

Formalization of Informal Sector Business Enterprises and Accessibility to Social Security Services by Workers in Uganda's Informal Sector

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Abstract

The study examined the effect of the formalization of informal sector business enterprises on accessibility to social security services by workers in Uganda's informal sector. This study was motivated by the persistent concerns and outcry by stakeholders over the inadequate access to social security services by workers in the informal sector despite the sector's huge contribution to the country's economic development. Moreover, the study adopted a quantitative research approach and employed a descriptive correlational research design. Quantitative data were collected using the questionnaire method from 302 respondents who were randomly selected from the informal sector and analyzed using descriptive and regression analysis methods. Findings revealed that registration of informal sector businesses ($B=.166$; $p=.001$), accessibility to finances ($B=.329$; $p=.000$), and informal sector regulatory policies ($B=.263$; $p=.000$) have a statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services. However, overall, the study revealed that formalization ($R=.616$; $R^2=.379$; $p=.000$) has a significant influence on accessibility to social security services in the informal sector in Uganda. Therefore, it was concluded that other factors remaining constant, formalization of informal business enterprises would enhance accessibility to social security services by workers in Uganda's informal sector. Thus, the study recommends that stakeholders need up all efforts aimed at formalizing the informal sector to enhance accessibility to social security services by workers in Uganda's informal economy.

Key Words: Formalization, informal sector, business enterprises, social security services, informal workers

Introduction

Uganda has one of the fastest-growing and most vibrant informal sectors compared to its formal sector. Indeed, the Quarterly Informal Economy Survey (QIES) report on world economies indicates that the size of Uganda's informal economy is estimated to be 34.4%, which represents approximately \$58 billion at the GDP PPP level (QIES, 2021). Moreover, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2014) reports that over 50% of Uganda's GDP is attributed to the informal sector, while more than 80% of the country's labor force work in the informal sector. This implies that the informal sector is a major sector contributing greatly to the country's economic development today.

According to the World Bank (WB), Uganda's informal sector is characterized by low productivity personal services, and basic manufacturing activities (WB, 2019). Business enterprises in this sector are mainly manned by their owners as the only workers, but sometimes, one additional staff may be employed (UBOS, 2018). Indeed, non-agricultural household enterprises many of which operate in undefined places and they are also not registered characterize the country's informal sector (UBOS, 2018; UNHS, 2016/2017). Relatedly, businesses such as eating kiosks, fish selling, and shoe shining, among others, dominate Uganda's informal sector (Mugoda, Esaku, Nakimu & Bbaale, 2020). Moreover, it is also reported that more than half of the

workers employed in Uganda's informal sector are paid employees, followed by the self-employed and contributing family workers coming third (MAPU, 2016).

However, although the informal sector is the back bone of Uganda's economy, extending social security services to meet the social security needs and expectations of workers in the sector remains a challenge. Moreover, this is in contravention of one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of ensuring universal coverage of social protection. Indeed, the inability to access social security services by workers in the sector was because business enterprises in the country's informal sector had no formal structures and it mainly attracted school dropouts and those who had failed to secure jobs in the formal sector (Mugoda et al, 2020; (NSPP, 2015). Because of this, the sector is viewed as an illegality, a source of hooligans, criminals, and detractors who cannot, therefore, complement the government in national development efforts (Mugoda et al, 2020; DTDA, 2022).

Meanwhile, steps have been made following consistent demands made by stakeholders to embrace a holistic approach to ensure universal coverage of social security services to meet the social security needs of all workers including those in the informal sector. Indeed, this is also in line with the ILO (2002) resolution on decent work and the informal economy, and the subsequent ILO (2015) recommendation No. 204 concerning transitioning from the informal to formal economy. As such, efforts have been made to have activities in the informal sector formally run including having business enterprises in the sector formalized (Mugoda et al, 2020; UBOS, 2018, NOTU, 2022; DTDA, 2022). Moreover, it was also assumed that having businesses in the sector formalized through registration, extending financial assistance to workers in the sector, and formulation of policies to regulate the sector will enhance accessibility to social security services. Also, the amendment of the NSSF Act 1985 (as amended, 2022) which provides for a voluntary membership scheme was intended to enable workers in the informal sector to access social security services. However, despite all this, accessibility to social security services by workers in the informal sector remains a challenge, which has raised and continues to raise public concern thus the motivation behind this study.

