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Mobile Money Usage and Financial Inclusion among Rural Households: Empirical Evidence from Bukombe District, Tanzania

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Abstract: *This study examined the influence of mobile money usage on financial inclusion among rural households in Bukombe District, Tanzania. Specifically, it explored how mobile money enhanced access to savings and financial services, facilitated access to credit, and influenced household financial decision-making and resilience. Guided by Financial Capability Theory, the study employed a qualitative case study design. Data was collected from 25 purposively selected participants, including rural household members and mobile money agents, using focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that mobile money was widely used for daily financial transactions, improved convenience and reduced reliance on cash. It enhanced access to savings by providing a secure and flexible platform for storing funds and supports access to financial assistance through quick transfers and informal credit. Additionally, mobile money improved household financial planning and strengthened resilience by enabling timely responses to economic shocks. However, its effectiveness was influenced by gender roles, financial literacy, and user confidence. The study concludes that mobile money significantly promoted financial inclusion, though its full potential depended on improved financial education and access.*

Keywords: *Mobile money, Financial inclusion, Rural households, Savings, Resilience, Tanzania*

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1. Introduction

Globally, over the past decade, mobile money services have increasingly been recognized as a transformative financial innovation that promotes financial inclusion, particularly among underserved populations in developing countries (Mhando, 2024). Mobile money platforms such as M-Pesa, Mixx by Yas, and Airtel Money have enabled households to perform financial transactions, including saving, sending, and receiving money, without relying on traditional banking infrastructure (Simatele & Dlamini, 2023). For rural households, where access to formal financial institutions remains limited, mobile money has become an essential tool for improving access to financial services, enhancing economic participation, and supporting household resilience (World Bank, 2022). Contemporary perspectives on financial inclusion emphasize not only access to financial services but also their usage, affordability, and impact on improving livelihoods, particularly in low-income and rural settings (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2021).

Despite the growing importance of mobile money, empirical evidence suggests that its usage and impact on financial inclusion remain uneven across different regions and population groups, especially in rural areas with infrastructural and socio-economic constraints (Evans, 2024; GSMA, 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa, recent studies indicate that while mobile money adoption rates have increased significantly, challenges such as low financial literacy, limited network coverage, and trust issues continue to hinder effective utilization among rural households (GSMA, 2023). For example, a study in rural Kenya found that although mobile money improved access to basic financial services, disparities persisted in usage intensity and the ability to leverage such services for productive investments (Suri & Jack, 2022). The study recommended targeted interventions to enhance financial literacy and infrastructure development to maximize the benefits of mobile money.

In Tanzania, mobile money services have expanded rapidly, contributing significantly to the country's financial inclusion agenda. Mhando (2024) reported that mobile money usage has improved access to financial services among rural populations, enabling households to engage in savings, credit access, and risk management activities. However, the study also highlighted persistent challenges, including limited digital literacy, unreliable network connectivity in remote areas, and transaction costs that discourage frequent usage (Mhando, 2024). Similarly, research by Nkwabi and Mlangwa (2023) found that while mobile money platforms have increased financial accessibility in rural districts, their impact on broader financial inclusion outcomes, such as wealth creation and investment, remains constrained by socio-economic factors and limited awareness.

Comparable findings are reported in other parts of Tanzania. A study conducted in Mwanza Region demonstrated that mobile money services have enhanced financial transactions and reduced reliance on informal financial systems among rural households (Kato & Moshi, 2022). However, the study emphasized that effective usage is often influenced by factors such as education level, income, and accessibility of mobile network services (Kato & Moshi, 2022). These findings suggest that while mobile money holds significant potential for advancing financial inclusion, its benefits are not uniformly realized across all rural communities.

Conceptually, mobile money usage is grounded in financial inclusion theory, which posits that access to affordable, reliable, and convenient financial services enables individuals and households to improve their economic well-being and manage financial risks effectively (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2021). When rural households actively use mobile money for transactions, savings, and credit, they are more likely to participate in the formal financial system, enhance income stability, and improve their overall living standards.

