

# Success Stories of Tanzanian Women Entrepreneurship Programs in Alleviating Poverty: Insights from WORTH Program

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study attempts to provide evidence on the relevance and type of support given by women entrepreneurship support programs in alleviating poverty among Tanzanian women entrepreneurs. As such, it argues that WORTH is beneficial for women entrepreneurs.

**Research Design & Methods:** Data for this study was drawn from the reviewed literature including existing documents at PACT Tanzania, supplemented by field work and discussions with PACT Tanzania's WORTH specialists.

**Findings:** The study revealed that the WORTH program provides various support to women both in groups and at an individual level. In addition, the success stories highlight that in the face of daunting obstacles, women have shown their ability and commitment to change their lives and their communities.

**Implications & Recommendations:** Working with allies and partners, in both the public and private sectors, is essential in successfully addressing and scaling up women's entrepreneurial opportunities and support programs.

**Contribution & Value Added:** Women entrepreneurs have had limited opportunities to describe their own opinions, experience and their ways of establishing and conducting business. This study gives voice to the voiceless and contributes to the growing body of literature on women entrepreneurship support programs in alleviating poverty.

**Article type:** research paper

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, support programs for women entrepreneurs have gained traction and prominence as a means to expand employment and earning opportunities and to reduce poverty in both developed and developing countries (Vossenbergh, 2013). Allen, Elam, Langowitz & Dean (2007) further suggest that women entrepreneurship is among important sectors that contribute significantly in the world economic development and poverty alleviation, especially in the developing countries.

Feminist researchers such as Moghadam (2005) argue that women around the world are caught up in poverty because of many factors including increase in female headed households, inequalities and bias against women within households as well as unbalanced economic policies and markets. Other important factors discussed are women's limited access to property and employment. Pearson (1992) and Hallward-Driemejer (2013) explain that in third world regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, incidences of poverty among women are higher than men, and women in this same region have fewer alternatives for entrepreneurship than do women in other regions.

According to Jullu (1996) the history of poverty in Tanzania has contributed towards women participation in entrepreneurship. Before 1961 Tanzanian independence, women were not engaged fully in entrepreneurship. Gaidzanwa (1993) explains that most rural women were engaged in agriculture only, or in supporting family businesses. Few women who tried business in urban areas confined themselves into small business mainly selling food, beer and in some cases prostitution.

Another scholar, Cherryl (1990) reports that the Tanzanian economic changes of mid 1970s and early 1980s brought big changes on gender and entrepreneurship. This was a time where women seized opportunities to initiate income generating activities in many areas across the country. Examples of income generating activities include livestock production, dye and tie clothes, food production and processing and other buying and selling businesses.

Although women gradually joined the entrepreneurship sector, it has never been easy to scale. A combination of many factors such as social and cultural reasons have contributed to a tendency of discounting the economic potential role of women and therefore failure to mobilize and benefit from their contribution through entrepreneurship. They continue to face many business constraints to start and run the types of enterprises associated with higher productivity and profits notably lack of access to credit, markets, business skills development and business information (Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005).

A report released by Equality for Growth (2009) indicates that women constitute 43% of all entrepreneurs in Tanzania. This indicates that women entrepreneurship proved to be one of the key sources of women employment and income in Tanzania. Through various programs, development actors such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have come forward to support productive women entrepreneurship to improve their access to credit, markets, training and information.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite there being evidence that support the contention that the importance of women entrepreneurship in Tanzania has increased significantly since the early 1980s, as is stipulated by Equality for Growth (2009), Hanna-Andesson (1995) and Hallward-Driemejer (2013) poignantly remark that women entrepreneurship is an untapped resource especially in many developing countries. Women entrepreneurs face challenges associated with lack of strong management skills and access to credits, markets, information and networks.

*Tibandebage, Wangwe, Msuya & Mutalemwa (2001)* explain that NGOs and other stakeholders came in to support women entrepreneurship after recognizing their potential role in empowering women as a marginalized group, employment creation, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Furthermore, the growth in the number of NGOs since the 1980s has been enormous in terms of their outreach, services and funding. While there is a growing commitment among NGOs to integrate women into all aspects of the development process, there is limited evidence about the nature of successes and challenges. More evidence is needed to understand how successful these women entrepreneurship programs, particularly WORTH's PACT Tanzania, are in poverty alleviation.

To be specific, this paper argues that WORTH is beneficial for women entrepreneurs. As succinctly put by Petterson (2012, p. 19): "Are the programmes really beneficial for women, or do they portray them as helpless and needy? Is such a portrayal necessary for the organizations supporting women entrepreneurs and, therefore, unavoidable?" The study thus attempts to provide evidence on the relevance and type of support given by women entrepreneurship support programs in alleviating poverty among Tanzanian women entrepreneurs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Key Terms

Key terminologies used in this study include poverty and entrepreneurship. The two terminologies are defined based on ideas put forward by different scholars. As it is a herculean task to define these two concepts because of the elusiveness and the controversy surrounding them, there is essentially no single agreed definition of poverty or entrepreneurship. However, few definitions are reviewed below that will bring an understanding of the meaning of the two terms as they are used in this study.

