

Annex: Projects & impacts reviewed for the VSLA gender equality learning report

This document accompanies the learning report [Beyond Money: Savings Groups as a Platform for Addressing Root Causes of Gender Inequality](#).

In 2022, CARE's *Gender Equality through VSLAs webinar series* surfaced four VSLA projects with rigorous evidence of impact on gender equality as well as creating economic gains. In 2023, deeper analysis of these projects identified the common elements which contributed to gender equality impact across VSLAs. This learning was summarized in the brief [Gender Equality through Savings Groups: Learning from East & Central Africa](#).

In 2024, CARE set out to refine and validate what we are learning about VSLA programming and gender equality by reviewing a larger number of VSLA projects from other regions.

This document provides further detail on the six additional projects reviewed for comparison and the common elements identified across all 10 projects. It outlines project details, evidence sources and the process used.

Highlighted impacts from current or recent projects

Project	Economic impact	Gender equality impact
SHOUHARDO Bangladesh	Women used the savings, loans, or interest-based profits from VSLAs to invest in alternative livelihood activities to increase their income. ¹	2.5x increase in percentage of married women whose husbands participated in household tasks. ²
Women for Change Côte D'Ivoire	63% of VSLA members report improvements in their income compared to the past year. ³	82% of VSLA members report they make joint decisions regarding the use of household income. ⁴
Rupantaran & SAMARTHYA Nepal	36 VSLA groups set up more than 5 years ago have collectively saved close to USD19,500 and use this to invest in improving their agricultural enterprises. ⁵	Women report they have more freedom in terms of mobility and decision making in financial matters. ⁶
Her Money, Her Life Tanzania	98% participants reported improvements in their household income. ⁷	82% women reported active engagement in economic decision-making in their households, cooperatives and communities. ⁸
AWEEV Vietnam	The average household income increased by 120% from baseline to the mid-term review. ⁹	Women reduced their time spent on unpaid domestic and care work by 1/6. ¹⁰
Undisclosed project	\$134k in loans received by vulnerable households facing challenges in accessing financial resources. ¹¹	70% of surveyed men agree women have a place in household financial decision-making. ¹²
Win Win Burundi L4R Ethiopia Indashyikirwa Rwanda Digital Sub-Wallets Uganda	Impacts from four previously reviewed projects in East & Central which conducted RCTs in the period 2018-21 are highlighted in the brief Gender Equality through Savings Groups: Learning from East & Central Africa .	

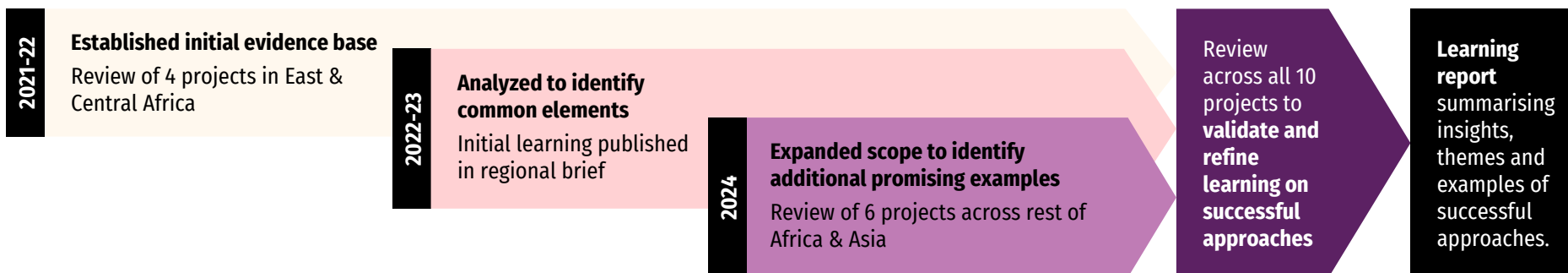
Across the 10 projects reviewed, clear themes emerged for *how* projects are layering activities focused on gender equality alongside basic engagement on savings to address root causes of gender inequality.

