



Effectiveness of Skills Development Initiatives in Public Works Programmes in Enhancing Employment Opportunities

Evidence from Mpwapwa District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the perceived effectiveness of skills development initiatives within Public Works Programmes (PWPs) in relation to employment opportunities among programme beneficiaries in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. A descriptive research design was employed, involving 300 household heads selected through simple random sampling from a population of 1,200 participating households. The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, combining structured questionnaires with qualitative data, which were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively. The findings indicate that participants perceived PWPs as making a meaningful contribution to their employability and future employment prospects. Participants strongly agreed that PWPs provide valuable skills for future employment ($M = 4.41$), while the relevance of acquired skills to the local labour market was also rated positively ($M = 3.96$). Respondents further reported the presence of vocational training and capacity-building components ($M = 3.95$) and perceived household benefits from skills acquired by participating family members ($M = 3.72$). However, perceived improvement in professional and technical skills received a comparatively lower rating ($M = 3.29$), indicating perceived limitations in the depth and intensity of training. Qualitative findings reinforced these results, highlighting skills acquisition, labour-market relevance, vocational training, limited professional competency development, and application of acquired skills as key themes. The study concludes that participants perceive PWPs as having potential to strengthen employability and household livelihood opportunities, although their perceived effectiveness may depend on market-oriented, competency-based, practically intensive training and stronger post-programme linkages to employment, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, certification, and access to finance.

Keywords

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Introduction

Public Works Programmes (PWP) have become an important social protection strategy for addressing unemployment, poverty, and economic vulnerability, particularly in low- and middle-income countries [1]. Traditionally, these programmes have focused on providing temporary employment through labour-intensive public infrastructure projects while simultaneously improving community assets such as roads, schools, irrigation systems, and environmental conservation initiatives [2]. More recently, governments and development agencies have increasingly integrated skills development initiatives into PWP with the expectation that beneficiaries will acquire technical, vocational, entrepreneurial, and life skills that enhance their employability beyond programme participation [3], [4]. Consequently, the success of contemporary PWP is increasingly measured not only by the number of temporary jobs created but also by their ability to facilitate sustainable employment opportunities and labour market integration.

Historically, Public Works Programme have been implemented as policy responses to economic crises and widespread unemployment. During the Great Depression, the United States introduced the New Deal programmes, including the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration, which combined employment creation with skills acquisition through infrastructure development and environmental conservation projects [5]. Although these programmes primarily aimed at providing immediate employment, subsequent evaluations demonstrated that participants acquired transferable skills that improved their long-term labour market prospects [6]. This historical experience established the foundation for integrating skills development into employment-oriented public works interventions.

Across Europe, PWP have continued to evolve as labour market interventions during periods of economic instability. Following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, countries such as Spain and Greece implemented public employment programmes targeting unemployed youth and other vulnerable populations through infrastructure and community service projects [7]. Spain's *Plan de Empleo Social* introduced in 2012 incorporated vocational training and workplace experience alongside temporary employment to improve participants' future employability [8]. Despite these efforts, evidence suggests that while such programmes

effectively reduce short-term unemployment, their contribution to sustained employment depends largely on the quality and relevance of the skills acquired during programme implementation [9], [10].

Asian countries have similarly expanded the scope of PWPs by integrating capacity-building components into employment programmes. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), introduced in 2005, remains one of the world's largest public employment programmes, providing up to 100 days of guaranteed employment annually to rural households [11]. Although the programme has significantly increased household incomes and improved community infrastructure, recent reforms have emphasized skills upgrading to facilitate participants' transition into permanent employment and self-employment opportunities [12]. Nevertheless, challenges including delayed wage payments, inadequate training quality, and weak linkages between acquired skills and labour market demands continue to limit employment outcomes [13]. Likewise, Bangladesh's Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest has incorporated livelihood skills training to improve beneficiaries' economic resilience, although evidence on its long-term employment effects remains inconclusive [14].

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, PWPs have increasingly been positioned as instruments for promoting productive employment rather than merely providing temporary income support. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) has incorporated technical training, agricultural extension, and livelihood diversification initiatives to strengthen participants' productive capacities and improve employment prospects beyond programme participation (Scognamillo & Sitko, 2021). Similarly, South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) integrates accredited training, work experience, and skills certification to improve employability among unemployed youth and vulnerable populations [15]. However, empirical evidence indicates that although these programmes successfully create temporary employment opportunities, many beneficiaries continue to experience difficulties securing sustainable employment after programme completion due to limited demand for acquired skills and insufficient post-programme support [16].