Generally, from the foregoing discussion, it is evident that while mobile money usage is widely acknowledged as a key driver of financial inclusion, there is limited empirical evidence examining how rural households in specific districts such as Bukombe utilize these services and the extent to which such usage translates into meaningful financial inclusion outcomes. Existing studies tend to focus on access and adoption at national or regional levels, with less attention given to localized contexts and usage patterns. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge this gap by examining mobile money usage and its influence on financial inclusion among rural households in Bukombe District, Tanzania, with a focus on usage patterns, accessibility, affordability, and socio-economic impacts to inform policy, practice, and future research.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Effective mobile money usage is central to improving financial inclusion, economic participation, and household resilience among rural populations. Mobile money services provide rural households with opportunities to save, transfer, and access credit, thereby reducing reliance on informal financial systems and promoting economic stability. However, many rural households face challenges in fully utilizing these services due to factors such as limited digital literacy, poor network connectivity, transaction costs, and low awareness of financial management practices (GSMA, 2023; Nkwabi & Mlangwa, 2023).

In Tanzania, there is limited empirical evidence documenting how rural households in districts like Bukombe access, use, and benefit from mobile money services. While national and regional studies highlight adoption rates, few studies investigate usage patterns, affordability, and the extent to which mobile money contributes to meaningful financial inclusion outcomes at the local level (Kato & Moshi, 2022; Mhando, 2024). Inadequate understanding of these dynamics may hinder the design of effective policies, interventions, and financial literacy programs that could maximize the potential of mobile money for rural households. Consequently, investigating mobile money usage and its impact on financial inclusion in Bukombe District is essential to inform policy, improve service delivery, and enhance economic participation among rural communities.

1.2 Research Objectives

Specifically, the study aimed:

(i) To explore how mobile money usage influences households' access to savings and financial services
(ii) To examine the role of mobile money in facilitating access to credit and financial support for household needs

(iii) To determine the role of mobile money in household economic decision-making and financial resilience

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mobile Money Usage and Its Influence on Households' Access to Savings and Financial Services

In financial inclusion literature, mobile money usage is widely regarded as a key mechanism for expanding households' access to savings and financial services, particularly in rural and low-income contexts. Mobile money platforms allow users to store, transfer, and manage funds with minimal reliance on traditional banking infrastructure, which is often limited in rural areas (Aker & Mbiti, 2022). From a theoretical perspective, mobile money aligns with financial inclusion frameworks that emphasize access, usage, and welfare outcomes as critical dimensions for reducing poverty and enhancing economic participation (Allen et al., 2021).

Recent empirical evidence illustrates the influence of mobile money on household access to savings and financial services across diverse settings. A longitudinal study conducted in Ghana found that mobile money users were significantly more likely to save regularly compared to non-users, attributing this to the convenience and security afforded by mobile wallets, especially where formal savings institutions were inaccessible (Boateng et al., 2023). Households in the study reported that the ability to hold small balances and transact securely increased their motivation to set aside funds for emergencies and planned expenditures, such as school fees and agricultural inputs (Boateng et al., 2023).

Similarly, research in rural Uganda by Nakabugu et al. (2024) showed that mobile money services positively influenced access to savings not only by enabling wallet-based savings but also by facilitating linkages with formal microfinance institutions. In households participating in the study, mobile money was used as a bridge to structured saving arrangements with village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), enhancing financial discipline and access to credit resources. However, the study highlighted that gender dynamics and intra-household decision-making processes shaped how different household members engaged with mobile savings services (Nakabugu et al., 2024).

In the Kenyan context, a comparative qualitative analysis observed that smallholder farmers using mobile money were more likely to engage in informal savings groups, often using mobile wallets as a record-keeping and pooling tool, which strengthened group trust and financial coordination (Mutua & Odhiambo, 2022). Participants noted that the use of mobile platforms reduced transaction costs and travel time to group meetings held for deposit collection, which in turn increased group savings and participation rates (Mutua & Odhiambo, 2022). This study underscored the role of mobile money as not only a personal savings tool but also a facilitator of collective financial practices.

Evidence from West Africa further demonstrates varied impacts of mobile money on savings behavior. A study in Senegal found that although mobile money users appreciated the convenience and reduced risk of theft, concerns about fees and transaction reliability sometimes discouraged frequent saving through mobile wallets (Diop & Sarr, 2025). The researchers emphasized that perceived cost and trust play pivotal roles in determining whether mobile money truly enhances access to savings services beyond basic remittances and payments (Diop & Sarr, 2025).