Indeed, this study was informed by the Informality of Handcuff Theory (De Soto, 1989) which postulates that informal firms are potentially very productive, but they are only constrained by costly government regulations, government bureaucracy, their inability to secure property rights, and to access financial help. Furthermore, the theory suggests that informal firms would be fundamentally similar to formal firms if they were not constrained by policy. Therefore, this implies that if the barriers to official status were lowered and capital provided, informal firms would register and then take advantage of the formalization, which would guarantee workers in the sector enhanced accessibility to social security services.

Study Objectives

Overall, this study aimed to ascertain the effect of the formalization of informal sector business enterprises on accessibility to social security services by workers in Uganda's informal sector. Indeed, the study specifically investigated the effect of; (i) registration of informal sector business enterprises, (ii) increasing accessibility to financial help, and, (iii) formulation of regulatory policies which support the sector on accessibility to social security services by workers in Uganda's informal sector

Literature Review

A few studies have investigated formalization of informal sector business enterprises and accessibility to social security benefits in the informal sector (Okello, 2019; Mugoda et al, 2020; UBOS, 2018, NOTU, 2022; Ssanyu, 2019; Galiani, Gertler & Bando, 2016; DTDA, 2022; Boly & Amadou, 2018; Agravat & Kaplelach, 2017; Alfes, 2016; Adzawla, Baanni & Wontumi, 2015; Barbosa & Corseuil, 2014; Obare, 2015). However, in a number of these studies, the formalization of business enterprises was conceptualized in different ways including how business enterprises are registered, how workers in the informal sector can access finances, and the process of formulating informal sector business regulatory policies. For instance, Adzawla, Baanni, and Wontumi (2015) carried out a study in Ghana in which they discovered that formalization of the informal sector activities positively affects access to social security benefits. Moreover, Masanyiwa, Mosha, and Mamboya (2020) also investigated Tanzania and their findings revealed that access to social security benefits is dependent on several factors including workers in the sector being in the position to access finances and the regulation of the informal sector business activities. These however observed that the ability of the workers in the informal sector to access social security services is largely dependent on how well the registration of business enterprises and how participatory the process of the formulation of the sector policies is conducted.

Similarly, Gwer, Odero, and Totolo (2019) Investigated accessibility to social security services in Kenya's informal sector and findings revealed that formalizing business activities in the informal sector increases accessibility to financial help. However, the same study was quick to report that workers in the informal sector spend the finances they get on consumption

instead of investing it, which affects their contributions to social security schemes. Moreover, in another study by Bennett and Rablen (2015), it was reported that enhanced access to social security services is a product of concerted efforts which involves is premised on several factors including regulating activities in the sector and increasing avenues through which workers can have access to finances to grow their businesses. Indeed, Bergolo and Cruces (2021) also agreed with the observation that formalization of the informal sector increases accessibility to social security services.

However, whereas several studies report that formalizing informal sector business enterprises enhances accessibility to social security benefits, many of these studies were qualitative. Still, many earlier studies were carried out in the context of other countries and not in Uganda. Therefore, these were the gaps identified by the researcher which required further investigations, thus the motivation behind this investigation.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research approach, as well as a descriptive regression research design. The choice of the approach and the research design was premised on the nature of the research problem the study intended to resolve. Data were specifically collected from different informal sector sub-groups including leaders of market vendors, the vendors themselves, leaders and workers in the transport sector, leaders and workers in plantations, and leaders and workers in the fisheries industry. Data were collected from a sample of 302 respondents selected from both the leaders and the workers in the informal sector. Because the respondents targeted by the study were many, the study opted to use a structured questionnaire. Data analysis was undertaken using quantitative methods including descriptive and regression analysis using inferential statistics. The results of the study were then presented in the next section of the article.