Simon (1999) defines poverty as a vulnerability situation facing a person or a group of people. The author gives examples of vulnerable situations as lack of sustainable livelihood, social exclusion, lack of sound capability and functioning and inability to acquire basic needs. But the author clarifies that these characteristics may not matter much if they are not compared with those of another person or group. According to Chambers (2006), poverty means high level of deprivation of wellbeing. Again here the word wellbeing may carry various understanding and meaning depending on where the person is.

Other scholars such as Laderchi, Saith & Stewart (2003) define poverty through three approaches namely monetary, capacities and social exclusion. In their monetary approach, they argue that poverty is a decline in income. The capacities approach is explained as the level at which an individual is free to live the kind of life that can fulfil his capacities. In this case a poor person has no resources to engage in certain basic activities like interactions with others, seeking information and self-expression. Social exclusion engages studies on community characteristics that exclude people or some groups of people from participating in social activities, opportunities and resources. Groups that are socially excluded will likely become poor.

Eradicating poverty among women and other groups is among the United Nations' (UN) objectives under Millennium Development Goals. It targets to reduce poverty by 50 per cent by the year 2015. Specifically, the United Nations declared intention to empower women and promote gender equality. Empowering women and gender equality is among effective strategies to alleviate poverty and contribute towards sustainable development (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2003). The UN goals are supported by many countries across the world. This is seen through signed declarations and new economic and social policies put in place by various nations. For example by 2003, a total of 45 nations prepared poverty reduction strategy programs (PRSP) for their countries. The process of preparing the PRSP involved representation of the community through civil society organizations. These papers acknowledge that the poverty status of women is manifested at the household, sectoral, occupational, and locational levels and that it cannot be easily defined.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that despite authors' different opinions, they do agree on the fact that if we are to define poverty, we need to consider these questions: who is asking for this definition, who is the person answering the question and where is this individual defining poverty from.

The term entrepreneurship is also defined by many scholars. Kirzner & Sautet (2006) define entrepreneurship as the ability and creativity of an individual or organization to formulate ideas that are profitable and enter into market for training and make profit. Stevenson & Sahlman (1989) define entrepreneurship as deliberate efforts to pursue an opportunity that has been identified to generate new products or services and make an income and ultimately profit. To relate opportunity based theory anchored by Drucker (1985) to this study, Doyle (1991) explains that failure for women to engage fully in entrepreneurship is not because women do not see the opportunities. It is because they lack the key support needed, especially resources. It is therefore important for various programs to support women to successfully engage in entrepreneurship. These definitions are similar in the fact that they refer to human efforts towards changing ideas into reality to bring (positive) change.

### **Relevance and Support Given to Women Entrepreneurship**

Stevenson and St-Onge (2005) explain that different actors across nations are supporting women entrepreneurship. Such actors include governments through their agencies, donors, local and international NGOs and the private sector and they also depict microcredit as the silver bullet of development policy, which is able to single-handedly eradicate poverty. There is ample consensus in the literature that institutional theory offers a powerful approach in understanding how working with allies and partners in

both the public and private sectors is essential in successfully addressing and scaling up women's economic opportunities (Uphoff, 1986; Howes, 1997). Institutional theory also predicts that strong and effective relationships will contribute to successful sustainable programs.

Stakeholders have different motives for supporting women entrepreneurship. Governments are doing it as their responsibilities towards marginalized groups and justifying their tax base. If productive women entrepreneurship is to emerge, the role of government in enterprise creation and growth is particularly crucial in Africa. It can secure the proper foundations for the private sector to appropriately contribute to economic growth and for entrepreneurial initiative to thrive in developing countries and also many of the necessary changes in the business climate can only occur as a result of specific actions by the state, such as easing the lengthy and costly procedures to start a business or minimizing corrupt practices (Siram & Mersha, 2010).

In Tanzania, the government recognises the contribution of women in the national economy. After realizing that women are marginalized in terms of access to land, education and facing cultural barriers, the government opted to enhance gender mainstreaming in many sectors. The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Policy of Tanzania outlines measures to promote women entrepreneurship in the country. The policy considers special programs for women as one of the disadvantaged groups. It also identifies barriers for women to engage in business and provided guidance to design programs to address such barriers (United Republic of Tanzania, 2003). The Micro Finance Policy of Tanzania also focuses on the majority of Tanzanians, especially women, whose incomes are very low in which cases access to financial services, such as savings services, allows higher standards of living to be achieved and ultimately alleviate poverty (United Republic of Tanzania, 2000).