In Ethiopia, survey and interview data revealed that mobile money adoption enhanced access to savings among younger and more educated rural residents but had limited impact among older populations due to usability challenges and digital literacy gaps (Wolde & Kim, 2024). Households that overcame these barriers reported improved financial confidence and an increased ability to manage irregular income flows, pointing to the importance of user skills in realizing the savings potential of mobile money (Wolde & Kim, 2024).

Despite the generally positive evidence, literature also highlights persistent barriers to mobile money's effectiveness in improving access to savings and financial services. Several studies note that network infrastructure deficiencies, limited digital literacy, cost barriers, and trust issues often constrain the extent to which rural households can leverage mobile financial services for long-term savings and formal financial engagement (Mwangi et al., 2023; Tadesse & Maina, 2021). These constraints suggest that mobile money's potential for advancing financial inclusion is mediated by broader socio-economic and infrastructural conditions.

In summary, literature on mobile money usage consistently portrays it as an important pathway for enhancing households' access to savings and financial services. Scholars generally agree that mobile money supports convenience, security, and financial participation, particularly among underserved populations. However, evidence also points to significant challenges including costs, digital skills gaps, gender dynamics, and infrastructure limitations which influence how mobile money translates into meaningful access to savings and formal financial services. These findings highlight the need for more context-specific studies, especially in rural

Tanzanian districts such as Bukombe, to understand localized patterns and barriers in mobile money usage and financial access.

2.2 Role of Mobile Money in Facilitating Access to Credit and Financial Support for Household Needs

Mobile money has emerged as a critical tool for enhancing access to credit and financial support among rural households, particularly in contexts where formal banking infrastructure is limited. By leveraging mobile platforms, households can access microloans, receive remittances, and participate in informal credit arrangements without the constraints of traditional financial institutions (Aker & Mbiti, 2022). Mobile money platforms reduce transaction costs and processing times, allowing households to obtain timely financial resources for essential needs, including health, education, and agricultural inputs (Allen et al., 2021).

Recent empirical studies illustrate the transformative potential of mobile money in improving credit access. For example, Boateng et al. (2023) observed in Ghana that rural households using mobile wallets could access small-scale loans through linked financial services, which enhanced their capacity to cope with short-term financial shocks. Households reported using these loans for paying school fees, purchasing farming inputs, or covering emergency expenses, demonstrating that mobile money extends both convenience and financial resilience.

Similarly, Nakabugu et al. (2024) in rural Uganda documented that mobile money services facilitate participation in village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), where mobile platforms are used for loan disbursement and repayment tracking. This integration strengthens transparency, reduces default risk, and improves households' access to financial support. The study also highlighted that mobile money empowers women to access household credit, as platforms provide greater control over funds and reduce reliance on male intermediaries (Nakabugu et al., 2024).

In Kenya, Mutua and Odhiambo (2022) found that smallholder farmers increasingly rely on mobile money to access both informal and formal credit, including digital microloans offered by mobile network operators. Participants indicated that mobile money facilitated timely credit access for agricultural production cycles, enabling investments in seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs that would have been difficult to finance through cash savings alone. The study also noted that the use of mobile platforms for loan management improves recordkeeping and accountability within informal lending groups (Mutua & Odhiambo, 2022).

Despite these benefits, several studies note challenges that limit mobile money's effectiveness in providing credit. Diop and Sarr (2025) highlighted in Senegal that transaction fees, network unreliability, and trust concerns restrict the use of mobile money for borrowing. In addition, Mwangi et al. (2023) observed that households with limited digital literacy or low income are less likely to access mobile credit, which exacerbate inequalities in financial support. These findings suggest that while mobile money can facilitate access to credit and support, its full potential depends on complementary factors such as infrastructure, financial literacy, and household economic capacity.

