

Income from Public Work Programmes and Household Economic Stability

Evidence from Mpwapwa District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Public Work Programmes (PWPs) are widely recognized as important instruments for poverty reduction and social protection, particularly in developing countries. This study examined the contribution of income from PWPs to household economic stability in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. The research adopted a descriptive design, using both primary and secondary data sources. A sample of 300 household heads was selected through simple random sampling, while structured questionnaires and document reviews were employed to collect data. Descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis were used to analyse the relationship between PWP participation and household economic outcomes. Regression results showed a strong association between participation in PWPs and household economic stability, with income diversification, employment creation, and local market contributions emerging as key determinants. Despite these benefits, income adequacy remained relatively low, suggesting that programme earnings were insufficient to fully meet household needs. This highlights the limitations of PWPs in providing long-term security without complementary interventions. The findings provide empirical evidence to guide policymakers in refining PWPs to better support vulnerable households while contributing to Tanzania's development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords
Household Economic Stability
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Introduction

Public works programmes (PWPs) have long been recognized as critical tools for poverty alleviation and welfare improvement, especially in developing countries. These initiatives typically offer short-term employment through community-based infrastructure projects with the dual aim of providing immediate income support and stimulating long-term socioeconomic benefits [1]. Globally, PWPs have been introduced during economic downturns and social inequalities. For instance, during the Great Depression, the United States implemented the New Deal programmes, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, which created employment while promoting infrastructure development and natural resource conservation [2], [3]. In Europe, similar programmes were employed during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis to address unemployment, with countries like Spain and Greece introducing schemes to boost social cohesion and household incomes, though evidence of sustainable benefits remains mixed [4], [5], [6]. In Asia, India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been hailed as one of the largest employment schemes worldwide, offering rural households 100 days of work annually with reported improvements in income, women's participation, and community development, albeit challenged by inefficiencies such as delayed payments [7], [8], [9].

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, PWPs are central to poverty reduction strategies. Programmes such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) have significantly improved food security and created millions of work opportunities, yet the sustainability and transformative capacity of these interventions continue to spark debate [10], [11]. Tanzania's experience aligns with this broader trend through the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), established in 2000 to improve the welfare of vulnerable households via cash transfers and public works projects [12], [13]. TASAF has reached over one million households by creating employment opportunities and funding infrastructure initiatives. However, the impact of these interventions on long-term household welfare remains contested, with persistent challenges including limited funding, skills mismatches, and questions over sustainability [14].

Mpwapwa District, a rural area characterized by low agricultural productivity and high poverty rates, provides an important case for examining the role of PWPs. In this district, public works initiatives such as rural road construction have increased market access and temporarily boosted household incomes. Yet, while these programmes create short-term relief, many households continue to face vulnerability due to the transient nature of employment and limited opportunities for skill enhancement. This raises questions about the extent to which PWPs in rural Tanzania can meaningfully improve household economic stability.

Although a growing body of literature exists on social protection and poverty reduction in Tanzania, most studies have focused on broad policy-level evaluations rather than the direct, household-level effects of PWPs. For instance, Emmanuel and Hepelwa [16] assessed integrated cash transfers and public works but did not isolate welfare outcomes in specific districts such as Mpwapwa. Similarly, Masanyiwa et al. [17] examined formal social security schemes, while Khan and Morrissey [18] investigated income diversification, both without addressing the specific role of TASAF's PWPs in shaping rural livelihoods. Existing research, therefore, leaves a gap regarding the localized impact of PWPs on income, social empowerment, and skill development at the household level in rural Tanzania.

Addressing this gap is particularly important given the government's policy commitments under the National Employment Policy and the alignment of PWP interventions with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Without empirical evidence at the household level, it remains difficult for policymakers to refine these programmes for maximum impact. This study therefore investigates the extent to which income generated from public works programmes contributes to household economic stability in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. By focusing on income, social empowerment, and skills development, the study provides evidence to inform more effective poverty reduction strategies in rural communities.

