational training to economically empower women in rural communities

(Senent Venerdi, 2023; Muza & Thomas, 2022). Ghana and South Africa also provide illustrative cases: firms with low gender diversity on boards and inconsistent CSR funding show weaker performance outcomes, whereas initiatives like Vodacom's "Code like a Girl" program enhance digital skills and career readiness among young women, contributing to broader societal and organizational gains (Juliana, 2021; Vijeyarasa & Liu, 2022; Sikhosana, 2024). These examples highlight that gender-focused capacity-building not only addresses social inequalities but also strengthens CSR impact by fostering innovation, accountability, and stakeholder trust.

Within East Africa, organizations increasingly implement CSR initiatives that integrate gender-responsive capacity-building, reflecting a recognition of the link between social inclusivity and organizational performance. In Tanzania, firms contribute to community education and mentorship, improving both societal welfare and the talent pool for recruitment (Mwanapara, Mwonge & Tlegray, 2022). Such efforts align with Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals by reducing inequalities and promoting equitable access to opportunities (Masanja, 2023).

Kenya presents a nuanced context where gender disparities in corporate leadership persist, with women occupying only 19% of managerial roles (Manoti, 2024). While CSR initiatives exist, their impact is constrained by systemic barriers such as limited policy enforcement and cultural resistance. Safaricom, through its M-Pesa Foundation, exemplifies the potential of gender-responsive CSR in the local context. Programs such as "Wezesha" focus on building the capacity of women entrepreneurs by providing mentorship, skills training, and financial access, particularly in underserved rural areas (Magale & Yengeni, 2024). These capacity-building initiatives not only enhance women's economic empowerment (Makario, Mutui & Muhingi, 2023) but also strengthen CSR performance by ensuring programs are equitable, sustainable, and responsive to community needs.

Despite the substantial investments by the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation in health, education, and environmental initiatives, performance gaps persist. Surveys indicate that a significant proportion of beneficiaries report minimal long-term impact, suggesting that CSR outcomes are closely tied to the effectiveness of gender-responsive practices (Infotrak, 2022; Safaricom Foundation, 2023). Consequently, understanding the influence of gender-focused capacity-building on CSR performance is crucial for designing programs that achieve measurable social and economic outcomes. By equipping women with knowledge, skills, and opportunities, capacity-building interventions enhance inclusivity, accountability, and

stakeholder engagement, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of CSR initiatives.

This study, therefore, seeks to critically examine the relationship between gender capacity-building practices and CSR performance at the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation, providing insights into how gender-responsive initiatives can optimize CSR outcomes, enhance organizational reputation, and contribute to sustainable development in Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a strategic avenue for organizations, including the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation, to enhance social impact while maintaining competitiveness in a globalized and technologically advanced business environment (Benabed & Boeru, 2023; Toyya, Guyo & Odhiambo, 2024). While the Foundation invests heavily in CSR initiatives—ranging from environmental conservation and disaster relief to maternal and child health programs—evidence suggests that the long-term impact of these initiatives remains inconsistent. A 2022 survey by Infotrak indicated that 47% of beneficiaries reported minimal sustained benefits, highlighting gaps in program effectiveness.

Although prior studies have examined CSR adoption and general organizational performance, few have explored the influence of gender-responsive practices, particularly capacity-building initiatives, on CSR outcomes. Gender capacity-building programs—such as mentorship, skills training, and financial empowerment for women—are increasingly recognized as critical for promoting inclusivity and improving program performance. Yet, the specific relationship between these initiatives and CSR effectiveness within Kenyan corporate foundations remains underexplored.

