

Gender equality through VSLAs in Tanzania

Her Money, Her Life

VSLA members are changing the face of the tea value chain in Tanzania.

The *Her Money, Her Life* project is maximizing the potential benefits women receive from their crops through a focus on entrepreneurship and collective investment. With **Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)** at the center, women are improving their income, leading change in their communities, and working together to challenge traditional views of women’s role in the tea value chain and other agricultural production.



Photo: CARE Tanzania

What role do women play in the tea value chain?

Tea has traditionally been a male-dominated crop in Tanzania. Women engage at several points in the value chain, often cultivating or plucking tea leaves, but face many obstacles in gaining benefit from this. Within households and communities, social norms confine women’s role to endless lists of tasks perceived as ‘lighter’, such as plucking, and limit their control over financial resources. Despite national policies stating all can own land, customary roles mean men are more likely to inherit farms and limit women’s ability to make decisions about their crops. Where women do produce tea, they face challenges in taking this to market – particularly as proceeds from the sale of tea in Tanzania must be paid to a bank account, but many women do not have an account in their name.

However, when women are aware of the many opportunities in the tea supply chain and have access to financial resources, they demonstrate they can make an important contribution to Tanzania’s tea sub-sector – from increasing the quality of crops to attracting foreign investment.

How is *Her Money, Her Life* promoting gender equality for women farmers?

Her Money, Her Life deliberately **addresses root causes of gender inequality within households and communities** by working across all of CARE’s [Gender Equality Framework](#). Training and activities with VSLA groups are informed by a **gender analysis** looking at the dynamics affecting women in communities.

How are VSLAs going beyond standard savings groups with households and communities?

- A focus on **entrepreneurship** alongside training to strengthen financial and digital literacy skills encourages **confidence in women’s ability to lead change** and generate income from their tea farms.
- All members join **couples’ dialogue** with their partners to explore the power dynamics within their relationship – which also reduces risk of **gender-based violence**.
- Social Analysis & Action (SAA) groups **engage men** and women in **gender dialogue at community level** to identify **harmful and discriminatory social norms**, agree what change they want to see and plan for how to achieve this.
- More open discussion of **gender-based violence** through the gender dialogue, with Community-Based Trainers supported in appropriate reporting and referrals where they encounter cases.



These efforts are supported by in-depth training to ensure all **staff and volunteers are confident leading discussion on gender**.

Creating new opportunities for women farmers

The greater gender equality women experience through participation in gender transformative VSLAs enables them to **take on new roles** and **lead change within their communities**, changing perceptions of what women can achieve and the value they bring to the local economy. Through VSLAs, women are making **individual and collective investments** to improve quality and quantity of crops and add value through processing. They are also **building connections with value chains**, including spices as well as tea. Together, shifted norms and connections with markets increase women's ability to sell for a good price and earn reliable income from their crops.

546%

Income increase for one smallholder cooperative through selling processed tea instead of green leaves.*

At national level, *Her Money, Her Life* worked with partner [Kazi Yetu](#) to develop a deep understanding of the tea sub-sector in Tanzania and identify the systemic shifts which would lead to the most impact for women farmers. **Infrastructure investments** included a demonstration factory for processing specialty tea and working with the Tea Board of Tanzania to set up a Tanzanian tea auction in Dar-es-Salaam. Ongoing **engagement with government and private sector partners** is advocating for changes to administrative and financial systems to increase access for women.

How is *Her Money, Her Life* improving women's market engagement?

Improving productivity across the tea sub-sector through increased access to resources

Low yields or poor quality prohibit tea crops from being profitable for farmers, and the official guide on optimal tea farming practices in Tanzania was previously only available in English.

- ⇒ CARE worked with the Tea Research Institute of Tanzania to develop a manual on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for tea cultivation in the local language, with step-by-step visuals to make this more **accessible to those with low literacy**.
- ⇒ VSLAs enable women to make individual and **collective investments** in their farms to improve quality and productivity so their crops are more marketable.

Extending women farmers' role in the value chain through collective action and challenging social norms

Social norms associate women's role with lighter tasks such as plucking, and the role of Tanzanian farmers in the tea value chain typically ends with selling raw, unprocessed crops.

- ⇒ VSLA **group solidarity enables collective investment** in processing to increase the value of crops before selling to buyers.
- ⇒ Radio campaigns in partnership with Kazi Yetu and Transform Trade **challenge social norms about women's role** in tea production.
- ⇒ The new women-led processing factory is **challenging social norms about what women can achieve**.
- ⇒ The new Dar Tea Auction offers **potential for women to have a greater role in selling tea**.

Building linkages with markets and government services

To make their farms profitable, women need a reliable market for their crops. VSLAs offer an easy entry point for private sector companies to engage with communities so they can ensure quality standards and sufficient supply to meet their needs. VSLAs also enable budding entrepreneurs to access capital and training to develop local enterprises.