Results and Discussion

Background Information on Respondents

Different background characteristics for the 302 respondents were captured and they are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of participants by background characteristics

Background Characteristics	Respondent Attributes	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	183	60.3%
	Female	120	39.7%
	Total	302	100%
Age	20-29 years	51	16.9%
	30-39 years	142	47.0%
	40-49 years	68	22.5%
	50 years & above	41	13.6%
Total		302	100%

Results in Table 1 reveal that more males 182(60.3%) participated in this study were more than their counterparts, the female participants 120(39.7%). Indeed, the results also indicate that the majority of the participants 142(47%) participated in this study were between 30 and 39 years old, which means that the majority of them were mature enough to comprehend the constructs under investigation.

Descriptive Statistics on the Independent Variable-Formalization of Informal Sector

Five questions on the independent variable were conceptualized and presented by the researcher to participants who were then asked to indicate their opinions on a scale with responses ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree to 5= Strongly Agree. Results were however finally categorized into three groups and coded as 1=Disagree (D), 2=Neutral (N), and 3=Agree (A) and presented here in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on respondents' views on the formalization of the informal sector

Questionnaire Item	AF (%)	NF (%)	DF (%)	Mean
Registration of informal sector business enterprises enhances accessibility to social security services	128(42.4%)	71(23.5%)	103(34.1%)	2.93
Improving access to finances enhances accessibility to social security	114(37.8%)	87(28.8%)	101(33.4%)	2.88
Formulation of informal sector regulatory policies enhances accessibility to social security benefits	118(39.1%)	89(29.5%)	95(31.4%)	2.87

Results in Table 2 indicate that the majority of the respondents 128(42.4%); mean= 2.93 agreed with the statement that registration of business enterprises within the informal sector enhances accessibility to social security benefits. Results imply that respondents agree that registration of business enterprises in the informal sector in Uganda will increase accessibility to social security services by workers in the sector. Indeed, as to whether improving accessibility to finances by workers in the informal economy enhances accessibility to social security benefits, results show that the majority of the respondents 114(37.8%); mean=2.88 agreed that improving accessibility to finances enhances accessibility to social security benefits in the informal sector. Finally, results further reveal that majority of respondents 118(39.1%); mean=2.87 agreed that formulation of informal sector regulatory policies enhances accessibility to social security services. Overall, although the results showed that efforts to formalize Uganda's informal sector are high with mean responses ranging from 2.87 to 2.93, there is still room for improving informal sector formalization efforts in the country.

Descriptive Statistics on the Dependent Variable - Accessibility to Social Security Services

The researcher put across question items on accessibility to social security benefits such that respondents could express their opinions by selecting the right response from a range of responses on a scale with responses ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Results were however finally categorized into three groups and coded as 1 = Disagree (D), 2 = Neutral (N), and 3 = Agree (A) and presented in Table 2.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on the Dependent Variable-Accessibility to Social Security benefits

Questionnaire Item	AF (%)	NF (%)	DF (%)	Mean
Informal social security arrangements are well organized	76(25.2%)	63(20.9%)	163(54%)	2.54
Existing informal social security arrangements adequately handle members' social security needs	120(39.7%)	61(20.2%)	121(40.1%)	2.98
Existing informal social security arrangements respond faster to the members' social security needs	118(38.7%)	60(19.9%)	124(41%)	3.01
Contributions of members to existing social schemes are adequate	116(38.4%)	51(16.9%)	135(44.7%)	3.10
Members easily access funds from their existing informal social security arrangements	98(32.5%)	91(30.1%)	113(37.4%)	2.94

