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Analysis of Uganda's Political Governance Paradigm and Economic Transformation Evidence from National Resistance Movement Regime

Mark Kiiza
Associate Professor, School of Arts and Social Sciences Kampala- University –Uganda

Abstract*—This article evaluates Uganda's political governance paradigm and economic transformation under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime since 1986. It examines the relationship between political stability, governance reforms, and socio-economic development, assessing the extent to which the NRM's policy framework has shaped Uganda's development trajectory. The study adopted a singular mixed methodology that enabled collection of the qualitative analysis of policy documents, government reports. The study used interviews, survey, focused group discussion methods that enabled the study explores developments in governance, agricultural modernization, infrastructure expansion, and economic growth. The findings suggest that the NRM regime has played a significant role in restoring political stability and facilitating economic recovery following decades of political turmoil and economic decline. Notable achievements include increased agricultural productivity, expansion of infrastructure, growth in export earnings, improvements in service delivery, and enhanced regional economic integration. The transformation of the dairy sector, alongside broader agricultural and private-sector development, illustrates the impact of state-led development initiatives on economic performance. However, the study also identifies enduring challenges, including corruption, youth unemployment, regional inequalities, public debt, and concerns regarding democratic accountability, political pluralism, and institutional effectiveness. The article argues that Uganda's experience demonstrates the centrality of political stability in fostering economic transformation, while also highlighting the limitations of development gains in the absence of stronger governance institutions and inclusive political processes. By providing a balanced assessment of Uganda's post-1986 development experience, the study contributes to broader debates on governance, state capacity, and economic transformation in Uganda and entire contemporary Africa.

***Index Terms*—Economic Transformation, Governance, Agricultural Development, Dairy Industry, Political Stability, Economic Growth, Development Policy**

I. INTRODUCTION

The nexus between political governance and economic transformation has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in developing countries where political institutions significantly influence development outcomes (Mohamad, 2024). In Africa, debates on governance and development have increasingly focused on the extent to which political stability, state capacity, and institutional reforms contribute to sustainable socio-economic transformation (Gumede et al., 2026a). Uganda presents an important case for examining these dynamics because of its remarkable transition from a period of political instability. It is notable that, economic decline in the 1970s and early 1980s to a relatively stable political environment and expanding economy under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime since 1986.

Since assuming power in 1986, the NRM government has pursued a broad agenda of political reconstruction and economic reform aimed at restoring peace, rebuilding state institutions, revitalizing agricultural production, expanding infrastructure, and promoting private-sector-led growth (Dept, 2024). These interventions have generated notable outcomes, including increased agricultural productivity, growth in export earnings, improved infrastructure, expansion of social services, and sustained economic growth. For instance, Uganda's dairy sector has transformed from a largely subsistence activity into a significant contributor to national income and export earnings. While investments in roads, energy, telecommunications, and regional integration have enhanced the country's economic competitiveness (Abor et al., 2025). These developments make Uganda a compelling case for evaluating the relationship between governance paradigms and economic transformation.

Despite extensive literature on Uganda's political economy, existing studies have largely examined political governance and economic transformation as separate phenomena. Much of the scholarship focuses either on democratic governance, political liberalization, and institutional reforms or on economic growth, poverty reduction, and sectoral development (Boadu-Ayeboafoh, 2006). Consequently, limited attention has been paid to the interaction between Uganda's governance paradigm and the broader processes of economic transformation over the entire NRM period. Furthermore, existing analyses often emphasize either the successes or the shortcomings of the NRM regime, resulting in polarized interpretations that inadequately capture the complexity of Uganda's development experience (Van et al., 2025). This creates a significant knowledge gap regarding how governance structures, political stability, and policy choices have collectively shaped Uganda's socio-economic trajectory since 1986.

Motivated by the need to provide a more integrated and balanced assessment of Uganda's development experience, this study evaluates the political governance paradigm and economic transformation under the NRM regime. Specifically, the study seeks to: (i) examine the key characteristics of Uganda's political governance framework since 1986; (ii) assess the major dimensions of economic transformation achieved during the NRM era; (iii) analyze the relationship between political governance and socio-economic development outcomes; and (iv) identify the persistent governance and development challenges that continue to affect Uganda's transformation agenda.