	Addressing barriers to gender equality in households and communities				Addressing systems-level change		
	Addressing GBV	Shifting social norms	Engaging men & boys	Enabling gender dialogue	Strengthening networks & collective action	Building market engagement for women	Advocating with government & financial systems
SHOUHARDO Bangladesh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Win Win Burundi	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Women for Change Côte D'Ivoire	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Livelihoods for Resilience Ethiopia		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Rupantaran / SAMARTHYA Nepal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indashyikirwa Rwanda	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Her Money, Her Life Tanzania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Digital Sub-Wallets Uganda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
AWEEV Vietnam		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Undisclosed project location	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

About the learning report

This report draws on in-depth review of 10 projects covering 10 countries across 4 CARE regions.

From 2022-2024, a series of project reviews have together created a picture of what works to address gender equality through savings groups with examples of how programs are currently putting this into practice in different contexts around the globe.



How were projects identified?

Initial evidence base

The four initial projects were originally identified to feature in a series of webinars showcasing promising examples of VSLA programming which integrated gender equality. These projects all:

- Used VSLAs as a primary approach
- Consciously integrated gender equality throughout programming
- Had rigorous evidence of impact, such as a Randomized Control Trial (RCT)
- Had ended in the preceding three years (2018-21).

Analysis of the initial projects identified common elements which contributed to gender equality impact across VSLAs.

This learning was summarized in the brief [Gender Equality through Savings Groups: Learning from East & Central Africa](#).

Expanded scope

For the extended learning report, broader criteria for inclusion were used with the aim of sourcing promising examples from current or recent programs and highlighting the impact of comprehensive VSLA programs which address root causes of gender inequality across a wider range of geographical locations.

This further investigation refined and validated the approaches identified from the previous analysis (as detailed in the table on p2) and surface further examples of [how](#) projects layered action to address root causes of gender inequality alongside VSLAs.

CARE's [Project Information & Impact Reporting System \(PIIRS\)](#) data was used to shortlist potential projects for review.

This was filtered by:

- Projects which used the VSLA model
- Highest score on CARE's Gender Marker
- Located in Western Africa, Southern Africa or Asia regions
- Conducted some form of evaluation
- Implemented programming in the past two years (by filtering for projects which measured outcomes or impacts in 2022-24)

This identified 36 potential projects. These were then individually screened for other pertinent considerations, including:

- VSLAs as a core focus: Priority was given to projects built around the VSLA model, as opposed to programs focused on other sectors which integrate VSLAs solely as an economic component to complement other activities.
- Builds on long-term VSLA programming in the country: A focus on projects have had time to adapt and build upon learning from prior phases or previous projects with a similar focus within their country.

Notes on the broader selection criteria for the second review phase

Regions

The second phase of this learning review focused on **Western Africa, Southern Africa** and **Asia**.

- Regions beyond East & Central Africa (ECA): Given previous evidence of VSLA projects with gender equality impact came from four countries in this region (Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda & Uganda), a conscious decision was made to review projects from across a broader geographical area to ensure learnings hold true across locations.
- Not Middle East & North Africa (MENA) or Latin America & Caribbean (LAC) regions: These regions have only been implementing VLSAs in the past five years, meaning there is not yet comprehensive evidence of change over time.

Timeframe

- Implemented programming in the past two years: This work is constantly evolving, so there was a desire to focus on projects which have implemented the most up-to-date approaches and built on the most recent learning. From a practical perspective, learning was based on in-depth discussion with project staff on the ways in which gender equality approaches were layered alongside VSLAs, so there was a need to work with current or recent projects to ensure staff were available.
- Builds on long-term VSLA programming in the country: Because in-depth change takes time – and it takes time to build

evidence of change – this review aimed to focus on long-term programs with Country Offices which have been implementing layered VSLA approaches for some time. Some projects reviewed were advanced phases of long-term projects such as Women for Change, which is now in its fourth Cohort in Cote D'Ivoire, or the third phase of SHOUHARDO. Others were projects which consciously built upon learning from previous programming in similar sectors within the country (eg Rupantaran in Nepal builds on learning from SAMARTHYA; AWEEV in Vietnam builds on learning from a number of VSLA projects in the country).

VSLAs as a core focus

CARE's global PIIRS system allows projects to identify whether they use VSLAs. However, while some projects are built around the VSLA model, comprehensive programs focused on other sectors may also add VSLAs to integrate an economic component to complement other activities.