The results in Table 3 reveal that the respondents' perceptions of access to social security services are not good. Results show that the majority of the respondents 163(54%); mean= 2.54 disagreed with the statement that existing informal social security arrangements are well organized. This suggests that workers in Uganda's informal sector cannot easily access social security services. Regarding whether the members' social security needs are adequately handled by the existing informal social security arrangements, the results in Table 3 indicate that the majority of respondents 121(40.1%); mean= 2.98 disagreed that existing informal social security arrangements adequately handle the members' social security needs. This result insinuates that existing informal social arrangements do not adequately handle the members' social security needs. Moreover, regarding whether the existing informal social security arrangements respond faster to the social security needs of the members, results show that the majority of the respondents 124(41%); mean=3.01 disagreed with the statement. Indeed, results also reveal that

the majority of respondents 135(44.7%); with mean= 3.10 disagreed that the contributions of members to the existing social schemes are adequate. Meanwhile, findings reveal that the majority of the respondents 113(37.4%); mean=2.94 disagreed with the statement that members can easily access funds from the existing social security arrangements in the informal sector.

Verification of Research Hypotheses

This study is based on three research hypotheses, namely: H₁: Registration of informal sector business enterprises has a statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services by workers in the informal sector; H₂: Improving access to finances has a statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services; and H₃: Formulation of informal sector regulatory policies has a statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services. However, before verifying these hypotheses, they were first converted into null hypotheses. Thus, the tested null hypothesis was stated as follows: H₀₁: Registration of informal sector business enterprises has no statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services by workers in the informal sector; H₀₂: Improving access to finances has no statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services; and H₀₃: Formulation of informal sector regulatory policies has no statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services. Moreover, the study further generated indices to measure each one of the constructs, namely: registration of informal sector enterprises (RegInforBus), increasing accessibility to finances (IncrFinancial), and formulation of informal sector regulatory policies (InforPol), while accessibility to social security services (Independent Variable) as (SocSec). This was followed by testing of the null hypotheses using the multiple regression technique and the results of the hypothesis tests are presented in tables 4(a), 4(b), and 4(c) below;

Table 4(a): Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.616 ^a	.379	.373	.70343	.379	60.621	3	298	.000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), InforPol, RegInforBus, IncrFinancial
- b. Dependent Variable: SocSec

Results in Table 4(a) show that the correlational coefficient between the formalization of informal sector enterprises is positive with an R-value of 0.616 and R² of 0.379. These results imply that a unit change in the formalization of informal sector enterprises brings about a 0.379 (37.9%) increase in accessibility to social security services by workers in the informal sector in Uganda, with other factors remaining constant. The observed sig (p) value of 0.000, is much lower than the critical sig. value of 0.05, implies that formalization of the informal sector has a statistically significant effect on accessibility to social security services.

Moreover, to determine whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data, the researcher went ahead and performed the F ratio test, and the results are presented in Table 4(b).

Table 4(b): ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	89.988	3	29.996	60.621	.000 ^b
1 Residual	147.454	298	.495		
Total	237.442	301			

- a. Dependent Variable: SocSec
- b. Predictors: (Constant), InforPol, RegInforBus, IncrFinancial

The results in Table 4(b) (F (29.996) = 60.621, P < .05) indicate that the independent variables (registration of informal sector enterprises, increasing accessibility to finances, and formulation of informal sector regulatory policies) significantly

predict the dependent variable (accessibility to social security services); implying that, the regression model is a good fit of the data.

Indeed, to test for the effect of each independent variable on accessibility to social security services, a multiple regression analysis was conducted and the results are presented in Table 4(c).

Table 4(c): Multiple regression results for the effect of formalization of informal sector business enterprises on accessibility to social security services Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
(Constant)	1.366	.126		10.846	.000
1 RegInforBus	.113	.035	.166	3.263	.001
IncriFinacial	.219	.038	.329	5.718	.000
InforPol	.204	.043	.263	4.713	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SocSec

The results in Table 4(c) show that the coefficients relating to the first independent variable, registration of informal sector business enterprises, with accessibility to social security services are positive with a beta value of 0.166. This result implies that a unit change in the registration of informal sector businesses will bring about a 16.6% increase in accessibility to social security services, with other factors remaining constant. The observed sig (p) value of 0.001, is lower than the critical sig. value of 0.05, means that registration of informal sector enterprises has a statistically significant effect on accessibility to social security services. Therefore, the null hypothesis that “registration of informal sector business enterprises has no statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services by workers in the informal sector” was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was upheld.