In the Ethiopian context, Wolde and Kim (2024) emphasized that mobile money facilitates access to both emergency funds and structured microloans, particularly among younger and digitally literate household members. Their study showed that households using mobile credit were better able to manage irregular income flows, invest in small businesses, and respond to urgent household needs, illustrating the role of mobile money in enhancing financial stability and resilience (Wolde & Kim, 2024).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that mobile money significantly contributes to rural households' access to credit and financial support, supporting both short-term and strategic household needs. However, these benefits are moderated by infrastructural constraints, digital literacy, cost, and trust issues. This underscores the importance of understanding local usage patterns, socio-economic contexts, and barriers in districts such as Bukombe, Tanzania, to maximize the impact of mobile money on household financial support.

2.3 Role of Mobile Money in Household Economic Decision-Making and Financial Resilience

Mobile money has been increasingly associated with influencing household economic decision-making and enhancing financial resilience, especially among rural and low-income populations (Mutua & Odhiambo, 2022). Economic decision-making refers to how households plan, allocate, and use financial resources for consumption, investment, and risk management. Financial resilience reflects the ability of households to withstand economic shocks, unexpected expenditures, and income variability (Mutua & Odhiambo, 2022). In contexts where formal financial institutions are limited, mobile money offers an accessible digital platform that can shape both how households manage daily finances and how they prepare for financial uncertainties (Jack & Suri, 2021).

Empirical studies show that mobile money usage can significantly improve financial decision-making by facilitating budgeting, expense tracking, and long-term planning. For instance, a study by Pickens et al. (2022) in rural Uganda found that mobile money users reported increased clarity in financial planning because mobile wallets enabled them to separate funds for different needs, visualize cash flows, and avoid unnecessary cash expenditures. Participants noted that the digital record of transactions helped them anticipate upcoming costs and make more informed decisions about savings and consumption (Pickens et al., 2022). Similarly, research in rural South Africa by Mokwena and Mali (2023) revealed that mobile money empowered households to manage irregular income more effectively. Households using mobile wallets demonstrated improved timing of expenditures, for example delaying non-essential purchases until after income inflows, which strengthened their financial stability. The authors argued that mobile money's convenience and transparency gave households greater control over when and how they spent money, reducing impulse spending and supporting financial goal setting (Mokwena & Mali, 2023).

Other studies link mobile money with resilience to economic shocks. In Mozambique, Silva and Tembe (2024) found that households with regular mobile money usage were better able to cope with unexpected financial shocks, such as medical emergencies or crop failure, because they could quickly mobilize funds through peer transfers or informal savings networks facilitated by mobile platforms. The study highlighted that mobile money not only provided a digital tool for storing funds but also strengthened social financial networks that serve as informal safety nets (Silva & Tembe, 2024). Moreover, evidence from East Africa by Mutesasira and Lwanga (2023) suggests that mobile money usage increases financial confidence and preparedness among women, who often shoulder major household budgeting responsibilities. Women who used mobile wallets were found to engage more actively in planning expenditures for education, food security, and farming inputs, citing enhanced autonomy and visibility into household finances as key factors. This study emphasized that mobile money's impact on household decision-making is shaped by intra-household roles, potentially strengthening financial agency among women (Mutesasira & Lwanga, 2023).

Nonetheless, not all findings portray uniformly positive outcomes. A study in Ghana by Yeboah and Amankwah (2025) found that while mobile money improved short-term financial discipline, some households became overly reliant on informal lending facilitated through mobile platforms, leading to cyclical debt and less resilient financial positions over time. This suggests that without supportive financial literacy or regulation, mobile money usage can sometimes reinforce risky financial behaviors (Yeboah & Amankwah, 2025). Likewise, Mensah and Owusu (2022) reported that the benefits of mobile money for economic decision-making were more pronounced among households with higher baseline education or income levels, indicating differentiated impacts across socio-economic groups. Households with limited digital literacy or more volatile incomes showed less improvement in structured financial planning despite access to mobile financial services (Mensah & Owusu, 2022).

Taken together, the literature indicates that mobile money plays a noteworthy role in shaping household economic decisions and enhancing resilience to financial uncertainties. The evidence suggests that the digital features of mobile money, including automated transaction records, ease of access to funds, and connectivity with informal networks, can support better financial planning and coping mechanisms. Yet, these benefits are mediated by household socio-economic status, digital skills, and broader institutional factors, underscoring the need for context-specific understanding, such as in Bukombe District, Tanzania.