- ⇒ For example, **SOAR III**, which uses the UDAAN model, is an education project in Nepal primarily focused on girls' education, leadership & vocational skills. This added VSLAs as an option for girls to join alongside comprehensive dialogue and girl-led action on social norms.
- ⇒ **IMAGINE** is a reproductive health project in Niger which offered adolescent girls the option to join VSLAs as part of a broader intervention which included girls' collectives, community dialogue, and male engagement.

- **448 projects using VSLAs have reported impact since 2020**
- **184 (41%) had the highest score on CARE's Gender Marker**
- **104 were located in Africa or Asia.**
- **63 have conducted some form of evaluation**
- **36 have measured outcomes or impact in 2022-4**
- **6 analyzed for comparison**

When selecting projects to review in depth, priority was given to those with VSLAs as a core component – either in economic justice programming or multisectoral programming built around the VSLA model – in order to best illustrate how VSLAs can be a platform for further action to address root causes of gender inequality. Projects such as SOAR III were not included in the detailed comparison of approaches.

Limitations

In-depth project review necessitated extensive discussion with program teams and, as such, led to self-selection of projects based on availability of relevant staff.

This is not an exhaustive list. Within these countries there are further examples of excellent projects. Other countries also have promising examples which we anticipate will show promise over time.

Moving forward, we aim to continue building this evidence base to strengthen collective understanding of the most effective approaches to layer alongside VSLAs to address systemic market inequities.

Project details

Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Vietnam (AWEEV)			
Key info:	Description:	Income impacts	Gender Equality impacts
<p>Country: Vietnam</p> <p>Dates: 2021-2025</p> <p>Gender Marker: Highest score</p> <p>Donor: Govt of Canada</p>	<p>AWEEV works with VSLA members and their communities in poor rural and ethnic minority areas to increase women's participation in paid economic activities.</p> <p>The project uses VSLAs as a platform for deep engagement within communities on systemic barriers faced by women.</p> <p>AWEEV builds upon learning from other projects across CARE Vietnam's long-term VSLA programming, such as the Technologically Enhanced Agricultural Livelihoods (TEAL) project which also layered additional approaches alongside VSLAs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The average household income increased by 120% from baseline to the mid-term review.^{xiii 1} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 84% of women reported having meaningful participation in economic decision-making in the household.^{xiv} Women reduced their time spent on unpaid domestic and care work by 1/6.^{xv} 66% of women reported increased participation and voice/power in economic decisions in public spaces.^{xvi}
Impact evidence sources:	Mid-term review (internal link), Project annual report.		
Learn more:	AWEEV: Gender Equality through VSLAs in Vietnam		

Rupantaran			
Key info:	Description:	Income impacts	Gender Equality impacts
<p>Country: Nepal</p> <p>Dates: 2022-2025</p> <p>Gender Marker: Highest score</p> <p>Donor: Sall Family Foundation</p>	<p>Rupantaran builds on a decade of work with landless and smallholder farmers in rural Nepal to increase resilience and improve their livelihoods.</p> <p>Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are used alongside the Farmer Field and Business School (FFBS) model as a key way to challenge social norms around women's participation and decision making, explore opportunities and promote economic empowerment.</p> <p>Rupantaran builds upon learning from other projects across CARE Nepal's long-term VSLA programming, such as the SAMARTHYA project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36 VSLA groups set up more than 5 years ago have collectively saved close to USD19,500 and use this to invest in improving their agricultural enterprises.^{xvii} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women report they have more freedom in terms of mobility and decision making in financial matters.^{xviii} Social movements formalized policies to ensure representation of women in their leadership structures from local to national level.^{xix}

¹ Household income increased from 38.3 mil VND at the baseline to 84.3 mil VND at the Mid-Term Review.