There is increasing recognition that the private sector including micro and small enterprises has an important role to play in creating and sustaining the jobs necessary for poor people to work and earn the income needed to purchase goods and services. In this regard, it is important that the government, and not for profit actors, initiate programs and policies to promote and develop women entrepreneurship in order to build entrepreneurial skills, strengthen women's networks, provide finance and trainings and ultimately enable more and stronger start-ups and business growth.

NGOs which form a sector of civil societies, are the result of market and government failures (Weisbrod, 1986; Weisbrod 1998) and have become increasingly important over the past few decades in terms of their participation in economic development such as poverty alleviation and policy processes. NGOs have also made significant contributions to public debate in such diverse areas as service delivery, public accountability and the rule of law. These actors which have recognised that women entrepreneurship are essential for growth and development (Vossenber, 2013), are supporting women entrepreneurship through different approaches.

The most common approaches include the establishment of microcredit schemes which are effective tools to fight poverty by providing financial services to those who do not have access to or are neglected by the commercial banks and financial institutions (Armediariz & Morduch, 2010; Banerjee, Duflo, Glennerster & Kinnan, 2010). They are often considered to be instruments that promote empowerment (Hunt & Kasynathan,

2002; Mayoux, 1998; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Swainson, 2000). This study advocates four dimensions of empowerment: (i) power within: confidence and self-respect, (ii) power to: building assets, incomes, and capacities, (iii) power over: increasing control and voice in decision making and (iv) power with: mutual support and collective action. Within microcredit schemes, women get access to loans, marketing skills, business management skills, legal services and relevant information that they need. For such support to reach women, women entrepreneurs are normally organized in groups for easy access and sharing of resources and more importantly joint liability lending, meaning that when one of the group members fails to repay their part of the group loan, credit is suspended for all other members of the group (Levitsky, 1993; Armediariz & Morduch, 2010).

There are five main categories of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Tanzania (MFTransparency, 2011) which support women entrepreneurship development: (i) International branches of NGOs and locally founded and based NGOs amongst which the most prominent include PRIDE TZ, FINCA. (ii) Banking institutions offering a range of microcredit products. The largest banks are the National Microfinance Bank (NMB), CRDB Bank and Akiba Commercial Bank. There are a few regional and community banks, namely Dar es Salaam Community Bank, Mwangi Community Bank, Mufindi Community bank, Kilimanjaro Cooperative Bank, Mbinga Community Bank and Kagera Cooperative Bank. (iii) Member based MFIs institutions (SACCOS, SACCAS, VICOBA), which are not regulated by the Bank of Tanzania, and that provide financial services that are predominately savings based. (iv) Government funded MFIs which comprise central and local government schemes for resources-disadvantaged groups like women, youth, and the disabled. They include Small Industries Development Organisation, Presidential Trust Fund, Small Enterprise Loan Facility, and Tanzania Social Action Fund. (v) Private/religious organisations such as SELFINA, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) CARITAS fall in the last category.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Data for this study was drawn from existing documents within Pact Tanzania where WORTH program is hosted. These include Worth program reports, Operations Manual, and Worth leaflets available at Pact Tanzania front office shelves.

Interestingly, Fallatah (2012) points out that most of the literature on women's entrepreneurship relies on quantitative data research. She further adds that women entrepreneurs have had limited opportunities to describe their own opinions, experience and their ways of conducting business. In this context, success stories which are included in the study, are quoted verbatim and were gathered and collected during an intensive two weeks fieldwork by one of the co-authors in 2011 who was working as an Assistant communication officer at PACT Tanzania. Consent has been given by PACT to use them in this study. All names have been changed to protect the identity of respondents.

The collection of success stories at PACT is guided by the group process methodology known as appreciative planning and action (APA) (Odell 2001a, 2011b), which encourages WORTH participants to focus on success and possibilities rather than obstacles. Sharing success stories is a driving force in the program and as such community members are made to see their strengths and opportunities. The sampled stories are collected on condition that there is achievement, aspiration and change

experienced as result of engaging in the program. Pact in Tanzania and other countries value each story as long as in it there is an empowerment message when shared. These stories serve as encouragement for others to see their potential and try new things to bring change in their lives and families and community at large. It is also worth noting that women who share their stories not only regarding where they have succeeded, but also regarding the challenges they go through in the process of realizing their dreams. By sharing challenges encountered, other individuals, who have not attained success, are motivated to continue working and perfecting their small achievements as they know that if they don't give up they will also realize their dreams of making a better future for their children.

