Table of Contents

I. Introduction
II. Methodology
III. Demographics
IV. Our impact
   a. Economic
   b. Skills Improvement
   c. Family Relationships
   d. Local Community
   e. Future Initiatives
V. Community Engagement
VI. 2021 Interns
VII. Contact Us
The Women's Microfinance Initiative (WMI) is a microlending organization operating in rural villages in East Africa. WMI was founded in 2008 by American businesswomen. Since then, we have gone from 20 borrowers in Buyobo, Uganda to over 16,000 borrowers across three countries. By providing resources and holding women accountable for their own finances, WMI has helped rural women launch businesses to support their families, improve their households, and expand the local economy in their villages. By connecting them with capital and training, WMI has provided a pathway for these women to become a powerful economic force in their communities.

Our program’s goal is to give women the tools that they need to integrate into the mainstream economy and allow them to choose how to improve life for themselves and their families.

With a myriad of loan hubs across East Africa, WMI is able to offer microloans ranging from $80 - $150. Unlike many other financial lending hubs, we do not require borrowers to provide any collateral. Over the span of two years, each woman receives four loans from one of our various loan hub distribution centers.

Training sessions prior to the first and third loan cycles teach business skills like project management, record keeping, marketing, and customer service. Each borrower is put into a cohort of twenty women who simultaneously receive loans. The women provide encouragement, business knowledge, advice, and hold each other accountable for loan repayment. These groups have proven to be effective in maintaining the sustainability of the loan programs.

Each of the four loan cycles is six months long. The women pay the loan back in ten increments with a 10% flat interest rate. The interest covers operational costs: salaries, supplies, transport, training, and community engagement projects. Utilizing this unique economic platform, each loan hub is fiscally independent and self-sustaining.

3,750 Uganda shillings = $1
2,500 borrowers each cycle
Since 2008 → loaned over $8,000,000
Why are Microloans Important?

Some of the world’s poorest people do not have access to any reliable source of credit. Without collateral or property to fall back on, these marginalized populations are unlikely to secure loans of any type. Even if banks were willing to issue small loans to impoverished people, the typical processing and administrative fees would make the cost of borrowing exorbitant. But, in the 1970s, microlending was popularized: rural lenders began experimenting with issuing small loans to local businesspeople without excessive processing costs.

The basic economic nature of microloans is that if small amounts of credit could help poor women launch small entrepreneurial ventures, like selling local goods and services, then these women can slowly rise out of poverty. An important caveat to this lending model is that one cannot quickly rise out of poverty by simply borrowing money and immediately paying it back — the lender has to be sensitive to and willing to work with a repayment timeline that makes sense for the rural, agriculture-based economy where many of the world’s poor live and work.

Not only does WMI focus on the quantitative aspects of business loans—higher household revenue and savings—but it also understands there are more facets to life than simply increasing monthly income. Whether these women are able to improve their homes, send children to school, or afford healthcare, these loans have proven to enhance the lives of rural families.

Data in the Factbook

Throughout each woman’s independent experience, we collect ample data using baseline, follow-up, and exit surveys. By consolidating and analyzing this data, we are able to identify key trends and develop crucial insights into our operations. By collecting a variety of qualitative and quantitative data we are able to ensure the success of our loan program and assess the impact on women, their families, and their communities.
II. Methodology

The data analyzed in this report was collected from 1,080 borrower surveys, conducted by a team of regional coordinators who are fluent in both English and local languages. Most of our survey participants are borrowers living near our main facility in Buyobo village, with some participants based in our partner CBOs in other villages throughout East Africa. The data comprising this year’s factbook was collected between July 2020 and April 2021. Surveys are administered at three points in the two-year loan cycle.

The first is the baseline survey, which is administered to women entering the loan program. Baseline data represents a woman’s initial living conditions and financial situation. The second is the follow-up survey, which is administered one year into the loan program. This survey reveals the inner workings of the entrepreneurial process and shows the initial impact of the loan. The final is the exit survey, which is completed just after women make their final repayment and graduate from the loan program. Exit data provides critical insights into how our borrowers have developed their homes, improved their personal and business skills, and bettered their lives and communities.

