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The Meso-Organizational Factors Connected to Gender Dynamics in Family Business in Uganda

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Abstract

Family businesses are vital for employment, wealth, growth, and intergenerational continuity in Uganda, yet socio-cultural norms shaping gendered practices threaten their survival. With a global retention rate of 30% to the second generation and under 10% in Uganda, this study explores meso-organizational gender dynamics resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning across four regions. The qualitative research comprised 20 key informant interviews with women leaders of business-oriented NGOs, 12 focus groups with 80 women entrepreneurs from Central, Western, Northern, and Eastern Uganda, and participant observation in 12 businesses and four institutional meetings, enabling regional comparison. Data were transcribed and analyzed in NVivo, with thematic analysis using inductive and deductive coding revealing three interconnected themes. Women's access to finance depended on informal support, spousal backing, or savings, limiting independence. Regional differences showed women in Central Uganda used group lending, SACCOs, and family bank hybrid models; Soroti and Lira relied on NGOs and livestock assets; Mbarara combined microfinance with training. Patriarchal norms favoring men persisted, with women in Soroti hiding income. Governance was mostly informal and patriarchal, with men controlling decision-making, though some larger Kampala businesses had formal management. Traditional family hierarchies dominated Soroti and Lira; Mbarara saw gradual women's leadership. Succession was informal and gendered, favoring sons because of beliefs about risk and lineage. Observations revealed the same pattern; cash was often left with the husband at closing; sons were sent to mills and suppliers while daughters served or cleaned. In Central Uganda, female heirs faced stigma; Ankole and Soroti showed shifts towards competence-based inheritance. Overall, gendered resource allocation, governance practices, and succession processes hinder women's participation and threaten family business sustainability. However, some inclusive practices exist, such as performance-based grooming and women-led governance, but inequalities remain.

Addressing these through gender-inclusive governance, fair access to resources, and a formal succession plan is vital for continuity. The findings stress the need for context-sensitive strategies to address both entrenched patriarchal norms and regional differences in Ugandan women's entrepreneurship.

Keywords

Family Businesses, Gender Dynamics, Resource Allocation, Governance Structures, Succession Planning, Patriarchy, Meso-Organisational Factors

1. Introduction

Family businesses form the largest category of businesses globally. Family businesses are enterprises in which family involvement meaningfully shapes ownership, management, governance, and often succession intent (Hernández-Linares et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2026; Roffia & Moracchiato, 2021). Meso-organisational factors refer to enterprise-level mechanisms within the firm, particularly gendered patterns of resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning practices, through which family influence is translated into managerial decisions and business continuity outcomes (Anjum & Syed, 2026; Klugah et al., 2025; Orole et al., 2025). These meso-level mechanisms are analytically distinct from household-level influences, such as family relationships and successor motivation; community-level influences, such as extended kin, elders, and local legitimacy pressures; and national institutional influences, such as legal systems, patriarchal norms, and regulatory environments (Okeke, 2025; Orole et al., 2025; Randerson & Frank, 2021). At the enterprise level, gendered resource allocation influences who receives access to capital, training, information, and leadership opportunities; governance structures determine how authority, accountability, and strategic decisions are exercised; while succession planning practices shape the identification, preparation, and transfer of leadership and ownership to future generations (Anjum & Syed, 2026; Orole et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2025). Consequently, these meso-organisational mechanisms either strengthen or constrain family business continuity, depending on whether they promote merit-based decision-making, effective governance, successor preparation, and equitable access to organisational resources.

According to Poza & Acquaah (2016), family-owned or controlled enterprises account for about 80% of all businesses worldwide. Alderson's (2018) findings further corroborate this, placing the prevalence of family businesses at 80% - 95% in the United States, 70% - 80% in Europe, 75% - 90% in the Middle East, 70% in Latin America, and 67% in Australia. Beyond their dominance, family businesses contribute significantly to social and economic development at both micro and macro levels and remain a strong business model due to inherent strengths and behaviours that give them a competitive advantage over non-family firms (Aronoff & Ward, 1995). However, despite their importance, most family businesses struggle to transition successfully across generations. Research shows that, globally, the average lifespan of many family businesses coincides with the first generational change at around 24 years (Alayo, Jainaga, Maseda, & Arzubiaga, 2016). Globally, only about 30% transition from the first to the second generation, while a mere 15% survive into the third generation (Ward, 1987).

In Africa, the prevalence of family businesses is largely based on anecdotal estimates, with Sub-Saharan Africa approximated at 90% and Asia broadly described as dominated by family firms. More specific evidence places family businesses at about 80% of all enterprises in South Africa (Venter, Boshoff, & Maas, 2003). Family businesses are found in almost all economic sectors across all regions (Howorth, Rose, Hamilton & Westhead, 2010); they provide almost 80% of employment opportunities (De Massis et al., 2018) and generate 70% - 90% of total annual output (Firfiray & Gomez-Mejia, 2021), reflecting their significant role in development. Conversely, African family businesses are characterized by paternalistic management (Bertrand & Schoar, 2006), strong clan cultures (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005), altruism and nepotism (Lubatkin et al., 2005; Schulze et al., 2003), limited delegation (Sieger et al., 2011), and in-group favouritism for family members (Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006), with leadership positions filled on the basis of kinship rather than expertise (Bertrand & Schoar, 2006). These patterns are also linked to broader cultural and institutional factors that shape entrepreneurship and gender relations within African economies (Hofstede, 2001; Bikaako & Ssenkumba, 2003). Such processes have been linked to bias and perceptions of unfairness (Lubatkin et al., 2005; Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006) and can disadvantage women through the persistent dominance of male leadership structures and the lack of skilled female professionals at the top of management.

In sub-Saharan African family businesses, where societal cultures are marked by high collectivism and high-power distance, employees expect the procedures used to determine rewards and outcomes to be fair (Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006; Hofstede, 2001). Procedural fairness signals organizational support for non-family employees, motivating greater commitment and engagement. Conversely, when non-family employees perceive these mechanisms as unfair, particularly when family members receive excessive favour, it fosters negative attitudes and behaviours toward the organization. Procedural fairness is therefore essential, as it facilitates social exchange relationships and communicates that the organization values and supports non-family employees (Herda & Lavelle, 2011). Essentially, perceptions of injustice may disproportionately discourage women from seeking leadership positions, especially among non-family female employees, thereby reinforcing existing gender disparities within family businesses.

In family business environments, non-family employees are more likely to experience workplace injustice because, unlike family members, they are not part of the family system and therefore may receive unequal treatment. Parental altruism has been shown to facilitate such inequities, with family employees often favoured in promotions, salary increases, authority, and other perquisites regardless of merit (Lubatkin et al., 2005; Lubatkin, Ling, & Schulze, 2007; Schulze et al., 2003). Consequently, family businesses frequently become fertile grounds for injustice perceptions due to characteristics such as nepotism and altruism (Lubatkin et al., 2005), HR practices that privilege family members (Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006; Lubatkin et al., 2007), and leadership cultures that prioritise family interests above all else (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). Although justice violations can affect family members as well, they tend to impact non-family employees more severely (Sieger et al., 2011). Within this context, women, especially non-family female employees, face compounded disadvantages arising from both their outsider status and prevailing gender norms, making access to leadership or strategic roles particularly difficult, a dynamic intensified in patriarchal settings such as Uganda where male family members are often prioritised for leadership positions.

Despite extensive entrepreneurship literature, a significant gap persists between women's lived experiences and the explanations produced by traditional research, which remains largely rooted in male-centered perspectives that compare male and female entrepreneurs without questioning why entrepreneurship has been defined primarily through men's behaviours. This gap is particularly evident in Ugandan family businesses; patriarchal norms further obscure women's entrepreneurial contributions and leadership potential (Bikaako & Ssenkumba, 2003). Orthodox approaches have been criticized for rendering entrepreneurship discriminatory (Billig, 1994), gender-biased (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990), ethnocentric, and ideologically controlled (Armstrong, 2001; Ogbor, 2000). Ogbor (2000) has suggested that the mainstream rhetoric of entrepreneurship reproduces societal biases and embeds unconscious preconceptions about who is an entrepreneur. Feminist scholars have also challenged the limitations of conventional frameworks to comprehend women's experiences in small business and entrepreneurship. While some scholars such as Davidson and Wiklund (2001), Low and MacMillan (1988) and Shane and Venkataraman (2000) have suggested alternative paradigms, much of the literature is still rooted in traditional orientations. This reinforces the necessity of gender-inclusive frameworks in studying family business management in Uganda to better represent women's experiences and contributions.

The above arguments indicate that although research on female entrepreneurship has generated valuable insights into women business owners, much of it still encourages women to emulate male norms, focusing on sex equality defined as women gaining similar access to entrepreneurial success as men. However, such approaches remain limited. Ahl (2006) argues that these frameworks are inadequate for understanding gender and women's activities because women's perspectives become marginalized not only through underrepresentation but also through representation on terms defined by dominant male groups rather than through women's own voices. Applied to Ugandan family businesses, this underscores the need to foreground women's unique experiences and management styles rather than measuring them against male standards. Bruni et al. (2004) similarly contend that gender and entrepreneurship are mutually constituted through everyday gendered practices. Feminist theorizing, grounded in the view that gender fundamentally structures society and historically disadvantages women, critically examines how knowledge, including entrepreneurship discourse, advances the interests of some while marginalizing others (Harding, 1991). This feminist lens enables more reflexive and critical analyses, especially for studying female-led family businesses in Uganda, where entrenched gender roles shape governance, opportunity structures, and entrepreneurial practices.