The positive or appreciative lens of APA is one of the WORTH program's central tenets and as such was influential in our selection of it as a suitable methodology. However, it is naive to believe that APA does not have its limitations (Kevany & MacMichael, 2014). For example, some interviewees in deprived communities raise expectations. As there is a tendency of thinking that if they have tried to participate, they deserve an incentive in the form of cash or handouts. Language is another limitation; when interviewees do not speak Swahili while the outreach staff cannot understand their local language. Some interviewees are not comfortable with their pictures taken which are part of stories to be shared (these have not been included in this study).

To supplement the field data, discussions with Pact Tanzania's WORTH specialist Mary Mpangala were held in March 2014 and also in February 2015 with the same respondent and Victoria Munene who was initially in charge of the WORTH program to understand more about how the program works and most importantly to help in answering the most important issues and point of focus for this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **About WORTH**

Pact Tanzania being an international United States funded NGO with an aim of helping and enabling vulnerable Tanzanian children and their families, significantly take ownership and improve their own lives, centres its main activities on capacity building and management of grants. The NGO is currently under implementation of a five year grant program since 2010 known as "Pamoja Tuwalee" (which means together we shall raise our children) in partnership with other organizations and support from the United States President's Emergency Plan For Aids Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International (USAID).

One approach that the program adapts to support and help these vulnerable children and their families, is helping the mothers, guardians and care takers of these children earn a decent living income. As a result, an approach called WORTH was introduced in the program.

The WORTH program entails women forming small groups among their communities and save money together in order to give each other loans with low interest return rates to either start or expand their businesses. It develops women capacities through business skills training for successful micro-enterprise ventures. It is one among the

women entrepreneurship programs working with women entrepreneurs in various regions in Tanzania.

Pact Tanzania is reaching out to the communities it serves through local organizations, mainly NGOs and faith-based organisations in a partnership arrangement. The local organizations are given support by Pact Tanzania in terms of technical aspects and financial aid. Other stakeholders are involved through joint meetings, resource mobilization, information sharing, referral system and networking. Special collaboration is maintained with the government at various levels from the Department of Social Welfare down to the district councils.

Support given to women by the WORTH program is realized from the beginning when the program is introduced to the respective communities. During the initial phase and introduction of the program, Pact Tanzania reaches out and meets women who are the caregivers of most vulnerable children. In these meetings, women are given information related to economic and social opportunities available in their areas. This makes women realize their own capacity to change their lives through their own potentialities. It is usually an eye opener making women choose WORTH and welcome further processes of progress.

Women who choose to join WORTH are taken to the next stage where they participate in developing community profiles. It is a participatory process of identifying resources and potentials available in the community that can support business activities for women. They also participate in baseline surveys to assess family income status, literacy level, child protection issues and other needs. According to Gakure (2003) in any community, individual women have resources and potentials that can contribute towards business growth. The WORTH women become motivated when they go through the process of developing community profiles and baseline surveys.

The WORTH program implementation manual indicates that the program has to be introduced to the government at district, ward and village levels. This stage makes leaders at district, ward and village levels welcome WORTH and pledge their support through community mobilization and follow up. Women are then assured of sustainability and political will from their leaders.

For sustainability of the WORTH program, Pact is working with empowerment workers (EWs) who are from within wards and villages. In each village there are also committees responsible for most vulnerable children formed during children identification process. Committee members of these committees are under the government structure but are not paid. They are volunteers. Pact Tanzania came out with various ways to motivate the committee members. They have been allowed to form WORTH groups that are supported the way other women groups are supported.

EWs are not only responsible for the coordination of WORTH implementation at ward and village levels, but also for providing support to individual women and groups. EWs are trained to work with women groups in their communities. They provide reference information, uniting women and supporting them with individual help when needed in order to form solidarity within women groups. The groups are the potential for working together in a collective manner.

Daily EWs' role includes coaching and training women on business skills, savings, loan disbursement, loan repayment, literacy classes, parental skills and child protection.

The objective of mentoring women is to equip them with appropriate skills to run and manage their individual businesses and take active roles in a group. The ultimate result is to see that each member in a group will be capable to manage business and adhere to group norms and regulations, literacy level is improved and women participate in child protection at both family and community levels.

Women are also empowered to elect their own leaders and make their own by-laws. After being elected, the group leaders are trained for four days in training sessions followed by continued mentoring and coaching by EWs. The objective of training group leaders is to make them effective in managing group level activities and link groups with partner organizations and with community leaders. The training given to women is based on improving their leadership and financial skills.

Sustainability of poverty alleviation programs has been reported by many scholars to be an important issue. Morrow (2001) for example argues that most of poverty alleviation programs almost come to a total closure as soon as donor funding pulls out. But for the WORTH program, there is promising signs of successful sustainability. One good sign reported in one of Pact Tanzania leaflets shows that 25 per cent of WORTH groups had helped establish over 500 new women groups.

