

Gender Equality through Savings Groups

How CARE's savings groups are a platform for addressing root causes of gender inequality

The impact of savings groups goes far beyond money.

CARE's Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) have proven successful in addressing root causes of gender inequality while simultaneously increasing economic stability for women, their families and communities.

For many years, the focus has been on the positive impact of savings groups on women's individual agency — by strengthening vital attributes such as confidence, negotiation and communication skills, and self-efficacy. But the potential of savings groups goes beyond this.

We believe community savings programs can be a platform for women to build power in all areas of their lives and lead their communities to prosperity.

Our review of 10 projects covering 10 countries across 4 regions shows the many ways savings groups can play a key role in addressing systemic gender inequities.

What have we learned?

When savings group projects intentionally address barriers to gender equality in homes and communities, women increase their income and experience positive benefits across all aspects of their lives. The projects reviewed are achieving this through comprehensive VSLAs which include intentional efforts to:

-  **Address gender-based violence**
-  **Shift harmful & discriminatory social norms**
-  **Engage men & boys in support of gender equality**
-  **Enable dialogue in homes & communities**

Can Savings Groups be a Platform for Economic & Gender Equality Impact Beyond Women as Individuals? YES!

In TANZANIA...



VSLA members in a smallholder cooperative **increased their income by 546%** through collective investment in processing.



82% women reported active engagement in **economic decision-making in their households, cooperatives and communities.**

In VIETNAM...



The average household **income increased by 120%** from baseline to the mid-term review.



Women **reduced their time spent on unpaid domestic and care work by 1/6.**

In BANGLADESH...



Women used the savings, loans, or interest-based profits from VSLAs to invest in alternative livelihood activities to **increase their income.**



There was a 2.5x increase in the percentage of married women whose **husbands participated in household tasks.**

Beyond homes and communities, savings group programming is starting to influence market systems and contribute to broader social and policy change which benefits women and girls. Emerging insights from successful programs show this is deepening impact, building upon VSLAs to:



Strengthen networks & collective action



Strengthen women's market engagement



Advocate with government and financial systems



“In our culture, this work is for men, but I challenged myself to grow in this career.”

Latifa works at the first women-led factory for processing specialty tea in Tanzania. Co-owned by VSLA members through partnership between a smallholder cooperative and a private-sector enterprise, the factory is shifting women's role in the tea value chain.

Looking to the future

The community savings groups CARE works with today look very different to those from 30 years ago.

We want to inspire more savings group programs to create sustainable impact at scale through a focus on the root causes of gender inequality. We see this as crucial for ensuring women gain financial autonomy and economic power which goes beyond access to savings and loans. Our goal is to address the systemic inequities in markets which stand in the way of women earning, saving and investing so that savings groups can catapult women into entrepreneurship and economic resilience.

Read the full learning report **[Beyond money: Savings groups as a platform for addressing root causes of gender inequality](#)** for practical examples of how savings group programs are overcoming the challenges women face in homes, communities and markets.



“The loan from the VSLA has not only improved my family's livelihood – it has given me exposure to opportunities & respect.”

Parita, farmer, Nepal

Parita's family used to restrict her from attending group meetings and she often faced censure when out in the community on her own. This all changed when Parita was able to join a savings group, which enabled her to attend training and take a loan to invest in her farm. How did this happen? Through dialogue sessions with Parita's husband and the efforts of community-led groups to change prevailing views on women's role in earning income.

The positive changes she has seen since joining a savings group go far beyond money. It's not just that Parita's family eat better and are earning more income. Or that her son has been able to complete school. Now, Parita has a better relationship with her husband, so there's less conflict at home. She can make decisions about what to sell at the market and move freely around the community.

Because of her success since joining a savings group, Parita has gained social standing in her community and now she is leading broader changes. She is on the committee of the road maintenance consultation team, ensuring women's views on community infrastructure are heard, and is supporting women in a nearby community who have been inspired to form their own savings group.