Despite growing global participation of women in business ownership, entrepreneurship remains a predominantly male-associated domain (GEM, 2017; Hamilton, 2013; Hanson, 2009). Ugandan women have a long history of entrepreneurial activity, although their contributions have remained informal and under-recognized (Snyder, 2000). Women-owned enterprises tend to be smaller, employ fewer people, generate lower sales, and have less access to capital compared to men's businesses (Blake, 2006; Hanson, 2009), while their economic contributions, particularly through home-based enterprises, are often ignored in official entrepreneurial surveys or dismissed as mere self-employment (Hanson, 2009). Much of women's work remains relegated to the reproductive sphere, obscuring its economic and social value (Fraser, 2014). As a result, entrepreneurship remains framed through masculine ideals (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005), centered on the image of a heroic, individualistic, and aggressive adventurer (Hamilton, 2013). These global patterns are strongly reflected in Uganda, where women's contributions to family businesses are frequently undervalued, limiting their leadership and growth opportunities. A woman entrepreneur is defined as one who initiates a business alone or with partners, assumes financial, administrative, and social risks, manages daily operations, holds majority ownership, and oversees decision-making processes (Carter & Shaw, 2006). However, women's entrepreneurial outcomes are shaped by their broader contexts (Kikooma, 2012; Yousafzai et al., 2019), and in Ugandan family businesses, patriarchal norms and gendered roles significantly influence their ability to lead and sustain enterprises.

The study employed Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1978, 1986), which posits that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence their choice of activities, persistence, and performance. Self-efficacy expectations distinguish from outcome expectations determine the perceived ability to execute specific tasks, affecting motivation, coping, and resilience. Career applications of the theory (Hackett & Betz, 1981) highlight gender-based differences shaped by socialization, with women often reporting lower efficacy in male-stereotyped domains. In entrepreneurship, self-efficacy shapes intention formation and venture creation likelihood (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994), with mastery experiences, role modelling, social persuasion, and emotional states as key influences. In Ugandan family business contexts, the theory helps explain how cultural norms assign leadership to men, limiting women's self-efficacy and decision-making authority (Bikaako

& Ssenkumba, 2003; Hofstede, 2001). It underscores the need for targeted interventions such as mentorship, skills training, and supportive family dynamics to counteract gendered disparities and enhance equitable participation.

Feminist perspectives interrogate the gendered structures and biases embedded in entrepreneurship, challenging male-dominated narratives and highlighting systemic barriers to women's participation. Liberal feminism focuses on removing individual-level biases and promoting equal opportunities; socialist feminism addresses structural inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal capitalism; and transnational or post-colonial feminism critiques the gendered political economy shaped by global neoliberal practices (Calás & Smircich, 2006). Applied to entrepreneurship, these lenses reveal how women are often channeled into socially oriented, small-scale ventures seen as congruent with feminine traits while men dominate high-growth, profit-centric domains. Although social entrepreneurship offers potential for women's empowerment, it may also reinforce occupational segregation and implicit bias. In Ugandan family businesses, feminist theory provides a framework for analyzing how gender norms, resource allocation, and societal expectations shape women's entrepreneurial legitimacy, leadership roles, and long-term business sustainability.

This study is grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1986) theory of self-efficacy, which suggests that an individual's belief in his or her ability to complete a task successfully influences his or her motivation, persistence, and performance. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his/her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce specific performance attainments. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy derives from four primary factors: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological conditions. These beliefs affect how people respond to challenges, how they handle disappointments, and how they make decisions (Bandura, 1997; Bandura et al., 1999). This theory is relevant to understanding the link between gender and leadership. Hackett and Betz (1981) argue that women's job advancement is typically influenced by gendered socialization processes that impact on confidence and perceived skill, particularly in historically male-dominated domains. As such, opportunities for leadership, role models and supportive environments can have a huge impact on women's self-efficacy and readiness to take up leadership positions.

Entrepreneurship research has repeatedly linked self-efficacy to entrepreneurial activities and goals. Boyd & Vozikis (1994) suggest that perceptions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy influence the decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is an important predictor of entrepreneurial intent (Zhao et al., 2005). Most recently, Newman et al. (2019) suggest that entrepreneurial self-efficacy remains the most important psychological predictor of entrepreneurial activity and success.

The theory of self-efficacy is used to characterize women's confidence to engage in leadership and decision-making in Ugandan family firms, mediated by cultural norms, governance structures, and succession practices. However, if women are denied opportunities for leadership, mentorship or business ownership based on patriarchal ideals, it may decrease self-efficacy for strategic leadership roles. However, exposure to role models, participation in governance and entrepreneurial experience (Bandura, 1986; Hackett & Betz, 1981; Bikaako & Ssenkumba, 2003) may increase women's confidence and preparedness to take on leadership roles in family companies.

The study aimed to examine the meso-organizational factors connected to gender dynamics in family businesses in Uganda. Specifically, it sought to analyze gendered patterns of resource allocation, examine governance structures and their implications for gender inclusion, and explore how succession planning influences women's leadership opportunities and business continuity in Uganda. The study was guided by three research questions: How is resource allocation connected to gender dynamics in family businesses in Uganda? How are governance structures connected to gender dynamics in family businesses in Uganda? And how is succession planning connected to gender dynamics in family businesses in Uganda?

2. Methodology

This study adopts the research onion framework by Saunders et al. (2007), which structures methodological decision-making and positions research methodology as the systematic study of procedures for generating meaningful insights. It is guided by the epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions identified by Burrell and Morgan (1979), which are central to qualitative inquiry into human experience. The research is grounded in an interpretivist philosophy inspired by Dilthey and Weber, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the meanings individuals attach to their experiences and actions (Schwandt, 1994; Saunders et al., 2016). The study blends exploratory and descriptive strategies to gain deep insights and provide detailed accounts of patterns and relationships. The study follows an inductive approach, allowing observations and emerging patterns to inform conceptual development rather than testing predetermined hypotheses. Qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation are used to capture contextualized human experiences. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for autonomy, are integrated throughout. The methodological approach seeks to uncover underlying meanings and relationships while embracing methodological pluralism, combining positivist elements that strengthen reliability and rigor with interpretivist depth and contextual richness.

Selecting research methodologies is a crucial step in the research process, as Johnson (1994) emphasizes. For this study on meso-organizational factors connected to gender dynamics in family businesses in Uganda, qualitative methods were chosen to provide deep insight into the social, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of gender roles through interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, enabling detailed exploration of the complex dynamics at play. Guided by the objective of conveying an accurate profile of individuals, events, and circumstances (Robson, 2002), the study uses an exploratory and descriptive approach to examine how gender roles influence decision-making, power structures, and business outcomes within family enterprises, providing a basis for future research in other socio-economic contexts. To capture this complexity, data collection relies on semi-structured interviews that allow participants to share their experiences and beliefs, participant observation that documents real-world interactions, and focus group discussions (FGDs) that bring together diverse participants to reveal collective insights, community norms, and contrasting viewpoints on gender roles, insights that might not emerge through one-on-one interviews. Combining interviews, observations, and FGDs provides a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics, and this methodological triangulation enhances the reliability and validity of the findings by drawing on multiple perspectives and contexts.

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explain the methods used to collect, analyze, and interpret data, incorporating approaches suited to exploring the complexities of gender roles and relations within family businesses (Saunders et al., 2016). Research methods are classified according to the study's scope and objectives, enabling the adoption of diverse strategies that address the nuanced social and cultural dynamics under investigation. This study uses multi-method qualitative design, integrating in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation to generate rich, detailed insights (Saunders et al., 2016). This flexibility allows the researcher to capture subjective experiences and contextualize gender dynamics within the broader socio-economic and cultural framework of Ugandan family businesses. The study systematically analyses data to reveal patterns, themes, and relationships, using descriptive formats such as thematic narratives and verbatim quotations.

Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study provides a comprehensive account of the factors shaping gender dynamics in family enterprises, clarifying the linkages between gender roles, power relations, and decision-making processes (Kabeer, 1999). By examining multiple viewpoints, the research design outlines the "who, when, where, why, and how" of the study, offering a structured framework for data collection and analysis while encouraging systematic reflection on the phenomenon. This approach ensures a thorough exploration of intricate gender dynamics, yielding actionable insights and fostering a deeper understanding of the sociocultural factors that shape family businesses.

2.2. Population and Sampling

The study involved 100 participants across four regions of Uganda (Central, East, North, and South). Data were collected through 20 key informant interviews with leaders of business-focused NGOs, with five participants selected from each region. In addition, we conducted 12 focus group discussions with 80 women operating family businesses, comprising three groups per region with 7, 7, and 6 participants, respectively. Participant observation in 12 family businesses, one selected from each focus group. Table 1 provides a detailed summary of participant distribution and data collection activities across selected regions of Uganda. While observation generated additional data, the observed businesses were not counted as separate participants because owners had already participated in the focus group discussions. The approach ensured diverse perspectives while providing in-depth qualitative insights into gender dynamics within family businesses. The investigation was constrained by time, labour, and financial resources. Purposive sampling (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018) was used to ensure that participants were knowledgeable about the subject matter and could provide relevant insights.

Table 1. Participants by region.

Region	Key Informants	FGD Participants	FGD Groups	Businesses Observed
Northern	5	20	3	3
Eastern	5	20	3	3
Central	5	20	3	3
Western	5	20	3	3
Total	**20**	**80**	**12**	**12**

Note. The 12 observed businesses were selected from among the 80 women participating in the focus groups. Four institutional meetings (11 hours in total) were also observed. Non-family employees were not recruited.

The inclusion criteria covered women with direct experience of family business activities and knowledge of family business operations, including owners, founders, co-founders, spouses participating in management, daughters involved in business operations or succession processes, and women holding leadership responsibilities within family enterprises. The study also included key informants from women-focused and business-support NGOs with experience in women's economic empowerment and enterprise development, as well as women recruited through local business networks, entrepreneurship associations, community-based business groups, and Local Government Community Development Officers. To qualify, a family business had to be an enterprise substantially controlled by members of the same family, with at least two family members actively involved in business operations. Participants were included based on their ability to provide relevant information on gendered resource allocation, governance, and succession planning practices. The study excluded women with no direct involvement or experience in a family business, individuals who were not knowledgeable about the business's resource allocation, governance, or succession practices, employees without family ownership or decision-making involvement, and NGO personnel whose work was unrelated to women's economic empowerment or family/business enterprise development. Family enterprises that did not meet the study's operational definition, particularly those without substantial family ownership and management involvement or without at least two actively participating family members, were also excluded.