In the opinion of Brown, Denning, Groh & Prusak (2004), the good attributes of a story are salience, sense making and comfort. Readers and listeners should live the ideas and feel the ideas as much as if they were their own. The following three success stories are among many signature evidence of how WORTH is actually supporting women in Tanzania. They are from WORTH group members in Mara, Mbeya and Shinyanga regions.

### **“Wiping Out the Curse”**

Across the windy waves of Lake Victoria, in the Bukima village in Mara, a funeral is taking place. A woman is crying for her husband who has just died after being sick for some time. She is wondering how she is going to take care of their six children, how they are going to survive, and most of all, how she is going to wipe out the curse of losing a husband that has fallen upon her. Nyangeta Omari lost her husband in 2004. They loved each other and used to work together for a living, and life was not that difficult. When he passed away, she knew she would have to go through the traditional practice of the Wajita tribe for a widow to wipe out the curse of losing a husband by sleeping with another man with that specific intention. The belief is that the curse then melts away. According to Nyangeta, if a widow starts having relationships with other men without going through that practice she can fall sick and even have some problems in life. *„And that is how I got pregnant again. After six years of mourning I went to another village to visit a relative, but my real aim was to wipe out the curse. There I met a man who didn't know my real intentions, and I slept with him only once. Nine months later I gave birth to a baby girl,”* she says. *“I have never seen that man again, and he doesn't know that I have a child. In fact, this is my late husband's baby, and even his relatives have given the child their surname, because they know that I was going through a very important traditional practice,”* she explains. After her husband's death, Nyangeta's life started to become difficult. She started frying fish, but after some time she could not keep up that business because a lot of money was needed for the children's school fees. She started taking any job that crossed her path. She explains: *“I would carry buckets of water on my head and take them to other people's houses; I would wash other people's clothes and*

cook for them. In the end, all I got was little money for maize flour". When WORTH started in 2008, Nyangeta continued with casual labour, so that she could contribute her savings to the group. She also had a little vegetable garden that added to her income. With her first loan of 50 000 shillings she started selling soft drinks at the Mwigobero ferry, where a lot of passengers cross over to the islands of Irugwa, Ngera, Nabweko, Baruza, Liyegoba and Ukerewe. She took another loan of 100 000 shillings and added it to her soft drinks capital, and also started selling sugarcane. She has a lot of customers, her business is doing well, and most importantly, her children are now happy because she is able to provide for them comfortably. She proclaims: *"WORTH is really good. It has helped me a lot because, seriously, I don't know how my life would have been without it. Maybe my children would have already died of hunger."* Nyangeta is the Secretary of the Sautiya Wengi group and she acknowledges that WORTH has helped a lot of women survive through life's difficulties. Moreover she loves WORTH because it has enabled her to take good care of her children. She believes that her curse has been wiped out.

### **"HIV Positive and Happy"**

Rahel Joseph found out that she was HIV positive in 2007 when she was feeling ill and decided to take a test. The news of her positive status did not make her lose hope but instead she encouraged her husband to take the test too, and that was when it was confirmed that they both had the virus. Their last born child was also HIV positive. Rahel and her husband were married in 1998. Rahel was a housewife depending solely on her husband, who had to provide for her and their three children. She explains: *"I was born with asthma, so I had never gone out to work in my life. My husband was the one who went to the farm and had to provide for us, while I stayed at home and looked after the kids"*. In 2010, her husband died suddenly of a heart problem, and Rahel was left to provide for her children. She did not know what to do, and ended up working for other people for a small income that would enable her to feed her children for them not to die from starvation. Rahel recalls: *"First of all, my husband's relatives wanted to take away our coffee farm, but the village government intervened and I won. Later my brother-in-law wanted to inherit me. I told him that it was impossible, especially because I was HIV positive. He then decided to stop helping me and my children"*. That was when Rahel lost direction. When WORTH was introduced in Mbozi district, Rahel decided to join the Upendo group in her village. She worked hard to save her money and eventually was able to take a loan of 60 000 shillings which helped her set up a small café business where she prepares morning breakfast. The business has helped her also in taking care and providing for her family. Rahel acknowledges that WORTH has helped her pay for her child's school fees, and it has also helped her get a weekly audience to talk to about HIV. Her biggest desire is to see an HIV-free generation. She uses the weekly WORTH meetings to educate her children as well as fellow members on HIV prevention, and the importance of voluntary testing, so that if a person is HIV positive they can start using ARVs and should stop thinking about ending their lives. She remarks: *"Everybody knows me in this village. I have told everyone that I am HIV positive, and that has made me a voluntary counsellor in this area. If I hear that a person has fallen ill, I feel bad. I want them to go get a test and live a healthy life"*. Her children know about her status too. She says: *"I actually sat them down and explained everything to them. After that they all decided to get tested, and I thank God that they are safe, except for my last born"*. She is

also thankful that people neither stigmatize her, nor her children. They listen to her teaching, ask questions, nod their heads in approval, and chat with her as if everything was normal. Her last born also knows that he is positive, and his mother decided to buy him a watch so that he could set the alarm for the time when he is supposed to take the ARV pills. Rahel has even formed another group that operates like WORTH, but is specifically for caregivers living with HIV. She knows that this group will help them save enough money to be able to buy food, so that the medication they take works effectively. She says happily: *“WORTH has been our saviour. Just imagine; as well as being able to take loans and start our own businesses, it is also a place where I can easily speak with my fellow members and tell them all about HIV & AIDS. I don’t want anyone to die from this disease. If you are HIV positive, it doesn’t mean that the world has ended.”*