This gap is significant given the persistent gender disparities in leadership and access to resources, which can limit the strategic potential of CSR programs. Understanding how gender-focused capacity-building enhances CSR performance is therefore crucial for designing interventions that are both socially equitable and operationally effective. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by examining the influence of gender capacity-building practices on the performance of CSR programs at the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

This section presents the theoretical and empirical foundations underpinning the study. The theoretical review explores Gender Role Theory and Feminist Theory as guiding lenses to understand how social norms, cultural expectations, and structural inequalities shape women's participation in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. These frameworks illuminate the significance of capacity-building interventions such as mentorship, skills training, financial empowerment, and technological inclusion. The empirical review synthesizes evidence from global, African, and Kenyan contexts, highlighting both successes and gaps in gender-responsive CSR practices. Together, these perspectives establish the rationale for examining gender capacity-building as a driver of CSR performance.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on Gender Role Theory and Feminist Theory to examine how gender capacity-building initiatives influence the performance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Gender Role Theory, introduced by Eagly and Wood (1980), explains how societal norms and cultural expectations shape gender-specific behaviors and access to leadership, economic resources, and decision-making. In the context of CSR, these norms can limit women's participation, thereby constraining program effectiveness. Applying this theory enables organizations to identify and dismantle barriers that prevent women from fully engaging in CSR, highlighting the importance of structured gender-responsive capacity-building interventions (Anglin, Kincaid, Short & Allen, 2022).

Mentorship programs enhance CSR performance by developing women leaders who can actively contribute to program design, execution, and evaluation. Mentorship challenges traditional gender norms and empowers women to take strategic roles in CSR initiatives, improving program inclusivity and effectiveness (Ayisi & Krisztina, 2022).

Skills training equips women with the competencies required to implement CSR projects efficiently, including project management, financial literacy, and technological proficiency. According to Feminist Theory, addressing these structural inequalities enhances both individual and organizational capacity, increasing innovation and the overall impact of CSR programs (Butler, 2025; Costa & Sharp, 2023).

Financial empowerment strengthens women's ability to participate in and benefit from CSR initiatives. By providing access to financial literacy, microcredit, and entrepreneurial support, organizations can maximize the reach and sustainability of CSR programs, thereby improving performance outcomes (Andrews, Lariccia, Talwar & Bosacki, 2021).

Technological inclusion ensures women can leverage digital tools to enhance CSR delivery, monitoring, and scalability. Feminist Theory highlights that bridging technology gaps mitigates structural inequities, enabling women to contribute effectively to CSR objectives and drive innovation (Esquivel, Ghosh, & Kelleher, 2022).

Integrating Gender Role Theory and Feminist Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how gender-focused capacity-building—through mentorship, skills training, financial empowerment, and technological inclusion—directly enhances CSR performance. Gender Role Theory addresses social norms restricting engagement, while Feminist Theory highlights structural barriers to resource access and decision-making. Together, these perspectives justify the implementation of targeted capacity-building initiatives as a strategic approach to improving CSR outcomes, promoting inclusivity, and achieving sustainable social and economic impact.

2.2 Empirical Review

Gender Capacity-Building and Performance of Corporate Social Responsibility Programs

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) performance in Kenya has gained increasing prominence as organizations recognize their role in socio-economic development. Safaricom's M-Pesa Foundation exemplifies strong CSR practices, focusing on education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment, all of which align with the Sustainable Development Goals (Musembi, 2024). Initiatives such as the M-Pesa Foundation Academy provide quality education to underserved students, simultaneously nurturing leadership and business acumen (Ngware, 2024). Investments in rural schools, including digital learning resources and classroom construction, have improved enrolment and reduced dropout rates in disadvantaged counties, demonstrating a positive CSR impact (Ngware, 2024). Similarly, maternal and child health programs like Uzazi Salama have significantly reduced maternal mortality in regions such as Bungoma and Siaya by 25%, while mobile health clinics have expanded access to over 500,000 citizens annually (Ndugu, 2021; Ministry of Health, 2022). Safaricom's sustainability initiatives, including large-scale tree planting and water catchment restoration, have enhanced environmental resilience and livelihoods, while financial inclusion through M-Pesa has economically empowered women and small entrepreneurs, increasing micro and small business revenues by 20% (Nyamae, 2024; Lemaiyan & Chelogoi, 2023).

