

**EXAMINING THE ROLE OF VILLAGE COMMUNITY BANKS (VICOBA) IN
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, A CASE OF ILALA MUNICIPALITY MAJOR
MARKETS.**

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**A RESEARCH DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN GENDER
STUDIES**

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CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certifies that they have read and hereby recommends for acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania the research titled “*Examining the Role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in Women Empowerment, A case of Ilala Municipality Major Markets.*” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies.

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DECLARATION

I, **Kamugisha Jesca**, declare that, the work presented in this Research is original. It has never been presented to any other University or Institution. Where other people's work has been used, references have been provided. It is in this regard that I declare this work as originally mine. It is hereby presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies.

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my lovely husband, CPA Munir Rajab Masale for his constant support in everything it took for me to achieve this goal. The love, care, patience, inspiration and encouragement, he showed to me during my study are immeasurable.

To my children, Muneera and Nadeerah, thank you for being there for me and showing love most of the times during my academic struggle. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women within Ilala Municipality's major markets. Grounded in Naila Kabeer's Feminist Economics of Empowerment, the study employs an interpretivist research philosophy, using a qualitative research design and a case study approach. The research utilizes purposive sampling to select 30 participants, including VICOBA members, leaders, and Community Development Officers. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and secondary document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns related to financial inclusion, decision-making power, and socio-cultural transformations. Findings reveal that VICOBA fosters women's financial autonomy by improving access to credit, enhancing financial literacy, and strengthening social support networks. Moreover, participation in VICOBA challenges traditional gender norms by increasing women's leadership roles in both household and community decision-making. Despite these benefits, challenges such as financial illiteracy, limited access to capital, and societal constraints persist. The study concludes that VICOBA plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and economic empowerment but requires further policy interventions to enhance sustainability and accessibility.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONOMY

CDO	-	Community Development Officer
MFI	-	Microfinance Institutions
SEDIT	-	Social Economic and Development Initiative of Tanzania
VICOBA	-	Village Community Banks
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
WWF	-	World Wildlife fund
URT	-	United Republic of Tanzania.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This research is crucial in addressing the structural challenges posed by poverty within marginalized communities. In regions such as Ilala district, residents face numerous obstacles, especially economic hardship. Examining the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) is therefore essential, given their potential to empower marginalized groups. This study seeks to investigate the specific workings of VICOBA within Ilala, shedding light on their substantial impact on economic empowerment, with a particular focus on women. By evaluating their effectiveness in improving financial access, decision-making abilities, and social inclusion, this research aims to offer valuable insights for targeted interventions. Ultimately, the study contributes to the development of informed policies and sustainable strategies to enhance economic empowerment within underserved communities, especially for women.

1.2 Background to the study

Women's economic empowerment remains a key agenda in global development discourse, recognized as a crucial driver of poverty reduction and gender equality. International organizations, including the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank, emphasize financial inclusion as a strategic approach to empowering women, particularly in developing economies. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), highlight the need for inclusive financial systems that provide women with

opportunities to enhance their livelihoods (United Nations, 2015). Across the globe, women face systemic barriers to accessing financial resources due to restrictive socio-cultural norms, limited property rights, and lack of financial literacy (World Bank, 2020). However, community-based microfinance initiatives such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and Village Community Banks (VICOBA) have emerged as effective tools for fostering women's economic participation, particularly in marginalized communities (Allen et al., 2016).

In Africa, microfinance models have been instrumental in supporting women's financial inclusion. Institutions like the African Development Bank (AfDB) advocate for gender-responsive financial systems, noting that only 37% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa have access to formal banking services compared to 48% of men (AfDB, 2019). Microfinance institutions and savings groups, including VICOBA, provide alternative mechanisms for women to access credit, invest in income-generating activities, and enhance their decision-making power within households and communities (Bastian et al., 2018). In East Africa, the widespread adoption of informal financial groups has transformed women's economic agency, particularly in rural and low-income urban areas. Studies from Uganda and Kenya indicate that women engaged in community-based savings groups experience increased financial autonomy, improved household well-being, and greater participation in local governance structures (Ssendi & Anderson, 2018).

In Tanzania, VICOBA has played a significant role in advancing women's empowerment since its formalization by CARE International in 2002. Initially established to support rural populations with limited access to formal banking

institutions, VICOBA has expanded to urban areas, including major municipalities such as Ilala, where women in informal markets rely on these financial mechanisms for capital and business expansion (Massawe, 2014). Despite these benefits, Tanzanian women continue to encounter economic challenges due to gendered financial exclusion, limited access to collateral, and socio-cultural constraints that hinder their full participation in economic activities (URT, 2019). This study seeks to examine how VICOBA operates within Ilala's major markets and assess its effectiveness in enhancing women's economic empowerment. By providing insights into the structural, financial, and socio-cultural dimensions of VICOBA, the research aims to contribute to policy discussions on gender-responsive economic interventions in Tanzania.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Women's economic empowerment is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development, poverty reduction, and gender equality. Ideally, financial inclusion should provide all individuals, regardless of gender, with access to financial resources, decision-making power, and economic opportunities that enable them to contribute meaningfully to household and national development (World Bank, 2020). In Tanzania, national policies such as the *National Microfinance Policy (2017)* and the *Women and Gender Development Policy (2000)* emphasize the importance of promoting financial services for women to enhance their economic participation. Ideally, community-based financial models like Village Community Banks (VICOBA) should function as effective mechanisms for empowering women,

enabling them to access credit, engage in entrepreneurship, and improve their livelihoods without systemic gender-related obstacles (URT, 2019).

However, despite the existence of policies aimed at fostering women's financial inclusion, Tanzanian women continue to face significant economic marginalization. Structural inequalities, limited access to financial resources, and socio-cultural norms restrict their ability to participate in and benefit from economic activities (Massawe, 2014). A considerable percentage of women in the informal sector, particularly those operating in urban markets such as Ilala Municipality, rely on VICOBA for capital and financial support due to their exclusion from formal banking institutions (Ssendi & Anderson, 2018). While VICOBA presents an alternative to traditional banking, its effectiveness in addressing women's economic challenges, particularly in urban markets, remains underexplored. Questions persist regarding the extent to which VICOBA enhances women's decision-making power, financial autonomy, and ability to overcome socio-cultural barriers to economic participation.

Existing studies on microfinance in Tanzania have largely focused on rural contexts, leaving a knowledge gap regarding the role of VICOBA in urban market settings like Ilala Municipality. Furthermore, while research has explored the economic benefits of VICOBA, limited attention has been given to its broader socio-cultural impacts, such as shifts in gender roles, leadership participation, and household financial decision-making. Given the evolving nature of informal financial systems in urban Tanzania, there is a critical need for empirical evidence on how VICOBA functions in urban markets and whether it effectively contributes to sustainable women's empowerment beyond financial access. To address this gap, society requires well-

informed financial policies that enhance VICOBA's role in advancing gender equality while ensuring financial sustainability. Policymakers, financial institutions, and gender advocates need data-driven insights to strengthen financial inclusion strategies and address persistent socio-economic disparities affecting women in Tanzania's urban economy. Understanding how VICOBA shapes women's financial empowerment and socio-economic mobility will provide essential guidance for improving community-based financial interventions.

Therefore, this study intends to examine the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women in Ilala Municipality's major markets. By assessing its effectiveness in improving financial inclusion, fostering economic independence, and challenging gender norms, the research aims to generate knowledge that informs policy, practice, and future research on gender-responsive economic development in Tanzania.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) on women empowerment.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

To identify the strategies employed by VICOBA in advancing women empowerment among women in Ilala major markets.

To assess the social-cultural impact of VICOBA to the lives of women in Ilala major markets.

To analyze the challenges faced by VICOBA in their efforts to empower women in Ilala major market.

1.4.3 Research Questions

What are the social-cultural impact of VICOBA to the lives of women in Ilala major markets?

What are the strategies employed by VICOBA in advancing women empowerment?

What are the challenges faced by VICOBA in their efforts to empower women in Ilala major markets?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in multiple dimensions, including theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. Theoretically, the research is grounded in Feminist Economics of Empowerment, particularly Naila Kabeer's framework, which emphasizes women's agency, access to resources, and achievements as critical dimensions of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). While existing studies on financial inclusion often focus on formal microfinance institutions, this study expands the theoretical discourse by examining how informal financial mechanisms, such as Village Community Banks (VICOBA), contribute to women's economic agency and social transformation in urban market settings. By applying this theoretical lens, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between gender, financial access, and socio-economic empowerment in Tanzania.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis to explore the lived experiences of women engaged in VICOBA. Unlike prior studies that have largely relied on quantitative approaches to measure financial inclusion, this research adopts an interpretivist perspective to capture the subjective experiences of women, their decision-making power, and the socio-cultural shifts associated with their

financial participation. The study's qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the challenges and opportunities that VICOBA presents in fostering women's empowerment, particularly in the informal economy of Ilala Municipality (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the research's methodological contribution lies in its focus on an urban market setting, filling a knowledge gap in microfinance research, which has traditionally emphasized rural contexts (Ssendi & Anderson, 2018).

Practically, the study offers valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and financial institutions aiming to enhance gender-responsive financial policies in Tanzania. The findings will provide evidence on how VICOBA influences women's financial independence, leadership participation, and economic mobility, informing targeted interventions that strengthen community-based financial initiatives. Additionally, the study's insights will be useful for VICOBA stakeholders, including local government authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in designing strategies to enhance the sustainability, inclusivity, and effectiveness of informal financial institutions in promoting women's empowerment.

At the societal level, the study addresses critical development concerns related to gender equality, financial inclusion, and poverty reduction, aligning with Tanzania's *National Microfinance Policy (2017)* and the *Women and Gender Development Policy (2000)* (URT, 2019). By highlighting the structural barriers that women face in accessing financial resources, the study aims to advocate for inclusive economic frameworks that support women's entrepreneurship, enhance their social capital, and promote their economic autonomy. Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader

discourse on sustainable development by emphasizing the role of grassroots financial initiatives in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (United Nations, 2015).

In summary, this study is significant in advancing theoretical perspectives on gender and financial empowerment, refining methodological approaches for studying informal financial institutions, and informing practical strategies for enhancing women's economic participation in Tanzania's urban markets. Through its interdisciplinary contributions, the research aims to generate impactful knowledge that fosters gender equity, economic resilience, and inclusive financial development in Tanzanian society.

1.6 Organization of the Proposal

The proposal is organized into five key chapters, each playing a crucial role in steering the research towards its objectives. Chapter One, the Introduction, lays the foundation for the study by offering a thorough overview of the research context, significance, and objectives. This chapter establishes the study's rationale, emphasizing the need to address a particular problem or gap in the field. The Statement of the Problem defines the core issue the research aims to explore, highlighting challenges or deficiencies that warrant investigation. The Objectives of the Study outline the research aims, creating a structured path for the study. Additionally, the Research Questions are crafted to examine the intricacies of the research problem, directing the inquiry towards a deeper understanding.

Chapter Two centers on an extensive review of literature and the development of the theoretical framework supporting the research. Key terms are defined in the List of Operational Terms, ensuring clear and consistent terminology throughout the proposal. The Literature Review synthesizes relevant studies, identifying patterns, gaps, and debates in the field, thereby establishing a basis for the research. Meanwhile, the Theoretical Framework uses established theories or models to provide a lens for analyzing and interpreting the research problem.

Chapter Three explains the research methodology to be employed, detailing the approach, design, and procedures for data collection and analysis. The Research Philosophy describes the foundational beliefs guiding the researcher's approach to knowledge and inquiry, shaping the study's methodology. The Research Design addresses decisions related to the study type, sampling methods, and data collection techniques. Research Strategies specify the techniques for achieving the research objectives, including data collection and analysis methods appropriate for the study's context. The Proposed Methods of Data Collection outline the tools and approaches for gathering data, and the Data Analysis Methods describe the procedures for interpreting findings. Finally, Ethical Considerations address the ethical standards guiding the research, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines and the protection of participant rights and well-being. Chapter Four presents the data gathered from the field, along with a detailed analysis and discussion of the findings. This chapter examines the results, identifying patterns, relationships, and insights that address the research objectives and questions. Through careful analysis, Chapter Four interprets

the data, connecting it to existing literature and theoretical perspectives to place the findings within the wider field.

Chapter Five includes a summary of the main findings, followed by conclusions and recommendations. This final chapter brings together the research outcomes, offering clear conclusions that highlight the study's contributions and implications. Additionally, recommendations are provided to guide future research, policy, and practice relevant to the study's focus.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The literature review on the "**Role of Village Community Banks in Women's Empowerment**" aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of current research and insights in this area. Women's economic empowerment has become a priority on the global agenda, with Village Community Banks (VICOBA) playing a notable role in supporting this empowerment. This review intends to compile and assess key studies, theories, and empirical findings that highlight the various impacts of VICOBA initiatives on women's economic position. By reviewing the literature, we seek to identify major themes, challenges, and possibilities linked to VICOBA in advancing economic empowerment among women, enhancing understanding of this field, and guiding future research and development in this vital area.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the *Feminist Economics of Empowerment* framework, particularly the contributions of Naila Kabeer (1999), which provides a gendered lens for analyzing economic empowerment. This framework challenges mainstream economic theories that prioritize market efficiency while overlooking the structural and social barriers that hinder women's economic participation. It argues that empowerment is a multidimensional process involving not only financial access but also agency and achievements, which together shape women's ability to make strategic life choices. The study applies this theoretical framework to examine how

VICOBA fosters women's financial independence, challenges gendered economic inequalities, and enhances their social and economic decision-making power in Ilala Municipality's major markets.

2.3.1 Key Assumptions of the Feminist Economics of Empowerment

The *Feminist Economics of Empowerment* framework is built upon several core assumptions relevant to this study:

- i) **Access to Resources and Economic Opportunities** – Women's empowerment is contingent upon their ability to access financial resources, income-generating activities, and decision-making opportunities (Kabeer, 1999). In the context of this study, VICOBA serves as an alternative financial institution enabling women to overcome barriers to credit and business capital.
- ii) **Agency and Decision-Making Power** – Empowerment extends beyond financial access to include women's capacity to exercise agency in economic and social spheres (Kabeer, 2005). This study examines how VICOBA participation enhances women's decision-making power within households and communities, particularly in resource allocation and business investments.
- iii) **Structural and Social Constraints** – Women's economic participation is influenced by societal norms, gender roles, and institutional frameworks that either facilitate or hinder their progress (Kabeer, 2012). In the context of Tanzania, cultural perceptions regarding women's financial autonomy often limit their ability to fully benefit from economic opportunities. This study

explores how VICOPA challenges or reinforces these socio-cultural constraints.