In Tanzania, Public Works Programme are primarily implemented through the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), established in 2000 as part of the country's national social protection framework. TASAF combines temporary employment with community asset creation and increasingly incorporates basic skills development activities intended to improve beneficiaries' employability and income-generating capacities [17]. According to the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, the programme has reached more than one million vulnerable households through labour-intensive public works and cash transfer interventions. While previous assessments have reported improvements in household income and consumption, concerns remain regarding

whether the skills acquired through these programmes are sufficiently relevant and adequate to enable beneficiaries to secure sustainable wage employment or establish viable self-employment enterprises after programme completion.

Mpwapwa District in Dodoma Region presents a particularly relevant context for examining this issue due to its persistent poverty, recurrent climatic shocks, limited formal employment opportunities, and heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Public Works Programme implemented in the district have created temporary employment through activities such as rural road construction, environmental conservation, and community infrastructure development (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2020). Although these programmes expose beneficiaries to various practical skills, little is known about the effectiveness of these skills development initiatives in improving participants' access to long-term employment opportunities or facilitating transitions into productive livelihoods beyond programme participation.

Existing literature on PWPs has predominantly focused on programme impacts on poverty reduction, household income, food security, and social protection outcomes [18], [19]. Comparatively fewer studies have specifically examined whether the skills development initiatives embedded within Public Works Programme effectively enhance beneficiaries' employability and employment opportunities, particularly in rural Tanzania. Moreover, previous studies conducted under TASAF have largely emphasized income support and household welfare, with limited attention given to the quality, relevance, and labour market outcomes of the skills acquired by programme participants. This represents an important empirical and contextual gap because the long-term success of PWPs increasingly depends on their capacity to build human capital that enables beneficiaries to transition from temporary public employment to sustainable wage employment or self-employment.

Therefore, this study assessed the perceived effectiveness of skills development initiatives within Public Works Programmes in relation to employment opportunities among programme beneficiaries in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania. Specifically, the study examined participants' perceptions of the usefulness, relevance, and application of skills acquired through programme participation and their reported contribution to employability and livelihood opportunities beyond temporary public employment. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on employment-oriented social protection and provide evidence that may inform the design and implementation of PWPs that support Tanzania's Development Vision 2050, the National Social Protection Framework, and Sustainable Development Goal 8.

Methodology

A. Description of Study Area

The selection of Mpwapwa District in Tanzania as the study area was informed by several important considerations. First, the district has been a significant beneficiary of the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) programme, which incorporates public works interventions designed to enhance household livelihoods and improve overall welfare. In predominantly rural settings such as Mpwapwa, where livelihoods are largely dependent on agriculture and informal economic activities, participation in public works programmes provides an important avenue for income generation and social empowerment [20].

Second, Mpwapwa District faces substantial poverty challenges, with about 65% of its population estimated to live below the national poverty line. This socioeconomic condition provides an appropriate context for examining how participation in public works programmes influences household welfare outcomes [21]. Third, the district has received significant government support for skills development through public works initiatives, particularly those implemented with the support of the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF). These interventions are intended to enhance employability, strengthen livelihood opportunities, and improve the economic resilience of rural households and communities [22]. Therefore, the combination of extensive participation in PSSN interventions, persistent poverty, and investment in skills development makes Mpwapwa District a relevant and suitable case for examining the effectiveness of skills development initiatives in Public Works Programme on employment opportunities.

B. Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods research design was adopted to assess the perceived effectiveness of skills development initiatives implemented through Public Works Programmes (PWPs) in relation to employment opportunities among programme participants. The design involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide complementary evidence on participants' perceptions and experiences regarding skills development, the relevance and applicability of acquired skills, and their reported contribution to employability and livelihood opportunities.

The quantitative component involved the collection of structured questionnaire data from household heads participating in PWPs, while the qualitative component captured participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the relevance, adequacy, practical application, and perceived benefits of the skills acquired through programme participation. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively, and the findings were subsequently integrated during interpretation.