The study lies in its integrated analytical approach that bridges the governance and economic transformation literature within a single evaluative framework. Rather than treating political and economic developments as independent processes, the article demonstrates how governance institutions, political stability, policy implementation, and state capacity interact to influence economic transformation (Ghosh, 2023). By synthesizing evidence from governance reforms, agricultural modernization, infrastructure development, and economic performance, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of Uganda's post-1986 development trajectory. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates on governance, state-building, and development in Africa and offers policy insights relevant to countries pursuing long-term socio-economic transformation under conditions of political change (Fossum et al., 2023).

The article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on political governance and economic transformation. This is followed by the methodology section, which outlines the research design and analytical approach. Subsequent sections examine Uganda's political governance paradigm and key dimensions of economic transformation under the NRM regime. The final section presents conclusions and policy implications.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted mixed-methods to enable collection of both qualitative and quantitative data required for the study (Patrick, 2021). The method was suitable; it enabled effective exploration of the variables under investigation. The study also used a case research design grounded in a multiple case study approach. The integration of mixed-methods and research design enabled the comprehensive findings of the variables (Poth, 2023).

This study was supported by the pragmatism philosophy that enabled epistemology and ontological stance to ease the study. These approaches eased the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the paradox of livestock farming in Sub-Saharan Africa’s cattle corridor (Oyanedel et al., 2023). The case study design was appropriate because it allowed in-depth examination of livestock farming systems within real-life contexts across selected districts in Uganda.

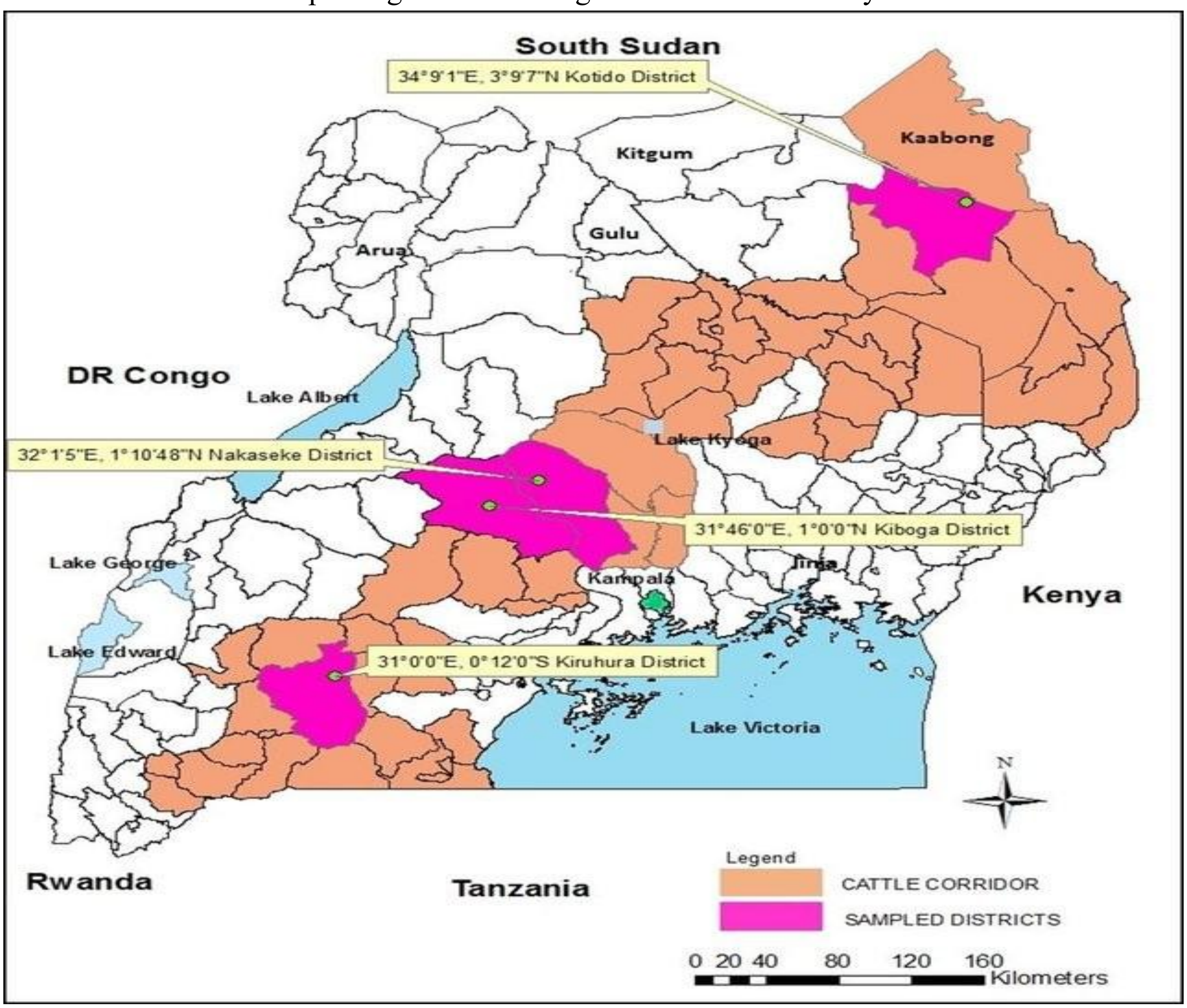
III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a mixed-methods case study design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate Uganda’s political governance paradigm and economic transformation, with specific emphasis on the cattle corridor (Akotia et al., 2023), (Alan et al., 2021). This design was considered appropriate as it enables both statistical measurement of socio-economic trends and an in-depth exploration of community experiences under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) governance framework.