- iv) **Economic Empowerment as a Collective Process** – Unlike neoliberal economic models that focus on individual gains, feminist economics emphasizes collective empowerment through community-based initiatives (Benería et al., 2016). VICOPA operates within this paradigm by fostering solidarity, shared savings, and mutual financial support among women, making it an ideal case for analyzing collective economic agency.

2.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Theory

One of the key strengths of the *Feminist Economics of Empowerment* framework is its holistic approach to analyzing economic empowerment. Unlike traditional economic theories that focus narrowly on financial metrics, this framework integrates social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence women's access to resources and economic opportunities (Elson, 1999). Its emphasis on agency and social transformation makes it particularly useful for studying informal financial institutions like VICOPA, which operate beyond formal banking structures.

However, the theory also has certain limitations. One critique is its broad and often abstract conceptualization of empowerment, which makes it difficult to develop standardized measures of economic progress (Cornwall, 2016). Additionally, while the framework highlights structural barriers, it provides limited guidance on practical strategies for overcoming them within specific economic contexts (Mahmud, 2018). Furthermore, the collective empowerment approach, while valuable, may overlook individual differences in women's experiences and economic needs.

2.3.3 Application of the Theory in This Study

Despite these limitations, the *Feminist Economics of Empowerment* framework remains highly relevant for this study. It provides a robust analytical lens for understanding how VICOBA facilitates financial inclusion, enhances agency, and influences women's socio-economic mobility in Ilala Municipality. By examining the intersection of financial access, social structures, and economic decision-making, the study will contribute to strengthening the empirical application of feminist economic theories in urban market settings. The research will also address one of the theory's weaknesses by providing context-specific insights on how VICOBA operates within Tanzania's informal economy, offering practical recommendations for improving gender-responsive financial policies.

2.3.4 Conclusion

The *Feminist Economics of Empowerment* framework provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for analyzing women's economic participation in VICOBA. By focusing on access, agency, and structural constraints, the study will explore how informal financial institutions contribute to women's financial independence and broader social empowerment. Although the theory has limitations, its applicability in addressing gendered financial inequalities makes it an essential framework for this research. The study's findings will not only validate the strengths of the theory but also contribute to ongoing discussions on gender-sensitive economic policies in Tanzania.

2.4 Empirical Literature Review

2.4.1 Overview

Women's economic empowerment is a central theme in gender and development discourse, particularly in the context of financial inclusion and microfinance initiatives. Scholars and policymakers have long debated the role of community-based financial systems in fostering financial independence among marginalized groups, particularly women. This chapter critically reviews existing literature on the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in women's empowerment, with a focus on financial inclusion, economic decision-making, and socio-cultural transformation. By engaging in an analytical discussion of previous studies, this review highlights areas of convergence, divergence, and existing knowledge gaps relevant to this study.

2.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Women's Economic Empowerment

Women's economic empowerment has been conceptualized through multiple theoretical perspectives, including feminist economics, social capital theory, and microfinance models. *Feminist Economics of Empowerment*, particularly Naila Kabeer's framework, argues that access to financial resources alone is insufficient for empowerment; rather, it must be accompanied by increased agency and achievements in economic and social spheres (Kabeer, 1999). This aligns with studies emphasizing that microfinance institutions should not only facilitate financial access but also challenge gendered power structures that restrict women's decision-making (Elson, 1999; Benería et al., 2016). Social capital theory, as advanced by Putnam (2000), posits that financial inclusion through community-based initiatives

enhances collective agency by fostering networks of trust, reciprocity, and shared resources. Studies examining microfinance in Africa have noted that group-based savings schemes such as VICOBA generate social cohesion, enabling women to leverage their networks for both financial and social mobility (Ssendi & Anderson, 2018; Bastian et al., 2018). However, critics argue that not all women benefit equally from such networks, as pre-existing socio-economic hierarchies can reinforce inequalities within financial groups (Goetz & Gupta, 1996).

These theoretical perspectives provide a critical lens through which to analyze VICOBA's role in Ilala Municipality, particularly in assessing whether financial access translates into broader economic and social empowerment for women.

2.6 VICOBA and Women's Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion is a widely acknowledged enabler of economic empowerment, particularly for women who face systemic barriers to accessing credit and financial services (World Bank, 2020). VICOBA has emerged as an alternative financial model to bridge this gap, providing low-income women with opportunities to save, invest, and expand their businesses (Massawe, 2014). Studies from Tanzania and other East African countries suggest that VICOBA enhances financial accessibility by offering flexible loan terms and group-based lending, which circumvents the collateral requirements imposed by formal banks (Ngalemwa, 2013; Satta, 2020).

However, there is considerable debate regarding the sustainability of these informal financial mechanisms. While researchers like Ahlén (2012) emphasize the affordability and accessibility of VICOBA, others caution that reliance on community-based savings models may be limiting, as funds are often insufficient for

large-scale investments (Mkombe, 2005). Additionally, while VICOBA promotes financial inclusion, evidence suggests that women's control over financial resources within these groups is not always guaranteed, as male family members sometimes exert influence over financial decisions (Kihongo, 2023).

In the context of Ilala Municipality, it remains unclear whether VICOBA participants experience long-term financial stability beyond immediate access to credit. This study seeks to explore whether VICOBA truly facilitates financial independence or if structural limitations undermine its potential for sustainable empowerment.

2.6.1 VICOBA and Women's Economic Decision-Making

Economic empowerment is not only about financial access but also about the ability to make decisions regarding resource allocation, investment, and business expansion. Several studies have examined whether participation in microfinance initiatives enhances women's economic decision-making power. Kabeer (2005) asserts that economic agency is crucial in assessing empowerment, as access to resources must translate into the ability to make meaningful life choices.

Empirical research from Uganda and Kenya has shown that women engaged in community-based savings groups report increased control over household finances and business decisions (Ssendi & Anderson, 2018; Bastian et al., 2018). Similarly, in Tanzania, Massawe (2014) found that VICOBA participants were more likely to make independent financial decisions compared to non-participants. However, these studies also highlight constraints, including socio-cultural norms that continue to limit women's financial autonomy despite their economic contributions. Goetz and Gupta (1996) argue that financial access does not automatically translate into

decision-making power, as male relatives often mediate women's financial engagements. This perspective is supported by studies in Tanzania, where some women face challenges in asserting control over their earnings due to patriarchal household structures (Kihongo, 2023). This study will critically examine whether VICOBA participation enhances women's economic agency in Ilala Municipality or whether socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder their autonomy.

2.6.2 VICOBA and Socio-Cultural Transformation

Beyond financial inclusion, Village Community Banks (VICOBA) have been associated with broader socio-cultural transformations that influence gender roles, household decision-making, and community leadership. Scholars argue that participation in microfinance institutions fosters solidarity, leadership development, and advocacy for gender equality by providing women with the resources and social capital necessary to navigate male-dominated economic spaces (Cheston & Kuhn, 2002). In many Sub-Saharan African contexts, financial access alone does not guarantee empowerment, but when combined with skill-building and peer support networks, it can lead to shifts in traditional gender norms (Mchenga, 2022; Ndunguru, 2023).

Microfinance initiatives like VICOBA often serve as entry points for women into leadership roles within their communities. Studies suggest that as women engage in financial groups, they gain confidence, negotiation skills, and exposure to collective decision-making, which strengthens their ability to participate in household and community affairs (Cornwall, 2016). Research from Uganda and Kenya demonstrates that women who participate in savings and credit groups are more

likely to take on leadership roles, not only within these groups but also in local governance and community-based organizations (Bastian et al., 2018). Similarly, in Tanzania, VICOBA has been linked to increased social mobility among women, allowing them to assert greater influence in public spaces traditionally dominated by men (Ssendi & Anderson, 2018).

However, the extent to which VICOBA challenges entrenched gender norms remains a subject of debate. While some studies highlight its role in promoting female leadership, others suggest that socio-cultural barriers continue to limit its transformative potential. Nayabinda (2014) found that while women in VICOBA gained financial independence, their roles within households and broader communities remained largely unchanged, as men retained ultimate control over major financial decisions. Similarly, Mkombe (2005) notes that in some cases, women's increased earnings from VICOBA participation led to heightened tensions within households, as traditional gender expectations clashed with shifting economic dynamics.

In the context of Ilala Municipality, it remains unclear whether VICOBA participation translates into tangible shifts in gender relations or whether structural and cultural barriers persist. This study will examine whether women engaged in VICOBA experience enhanced participation in community leadership and household decision-making, assessing the degree to which financial access fosters broader social transformation. By exploring these dimensions, the research will contribute to ongoing discussions on gender equality and financial inclusion in Tanzania.

2.7 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of research on financial inclusion and women's empowerment, several gaps persist, particularly in the Tanzanian context. Most existing studies on Village Community Banks (VICOBA) focus on their role in rural areas, leaving urban settings underexplored (Ngalemwa, 2013; Massawe, 2014). Given the distinct socio-economic and financial landscapes of urban markets, where informal trading is dominant, there is a need for an in-depth examination of how VICOBA operates in urban municipalities such as Ilala. Unlike rural areas, where VICOBA primarily serves as an alternative to formal financial institutions, urban settings present a more complex financial ecosystem with multiple banking options and economic opportunities. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the effectiveness of VICOBA in empowering women within the urban marketplace context.

Furthermore, while existing literature highlights the role of microfinance in enhancing women's access to credit and business opportunities, there is limited research on whether this financial inclusion translates into increased economic agency and decision-making power (Kabeer, 2005; Ssendi & Anderson, 2018). Many studies focus on access to financial resources without critically examining whether women gain control over their finances and exercise autonomy in household and business decisions. Goetz and Gupta (1996) caution that financial access alone does not necessarily lead to empowerment if women lack control over how funds are used. In Tanzania, where patriarchal norms often influence financial decision-making, it is unclear whether VICOBA enables women to assert greater authority over their

earnings or whether economic benefits remain mediated by male household members. This study will investigate the extent to which VICOBA enhances women's financial autonomy and decision-making within their households and businesses.

Additionally, the literature on the socio-cultural impact of VICOBA remains fragmented, with limited discussion on how participation in these financial groups influences gender roles, leadership opportunities, and social mobility. While some studies suggest that microfinance fosters women's leadership and social capital (Cheston & Kuhn, 2002; Cornwall, 2016), others argue that traditional gender norms continue to constrain women's empowerment despite economic gains (Nayabinda, 2014). There is a need for empirical research that critically examines whether VICOBA participation leads to meaningful shifts in gender dynamics, particularly in urban areas where gendered power relations may differ from rural settings.

Finally, there is a lack of longitudinal studies assessing the sustainability of VICOBA as a financial empowerment tool. Most existing research captures short-term economic outcomes but does not explore whether women's financial stability is sustained over time or if VICOBA remains a viable mechanism for long-term economic empowerment (Satta, 2020). This study will contribute to bridging this gap by examining both the immediate and long-term impacts of VICOBA participation on women's financial independence, leadership, and social mobility in Ilala Municipality.

2.8 Summary

In the literature review that precedes the methodology chapter of this study on VICOBA (Village Community Banks), an extensive examination of existing scholarly works provided valuable insights into the operations, impacts, and challenges associated with VICOBA initiatives. Research from various fields, including economics, sociology, and development studies, was analyzed to comprehend the socio-economic landscape in which VICOBA functions. Central themes that emerged from this discourse included financial inclusion, community empowerment, and sustainable development. Additionally, the review identified gaps in the literature, particularly concerning the long-term sustainability and scalability of VICOBA models. This literature review established a foundational basis for developing the research methodology and directing the investigation into the effectiveness of VICOBA in promoting socio-economic development.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter of the study on VICOBA detailed the research approach, design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques that were used to investigate how VICOBA initiatives empowered women. It offered a comprehensive overview of the research framework, including the theoretical foundations that underpinned the study. This chapter outlined the sampling strategy, criteria for participant selection, and the data collection tools employed, such as surveys, interviews, and observations. Furthermore, it clarified the data analysis process and the techniques that were applied. By ensuring transparency and rigor in the research process, the methodology chapter facilitated a systematic evaluation of VICOBA's impact and effectiveness.

3.2 Research Strategies

3.2.1 Study Philosophy

The study about VICOBA utilized interpretivism philosophy due to its alignment with the complex and dynamic nature of social phenomena, such as community-based financial initiatives. Interpretivism emphasized the subjective interpretation of social reality, acknowledging the influence of individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and values on their actions and interactions. In the context of VICOBA, which operated within diverse socio-cultural contexts and involved multiple stakeholders with varying perspectives, interpretivism offered a holistic approach to understanding the nuanced dynamics at play. By adopting this philosophical stance, the study sought to

explore the meanings, experiences, and social constructions surrounding VICOBA programs, thereby providing rich insights into their impact on community development, financial inclusion, and empowerment. Moreover, interpretivism allowed for the exploration of context-specific factors influencing the success or failure of VICOBA initiatives, facilitating the development of more contextually relevant and effective interventions.

3.2.2 Research Design

This study employs a case study design, which is particularly suitable for investigating complex phenomena within real-life contexts. Case study research allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific case or cases, providing rich and detailed insights into the subject under investigation, Flick, (2011). This study employed a case study design, which was particularly suitable for investigating complex phenomena within real-life contexts. Case study research allowed for an in-depth exploration of specific cases, providing rich and detailed insights into the subject under investigation (Flick, 2011).