Methodology

A. Study Area

This study was conducted in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania, due to several key reasons. First, Mpwapwa is a district that has actively participated in the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) programme, which is designed to provide public works as a means of improving household welfare. According to the Tanzanian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), rural districts such as Mpwapwa, with significant populations engaged in agriculture and informal sectors, rely heavily on public works for income and social empowerment [19].

Second, Mpwapwa has a high prevalence of poverty, with about 65% of the population living below the national poverty line, making it a critical area for examining the impacts of such programmes on household welfare [20]. Third, the district has seen substantial government investment in skills development through public work initiatives, such as the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), which is designed to enhance the employability of rural populations [21]. These combined factors make Mpwapwa District an ideal location to assess the impact of public work programmes on household welfare.

B. Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of the income from Public Work Programmes and household economic stability. This approach enables

a systematic exploration of how income generated through PWPs contributes not only to meeting immediate household needs but also to strengthening long-term resilience. The study emphasizes the multifaceted outcomes of these programmes, particularly in income generation, social empowerment, and the development of marketable skills that can sustain livelihoods beyond programme participation. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods will be employed, including structured questionnaires to capture measurable income and expenditure patterns, as well as reflections on household experiences. By analyzing numerical data alongside contextual insights, the study seeks to evaluate the extent to which PWPs enhance household income, promote social cohesion, and facilitate skills acquisition that underpins broader economic stability.

C. Target Population

The study population focused on household heads in Mpwapwa District, as they are primarily responsible for decision-making and household welfare, making them key respondents in assessing the impact of Public Work Programmes on economic stability. According to [19], the district has a total of 1,200 households, which formed the basis for determining the study population.

D. Sample Size

The sample size of this study was calculated using Yamane's formula, which is a widely used method for determining sample size in survey research. The formula is represented as follows:

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

Where:
n -The sample size
N- The population size is 1200 number of household participating in the programme
e - The acceptable sampling error =0.05

$$n = \frac{1200}{1+1200\ (0.05)^2} \quad (2)$$

$$Sample\ size\ (n) = 300$$

E. Sampling Procedure

The study employed probability sampling techniques to ensure representativeness of the target population. Specifically, simple random sampling was used to select household heads, thereby giving each household an equal chance of inclusion and minimizing selection bias. This approach was considered appropriate for capturing diverse household experiences with Public Work Programmes and provided a reliable basis for examining their contribution to household economic stability.

F. Data Collection Methods

The study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods to assess the relationship between income from Public Work Programmes and household economic stability.

Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires that were designed to capture detailed information on income generation and household welfare outcomes among programme beneficiaries. Respondents included community members, local leaders, and representatives from non-governmental organizations, with questions focusing on income earned, improvements in living conditions, and skills acquired that enhanced productivity or job opportunities. For secondary data, the study reviewed existing literature, government and donor-funded project reports, and academic publications sourced from databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and government archives. Document review guides were used to systematically analyze these materials, while media content analysis was applied to examine news articles, television reports, and social media posts to capture public perceptions and real-life experiences. The combination of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how income from Public Work Programmes contributed to household economic stability in Mpwapwa District.

G. Data Analysis Methods

Descriptive statistics were employed to provide a clear summary of household characteristics, offering insights into variables such as household size, number of dependents, and general socio-economic attributes of the respondents. These descriptive measures helped in understanding the distribution patterns and central tendencies of key indicators relevant to household economic stability. To further investigate the effect of programme participation on income changes, multiple linear regression analysis was applied. The model was specified as:

$$Yi = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_k X_k + \epsilon_i \quad (3)$$

In this formulation, Y_i represented the dependent variable (household income), X_k denoted the independent variables such as household size, number of dependents, and other socio-economic characteristics, β_0 indicated the intercept, β_k the regression coefficients showing the magnitude of the relationship between each independent variable and household income, while ϵ_i captured the error term accounting for unexplained variations. The regression analysis not only established whether participation in the programme was associated with changes in household income but also quantified the extent to which demographic and socio-economic factors influenced household economic stability. This approach ensured both descriptive clarity and inferential depth, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between programme participation and income outcomes.