2.4 Theoretical Review

This research is informed by Financial Capability Theory as proposed by Sherraden (2021). The theory posits that access to financial resources alone is insufficient for economic well-being; individuals must also possess the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to make effective financial decisions, including saving, budgeting, and managing credit (Collins et al., 2022). Financial capability emphasizes that empowerment arises from the intersection of financial access, literacy, and informed decision-making, enabling individuals and households to use financial tools effectively to improve their economic outcomes (Xiao & O'Neill, 2023). The theory further asserts that financial inclusion is not just about holding an account or using financial services but about transforming access into meaningful financial participation that enhances resilience, savings behavior, and household decision-making (Dupas et al., 2022). By equipping individuals with both the resources and the skills to manage them effectively, financial capability facilitates informed action that can strengthen household economic stability and well-being.

In the context of this study, Financial Capability Theory provides a conceptual lens to examine how mobile money usage influences rural households' access to savings and financial services in Bukombe District, Tanzania. The theory explains how households' ability to access mobile money platforms, combined with their knowledge of financial management practices, affects their saving behavior, credit utilization, and overall financial participation (Mokwena & Mali, 2023; Pickens et al., 2022). For example, households that effectively integrate mobile money into budgeting, planning, and saving practices are better able to withstand financial shocks, make timely payments for essential needs, and participate in formal and informal financial systems. Moreover, the theory supports understanding that financial inclusion outcomes depend on both structural and behavioral factors. While mobile money provides access to digital financial services, households' financial literacy, decision-making skills, and digital competence determine how these services translate into tangible economic benefits (Mutesasira & Lwanga, 2023; Silva & Tembe, 2024). This aligns directly with the study's objectives of assessing patterns of mobile money usage, evaluating its impact on savings and credit access, and understanding how households' financial behaviors influence resilience and economic decision-making.

Thus, Financial Capability Theory serves as a foundation for analyzing the pathways through which mobile money usage can enhance financial inclusion among rural households. It emphasizes the importance of combining access to digital financial tools with household knowledge, skills, and behaviors to achieve meaningful improvements in savings, credit utilization, and overall financial well-being. This theoretical grounding provides a framework for understanding how mobile money, when effectively used, can strengthen economic participation, resilience, and household financial management in rural Tanzanian contexts.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to explore mobile money usage and its influence on households' access to savings and financial services in Bukombe District, Tanzania. The case study design was chosen for its flexibility, allowing participants to express their experiences freely and enabling the collection of rich, detailed data from a relatively small sample. This design also facilitates the exploration of complex financial behaviors and decision-making processes in real-life rural household contexts, providing an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences.

The study's target population comprized rural household members and local mobile money agents in Bukombe District. A total of 25 participants were purposively selected to ensure that all participants possessed direct experience and relevant knowledge about mobile money usage and financial practices. Out of these, 20 participants were involved in two focus group discussions (FGDs) with 10 rural household members each, while 5 participants engaged in semi-structured interviews with local mobile money agents. Purposive sampling ensured that the selected participants were knowledgeable about household financial practices, access to savings, and mobile money services.

Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews with local mobile money agents to capture professional insights into mobile money operations, service accessibility, and observed household usage patterns. Focus group discussions were conducted with rural household members to collect collective perspectives on mobile money adoption, savings behavior, access to credit, and financial decision-making. The use of both interviews and FGDs allowed triangulation of data, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings. All sessions were conducted in convenient and private settings to ensure participants' comfort and encourage open and honest discussions. With informed consent, all interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step procedure. This method enabled systematic identification, reporting, and interpretation of patterns (themes) within the qualitative data, providing meaningful insights into mobile money usage, access to savings and credit, and household financial behaviors. Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility and suitability for exploring complex, context-specific qualitative data, allowing the researcher to understand the depth, diversity, and nuances of participants' experiences and perspectives.

4. Results and Discussion

Several themes emerged from the participants during focus group discussions and interviews, reflecting their experiences with mobile money usage and its influence on household access to savings and financial services in Bukombe District, Tanzania. The participants' perspectives on patterns of mobile money usage, access to savings and credit, and household financial decision-making are presented and analyzed in the sections that follow.