2.3. Research Site, Data Collection Process, Reliability and Validity of the Instruments and Analysis

To achieve the study's objectives, women involved in family businesses across Uganda's four regions (Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western) were selected as respondents; this regional selection aimed to ensure diversity, economic variation, and representative findings. Ensuring the validity and reliability of the instruments was critical to the study on Gender Dynamics in Family Business in Uganda. Validity concerns how well the instruments measure the intended constructs, while reliability concerns the consistency and accuracy of the measurement process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). To ensure validity, a panel of experts familiar with gender dynamics in family businesses reviewed data collection instruments, such as interview guides and focus group discussion frameworks, and assessed the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the questions against the research objectives. The study also triangulated data through multiple methods, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, to strengthen credibility (Yin, 1994). Semi-structured interviews with NGO leaders explored experiences relating to women's entrepreneurship, governance, resource access, and succession planning. Focus group discussions enabled women entrepreneurs to share collective experiences and regional perspectives. **Table 2** presents the data collection methods and their contributions to the study.

Reliability was ensured through a pilot study that pre-tested the instruments with a small sample to assess clarity and consistency, leading to adjustments to improve logical flow. Internal consistency was maintained by ensuring uniform

Table 2. Data collection methods and contributions.

Method	Participants/Setting	Sample	Contribution to Analysis
Key informant interviews	Women leaders of organisations supporting women entrepreneurs	20	Provided institutional perspectives on access to credit, governance support, business development, and succession-related interventions.
Focus group discussions	Women who owned, co-owned, or managed family businesses	12 groups (80 women)	Explored participants' experiences of resource allocation, decision-making authority, governance practices, and succession planning.
Workplace observation	One business selected from each focus group	12 businesses (168 hours)	Captured how organisational practices, responsibilities, and financial activities were enacted in everyday business operations.
Institutional observation	Regional meetings involving support organisations and financial institutions	4 meetings (11 hours)	Examined how policies and support mechanisms were implemented in practice and whether stated commitments to gender inclusion were reflected in organisational behaviour.

Note. Divergences between reported practices and observed behaviour were treated as analytical findings. Pilot data were excluded from the analysis.

responses across similar themes, while external consistency was achieved by comparing findings with existing literature. Internal validity was strengthened by designing questions that effectively captured key aspects of gender dynamics, such as resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning. In contrast, external validity was enhanced by selecting a diverse sample of women leaders from various regions and business contexts in Uganda, while acknowledging that purposive sampling may limit the broader generalizability of the results.

Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and themes across the data. Coding is conducted both manually and with qualitative analysis software such as NVivo to ensure systematic organization and to manage large datasets. This approach allows the researcher to remain grounded in participants' voices while drawing meaningful conclusions. By employing these qualitative methods, the study captures the richness and complexity of the meso-organizational factors connected to gender dynamics in family business in Uganda, providing insights that could inform gender-equitable policies and practices in entrepreneurship.

The study analyzed qualitative data from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation using thematic analysis. Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, and observation notes were organized and coded in NVivo. Participant observation adopted an observer-as-participant role, with the researcher observing rather than participating in business activities. The researcher observed each of the 12 businesses over two successive days, focusing on everyday practices such as cash handling, task allocation, decision-making, and family members' roles.

Analysis followed six stages: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation. The study used a combination of deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were informed by the study objectives, research questions, Self-Efficacy Theory, and feminist perspectives, and included resource allocation, governance structures, succession planning, women's leadership, patriarchal norms, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Inductive coding identified emerging issues from participants' accounts and observed practices, such as role overload, informal household savings, competence-based succession, and changing attitudes towards women's leadership.

Related codes were grouped into broader categories and refined into three themes aligned with the research questions: resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning. To enhance rigor, the study compared coded data across Uganda's Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western regions and triangulated findings across interviews, focus groups, and observations. The study retained and examined contradictory and deviant cases alongside dominant patterns, ensuring the findings reflected both theoretical expectations and participants lived experiences of gender dynamics in family businesses.

3. Results

The findings address meso-organizational issues that significantly shape gender dynamics within family businesses in Uganda. The analysis draws on evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. Integrating multiple data sources enabled triangulation of findings and provided a deeper understanding of organizational practices in resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning. This analysis shows how these internal organizational mechanisms, often shaped by broader socio-cultural norms, either perpetuate or challenge existing gender inequalities, affecting women's participation, influence, and leadership within their family enterprises. The themes presented below emerged through an iterative process of deductive and inductive coding, with findings compared across regions and data sources to identify common patterns, regional variations, and divergent experiences.

3.1. Gendered Resource Allocation Practices

The data indicate that access to start-up capital in family businesses in Kampala (central) is largely informal and gendered, with women often relying on spousal support or small domestic savings rather than independent financial sources. One respondent noted: "*...I started my business with* 500,000 *UGX... I got it from the small monies my husband leaves home for domestic use... Those savings are what I used to start my charcoal business…*" (*R*1, *FGD* 1 *central*). This reflects a structural financial dependency in which women's entrepreneurial entry is shaped by patriarchal household resource flows, limiting their autonomy, scalability, and long-term business security compared with men, who typically access more formal or independent capital streams. However, findings from the Central region reveal a more varied picture. As one participant explained, "*...here in central there are many women-led family businesses; women look for their own capital through group lending or SACCOS; some have rich relatives who give them capital; women look for the location where they want the business to be located…*" (R1, FGD 1). This suggests that in urbanized contexts, women are increasingly proactive in seeking independent funding sources beyond spousal provision. Yet spousal negotiation remains a key gateway, as another respondent noted: "*...you see as a woman I may bring an idea, and I tell my husband to give me capital to fund the idea.... because you cannot think for me that go and do this because I might not have interest in that…*" (*R*2, *FGD* 3). This indicates that while women exercise agency in ideation, their financial execution often still depends on male consent and provision.

Participant observation in the same business in the Central region demonstrated that this household control of capital persisted in everyday financial practices. At OBS-C1, the operator managed sales throughout the day. At 16:10, her husband arrived, sat in the only chair, took a knotted bag of cash from under the sacks without counting the money with her, and left. She then continued sales using her personal mobile-money account, which she had previously described in the focus group discussion as a safer way to maintain some control over business earnings.

Another support mechanism identified was external assistance from NGOs and local organizations, primarily through seed capital and mentorship. Although these initiatives provide essential early-stage support, they often prioritize short-term business survival over building sustainable, autonomous financial systems for women entrepreneurs. As one key informant noted: "…. *We offer mentorships for those who get a booster grant... We nurture you to see that your business is thriving…*" (*KI*4). This suggests that while such interventions offer valuable momentum, they rarely address the structural barriers that keep women dependent on external aid, limiting long-term financial independence and transformative change within family enterprises.

Access to resources for family enterprises in Soroti (Eastern) often depends on NGO-led interventions and community-based savings structures that prioritize women as more reliable and growth-oriented. Support typically takes the form of physical assets, seed capital, or livestock, emphasizing group accountability rather than individual financial independence. As a key informant respondent explained, "*Most times those resources go to women… because NGOs don't give money where there's no seed growing… we realized women are more trustworthy and more passionate about growth and development.*" (*KI*7, *Eastern*). This suggests that resource allocation in family businesses remains externally driven and gendered, with women positioned as the preferred recipients of aid yet still constrained by group-based rather than individually empowering funding mechanisms.

The data indicate that resource allocation in family businesses in Lira (Northern) largely depends on financial capital provided through structured mechanisms such as loans and small NGO grants. Respondents noted that organizations prefer loans to direct capital to promote accountability and prevent misuse, often pairing these funds with training in business management and financial literacy to strengthen entrepreneurial capacity. As one respondent explained: "...*they give through loans where people in business can access and pay back… because if you give someone capital it is very difficult for someone to maintain… that's why most NGOs and other entities give it through loans…*" (*FDG*8, *Northern*). This approach reflects a deliberate shift towards sustainable empowerment rather than dependency, aligning with broader efforts to enhance family economic stability and reduce social challenges such as gender-based violence and youth crime.

The data indicate that women in Mbarara (Western) primarily access business capital through structured microfinance services, including group, individual, and school-fees loans, often paired with training in risk management, savings, and business skills. As one respondent noted: "...*we have group loans, we have individual loans, we have school fees loans… we reach them and train them… we advise them always to invest the money we give them because it is loan money. We have to pay back, not to get loans and go home and eat*" (*KI*17, *Western*). This trend suggests a shift from dependency-based support towards self-sustaining financial inclusion models that emphasize accountability and empowerment; however, persistent challenges, including limited capital, cultural constraints from male partners, and insufficient training, continue to hinder women's effective participation in business, highlighting the need for affordable credit and continuous capacity-building.

Respondents noted that men are widely perceived as having the greatest investment potential, reflecting cultural norms that privilege male financial agency. At the same time, women-led cooperatives, such as SACCOs, have created alternative systems of collective resource management grounded in trust and accountability. As one respondent stated: "*...for girls even here we work only as women… girls are trustworthy… if you entrust them with money, even when it is small, they bring it back just as you gave it to them…*" (*KI*16, *Western*). This contrasts with the perceived misuse of funds by men, attributed to greed, peer pressure, and social distractions. Women's savings groups and microfinance institutions such as BRAC were also praised for deliberately engaging and empowering women, and for their reliability.

Resource allocation within family businesses in Soroti District (Eastern) is deeply shaped by gendered cultural norms that privilege men's authority over household income and property. As one respondent explained: "*.... you find a woman toiling; she has maybe her acre of cassava that your account to the husband who has done nothing... he's like the landlord of the home... unless she's a smart lady, like now these days women are empowered, you find a woman says she makes* 100,000 *when in actual sense she makes* 150,000, *and she's keeping the rest. But it's because women really have little ownership of property, land, and then also culturally they are very submissive....*" (*KI*7, *Eastern*). These dynamics show how cultural expectations limit women's financial autonomy and decision-making power, despite their central role in sustaining family enterprises. Concealing income is an adaptive strategy to navigate patriarchal restrictions, but it also highlights the vulnerability of women's economic position. The practice of concealing part of their income signifies women's adaptive response to patriarchal constraints and exposes the fragility of their empowerment.