Indeed, results in Table 4(c) show that coefficients linking improvement in accessibility to finances, the study’s second independent variable, to access to social security services is also positive with a beta of 0.329. This finding suggests that holding other factors constant, a unit change in improving accessibility to finances brings about a 32.9% increase in accessibility to social security services. The observed sig (p) value of 0.000, is much lower than the critical sig. value of 0.05, suggests that improving accessibility to finances has a statistically significant effect on accessibility to social security services. Thus, the null hypothesis that “increasing accessibility to finances has no statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services” was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was upheld.

Moreover, findings in Table 4(c) also show that coefficients associating the formulation of informal sector regulatory policies, the third independent variable, with accessibility to social security services, is also positive with a beta of 0.263. This finding suggests that a unit change in the formulation of policies to regulate business enterprises in the informal sector brings about a 26.3% increase in accessibility to social security services. The observed sig (p) value of 0.000, is lower than the critical sig. value of 0.05, suggests that the formulation of policies to regulate the informal sector business enterprises has a statistically significant effect on accessibility to social security services. Thus, the null hypothesis that “formulation of informal sector regulatory policies has no statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services” was rejected and the research hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

This study aimed to ascertain the effect of the formalization of informal sector business enterprises on accessibility to social security services. The study came out with key findings: first, that registration of informal sector business enterprises, increasing accessibility to finances, and formulation of informal sector regulatory policies have a statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services. Moreover, the finding that registration of informal sector business enterprises, accessibility to finances, and formulation of policies to regulate the informal sector will increase accessibility to social security services in the informal sector is in agreement with the results of earlier studies. For instance, Charmes (2017) also established that registration of business enterprises in the informal sector results in enhanced accessibility to social security services by

workers in the informal sector. This was also in consonance with the work of Adzawla, Baanni, and Wontumi (2015) where it was established that access to social security services in the informal sector can be enhanced by the registration of businesses in the sector.

Moreover, Masanyiwa, Mosha, and Mamboya (2020) investigated factors influencing the participation of informal sector workers in formal social security schemes in Tanzania and findings revealed that increasing accessibility to finances by workers in the informal sector is a driver to enhancing access to social security services in the informal economy. This implies that the more workers in the informal sector have access to finances, the higher would be the chances of joining formal social security schemes and accessing social security services. Indeed, this argument is supported by Agravat and Kaplelach (2017) who observe that increased accessibility to finances by workers in any sector enhances their access to social security services. Dorfman (2015) also agrees with this finding, where he vehemently contends that access to finances enhances the workers' accessibility to social security services. Moreover, Alferts (2016) also reported that regulating business activities through the formulation of regulatory policies enhances accessibility to social security services.

Implications of the Study

Overall, the finding that the formalization of business enterprises in the informal sector has a statistically significant effect on the accessibility to social security services is in tandem with both the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of this study. The informality as handcuff theory (De Soto, 1989) used to underpin this study stipulates that if the barriers to official status of the informal sector were lowered and capital provided, informal firms would register and then take advantage of the formalization including enhancing access to social security services. Concerning this study, therefore, the results show that other factors notwithstanding, the registration of business enterprises, increasing accessibility to finances, and designing policies to regulate the informal sector enhance accessibility to social security services. This implies that all stakeholders should pay attention to all efforts and how Uganda's informal sector is formalized.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of the study and the discussion which followed, the researcher concludes that holding other factors constant, the formalization of informal sector business enterprises would enhance accessibility to social security services in Uganda's informal sector.

Recommendations

Thus, the study recommends that local and international stakeholders should intensify efforts aimed at having informal sector business enterprises formalized and also invest more resources in all programs which will ensure that formal structures are established, and business activities in the informal sector streamlined.

Declaration

I declare that research was conducted in the absence of any financial relationship which could be perceived as a potential conflict of interest.

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