IV. STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in Uganda's cattle corridor, a major agro-ecological zone characterized by extensive livestock production and dairy farming systems (Ibeagha-Awemu et al., 2025), (Gaouar et al., 2026a). The region is central to Uganda's agricultural transformation agenda, particularly in relation to commercialization, productivity enhancement, and livestock-based livelihoods. However, it should be notable that, in order to achieve social economic transformation of people number, strategies must be embrace that entails education, health, peace and security. All these are drivers for socio-economic transformation of the country and the entire region (Kosmaczewska & Poczta, 2021).

A Map of Uganda indicating cattle corridor as study areas



(Source: Google maps retrieve 29th May, 2026)

ISSN: 3139-8464 (p)

V. POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The target population comprised households engaged in livestock production, dairy farmers, cooperative members, and key stakeholders along the cattle value chain (Burkart et al., 2024). A scientifically determined sample of 4,600 respondents was selected from different communities within the cattle corridor to ensure representativeness and statistical reliability. These include Kirihura, Kibogga, Nakaseke and Kotido Districts in Uganda's cattle corridor strip.

VI. SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed; these include Purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling system (Dale, 2026). First, districts within the cattle corridor were purposively selected based on their intensity of livestock production. Second, sub-counties and parishes were randomly selected. Finally, households were selected using systematic random sampling (Moreira et al., 2012). In addition, purposive sampling was used to select key informants, including veterinary officers, extension workers, local leaders, and cooperative managers.

VII. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Primary data were collected using survey method in which structured questionnaires were developed, interviews, and focus group discussions (Poth, 2023). These data collection methods and instruments were generated quantitative data on livestock production, income levels, market access, and adoption of improved farming practices. Qualitative tools captured perceptions on governance, policy implementation, service delivery, and agricultural transformation.

VIII. DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations to examine patterns in livestock production and economic outcomes (Badr & Lhoussaine, 2024). Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to governance influence, agricultural modernization, productivity changes, and development constraints. Findings from both strands were integrated during interpretation to enhance analytical depth.

IX. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity was ensured through pre-testing of research instruments in selected communities within the cattle corridor. Reliability was strengthened through standardized data collection procedures, enumerator training, and consistency checks (Okoko, 2024). Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sources further enhanced the credibility of the findings.

ISSN: 3139-8464 (p)

X. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant institutional authorities prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation was voluntary. Confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection principles were strictly observed throughout the study (Ahmad & Islam, 2024).

XI. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The study acknowledges potential limitations, including recall bias among respondents and variations in socio-economic conditions across districts within the cattle corridor, which may affect generalizability (Anwar & Shima, 2025). However, the large sample size and mixed-methods approach significantly strengthen the robustness and reliability of the findings.