Impact evidence sources:	As Rupantaran built upon learning from the previous SAMARTHYA project and evidence from SAMARTHYA was published in 2022, evidence from both projects was considered as part of this review. This includes Evaluating Systems-level change and impact: Findings from the evaluation of the SAMARTHYA project in Nepal and project monitoring data.
Learn more:	Rupantaran: Gender Equality through VSLAs in Nepal

Her Money, Her Life (HMHL)			
Key info:	Description:	Income impacts	Gender Equality impacts
<p>Country: Tanzania</p> <p>Dates: 2021-2023, now entering 2nd phase</p> <p>Gender Marker: Highest score</p> <p>Donor: Bloomberg Philanthropies</p>	<p>HMHL aims to maximize the potential benefits women receive from their crops by challenging traditional views of women's role in the tea value chain and other agricultural production.</p> <p>VSLAs form the basis of community-level engagement on the harmful social norms faced by women. At the same time, the project built strong partnerships with government and private sector actors to address systemic market inequity.</p> <p>HMHL builds upon learning from other projects across CARE Tanzania's long-term VSLA programming, such as the Growing is Learning project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% members reported an increase in individual savings due to their participation in VSLAs in the past 12 months.^{xx} 98% participants reported improvements in their household income.^{xxi} 546% income increase for VSLA members in a smallholder cooperative through collective investment in processing with a women-led enterprise.^{xxii} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82% women reported active engagement in economic decision-making in their households, cooperatives and communities.^{xxiii} The Government of Tanzania recognises the potential of the women-led factory model and commits to construct five more tea processing factories.
Impact evidence sources:	HMHL Impact Study; Gender Survey of Tea and Spices Farming Communities in Korogwe and Bumbuli, Tanga region		
Learn more:	Her Money, Her Life: Gender Equality through VSLAs in Tanzania		

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO)

Key info:	Description:	Income impacts	Gender Equality impacts
<p>Country: Bangladesh</p> <p>Dates: 2004-24</p> <p>Gender Marker:</p> <p>Highest score</p> <p>Donor: USAID</p>	<p>SHOUHARDO has worked for two decades to deliver improved, gender-equitable, and resilient food and nutrition security among poor and extremely poor communities in Bangladesh.</p> <p>Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) were a key model layered alongside other core approaches to create a holistic engagement which addressed the barriers women face.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women used the savings, loans, or interest-based profits from VSLAs to invest in alternative livelihood activities to increase their income. ^{xxiv} • VSLAs were an especially important for women as a pathway for increased income generation. Women used the savings, loans, or interest-based profits from VSLAs to invest in alternative livelihood activities. ^{xxv} • By December 2023, approximately 3,300 bank accounts had been opened for VSLA members. ^{xxvi} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.5x increase in percentage of married women whose husbands participated in household tasks. ^{2 xxvii} • Increased participation of women in household decision-making. ^{xxviii} • Increased access to services by both men and women. ^{xxix} • Increased mobility of women outside the home. ^{xxx} • Reduced gender-based violence. ^{xxxi} • Women's savings and contributions to family expenditure improved their status within the family, as they are included in major family decisions such as buying cows or other livestock, selling produce, children's education and other matters. ^{xxxii}
Impact evidence sources:	<p>SHOUHARDO III Final Evaluation</p> <p>Unlocking Financial Prosperity in Bangladesh</p> <p>Gender Analysis Study for SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity</p>		
Learn more:	<p>SHOUHARDO microsite</p> <p>VSLAs in SHOUHARDO</p> <p>A learning brief on Village Savings & Loan Association (VSLA)</p>		

² From 37% to 98%.