The use of a convergent mixed-methods design enabled the study to compare and complement quantitative patterns with qualitative accounts, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the perceived effectiveness of skills development initiatives. Importantly, given the descriptive nature of the quantitative component, the design was used to describe and interpret participants' perceptions and reported experiences rather than to establish causal relationships between skills development and employment outcomes.

1. Target Population

The target population comprised household heads participating in Public Works Programmes (PWP) in Mpwapwa District, rather than all households residing in the district. These household heads were considered appropriate respondents because they had direct experience with participation in PWPs and could provide information regarding skills acquired through the programme, the relevance and application of those skills, and reported employment and livelihood opportunities.

According to the programme records used for the study, the eligible population comprised 1,200 households participating in Public Works Programmes in Mpwapwa District. This figure represented the accessible PWP participant population from which the study sample was drawn. It should therefore not be interpreted as the total number of households or the total population of Mpwapwa District. The sample size of 300 household heads was subsequently determined from this eligible PWP population using Yamane's formula at a 5% level of precision.

2. Sample Size

The sample size for the study was determined using Yamane's formula. The eligible population (N) was 1,200 households participating in Public Works Programmes in Mpwapwa District. This figure represented the accessible PWP participant population from which respondents were selected. Using an acceptable sampling error of 5%, the calculated sample size was 300 household heads. The calculation was expressed as follows:

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

Where:

n - The sample size

N- The population size is 1200 number of households participating in the programme

e - The acceptable sampling error =0.05

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

Thus, sample size (n) = 300

3. Sampling Procedure

The study employed a probability sampling approach to obtain a representative sample of household heads participating in Public Works Programme (PWP). Specifically, simple random sampling was used to select respondents, giving each eligible household head an equal probability of being included in the study and thereby minimizing potential selection bias. This sampling technique was appropriate for capturing diverse experiences regarding participation in skills development initiatives under PWP. It also provided a reliable basis for assessing the effectiveness of the acquired skills in enhancing employability, facilitating access to employment opportunities, and supporting participants' transition into sustainable employment or self-employment.

C. Data Collection Methods

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design, involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires to assess participants' experiences of skills training, acquisition of relevant competencies, perceived access to employment opportunities, and reported changes in employment status following participation in PWP.

The structured questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of skills development initiatives in Public Works Programmes. The response categories were coded as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The five-point scale enabled respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement concerning skills acquisition, relevance to the local labour market, vocational training, professional and technical skills development, and household benefits.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 key informants, comprising local leaders and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in or familiar with Public Works Programmes in Mpwapa District. The interviews were used to obtain detailed information on the implementation of skills development initiatives, the relevance and adequacy of the skills provided, opportunities for participants to apply acquired skills, and the challenges affecting access to employment and livelihood opportunities after programme participation. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to use predetermined questions while providing flexibility to probe emerging issues and obtain detailed explanations from the informants. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence enabled the study to describe participants' perceptions and reported experiences regarding the contribution of skills development initiatives to employability, employment opportunities, and household livelihood outcomes, rather than to establish causal effects.

D. Data Analysis

The perceived effectiveness of skills development initiatives implemented through Public Works Programmes (PWPs) was assessed using quantitative and qualitative data analysis approaches. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including minimum, maximum, means, and standard deviations, to summarize participants' experiences and perceptions of skills acquisition and their reported contribution to employment opportunities. The analysis focused on the types of skills acquired, their perceived relevance to the labour market, participants' reported ability to apply the skills in employment or self-employment, and perceived household livelihood benefits associated with participation in PWPs.

For interpretation of the mean scores, equal intervals were used to establish the level of respondents' agreement. Mean scores ranging from 1.00–1.80 were interpreted as Strongly Disagree, 1.81–2.60 as Disagree, 2.61–3.40 as Neutral, 3.41–4.20 as Agree, and 4.21–5.00 as Strongly Agree. Accordingly, higher mean scores indicated stronger agreement with the statements, whereas lower mean scores indicated weaker agreement.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The collected responses were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and ideas related to participants' experiences and perceptions of skills development initiatives. Particular attention was given to the perceived relevance and adequacy of the skills provided, opportunities to apply acquired skills, challenges encountered in accessing employment, and participants' reported experiences regarding the contribution of skills development to employment and household well-being. Thematic findings were integrated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions and reported experiences of skills development and employment opportunities.