### **“The Maize Thieves”**

A gentle breeze blows through the night. The children are snoozing, the chickens are clucking, and the men are busy getting drunk. But in a dark corner of one room a shadow is moving towards a sack of maize. Some of the contents are poured into a bucket and then the shadow creeps to the door. Safely outside, the mission has been accomplished – the shadow, who is none other but the woman of the house, has stolen a bucket of maize! One interviewee states: *“I used to steal maize from my house because when I asked for money for my children’s needs or my own needs my husband refused. The only way that I could provide for my children was to steal maize from the house and go and sell it”*. This has been the life of many of the women in a village called Nanga, in Chinamil Ward, Bariadi District, in Shinyanga region. Despite the fact that these women work even harder than their husbands at farming, when the harvest season comes, their husbands take the maize harvest and sell it, keeping the proceeds to themselves. The place where the sacks are stored in the house is a “no-entry zone” for the woman, who has to ask her husband for expenses and hope that he will provide. Ng’wasi Mbilibili is a mother of seven who used to work in the fields with her husband. Whenever she asked for money for her children her husband used to say he didn’t have any, leaving her to wonder where all the harvest money went. She says: *“The duty of taking care of the children was mine alone. Whenever the children asked their father for money he would send them back to me and when I went to ask him for money he would say he didn’t have any. This left me with no choice but to steal maize from our house and go sell it to the neighbours, depending on how much my children needed at that time”*. However, after WORTH was introduced in her village she became a member of the Kujiendeleza group, where she is now the secretary, and started saving money in order to be able to take a loan later. She concludes: *“I no longer steal maize from home because I now have a business selling soap and cooking oil after I took a loan of 20 000 shillings. I am now able to take care of my children, myself, and even help my husband when he is in need of some money”*. Ng’wasi Maduhu is another beneficiary who also recalls her stealing days. She elaborates: *“During the harvest period it used to be nothing but arguments between me and my husband. We harvested cotton together but he sold it alone with his friends and never gave me a share of our profits. The only way forward for me was to steal maize and green beans that we had stored in the house, and sell them around the village to get some money for my children and I to at least survive.”* When WORTH was introduced in

her village, she became a founding member of the Ushirikiano group, and is now the secretary. She took a loan of 10 000 shillings, and then 20 000 shillings and 40 000 shillings and started a business selling crates of soda. She makes a profit of 3 800 shillings per crate. She concludes: *“My life is now very smooth as I have a business. I decided not to tell my husband anything about it at first because all we did was fight and argue. Then he kept wondering why I never asked him for money for our children anymore. Later he found out that I got the money from my WORTH group and is now proud of me. He calls me clever”*.

Esther Samson is no different from her fellow Nanga women. She is 39 years old and a member of a WORTH group called Ushirikiano. She explains: *“I lived by stealing maize from my own house in order to sell it. I was caught so many times by my husband and received severe beatings, but I had no choice as I had to take care of my children. However, ever since I started my business of selling vegetables after taking a loan of 10,000 shilling, I no longer need to steal my maize. In fact my husband has been setting many traps for me to see whether I continue to steal the maize, but he doesn’t realize that I don’t need to steal anymore. Life is no longer hard for me and my five children and I don’t need to ask for money from him at all, thanks to WORTH”*.

Mpingi Sai is another former maize stealer until she was told by her fellow women that WORTH was the only way out of the misery of being beaten up by her husband after getting caught for stealing maize from her house. She never believed it and laughed at her fellow women, telling them that the empowerment workers would steal their money from them. She says with laughter: *“I used to think that I was cleverer than all of them until they convinced me that WORTH was very beneficial and my life would become easier for me and my children. Along with 25 other women we formed a group called Muungano and I was chosen as the treasurer. My life is now much better because I take care of all my four children after receiving a loan of 15 000 shillings which I used to buy and sell rice plants”*.

Until WORTH gave them a better way out, their only means of survival was stealing from their own households. All these women are now happy and proud of themselves for being able to take care of their children with the savings they get from their various businesses.