3.2.3 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach, recognizing the importance of this method in gaining a deep understanding of complex phenomena from the perspectives of the participants involved. Qualitative research offered a nuanced exploration of human experiences, behaviors, and social interactions, allowing for the investigation of underlying meanings, motivations, and contexts that quantitative methods might not capture adequately (Kohari, 2009). By employing techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, the qualitative approach facilitated the exploration of

diverse viewpoints and enabled researchers to uncover rich and detailed insights into the research topic. This approach was particularly valuable when studying subjective experiences, cultural practices, and social dynamics, as it allowed for the examination of context-specific factors and the generation of in-depth and contextually situated knowledge (Flick, 2011). Therefore, by embracing a qualitative approach, this study aimed to provide a holistic and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

3.2.4 Study population

The population for this study comprised three main groups: members of Village Community Banks (VICOBA), leaders of VICOBA groups, and Community Development Officers (CDOs) in the respective wards where the markets were located. VICOBA members represented individuals actively engaged in community-based microfinance initiatives, providing valuable insights into the impact of being members of VICOBA on their livelihoods. Leaders of VICOBA groups played a crucial role in overseeing the operations and decision-making processes within their respective groups, offering perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by VICOBA members in accessing markets. Additionally, Community Development Officers stationed in the wards where the markets were situated served as key stakeholders involved in facilitating community development initiatives and were responsible for the registration of VICOBA in their wards. Together, these three groups constituted the target population for this research, ensuring a comprehensive

exploration of the research topic from multiple perspectives within the community context.

3.2.5 Area of the Study

The study focusing on the role of community banks in women's empowerment will take place in major markets across the Ilala District: Kisutu Market, Sambusa Market, Ilala Market, Machinga Complex and Buguruni. These markets were selected due to their central location, ensuring easy accessibility to a significant portion of the district's population. Moreover, these markets attract a substantial number of women engaged in diverse economic activities, providing an optimal environment for examining the impact of community banks on women's empowerment.

These markets also offer a wide array of economic activities, including trading, retailing, and small-scale entrepreneurship, reflecting the district's socioeconomic diversity than any other markets in Ilala Municipality. This diversity enables the study to encompass women from various backgrounds, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of how community banks contribute to empowering women across different sectors. Additionally, as many women in the Ilala District participate in the informal economy, these markets serve as hubs for such activities. Consequently, conducting the study in these markets aims to shed light on how community banks support the empowerment of women operating within the informal sector, which often lacks access to formal financial services. The study focusing on the role of community banks in women's empowerment took place in major markets across the Ilala Municipality: Kisutu Market, Sambusa Market, Ilala Market, Machinga Complex,

and Buguruni. These markets were selected due to their central location, which ensured easy accessibility to a significant portion of the district's population. Moreover, these markets attracted a substantial number of women engaged in diverse economic activities, providing an optimal environment for examining the impact of community banks on women's empowerment.

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3.3 Sampling

3.3.1 Sample Size

Given the qualitative nature of the research and the focus on understanding the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women, the sample size was determined through purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation from key stakeholders within the population of interest. A sample size of 30 participants was designated for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This sample included a diverse range of participants, such as VICOBA members, leaders

of VICOBA, and Community Development Officers (CDOs) from various wards where the VICOBA were registered. The specific number of participants from each subgroup was determined based on factors such as accessibility, availability, and diversity of perspectives within the population. This sample size was deemed adequate to achieve data saturation and capture the richness and diversity of experiences and perspectives related to the research topic. Creswell discussed the concept of saturation and provided guidance on determining sample size in qualitative research, emphasizing the importance of achieving saturation to ensure the richness and depth of the data collected (Creswell, J. W., 2013). Additionally, the sample size was flexible, allowing for adjustments during the data collection process to ensure the depth and breadth of data necessary for a comprehensive qualitative analysis.

Table 3.1: Composition of Respondents

S/N	Category	Number of Respondents
1	Leader of VICOBA	10
2	Members of VICOBA	15
3	Community Development Officers	5
	Total	30

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure for this study about the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in Ilala District involved a multi-stage process to ensure representation from the diverse groups within the population of interest, including VICOBA members, leaders of VICOBA, and Community Development Officers (CDOs) from the respective wards where the VICOBA were registered. Firstly, a list of VICOBA groups registered in Ilala District was obtained from relevant administrative

authorities and the municipal council. This list served as the sampling frame for selecting VICOBA groups to participate in the study.

Next, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select VICOBA groups that represented a range of characteristics, such as size, geographical location, and duration of operation. This ensured diversity within the sample and allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the role of VICOBA in empowering women across different contexts. Purposive sampling was applied in the study to intentionally select participants who possessed specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research questions, ensuring the depth and richness of the data collected (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D., 2017). This approach allowed researchers to target individuals who could provide valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation, enhancing the study's validity and relevance. Within each selected VICOBA group, a convenience sampling approach was used to recruit members who were actively engaged in the activities of the group and had firsthand experience with the services provided by VICOBA.

Additionally, leaders of selected VICOBA groups were purposively sampled to participate in the study, ensuring representation from individuals who held leadership positions and were involved in decision-making processes within their respective groups. Finally, Community Development Officers (CDOs) from the respective wards where the selected VICOBA groups were registered were purposively sampled to provide insights into the broader community development context and the role of VICOBA within their areas of jurisdiction. Overall, this sampling procedure aimed to ensure a diverse and representative sample of participants who could provide

valuable insights into the role of VICOBA in empowering women within the context of Ilala District.

3.4. Data collection

The data collection process employed a variety of techniques to gather rich and detailed insights from the participants. The methods chosen were intended to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the research topic while ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.4.1 In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including VICOBA members, leaders of VICOBA, and Community Development Officers (CDOs) in Ilala District. These interviews provided an opportunity for participants to share their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the role of VICOBA in empowering women. The interview questions were designed to explore various aspects of women's empowerment within the context of VICOBA, including access to financial resources, decision-making processes, and socio-economic outcomes.

3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted with selected VICOBA groups to facilitate group interactions and discussions on the topic of women's empowerment. These discussions enabled participants to explore common themes, share collective experiences, and generate insights into the role of VICOBA in fostering women's empowerment within their communities. The FGDs were structured around specific topics related to women's empowerment, such as access to credit, leadership opportunities, and social support networks.

3.4.3 Secondary data collection

Relevant documents, such as VICOBA guidelines, reports, and other organizational documents, were analyzed to provide additional context and background information on the operations and activities of VICOBA groups in Ilala District. This document analysis helped in understanding the institutional framework, policies, and practices that shaped the role of VICOBA in promoting women's empowerment.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process for the study involved a systematic approach guided by thematic analysis principles. Data coding was the initial step, where qualitative data from various sources were categorized into meaningful units based on research objectives. Subsequently, themes were identified, and coded data were organized into clusters, facilitating further analysis. Data exploration entailed an in-depth examination of themes, including illustrative quotes, to understand variations in the management of VICOBA. Pattern recognition involved identifying trends across participant responses, VICOBA groups, and community contexts, providing insights into VICOBA's role in women's empowerment. Finally, data interpretation integrated findings to generate overarching conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice.

The process emphasized identifying patterns, themes, and trends to interpret findings regarding the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in women's empowerment. Data coding categorized qualitative data, leading to theme identification and organization. Exploration delved into theme nuances, while pattern recognition identified trends across participants and contexts. Ultimately, data

interpretation synthesized findings from various sources to generate actionable insights for policy and practice regarding VICOBA's role in empowering women.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were two crucial concepts in research methodology that assessed the quality and trustworthiness of research findings. Validity referred to the extent to which a study accurately measured or reflected the phenomenon it claimed to investigate (Kothari, 2009). It ensured that the conclusions drawn from the research were meaningful and relevant to the research question or objectives. On the other hand, reliability referred to the consistency and stability of research findings over time and across different conditions. It ensured that the results of the study were reproducible and dependable.

3.6.1 Validity

Reliability in the study "**Role of Village Community Banks in Women Empowerment**" was ensured through consistent data collection methods, pilot testing of research instruments for clarity, inter-coder agreement for consistent analysis, maintaining an audit trail for transparency, and practicing reflexivity to minimize bias. These measures aimed to enhance the dependability and replicability of the research findings (Kothari, 2009).

3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability in the study "**Role of Village Community Banks in Women Empowerment**" was ensured through consistent data collection methods, pilot testing of research instruments for clarity, inter-coder agreement for consistent analysis, maintaining an audit trail for transparency, and practicing reflexivity to minimize

bias. These measures aimed to enhance the dependability and replicability of the research findings.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

According to the American Psychological Association (2020), ethical considerations in research involved ensuring that studies were conducted in an ethical manner, with due respect for the rights, well-being, and dignity of participants. This included obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, minimizing harm, and adhering to professional standards and guidelines.

In conducting this study, several ethical considerations were paramount to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being. Firstly, clearance was sought from the University and other relevant authorities. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, clearly outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Additionally, measures were taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of participants' personal information throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. Respect for cultural sensitivities and local norms was maintained, with particular attention to accurately representing participants' voices and avoiding misrepresentation or exploitation of their perspectives. Furthermore, steps were taken to minimize potential risks or discomfort to participants by providing and ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for data collection activities. Finally, the research adhered to ethical guidelines and standards set forth by relevant institutional review boards and regulatory bodies to

uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct in research involving human participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women in Ilala Municipality's major markets. The chapter is structured to align with the study's specific objectives, focusing on financial inclusion, economic decision-making, and socio-cultural transformation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis, and findings are presented thematically based on key patterns that emerged from the data.

The chapter begins by discussing participants' general understanding of VICOBA and its perceived benefits, followed by an in-depth exploration of its impact on women's financial inclusion, decision-making power, and social mobility. The findings are then analyzed in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework guiding the study. Furthermore, challenges associated with VICOBA participation are examined, along with potential strategies for enhancing its effectiveness in promoting women's empowerment.

The discussion section critically engages with the findings, comparing them with previous research and theoretical perspectives to highlight areas of convergence, divergence, and new insights. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how VICOBA functions as an empowerment tool and whether it effectively

addresses the financial and socio-cultural barriers that women face in Ilala Municipality.

4.1.1 Community-driven Financial Inclusion

Community-driven financial inclusion is a significant theme that emerged from participants' descriptions of VICOBAs as small, trusted community groups predominantly comprised of women. These groups are typically formed by individuals who share social and economic ties, creating a sense of trust and mutual support. Participants emphasized how VICOBAs provide women with access to loans at much lower interest rates than traditional financial institutions, making them a preferred and accessible option for women who otherwise face financial barriers. This financial inclusivity helps women avoid exploitative loans while fostering their ability to save and manage money within a supportive community environment. The availability of these low-interest loans enables women to improve their livelihoods by starting or expanding businesses, supporting their children's education, or covering healthcare costs. As one participant stated:

*"Most members of these groups are women, many of whom find themselves financially dependent hence need to emancipate themselves from that dependence". **KII/Leader/woman/Kisutu/10th Sept, 2024***

Another pulling factor is the fact that VICOBA offers loans at lower interest rates. As another participant echoed this sentiment, highlighting the role of VICOBAs in providing a vital financial lifeline:

*"By joining VICOBA, I gained access to funds without the high costs that come with bank loans. It has made a big difference in how I manage my family's expenses." **KII/member/woman/Kisutu/10th Sept, 2024***

These personal testimonies reflect the crucial role that VICOBAAs play in addressing the financial needs of women, particularly those who are often excluded from traditional banking systems. Many women in rural or underserved communities lack the collateral, formal employment, or credit history required to secure loans from banks and other financial institutions. VICOBAAs provide an alternative pathway for these women, allowing them to participate in financial activities that would otherwise be inaccessible. By offering small loans with manageable interest rates and flexible terms, VICOBAAs empower women to take control of their financial lives, making it possible for them to start or expand small businesses, invest in their children's education, or meet essential household needs.

For women who have faced barriers in accessing credit due to gender bias or lack of financial literacy, VICOBAAs provide more than just financial services they also foster a sense of community and mutual support. In many cases, women gain not only financial independence but also the confidence to participate in broader economic and social decision-making processes. The structure of VICOBAAs, where members meet regularly to discuss their progress and financial needs, promotes transparency and collective accountability, ensuring that all members benefit from the system. One participant noted,

"Through VICOBA, I have been able to save and access loans without the stringent requirements of banks, which has allowed me to improve my business and my family's well-being."

KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th Sept, 2024

These testimonies highlight how VICOBA help fill the gaps left by formal financial institutions, particularly for women, by addressing their unique financial needs in a supportive and inclusive environment.

4.2 Role of VICOBA in Women's Financial Autonomy

4.2.1 Empowerment through Financial Literacy and Business Skills

VICOBA are widely recognized as platforms that offer far more than just access to financial resources. While providing loans and savings mechanisms are central to their function, participants emphasized that VICOBA also play a transformative role in enhancing business skills and financial literacy. This combination empowers women to manage their finances more effectively, fostering long-term financial independence. Through the comprehensive training and ongoing support offered by VICOBA, women not only learn how to manage their money better but also acquire a broad range of valuable skills in areas such as business planning, entrepreneurship, and marketing. These skills enable them to make more informed financial decisions, helping them grow and sustain their businesses. This, in turn, provides a solid foundation for their financial autonomy, allowing them to achieve sustainable livelihoods that can benefit not only themselves but also their families and communities.

For many women, joining VICOBAs marks the first time they have had access to structured training on financial literacy and business management. The impact of this training is evident in the stories shared by members, who report increased confidence and improved ability to handle their businesses effectively. One participant shared:

"VICOBA supports women who want to start or expand their businesses by helping us develop our financial and business skills."
(KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th Sept, 2024).

These skills go beyond basic financial management and include practical knowledge of how to identify market opportunities, create effective business plans, and manage risks, all of which are critical to building successful and sustainable enterprises. Another participant noted that the financial literacy training provided by VICOBA had significantly impacted her ability to manage her finances:

"Before joining VICOBA, I didn't understand how to budget or manage my small business, but the training helped me gain confidence and run my business better."
(KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th Sept, 2024).

This participant's experience highlights the critical role that financial education plays in equipping women with the tools they need to make informed financial decisions. By learning how to create budgets, set financial goals, and track their expenses, these women are better positioned to achieve long-term financial stability.