Participant observation revealed a related practice. At OBS-W1 (Western), a Parish Development Model poster and an NGO sales chart were on the wall. Over two days, 61 sales were observed, yet none was recorded on the chart. Instead, sales amounts were noted on the back pages of a child's exercise book. The operator explained that keeping records in a separate notebook prevented her husband from seeing the exact amount earned. In this case, not using formal record-keeping tools appeared to be a strategy for protecting financial information rather than simply reflecting a lack of bookkeeping skills. A contrasting case was observed at OBS-N2 (Northern), where a separated woman managed the business independently. She wore the cash-box key on a string around her neck; no adult man entered the business for the two-day observation period, and customers referred to her as "boss". Unlike the Western case, the woman operating the enterprise retained control of cash and business records.

Resource allocation in family businesses in Uganda remains heavily gendered and sometimes informal. Women tend to rely on spousal support, limited domestic savings, or group-based assistance rather than tapping independent financial resources. As highlighted by one respondent, she started her business with money from home groceries allowances given by her husband. External support from NGOs and microfinance provides some respite, but it seldom leads to long-term financial independence. Community-based savings systems and women's cooperatives support community accountability but may not translate into individual empowerment. Cultural traditions continue to support male control of property and household finances. As a result, the scale-up and stability of women's financial independence remain limited.

3.2. Governance Structures and Gender Dynamics

Findings indicate that governance in family businesses is largely informal and patriarchal, with men dominating decision-making even when women manage day-to-day operations. In contrast, NGO-supported group enterprises have more formal leadership and accountability systems. As one key informant noted, "…*Family businesses… don't have that organizational structure. But group businesses have because we train them on leadership and good governance*" (*KI*1). This shows that informality and male-centered control weaken governance in family enterprises. At the same time, trained groups demonstrate greater transparency, shared leadership, and responsibility, highlighting the need for structured governance models within household businesses. Participant observation supported the contrast. Group meetings had a chair, a list and turns to speak (INST-N, Northern). Household stalls had a chair that, in practice, belonged to the husband. These observations suggest that enterprises receiving external governance support were more likely to adopt structured accountability mechanisms. This pattern is echoed in Central region findings, where a respondent observed: "….*in central here, some big businesses have management structures that will have manager, accountant, human resource, marketing that help to run the business; these are a few, most family businesses are run informally without formal paperwork…*" (*R*1, *FGD* 4). This confirms that while formal governance exists in larger enterprises, it remains the exception rather than the norm across most family firms.

Family businesses in the area operate largely informally, with minimal role differentiation and few structured management systems. Most are individually owned or family-assisted ventures, with founders retaining unilateral control and viewing others mainly as helpers. As one respondent noted, "…*it is mostly informal where someone is assuming that I am the owner and you are just helping me*…" (*FDG*2). This informality weakens governance, limits shared decision-making, and reduces transparency and accountability, ultimately constraining business continuity and growth. Observational evidence further confirmed the informal nature of governance in many family businesses. During field visits and focus group interactions, management responsibilities were frequently concentrated in one or two individuals, with limited evidence of written role descriptions, formal reporting structures, or documented decision-making procedures.

Findings indicate that governance structures in family businesses in Mbarara (Western) are gradually shifting, with women increasingly assuming leadership roles in enterprises once dominated by men. As one respondent observed, "…*nowadays women, they don't want to be dependents. They want to be independent… most of the successful businesses we have dealt with, women lead them.*" (*KI*17, *Western*). However, patriarchal norms continue to shape governance dynamics, with some men resisting women's initiatives, perceiving them as threats to their authority. Thus, despite progress, cultural attitudes continue to influence decision-making and constrain women's leadership, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive governance practices to enhance inclusion and business sustainability. In Kampala (Central), early socialisation into business governance begins early, as another respondent noted: "…*here in central immediately after school children are introduced to business, they are tasked to help their mother who owns a business to run alongside the mother in her presence or absence…*" (*R*2, *FGD* 4). This suggests that governance exposure is gendered from childhood, with children, especially daughters, groomed into operational roles rather than strategic decision-making positions.

Governance in small businesses and partnerships in Ankole (Western) is becoming more structured, with clearer roles introduced to improve order and accountability. However, gender inequalities persist, as women leaders still face perceptions that their authority is politically enabled rather than merit based. As one respondent noted, "…*thanks to the NRM government. You see, they push for the girl child… now girls also build and support their parents. The thinking has changed how they used to believe only boys lead…*" (*KI*19, *Western*).

Religion, particularly in Pentecostal communities, also supports women's confidence and leadership. However, cultural expectations, including patriarchy and bride-price norms, continue to limit women's full decision-making power in business and family settings.

Findings indicate that governance in Soroti (Eastern) family businesses is largely patriarchal and informal, with leadership hierarchies often modelled on traditional family roles. Respondents noted that "*it's always the father as the general manager and the mother as second in command and the children follow in line*" (*FGD*5, *Eastern*). These arrangements reflect gendered authority patterns in which decision-making flows from men to women and children, mirroring broader community power relations. Participant observation made these hierarchical dynamics visible in everyday business transactions. At OBS-E2 (Eastern region, produce business), the woman's bargaining authority varied according to her husband's presence. On day 1, while her husband was attending a burial, she negotiated the price of tomatoes down from UGX 1000 to UGX 800 per pile. On day 2, when her husband was present and seated in the chair, the same supplier offered the tomatoes at UGX 1000. The woman looked to her husband, who nodded, and she paid the full amount. After the supplier left, she explained, “When he is here, I don’t want noise”.

Female participants reported a growing number of women managing family enterprises, particularly when husbands are occupied elsewhere. As one participant explained, “*…the husband can be having a big job somewhere, and he tells the wife to lead the business management.*” (*FGD*5, *Eastern*). This reflects a gradual adaptation to socio-economic demands, though challenges such as domestic interference, unequal sharing of responsibilities, and limited decision-making persist. Thus, while governance in Soroti remains largely patriarchal, emerging pressures are creating space for women to take on managerial roles.

A respondent highlighted the effects of informal governance, noting the concentration of multiple roles in one person: “*I am the director, I am the accountant, I am the marketer*” (*FGD*3, *Central*). This role centralization, often borne by women, creates overload and undermines efficiency, accountability, and strategic growth, reflecting the survivalist and informal nature of many family enterprises. At OBS-C2 (Central, grocery business), the woman served 34 customers between 09:00 and 13:00, received a supplier, responded to a school-fees call, sent a child to buy food, breastfed, cleaned a spill, and handled cash transactions without a calculator or machine. No other adult assisted in the business. However, three late customers found the shop closed between 12:50 and 14:15 because she had gone home to prepare a meal. One regular customer subsequently purchased goods from a neighbouring shop. These observations illustrate how unpaid care responsibilities interrupted business operations, even for a highly capable and productive operator.

Even where leadership and governance training is available, particularly for group businesses, individual family enterprises rarely adopt it. As one key informant noted, “*They don’t have that organizational structure. But these other ones, group businesses have because we train them on leadership and good governance*” (*KI*1). This highlights a persistent gap between knowledge and practice in nuclear family-run enterprises. Entrenched gender norms and household power dynamics often limit women’s visibility, keeping leadership roles informal and largely male-dominated despite women’s active contribution to daily business operations.

Governance in many family businesses still mirrors traditional patriarchal hierarchies, shaping gender dynamics in decision-making. As one respondent observed, “*…It’s always the father as the general manager and the mother as second in command and the children and other employees follow in line…*” (*FGD*5, *Eastern*). Such structures concentrate authority in male figures and confine women to supportive roles, reinforcing gender imbalances and limiting women’s influence in strategic and operational decisions. Nevertheless, a notable exception emerged in OBS-C3 (Central Region), where spouses shared governance responsibilities. At the close of business, the husband and wife jointly counted the day’s earnings while the wife maintained the financial records, indicating a more collaborative approach to financial oversight. Although this practice was uncommon among the businesses studied, it shows that alternative, more gender-inclusive governance arrangements exist in some family enterprises.

Most family businesses in Uganda are managed informally and within a patriarchal system. Leadership structures are based on traditional family roles, with fathers as general managers and women as second-in-command. Women often head enterprises (particularly in the absence of men), although their dominance is sometimes disputed or seen as temporary. The findings show that women's groups have built corporate governance through training and capacity building, whereas most nuclear family businesses lack defined frameworks. Women are assigned various responsibilities but are not involved in critical decisions. This reflects current gender power dynamics. In certain locations, such as Mbarara, change is slow as socio-economic factors shift and women become more educated.

3.3. Succession Planning and Leadership Continuity

Succession planning in family businesses is largely informal and culturally mediated, with inheritance decisions often guided by clan deliberations rather than by written wills or business continuity plans. One key informant noted: "*Sometimes parents write their wills… but a will is just something which is not so heard of here. The clan will always sit to discuss and see who can run the business*" (*KI*1). This suggests that succession processes are reactive rather than strategic, rooted in cultural traditions rather than institutional planning. Such practices hinder sustainability and limit women's access to inherited business roles, though emerging cases of daughters inheriting enterprises reflect a gradual shift towards gender inclusivity. In Kampala (Central), traditional norms remain deeply entrenched, as one respondent articulated: "*….in central here it's culturally known that boys inherit or succeed businesses especially in most Baganda traditional families….so it sounds bad when a parent installs a girl as heir to the business, and people will be like what kind of a person succeeds their family business with a woman…*" (*R*1, *FGD* 4). This highlights the strong social stigma attached to female succession in Buganda, where public perception actively discourages parents from appointing daughters, regardless of capability.