Each loan group is represented in one type of survey only. This methodology allows us to examine important macroscopic trends over time; it does not demonstrate the trajectory of any individual woman over the course of two years. There are several reasons why WMI favors a broader scope of analysis.

First, many of the questions on our follow-up and exit surveys ask borrowers to compare their pre-loan conditions to their post-loan conditions, including dimensions such as meal improvement, skill development, and healthcare access.

Second, since the objective of the Factbook is to examine large-scale trends over time, and since many borrowers share similar experiences becoming female entrepreneurs, following women on an individual basis does not provide extensive insights. To analyze these individual experiences, WMI conducts separate business case studies to examine how particular businesses operate over time. We publish these studies on our website.

Third, anonymizing borrower data, which can be highly personal, respects our borrowers’ privacy.

Finally, large-scale trends that can be applied to groups of women across time help us form a more stable representation of our borrower base as we seek to improve our program. This report illustrates a comprehensive picture of who WMI borrowers are, how they live, and how they utilize our loan program to change their lives.

The Demographics section analyzes data from baseline surveys on age, household, and living conditions to portray the starting points for each of our borrowers. The Impact section focuses on the effects that our loans have on borrowers by comparing data from baseline surveys to follow-up and exit survey results. Specifically, data on income, savings, education, and health are showcased to form a picture of the financial empowerment women have as a result of the loan program. This section also utilizes the qualitative data collected from the follow-up and exit survey results. Looking at the changes in women’s familial and communal relationships and the skills that they have gained from our program helps us understand the intangible, important impacts of our loan program on the communities we serve. Lastly, the Community Initiatives section looks at the local outreach that has been made possible through the loan program.
A majority of the women we loan to are between 20 and 50 years old (80%). Eighteen per cent are older than 50 and a small cohort, only two per cent, are under 20.

The average family size is four to six family members, accounting for nearly 70% of our borrowers. There are about fifteen percent on either side of that: from seven to ten members and one to three members. Most (about 70%) of our families have one to three children in the household. However, this statistic can be misleading as to the actual size of a woman’s family. Since women tend to start families at a young age, by the time they are 40 or 50 many women have children who are grown and living elsewhere but still receiving financial support from their mothers for university fees, rent, food or to start their own families.
A sweeping majority of the women WMI lends to (just over 90%) are married. Wives may have the luxury of spousal support to run their businesses but that can be a double-edged sword. In their patriarchal society, married women may feel impelled to seek their husbands’ approval in making a variety of business decisions. Over the years, WMI has found that borrowers generally report working in harmony with their spouses to maximize business profits.

![Marital Status Chart](chart1.png)

This graph displays the top expenditures for women in the loan program.

Paying for health care is the biggest expense for not quite half of the women surveyed. Nearly a quarter cited food and nearly another quarter cited school fees as their top household expense.

![Top Expenditures Chart](chart2.png)
IV. Our Impact
a. Economic Impact

The most immediate impact the loan program has on women and families is economic. By investing in these women, we are able to see consistently increasing income. Not only does this spark the local economy, but this allows women to provide for their families beyond traditional homemaking. Whether it’s through paying for healthier meals or school fees, families become stronger financially which leads to improved social outcomes, too. In this section, we analyzed qualitative data to highlight the businesses these women own and how owning a business leads to financial autonomy.

The types of businesses women operate, vary from selling bogoyas (bananas), to second hand clothing stores, to offering fresh fruits and vegetables to the community. With a variety of businesses, the community members are given options to improve and expand their society.
We surveyed women before and after they entered the loan program. Prior to receiving any loans from WMI, almost 80% of women had monthly incomes between $0 and $50. After they received their loans, we see a majority of monthly incomes doubling and tripling: the follow-up survey showcased an average monthly income of $135. As income increases, we begin to see lives improve in numerous ways.
By facing and overcoming business challenges, women gain a sense of resilience.