- ⇒ *Her Money, Her Life's* **strategic partnership with Viridium** led to additional training opportunities for women farmers and a reliable buyer for their produce.
- ⇒ When **women entrepreneurs** wish to expand their businesses, *Her Money, Her Life* supports them to navigate formal structures, such as connecting them with the Government Training Officer to be registered as a business, to ensure they can access additional training and incentives.



The Government of Tanzania recognises the potential of the women-led factory model and commits to construct five more tea processing factories.



CASE STUDY: The women farmers who co-own a tea factory

Her Money, Her Life intentionally created **women-centered solutions** to the challenges farmers faced in making tea crops profitable. In Korogwe District in Tanga region, many farms were abandoned due to a lack of market opportunities. Unprocessed tea leaves had a low market value, and any buyers would purchase at a low price, citing high travel and operational costs.

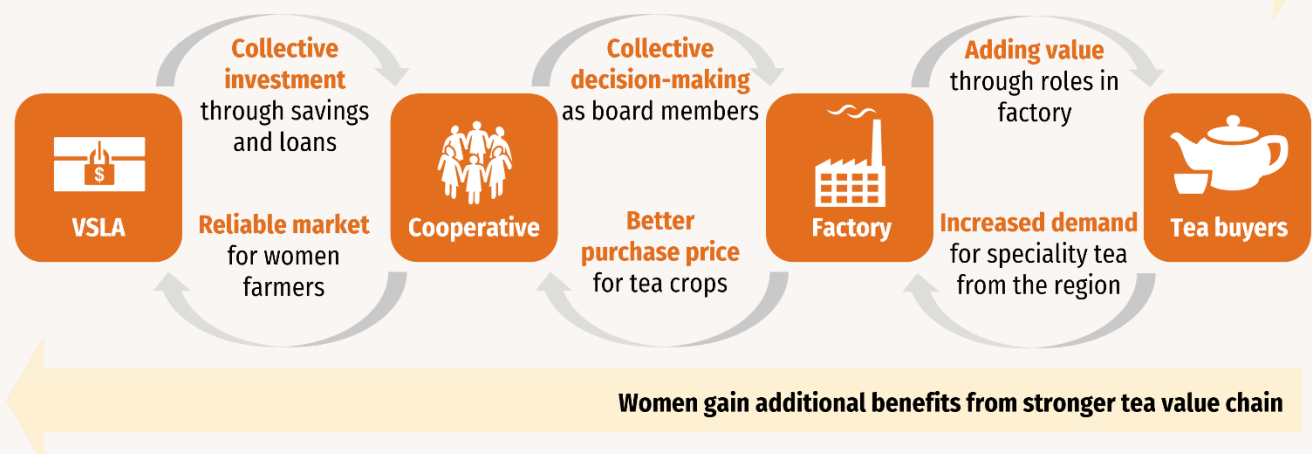
To address this gap in the market, a smallholder tea cooperative – formed of VSLA members – founded the [Sakare Speciality Tea Company](#) with partner [Kazi Yetu](#). With approval from the government, a new factory was built close to communities. This provides a guaranteed buyer for locally-grown tea leaves, processes tea to increase its value, and is creating a market for specialty tea.

From cultivation to cup, women now have a role at every stage of production. In Korogwe, women are not just growing and plucking tea. They are employed in further roles in the factory including processing or packaging. The smallholder cooperative also has a stake in the factory and elects members to the company's board, with women increasingly participating in decisions and shifting perceptions of the role they can play in building economic prosperity.

83%

Return on Investment for the partnership with Kazi Yetu to add value and promote market linkages for women tea farmers.*

Women add value at all stages of tea production



\$ Improving purchase prices for all

Previously, tea produced in Tanzania was sold at auction in Kenya. High transportation costs were passed down to farmers, keeping the purchase price of their tea low.

- ⇒ The new Dar Tea Auction reduces transport costs and enabled an **increase in the official price** for green leaf tea by 17%, increasing income for all tea farmers in Tanzania.
- ⇒ The Tanzania-based tea auction also **opens doors for a wider range of tea processors** – including women-led enterprises – to bring new teas to auction.



Changing financial and legal structures which exclude women

The tea sub-sector is dominated by men, in part because existing systems for owning land, registering as a farmer and accessing financial services are centered on men's ownership of assets. This means women's contributions to the tea sub-sector are less visible and they face additional hurdles when striving to improve their production.

- ⇒ CARE works closely with government ministries on **land rights** and **the process of farmer registration** to ensure women's contributions are recognized and they can access any support they are entitled to.
- ⇒ CARE engages with financial institutions and mobile money platforms **to advocate for joint bank accounts** which can be connected to mobile wallets. The mobile wallet creates the **credit scores** for women to be bankable for capital access.

* *Her Money, Her Life* Impact Study, Nov 2023.

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