Results and Discussion

A. Descriptive Results on Income Generated from Public Works

The findings in Table 1 show that Public Work Programmes in Mpwapwa District played an important role in enhancing household well-being. Respondents indicated that participation in these programmes significantly increased household income, with a mean score of 4.00 (Standard

Deviation = 0.958), reflecting their positive contribution to economic stability. Similarly, households that engaged in the programmes reported improved financial security, as shown by a mean score of 3.72 (Standard Deviation = 1.348), demonstrating the programmes' role in strengthening economic resilience. The sustainability of income was also acknowledged, with a mean score of 3.69 (Standard Deviation = 0.865), which points to the potential of these initiatives to provide households with a more stable and predictable source of earnings over time.

In addition, the programmes were perceived to contribute to poverty reduction, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.95 (Standard Deviation = 1.002). This finding underscores their relevance as a social protection mechanism that cushions vulnerable households against economic shocks. However, despite these positive outcomes, the adequacy of income to meet household needs was rated relatively low, with a mean score of 3.03 (Standard Deviation = 1.261). This suggests that while public work programmes provide meaningful financial support, the earnings may not fully cover essential household expenses.

Table 1. Descriptive results on income generated from public works

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Public work programmes have increased household income in Mpwapwa District.	300	4.00	.958
Households participating in public work programmes experience a significant improvement in their financial stability.	300	3.72	1.348
Public work programmes offer sustainable income sources for households in Mpwapwa District.	300	3.69	.865
Public work programmes help reduce poverty levels in participating households.	300	3.95	1.002
The income generated from public work programmes is adequate to meet the needs of household members.	300	3.03	1.261

The findings reveal that Public Work Programmes play an important role in enhancing household well-being in Mpwapwa District, particularly by improving income and strengthening financial stability. The relatively high mean scores for increased income (4.00) and poverty reduction (3.95) indicate that these programmes are effective in providing economic support and reducing vulnerability among households. However, the lower mean score for income adequacy (3.03) suggests that although the income generated is beneficial, it is often insufficient to meet all household needs and expenses. Moreover, the relatively high standard deviations for financial stability (1.348) and income adequacy (1.261) highlight notable variations in how households experience the benefits of these programmes. This variability implies that the impact of public work programmes is not uniform but rather influenced by household-specific factors such as family size, dependency ratio, and access to alternative income sources.

These findings are largely consistent with previous studies that have examined the contribution of public work programmes to household welfare. The evidence that programme

participation significantly increased household income and improved financial security aligns with the findings of Sakketa J. von Braun [22], who reported that public work programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa enhanced short-term income and provided a safety net for vulnerable households. Similarly, the observed contribution to poverty reduction supports the conclusions of Fields [23], who found that such programmes not only improved household consumption but also reduced poverty gaps in rural settings. The recognition of income sustainability in Mpwapwa District is in line with Essa [24], who emphasized that well-designed public work programmes can provide reliable and predictable income streams, thereby strengthening economic resilience.

However, the relatively low score on income adequacy highlights a limitation also reported in other studies. For instance, Muralidharan et al. [25] and Ravallion [26] found that while public work programmes increased household earnings, the amounts were often insufficient to meet all basic needs, particularly in larger households. Similarly, Tesso [27] observed that in Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme, income from public works provided only partial relief, leaving gaps in food and non-food expenditures. These similarities suggest that although public work programmes are valuable for income generation and poverty reduction, their overall effectiveness may be constrained if wages remain too low or programme durations too short to address long-term household needs comprehensively.