### **Multiplier effects of WORTH**

Ahmed (2008, p.122) states *“the impact of masculinity on poverty alleviation is strikingly absent in the vast literature on microcredit, the cornerstone of gender empowerment programs worldwide”*. The WORTH Program has proved to be a catalyst for change in all communities where it works. One example of such evidence is the fact that it has a spill over effect that reaches many other groups other than women. Men who are not WORTH Program beneficiaries have also joined and formed groups. In most wards where WORTH is implemented, there are men groups and other groups mixing both men and women. A story of Martin, Jeremiah and Juma narrated below indicates the multiplier effect of the WORTH Program:

Martin Juma, Jeremiah Kasasa and Juma Willie are proud members of a WORTH men’s group called Mkombozi, in Mbewe village, Mlangali Ward in Mbozi.

Martin who is the Treasurer of his group narrates *“I actually wasn’t here when WORTH started. I had gone to Sumbawanga to take care of my wife who had been sick*

for nearly a year, and when I came back I found out that some women's groups had been formed. I then called upon my brethren and we asked the empowerment worker to allow us to form our own men's group. „Martin takes care of two orphans who are 13 and 15 years old, in addition to his own two children. The mother of the orphans was his sister who passed away in 2000, leaving him with the responsibility of taking care of them. Life had not been easy. After forming the Mkombozi WORTH group and making the weekly contributions, he was able to take a loan of 310 000 shillings and open a shop. He also bought eight goats that have now produced seven more, making them 15 altogether. He says “Life has become much easier now, especially with taking care of the children and paying for their school fees. The good thing about WORTH is that the interest rate is affordable, and it really has the intention of helping us improve our lives and those of our children.”

Juma Willie is the group's secretary and lives with his 11 year old sibling and his sister's two children, after she moved to another place and could not take them. The father of the children has already passed away. He states laughingly: “My wife had joined a WORTH group and she started making more money than me. Of course I became jealous and decided to team up with the guys so that we could also form our own group.” From his savings, he took a 100 000 shilling loan and bought potato seeds that he planted on his new farm. He also bought a weighing machine and sacks of fertilizer that he uses at his shop to sell to customers at a retail price. Juma proclaims: “I really love WORTH. Sometimes I wonder ‘where were you all these days?’ My family, especially my children would have been even more developed than we are right now.” He now earns 40 000 shillings per day at his shop, whereas in the past he used to earn not more than 10 000 shillings.

Jeremia Kasasa is the controller of the group. He only has one plea: “We need education. We need to be trained more and more so that we learn more about how to do business, learn more about how to look for a market, and most importantly, learn more how to continue saving money in order to continue providing for all the most vulnerable children that we take care of.”

### **Challenges Facing WORTH Program**

Despite the numerous benefits of the WORTH program, it is also fraught with challenges. This is not surprising as there is considerable theoretical and empirical support on the challenges facing NGOs who make it their goal to empower women and their communities (Carr, 2000; Malhotra & Mather, 1997; Mayoux, 2001; Mosedale, 2005; Narayan, 2002; Nussbaum, 2000).

According to discussions held with PACT staff, apart from economically empowering participants, the program has also empowered members in the following ways: (i) members are able to unify their voices against social evils in their societies such as female genital mutilation, gender based violence, child abuse, early marriages; (ii) the literacy component of the WORTH program has enabled members not only acquire and improve their reading, writing and simple arithmetic skills, but enable them to access information which they need in order to improve their businesses and lives of their children and (iii) an increase in income has reduced gender disparities especially in relation to ownership of properties and making decision on the household spending. Members of the groups through their businesses have acquired properties and assets,

invested in improvement of their houses, they have been able to send the girl child to school, and taking up the role of being bread winners, to name just some few examples. These achievements are based on a WORTH rapid assessment conducted in 2010-2011 and an evaluation conducted on WORTH Tanzania program.

The WORTH program is clear in its approach that it does not give start-up capital to either women groups or individual members. It only provides capacity building support such as training, human resource and working facilities, such as files and reference books. This means that the Program utilizes women's strengths and capabilities for their own development. Women are motivated to save from their own little earnings. They are empowered to access loans from their own savings and invest in small businesses to make profit.

Program operations have never been easy. Just like other donor funded programs where beneficiaries have expectations, WORTH program's members show high expectations, especially at the beginning when the program is being introduced. They expect big capital to be injected. It should be noted that the WORTH Program is supporting rural women from poor and vulnerable families. They expect to receive more support such as food and educational support for their children.

The WORTH program is challenged by existence of other microcredit models operating in the same communities. When the WORTH Program is introduced for the first time, women tend to be hesitant to join because they know other types of microcredit schemes that work with women. Mfaume & Leonard (2004) report that there are many different types of women microcredit models in Tanzania, examples of such models include the Village Community Banks abbreviated as VICOBA. But Pact Tanzania reports indicate that the WORTH Program is still favourable to rural poor women because the contribution amount is set very low hence it is affordable to most rural poor women.