Beyond business skills, VICOBAs also contribute significantly to enhancing women's self-confidence and leadership abilities. Regular meetings, where members discuss their financial progress and make collective decisions, provide opportunities for women to engage in financial decision-making and practice leadership. These

meetings foster a supportive environment in which women can share their experiences and learn from one another, thus strengthening their ability to lead both within the group and in their wider communities. One participant remarked,

"Since joining VICOBA, I feel more confident about making decisions for my family and my business. I've even taken on leadership roles in my community, something I never thought I would do." (KII/member/woman/Ilala/20th Sept, 2024).

Another member added that the leadership skills she gained in VICOBA had extended beyond her financial decisions, influencing her role in family and community discussions:

"VICOBA has made me realize that I can take charge not just of my business but of decisions that affect my entire family. It has given me the strength to speak up and lead in ways I never imagined." (KII/member/woman/Buguruni/16th October, 2024).

VICOBAAs thus empower women not just by providing them with financial tools but by equipping them with the business acumen, confidence, and leadership skills needed to shape their economic futures. The knowledge and experience gained through VICOBA participation allow women to take control of their financial destinies, build sustainable livelihoods, and contribute meaningfully to their households and communities. Through this complex support system, VICOBAAs serve as vital instruments in fostering women's financial autonomy and social empowerment, creating ripple effects that extend well beyond individual success.

4.3 Strategies for Financial Autonomy

4.3.1 Economic Empowerment and Social Networks

Village Community Banks (VICOBA) employ a diverse range of strategies aimed at empowering women economically while simultaneously fostering robust social networks. These strategies are meticulously designed to offer women not only access to financial resources but also the essential social support they need to thrive in their personal and professional lives. One of the primary strategies involves providing favorable loans, which often come with lower interest rates and more flexible repayment terms compared to traditional financial institutions. These accessible loans enable women to start or expand their businesses, invest in income-generating activities, and improve their overall financial stability, thereby enhancing their quality of life. As one participant insightfully noted,

"VICOBA offers women the opportunity to obtain loans at favorable rates and save for themselves" (KII/member/woman/Machinga/18th Oct, 2024).

Beyond mere financial assistance, VICOBA play a critical role in building meaningful social networks among women. These networks cultivate a sense of solidarity and mutual support, where women can share resources, knowledge, and personal experiences. Through regular meetings and collaborative efforts, women not only discuss their financial progress but also brainstorm and collaborate on effective strategies to overcome common challenges they face in their businesses. One participant emphasized the importance of these networks by stating,

"The support I get from other women in VICOBA helps me feel less alone. We all share our experiences and help each other succeed"
(KII/member/woman/Buguruni/16th Sept, 2024).

The interconnectedness of economic empowerment and social support is profoundly clear. Women who participate in VICOBA not only gain financial independence but also build lasting relationships that significantly help them navigate the complexities of business ownership and financial management. Another member highlighted how these networks contribute to personal growth, stating,

"Through VICOBA, I have learned so much from other women. Their advice and encouragement have given me the confidence to take risks in my business that I wouldn't have taken on my own"
(KII/member/woman/Kisutu/19th October, 2024).

By effectively combining economic empowerment with robust social networks, Village Community Banks (VICOBA) create a comprehensive support system that significantly assists women in achieving long-term financial autonomy. This unique blend of financial resources and social capital is precisely what makes VICOBA particularly distinctive and exceptionally effective in transforming the lives of women. Through their participation in these community banks, women are not only able to access vital financial assistance but also engage with a network of supportive peers who share similar experiences and challenges. This dual approach enables them to realize their full potential and actively contribute to the well-being of their communities. Moreover, this method of merging financial support with social engagement not only fosters individual growth and self-sufficiency but also

encourages collective advancement among members. As women support one another, they build a foundation of shared knowledge and mutual empowerment that enhances their overall impact across various sectors. Consequently, the transformative power of VICOBAAs extends beyond personal gains, fostering a ripple effect that strengthens community ties and promotes broader societal change. Ultimately, this reinforces the overarching goal of empowering women and advancing gender equality, creating a more equitable future for all.

4.3.2 Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurial Training

Village Community Banks (VICOBAAs) provide a wide range of training programs focused on financial management, entrepreneurship, and effective communication skills. These programs are designed to empower women by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed financial decisions and effectively manage their businesses. The impact of this training is crucial in enabling women to navigate financial systems, enhancing their understanding of essential concepts like budgeting and savings. One participant emphasized the importance of this training, stating,

"VICOBA provides training in financial management, savings, and budgeting, which has helped me understand how to better manage my money"

(KII/member/woman/Machinga/18th October, 2024).

These training programs not only build technical skills but also foster confidence among women, encouraging them to take leadership roles in their enterprises. Another member shared,

"Before joining VICOPA, I lacked the confidence to run my own business. The training I received made me believe I could succeed"
(KII/member/woman/Buguruni/22nd Sept, 2024).

This newfound confidence often leads to increased entrepreneurial activities, as women feel empowered to explore opportunities that may have previously seemed unattainable. As they gain skills and knowledge through training programs, they become more willing to take calculated risks and invest in their own business ideas. This shift not only enhances their personal economic situations but also positively impacts their communities by creating jobs and stimulating local economies. Additionally, as women succeed in their ventures, they serve as role models for others, inspiring a culture of entrepreneurship among their peers. Their success stories contribute to changing societal perceptions about women's capabilities in business, thereby fostering an environment where more women are encouraged to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations. This collective progress creates a ripple effect, motivating even more women to step into leadership roles and actively participate in the economic landscape, ultimately leading to greater financial independence and empowerment.

4.3.3 Gender Equality in Financial Access

Village Community Banks (VICOBAs) are steadfast in their commitment to ensuring that women have equal access to loans and savings through gender-inclusive policies, special loan offerings, and comprehensive financial literacy programs. These initiatives are designed to tackle significant financial barriers, such as the lack

of collateral and the pervasive gender biases that often characterize traditional financial systems. As one participant noted,

“Gender loans give women access to special loans with flexible conditions that we could never find in banks”

(KII/member/woman/Machinga/18th October, 2024).

This increased accessibility empowers women to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams and enhances their overall financial security. Furthermore, these gender-focused initiatives not only provide critical financial resources but also significantly enhance women's bargaining power within their households and communities. One woman shared,

“With the financial independence I've gained, my voice in the family has become stronger. I can contribute meaningfully to decisions that affect us”

(KII/member/woman/Kisutu/19th Oct, 2024).

This newfound agency allows women to engage more actively in discussions around family finances and investment decisions, fostering a sense of equality within their homes. The confidence gained through these financial opportunities often leads women to advocate for themselves and their families, further solidifying their roles as decision-makers.

The comprehensive approach adopted by VICOBAs ensures that women are not just recipients of financial aid but also active participants in shaping their financial futures. The training they receive, in tandem with improved access to financial

resources, creates a holistic framework that underpins women's economic empowerment. Another member emphasized this point, stating,

“It's not just about getting a loan; it's about knowing how to use it wisely and ensuring it benefits my family”

(KII/member/woman/Buguruni/16th Oct, 2024).

This perspective underscores the importance of financial literacy in making the most of available resources, which is essential for ensuring long-term success.

Moreover, the positive ripple effects of this empowerment are felt throughout the community. A participant noted,

“When women succeed in their businesses, they uplift others too. We share our knowledge and resources, creating a supportive environment”

(KII/member/woman/Machinga/18th October, 2024).

This collective progress not only fosters a culture of entrepreneurship but also strengthens community ties, creating a supportive network that benefits everyone. The collaborative spirit encourages women to form partnerships and alliances, enhancing their collective economic power and resilience against challenges.

Ultimately, the combination of training and enhanced access to financial resources provided by VICOBAAs enables women to break the cycle of dependency and poverty. This complex approach to capacity building is pivotal in advancing gender equality in financial access and empowering women to achieve their economic goals. As another member aptly stated,

“Financial empowerment is the first step to changing lives, and VICOBA are making that possible for us”
(KII/member/woman/Buguruni/16th Oct, 2024).

By fostering an environment where women can thrive, Village Community Banks (VICOBA) play a crucial role in advancing a broader movement toward gender equity in economic participation. These organizations are not only focused on providing financial resources but also on creating supportive networks that empower women to achieve their full potential. Through tailored training programs in financial literacy and entrepreneurship, VICOBA equip women with the necessary skills to make informed decisions regarding their finances and businesses. This empowerment allows women to take ownership of their economic futures and actively participate in local economies.

Furthermore, VICOBA promote collaboration among women, fostering a sense of community and solidarity that enhances collective resilience. By ensuring access to affordable loans and savings options, these organizations help eliminate barriers that have historically hindered women's economic advancement. Ultimately, by providing women with the essential tools and resources, VICOBA are not just transforming individual lives; they are also contributing to lasting change within communities and promoting a more equitable economic landscape for future generations.

4.4 Social-Cultural Impact of VICOBA on Women in Ilala Major Markets

The second objective of this study assesses the socio-cultural impact of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) on the lives of women in Ilala’s major markets. The findings reveal that VICOBA has triggered significant changes in both the economic

and social lives of women, fundamentally reshaping their roles within their families and the broader community.

Before joining VICOPA, many women were financially dependent on their male partners, which constrained their autonomy in decision-making processes. This dynamic left them in a position of financial and social vulnerability, limiting their influence in household matters. Traditionally, gender roles assigned men as the sole providers, with women confined to domestic responsibilities. As one participant shared,

“My financial responsibilities have significantly changed since I joined VICOPA, with the largest role being paying the children's tuition. We have now divided up the responsibilities of raising our family; I handle the school fees and my husband handles the food”
(KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th Sept, 2024).

This statement illustrates the transformation in household dynamics, where women's economic contributions, gained through participation in VICOPA, allow them to share financial responsibilities with their spouses. This redistribution of household duties marks a major shift from traditional gender roles in which men were the sole breadwinners. Women's financial participation has also contributed to more equitable relationships and enhanced decision-making power within the family. Unlike earlier studies, such as Nayabinda (2014) and Cheston and Kuhn (2002), which suggested that women's financial independence might cause family tension or instability, this study reveals a more positive outcome. The reconfiguration of family roles due to VICOPA participation has led to improved relationships rather than

creating friction, demonstrating that women's economic empowerment can reinforce family cohesion.

In addition to transforming household roles, VICOBA empowers women by providing opportunities for networking, skill development, and leadership. Prior to their involvement in VICOBA, many women lacked business connections or economic relationships beyond their immediate families. Through VICOBA, women have developed new business networks, promoted their ventures, and fostered stronger social ties with other women. One participant noted,

“I’ve changed even mentally since joining VICOBA because of the training we receive; I can now use the internet to promote my business, which I was not aware of at first, and I have a great ability to build relationships with other groups”

(KII/member/woman/Buguruni/16th October, 2024).

This highlights how VICOBA not only offers financial benefits but also cultivates personal growth and mental empowerment. The introduction of business training, digital literacy, and market strategies has expanded women's entrepreneurial capacities, enabling them to compete in broader economic spaces. Women's newfound confidence and knowledge empower them to engage in decisions at the family and community levels, advancing gender equality. As women gain more influence through VICOBA, their participation in community leadership becomes increasingly prominent. Another participant stated,

"I feel more empowered now to make important decisions for my family and my business. VICOBA has helped me learn to lead"
(KII/member/woman/Buguruni/16th October, 2024).

The leadership skills acquired within VICOBA groups often extend to broader community involvement. Women are not only managing their own businesses more effectively but are also contributing to community development projects. One participant shared,

"Joining VICOBA gave me the confidence to not only manage my business but also to participate in local community meetings and initiatives"
(KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th October, 2024).

This statement reflects how VICOBA participation instills a sense of solidarity and communal responsibility among women, enabling them to challenge socio-cultural norms that have historically marginalized them. The communal spirit fostered by VICOBA extends beyond mere financial transactions. It cultivates an environment where women can exchange ideas, share experiences, and offer mutual encouragement to break free from traditional gender constraints. This process not only empowers individual women but also creates ripple effects that challenge entrenched social norms in their communities. As women collaborate and support one another, they collectively push against the boundaries of their previously limited roles. This transformation is both economic and deeply social, as it promotes greater participation of women in community and economic development. The impact of VICOBA also aligns with broader frameworks advocating for gender equality, which

argue that economic empowerment is a critical catalyst for social change. As women gain financial independence through VICOBA, they also acquire the capacity to influence household decisions, contribute to community initiatives, and challenge societal perceptions of gender roles. This broader socio-cultural transformation supports the idea that financial autonomy plays a pivotal role in achieving gender equality. According to Smith and Jones (2020), “Economic empowerment fosters social agency, enabling women to renegotiate their roles within patriarchal structures.” This finding resonates with the experiences of VICOBA participants, who are actively reshaping their socio-cultural realities.

Furthermore, VICOBA has provided a platform for women to engage in advocacy and mobilization efforts aimed at promoting women’s rights and interests. As participants take on leadership roles within their communities, they become advocates for change, pushing for policies and practices that further support women’s empowerment. This advocacy is vital in challenging longstanding traditions that have often marginalized women and restricted their access to economic opportunities. For example, Mussa and Mashauri (2023) argue that “Grassroots economic movements, such as VICOBA, play a crucial role in driving policy reforms that reflect the needs of marginalized groups.”

By gaining financial and social autonomy, VICOBA members also experience personal transformations that extend to their self-perception and societal value. The sense of empowerment that comes from financial independence enables women to redefine their identities, moving from being passive dependents to active contributors in both the family and community spheres. As one participant expressed,

“I no longer feel like I’m just someone’s wife or mother; I am a business owner and leader in my community”

(KII/member/woman/Ilala/20th October, 2024).

This reflects the significant socio-cultural shift that VICOBA initiates, as it provides women with the tools to assert their autonomy and redefine their roles. In conclusion, the socio-cultural impact of VICOBA on women in Ilala’s major markets has been profound. VICOBA has reshaped traditional gender roles within households, fostered business networks, and empowered women with the skills and confidence necessary to challenge long-standing social norms. The study’s findings illustrate that VICOBA’s influence extends beyond financial independence; it also serves as a powerful catalyst for social change and gender equality. As women gain financial and social autonomy, they are not only improving their own lives but also driving broader transformations within their communities. The empowerment fostered by VICOBA highlights the importance of grassroots economic initiatives in promoting gender equality and social progress.