While these examples highlight strong CSR performance, gaps remain in structural efficiency, public-private collaboration, and equitable participation. Moreover, despite widespread CSR adoption, limited attention has been given to the role of gender capacity-building as a determinant of CSR effectiveness. Gender capacity-building—encompassing mentorship, skills training, financial empowerment, and technological inclusion—enhances program outcomes by fostering inclusivity, equity, and long-term sustainability (Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Coles, 2024). Training and educational programs equip women with the knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in CSR, enabling initiatives to address diverse community needs effectively. However, few studies in Kenya empirically examine how these interventions directly influence CSR performance, reflecting a significant contextual and methodological gap.

Internationally, evidence demonstrates the impact of gender-focused capacity-building on CSR outcomes. The Philippines' GRAISEA program, supported by Oxfam, empowers women in agribusiness through financial management and legal training, translating to improved productivity and inclusive business practices (Sulasula, 2024; Geges, 2023). Similarly, Brazilian studies indicate that female board representation enhances corporate social performance by promoting workforce diversity, community engagement, and human rights compliance (Tzanakou, Infanger, Oliveira, & Staniscuaski, 2024; Cezarino, Liboni, Hunter, Pacheco, & Martins, 2022). In Chile, gender-focused educational initiatives at global forums have driven inclusive corporate policies and strengthened CSR outcomes by advocating equitable pay, representation, and workplace safety (Carrasco & Palma, 2024). These examples illustrate the conceptual gap in CSR research, where gender capacity-building is often treated as a peripheral rather than a core factor in program performance.

In Africa, gender capacity-building initiatives have yielded tangible CSR impacts. Ghana's Guzakuza Agribusiness Fellowship-Ignite trains women in agricultural entrepreneurship, equipping them with skills, networks, and knowledge to improve agribusiness sustainability across 21 countries (Odoom, Opoku, Annor-Frempong, Dick-Sagoe, & Crowder, 2022; Ansu-Mensah, Twum, Agyapong, & Nimako, 2023). Zimbabwe's Akashinga project employs women as anti-poaching rangers, promoting environmental sustainability while generating income and leadership opportunities, demonstrating the dual impact of capacity-building on social and environmental CSR objectives (Chundu, Masara, & Mucheri, 2022; Nkaye, 2024). Similarly, South Africa's "Take a Girl Child to Work Day" exposes young women to corporate environments, fostering career aspirations and workforce inclusivity, ultimately improving CSR program

effectiveness (Kuppuswami & Ferreira, 2022; Serfontein-Jordaan & Dlungwane, 2022).

Gender capacity-building also drives CSR performance in the renewable energy and technology sectors. Tanzania's Solar Mamas initiative trains rural women as solar technicians, enabling access to electricity for 1,858 households while creating economic opportunities for participants (Masanja, 2023; Mkonyi, 2022). In Uganda, programs such as Tech Herfrica reduce the digital divide by providing women with digital literacy, financial management, and e-commerce skills, which enhance entrepreneurship and productivity, thus increasing the social impact and reach of CSR initiatives (Fadhiila, 2024; Isabirye, 2024). In Rwanda, WomenLift Health develops women leaders in healthcare, improving systemic health policies and the sustainability of CSR interventions (Manikuzwe, 2023; Celestin, 2024).

Locally, gender capacity-building has been integrated into CSR programs across Kenyan counties. In Meru, the CORE-JSDF partnership provides training in gender mainstreaming and entrepreneurship, enhancing SME participation in socially responsive projects (Baariu, 2021; Mbijiwe, 2021). Kisumu County demonstrates gender-sensitive environmental CSR through workshops promoting inclusivity in disaster risk management and climate adaptation (Wabwire, 2022; Bunde, 2022). National initiatives, such as the Gender-Responsive Procurement Initiative, build women's business capacities, fostering equitable access to government contracts and enhancing CSR effectiveness (Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Wanjiku & Kithae, 2021).