As indicated in the graph to the left, competition between businesses and transportation of goods and services to towns remain as the top two challenges for women, cited by 48% and 21% of women respectively. The remaining 31% of women declared creditors, season change, and low demand as presenting difficulties.

These savvy businesswomen use a wide range of business solutions to address problems, from adopting friendly sales language, to altering locations, changing prices, and introducing better quality products. By incorporating a myriad of different approaches, these women are able to solve their own problems.

As indicated in the graph to the right, using friendly language was the most frequently cited solution to the main problem of competition.
As the women exited the loan program, they were surveyed on their savings. As indicated in the graph to the left, 55% of women reported having savings between $15 and $28; 24% reported between $29 and $56; 18% reported between $0 and $14; and 3% percent reported between $57-$83. As indicated in the graph below, all women had acquired new possessions in their homes. Livestock and land are a form of savings in a cash economy and do not lose value with inflation.
b. Skills Improvement

At WMI, one of our principal aims is to provide women entrepreneurs with business and management training to ensure their ability to achieve financial independence after completing the loan program. We were pleased to find that even in the midst of the pandemic 100% of the borrowers surveyed reported an improvement in their personal skills. Likewise, nearly 100% of WMI entrepreneurs indicated an improvement in their business skills relating to marketing, budgeting, problem-solving, record-keeping, or negotiating.

The largest cohorts reported improvements in their determination, self-confidence and resourcefulness.

We view our skill-building work as paramount to the success of our lending program. Microloan repayments and our borrowers’ subsequent transition to bank loans or self-financing in a male-dominated society is a major testament to their achievements. Women, although systemically undervalued, are often the center of their homes and communities, making their skill-development beneficial for enhancing their children’s future opportunities.
c. Impact on Familial Relationships and Gender Dynamics

Our data shows a vast improvement in family life, both in terms of our participants’ abilities to provide for their families’ basic needs, and in terms of familial relationships. Children’s education fees and family members’ nutritional requirements constitute a huge financial burden on our participants, 85% of whom have four or more people in their household. Nearly half of our participants state that they can more easily obtain food, medicine or education for their children and family members, or have noticed an overall improvement in their family’s living standards, since entering the WMI loan program.

The figure above shows the percentage of participants surveyed reporting various changes in their family’s household as a result of the loan program. The most frequently cited impact, by 30% of those surveyed, is the ability to easily meet the medical, nutritional, or educational needs of their family. This provides a tremendous sense of accomplishment for the women and relieves the stress of wondering if they can care for their families.
d. Community Impact

As previously mentioned, a crucial result of the loan program has been improved nutrition and access to healthcare for our participants and their families. In fact, 98% of women state they have an easier time paying medical fees since receiving their loans, and 100% of our participants report that their diets have improved. This not only reiterates the far-reaching effects of our small-scale microloan model, but also reflects how our participants put their additional income towards protecting their families and consequently improving the health of their communities.

**Meal Improvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More food</td>
<td>24.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More meat</td>
<td>20.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More vegetables</td>
<td>28.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More eggs</td>
<td>9.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More milk</td>
<td>17.69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure to the left shows the percentage of participants surveyed reporting the various ways in which their diets have improved. Nearly 30% stated that they ate more vegetables; while nearly 25% stated that they could purchase more food in general since entering the WMI program and, 20% stated that they ate more meat.

A prior graph on new purchases shows that nearly 35% of the women surveyed have been able to purchase new livestock since receiving their microloans. This contributes to the universal improvement in diet and offers a sustainable way for WMI women to continue to support their families after graduating from the loan program.
Many WMI women have assumed the double role of breadwinner and caretaker, which has been aided by improved dynamics between men and women inside and outside of the home.

As shown in the figure below, women listed a number of ways in which gender relations have changed. A vast majority of our participants (nearly 60%) have experienced more spousal cooperation and support since starting their business. This is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that our participants’ financial independence is not only beneficial for them, but also for those who depend on them, including their husbands and children.

Additionally, nearly ten percent of women cited a reduction in domestic violence as one of the loan program’s chief impacts.
The women surveyed were asked to provide their suggestions to WMI.