4.4.1 Challenges and Opportunities

4.4.2 Barriers to Financial Autonomy

While Village Community Banks (VICOBA) play a significant role in empowering women economically, several challenges persist that hinder the pursuit of financial autonomy. Among the most pressing barriers are limited financial education, entrenched societal gender norms, and inadequate access to financial resources. These obstacles create a complex environment that makes it difficult for women to

achieve their financial goals. One critical issue is the lack of financial education among women. As one participant pointed out,

“Many women still struggle to make the best decisions because they do not fully understand financial matters”

(KII/member/woman/Ilala/15th Oct, 2024).

This lack of understanding can lead to poor financial choices, ultimately affecting their ability to save, invest, or grow their businesses. The need for comprehensive financial literacy programs is essential to equip women with the knowledge required to navigate the complexities of financial systems effectively.

Additionally, societal gender norms continue to impose significant barriers to women’s financial independence. Many women face pressure to conform to traditional roles that prioritize domestic responsibilities over economic pursuits. A participant noted,

“In my community, women are often expected to take care of the home and family, which limits our ability to pursue business opportunities”

(KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th October, 2024).

These cultural expectations can discourage women from seeking loans or engaging in entrepreneurial activities, leading to a cycle of dependency and financial insecurity.

Moreover, inadequate access to financial resources presents another substantial hurdle. Women often encounter difficulties in obtaining loans due to a lack of collateral and the pervasive biases present in traditional banking systems. One member shared,

“I was turned down by banks multiple times just because they didn’t believe I could repay a loan”

(KII/member/woman/Kisutu/19th Oct, 2024).

Such experiences highlight the need for VICOBAAs to continue advocating for gender-sensitive financial policies that provide women with fair access to credit.

Despite these challenges, there are also significant opportunities for growth and empowerment. Increasing collaboration among women through VICOBAAs creates a supportive network that can help overcome societal barriers.

“In our meetings, we share not just our struggles but also solutions.

Together, we can break the chains of tradition,” explained another participant (KII/member/woman/Buguruni/22nd Sept, 2024).

Furthermore, expanding partnerships with local can bolster financial education initiatives. As one member emphasized,

“By partnering with NGOs that specialize in financial literacy, we can access more resources and expertise to empower ourselves”

(KII/member/woman/Kisutu/19th Oct, 2024).

This kind of collaboration can pave the way for workshops and training sessions that enhance women’s financial skills and confidence.

In conclusion, while significant barriers to financial autonomy remain for women, the combined efforts of VICOBAAs, community support, and enhanced financial literacy programs can create a more equitable environment. Addressing these

challenges not only improves individual financial outcomes but also contributes to the broader movement for gender equality in economic participation. As one participant aptly stated,

“When we overcome these obstacles, we pave the way for future generations of women to thrive” (KII/member/woman/Machinga/18th Sept, 2024).

This vision for the future underscores the importance of continued advocacy and action in addressing the challenges faced by women seeking financial autonomy. It is crucial that stakeholders, including community organizations, policymakers, and financial institutions, work together to create an environment that empowers women. By implementing targeted policies and programs, we can ensure that women receive the support and resources necessary to navigate financial systems effectively. This collaborative approach can help dismantle the barriers that limit women's economic participation and promote gender equity. Ultimately, fostering a culture of financial independence for women not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the overall economic growth and stability of communities. As more women achieve financial autonomy, they become catalysts for change, inspiring others and paving the way for future generations to thrive in an increasingly equitable society.

4.4.3 Suggestions for Improvement

Enhancing financial independence for women remains a critical focus area, as participants have highlighted several strategies aimed at achieving this goal. One key suggestion is the implementation of more comprehensive financial and entrepreneurship training programs tailored specifically for women. These programs

should encompass a wide range of topics, including financial management, investment strategies, and entrepreneurial skills. As one participant noted,

"Increasing the availability of in-depth training in financial management, investing, and entrepreneurship will empower women to make informed decisions that positively impact their financial futures"
(KII/Leader/woman/Kusutu/19th Oct, 2024).

Such training would not only enhance women's financial knowledge but also equip them with the confidence to take calculated risks in their business ventures.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of expanding gender-specific loan options to provide women with better access to capital. By offering loans with flexible terms and conditions, financial institutions can mitigate the barriers that often prevent women from accessing funds. As another participant pointed out,

"Access to gender loans is crucial for women to launch and grow their businesses, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities"

(KII/member/woman/Sambusa/17th, Sept, 2024).

Moreover, increasing awareness campaigns to promote financial literacy is essential. These campaigns can educate women about the importance of saving, budgeting, and investing, ultimately leading to improved financial decision-making.

Overall, VICOBA is viewed as a significant enabler of women's economic independence, improving their ability to contribute to household and community

decisions. Participants recognize its role in fostering both financial literacy and social cohesion among women. One participant remarked,

"By participating in VICOBA, women gain the confidence they need to be involved in financial decisions" (KII/member/woman/Machinga/18th Sept, 2024).

This holistic approach to capacity building not only enhances women's financial independence but also fosters a supportive community where women can thrive collectively. By encouraging collaboration and shared learning experiences, women can develop valuable networks that bolster their confidence and skills. As they engage in training programs and support one another, they build a sense of camaraderie that empowers them to face challenges together. Furthermore, as the initiatives to enhance financial independence continue, the overall socio-economic landscape for women will undoubtedly improve, leading to lasting positive change within communities. This transformation can inspire future generations of women to pursue their goals and aspirations, reinforcing the importance of collective empowerment and support in achieving long-term success.

The findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) reveal critical insights into the complex impact of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) on women's financial autonomy and empowerment. A prominent theme is the significance of peer support and community cohesion fostered within VICOBA. Participants articulated how the collaborative environment enhances their collective capacity to navigate financial challenges. This sense of belonging is essential for women who often face societal isolation in financial matters. The practice of lending among members not only

provides immediate financial assistance but also encourages shared learning and resilience, underscoring the value of community networks in fostering individual empowerment.

Another noteworthy finding is the enhancement of women's confidence and decision-making capabilities attributed to their involvement in VICOBA. Participants noted that access to financial resources and training has empowered them to take initiative in both household and community affairs. This newfound confidence extends beyond financial matters; women reported feeling more equipped to advocate for their rights and engage in leadership roles, indicating a significant shift in gender dynamics within their communities. The empowerment through VICOBA appears to be transformative, contributing to a broader cultural shift toward recognizing women's contributions to economic and social development.

However, the discussions also highlighted the persistent challenges posed by societal norms and stereotypes. While VICOBA has made strides in improving access to financial services for women, participants pointed out that deeply entrenched gender biases still hinder full equity in opportunities. Some women expressed concerns about how these societal expectations can create barriers to their financial aspirations, suggesting that the organization must continue to advocate for gender-sensitive policies that address these underlying issues.

Furthermore, the role of training and workshops emerged as a crucial component in enhancing financial literacy among women. Participants emphasized that educational programs offered by VICOBA equip them with essential skills in financial management, entrepreneurship, and strategic decision-making. This training not only

improves individual financial competence but also fosters a culture of collective learning, where women can share insights and best practices.

The findings also underscore the systematic approaches VICOBA employs to enhance financial management among its members. Tools such as record-keeping and the establishment of management groups facilitate transparency and accountability, thereby reinforcing members' financial competencies. Additionally, the incorporation of technology for financial transactions reflects an adaptive approach that modernizes the financial landscape for women, making financial management more accessible and efficient. In summary, the FGDs provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformative role VICOBA plays in women's financial empowerment. While challenges remain, particularly concerning societal norms, the sense of community, enhanced confidence, and structured support systems highlight VICOBA's potential to effect lasting change in women's socio-economic status. As such, ongoing advocacy for gender-sensitive policies and continued capacity building are vital for sustaining these gains.

4.5 Discussion

The findings from the study on the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women in the major markets of Ilala Municipality reveal a complex impact on financial autonomy, social transformation, and gender equality. The discussion section should align these findings with the study's objectives and the guiding theory, providing a comprehensive understanding of VICOBA's significance. The first objective of this study is to examine how VICOBA contributes to women's financial autonomy. The findings demonstrate that VICOBA offers

accessible financial resources through low-interest loans, allowing women to overcome traditional barriers posed by formal banking systems. Many women, particularly those without collateral or credit history, have gained access to loans, enabling them to start or expand businesses. This empowerment is evident in the testimonies of participants who highlighted how financial inclusion through VICOBA has enhanced their ability to manage family expenses and improve household welfare. This aligns with the objective by showing that VICOBA act as vital instruments for women's financial independence, enabling them to break free from dependence on male financial support, as seen in several cases where women now share household responsibilities with their partners.

The second objective of the study is to assess the socio-cultural impact of VICOBA on women's empowerment. The findings reveal that participation in VICOBA reshapes traditional gender roles within households and communities. Women are no longer confined to domestic roles but have gained confidence to engage in business and community leadership. This change is underscored by participants who reported feeling empowered to make financial decisions and take on leadership roles, both within their families and in the broader community. The communal spirit fostered by VICOBA has helped participants challenge entrenched social norms that previously limited their roles. This aligns with the objective by illustrating that VICOBA not only facilitate financial empowerment but also foster significant socio-cultural shifts, enhancing women's participation in economic and social decision-making.

The findings align with the guiding theory of women's empowerment, particularly the social capital and empowerment theory, which suggests that financial resources

and social networks contribute to individual empowerment. VICOBA not only provides financial capital but also builds strong social networks that foster mutual support and learning. This dynamic was evident in the formation of business partnerships and the collective problem-solving approach observed among VICOBA members. These networks enable women to share knowledge and resources, which contributes to the sustainability of their businesses and reinforces their financial autonomy. Moreover, the empowerment theory posits that gaining financial control leads to greater influence over household and community decisions. As observed in the findings, women reported increased confidence in managing household finances and contributing to broader community initiatives, thus confirming the role of financial autonomy in driving social change

The business skills and financial literacy training provided by VICOBA also reflect empowerment through education, a key tenet of the theory. These programs equip women with essential skills, such as budgeting, marketing, and entrepreneurship, allowing them to make informed financial decisions. This educational component not only enhances their businesses but also fosters long-term financial independence. Through this lens, the theory of empowerment through social capital and financial autonomy is fully supported by the evidence gathered from participants' experiences in VICOBA.

4.6 Conclusion

This study has examined the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women within the context of Ilala Municipality's major markets. The findings reveal that VICOBA has had a significant positive impact on the economic,

social, and psychological empowerment of women in the selected markets. Through access to credit, financial management training, and collective support systems, VICOBA members have experienced improvements in their entrepreneurial ventures, increased household income, and enhanced decision-making power within their families and communities. Furthermore, participation in VICOBA has fostered a sense of solidarity and social cohesion among women, contributing to the strengthening of their social networks and personal agency.

While VICOBA's contributions to women's empowerment are evident, the study also highlights challenges such as limited access to larger loans, the need for more financial literacy programs, and the influence of societal and cultural norms that may still constrain women's full participation in economic activities. Therefore, it is recommended that VICOBA groups be strengthened through enhanced training, better access to financial resources, and advocacy for gender-sensitive policies that support women's economic autonomy. Additionally, the government and other stakeholders should consider expanding and formalizing these initiatives to ensure sustainability and inclusivity, enabling more women to benefit from these empowering opportunities. In conclusion, VICOBA presents a viable avenue for advancing women's empowerment, but sustained efforts and comprehensive support are essential for maximizing its potential.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary of the findings

The study focused on understanding the role that Village Community Banks (VICOBA) play in empowering women within the major markets of Ilala Municipality. Through a detailed examination of participants' experiences, the findings reveal that VICOBAAs have significantly contributed to improving women's financial autonomy. Traditionally, many women have faced barriers when accessing financial services, especially from formal banking institutions, due to requirements such as collateral, credit history, or employment records. VICOBAAs provide a solution to these challenges by offering low-interest loans that are more accessible to women, particularly those in informal sectors or small-scale businesses. By gaining access to these loans, women have been able to start new businesses, expand existing ones, and better manage household expenses. This financial access is particularly critical for women who are responsible for supporting their families, allowing them to improve their living standards by investing in areas such as education, health care, and family welfare.

Additionally, the findings indicate that VICOBAAs play a crucial role in enhancing women's financial literacy and business skills. The training provided through VICOBAAs equips women with practical knowledge in areas such as budgeting, business planning, and financial management. Many participants reported that, before joining VICOBAAs, they lacked formal education or training in these areas,

which hindered their ability to manage finances effectively. Through VICOBA training, women not only learned how to manage their money more efficiently but also developed the entrepreneurial skills necessary to grow and sustain their businesses. This financial literacy has had a transformative effect, fostering long-term financial independence and empowering women to make informed economic decisions, both within their businesses and in their households. The increased confidence gained from these skills has allowed women to take on leadership roles within the VICOBA groups and their broader communities, contributing to their social and economic empowerment.

The findings also highlight the significant socio-cultural impact of VICOBA on women's lives. Prior to joining VICOBA, many women were financially dependent on their male partners, which limited their decision-making power and autonomy within the household. VICOBA membership has changed this dynamic by enabling women to contribute financially to their households, which has led to more equitable family relationships and shared financial responsibilities. Women are now playing a greater role in family decision-making, particularly regarding financial matters such as children's education, household investments, and business management. This shift in household roles challenges traditional gender norms, which have historically limited women's participation in economic activities. Furthermore, VICOBA has fostered the development of strong social networks among women. These networks provide a platform for women to share knowledge, resources, and experiences, creating a supportive environment where they can learn from each other and work collectively towards common financial goals. The social cohesion developed within

these groups has empowered women not only financially but also socially, as they have become more active in community leadership and development initiatives.