Despite these positive outcomes, gaps remain. Many studies focus on descriptive accounts of gender capacity-building rather than systematically linking these initiatives to measurable CSR performance. Moreover, most evidence originates from high-income or select African contexts, leaving geographical and contextual gaps in understanding how local Kenyan CSR programs can optimize gender-focused interventions. There is also limited research on integrating multiple capacity-building dimensions, mentorship, skills training, financial empowerment, and technological inclusion into a cohesive framework for evaluating CSR outcomes. Addressing these gaps is critical to ensuring that gender-responsive CSR initiatives are both inclusive and strategically effective, ultimately enhancing socio-economic development and sustainable organizational performance in Kenya.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted to examine the influence of gender capacity-building on the performance of CSR programs at Safaricom M-PESA Foundation. The study employed a convergent parallel design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both measurable outcomes and contextual insights. The research design, study area, target population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, and pilot testing are described. Further, issues of validity, reliability, and ethical compliance are addressed. Data analysis techniques are detailed to illustrate how triangulation enhanced the robustness of findings, ensuring credible, comprehensive, and contextually grounded results for both practice and scholarship.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a convergent parallel design, which enabled simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by their independent analysis (Bhana, 2024). The quantitative component provided measurable data for statistical interpretation, while the qualitative aspect generated non-numerical insights for deeper contextual understanding. Quantitative data underwent statistical analysis, whereas qualitative data was analyzed thematically (Christou, 2022). Triangulation was then employed to compare findings, highlighting consistencies and discrepancies across methods.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted at the Safaricom M-PESA Foundation, a subsidiary of Safaricom Ltd., Kenya's largest mobile service provider (Mulili, 2022). Located at Safaricom House in Westlands, Nairobi, the foundation leverages M-PESA's extensive reach to implement Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs across Kenya. Its initiatives focus on education, health, environment, and economic empowerment, targeting marginalized communities. Nairobi County was chosen for this study due to its proximity to the foundation's headquarters, where CSR policy-making and program coordination occur. Moreover, Nairobi serves as a monitoring hub for national projects, making it a suitable site for analyzing gender-responsive approaches within CSR initiatives.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised 136 staff members involved in CSR program implementation at the foundation (Willie, 2024). These included 20 trainers overseeing capacity building, 25 field officers managing grassroots project execution, 15 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) officers, 5 finance officers, and 16 communication/public relations staff. Additionally, 20

officers were responsible for partnerships and resource mobilization, 20 program officers coordinated initiatives, and 15 logistics staff supported operations. Key informants included the Director of Sustainable Business and Social Impact, as well as the Acting Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, both of whom provide strategic oversight of CSR, gender programming, and policy.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Target Population
Trainers	20
Field Officers	25
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Officers	15
Finance Officers	5
Communication & PR Officers	16
Partnership & Resource Mobilization	20
Program Officers	20
Logistics & Operations Staff	15
Total	**136**

Source: Field data, 2025

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

The quantitative sample consisted of the entire target population of 136 staff, selected through a census approach owing to the manageable population size (Omair, 2025). The qualitative sample size was determined through saturation, achieved after interviewing 35 participants, including three key informants. This ensured a comprehensive representation of strategic and operational perspectives.

Table 2: Sample Frame

Category	Sample Size
Trainers	20
Field Officers	25
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Officers	15
Finance Officers	5
Communication & PR Officers	16
Partnership & Resource Mobilization	20
Program Officers	20
Logistics & Operations Staff	15
Total	136
Key Informants (Qualitative)	3

Source: Field data, 2025

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

A combination of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was used. The questionnaire, designed for staff, featured closed-ended Likert-scale questions aligned with the study objectives. Section A gathered demographic data, while subsequent sections addressed gender capacity building, leadership

representation, financial inclusion, gender-responsive technological innovations, and CSR performance. Additional sections captured data on the moderating variable (policy implementation strength) and the dependent variable (CSR performance).

For the qualitative component, interviews were conducted with key informants and program coordinators. Guided by themes identified in the literature review, open-ended questions encouraged in-depth exploration of gender-responsive practices and CSR performance. Interview guides contained eight concise yet flexible questions to ensure focus while allowing elaboration.

3.5.1 Pilot Testing of Instruments

A pilot study was conducted with 14 staff (10% of the target population) at the M-PESA Foundation program in Kiambu County, a site chosen for its operational similarity to Nairobi while avoiding data duplication. The pilot assessed the clarity, reliability, and applicability of the tools (Teresi, Yu, Stewart, & Hays, 2022). Feedback from participants informed revisions to ambiguous items and improved instrument design.