XII. RESULTS

Findings from the cattle corridor indicate that Uganda's economic transformation has been strongly shaped by state-led development strategies implemented under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime. The Government of Uganda has tried Key programs such as Entandikwa, National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Emyooga, the Parish Development Model (PDM), and broader wealth creation initiatives have been central in integrating rural households into the money economy (A. P. Jr & Sousa, 2023). These interventions reflect a deliberate policy shift toward decentralized development financing aimed at improving household income, productivity, and enterprise development at community level.

Respondents consistently indicated that the Parish Development Model, which allocates seed capital to parishes, has enhanced access to low-cost financing for household enterprises. Similarly, Emyooga and NAADS were perceived as important mechanisms for promoting skills development, enterprise formation, and agricultural modernization, particularly in livestock-based livelihoods (Resources, 2021). However, concerns were raised regarding uneven access, administrative inefficiencies, and limited financial absorption capacity in some communities.

XIII. AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE CATTLE CORRIDOR

A major finding of the study is the structural transformation of livestock production systems from predominantly subsistence and nomadic grazing (okusetura) to more sedentary and commercialized dairy farming systems. Respondents highlighted increased adoption of improved cattle breeds, pasture development, and cattle -grazing practices as key drivers of productivity growth (M. R. Jr & Aiken, 2019).

XIV. CATTLE FARMING TO BOOST HOUSEHOLD INCOME

(Source: Field collection 29th May, 2026)

The introduction of dairy infrastructure, including milk cooling facilities, facilitated value addition and reduced post-harvest losses (Gaouar et al., 2026b). These changes contributed to increased household incomes and integration into regional and national dairy value chains. The transition from indigenous livestock systems to crossbreeding and commercial dairy farming was widely regarded as a turning point in the economic modernization of the cattle corridor (Panel, 2020).

XV. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The study findings indicate that economic transformation in the cattle corridor has been strongly supported by improvements in national infrastructure (Fitzsimons et al., 2024). Investments in road networks, energy systems, and regional transport corridors have enhanced market access and reduced transaction costs for agricultural producers.

Respondents emphasized that road connectivity linking rural production zones to urban and cross-border markets have facilitated the commercialization of livestock products. In addition, improvements in electricity generation and distribution have supported agro-processing, cold chain systems, and small-scale industrial activities (Crush et al., 2020). The development of railway and pipeline infrastructure was also identified as part of a broader strategy to shift freight transport away from roads, thereby improving efficiency in the logistics sector.

XVI. GOVERNANCE, PEACE, AND INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY

A key finding is that respondents widely associate economic transformation with political stability and security provided by state institutions, particularly the Uganda People's Defence Forces

(UPDF), police, and judiciary. Peace and law and order were consistently identified as foundational conditions for wealth creation and investment in rural areas (Gumede et al., 2026b).

The decentralization of governance and the presence of local administrative structures were also viewed as important in facilitating service delivery and implementation of development programs. However, concerns were raised regarding corruption, accountability gaps, and uneven enforcement of development policies, which in some cases limit the effectiveness of government programs (Bhattacharya et al., 2025).

XVII. ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE

The findings further reveal a gradual shift from a predominantly agrarian subsistence economy to a more diversified economic structure encompassing commercial agriculture, manufacturing, services, and ICT (Agrawal et al., 2024). This diversification is reflected in the expansion of agro-processing industries, growth in export-oriented production, and increasing participation of households in non-farm economic activities.

Respondents noted that Uganda's economic strategy emphasizes value addition, industrialization, and knowledge-based sectors as key drivers of future growth. However, the persistence of low productivity in some agricultural subsectors and limited industrial absorption capacity remain structural constraints.

XVIII. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Despite reported achievements, the study identified critical concerns regarding implementation effectiveness, equity, and governance outcomes of development programs (Parsafar & Miller, 2024). Some respondents pointed to inefficiencies in fund distribution under programs such as PDM and Emyooga, as well as disparities in access to development resources across districts.

Additionally, issues of corruption, weak institutional coordination, and limited monitoring mechanisms were highlighted as factors undermining program effectiveness. These findings suggest that while the policy framework is comprehensive, governance and implementation challenges continue to affect development outcomes (A. P. Jr & Sousa, 2023).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Uganda's cattle corridor has undergone significant socio-economic transformation driven by a combination of state-led development programs, infrastructure expansion, agricultural modernization, and relative political stability (Agrawal et al., 2024). However, the sustainability of these gains depends on addressing governance inefficiencies, strengthening institutional accountability, and improving equitable access to development resources.