In addition to individual financial and social empowerment, the study's findings show that VICOBAAs have broader implications for community development and gender equality. By empowering women economically, VICOBAAs are contributing to the overall economic stability of families and communities. Women who are financially empowered are better able to support their families, invest in local businesses, and contribute to community development projects. This creates a positive ripple effect, as women's economic contributions strengthen local economies and promote broader social change. Moreover, the study found that the increased confidence and leadership skills developed through VICOBA participation have enabled women to challenge societal norms that have traditionally marginalized them. As women take on more active roles in economic and social decision-making, they are helping to break down the barriers of gender inequality and promote a more inclusive and equitable society. The findings, therefore, underscore the transformative power of VICOBAAs in promoting women's empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable community development.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that Village Community Banks (VICOBA) have proven to be highly effective in promoting the economic and social empowerment of women within Ilala Municipality's major markets. VICOBAAs serve as vital tools for enhancing women's financial autonomy by providing them with access to affordable and accessible financial services. In an environment where women have traditionally

faced numerous barriers to obtaining loans and financial support, VICOBA's fill a crucial gap. By offering low-interest loans and fostering financial literacy, these community-driven financial systems enable women to gain control over their economic lives. Women are able to start businesses, improve household living conditions, and invest in long-term goals such as education and health. As a result, VICOBA participation allows women to achieve greater financial independence and stability, which in turn strengthens their roles both within their households and in the broader community. This empowerment transcends mere financial gains, fostering deeper social and cultural shifts in the way women are perceived and involved in economic and social activities.

Moreover, the study highlights that the impact of VICOBA's extends beyond financial autonomy to include profound socio-cultural changes. Traditionally, women in Ilala Municipality, like in many other parts of the world, have been limited in their social roles due to financial dependence on their male counterparts. The findings reveal that by joining VICOBA's, women are now able to contribute meaningfully to household finances, leading to more balanced and equitable relationships within families. The redistribution of financial responsibilities has not only improved women's decision-making power but has also challenged the traditional gender norms that have historically relegated them to the domestic sphere. This shift towards shared financial responsibility demonstrates how economic empowerment can drive broader social change, leading to improved family cohesion and more inclusive social dynamics. Women are no longer seen solely as caretakers

but as active contributors to the economic wellbeing of their families and communities.

Additionally, the study concludes that VICOBAAs foster leadership and community engagement among women, thereby promoting gender equality. The collaborative nature of VICOBAAs, where members meet regularly to discuss financial progress and share experiences, encourages women to take on leadership roles within the group and, eventually, in their communities. This leadership development, coupled with increased financial autonomy, empowers women to participate actively in community development projects and local decision-making processes. The study found that many women who participated in VICOBAAs gained confidence to lead not only in business but also in community affairs. These opportunities for leadership help break down the barriers of gender inequality by allowing women to assert their influence in traditionally male-dominated spheres. Thus, the role of VICOBAAs goes beyond economic empowerment; they serve as platforms for cultivating women's leadership potential and enhancing their social agency.

The study underscores the vital role that VICOBAAs play in advancing both economic and social empowerment for women. By providing women with access to financial resources, fostering financial literacy, and developing strong social networks, VICOBAAs enable women to take control of their economic futures while simultaneously transforming social structures. The empowerment that women gain through their involvement in VICOBAAs not only benefits them individually but also contributes to the economic stability of their households and the broader community. Furthermore, VICOBAAs challenge and shift traditional gender norms, allowing

women to take on more significant roles in family and community decision-making. These outcomes demonstrate the potential of VICOBAAs to act as catalysts for broader societal change, promoting gender equality and fostering sustainable development. The study concludes that VICOBAAs are not just financial tools but essential instruments of social transformation, empowering women to achieve lasting financial independence and create positive ripple effects in their communities.

Finally, the study concludes that the empowerment of women through VICOBAAs is an essential step towards achieving gender equity in economic and social participation. By providing women with the financial tools, skills, and confidence necessary to take charge of their economic lives, VICOBAAs lay the foundation for broader societal change. Women's increased participation in economic activities, coupled with their growing leadership roles within both households and communities, demonstrates how economic empowerment can reshape traditional power dynamics. As VICOBAAs continue to expand and support more women, they have the potential to drive even more significant progress in promoting gender equality and sustainable community development. Through the empowerment of women, VICOBAAs are not only transforming individual lives but are also helping to build stronger, more inclusive communities that benefit from the active participation of all members, regardless of gender. Thus, VICOBAAs are shown to be critical instruments in the broader movement toward gender equality and social progress.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBAAs) in empowering women

and promoting sustainable economic development in Ilala Municipality. These recommendations are designed to build on the successes of VICOBAAs while addressing the challenges and barriers that remain, particularly in expanding financial access and strengthening support systems for women.

First, there is a need to expand the reach and accessibility of VICOBAAs, especially in more rural and underserved areas where women are often excluded from traditional financial systems. Many women in rural regions still face significant barriers to accessing financial resources due to geographical, educational, and infrastructural limitations. Therefore, outreach programs and awareness campaigns should be launched to encourage more women to form and join VICOBAAs. These programs should involve partnerships between VICOBAAs, local government authorities, and community-based organizations to ensure that women in remote areas are informed about the opportunities that VICOBAAs provide.

By expanding the geographic reach of VICOBAAs, more women will be able to benefit from the financial services and social support that these institutions offer, thus helping to reduce the financial exclusion that many rural women experiences.

Second, the study recommends that VICOBAAs continue to prioritize comprehensive training programs that focus on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills. While the financial services offered by VICOBAAs are crucial, the empowerment of women through education is equally important. The training programs should be expanded to cover a broader range of topics, including digital literacy, investment strategies, and business innovation, to equip women with the tools necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive economy.

Additionally, VICOBAAs should offer ongoing mentorship programs where successful women entrepreneurs can mentor newer members, providing guidance and sharing best practices. By continuously building on the financial and business education of its members, VICOBAAs can help ensure that women are well-prepared to make informed decisions, grow sustainable businesses, and contribute more effectively to their communities.

Third, policymakers and financial institutions should work towards developing more gender-sensitive financial policies that address the unique challenges women face in accessing credit. Traditional banking systems often require collateral and credit history, both of which are barriers for many women, particularly those in informal sectors. VICOBAAs offer an alternative, but there is a need for broader policy changes that support gender equality in financial access. The government should explore ways to provide incentives for banks and financial institutions to create more flexible loan options for women, such as microloans with reduced collateral requirements or interest rates. Additionally, there should be an effort to integrate gender-inclusive financial policies into national development plans, ensuring that women's financial empowerment is prioritized at the highest levels of decision-making. This would involve collaboration between government agencies, financial institutions, and women's advocacy groups to create a financial ecosystem that supports women's economic participation and growth.

Fourth, the study recommends fostering stronger partnerships between VICOBAAs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies to provide women with a more comprehensive support system. NGOs that specialize in

women's empowerment, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship could work alongside VICOBAs to enhance the range of services available to women. These partnerships could help provide additional resources, such as advanced business training, legal advice for women entrepreneurs, and access to markets beyond their local areas. Additionally, government support could come in the form of grants, subsidies, or technical assistance to VICOBAs, enabling them to scale their operations and reach more women. By fostering such collaborations, VICOBAs can provide a more holistic approach to women's empowerment, ensuring that their members not only gain financial independence but also access the necessary resources to thrive in business and leadership roles.

Fifth, there is a need to strengthen the regulatory framework around VICOBAs to ensure transparency, accountability, and sustainability. As VICOBAs grow in size and influence, it is important to establish mechanisms that ensure they operate efficiently and fairly. This could include creating standardized guidelines for the management of VICOBAs funds, implementing regular audits, and developing conflict resolution mechanisms to address issues that may arise within the groups. Additionally, providing training to VICOBAs leaders on governance and financial management can help ensure that these groups are run effectively and transparently, further enhancing their credibility and trust within the community. By improving the governance structures of VICOBAs, their long-term sustainability can be ensured, allowing them to continue playing a pivotal role in empowering women.

Lastly, it is recommended that VICOBAs increase efforts to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment within the broader

community. While VICOBAAs have been successful in empowering women economically, societal attitudes towards gender roles can still present barriers to women's full participation in economic and social life. VICOBAAs, in partnership with local authorities and advocacy groups, should conduct community-wide campaigns that address gender stereotypes and promote the benefits of women's economic empowerment for the entire community. These campaigns could include educational workshops, media outreach, and public discussions that highlight the positive impact of women's financial independence on family stability, community development, and national economic growth. By engaging the wider community in discussions about gender equality, VICOBAAs can help create a more supportive environment for women's empowerment and ensure that the progress made through their initiatives is sustained in the long term.

In conclusion, the recommendations outlined above are aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and impact of VICOBAAs in empowering women and promoting sustainable development. Expanding access to VICOBAAs, strengthening training programs, promoting gender-sensitive financial policies, fostering partnerships, improving governance, and raising community awareness are all critical steps towards ensuring that women can fully benefit from the opportunities that VICOBAAs provide. By implementing these recommendations, VICOBAAs can continue to play a transformative role in women's economic and social empowerment, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: English Version Tools.

Name: Age:

Occupation: Marital status.....

Data Collection Tool: Semi-Structured Interview (for VICOBA Members and Leaders)

General Understanding of VICOBA:

1. Can you briefly describe your experience with VICOBA in Ilala Municipality?
2. What role does VICOBA play in your community, particularly for women?

Strategies for Financial Autonomy:

1. What specific strategies do you think VICOBA employs to help women achieve financial independence?
2. Can you explain any programs or initiatives that have been implemented by VICOBA to encourage women's financial involvement?
3. How does VICOBA help women in managing their savings and loans? Are there any particular methods or practices that you believe empower women to control their financial resources?

Training and Capacity Building:

1. Does VICOBA provide any training or capacity-building programs? How do these programs help women enhance their financial decision-making skills?

2. What kind of support does VICOBA offer to ensure women are able to manage their businesses or savings successfully?

Access to Financial Resources:

1. How does VICOBA ensure that women have equal access to loans and savings programs?
2. Are there any specific measures in place to support women in accessing funds?

Challenges and Opportunities:

1. Have you faced any challenges in implementing strategies that advance women's financial autonomy? If yes, what are some of these challenges?
2. What strategies do you think could be improved or added to better support women's financial independence within VICOBA?

Conclusion:

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about the role of VICOBA in empowering women financially?

Thank you for your time and insights.

(a) Data Collection Tool: Focus Group Discussion (for VICOBA Members)

Introduction:

Introduce the purpose of the group discussion.

Emphasize that participation is voluntary and anonymous.

Obtain informed consent and remind participants of the group's confidentiality.

Focus Group Questions:**Understanding of VICOBA:**

1. What does VICOBA mean to you? How would you explain its purpose to someone unfamiliar with it?

Financial Autonomy:

1. How do you feel VICOBA has helped women in your community gain financial autonomy/ empowerment?
2. What are some of the strategies you think VICOBA uses to support women in becoming financially independent?

Loan Access and Savings Programs:

1. Can you share your experience with VICOBA's loan schemes? How do they affect women's ability to manage their finances?
2. Do you feel that women have the same opportunities as men to access loans and savings programs in VICOBA?

Training and Education:

1. Has VICOBA provided any training or workshops to help women improve their financial skills? How have these programs benefited you or others in the group?

Support Systems:

2. How do the women in VICOBA support one another in their financial endeavors? Are there any specific networks or systems within the group that help women manage their finances?

Impact on Daily Life:

1. Can you describe any changes in your daily life or household decision-making that you attribute to your involvement in VICOBA?

Suggestions for Improvement:

2. In your opinion, what more could VICOBA do to improve women's financial autonomy and support women's growth financially?

Conclusion:

Any final thoughts or suggestions on how VICOBA could better serve women in Ilala Municipality?

Thank participants for their contributions and assure them that their input is valuable to the study.

Data Collection Tool:

In addition to interviews and FGDs, observation is a valuable tool for collecting qualitative data on how VICOBA strategies are implemented in practice. The researcher will attend VICOBA meetings, observe interactions, and take note of:

1. The role of women during meetings.
2. How financial decisions are made.
3. The presence (or absence) of training materials or capacity-building activities.
4. Group dynamics, including how women engage with financial resources and each other.

Data Collection Tool: Semi-Structured Interview (for Community Development Officers)

Introduction:

Introduce yourself and the purpose of the study.

Explain the importance of their role in the research.

Emphasize confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Obtain informed consent.

Interview Questions:

Role of VICOBA in Women's Financial Empowerment:

1. In your opinion, how has VICOBA contributed to the financial autonomy of women in Ilala Municipality? Can you provide examples of specific strategies or activities that have been effective?

Support Provided by VICOBA:

2. What kinds of support or resources does VICOBA offer to ensure women's financial independence? For instance, are there particular loan or savings products targeted specifically at women?

Challenges in Advancing Financial Autonomy:

1. From your experience, what are the major challenges faced by women in VICOBA when it comes to achieving financial autonomy? How do you think these challenges can be addressed?

Training and Capacity Building:

1. Does VICOBA provide any form of training or education to women on financial management? How do you think such programs contribute to the financial empowerment of women in the community?

Impact of VICOBA on Women's Social Status:

1. Beyond financial benefits, how has participation in VICOBA affected women's social status or decision-making power within their households and communities?

Conclusion:

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the role of VICOBA in empowering women financially in Ilala Municipality?

Thank the participant for their time and valuable insights.

Justification for Collecting Demographic Information (Name, Age, Occupation, and Marital Status) (to be written in the report)

1. Age: Age is an important demographic factor because age-related differences can significantly influence women's financial autonomy and decision-making within VICOBA groups. For example, younger women might have different financial needs, access to resources, or family responsibilities compared to older women. By collecting age data, the research can assess whether VICOBA strategies are more or less effective for different age groups. Age can also help to identify any generational differences in the empowerment outcomes achieved through participation in VICOBA. During the analysis phase, age data can be used to

group participants and explore trends or patterns related to financial autonomy, access to loans, and social impacts.

2. **Occupation:** Knowing the occupation of participants provides insight into economic independence and how women engage with financial resources within VICOBA. Women in different occupations may have varying levels of financial literacy, income stability, and access to opportunities for utilizing VICOBA services. For example, women who are self-employed or involved in small businesses might have different needs and experiences compared to those employed in the formal sector or homemakers. This demographic information allows for a better understanding of how VICOBA supports women from various economic backgrounds and whether certain occupations correlate with higher success rates in achieving financial autonomy.
3. **Marital Status:** Marital status can play a crucial role in determining household decision-making dynamics and gendered financial power. For instance, married women might experience different levels of control over financial resources compared to unmarried women. In many cultures, marital status can affect a woman's economic autonomy and her ability to make independent financial decisions, including how she participates in financial institutions like VICOBA. By capturing this information, the study can analyze how marital status interacts with women's empowerment within VICOBA. It may also reveal differences in how VICOBA benefits women based on their relationship or household status.