Women for Change

Key info:	Description:	Income impacts	Gender Equality impacts
<p>Country: Côte D'Ivoire</p> <p>Dates: 2015-2025</p> <p>Gender Marker: Highest score</p> <p>Donor: Mars</p>	<p>Women for Change focuses on the potential of women in cocoa-growing communities to improve the situation of their families and play a greater role in the cocoa supply chain.</p> <p>VSLAs form the basis of efforts to overcome barriers to women's participation and decision-making within their homes, communities, and the cocoa sector.</p> <p>Mars has supported projects working with women in cocoa-producing communities for almost a decade and programming continues to build upon insights from long-term implementation. Over this time the project has tested layering approaches from other contexts, such as the Family Business Management Training model used with famers in Papua New Guinea, alongside VSLAs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 88,000 members mobilized USD\$12+m in savings and credit in Côte D'Ivoire since 2015.^{xxxiii} • 63% of VSLA members surveyed say they have experienced an improvement in their income compared to the past year ^{xxxiv} • 90% of members report they can meet household needs due to the profits from their income-generating activities.^{xxxv} • 90% of households report they have diversified their incomes through VSLAs.^{xxxvi} • 88% of women say they have developed increased skills to engage in economic activities.^{xxxvii} • 80% of women in VSLA areas report increased capacity to engage in economic activity.^{xxxviii} • 75-98% women across project locations report access to productive assets.³ • Twice as many VSLA households have an acceptable dietary diversity score compared to control households 63.86% of VSLA households have an acceptable dietary diversity score, compared to 36.14% of control households.^{4 xxxix} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 82% of VSLA members report they make joint decisions regarding the use of household income.^{xi} • 93% report they have increased decision-making power at the household level.^{xii} • 91% report they have increased decision-making power at the community level.^{xiii} • 91% of VSLA members have a better relationship with their partners.^{xiiii} • Men are more financially transparent with their wives. Couples plan family budget and make decisions together.^{xliv}
<p>Impact evidence sources:</p>	<p>The Women for Change project covers two countries: Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire. This learning report only focused on Côte D'Ivoire as this country had more impact evidence available.</p> <p>In Côte D'Ivoire, project impact has been assessed through range of complementary studies and assessments. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-annual surveys • Study to assess the use of how benefits form income-generating activities are being used • Rapid Assessment of the Family Business Management Training (FBMT) approach • Social Impact Assessment on the VSLA approach in Côte D'Ivoire (Forthcoming – not yet publicly available. This report covers multiple VSLA projects in Côte D'Ivoire). <p>Together these indicate positive impacts on women's economic situation and gender equality. We have chosen to highlight the most conservative of these figures in our learning report while the findings from a deeper Social Impact Assessment are validated, but we believe together these show a comprehensive picture of progress.</p>		
<p>Learn more:</p>	<p>Women for Change project overview</p>		

³ Semi-annual monitoring 2022-4: 83 / 75 / 97% reported in the three semi-annual reports.

⁴ 64% of VSLA households have an acceptable dietary diversity score, compared to 36% of control households.

Undisclosed project

An additional long-term project was reviewed and learning was incorporated into this report. However, due to the sensitive context in this project location, specific findings and examples are not being published externally.

Impact evidence sources: Mid-term review; annual report.

Learn more: Internal CARE staff may contact the Global VSLA team for further information.

Previously reviewed projects

Project	Key info:	Key impacts	Learn more
Win Win	<p>Country: Burundi</p> <p>Dates: 2016-2020</p> <p>Donor: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 59% increase in revenues from rice sales among EKATA groups. • Households which joined EKATA more than doubled their rice production. • Gender Parity Index improved by 51% in EKATA groups, compared to an increase of less than 10% in gender light groups. • \$5 return for every \$1 invested in EKATA, compared to a 3:1 return for gender light and 2:1 for Control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Win-Win for Gender and Nutrition: Testing A Gender-Transformative Approach From Asia In Africa - CARE Evaluations. (careevaluations.org)
Livelihoods for Resilience	<p>Country: Ethiopia</p> <p>Dates: 2011-2021</p> <p>Donor: USAID Feed the Future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households reported a seven-fold increase in household savings. • Household incomes increased by 102 – 552% depending on the region. • Over 1,300 women are engaged as micro franchise saleswomen. • Women account for 43% of project clients engaged in value chains (producing on a more “commercial” level). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihoods for Resilience (L4R) - Food Insecurity in Ethiopia - CARE • Livelihoods For Resilience May 2023 - CARE
Indashyikirwa	<p>Country: Rwanda</p> <p>Dates: 2014-2018</p> <p>Donor: UK FCDO (formerly DFID)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55% reduction in the odds of experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from their partner. • 47% reduction in the odds of having perpetrated physical and/or sexual violence against their partner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indashyikirwa - Reducing Intimate Partner Violence in Rwanda - CARE
Digital Sub-Wallets	<p>Country: Uganda</p> <p>Dates: 2015-2019</p> <p>Donor: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women who participated in household dialogues experienced increased participation in financial decision making. • Household dialogue participants were more likely to achieve financial goals than groups which did not participate in household dialogue. • 76% of participants who joined household dialogue reached their financial goals in comparison to 69% in the Sub wallets-only arm. • 81% of women saw a positive change in their partners' behavior; 96% said this was sustained after project-end. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Sub-Wallets for Financial Empowerment of Women - CARE

For more information, contact
Vidhya Sriram | Director, Global VSLAs |
CARE USA
email: vidhya.sriram@care.org



Endnotes

¹ Pulte Institute for Global Development: [SHOUHARDO III Performance and Impact Evaluation](#), October 2023.