The study therefore establishes that economic transformation in the cattle corridor is not solely a product of market forces but is deeply embedded in governance structures, policy interventions, and state capacity.

XIX. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the centrality of political governance in shaping Uganda's economic transformation, particularly within the cattle corridor where livestock production constitutes a key livelihood system (B, 2022). The evidence suggests that Uganda's development trajectory under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime is characterized by a deliberate state-led strategy combining political stability, decentralized service delivery, and targeted economic programs aimed at integrating rural households into the monetary economy (The Oxford Handbook of the Moroccan Economy, 2026).

A theoretical implication emerging from the study is the strong link between political stability and productive economic activity. Respondents consistently associated peace, security, and functioning legal institutions with increased investment in livestock production and agricultural commercialization (Moritz et al., 2026). This finding aligns with state-centric development perspectives which argue that effective governance institutions are a prerequisite for sustained economic transformation. The role of institutions such as the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), police, and judiciary was repeatedly emphasized as foundational in maintaining order and enabling rural economic participation (Zioło & Zaleska, 2025).

The study also highlights the significance of state-led development interventions such as the Parish Development Model (PDM), Emyooga, NAADS, and earlier Entandikwa initiatives in facilitating grassroots economic empowerment (Manyane & Mariam, 2023). These programs reflect a policy shift toward localized capital provision and household enterprise development. However, while these interventions have expanded financial inclusion and encouraged participation in income-generating activities, their effectiveness appears uneven across communities. This suggests that implementation capacity, governance quality, and local administrative efficiency significantly mediate development outcomes.

From an agricultural transformation perspective, the cattle corridor has experienced a gradual but notable shift from subsistence and nomadic livestock systems to more commercialized and sedentary production models (Amanullah, 2024). The adoption of improved breeds, pasture development, and zero-grazing practices indicates a structural change in livestock management. This transition has contributed to increased milk production, value addition, and integration into formal markets. Nevertheless, the persistence of traditional practices in some areas highlights the coexistence of modern and customary production systems, reflecting uneven modernization processes.

Infrastructure development emerges as another critical driver of transformation. Improvements in road networks, energy supply, and regional connectivity have reduced transaction costs and enhanced market access for agricultural producers (Akram, 2026). These investments have not only facilitated domestic trade but have also strengthened Uganda's integration into regional markets (Estudillo et al., 2022). However, infrastructural gains remain spatially uneven, with some rural areas still experiencing limited access to reliable transport and energy services, thereby constraining full economic integration.

The findings further reveal that Uganda's economic transformation strategy is increasingly anchored in a diversification agenda spanning commercial agriculture, manufacturing, services, and ICT (Agrawal et al., 2024). This structural shift is consistent with broader development theories that emphasize economic complexity and value addition as pathways to sustained growth. However, the continued dominance of primary production in rural areas suggests that structural transformation remains incomplete.

At the same time, the study identifies important governance and implementation challenges that temper the overall assessment of Uganda's development model. Issues such as corruption, uneven distribution of development funds, and limited institutional accountability were reported as constraints on the effectiveness of government programs (Aceska et al., 2025). These challenges highlight a persistent gap between policy design and implementation outcomes, suggesting that institutional capacity remains a critical bottleneck in Uganda's transformation agenda.
The study also engages with broader political economy debates concerning the role of the state in development (Ahluwalia, 2025). While some perspectives emphasize the effectiveness of Uganda's governance model in restoring stability and promoting growth, others caution that the sustainability of these gains depends on deeper institutional reforms and enhanced political accountability. The findings suggest a hybrid outcome: significant economic progress coexists with unresolved governance deficits (Ali et al., 2024).

In synthesis, Uganda's experience in the cattle corridor illustrates a development pathway driven by strong state intervention, infrastructural investment, and agricultural modernization, but constrained by uneven implementation and governance challenges (Estudillo et al., 2022). The evidence suggests that while the foundations for transformation have been established, the transition toward fully inclusive and sustainable development requires stronger institutional performance, improved accountability mechanisms, and more equitable distribution of development resources.