Succession planning emerged as a major gap undermining the sustainability of family enterprises. Most owners neither prepare nor mentor successors, leading to business collapse when the founder retires or dies. One respondent explained, "*…when my mum retired since she used to be the core of the business… there was a big loophole and the financial stability drifted…*" (*FDG*1, *Central*). This lack of structured governance and succession planning undermines business continuity and weakens the long-term resilience of family enterprises, while gendered patterns also shape who is considered a successor. This bias is explicitly linked to risk perceptions, as another respondent noted: "*……most businesses are trusted with boys as successors because boys are more risk averse than girls, so it's believed that boys can continue the business more than a girl…*" (*R*4, *FGD* 2). This belief, though empirically questionable, persists as a powerful cultural script that systematically disadvantages female heirs.

Traditionally, family businesses reserve succession for male children, reflecting the Banyankole belief that "the family is a boy." As one respondent noted, "*...if the family is having both genders, girl and boy, automatically… it is a boy… unless the boy is having a mental case or is not functioning well.*" (*KI*17, *Western*). However, some families are slowly shifting, training both sons and daughters and, in rare cases, entrusting capable girls with leadership. As the respondent explained, "*...there are families… they train both children… all of them are treated equally to know the business…* but they are few." (*KI*17, *Western*). This shows that while succession remains largely patriarchal, gender attitudes are evolving and change is occurring gradually.

The data indicates a gradual shift from strictly patrilineal inheritance towards more competence-based succession. Traditionally, boys inherited the business because a girl doesn't build a family, but this view is changing as daughters are increasingly seen as reliable and financially supportive. As one respondent noted: "*...girls now even inherit more… even when a girl has a salary… she can give her parents at least* 10*k. But if it's a boy, they eat everything…*" (*KI*17, *Western*). Some business owners now train all their children, regardless of gender, in business operations and assess succession on knowledge, responsibility, and potential. However, practices such as bride price and expectations of female submissiveness still limit women's autonomy. This shows that succession in Ankole (Western) is becoming more inclusive, though it remains shaped by entrenched patriarchal norms.

The data further highlights that succession planning within Soroti (Eastern) family businesses is understood as a collective process involving family agreement on capital contribution, investment type, and responsibility sharing. Respondents described it as "*…agreeing as a family how much money you are committing to a business, what kind of business you are going to invest in, who is going to work, and so on…*" (*FGD*5, *Eastern*). Others emphasized contingency planning, such as determining "*…if you die or get incapacitated, who will handle the business and which way...*" (*FGD*5, *Eastern*). Such participatory planning promotes harmony and reduces conflict, as participants agreed that it "helps to keep the business afloat even without the founder" (*FGD*5, *Eastern*). Observations during discussions indicated that participants generally treated succession matters as family issues rather than business management concerns and often discussed them informally. These findings reinforce the view that succession decisions were typically guided by family traditions, informal consultations, and cultural expectations rather than documented continuity strategies. However, gender still shapes succession outcomes; most family enterprises prioritize male heirs, though some women increasingly manage businesses after spousal death or separation. This suggests that succession planning in Soroti is gradually shifting from strictly patriarchal inheritance systems to more pragmatic, consensus-driven models that value commitment and competence over lineage. Nonetheless, entrenched gender norms and a lack of formal documentation limit the full institutionalization of succession strategies.

The final key meso-organizational issue the data reveal concerns gendered pathways in succession planning within Ugandan family businesses. This refers to the informal, often implicit processes by which future leadership and ownership roles are determined, which frequently disadvantage women. My analysis indicates that traditional gender roles and patriarchal expectations strongly shape who is groomed for leadership, with male heirs typically preferred over female family members, even when women demonstrate strong capabilities and commitment to the business (Bikaako & Ssenkumba, 2003). This directly addresses succession planning in the first research question.

The data reveal that succession planning in many family businesses remains largely informal and is often absent altogether, leaving these businesses highly vulnerable during transitions, especially upon the death or incapacitation of the primary owner or manager. A key informant highlighted this pervasive lack of foresight: "…*Most times people are caught abruptly but not planned who should take over... in most cases the businesses fail when the owner dies*…" (*FDG*1, *Central*). This suggests that the lack of proactive succession strategies undermines the continuity of family businesses.

Gender roles also play a part, with sons often expected to take over and daughters excluded or less interested due to socialization or lack of prior exposure. This suggests that the absence of formal, proactive succession planning in many family businesses creates significant risks to long-term sustainability, especially during critical transitions such as the death or incapacitation of the founding member. Without clear, well-communicated plans for leadership transfer, businesses are often plunged into uncertainty, leading to operational disruptions, conflicts, or outright failure.

Mentorship for potential successors exists in some family businesses but is often informal, irregular, and influenced by gender bias. As one respondent explained, "...*I mentor some children at home so that when I am not around, they can run the business smoothly*...." (*R*1, *FGD*1). Such unstructured mentoring leaves succession uncertain and often favours sons over daughters, reinforcing patriarchal inheritance patterns and limiting women's opportunities for leadership. Formal, inclusive succession plans remain largely absent, increasing the risk of business discontinuity.

Participant observation examined the tasks children were assigned within family businesses. In OBS-W3 (Western), a mother stated during the focus group discussion that she rotated responsibilities among her children. However, over two days of observation, gender differences in task allocation were evident. The boy was sent to the mill with cash and interacted directly with the male mill operator, while the girl arranged tomatoes, swept the premises, and was repeatedly instructed to "help Mummy." Although both children participated in the business, they performed distinctly different roles: the boy undertook externally oriented, financially related tasks, while the girl performed supportive, domestic-type duties. A similar pattern emerged in succession-related practices. In OBS-N1 (Northern), a widow who wanted her daughter to inherit the business still called on her brother-in-law whenever a male customer arrived to make a large purchase. Despite the intention to support daughter succession, authority in key commercial transactions remained associated with a male presence.

Cultural discomfort with discussing death and inheritance limits the development of formal succession plans in family businesses. Many owners avoid conversations about future leadership or asset transfer. As one informant observed, "*A business plan lays everything... Some parents write their wills... but a will is just something which is not so heard of here...*" (*KI*1). This reluctance delays planning and weakens business continuity, while gender norms often further marginalize women from succession decisions. Amid these challenges, some families are adopting more intentional succession practices, especially where women proactively train their children, including daughters, for future business roles. As one respondent shared, "*Yes, of course, in case I am not there, I have trained my daughter... I always wish she takes over with the help of her father....*" (*KI*8). This reflects a gradual shift towards more inclusive succession, with women challenging traditional norms by preparing daughters for leadership. This evolving mindset suggests potential for more equitable and strategic succession planning that not only ensures business continuity but also promotes gender balance in decision-making roles. These examples reflect broader social changes and the emergence of more progressive attitudes toward women's leadership in family enterprises, offering promising pathways to transform patriarchal succession patterns over time.

A contradictory case emerged in OBS-C3 (Central). Unlike most businesses observed, a boy and a girl were both entrusted with operating the till and giving change, and the mother corrected and instructed them in the same manner. This reflected an uncommon practice of equal training for future business responsibilities. However, such examples were rare, occurring in only one of the 12 businesses observed. Gendered expectations were also evident beyond the family business itself. During an Eastern savings and credit cooperative meeting (INST-E), the male chairperson asked a woman applying for a restocking loan whether her husband had approved the request. When a male applicant sought the same type of loan, no comparable question was raised regarding his wife's consent. This suggests that despite formal commitments to equal treatment, women's economic participation remained mediated through assumptions about male authority.

Overall, succession planning is ad hoc and relies on clan customs and beliefs rather than conventional company processes. Inheritance and leadership decisions typically favour male heirs; yet more cases involve daughters taking over businesses. Many owners are uncomfortable with death and inheritance and do not plan for succession, leaving businesses vulnerable to failure when founders stand away. In some families, notably in areas like Ankole and Soroti, competence and commitment are beginning to matter more than gender in selecting successors.

Nonetheless, opaque and non-inclusive succession planning stunts women's progress and risks corporate stability. Table 3 below summarizes the main findings for RQ1-RQ3, integrating evidence from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and contradictory cases.

Table 3. Summary of findings by research question.

RQ	Theme	Evidence from Interviews and Focus Groups	Evidence from Observation	Contradictory Case
RQ1	Resource Allocation	Business start-up capital commonly originated from housekeeping money or gifts from husbands. Support from NGOs and SACCOs was typically short-term and often delivered through group-based arrangements.	Cash generated by a business operator was collected by her husband at closing without a joint count (OBS-C1). Formal record-keeping tools were left unused, while sales were recorded privately to conceal earnings from a spouse (OBS-W1).	A separated business operator retained sole control of the cash-box key and was referred to by customers as "boss" (OBS-N2).
RQ2	Governance Structures	Most household businesses lacked formal governance arrangements, whereas NGO-supported groups often had written structures. Men were frequently described as primary decision-makers, while women experienced role overload.	Authority appeared to follow household hierarchy, with decisions influenced by the person occupying the leadership position in the business (OBS-E2). Unpaid care responsibilities interrupted business operations and led to temporary shop closures (OBS-C2).	In one case, husband and wife jointly counted the day's takings, indicating shared financial oversight (OBS-C3).
RQ3	Succession Planning	Formal wills were uncommon. Succession decisions often involved clan structures, and sons were generally preferred as successors. Informal mentoring occurred within the household.	Gendered succession practices were evident, with boys assigned higher-value tasks while girls were directed toward support roles (OBS-W3). Even where daughters were identified as successors, male involvement remained necessary for some transactions (OBS-N1). Women, but not men, were asked whether their spouses had approved business activities (INST-E).	One business trained both boys and girls in cash management and business operations, suggesting a more gender-inclusive succession approach (OBS-C3).

Note. Evidence was drawn from Uganda's Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western regions. KI = Key Informant Interview; FGD = Focus Group Discussion; OBS = Participant Observation; INST = Institutional Meeting Observation; RQ = Research Question.