B. Multiple Linear Regression Results on Income and Household Economic Stability

1. Model summary and goodness of fit

The regression model summary indicates a strong positive relationship between participation in public work programmes and household economic stability in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. The R value of 0.813 reflects a strong correlation between the independent variables namely household income increases from participation, employment opportunities created, contribution to the local market economy, diversification of income sources, and access to financial support and the dependent variable, household economic stability.

The R Square value of 0.660 suggests that approximately 66% of the variance in household economic stability is explained by these five factors, underscoring the explanatory power of the model. Additionally, the Durbin–Watson statistic of 1.925 indicates no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, affirming the reliability and validity of the regression results (Table 2).

Overall, the findings confirm that public work programmes play a crucial role in enhancing household economic stability in Mpwapwa District. These results are consistent with studies by Emmanuel and Hepelwa [16] and Sakketa J. von Braun [22], who documented similar impacts in rural Tanzania and across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Results on Income and Household Economic Stability

Coefficients							
Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**	**95.0% Confidence Interval for B**	
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**			**Lower Bound**	**Upper Bound**
(Income Generation)	1.740	.232		3.189	.000	1.197	.283
Household income increases from participation	.265	.058	.083	4.698	.000	.016	.213
Employment opportunities created through the programme	.257	.036	.305	7.123	.000	.186	.328
Contribution to local market economy	.222	.054	.169	4.099	.000	.116	.329
Diversification of income sources	.539	.053	.474	10.097	.000	.434	.644
Access to financial support or savings opportunities	.115	.033	.127	3.514	.000	.050	.179

2. Interpretation and discussion of regression results

The regression coefficients presented in Table 2 provide important insights into how participation in public work programmes influences household economic stability in Mpwapwa District. Income generated from the programmes significantly enhances household stability, with a coefficient of 1.740 ($p = 0.000$), confirming the central role of earnings in strengthening livelihoods. Employment opportunities also show a substantial impact, with a coefficient of 0.257 and a beta value of 0.305 ($p = 0.000$), indicating that job creation meaningfully improves household well-being.

The contribution to the local market economy further supports stability, with a coefficient of 0.222 and beta value of 0.169 ($p = 0.000$), underscoring the importance of stimulating local economic activities. Diversification of income sources emerges as a particularly influential factor, with a coefficient of 0.539 and beta value of 0.474 ($p = 0.000$), demonstrating that multiple income streams substantially reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience. Finally, access to financial support or savings options strengthens household economic security, with a coefficient of 0.115 and beta value of 0.127 ($p = 0.000$).

Overall, the findings in Table 2 show that public work programmes contribute to household economic stability through a combination of income generation, employment creation, market participation, income diversification, and financial inclusion. Such outcomes reduce household vulnerability and promote long-term resilience. These results align with studies by Emmanuel and Hepelwa [16] who reported similar impacts in rural Tanzania and Khan and Morrissey Taruno [18] who highlighted the role of income diversification in improving well-being. [28] further emphasized the significance of public spending in reducing poverty, while Sakketa J. von Braun [22] demonstrated the positive effects of labor-

intensive public works across Africa. However, as Glimmerveen et al. [29] caution, these programmes must ensure inclusivity to avoid marginalization.

Despite these promising results, there remains a scarcity of localized studies in districts such as Mpwapwa, highlighting the need for further research to validate and contextualize these findings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that income from public work programmes significantly contributes to household economic stability in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania, primarily through income generation, employment creation, market stimulation, income diversification, and access to financial support. The findings affirm the value of these programmes as a social protection mechanism that reduces poverty and enhances resilience among vulnerable households. However, the results also reveal limitations, particularly regarding the adequacy of earnings to fully meet household needs, highlighting the need for wage adjustments and programme expansion to ensure more sustainable impacts. These insights underscore the importance of tailoring public work programmes to local contexts and integrating them with broader livelihood and capacity-building initiatives. By doing so, PWPs can move beyond providing short-term relief to fostering long-term economic empowerment, thereby aligning with national employment policies and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. The authors further confirm that they have no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the research and its outcomes.

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