4.1 Purpose of Mobile Money Transactions

The findings of this study revealed that rural households in Bukombe District used mobile money for a variety of purposes that supported daily financial management and household needs. Participants in the focus group discussions reported that mobile money was primarily used for sending and receiving money, paying school fees, purchasing goods, and transferring funds to family members. These transactions reflected the integration of mobile money into routine household financial practices.

Participants emphasized that using mobile money for these purposes enabled them to manage finances more conveniently and securely. Participants noted that the platform reduced the need to carry cash, facilitated timely payments, and allowed households to respond quickly to both planned and unexpected expenses. One household participant explained:

> *"We use mobile money almost every week to pay school fees, send money to relatives, and buy some groceries. It saves us time and keeps our money safe without having to go to the bank"* (FGD with Participant 3, Bukombe District on 24/1/2026).

Similarly, another participant highlighted the importance of mobile money in accessing funds from distant family members and supporting household needs:

> *"Sometimes my children's school fees are sent directly from my brother in another district through mobile money. It makes things easier because I do not have to travel long distances to receive cash"* (FGD Participant 7, Bukombe District on 17/1/ 2026).

The quotations above indicate that mobile money transactions served multiple household purposes, ranging from everyday consumption to education and financial support. This theme demonstrated that mobile money has become an essential tool for managing household finances, improving convenience, and enhancing the security and efficiency of financial transactions in rural Bukombe District.

4.2 Gendered Patterns and Household Roles in Mobile Money Use

The findings of this study revealed that gender significantly influenced the use of mobile money and the roles households assigned to different family members in managing finances. Participants in the focus group discussions explained that women were often responsible for routine household expenses, such as purchasing food, paying school fees, and managing small savings through mobile money, while men tended to handle larger financial decisions, such as agricultural investments or loan repayments. Participants emphasized that this division of roles shaped how mobile money was used within the household. Women reported that mobile money provided them with greater control over daily expenditures and allowed them to contribute actively to household decision-making. One female participant noted:

> *"I use mobile money every week to pay for food, school fees, and small household needs. It helps me manage our money and plan our spending without always waiting for my husband"* (FGD with Participant 5, Bukombe District on 10/1/2026).

In contrast, male participants highlighted that while they relied on women to manage daily transactions, they were usually responsible for larger transfers or savings related to farming and business activities: One of the participants noted:

> *"My wife usually handles the mobile money for school fees and groceries. I use it mainly to send or receive money for farm activities or bigger payments. It works well because we know our roles"* (FGD with Participant 2, Bukombe District on 12/1/2026).

The quotations above indicate that mobile money usage reflected existing household roles and gender norms, with women increasingly managing routine financial transactions and men overseeing strategic financial decisions. This theme demonstrates that while mobile money enhanced access and convenience for all household members, it also interacted with gendered responsibilities, highlighting the importance of considering household roles when assessing mobile money adoption and its impact on financial inclusion.

4.3 Enhanced Access to Savings Mechanisms

The findings of this study revealed that mobile money had significantly enhanced rural households' access to savings mechanisms, enabling them to store funds securely and plan for both short-term and long-term needs. Participants in the focus group discussions explained that before mobile money, many households relied on keeping cash at home, which posed risks of loss, theft, or mismanagement. It was reported that mobile money platforms allowed households to deposit small amounts regularly, track their balances, and access funds whenever needed. Participants emphasized that mobile money accounts provided a safe and convenient alternative to traditional cash savings, particularly for women and other household members who managed daily expenditures. Participants collectively viewed the following:

> *"With mobile money, we can save a little every week, and we do not have to worry about losing the cash. We even check our*

balance to see how much we have for school fees and other needs" (FGD with Participants, Bukombe District on 10/1/2026).

Similarly, local mobile money agents highlighted that rural households were increasingly using mobile wallets not only for transactions but also for building savings:

> *"Many of our clients, especially women, keep money in their mobile accounts instead of at home. They use it to save for emergencies or school fees, and this shows how mobile money helps them manage finances better"* (Interview with Mobile Money Agent 1, Bukombe District, on 17/1/2026).

The quotations above indicate that mobile money has transformed savings practices among rural households, allowing secure storage, systematic saving, and better financial planning. This theme demonstrated that mobile money was not just a transactional tool but also a critical mechanism for enhancing household financial security and promoting consistent savings behavior in Bukombe District.