² Ibid.

³ CARE: [Women for Change Semi-annual monitoring survey](#), Côte D'Ivoire, May 2024

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Project monitoring data.

⁶ 3D Research and Development Solutions: [Evaluating Systems-level change and impact – Findings from the evaluation of the SAMARTHYA project in Nepal](#), June 2022.

⁷ Solveris Consulting Limited: [Impact Study and Documentation of the Tea, Herbs and Spices Farmer's Situation and Experiences in the Phase I of Her Money, Her Life Project Implementation](#), November 2023.

⁸ DecisionBridge Ltd: [Gender Survey of Tea and Spices Farming Communities in Korogwe and Bumbuli, Tanga region](#), October 2023.

⁹ Pham, Chi: [Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Vietnam \(AWEEV\) Project Mid-term Review](#), April 2023.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Project's mid-term review & annual report

¹² Project's mid-term review & annual report

^{xiii} Pham, Chi: [Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Vietnam \(AWEEV\) Project Mid-term Review](#), April 2023.

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} AWEEV Annual report, April 2023-March 2024.

^{xvii} Project monitoring data.

^{xviii} 3D Research and Development Solutions: [Evaluating Systems-level change and impact – Findings from the evaluation of the SAMARTHYA project in Nepal](#), June 2022.

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Solveris Consulting Limited: [Impact Study and Documentation of the Tea, Herbs and Spices Farmer's Situation and Experiences in the Phase I of Her Money, Her Life Project Implementation](#), November 2023.

^{xxi} Ibid.

^{xxii} Ibid.

^{xxiii} DecisionBridge Ltd: Gender Survey of Tea and Spices Farming Communities in Korogwe and Bumbuli, Tanga region <https://www.careevaluations.org/evaluation/final-report-gender-survey-of-tea-and-spices-farming-communities-in-korogwe-and-bumbuli-tanga-region/>, October 2023.

^{xxiv} Pulte Institute for Global Development: [SHOUHARDO III Performance and Impact Evaluation](#), October 2023.

^{xxv} Ibid.

^{xxvi} CARE Bangladesh: [Advocacy brief: Unlocking Financial Prosperity in Bangladesh](#), 2024.

^{xxvii} Pulte Institute for Global Development: [SHOUHARDO III Performance and Impact Evaluation](#), October 2023.

^{xxviii} Nazly, Qumrunnessa: [Gender Analysis Study for SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity](#), June 2024.

^{xxix} Ibid.

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- xxx Ibid.
- xxxi Ibid.
- xxxii Pulte Institute for Global Development: [SHOUHARDO III Performance and Impact Evaluation](#), October 2023.
- xxxiii Women for Change VSLA dashboard, August 2024.
- xxxiv CARE: [Women for Change Semi-annual monitoring survey](#), Côte D'Ivoire, May 2024
- xxxv CARE: [Report on the Study of the Use of Income Generated from Impact-Generating Activities](#), 2023.
- xxxvi VSLA Social Impact Assessment, Côte D'Ivoire, 2024.
- xxxvii Ibid.
- xxxviii Ibid.
- xxxix Ibid.
- xl CARE: [Women for Change Semi-annual monitoring survey](#), Côte D'Ivoire, May 2024
- xli CARE: [Report on the Study of the Use of Income Generated from Impact-Generating Activities](#), 2023.
- xlii Ibid.
- xliii VSLA Social Impact Assessment, Côte D'Ivoire, 2024.
- xliv Peham, Andreas: [Rapid Assessment of the Family Business Management Training \(FBMT\) approach](#), October 2022.