3.5.1.1 Validity

Validity was ensured through content, construct, and face validity (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). Experts in CSR reviewed the questionnaires to confirm coverage of relevant program aspects. Instruments were aligned with theoretical concepts of gender-responsive CSR practices to enhance construct validity. Pilot testing further refined the clarity and wording of items, strengthening face validity.

3.5.1.2 Reliability

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures internal consistency (Sudina & Plonsky, 2021). A threshold of 0.7 or above (Izah, Sylva & Hait, 2023) was considered acceptable, ensuring the tools consistently captured the intended constructs.

Reliability Results of Constructs

Internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (Table 4.5). All constructs surpassed the minimum threshold of 0.70, confirming strong reliability of the measurement tools (Avinç & Doğan, 2024). The overall scale recorded an excellent reliability coefficient (α = 0.947, items = 54). Financial Inclusion (α = 0.898) demonstrated the highest reliability, followed by CSR Performance (α = 0.872), while Technological Innovations (α = 0.700) met the minimum acceptable level (Adeniran, 2025). These results affirm the suitability of the instruments for statistical analysis.

Table 3: Reliability of constructs

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
CSR Performance	0.872	9
Gender Capacity Building	0.765	9
Financial Inclusion	0.898	9
Technological Innovations	0.700	9
Gender Representation in Leadership	0.783	9
Policy Implementation Strength	0.775	9
Overall Instrument	**0.947**	**54**

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Following approval from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), NACOSTI, and the foundation, questionnaires were distributed to respondents, who completed them independently to minimize bias. Qualitative interviews with key informants were scheduled at convenient times and locations. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes.

Data saturation guided the qualitative phase to ensure comprehensive thematic coverage.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques, with findings triangulated for holistic interpretation. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarized demographics and key variables through frequencies,

means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics included correlation analysis to establish relationships between gender-responsive variables and CSR performance. Hierarchical multiple regression, conducted in two stages, tested the influence of independent variables on CSR outcomes and the moderating effect of policy implementation, using a 95% confidence interval. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to generate patterns and sub-themes around gender-responsive practices. Findings from both strands were compared and integrated through triangulation to enhance validity and depth.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed (Kang & Hwang, 2021). Privacy and confidentiality were maintained by assigning codes instead of personal identifiers, and data were securely stored. The principle of non-maleficence was upheld to avoid harm or coercion. Informed consent was obtained after participants were briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and right to withdraw. Approval was granted by CUEA and NACOSTI, and all research protocols adhered to anti-plagiarism and AI-use requirements. Findings were reported truthfully, ensuring data integrity and research credibility.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study distributed 136 questionnaires, out of which 131 were duly completed and returned, yielding a 96% response rate (Table 5). This surpasses the 70% threshold generally recommended (Huang, 2023). A rate above 90% strengthens validity, enhances generalizability, and reflects both the relevance of the study and the high engagement of participants. The strong response was attributed to adherence to ethical standards and rigorous pre-testing of the instruments, which minimized ambiguity and errors.

Table 4: Response Rate

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires Returned/Response Rate	131	96%
Non-response rate	5	4%
Total	**136**	**100%**

Source: Field data (2025)

Level of Education

Background characteristics of respondents were summarized to contextualize perspectives on gender-responsive CSR initiatives at the M-PESA Foundation.

Table 5: Level of Education

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	29	22.1%
Undergraduate Degree	76	58.0%
Master's Degree	23	17.6%
PhD	3	2.3%
Total	**131**	**100%**

Source: Field data (2025)

The findings indicate a highly educated workforce capable of managing complex CSR initiatives, consistent with Manoti (2024), who found that education significantly influences participation in social development programs.