XX. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated Uganda's political governance paradigm and economic transformation under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime, with specific attention to developments in the cattle corridor. The evidence demonstrates that since 1986, Uganda has experienced substantial

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political stabilization and significant socio-economic transformation driven by deliberate state-led development strategies, institutional reforms, and sustained investments in infrastructure and productive sectors.

Findings indicate that programs such as the Parish Development Model (PDM), Emyooga, NAADS, and earlier livelihood interventions have played an important role in expanding financial inclusion and promoting household participation in the money economy. In the cattle corridor, these interventions, combined with agricultural modernization—particularly the shift from nomadic livestock systems to commercialized dairy farming—have contributed to increased productivity, improved household incomes, and stronger integration into national and regional markets.

The study further establishes that infrastructure development, peace and security, and governance structures have been central enablers of economic transformation. Improvements in roads, energy systems, and institutional stability have reduced production constraints and facilitated market access, thereby strengthening Uganda's broader economic performance. However, the study also reveals persistent challenges, including uneven implementation of development programs, governance inefficiencies, corruption concerns, and disparities in access to development resources, which continue to constrain inclusive transformation.

Overall, the study concludes that Uganda's post-1986 development experience reflects a mixed but progressive transformation trajectory characterized by significant economic gains alongside structural and governance limitations. While the foundations for long-term transformation have been established, sustaining and deepening these gains will require stronger institutional accountability, improved policy implementation, and more equitable distribution of development resources.

The cattle corridor experience specifically demonstrates that rural transformation is achievable under conditions of political stability and targeted state intervention, but long-term sustainability depends on addressing remaining structural constraints and enhancing the productivity and inclusiveness of rural economies.

XXI. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have important implications for understanding the relationship between political governance and economic transformation in Uganda. First, the evidence demonstrates that political stability and strong state institutions are foundational to rural economic development. The sustained role of security institutions, administrative structures, and decentralized governance systems suggests that development outcomes are closely tied to governance effectiveness and institutional coordination.

ISSN: 3139-8464 (p)

Second, the study highlights that state-led development programs such as the Parish Development Model (PDM), Emyooga, and NAADS play a significant role in expanding financial inclusion and promoting grassroots enterprise development. However, their uneven effectiveness implies that policy success depends not only on resource allocation but also on implementation capacity, accountability systems, and local governance efficiency.

Third, the findings reveal that structural transformation in Uganda remains incomplete, despite progress in agricultural modernization, infrastructure expansion, and sectoral diversification. This suggests that economic transformation is a gradual process that requires sustained investment in productivity enhancement, value addition, and industrial development.

Finally, the study implies that governance quality is a critical mediating factor between policy formulation and development outcomes. Without strong accountability mechanisms, the impact of otherwise well-designed programs may be diluted at the implementation level.

XXII. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to reinforce transparency and accountability mechanisms in the implementation of development programs such as PDM and Emyooga. Strengthening oversight institutions at national and local levels will help reduce inefficiencies, corruption risks, and misallocation of resources.

The study recommends that the Local government structures should be equipped with adequate technical, financial, and human resources to effectively manage development programs. Capacity-building initiatives for district and parish-level administrators are essential to improve service delivery and program efficiency.

The study also recommended government of Uganda should intensify efforts to transition farmers from subsistence and semi-nomadic systems to fully commercialized and climate-smart agricultural production. This includes expanding access to improved breeds, irrigation systems, pasture development, veterinary services, and agro-processing facilities.

The study recommended to accelerate structural transformation, greater emphasis should be placed on agro-industrialization and value addition on national sustainable economic transformation. Investments in processing facilities, cold chain systems, and industrial parks will enhance competitiveness and increase export earnings from agricultural products.

Although programs such as PDM provide seed capital, there is still a need for broader access to affordable and sustainable credit systems. Strengthening microfinance institutions and cooperative savings structures can complement government interventions and support enterprise growth.

Furthermore, the study recommended for development interventions should be designed to ensure equitable distribution of resources across regions and socio-economic groups. Special attention should be given to vulnerable households, youth, and women to reduce inequality and enhance inclusive growth.

Lastly the study recommends for continued investment in transport, energy, and ICT infrastructure is essential to reduce production and transaction costs. Regional trade integration should also be deepened to expand market opportunities for Uganda's agricultural and industrial products.

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