4. Discussion

The findings are discussed in relation to the study's purpose: exploring the meso-organizational factors that affect gender dynamics in family businesses in Uganda. The themes are resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning. The discussion situates the findings within the theoretical lenses of the study, specifically feminist theory, self-efficacy theory, triple patriarchy, and organizational justice views, as well as the existing family business and gender literature. It contextualizes the findings in relation to women's entrepreneurship, family business sustainability, and gender relations in Sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda, and highlights where the findings support, extend, or contradict earlier research. Although the dominant findings reflected persistent patriarchal practices across all regions, some contradictory cases demonstrated emerging forms of gender-inclusive governance and competence-based succession, indicating gradual institutional change.

4.1. Gendered Resource Allocation

The data suggests that women's access to business resources remains largely mediated by patriarchal household systems. Many women entered business using savings from home grocery balances provided by spouses, rather than their own acquired capital, because they did not independently own assets, land, or formal credit. Such findings reinforce feminist claims that women entrepreneurs operate within institutional contexts that restrict access to resources and opportunities (Ahl, 2006; Hanson, 2009).

The findings support feminist theory's assertion that women's entrepreneurial decisions stem from unequal access to economic resources, not a lack of entrepreneurial capacity (Ahl, 2006). From an Organizational Justice perspective, this constitutes distributive injustice when access to valuable resources is not distributed according to merit or economic potential, but according to gendered power relations (Acquaah et al., 2016). Women are an important part of family enterprises' sustainability, yet their access to money remains highly dependent on resources controlled by men. These arrangements reinforce what the study's theoretical framework calls triple patriarchy, in which power is exercised simultaneously through family, social, and organizational institutions **(**Dumas, 1989; Glover, 2014; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017**)**. Limited access to productive assets reflects structural gender inequities, not differences in entrepreneurial capability. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory suggests that these constraints undermine women's belief in their entrepreneurial abilities, reducing agency and reinforcing dependency (Bandura, 1986). Even as microfinance, NGOs, SACCOs, and savings groups expand opportunities for women, these interventions often address only symptomatic challenges, not the structural roots of inequality (Fraser, 2014). Resource gains typically remain collective or externally mediated and rarely shift power enough to create true financial independence. This aligns with evidence that women still face significant barriers to inheritance and property ownership despite legal reforms (FIDA Uganda, 2022).

Participant observation revealed that resource allocation remained gendered within family businesses. In some cases, women managed business activities throughout the day, yet husbands took control of the cash at closing time (OBS-C1, Central). Similarly, unused record charts appeared to serve not only as evidence of failed training but also to prevent scrutiny of business income and to maintain control over the till (OBS-W1, Western). A contrasting case emerged in OBS-N2 (Northern), where a separated woman wore the cash-box key and was referred to as the "boss." Without a mediating husband, control over business finances remained with the individual actively managing the enterprise. These findings suggest that while NGO loans and booster grants can support business start-up and growth, they do not necessarily alter underlying patterns of authority over financial resources.

This study contributes to the literature on gender and family enterprise by showing that the resource allocation challenge is not merely a question of access but is substantially affected by intersecting institutional systems. It shows how existing norms maintain women's economic dependence on men for resources. It draws clear links between self-efficacy, institutional theory, and resource limitations (Ahl, 2006; Bandura, 1986). This study of triple patriarchy emphasizes the need for a shift in policy and practice to address not only women's access to resources, but also the underlying gendered power relations that dictate access by both men and women. The persistence of interrelated inequalities in the distribution of resources, governance and succession supports the feminist argument that gender disadvantage is ingrained in institutional systems rather than a matter of individual behaviour (Harding, 1991; Calás & Smircich, 2006). The findings also lend support to Ogbor's (2000) assessment that dominant organizational and entrepreneurial systems reproduce existing power relations while portraying them as natural or merit based.

The findings show that resource allocation, governance and succession are interrelated expressions of a broader patriarchal system. Limited access to finance constrains women's leadership potential; exclusion from governance limits their visibility as rightful successors; and exclusion from succession planning reinforces existing disparities in ownership and control. This confirms the theoretical assumption that triple patriarchy exists concurrently within families, society and organizations (Dumas, 1989; Glover, 2014; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017). The results indicate that gender inequalities are not isolated behaviors but interrelated institutional structures that shape the entire life cycle of family companies. However, counter-narratives are emerging, in which women's growing access to education, engagement with savings organizations, exposure to governance training, and greater economic contributions are gradually eroding long-standing notions of male dominance in company leadership. Women's growing participation in leadership roles can be understood through the lens of Self-Efficacy Theory. Mastery experiences and social learning strengthen individuals' views of their capacities (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Entrepreneurial experience, training, and exposure to successful role models are likely to promote women's entrepreneurial self-efficacy, thereby improving women's participation in leadership and company decision-making (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Hackett & Betz, 1981).

From a political economy perspective, the data suggest that resource distribution in family businesses reflects broader social patterns of power and control. Women's reliance on marital support, informal savings, and externally sponsored programmes indicates uneven access to productive assets and financial capital. Economic resources remain concentrated within male-dominated regimes. Women's agencies as independent entrepreneurs is constrained. These patterns show how the distribution of economic power within families affects women's chances of leadership, wealth creation, and family business performance. The results can also be understood through Institutional Theory, which holds that organizational operations are molded by socially accepted rules and norms. In Ugandan family-owned businesses, access to resources, leadership positions, and succession paths is more contingent on institutionalized cultural expectations of gender than on conventional business criteria. Even as women contribute actively to firm performance, institutional norms perpetuate uneven outcomes. Thus, gender inequality in family enterprises does not seem to be an individual matter but a consequence of deeply rooted institutional arrangements.

4.2. Governance Structures and Women's Leadership

The findings show that governance in most family businesses is informal, with power often held by male heads of households, even though women perform the greater share of operational work. Observational evidence corroborated these interview findings, showing limited formalization of management structures. This aligns with past research on family businesses, which suggests that informal governance often trumps merit-based leadership in favour of family hierarchy. The results reveal severe procedural injustice from an organizational justice perspective. Decision-making procedures are neither transparent nor inclusive, and women often have little say in strategic decisions, despite being involved in day-to-day corporate operations. Thus, governance arrangements institutionalize gender inequities. These results also corroborate the concept of triple patriarchy as described in the study.

Leadership in family firms mirrors wider society, where leadership is culturally linked to masculinity, reinforcing stereotypes that associate effective leadership with male characteristics and reducing the perceived legitimacy of women leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Schein, 2001). The recurring image of 'father as general manager and mother as deputy' reveals how family companies reflect broader social power relations and reproduce gender stereotypes that position men as natural leaders and women as supporters (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Schein, 2001). These results align with Tagiuri and Davis's (1996) argument that family enterprises have distinctive "bivalent attributes" that create both advantages and governance problems. Similarly, Bertrand and Schoar (2006) find that family enterprises commonly use family-based authority structures that may place kinship ahead of merit. This further supports Lubatkin et al. (2005) and Schulze et al. (2003) assertion that altruism and family-centered decision-making can lead to governance arrangements that inadvertently disadvantage non-family and female stakeholders.

Participant observation illustrates how governance hierarchies were enacted in everyday business practice. In household stalls, authority was often signalled through subtle interactions and appeared to shift when a man assumed a visible leadership position (OBS-E2, Eastern). By contrast, trained business groups displayed more formal governance arrangements, including designated chairs, attendance lists, and structured opportunities for members to speak (INST-N, Northern). Role overload was observed not only in participants' accounts but also in daily business activities. At OBS-C2 (Central), one woman served customers, received a supplier, answered a school-fees call, sent a child to buy food, breastfed, and swept the premises before closing the shop at midday to prepare a meal. These observations demonstrate how unpaid care responsibilities routinely interrupt business operations. A contrasting case was observed at OBS-C3 (Central), where a husband and wife jointly counted the day's takings, indicating shared governance. However, such arrangements were the exception rather than the norm.

The study also identifies progress as women increasingly assume leadership positions in Mbarara and Ankole (Western), particularly in businesses that benefit from training programmes and financial assistance. These findings suggest that exposure to formal governance training, education, and economic empowerment initiatives can weaken traditional patriarchal norms and create a path to more inclusive leadership by challenging stereotypes that constrain women's leadership advancement (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). The continued concentration of roles, with one person serving as director, accountant, marketer, and manager, also poses significant challenges to the professionalization of Ugandan family enterprises. Such arrangements unfairly disadvantage women and can impair corporate success, continuity, and growth. This aligns with Ahl's (2006) description of women's continued exclusion from entrepreneurial discourse and practice. It also supports Bruni et al. (2004), who suggest that entrepreneurship is socially constructed through gendered activities that reproduce masculine norms. The findings also align with Hamilton's (2013) notion that entrepreneurship remains linked to masculine identities, creating obstacles to women being recognized as genuine company leaders.

A key contribution of the study is to demonstrate that gender inclusion is not merely a social justice issue but also a business sustainability concern. The findings show that informal governance, unequal resource distribution, and exclusionary succession processes undermine continuity, professionalization, and long-term growth. Many respondents identified insufficient succession planning and a lack of grooming for capable successors as the main reasons for business collapse. The results suggest that gender-inclusive governance can enhance the sustainability of family businesses by increasing the number of competent executives and successors. This supports Miller and Le Breton-Miller's (2005) assertion that successful family organizations achieve longevity through the long-term development of competencies. It is also consistent with Firfiray and Gomez-Mejia (2021), who observe that family firms are better equipped to preserve socioemotional wealth by adapting governance structures to changing environmental and social conditions. From a governance studies perspective, family businesses are governance structures in which authority, accountability, and decision-making obligations are dispersed among players. The results show that governance systems are generally informal and patriarchal. Women are well represented in administrative tasks, but male family members largely hold strategic power, reflecting prescriptive and descriptive gender stereotypes that portray leadership as masculine and women as less suitable for authority positions (Heilman, 2001, 2012). Such governance approaches restrict participation, diminish transparency, and weaken accountability measures. Governance structures are therefore essential sites in the reproduction of gender inequality and the constraining of organizational sustainability.