Years Worked at the Foundation

Table 6: Years of Service at the Foundation

Years Worked	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	11	8.4%
1–5 years	68	51.9%
6–10 years	34	26.0%
Above 10 years	18	13.7%
Total	**131**	**100%**

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Gender Capacity-Building and CSR Performance (N = 131)

Gender Capacity-Building Dimension	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
Foundation frequently provides gender-focused training programs	1 (0.8)	3 (2.3)	22 (16.8)	69 (52.7)	36 (27.5)	4.04	0.77
Employees and beneficiaries rarely receive adequate gender training	2 (1.5)	1 (0.8)	38 (29.0)	61 (46.6)	29 (22.1)	3.87	0.81
Gender training sessions improve participants' skills and awareness	0 (0.0)	2 (1.5)	8 (6.1)	82 (62.6)	39 (29.8)	4.21	0.61
Women and marginalized groups frequently receive support for entrepreneurship initiatives	1 (0.8)	1 (0.8)	47 (35.9)	57 (43.5)	25 (19.1)	3.79	0.78
Gender-inclusive enterprise programs translate into economic empowerment	1 (0.8)	3 (2.3)	22 (16.8)	69 (52.7)	36 (27.5)	4.04	0.78
Foundation invests in gender-responsive business development programs	1 (0.8)	0 (0.0)	45 (34.4)	66 (50.4)	19 (14.5)	3.78	0.72
Educational programs promote gender equality in skills development	7 (5.3)	36 (27.5)	43 (32.8)	29 (22.1)	16 (12.2)	3.08	1.10
Training materials integrate gender-sensitive content	1 (0.8)	19 (14.5)	32 (24.4)	60 (45.8)	19 (14.5)	3.59	0.94
Gender-based education initiatives address societal inequalities	0 (0.0)	9 (6.9)	39 (29.8)	67 (51.1)	16 (12.2)	3.69	0.78
Overall Composite Mean	-	-	-	-	-	**3.79**	**0.49**

Source: Field data (2025)

The descriptive statistics reveal that gender-focused training is the most impactful aspect of capacity-building, with 62.6% of respondents agreeing and 29.8% strongly agreeing that training sessions improve skills and awareness (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.61). Similarly, enterprise initiatives show a positive perception, though responses indicate variability in inclusivity for marginalized groups (Mean = 3.79, SD = 0.78). Gender-based education demonstrates moderate influence, with significant neutral responses suggesting gaps in outreach and integration (Mean = 3.69, SD = 0.78). The lowest-rated item, promotion of gender equality in skills development (Mean = 3.08, SD = 1.10), indicates the need for enhanced programmatic targeting. Overall, the findings underscore

that consistent, inclusive, and well-structured gender capacity-building efforts contribute positively to CSR performance by fostering awareness, economic empowerment, and equitable participation.

Discussion: Gender Capacity-Building and CSR Performance

The descriptive findings reveal that gender capacity-building initiatives at the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation are largely perceived as effective in enhancing CSR performance, particularly through training, enterprise initiatives, and gender-based education. Training programs received the highest positive ratings (Mean = 4.21, SD =

1048

0.61), suggesting that participants recognize tangible improvements in skills and awareness. This aligns with global studies which emphasize that consistent gender-focused training enhances institutional responsiveness and fosters inclusive practices (Adewusi, Adekunle, Mustapha & Uzoka, 2020; Ruiters & Mathibe, 2023). From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support Gender Role Theory, which posits that interventions such as skills development and mentorship can challenge traditional gender norms and empower women to participate effectively in organizational initiatives, including CSR (Ayisi & Krisztina, 2022; Lamontagne-Godwin et al., 2019). By equipping women and marginalized groups with knowledge and skills, the foundation disrupts socialized constraints, enabling equitable participation in decision-making and program execution.

Enterprise initiatives aimed at economic empowerment received moderate agreement (Mean = 3.79, SD = 0.78), with some respondents remaining neutral regarding access for marginalized groups. This suggests that while financial empowerment programs are impactful, gaps remain in reaching all intended beneficiaries. Similar trends have been reported in Ghana and the Philippines, where targeted training and entrepreneurial support enhanced CSR outcomes but were limited by uneven outreach to rural or marginalized populations (Geges, 2023; Odoom et al., 2022). These findings corroborate Feminist Theory's assertion that structural inequities must be addressed through deliberate interventions, including mentorship, financial literacy, and inclusion in leadership roles, to achieve sustainable social and economic transformation (Esquivel, Ghosh & Kelleher, 2022; Butler, 2025). By embedding gender-focused enterprise programs into CSR, organizations can enhance both social responsibility and economic outcomes, reflecting a synergy between empowerment and organizational performance.