4.4 Access to Credit and Financial Support

The findings of this study revealed that mobile money significantly enhanced rural households' ability to save securely and manage their financial resources. Participants reported that using mobile wallets allowed them to save money safely, accumulate savings over time, and plan for household expenses without the risks associated with keeping cash at home. Households highlighted that mobile money provided a convenient alternative to traditional banking, especially in areas with limited access to formal financial institutions. Participants emphasized that mobile money facilitated both short-term and long-term savings goals. Participants explained:

> *"I save a small portion of my income on my mobile wallet every week. It is safer than keeping cash at home, and I can use it whenever I need to pay for school fees or buy food for my family"* (FGD with Participant 8, Bukombe District on 24/1/2026).

Similarly, insights from local mobile money agents confirmed that rural households increasingly use mobile money for saving purposes. One mobile money agent reported:

> *"Many of our clients, especially women, prefer keeping their money on mobile wallets. They can save regularly, and it is easier for them to track their money and avoid spending it unnecessarily"* (Interview with Mobile Money Agent 3, Bukombe District on 7/2/2026).

The quotations above indicate that mobile money strengthened households' financial discipline, security, and planning capacity. This theme demonstrates that mobile money not only provided a platform for transaction convenience but also enhanced the ability of rural households to save, thereby contributing to improved financial inclusion and resilience in Bukombe District.

4.5 Improved Household Financial Planning

The findings of this study revealed that mobile money usage positively influenced household financial planning. Participants explained that using mobile wallets allowed them to track income and expenditures, prioritize expenses, and allocate resources effectively for essential needs such as food, education, and healthcare. This improved planning helped households make informed decisions about spending and savings, reducing the likelihood of financial mismanagement. One FGD participant described:

> *"Before using mobile money, it was hard to keep track of how much we spend daily. Now, I can see how much comes in and goes out, and I can plan better for school fees and household needs"* (FGD with Participant 4, Bukombe District on 14/2/2026).

Similarly, a mobile money agent noted:

> *"We have seen that customers who actively use mobile wallets are more organized in managing money. They plan transfers and payments in advance, which shows better household financial management"* (Interview with Mobile Money Agent 5, Bukombe District on 7/2/2026).

Another participant emphasized the role of mobile money in budgeting:

> *"I divide my income into portions on my wallet – one for food, one for school fees, and one for emergencies. It makes*

> *managing money easier and prevents overspending"* (FGD with Participant 10, Bukombe District on 7/2/2026).

These quotations indicate that mobile money enhances household financial planning, enabling rural families to make structured and informed economic decisions.

4.6 Strengthened Financial Resilience and Coping Strategies

The study's findings also revealed that mobile money contributes to household financial resilience, enabling participants to respond effectively to economic shocks and unforeseen expenses. Participants reported that the platform allowed them to access funds quickly, mobilize support from relatives, and utilize informal lending networks facilitated via mobile money. One participant explained:

> *"When my child fell sick last month, I received money from my brother through mobile money immediately. This saved us from borrowing from neighbors or selling our assets"* (FGD with Participant 19, Bukombe District on 21/2/2026).

A mobile money agent corroborated this observation, noting:

> *"Many households rely on mobile wallets for emergencies. People can send and receive money quickly, which helps them cope with unexpected financial challenges"* (Interview with Mobile Money Agent 4, Bukombe District on 7/2/2026).

Another participant highlighted planning for irregular income:

> *"Sometimes our farm income comes late, but with mobile money, I can borrow a small amount from my savings or friends digitally. It helps me manage my household until harvest"* (FGD with Participant 13, Bukombe District on 28/2/ 2026).

These insights indicate that mobile money strengthens households' ability to cope with financial uncertainties, improving resilience and reducing vulnerability to economic shocks in rural Bukombe District.

4.7 Discussion

Based on the findings, it is evident that mobile money usage in Bukombe District played a pivotal role in enhancing household financial practices, access to savings mechanisms, and resilience, although these effects were mediated by socio-economic factors such as education, gender roles, and confidence in formal financial systems. The study showed that rural households used mobile money for everyday purposes, sending and receiving funds, paying school fees, purchasing goods, and transferring money to relatives, which reduced dependence on cash and enabled more timely responses to both planned and unplanned expenses. This pattern reflects broader evidence that mobile money adoption promoted financial inclusion across Sub-Saharan Africa by increasing access to and use of digital financial services, particularly in contexts where formal banking infrastructure remains limited (Joseph et al., 2025).