Organizational justice theory further supports these findings, which posits that family enterprises that prioritize fair resource allocation, participatory governance, and meritocratic succession are likely to gain greater legitimacy, trust, continuity, and resilience (Acquaah et al., 2016; Herda & Lavelle, 2011). Companies that continue to prioritize gender over competence risk losing valuable talent and jeopardizing their prospects for intergenerational survival (Lubatkin et al., 2005; Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006). Thus, family businesses that emphasize meritocratic succession, inclusive governance, and equitable access to resources are more likely to strengthen organizational resilience, continuity, and long-term sustainability, whereas those that prioritize gender or family status over competence are more likely to lose valuable talent and risk compromising their prospects for intergenerational survival. The self-efficacy perspective, by contrast, emphasizes the importance of participation in governance, as confidence in leadership is built through active involvement in decision-making processes. Women who rarely participate in strategic conversations may come to believe that leadership positions are for men. Limited involvement curtails opportunities for mastery experiences, social recognition, and role modelling, which are significant sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). By contrast, the increase in women heading family enterprises in Mbarara and Ankole (Western) shows how exposure to governance positions can improve leadership effectiveness and inspire greater participation in organizational decision-making. NGO governance training changes group businesses more than nuclear household businesses (KI1). Paper organograms do not, by themselves, change who sits in the chair.

4.3. Succession Planning and Gendered Leadership Pathways

The findings indicate that succession planning is the area most resistant to gender disparity. Most succession processes are informal, unwritten and culturally influenced. Boys are usually selected as heirs and future leaders, reflecting the persistence of primogeniture traditions in family business succession (Dumas, 1989). These results align with a global study of family businesses that has highlighted primogeniture and male preference as persistent barriers to women's succession to leadership (Dumas, 1989). This reflects procedural and distributive injustice from an organizational justice perspective. Women are typically passed over in succession planning and are not given leadership opportunities, even when they are capable (Curimbaba, 2002). Socially constructed concepts of gender have more influence on the choice of who is next than aptitude. These results align with studies that show that succession in family businesses generally reproduces established family hierarchies and gender norms (Alayo et al., 2016; Venter et al., 2003). This preference for sons aligns with feminist arguments that organizations and family institutions act as instruments for the reproduction of patriarchal authority across generations (Harding, 1991).

Self-efficacy theory, by contrast, contends that gendered succession traditions have psychological implications. If women are regularly excluded from conversations about leadership development, succession, or mentoring, they may receive subliminal messages that leadership is reserved for men. This might erode their confidence to run family companies and reduce their ambitions to lead in future. Mothers who actively mentor daughters do the opposite. Examples from the study show how succession planning can help cement leadership self-efficacy. Daughter Exposure to company operations, responsibilities, and role modelling increases daughters' confidence and competence and prepares them to be future leaders and successors.

Participant observation showed that the equal presence of boys and girls in family businesses does not necessarily translate into equal apprenticeship opportunities. At OBS-W3 (Western), the boy was entrusted with cash and sent to the mill, while the girl arranged tomatoes and swept the premises. Similarly, at OBS-N1 (Northern), a widow who intended her daughter to succeed her in the business still relied on a brother-in-law when a male customer arrived to make a bulk purchase. These observations suggest that higher-status tasks and business authority remained associated with men and boys. A contrasting case emerged at OBS-C3 (Central), where both a boy and a girl were assigned responsibility for the till and corrected with the same instructions. Further evidence of gendered expectations emerged at INST-E (Eastern), where only women applying for a restocking loan were asked whether their husbands had approved the application. Self-efficacy can be undermined when girls are excluded from high-status business tasks but strengthened when they are given equal opportunities to perform them (Hackett & Betz, 1981; Boyd & Vozikis, 1994).

The findings strongly support feminist arguments that family businesses are sites for the reproduction of patriarchal relations across generations (Glover, 2014). Usually a roadblock to leadership training, mentorship and inheritance rights for daughters, this pattern creates a cycle of male superiority that is accepted and self-perpetuating. Respondents in several places mentioned a gradual shift from male-only succession to competence-based succession. "*More and more, daughters are being appreciated for their contribution, particularly if they have a grasp of business, responsibility for money and care for the well-being of the family*" (*KI*17, *Western*). These findings align with current global family-business research indicating a shift from lineage-based to merit-based succession. This emerging shift toward competence-based succession supports recent claims that family firms are becoming steadily more inclusive as business continuity requires merit-based leadership selection (Barrett & Moores, 2009). The data therefore suggest that succession planning in Uganda is in transition; old patriarchal norms remain dominant, but new approaches based on competency, inclusion, and business continuity are beginning to emerge.

The findings indicate that patriarchal institutions and ideologies that shape resource allocation, governance arrangements and succession procedures in Ugandan family companies continue to define gender relations and women's leadership prospects. These structures still disadvantage women through distributive and procedural injustices. Yet evidence of increasing female leadership, competence-based succession and structured financial empowerment programmes indicate that some family businesses are slowly moving towards more inclusive and sustainable governance models. The results suggest that gender inequities in family enterprises in Uganda are not only individual experiences but also reflect broader institutional arrangements anchored in family, organizational and social systems. The study finds that family businesses that focus on fair resource distribution, participatory governance and merit-based succession are more likely to gain legitimacy, trust, organizational commitment, continuity and long-term resilience, while those that continue to prioritize gender and kinship over competence risk losing valuable talent and intergenerational survival. This aligns with the Organizational Justice Theory (Acquaah et al., 2016; Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). Furthermore, the findings align with Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986), as improved access to entrepreneurial opportunities, leadership experience, and empowerment efforts can increase women's confidence and engagement in decision-making processes. They also contribute to Feminist Theory by highlighting the ongoing impact of patriarchal norms on women's access to resources, authority, and succession opportunities in family firms (Calás & Smircich, 2006). The study thus contributes to the family business literature by showing how organizational justice, self-efficacy, and triple patriarchy (Dumas, 1989; Glover, 2014; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017) interact to shape women's leadership trajectories and entrepreneurial opportunities in Ugandan family businesses, thereby highlighting the importance of inclusive governance and meritocratic succession for long-term family business sustainability.

The results underscore the importance of informal institutions in shaping gender relations within family businesses. Informal institutions are socially accepted norms, traditions and unwritten rules that organize behavior outside formal legal systems. Informal institutions that affect organizational outcomes through succession decisions include clan consultations, male heirs' desires, expectations of female submissiveness (especially to males), and patriarchal family control over financial resources. Although support for gender equality is increasing within official legal systems, access to power, leadership and ownership in family enterprises remains strongly shaped by informal institutional norms. This contributes to the literature by showing how informal institutions, patriarchal governance systems and unequal resource distribution interact to produce gendered power relations in family companies. The results show that family enterprises are not merely economic organizations, but also sites where broader social and political institutions are reproduced. Drawing on institutional theory, governance studies, and political economy, the study shows how women's access to leadership and economic power in Uganda is mediated by household authority, governance arrangements, and systems of succession.

The findings have important implications for gender and development policy. Existing programmes aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs often focus on access to capital and short-term business support. However, evidence shows that deeper institutional barriers rooted in household authority, business governance, and succession norms continue to hinder women's economic participation. Therefore, for development policies to work, they need to go beyond financial inclusion and reach the governance structures that determine women's access to leadership and ownership in family businesses.

5. Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

From the analysis and discussion of this study's findings, gender dynamics continue to influence the operation, growth, and sustainability of family businesses in Uganda. The findings emphasize the importance of gendered resource distribution, patriarchal governance structures, and discriminatory succession practices for women's participation and leadership within family businesses. At the same time, the study finds increasing trends towards greater inclusion through women's economic empowerment, leadership development, and more competence-based succession approaches. This study ends with conclusions drawn from the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations to foster gender-inclusive family business governance and sustainability in Uganda.

5.1. Conclusion

Resource allocation in Ugandan family businesses remains highly gendered and informal, with patriarchal norms privileging male control of financial assets. Women often rely on domestic savings, spousal support, or community savings groups for start-up capital, limiting their independence and business growth. Although NGOs, microfinance institutions, and women-led cooperatives provide loans, seed capital, and training, much of this support is short-term and group-based, offering limited individual autonomy. Capacity-building programmes exist, but social and domestic constraints often hinder women from fully applying new skills. Observation revealed similar patterns in practice. Cash often passed to husbands at closing time (OBS-C1, Central), while unused training charts appeared to shield control of the till from external scrutiny (OBS-W1, Western). By contrast, where no adult male was involved, the woman managing the business retained control of the till (OBS-N2, Northern). Overall, resource allocation practices continue to reflect broader gender inequalities; women participate actively yet remain constrained, undervalued, and limited in their access to sustainable growth opportunities.

Governance in Ugandan family businesses remains largely informal and patriarchal, with men dominating leadership and strategic decision-making, even when women manage day-to-day operations. This results in blurred roles, limited accountability, and restricted female participation. Although NGO training and group-based interventions have improved governance in some enterprises, most nuclear family businesses have not adopted these practices. Traditional gender norms and patriarchal hierarchies continue to constrain women's visibility and influence in leadership. Nevertheless, in regions such as Mbarara (Western) and Soroti (Eastern), socio-economic changes, religious influences, and shifting cultural attitudes are gradually enabling women to assume leadership roles. Observation revealed that authorities often followed visible symbols of leadership, such as control of the chair (OBS-E2, Eastern), while unpaid care responsibilities interrupted women's business activities (OBS-C2, Central). In contrast, one Central business exhibited shared governance, with husband and wife jointly counting the till at closing (OBS-C3). Overall, governance is slowly becoming more inclusive, though entrenched patriarchy still hampers equitable participation and sustainable growth.