Appendix II:

Kiswahili Version Tools.

Jina: Umri:

Kazi: : hali ya ndoa.....

Zana ya Kukusanya Data: Mahojiano ya nusu muundo (kwa Wanachama na Viongozi wa VICOB)

Uelewa wa Jumla wa VICOB:

1. Unaweza kuelezea kwa ufupi uzoefu wako wa kuwa kwenye VICOB katika Manispaa ya Ilala?
2. VICOB ina nafasi gani katika jamii yako, hasa kwa wanawake?

Mbinu za Kupata Uhuru wa Kifedha:

1. Je, unadhani VICOB inatumia mikakati gani mahususi kuwasaidia wanawake kupata uhuru wa kifedha?
2. Je, unaweza kueleza programu au mipango yoyote ambayo imetekelezwa na VICOB ili kuhamasisha ushiriki wa wanawake kifedha?
3. Je, VICOB inawasaidiaje wanawake katika kusimamia akiba na mikopo yao? Je, kuna mbinu au desturi zozote ambazo unaamini zinawawezesha wanawake kudhibiti rasilimali zao za kifedha?

Mafunzo na kujenga uwezo:

1. Je VICOBA inatoa mafunzo au programu za kujenga uwezo? Je, programu hizi huwasaidiaje wanawake kuboresha ujuzi wao wa kufanya maamuzi ya kifedha?
2. VICOBA inatoa msaada wa aina gani ili kuhakikisha wanawake wana uwezo wa kusimamia biashara zao au kuweka akiba kwa mafanikio?

Ufikiaji wa Rasilimali za Fedha

1. VICOBA inahakikishaje kuwa wanawake wanapata fursa sawa za mikopo na mipango ya kuweka akiba?
2. Je, kuna hatua zozote mahususi zinazotumika kusaidia wanawake katika kupata fedha?

Changamoto na Fursa:

1. Je, umekumbana na changamoto zozote katika kutekeleza mikakati inayoendeleza uhuru wa kifedha wa wanawake? Ikiwa ndio, ni nini baadhi ya changamoto hizi?
2. Je, ni mikakati gani unadhani inaweza kuboreshwa au kuongezwa ili kusaidia zaidi uhuru wa kifedha wa wanawake ndani ya VICOBA?

Hitimisho:

1. Je, kuna jambo lingine ungependa kushiriki kuhusu nafasi ya VICOBA katika kuwawezesha wanawake kiuchumi?

Asante kwa muda wako na maarifa.

(a) Zana ya Kukusanya Data: Majadiliano ya Kikundi Lengwa (kwa Wanachama wa VICOBA)

Utangulizi:

Tambulisha madhumuni ya majadiliano ya kikundi.

Sisitiza kwamba ushiriki ni wa hiari na usiojulikana.

Pata idhini iliyoarifiwa na uwakumbushe washiriki usiri wa kikundi.

Maswali ya Kundi Lengwa:

Uelewa wa VICOBA:

1. VICOBA ina maana gani kwako? Je, unawezaje kueleza kusudi lake kwa mtu ambaye hafahamu.

Uhuru wa kifedha:

1. Je, unahisi VICOBA imesaidia wanawake katika jamii yako kupata uhuru wa kifedha/ uwezesaji?

2. Je, ni baadhi ya mikakati gani unadhani VICOBA hutumia kusaidia wanawake katika kujitegemea kiuchumi?

Mipango ya Ufikiaji wa Mkopo na Akiba:

1. Je, unaweza kushiriki uzoefu wako na miradi ya mkopo ya VICOBA? Je, zinaathiri vipi uwezo wa wanawake wa kusimamia fedha zao?

2. Je, unahisi kuwa wanawake wana fursa sawa na wanaume kupata mikopo na programu za kuweka akiba katika VICOBA?

Mafunzo na Elimu:

1. Je, VICOBA imetoa mafunzo au warsha zozote ili kuwasaidia wanawake kuboresha ujuzi wao wa kifedha? Je, programu hizi zimekufaidije wewe au wengine katika kikundi?

Mifumo ya Usaidizi:

1. Je, wanawake wa VICOBA wanasaidiana vipi katika jitihada zao za kifedha? Je, kuna mitandao au mifumo maalum ndani ya kikundi inayowasaidia wanawake kusimamia fedha zao?

Athari kwa Maisha ya Kila Siku:

1. Je, unaweza kuelezea mabadiliko yoyote katika maisha yako ya kila siku au maamuzi ya kaya ambayo unayahusisha na ushiriki wako katika VICOBA?

Mapendekezo ya Kuboresha:

1. Kwa maoni yako, VICOBA inaweza kufanya nini zaidi ili kuboresha uhuru wa kifedha wa wanawake na kusaidia ukuaji wa wanawake kifedha?

Hitimisho:

Mawazo au mapendekezo ya mwisho kuhusu jinsi VICOBA inavyoweza kuwahudumia vyema wanawake wa Manispaa ya Ilala?

Washukuru washiriki kwa michango yao na wahakikishie kuwa mchango wao ni muhimu kwa utafiti.

Zana ya Kukusanya Data:

Mbali na mahojiano ya vikundi, uchunguzi ni nyenzo muhimu ya kukusanya takwimu za ubora kuhusu jinsi mikakati ya VICOBA inavyotekelezwa kwa vitendo.

Mtafiti atahudhuria mikutano ya VICOBA, kuangalia mwingiliano, na kuzingatia:

1. Wajibu wa wanawake wakati wa mikutano.
2. Jinsi maamuzi ya kifedha yanafanywa.
3. Kuwepo (au kutokuwepo) kwa vifaa vya mafunzo au shughuli za kujenga uwezo.
4. Mienendo ya vikundi, ikijumuisha jinsi wanawake wanavyojihusisha na rasilimali za kifedha na kila mmoja wao.

Zana ya Kukusanya Data: Mahojiano ya nusu muundo (kwa Maafisa Maendeleo ya Jamii)

Utangulizi:

Jitambulisha na madhumuni ya utafiti.

Eleza umuhimu wa jukumu lao katika utafiti.

Sisitiza usiri na ushiriki wa hiari.

Pata kibali cha habari.

Maswali ya Mahojiano:

1. Nafasi ya VICOBA katika Uwezeshaji wa Kifedha kwa Wanawake:
2. Kwa maoni yako, VICOBA imechangia vipi katika uhuru wa kifedha wa wanawake wa Manispaa ya Ilala?
3. Je, unaweza kutoa mifano ya mikakati au shughuli maalum ambazo zimekuwa na ufanisi?

Msaada Unaotolewa na VICOBA:

1. VICOBA inatoa aina gani ya msaada au rasilimali ili kuhakikisha uhuru wa kifedha wa wanawake? Kwa mfano, je, kuna mkopo au bidhaa za akiba zinazolenga hasa wanawake?

Changamoto katika Kuendeleza Uhuru wa Kifedha:

1. Kwa uzoefu wako, ni changamoto zipi kubwa wanazokumbana nazo wanawake katika VICOBA linapokuja suala la kufikia uhuru wa kifedha?
2. Je, unadhani changamoto hizi zinaweza kutatuliwa vipi?

Mafunzo na kujenga uwezo:

Je, VICOBA inatoa aina yoyote ya mafunzo au elimu kwa wanawake kuhusu usimamizi wa fedha?

Je, unafikiri programu kama hizi zinachangia vipi katika uwezesaji wa kifedha wa wanawake katika jamii?

Athari za VICOBA kwa Hali ya Kijamii ya Wanawake:

1. Zaidi ya faida za kifedha, ushiriki katika VICOBA umeathiri vipi hali ya kijamii ya wanawake au uwezo wa kufanya maamuzi ndani ya kaya na jamii zao?

Hitimisho:

Je, kuna jambo lingine ungependa kuongeza kuhusiana na nafasi ya VICOBA katika kuwawezesha wanawake kiuchumi katika Manispaa ya Ilala?

Asante mshiriki kwa muda wao na maarifa muhimu.

Appendix III: ***BUDGET - TENTATIVE***

**JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA
OFISI YA RAIS
TAWALA ZA MIKOA NA SERIKALI ZA MITAA**

MKOA WA DAR ES SALAAM
Anwani ya Simu:
Simu: 2203156/2203158/286371
Barua pepe ras@dsm.go.tz



OFISI YA MKUU WA MKOA,
3 Barabara ya Rashidi Kawawa
S.L.P 5429,
12880 DAR ES SALAAM.

Unapojibu Tafadhali taja:

Kumb. Na. EA.260/307/04F/372

15 Oktoba, 2024

Mkurugenzi wa Jiji,
Halmashauri ya Jiji la Dar es Salaam,
Dar es Salaam.

Yah: **KIBALI CHA KUFANYA UTAFITI**

Tafadhali husika na somo tajwa hapo juu.

2. Ofisi ya Mkuu wa Mkoa wa Dar es Salaam imepokea barua Kumb. Na. OUT/PG/2022000089 ya tarehe 11 Oktoba, 2024 kutoka Chuo Kikuu Huria ikimtambulisha na kumuomba kibali cha utafiti Ndg. Jesca Kamugisha katika Halmashauri yako.
3. Mtafiti huyu anafanya utafiti kuhusu *"Examining the Role of Village Community Banks (VIKOBAs) in Women Empowerment: A case of Ilala Municipality Major Markets."*
4. Kwa barua hii, kibali kimetolewa kuanzia 15 Oktoba, 2024 hadi 30 Novemba, 2024.
5. Asante kwa ushirikiano wako.


Samwel R. Magweiga

Kny: **KATIBU TAWALA MKOA
DAR ES SALAAM**

Nakala: Makamu Mkuu wa Chuo,
Chuo Kikuu Huria,
S.L.P 23409,
Dar es Salaam.

Ndg. Jesca Kamugisha



Serikali za Mikoa, Skuti ya Wazamanzai,
Jitokese Kushiriki Uchaguzi

RECEIVED

DATE: 15/10/2024



THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA



Ref. No OUT/PG2022000089

11th October, 2024

Municipal Director,
 Ilala Municipal Council,
 P.O.Box 59,
DAR ES SALAAM.

Dear Director

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MS. JESCA
KAMUGISHA, REG NO: PG2022000089

2 The Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992, which became operational on the 1st March 1993 by public notice No.55 in the official Gazette. The Act was however replaced by the Open University of Tanzania Charter of 2005, which became operational on 1st January 2007. In line with the Charter, the Open University of Tanzania mission is to generate and apply knowledge through research.

3. To facilitate and to simplify research process therefore, the act empowers the Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania to issue research clearance, on behalf of the Government of Tanzania and Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, to both its staff and students who are doing research in Tanzania. With this brief background, the purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Ms. Jesca Kamugisha, Reg.No:**

PG2022000089), pursuing **Master of Arts in Gender Studies (MAGS)**. We here by grant this clearance to conduct a research titled “**Examining the Role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in Women Empowerment: A case of Ilala Municipality Major Markets**”. She will collect her data at your area from 15th October to 30th November 2024.

4. In case you need any further information, kindly do not hesitate to contact the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) of the Open University of Tanzania, P.O.Box 23409, Dar es Salaam. Tel: 022-2-2668820. We lastly thank you in advance for your assumed cooperation and facilitation of this research academic activity.

Yours sincerely,

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA



Prof. Gwahula Raphael Kimamala

For: **VICE CHANCELLOR**

Empowering Women Through Village Community Banks: Analyzing the Social-Cultural Impact of VICOBA in Ilala's Major Markets

Jesca Kamugisha

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in empowering women within the socio-cultural context of Ilala's major markets in Tanzania. Through a qualitative approach, the research explores how VICOBA initiatives influence women's financial independence, decision-making power, and social status within their communities. Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with VICOBA members, market vendors, and community leaders, revealing that participation in VICOBA significantly enhances women's access to financial resources and opportunities for entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the study highlights the cultural barriers women face and how VICOBA serves as a platform for collective action and social change. The findings indicate that VICOBA not only facilitates economic empowerment but also fosters social networks and resilience among women, challenging traditional gender roles. This research contributes to understanding the complex interplay between microfinance initiatives and women's empowerment in developing economies.

Key Words: Village Community Banks (VICOBA), Women's Empowerment, Microfinance. Social-Cultural Impact, Gender Roles

Introduction

The empowerment of women remains a crucial pillar in advancing gender equality and fostering inclusive socioeconomic development. In Tanzania, where women face systemic challenges in accessing formal financial services, community-based initiatives like Village Community Banks (VICOBA) have emerged as transformative mechanisms to bridge these gaps, especially within marginalized urban and rural areas (Nyamhanga & Nyoni, 2022). VICOBA, a grassroots microfinance initiative, enables groups of women to form savings and loan associations, providing vital access to financial resources that are otherwise out of reach due to strict collateral requirements and gender biases present in conventional banking institutions (Mwita, 2023). This financial access is not merely transactional; it represents a shift in the socio-cultural dynamics of economic agency, enabling women to transcend traditional household roles and contribute to broader community development (Ngowi & Kessy, 2022).

The socio-cultural impact of VICOBA is multifaceted, shaping women's roles within their households, communities, and even altering prevailing social norms. By promoting financial literacy, business management skills, and networking, VICOBA empowers women to achieve economic autonomy, which, in turn, strengthens their decision-making power within both domestic and public spheres (Ndimbo & Kihondo, 2023). The ability to earn an income, contribute to family needs, and make informed financial decisions fosters not only individual empowerment but also encourages collective action among women in community development projects (Kamugisha, 2023). This shift in roles often translates to increased visibility and

respect for women within their communities, challenging long-held gender norms that have historically constrained their economic and social participation (Mchenga, 2022).

In Ilala's major markets, where women play significant roles in informal economic activities, VICOBA's impact is particularly pronounced. Women participating in VICOBA have been observed to take on leadership roles, support each other's businesses, and advocate for gender-sensitive policies in local governance (Mkenda & Ndunguru, 2023). These transformations highlight VICOBA's potential to act as a catalyst for wider societal change by promoting gender equity through economic empowerment. However, the influence of VICOBA extends beyond financial inclusion to encompass broader social implications, such as fostering solidarity among women, providing platforms for advocacy, and promoting shifts in cultural perceptions of women's capabilities and roles (Chuma & Massawe, 2023).