Thematic findings were subsequently integrated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the effectiveness of skills development initiatives under Public Works Programme (PWPs). This integration enabled the study to not only establish the extent to which skills development contributes to employment opportunities but also explain participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing the application of acquired skills and their contribution to improved household livelihoods.

E. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Tengeru Institute of Community Development, and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the responsible authorities in Mpwapwa District. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the intended use of the information collected. Informed consent was obtained from all

participants before their participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that participants' identities were not disclosed in the reporting of the findings. The information collected was used solely for research purposes and was securely handled throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

A. Descriptive Results on Effectiveness of Skills Development Initiatives in Public Works Programme

The findings in Table 1 indicate that participants perceived Public Works Programmes (PWP) as making a meaningful contribution to skills development and future employment prospects. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement that Public Works Programmes provide participants with valuable skills for future employment ($M = 4.41$), indicating a strong level of agreement among respondents. This finding suggests that participants viewed participation in public works as providing opportunities to acquire knowledge and practical competencies that they perceived as potentially useful for future livelihood activities.

This finding is broadly consistent with the objectives of Tanzania's Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN), which combines public works with livelihood interventions intended to strengthen income-generating opportunities and household resilience (Tanzania Cash Plus Evaluation Team). The PSSN experience demonstrates that public works can provide poor households with opportunities to earn income while participating in activities that may contribute to broader socioeconomic development.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics results on the effectiveness of PWP toward employment opportunities ($n = 300$)

Statement	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public Works Programme provide participants with valuable skills for future employment.	2	5	4.41	0.865
The skills developed through Public Works Programme are relevant to the local job market in Mpwapwa District.	2	5	3.96	0.964
Households benefit from the skills acquired by family members participating in Public Works Programme.	2	5	3.72	0.884
Public Works Programme include vocational training and capacity-building components for participants.	2	5	3.95	1.002
Participants in Public Works Programme demonstrate improvement in their professional and technical skills.	1	5	3.29	0.930

Likewise, the finding is also supported by Sibanda [23], who examined the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in South Africa and found that public employment programmes have an important role in developing the human capacity of disadvantaged women and youth.

However, Sibanda cautioned that skills development within public works programmes needs to move beyond project-based training towards approaches that are more responsive to labour-market requirements. This observation is particularly relevant to the Mpwapwa findings because, although respondents strongly agreed that public works provide valuable skills for future employment, the relatively lower score for improvement in professional and technical skills ($M = 3.29$) suggests that the skills acquired may not always be sufficiently deep or specialized to facilitate transition into more sustainable employment. Therefore, the present findings support the positive dimension of Sibanda's findings while also reinforcing the study's concern about the limitations of project-based skills development.

Similarly, the finding that the skills acquired were relevant to the local labour market ($M = 3.96$) provides further evidence that participants perceive a relatively strong connection between programme-based learning and local employment opportunities. This finding is important because the relevance of training to prevailing labour-market needs is a major determinant of whether skills development translates into sustainable employment.

Evidence from Tanzania's skills-development programmes indicates that demand-driven and competency-based training can improve employment outcomes. For example, World Bank evidence shows that short-term training supported under Tanzania's Education and Skills for Productive Jobs programme achieved an estimated employability rate of approximately 80% among graduates, while reforms were also directed towards making training more responsive to industry needs [24]. Thus, the Mpwapwa findings are consistent with broader evidence suggesting that relevant skills may be associated with improved employability. Nevertheless, the difference between the high perceived relevance of skills ($M = 3.96$) and the relatively modest improvement in professional and technical skills ($M = 3.29$) suggests that relevance alone may not be sufficient. Participants may acquire skills that are appropriate to local economic activities without necessarily acquiring them at a level that enables them to compete effectively for formal or higher-skilled employment.

Further, the finding (Table 1) indicates that households benefit from the skills acquired by participating family members ($M = 3.72$) also suggests that the reported benefits associated with skills development may extend beyond individual participants to participating households. This is consistent with the broader rationale of Tanzania's social protection programmes, which seek to strengthen household livelihood security and productive capacity. The National Social Protection Policy reports that the PSSN public works component provides temporary paid employment to poor households, while complementary interventions such as savings groups, business skills training, coaching, mentoring, and productive grants are intended to strengthen longer-term household economic capacity [25]. The present finding therefore supports the

argument that participants reported that the benefits associated with public works may extend to the household level rather than being limited to individual employment experiences.