Succession planning in Ugandan family businesses is largely informal, patriarchal, and tradition-bound, with inheritance and leadership often favouring male heirs. Despite active participation, women are frequently excluded from leadership roles. Emerging evidence from Mbarara, Ankole, and Soroti indicates a gradual shift towards competence-based and more inclusive succession, driven by education, exposure, and changing gender norms. Informal mentorship, particularly by mothers, reflects growing awareness but remains inconsistent, while cultural taboos around discussing death further hinder planning. Observations showed that children's equal presence in family businesses did not translate into equal apprenticeship opportunities. In OBS-W3 (Western), boys and girls were assigned different tasks; in OBS-N1 (Northern), a daughter's succession still required a man's involvement in high-value transactions; and in OBS-C3 (Central), both a boy and a girl were trained on the till. Overall, the lack of formal, equitable succession frameworks continues to threaten business continuity and reinforce gender inequality.

5.2. Limitations

5.2.1. Cultural and Contextual Bias

This study focused on family businesses in Uganda, where traditional and cultural norms strongly shape gender roles, leadership, and organizational practices. These norms include patriarchal structures that govern decision-making and resource allocation, making the findings highly context specific. Responses to questions about resource allocation, governance structures and succession planning may closely reflect Uganda's societal expectations. While this provides valuable insights for the Ugandan context, the conclusions may not be directly applicable to other regions with different cultural and socioeconomic frameworks. The study's regional focus limits its ability to generalize findings, particularly in more liberal or contrasting cultural settings. The Central, Eastern, Northern and Western regions were included to capture variation within Uganda. They do not constitute a statistical sample of all Ugandan family businesses.

5.2.2. Reliance on Self-Reported Data

Given the nature of the research questions, much of the data derives from key informant interviews and focus group discussions. These qualitative methods are prone to self-reporting bias, in which participants may present an overly positive or socially desirable image of their practices and beliefs. For example, participants may exaggerate inclusive practice or underplay challenges in resource allocation and governance structures. This bias could obscure the true extent of gender inequalities or conflicts within the family business, affecting the reliability of the findings. Responses may also vary according to individual perceptions, limiting the objectivity of the data. Participant observation was used to check talk against practice. It reduced, but did not remove, self-report bias. A second observation day was used because the first day could produce a display of equality.

5.2.3. Access to Participants

Access to family businesses and to women who owned, co-owned, or managed them was challenging, particularly in smaller or informal enterprises. Some families viewed questions about gender dynamics, such as succession planning or managerial leadership, as intrusive or sensitive. This reluctance could lead to a non-representative sample, with participants skewed towards more open or progressive family businesses. This limitation could produce findings that do not fully capture the diversity of experiences and challenges across family businesses in Uganda. The study excluded non-family employees and did not collect men's accounts of RQ1-RQ3. Men therefore appeared only as observed husbands, suppliers, and officials. Because workplace observations were conducted in businesses represented by women who had already participated in focus group discussions, the study was unlikely to capture highly closed or exclusively male-controlled businesses. Two selected participants declined workplace observation and were replaced by women from the same focus groups.

5.2.4. Time and Resource Constraints

The research was constrained by time and resources, limiting the intensity of observation rather than the number of regions. Because family businesses in Uganda operate across various regions and sectors, two successive trading days in each of 12 businesses might overlook significant variations in gender dynamics. Data on resource allocation relied primarily on participant accounts and did not include financial records or enterprise audits. Consequently, the findings reflect perceived rather than objectively measured patterns of resource distribution.

5.2.5. Evolving Social Norms

Gender roles, societal expectations, and organizational strategies continue to evolve, particularly with the growing emphasis on gender equity and inclusion in Uganda and globally. Although the study examined resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning, the findings reflect the situation at a specific point in time. Over time, societal shifts or policy changes may render some insights outdated, limiting their long-term relevance. For example, succession planning or governance structures might differ between urban and rural family businesses or between industries such as agriculture and retail. This limitation challenged the study's ability to capture a comprehensive view of gender dynamics across all family business contexts in Uganda. Additionally, the study examined governance practices primarily through women entrepreneurs' perspectives. Future studies should include male business owners and non-family employees to provide a more comprehensive understanding of governance dynamics.

5.2.6. Potential Confirmation

Given the researcher's high social, academic, and institutional status, there was a risk of confirmation bias, in which the researcher might unintentionally interpret data to confirm pre-existing beliefs or theoretical expectations. For example, the researcher might unconsciously favour evidence that aligns with Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory or feminist perspectives, overlooking contradictory data. To mitigate this risk, the researcher employed reflexivity and methodological rigor. The study obtained contradictory cases, including OBS-C3, OBS-N2, and reports from the Western region indicating that some girls now inherit family businesses. Researcher positionality remained a limitation that could affect the interpretation of findings.

5.3. Recommendations

The recommendations cover resource allocation, governance structures, and succession planning. They address public, international, and national authorities; women operators; women-led family businesses; and women in decision-making positions.

5.3.1. Public Authorities

Public authorities, particularly district and municipal governments, should strengthen gender-responsive support systems for family businesses by institutionalizing Family Business Support Desks that offer simplified business registration, taxation guidance, and enterprise clinics. These offices should promote formal governance practices by providing user-friendly templates for record-keeping, role definitions, and succession planning. Governance training should be designed for nuclear household businesses, not only for women's groups, and should address seating, cash-up, unpaid care, and paper organograms. Local governments should further enhance women's access to finance by providing technical training to SACCOs and VSLAs and linking them to formal credit institutions. Financial products should not require a husband's consent as the default. A husband-agreement question asked only of women, as observed at INST-E, should be withdrawn. To facilitate women's participation, authorities must deliver financial literacy and entrepreneurship outreach in local languages and at flexible times. In addition, local procurement systems should prioritize women-led family enterprises. At the same time, district-level monitoring dashboards should track indicators such as formalization rates, women's access to credit, and the adoption of documented succession plans.

5.3.2. National Authorities

National ministries responsible for trade, gender, finance, and land should mainstream gender across all MSME policies, ensuring that national financing programmes include affordable products explicitly designed for women in family enterprises. Legal reforms should prioritize joint land titling, streamlined property registration, and enhanced consumer protection in microfinance to advance women's economic agency. The government should also develop a national Family Business Continuity Strategy that promotes business formalization, structured governance, and inclusive succession planning. This strategy should be supported by fiscal incentives, such as tax credits or priority licensing, for enterprises that adopt documented governance and succession systems. Succession notes should explicitly identify daughters and sons as potential successors. Integrating gender-responsive business curricula into vocational institutes and adult education centers would further build capacity. At the same time, national-level data systems should capture disaggregated data on governance practices, women's access to resources, and intergenerational leadership patterns.

5.3.3. International Authorities

International development partners should shift from short-term, survival-focused assistance to long-term, transformational support that strengthens women's financial independence and institutional resilience in family businesses. This includes funding blended finance schemes that combine matching grants, repayable loans, and tailored technical advisory services to advance women's economic empowerment. Support should enable women to maintain their own records of takings without exposing them to till capture (OBS-C1; OBS-W1). Donors should also support the development, testing, and scaling of gender-sensitive governance and succession toolkits for adoption by family enterprises across regions. Additional efforts should strengthen digital finance ecosystems, including mobile credit scoring, digital record-keeping, and mobile savings platforms, to help women build individual financial identities. International authorities should support legal reforms on land, inheritance, and matrimonial property rights, and provide resources to national and district actors for targeted gender-norm change campaigns. These efforts must be monitored using gender-specific performance benchmarks to ensure sustainability and impact.

5.3.4. Women

Women involved in family enterprises should strengthen their financial autonomy by opening personal business accounts, maintaining accurate financial records, and joining or leading savings groups to build social capital and creditworthiness. Where a formal cash book could expose business takings to appropriation, a privately kept record under the woman's control was seen as safer than using the wall chart provided through training (OBS-W1). Documenting income, expenses, and contributions to business can enhance their bargaining power in household financial negotiations or succession processes. Women should also seek mentorship through local business associations, actively discuss family roles and future leadership, and pursue ongoing learning in entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and legal rights. Strengthening legal awareness especially regarding inheritance, marriage, and property ownership is crucial to enabling women to claim their rightful place within family enterprises. Diversifying income sources and building small emergency funds can further enhance resilience, particularly in environments where patriarchal restrictions persist.

5.3.5. Family Businesses Led by Women Entrepreneurs

Women-led family enterprises should prioritize formalizing governance structures by developing simple family business charters, clarifying decision-making responsibilities, and separating household and business finances. Introducing written role descriptions and rotating responsibilities can reduce managerial overload, particularly for women who often perform multiple organizational functions, and improve business accountability. Unpaid care that closes the shop at midday should be treated as a governance issue, not merely a private matter (OBS-C2). These enterprises should invest in structured succession planning by documenting leadership transfer processes, mentoring both sons and daughters, and creating contingency plans for illness or unexpected disruptions. Girls should receive the same tasks as boys, such as mills, suppliers and tills (OBS-W3; OBS-C3). Building robust financial systems, joining business networks, and leveraging available training or microfinance opportunities can enhance enterprise credibility and expand access to formal markets. Moreover, women business owners should cultivate strategic partnerships, participate in advocacy platforms, and strengthen organizational resilience through consistent record-keeping and professionalization.

5.3.6. Women Leaders (Women in Decision-Making Positions)

Women leaders, whether in politics, community structures, civil society, or business associations, play a transformative role in reshaping gender relations within family enterprises. They should use their influence to advocate for reforms that strengthen women's land rights, improve access to affordable finance, and institutionalize gender-sensitive governance and succession practices. Women leaders can champion public dialogues that normalize discussions of wills, inheritance, and women's business ownership, thereby reducing cultural resistance. They should also spearhead mentorship programmes that prepare girls and daughters in family businesses for future leadership roles and promote supplier diversity policies that increase the participation of women-led enterprises in procurement markets. SACCOs and public programmes should adopt gender-equitable lending and support procedures. Women should not be required to demonstrate spousal approval when similar requirements are not imposed on men (INST-E). By modelling transparency, providing training in negotiation and conflict resolution, and sharing success stories, women leaders can shift community perceptions and create a supportive environment for gender-equitable family business governance.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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