This paper seeks to analyze the socio-cultural impact of VICOBA on women's lives in Ilala's major markets, focusing on how these community banks enhance women's financial autonomy and transform their socio-economic roles. Through a detailed exploration of VICOBA's contributions, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of community-driven financial initiatives as vital components in the pursuit of gender equality and sustainable development.

VICOBA as a Tool for Financial Inclusion and Economic Autonomy

Village Community Banks (VICOBA) have been instrumental in promoting financial inclusion among marginalized women in Tanzania and other parts of Africa.

Traditional financial institutions often exclude women from low-income communities due to stringent collateral requirements and complex application processes (Mwampamba & Mkandawire, 2023). In contrast, VICOBA offers a community-driven model that empowers women to save, borrow, and manage funds within a supportive framework (Kihongo, 2022). By pooling resources, women can access loans at minimal interest rates, allowing them to engage in income-generating activities such as small-scale trading and agriculture, thereby achieving economic independence (Mwita, 2023). Furthermore, VICOBA fosters a sense of ownership, as members collectively govern and oversee funds, enabling them to make strategic financial decisions (Ngowi & Nyoni, 2022).

Empirical evidence suggests that VICOBA participation not only improves women's household income but also increases their ability to contribute financially to family expenses and investments in children's education (Kamugisha, 2023). These financial contributions often strengthen women's decision-making power in family matters, allowing them to negotiate responsibilities more equitably with their spouses (Nyamhanga, 2022). Through financial empowerment, VICOBA plays a critical role in reducing women's dependency and enabling them to participate more actively in their communities. Consequently, VICOBA's impact on economic autonomy extends beyond individual benefits, promoting broader social and economic transformation in underserved areas (Ndimbo, 2023).

Socio-Cultural Impact of VICOBA on Women's Roles and Community Engagement

The socio-cultural impact of VICOBA transcends economic factors, influencing traditional gender roles and expanding women's engagement in community

development. Historically, women in Tanzania have faced restrictive gender norms that confine their roles to the domestic sphere (Kessy & Chuma, 2023). VICOBA initiatives disrupt these conventions by fostering financial independence, which, in turn, encourages women to participate in public life, assume leadership roles, and advocate for their rights within the community (Mchenga & Mkenda, 2023). For many women, joining VICOBA represents a first step toward economic and social agency, as they acquire skills in financial management, networking, and leadership (Mwita, 2023).

Studies by Kamugisha (2023) indicate that through VICOBA, women gain the confidence to challenge long-standing patriarchal norms, creating avenues for greater representation in local governance and decision-making bodies. Participation in VICOBA also strengthens social capital by fostering networks of solidarity and support, which women use to address common challenges, advocate for collective rights, and mobilize resources for community projects (Chuma & Massawe, 2023). This collaborative environment enhances women's agency and challenges societal stereotypes, which often limit their roles to caregiving and household responsibilities. In this way, VICOBA not only promotes individual empowerment but also cultivates a cultural shift that embraces gender equality and recognizes women as integral contributors to community well-being (Mkenda & Ndunguru, 2023).

Challenges and Barriers in Achieving Full Empowerment Through VICOBA

Despite the many benefits associated with VICOBA, women continue to face barriers that can limit their empowerment. A key challenge is the persistence of deeply rooted

cultural norms that restrict women's economic activities and limit their authority in decision-making processes, particularly in rural areas (Ndimbo, 2023). While VICOBA has provided women with access to financial resources, social resistance to female entrepreneurship and leadership remains significant in some communities, often resulting in a backlash or increased domestic tension (Nyamhanga & Nyoni, 2022). In such contexts, women may face resistance from spouses or family members, who may perceive their economic independence as a threat to traditional household structures (Ngowi & Kihongo, 2023).

Additionally, logistical and operational challenges within VICOBA can hinder effective participation and growth. Limited financial literacy among women, combined with inadequate training resources, can lead to difficulties in managing funds and making informed investment decisions (Kessy, 2022). Furthermore, while VICOBA initiatives are widespread, their sustainability can be uncertain, especially when external support from organizations or NGOs is withdrawn (Mwampamba, 2023). Thus, for VICOBA to fully empower women, it is critical to address these challenges by promoting supportive policies, expanding access to financial literacy training, and strengthening community awareness of the value of women's empowerment (Mchenga, 2022).

Methodology

Study Area

This study was conducted in the Ilala District of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, focusing specifically on its major markets: Kisutu, Sumbusa, Ilala, Machinga Complex, and

Buguruni. Ilala District, as one of the five districts of Dar es Salaam, represents a socioeconomically diverse area, acting as a hub for both formal and informal economic activities. Its urban setting, coupled with a high population density and vibrant commercial landscape, makes it an ideal area for studying the impact of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) on women's empowerment. The district's markets host a significant number of female entrepreneurs engaged in small-scale trading, food vending, and other informal business activities, many of whom are VICOBA members reliant on these savings and loan groups for economic support and growth.

The selection of Ilala District and its markets is justified due to several unique attributes that enhance the relevance and impact of this study. Firstly, the high concentration of VICOBA groups within these markets provides a valuable sample population of women who actively use community banking to enhance their economic standing. These markets not only serve as essential economic centers but also attract a wide variety of women from different socioeconomic backgrounds, offering a rich, diverse participant pool for the study. Secondly, as an urban area, Ilala embodies the challenges and opportunities faced by women in the informal sector, allowing the study to explore the socio-cultural dynamics of women's empowerment within an urban Tanzanian context. The administrative structure and accessibility of Ilala's markets further facilitate engagement with VICOBA groups and key informants, such as community development officers and market leaders, making it logistically feasible to conduct thorough interviews and focus group discussions.

Additionally, focusing on Ilala's markets allows for an exploration of the intersection between gender, urbanization, and informal economic activities, aligning with broader development goals in Tanzania aimed at empowering women in urban areas. The insights generated from Ilala District are likely to be applicable to other urban areas in Tanzania and potentially across East Africa, where similar socio-economic conditions exist, enhancing the study's relevance and potential impact on policies related to women's economic empowerment.

Study Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, suitable for exploring the complex socio-cultural dimensions of women's empowerment through Village Community Banks (VICOBA) in Ilala's major markets. A qualitative approach is particularly valuable in understanding subjective experiences, social dynamics, and community practices, as it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, motivations, and the cultural contexts influencing their lives (Creswell, 2014). Given that this study seeks to capture the nuanced impact of VICOBA on women's socio-economic roles and empowerment, a qualitative design provides the flexibility needed to uncover themes and patterns that might not emerge through quantitative methods.

A case study approach was selected within the qualitative design framework to focus deeply on the experiences of women in VICOBA groups in the selected Ilala markets. The case study approach is advantageous for examining a bounded system—in this case, VICOBA in Ilala District—allowing for an intensive analysis of the social and economic factors at play (Yin, 2018). By concentrating on a specific

location and group, the study gains insights into the localized impacts of VICOBA on women's empowerment and the socio-cultural dynamics within the markets, capturing the interactions, challenges, and success stories unique to this setting.

Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. These methods were chosen to provide a rich, layered understanding of VICOBA's influence on the lives of participating women, focusing on both their financial autonomy and social agency. In-depth interviews offered individual insights into each woman's experience, while focus group discussions enabled the capture of shared perspectives, collective concerns, and group dynamics among VICOBA members. Participant observation further enriched the study by allowing the researcher to observe the interactions, routines, and behaviors of women within the market settings, providing context to the narratives gathered during interviews.

By employing a qualitative case study design, this study aimed to construct a holistic understanding of how VICOBA operates as a tool for women's empowerment, revealing the depth and complexity of social change within Ilala's markets.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal a significant socio-cultural and economic impact of Village Community Banks (VICOBA) on women's empowerment in Ilala's major markets. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with VICOBA members, three primary themes emerged: enhanced financial autonomy, transformation in household dynamics, and increased community engagement.

Enhanced Financial Autonomy

Participation in VICOBA has provided women with essential financial access, fostering their ability to save, borrow, and invest in small businesses. Most respondents highlighted that VICOBA's low-interest loans and flexible repayment terms enable them to run small enterprises, secure their children's education, and improve household well-being. One respondent noted,

“Before joining VICOBA, I had no means of starting a business. Now, I can take a loan and run my own stall, which helps my family greatly.”

This financial autonomy has allowed these women to gain economic independence, reducing their reliance on spouses or male relatives. Respondents shared that their newfound ability to contribute to household expenses enhanced their influence within their families. As one woman put it, “With my income from VICOBA, I can now decide where the money goes and have a say in family matters.” This shift is particularly meaningful within a socio-cultural context that has traditionally limited women's financial agency.

Transformation in Household Dynamics

VICOBA participation has had a transformative effect on household gender roles and responsibilities. Several participants reported that as they began to contribute financially, their roles within the household expanded beyond traditional caregiving. This financial contribution has allowed for a redistribution of responsibilities, where many women now share decision-making roles with their spouses. One respondent shared,

“My husband used to handle all the finances, but now, with my earnings, we plan things together.”

Another participant emphasized the positive effect this shift has had on her self-esteem, saying,

“It feels good to know that I am respected for my contribution to our family.”

These shifts not only contribute to greater gender equality within the household but also strengthen women’s self-confidence and respect within their family structures.

Increased Community Engagement and Leadership

Another important finding was the effect of VICOBA on women’s roles within their communities. As women gained confidence through economic empowerment, many felt emboldened to participate in community meetings, take on leadership roles within VICOBA groups, and advocate for community improvements. In focus group discussions, one respondent shared,

“Before VICOBA, I would never think of speaking up in community meetings, but now I have the courage to voice my thoughts.”

Another member emphasized the support that VICOBA’s peer network provides, stating,

“We support each other not only in business but also when we face challenges in the community.”

This sense of solidarity has enabled VICOBA members to address issues collectively, such as advocating for better market spaces and fairer pricing for goods.

Moreover, VICOBA's structure, which encourages peer support, has enhanced women's social capital, creating networks that are instrumental in supporting one another's ventures.

In conclusion, these findings underscore VICOBA's role as a catalyst for socio-cultural transformation and economic empowerment. By fostering financial autonomy, reshaping household dynamics, and promoting community engagement, VICOBA has contributed to an environment where women can not only support themselves economically but also challenge and redefine their roles in family and society.

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the transformative role of VICOBA in promoting both economic empowerment and socio-cultural shifts among women in Ilala's major markets. These results align with existing literature that underscores the potential of community-based microfinance models to foster women's financial autonomy, promote gender equity, and facilitate social change (Mwita, 2023; Nyamhanga & Nyoni, 2022). By offering accessible loans and a supportive network, VICOBA provides a path for women to gain financial independence, a crucial factor in altering traditional gender roles. Women's increased ability to contribute financially has, as observed in the study, allowed them to take on decision-making roles within their families, contributing to a more equitable division of power and responsibilities within households. This shift is consistent with Kamugisha (2023), who finds that economic contributions empower women to engage actively in

household decisions, challenging the gendered economic dependency norms that often restrict women's agency.

Beyond individual households, the study reveals that VICOBA has empowered women to participate in community governance and advocate for communal issues. The support network fostered within VICOBA groups builds social capital and a sense of solidarity that encourages women to take on leadership roles and engage in collective actions to address market challenges. This finding supports research by Mkenda and Ndunguru (2023), who argue that community-based financial groups are essential for amplifying women's voices and helping them to overcome socio-cultural limitations that have traditionally kept them out of public roles. Through VICOBA, women in Ilala have gained a sense of community influence and legitimacy, allowing them to challenge restrictive social norms and establish a more visible presence in market governance.

However, the study also underscores persistent challenges, including deeply entrenched gender norms and limited access to resources, which can constrain VICOBA's impact. Some participants reported resistance from family members, particularly in rural areas, where women's financial independence may be perceived as a threat to traditional household structures (Ndimbo, 2023). These findings point to the need for policies that not only support VICOBA's financial resources but also address the socio-cultural barriers that women face in asserting their independence. Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of VICOBA initiatives and the role that targeted community education and awareness programs might play in normalizing women's financial autonomy and leadership roles.

In sum, this study highlights VICOBA's dual role as both an economic and social tool, advancing gender equality through economic empowerment and fostering collective resilience against traditional barriers. The insights gained from Ilala's VICOBA members suggest that community-driven financial models can be essential components of strategies for sustainable development and gender equity, particularly when supported by policies that address the broader social context.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several recommendations emerge to further enhance the impact of VICOBA on women's socio-economic empowerment in Ilala and similar urban settings. First, expanding access to financial literacy and business management training for VICOBA members is crucial. Many women expressed challenges in managing finances and making informed investment decisions, especially in the early stages of their entrepreneurial ventures. Partnering with local NGOs, financial institutions, and government bodies to offer structured training programs could address these knowledge gaps, equipping women with skills to maximize the benefits of VICOBA participation. Enhanced financial literacy would not only improve the effectiveness of these microfinance initiatives but also build women's confidence to manage independent businesses sustainably.

In addition to training, addressing socio-cultural resistance to women's empowerment remains essential. While VICOBA is positively shifting gender roles within households and communities, traditional norms still pose significant barriers. Implementing community awareness programs focused on the benefits of women's economic empowerment, such as increased family well-being and community

development, can help challenge entrenched gender stereotypes. Community dialogues, involving both men and women, could play a vital role in gaining broader support for VICOBA, encouraging an understanding that women's financial independence contributes positively to household and community resilience.

Furthermore, to ensure the sustainability and scalability of VICOBA, local governments and policymakers should consider supportive policies that make it easier for these groups to access formal financial services. Simplified procedures for group registration, access to low-interest loans, and partnership opportunities with microfinance institutions would strengthen the VICOBA model, providing a more stable framework for expansion.

Overall, by enhancing financial skills, promoting cultural change, and supporting policy improvements, VICOBA's impact on women's empowerment in Ilala and beyond could be more substantial and long-lasting. This integrated approach would further enable VICOBA to foster inclusive development and empower more women to assume active roles in economic and social spheres.

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