It was learned from the WORTH program reports that women savings is slow and small. This is because women have much workload at family levels. Bearing children and being responsible for the whole family affairs makes women spend whatever they have and remain with little to save. Despite this challenge, women are still managing to give their required share of contribution towards the group. Encouragement from EWs has been instrumental in bringing women to where they want to be.

Consultations with PACT staff revealed that the major limitation of WORTH program being an economic strengthening model by design, requires individuals who are able to work and save and engage in income generating activities such as agricultural activities, animal keeping and other petty businesses. Saving without investing in business will not contribute to an increase in income that will meet the needs of her household. This is why each member is encouraged to take loans from the group and initiate or expand her business. PACT staff opined that the fact that one has to invest in business has excluded some of vulnerable groups such as child headed households, elderly caregivers, caregivers with disabilities and those with long illness who cannot directly participate in income generating activities. They recommended that in order to ensure that these special groups are not excluded, project/program design should include special intervention such as cash transfers to these groups on condition that they use some of the cash to save in the groups. Being part of WORTH groups, they will benefit from other

interventions such as good parenting skills lessons, child protection and early childhood development lessons which are intended to improve their parenting skills and relationships with the children who are under their care. Furthermore, being in the group will provide a social safety net for them, as they develop relationships with group members and reduce isolation.

Consulted Pact staff also provided specific examples on programmatic challenges encountered in the course of implementation and they also proposed recommendations. These include: (i) Community members coming from households with elderly caregivers, caregivers with disabilities, child headed households and critically ill caregivers who most of time are reluctant to join due to lack of money for contribution and limited ability to engage in income generating activities. To support these special groups, the intervention should include provision while mobilizing resources for long term support; (ii) Dissolving groups due to different reasons including internal conflicts among members, dependency on handouts, money theft and mistrust. Although it is not easy to avoid cases like these, they can be minimized by ensuring groups choose a strong management and carefully recruiting members in the group; (iii) in some few groups, loan repayments pose a big challenge to the growth of group which sometimes leads to group disintegration. This is not a big threat as this is not so with the majority of groups. Currently there are about 2 888 WORTH groups which are active. Following the proper recommended loans management procedures could be a solution but also members should consider taking loans within their capacity to repay; (iv) Other parallel programs in some of the communities which offer seed money and make promises to match out savings have in some communities led to groups disintegrating, although this has not been a major challenge. Members who move away from the groups for such opportunity soon realize that those promises are not always kept. And if they are, the money which is given is very small and sometimes brings some conflict in the groups, especially who should be given the loans. WORTH program continues to enlighten members of the group on the importance of them working hard and building their own loan funds; (v) Politicians in some communities have also taken advantage of the organized groups trying to champion their political interests through some donations to some of the groups. They continue to educate the group members that dependency is not empowering. Donations can only solve an immediate problem and most of the times come with conditions attached. Members need to understand that it is only hard work and determination which are able to change the vicious circle of poverty experienced by the households involved in WORTH program.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that the WORTH program provides various support to women both in groups and at an individual level. Support given starts from mobilization of individual women to come into groups for the purpose of working together. Thereafter, women are sensitized to realize their potentialities and creation of saving culture among them. They receive training on how to start and manage businesses, then encouraged to take loans and continue running their own businesses. When in groups, the forum is used to facilitate other cross cutting issues such as health promotion, parental skills, food and

nutrition. The groups and individuals that are involved, receive market skills and market information relevant for identifying marketing opportunities.

The WORTH program which supports rural women who have limited access to credit facilities, has proved to be a catalyst for change in all communities where it works. It has a multiplier effect where it reaches many other groups other than women. Men are not WORTH program core group of beneficiaries, but they also joined and formed groups.

The success stories highlight that in the face of daunting obstacles, women have shown their ability and commitment to change their lives and their communities. Therefore the WORTH program is successful in terms of contributing towards poverty alleviation among women and other groups.

The following recommendations are drawn primarily from the findings of the study, but are also informed by research and lessons learned from experience in many countries:

1. The challenge of high expectations and dependence among women can be dealt with developing further awareness among women. Awareness can be created through one to one meetings, exposure through visiting other groups or sharing success stories of other groups.
2. Evidently, women groups cannot be supported for a long time or permanently. However, there should be a clear phase out plan for those groups that are about to be left on their own. The plan should set out sustainability strategies for the group and individual businesses. Sustainability plan should include aspects of linking women groups with other microfinance institutions and market structures.
3. Government involvement is important in assuring stable working environment for women entrepreneurship. Women require policy consideration as an important environment for business successes. Local government is responsible for setting new by-laws that may or may not favour women entrepreneurs. Any women entrepreneurship program should work with the government in order to know the government's guidelines and policies.

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