



## **Women Empowering Themselves through Research: Reflections on a Feminist, Participatory Action Research Project with Women in Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

Women are not empowered by others. Rather, women's empowerment results from opportunities to identify and articulate individual knowledge, skills, competencies, and contributions, and take action to achieve personal goals. This paper reports on the fifth stage of longitudinal, feminist, participatory research project (incepted in 2004), involving a research team of 12 Ugandan women who joined the project when they were secondary schoolgirls, a Research Assistant (RA), and a Principal Investigator (PI, myself) supported participants in working towards their personal aspirations of owning their own businesses by learning from successful Ugandan businesswomen. The research asked: (1) What can be learned from successful businesswomen in Uganda that can support the other Ugandan establish viable businesses?, and (2) How can research training and practice support the development of skills and knowledge of women aspiring to establish their own businesses? With guidance from the PI and RA, participants developed an interview protocol and, in pairs, conducted and analyzed interviews with the businesswomen and identified key themes that emerged, such as the importance of a savings culture, the need for joining networks, building a loyal client base, identifying business opportunities, and personal attributes of patience, determination, and selfconfidence. Additional data included pre- and post-project questionnaires completed by the participants and observational notes taken during team meetings, which reveal that in addition to knowledge from the businesswomen they interviewed, the participants gained valuable knowledge and skills relating to conducting research, planning, networking, and consultation and collaboration with others. The study offers powerful insights into participant-led research.

**Keywords:** Uganda, women's empowerment, feminist participatory action research