Gender-based education initiatives, while positively perceived (Mean = 3.69, SD = 0.78), displayed substantial neutrality, particularly regarding skills development and societal impact. This suggests that education programs are not yet fully optimized to translate knowledge into measurable CSR benefits, highlighting a contextual gap in Kenya relative to more structured global models (Carrasco & Palma, 2024; Kuppuswami & Ferreira, 2022). This echoes Gender Role Theory's emphasis on reshaping social discourse through educational and mentorship interventions, which can generate cascading effects on workforce diversity, equity, and inclusive corporate performance (Van Voorhis, 2022; Rubin & Bartle, 2023).

Interestingly, the lowest-rated item, promotion of gender equality in skills development (Mean = 3.08, SD = 1.10), indicates a critical area for improvement. While initiatives exist, variability in participation and content integration suggests a need for more targeted and contextually relevant

programs. This resonates with Ojo (2024), who noted that training content often lacks localized gender sensitivity, and underscores the importance of aligning capacity-building with both theoretical frameworks and the socio-cultural realities of beneficiaries.

Overall, the findings indicate that gender capacity-building enhances CSR performance by promoting inclusivity, skill enhancement, economic empowerment, and societal equity. The results validate theoretical perspectives from Gender Role and Feminist Theories, which posit that structured interventions addressing socialized gender norms and structural inequalities strengthen both individual and organizational outcomes. The study further identifies gaps in outreach, content integration, and inclusivity that future CSR programs must address to achieve equitable and sustainable impacts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that gender capacity-building practices significantly influence the performance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs at the Safaricom M-Pesa Foundation. Training initiatives were highly effective in enhancing skills and awareness among staff and beneficiaries, while enterprise programs contributed to economic empowerment, though gaps in outreach and inclusivity remain. Gender-based education initiatives positively influenced CSR performance but demonstrated variability in impact, particularly regarding skills development and societal equity. These findings corroborate Gender Role and Feminist Theories, illustrating that deliberate interventions addressing traditional gender norms and structural inequalities can enhance participation, equity, and sustainable organizational outcomes. Overall, integrating gender capacity-building into CSR programs fosters inclusivity, empowers marginalized groups, and strengthens the social and economic impact of corporate initiatives.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Enhance Training Programs
   The Foundation should expand and diversify gender-focused training sessions for both staff and beneficiaries. Training should include mentorship, leadership skills, financial literacy, and technological competencies. By targeting a broader audience and integrating practical, context-specific content, the Foundation can maximize CSR impact and address gaps in equity

(Government agencies, private sector, and NGOs can collaborate on content development).

2. Strengthen Enterprise Initiatives
   More inclusive enterprise programs should be designed to ensure that marginalized groups, particularly women in rural areas, have equitable access to resources, mentorship, and business networks. Implementing monitoring mechanisms can ensure outreach effectiveness and track long-term economic outcomes (Foundation management and local community leaders should jointly coordinate these programs).

3. Improve Gender-Based Education Integration
   Educational initiatives should explicitly embed gender-sensitive content to address societal inequalities and enhance skills development. Collaboration with educational institutions and NGOs can improve program quality and relevance. A focus on long-term follow-up and skill application will ensure sustainable CSR outcomes (policymakers and educational partners should be involved in program design).

4. Monitor and Evaluate Inclusivity
   Regular assessments of CSR programs should be conducted to measure inclusivity, participation, and socio-economic impact. Feedback from beneficiaries should inform program refinement, ensuring equitable representation and responsiveness to community needs (Foundation monitoring and evaluation teams, in partnership with independent auditors, can oversee this process).

5. Policy and Strategic Alignment
   Gender capacity-building initiatives should be strategically embedded into the Foundation's overall CSR framework, with clear objectives, performance indicators, and resource allocation. Policies should reinforce equity, sustainability, and inclusivity across all CSR activities (Foundation leadership should institutionalize these practices and align them with national gender equality policies).

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