The vast majority (over 65%) expressed their gratitude to WMI for bringing the loan program to their community.

Nearly 20% urged WMI to continue making loans and training available to their community, while 6% requested training for their husbands,
e. Future Initiatives

**Maternity Ward**

Next year, WMI and its local partner plan to invest approximately $36,000 into constructing a maternity ward within the health clinic at our major loan hub in southwestern Uganda. This will provide a safe environment for childbirth in a district with limited health facilities. In addition to protecting borrowers and their babies during the delivery process, this initiative will also help the clinic become financially sustainable.

**Jumbo Loan Program**

WMI, with the input of our Tanzanian fellow, has spent the past year developing a larger-scale loan program to reach ten women selected from across five villages in Tanzania. Each participant received $450 and entered a ten-month loan term, as opposed to our typical six-month term. Our 2021 Business Visiting Report shows that the top borrowers have expanded their businesses by means of hiring more employees, offering more products, or upgrading their equipment or work areas. All ten women also reported an improvement in quality of life with regards to their living space or their children’s education.
V. Community Engagement

Boys and Girls Group

Boys and Girls group is a teacher-facilitated program for students aged 11-17. It features weekly sessions on a wide range of topics including creative expression, business skills, and sexual health and hygiene, which has become particularly important as we continue to endure the spread of COVID-19. At the beginning of the school term students embarked on writing their own story books related to the culture of the Lumasaba people who live in Eastern Uganda. In Southwest Uganda we are supporting an on-going initiative with local primary schools to provide enhanced educational opportunities, entrepreneurial training, and project funding.

Budadiri Girl’s School of the Deaf

In collaboration with Budadiri’s Girl’s school, WMI has introduced a new initiative aimed at supporting the community’s deaf students. We spend approximately $270 bi-annually to provide these students with basic resources like soap, biscuits, maize flour for posho, and small personal toiletries.

WMI has also contributed materials such as fabric, scissors, thread, needles, and towels to create a reusable menstrual pad program where students can learn how to make pads for their own use. Reusable menstrual pads are imperative for girls and women because disposable menstrual products are often not readily available or accessible and may be impossible to afford on a monthly basis.

Keep Buyobo Clean

The Keep Buyobo Clean program is a community sanitation initiative which places trash receptacles around the village to encourage proper waste management. It is operated by two staff members who were hired and paid by WMI’s sister organization, the Buyobo Women’s Association (BWA). This effort has been extremely successful in decreasing litter and unsanitary conditions and has been implemented in other villages such as Buweli and Budadiri. The program is fully self-sustaining, with local residents managing trash bin collection and placement.
**Orphan Outreach Program**

In Uganda, an orphan is a child who has lost at least one parent. Most orphans live with relatives or other adults in their communities, but they remain vulnerable to risk factors like neglect, hunger and general mistreatment. The Orphan Outreach program was launched in June 2018 by WMI summer interns. It provides school supplies to orphaned children in Buyobo and in surrounding communities. In addition to academic support, the program provides orphans with meals and a comforting environment in which to relax and celebrate on the holiday breaks. During the pandemic, WMI has provided orphans with extra food which has been necessitated by the schools’ current inability to feed students.

**School Lunch Program**

In Uganda schools charge students additional fees if they want to have lunch during the school day, which has negative effects on both their health and learning abilities. Since 2014, BWA has invested approximately $1,000 per year in providing lunches for P6 and P7 students, who attend school for longer hours to prepare for their PLE examinations, which determine secondary school placement. P6 and P7 students are now better equipped to study for their critical PLE examinations because of these meals.

**Table Tennis**

The table tennis program began in January 2020 under the supervision of regional professional player, Kevin Mafabi, who has family ties to Buyobo. Currently serving 75 children, the program originated as a holiday training camp. The Table Tennis program aims to enhance community ties by encouraging cooperation through sport, and to give talented students a channel by which they could obtain scholarships to secondary school and university. The program has one table tennis table, 20 rackets, and 40 balls. WMI recently renewed the program’s funding so that it can continue into the 2022 school year.