Regarding gendered patterns in mobile money use, women largely managed routine transactions and small savings while men typically handled larger transfers and business-related payments. Although not all existing studies focused explicitly on gender divisions within households, research on mobile fintech adoption highlights that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and user characteristics such as education and social norms significantly shape how different groups engaged with mobile financial services (Hornuf et al., 2024). This supports the idea that mobile money's impact is not uniform across household members and that gendered roles influence both access to and control over digital financial tools.

Participants in this study also emphasized that mobile wallets provided a safer alternative to storing cash at home and enabled systematic savings behavior. The importance of access to savings platforms for enhancing financial inclusion and reducing vulnerability to shocks is supported by research showing that savings are critical for smoothing consumption and building resilience, particularly in rural and low-income settings. Recent survey evidence from Tanzania suggests that mobile and digital saving mechanisms can help households overcome barriers associated with traditional bank savings, though confidence in these platforms often varies by education and financial literacy levels (Mwaseba & Mwang'onda, 2026). In terms of financial planning, the findings showed that mobile money improved households' ability to monitor income and expenditures, prioritize essential needs, and make informed decisions on resource allocation. This aligns with broader literature on mobile fintech adoption, which found that digital financial services enhanced households' capacity for budgeting and financial organization by lowering transaction costs and providing tools that simplify money management (Hornuf et al., 2024).

Finally, the strengthened financial resilience observed, where mobile money enabled swift access to funds during emergencies and facilitated informal support networks, mirrors global trends. World Bank analysis of Global Findex data indicates that mobile money has been a key driver of increased financial inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa and is associated with greater account ownership and usage, particularly in rural areas where traditional banking remains scarce (World Bank, 2023). This suggests that mobile money can serve as both a transaction tool and a financial buffer, helping households cope with shocks and reduce reliance on costly or unreliable informal mechanisms.

Overall, the findings from Bukombe District demonstrated that mobile money significantly contributed to household financial management, savings behavior, planning, and resilience. However, its effectiveness was influenced by structural factors such as education, literacy, and gendered household roles. These observations reinforced the need for interventions that enhance financial literacy, address gender disparities in financial access, and build confidence in digital financial platforms to maximize mobile money's role in promoting inclusive and equitable financial development.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that mobile money adoption was vital for improving household financial management and inclusion in Bukombe District. Regular use of mobile wallets enhanced convenience, security, and access to funds, enabling households to meet both planned and unexpected financial needs. Mobile money also supported systematic savings, informed financial planning, and strengthened resilience against economic shocks. Gendered household roles influenced the patterns of mobile money usage, with women typically managed routine expenditures and men oversaw larger transactions, highlighting the importance of considering socio-cultural dynamics in financial inclusion strategies. To maximize these benefits, policies should focus on improving financial literacy, building confidence in digital financial services, and promoting equitable access for all household members.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing findings, this study recommends the following:

1. Mobile network operators and financial service providers should continue to develop user-friendly mobile money platforms tailored to rural households, ensuring that features for sending, receiving, and paying for essential services are accessible, secure, and convenient.
2. Policymakers and development agencies should design financial literacy and digital finance programs that target both men and women, promoting equitable participation in household financial management and empowering women to take active roles in larger financial decisions.
3. Mobile financial service providers and regulators should promote savings products integrated with mobile wallets, including automated savings plans, low-balance requirements, and incentives for rural users, to encourage consistent and secure household savings
4. Financial institutions and mobile money platforms should expand accessible, low-cost digital credit services and micro-loans, coupled with clear guidance on responsible borrowing, to help households manage both planned and emergency expenses.
5. Government agencies, NGOs, and mobile money providers should offer training and awareness programs on budgeting, income tracking, and financial planning using mobile wallets, enabling households to make informed decisions and allocate resources effectively.
6. Stakeholders should promote community-level support networks and emergency digital transfer schemes through mobile money to enhance households' ability to respond to economic shocks and unexpected financial challenges.

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