The positive rating of vocational training and capacity-building components ($M = 3.95$) further demonstrates that respondents recognize the importance of complementary training within Public Works Programme. This finding is consistent with Mhina et al.[26] (2026), who argue that public works programmes can potentially generate medium-term benefits through skill acquisition, savings, and investment in productive activities, particularly when public works are combined with additional interventions such as skills training or entrepreneurship support. However, their review of experimental evidence from low- and middle-income countries found that the positive effects of public works are generally strongest during programme participation and tend to diminish in the medium term unless programmes are accompanied by mechanisms that support sustained economic activity [27]. Therefore, the Mpwapwa findings partially support Bagga et al. (2026): participants perceive positive skills and employability benefits, but the comparatively low score for professional and technical skills improvement indicates that these benefits may not automatically translate into durable labour-market advantages.

Importantly, the relatively low mean score for the statement that participants demonstrate improvement in professional and technical skills ($M = 3.29$) provides an important qualification to the otherwise positive findings. This result suggests that participants perceived the programmes as relatively more useful for providing general, practical, or work-related exposure than for developing advanced technical and professional competencies. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Sibanda [23], who argued that skills development in public employment programmes should be more closely aligned with labour-market demands and should facilitate transition from temporary public employment to sustainable employment. It is also consistent with the broader evidence reviewed by Bagga et al. (2026), which shows that public works tend to produce strong short-term employment effects, while medium-term effects are less consistent. Thus, the Mpwapwa finding does not contradict previous studies; rather, it provides empirical evidence supporting their warning that public works alone may have limited capacity to generate sustained improvements in employability unless skills development is sufficiently intensive and linked to post-programme employment opportunities.

The findings also have implications for the current direction of Tanzania's social protection policy. The newly approved PSSN III places greater emphasis on linking social protection with productive livelihoods, including entrepreneurship training, livelihood support, and skills development for self-employment. The programme also incorporates climate-smart public works while seeking to strengthen pathways from social protection to employment [24]. This policy direction is consistent with the Mpwapwa findings, particularly the strong perception that public

works can provide useful skills for future employment. However, the relatively low score for professional and technical skills improvement indicates that implementation should go beyond simply including training components. Training should be market-oriented, competency-based, practically intensive, certified where appropriate, and linked to employers, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship opportunities, and access to finance.

In general, the findings largely support previous studies, particularly those emphasizing the positive contribution of public works to income opportunities, skills acquisition, and human-capital development. At the same time, they reinforce the concerns raised in previous research that public works programmes may have limited long-term effects when skills training is weak, short-term, or poorly connected to labour-market opportunities.

The key contribution of the Mpwapwa findings is therefore the identification of perceived skills-development gap: participants strongly perceive the programmes as providing useful and relevant skills ($M = 4.41$ and $M = 3.96$, respectively), yet they report considerably weaker improvement in professional and technical competencies ($M = 3.29$). This difference suggests that participants perceived the programmes as providing useful basic or work-related capabilities, while reporting comparatively limited development of advanced technical competencies. The findings therefore point to the need for stronger technical training and post-programme transition mechanisms if PWPs are to better support sustainable employment outcomes. This interpretation is consistent with the South African evidence of Sibanda [23] and the broader experimental evidence synthesized by Bagga et al. [27].

B. Qualitative Results on Effectiveness of Skills Development Initiatives in Public Works Programme

The qualitative findings (Table. 2) were analysed thematically to complement and provide deeper explanations for the quantitative results. The analysis focused on participants' experiences and perceptions regarding skills acquisition, the relevance of acquired skills, vocational training, opportunities to apply the skills, and the contribution of skills development to employment and household livelihoods. The qualitative findings are therefore linked to the quantitative results by explaining the experiences and contextual factors underlying the observed patterns. In particular, the strong quantitative assessment of skills acquisition and relevance to future employment is interpreted alongside qualitative evidence concerning how participants perceived and applied the skills obtained through Public Works Programme (PWPs). Similarly, the relatively lower assessment of improvement in professional and technical skills provides an important basis for examining challenges related to the depth, adequacy, and practical application of the training provided.