**Staff Support Fund**

WMI’s Staff Support Fund provides financial assistance to employees of our main office in Buyobo for healthcare expenses. The fund assists both BWA and WMI staff members who are unable to work for reasons such as temporary or chronic illness or injury. The fund assists them in managing their healthcare options and reduces the severe stress of expensive medical bills.
**Village Health Team**

The Village Health Team is an organization supported by BWA whose main objective is to improve the health and sanitary conditions in Buyobo and in the surrounding rural communities. The VHT conducts monthly home visits to promote hygiene techniques and to provide preventative healthcare. The VHT is comprised of 142 local volunteers who serve 71 villages.

---

**Three-Stone Cooking**

WMI is partnering with the non-profit Sun24 to make Three-Stone Cooking more efficient. In the villages where WMI works, many women cook over open fires surrounded by three, large stones, with firewood or sometimes charcoal as fuel. The adverse consequences of this practice are enormous: every year millions are sickened or die from smoke inhalation, children (typically girls) spend hours each day searching for fuel and are subject to sexual assault, and the open-fire cookstoves give off many climate-damaging emissions. The simple solution to this problem is placing small stones and a metal grate under the fire, thereby helping the fire burn more efficiently and reducing the amount of firewood used and smoke emitted by more than 50%. Ladies report they are using the grates and stones in daily cooking with positive results.
VI. 2021 Remote Summer Interns

Cindy Matsiko is a rising junior at University of Maryland Baltimore County and is returning for her second summer internship WMI, this year as the manger for the internship projects. Having traveled to WMI's headquarters in Buyobo several times, Cindy is also the liaison with WMI's field staff for gathering statistical data. Starting last summer Cindy took over creating the content for WMI's media platforms. She also works at the UMBC Residential Halls. She is studying Psychology and Africana studies and pursuing a certificate in Elementary Education.

Lyndsay White is a rising senior at the University of Michigan, where she is studying Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience with a Minor in Writing. She intends to pursue a career in the healthcare industry, working to create a more accessible and equitable global system. In Ann Arbor, she is involved with UM's Science Learning Center as a Peer Facilitator as well as her national honor fraternity, Phi Sigma Pi. Through this internship with WMI, she is excited to learn about microfinance and its impact on communities as well as the individual lives of the village women empowered through WMI.

Molly McPhaul is currently a sophomore at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. She is studying Music Business with an emphasis on production. Her work has recently been released on platforms like Spotify and she has a track on Chillhop's Summer Essentials mixtape. She has a passion for all things creative and is excited to use this passion to support the enhancement of the visual display and communication of Women's Microfinance Initiative's media platforms.
Cary Moore is a rising sophomore at Princeton University. She is a prospective economics major and plans to obtain certificates in American Studies, History and Diplomacy. On campus, she tutors incarcerated young people working toward their GEDs through The Petey Greene Program and participates in the Princeton Asylum Project by researching conditions in immigrants' countries of origin. She looks forward to working with the WMI team to build an understanding of how to maximize the community impact of micro-investment initiatives, specifically in the midst of the unique economic challenges posed by COVID-19.

Gabby Ostoyich is a rising senior at Boston University where she majors in International Relations and minors in Art History. On campus, she is involved in BU’s Leading Women of Tomorrow club and tutors students in English. She intends to pursue a career in foreign service or public policy and is particularly interested in humanitarian crisis management and refugee rehabilitation. She looks forward to working with WMI to help empower women which will, in turn, empower families and communities.

VII. Contact Us

Stay in touch with us. Use any of these avenues of communication to learn more about our mission, to receive updates from WMI on our programming and operations, and to find out how you can help.

Email  Phone
wmicontact@gmail.com  +1 (301) 520-0865

Address  Subscribe to updates
Robyn Nietert, President
P.O. Box 485
Cabin John, MD 20818 USA
Email wmicontact@gmail.com
Subject line: Subscribe to WMI Updates

wmionline.org