Table 2. Qualitative findings on the effectiveness of skills development initiatives in Public Works Programmes

Theme	Qualitative findings and participant evidence	Linkage to quantitative findings
Theme 1: Skills Acquisition as a Pathway to Future Employment	Participants explained that involvement in PWP provided them with practical skills that could be used beyond the programme. One participant explained that <i>“through the public works activities, I learned practical skills that I can continue using even after the programme ends, especially in doing small jobs to earn income.”</i> This indicates that participants viewed skills acquisition as an opportunity to improve their future employability and livelihood options.	This finding reinforces the quantitative result showing strong agreement that PWPs provide valuable skills for future employment (M = 4.41).
Theme 2: Relevance of Acquired Skills to Local Employment Opportunities	Participants emphasized that the usefulness of acquired skills depended on their relevance to activities and employment opportunities available within the local community. As one participant noted, <i>“The skills are useful because they can be applied to activities that are available in our community, although getting employment depends on whether there are opportunities to use them.”</i> This suggests that participants recognized the importance of aligning training with local labour-market opportunities.	This finding supports the relatively high quantitative rating regarding the relevance of acquired skills to the local job market (M = 3.96).
Theme 3: Vocational Training and Practical Capacity Building	Participants acknowledged that vocational training and practical capacity-building activities were important components of PWPs. However, some participants indicated that opportunities for practical application were limited. One participant stated that <i>“we received training and were shown how to do some activities, but we needed more time to practise because the training period was not enough to master the skills.”</i> This suggests that the availability of training did not always correspond with sufficient practical exposure.	The finding supports the quantitative result that PWPs include vocational training and capacity-building components (M = 3.95), while providing further insight into limitations in practical training.
Theme 4: Limited Improvement in Professional and Technical Competencies	Participants reported that although the programme provided useful basic skills, it did not always provide sufficient training to develop advanced professional and technical competencies. One participant explained that <i>“the programme helped us to learn basic skills, but we did not receive enough training or equipment to become highly skilled in the work.”</i> This indicates that the duration, intensity, equipment, and practical exposure associated with training may have constrained deeper competency development.	This finding helps explain the comparatively lower quantitative mean for improvement in professional and technical skills (M = 3.29).

Theme	Qualitative findings and participant evidence	Linkage to quantitative findings
Theme 5: Application of Acquired Skills and Household Livelihood Benefits	Participants described the application of acquired skills as an important mechanism through which skills development could generate household benefits. One participant explained that <i>“when the skills are applied to income-generating activities, the benefits are not only for the person who received the training but also for the whole household.”</i> However, participants also indicated that limited access to employment opportunities and resources could make it difficult to apply newly acquired skills.	This finding complements the quantitative result indicating that households benefit from skills acquired by participating family members ($M = 3.72$), while showing that actual application of skills is important for realizing household-level benefits.

Conclusion

The study concludes that participants perceived skills development initiatives integrated into Public Works Programmes (PWP) in Mpwapwa District as making a meaningful contribution to their employability and future employment prospects. Participants strongly perceived PWP as providing valuable skills for future employment, as reflected by the high mean score of 4.41. Similarly, the relatively high mean score of 3.96 for the relevance of acquired skills to the local labour market indicates that participants generally perceived the skills provided as applicable to employment and livelihood opportunities available within the district. Participants also reported the presence of vocational training and capacity-building components ($M = 3.95$) and perceived household benefits associated with skills acquired by participating family members ($M = 3.72$).

However, the findings also indicate that participants reported comparatively limited improvement in professional and technical skills, as reflected by the lower mean score of 3.29. The difference between the higher ratings for the value and relevance of acquired skills and the lower rating for professional and technical skills suggests a perceived gap between acquiring useful basic or work-related competencies and developing more advanced technical skills. The qualitative findings further indicate that participants reported limited opportunities to practise acquired skills, inadequate depth of training, and challenges in applying competencies to employment and self-employment opportunities.

Overall, the findings suggest that participants perceive PWP as potentially useful platforms for skills acquisition and future employment preparation, but the reported benefits may depend on the quality, relevance, intensity, and practical orientation of training, as well as post-programme linkages to employment, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, certification, and access to finance. Given the descriptive nature of the study and its reliance primarily on participants' reported perceptions and experiences, the findings should be interpreted as

evidence of perceived effectiveness and reported contribution rather than causal effects of skills development initiatives on employment outcomes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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