



## Women Participation and Women Empowerment for Alleviating Poverty Among Women from low-income Families: Study of a Women Empowerment Organization in Zanzibar

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### Abstract

The objective of this study to describe how women's participation and empowerment contribute to the effectiveness of poverty alleviation among women from low-income families. It also aims to identify gaps that need to be addressed in future interventions. This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize peer-reviewed research on women's empowerment and participation in poverty alleviation among low-income households in Zanzibar. Finding indicate Active participation in community, organizations and microfinance groups improve women's self-esteem and living standards. However, progress still limited by societal norms and unequal access to resources for sustainable poverty alleviation in Zanzibar, it is essential to address structural barriers preventing women from fully participating and empowering themselves, along with their economic needs. Although the study offers insightful information based on current and pertinent literature the generalization of the findings is limited by its exclusive emphasis focus on Zanzibar. To create more inclusive, context-specific solutions that support women's participation in social and economic development, future research should broaden geographically and incorporate a variety of sources.

**Keywords:** *Women's Participation; Women's Empowerment; The Role of Local Organizations; And Poverty Alleviation*

### Introduction

Social welfare plays crucial role in poverty alleviation, which is the main objective of the first Sustainable Development Goal, aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms worldwide. According to the World Bank, poverty alleviation involves both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, and other development actors working to improve access to education, economic resources, and empowerment opportunities for women. The participation and empowerment of women, especially those from low-income families, are key to ensuring sustainable poverty reduction.

According to a World Bank report, poverty is a global issue; 659 million people still live on less than \$2.15 a day. However, poverty is not a gender-neutral problem; it often affects women more significantly. Women are more likely than men to experiences various forms of deprivation due to

poverty such as lack of education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which explains why one in ten women worldwide lives in extreme poverty. These global figures highlight that poverty is highly gendered, and women's participation and empowerment are crucial components of any effective poverty reduction strategy (World Bank, 2022).

Poverty in Africa remains gendered with women's being more adversely affected than men. Approximately 37 percent of sub-Saharan Africans as of 2022 live below the international poverty level of US\$2.15 per day, and women are always worse hit compared to men. There are 388 million women and girls in extreme poverty in the world, as opposed to 372 million men and boys, with the biggest gap in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, among young adults under the age of 34 years, there are 127 women to every 100 men in extreme poverty (UN Women, 2024).

Zanzibar continues to face a considerable and persistent issue of poverty. As indicated, the population is 1.9 million, with 25.7% of individuals living below the basic consumption poverty line. This means around 440,150 people are currently in poverty in Zanzibar, especially for those who came from low-income families, according to the budget Survey (ZHBS, 2022). with only slightly more women (224,000 vs. 214,000) than men. Their mainly income source depends on low paying activities like seaweed farming, petty trade, and household work, food trade, which offers unstable incomes just enough to survive.

Although the Zanzibar government has attempted to address the issue through loans and training through the Zanzibar development plan, the impact remains limited due to weak empowerment mechanism and structural barriers. Therefore, women's empowerment in Zanzibar is not optional, but essential for breaking cycles of poverty and ensuring meaningful participation in poverty reduction. (ZHBS, 2022). The empowerment process has frequently been superficial, offering short-lived relief instead of changing the systems that have propagated inequality.

Addressing this research gap needs an inclusive review of previous studies that need to target the alleviation of poverty among women are the greatest proportion of poor people, but it also needs greater social benefits since the gains made by women spread to better livelihoods of families and communities, as well as offer more long-term ways of coming out of poverty. This article seeks to answer the question of how women's participation and the empowerment of women can serve to alleviate poverty among low-income families in Zanzibar. The primary aim of this article is to describe how women's participation and women's empowerment contribute to the effectiveness of poverty alleviation among women from low-income families. The study's aim will focus on the role of participation and an empowerment-based approach in addressing these challenges that hinder poverty alleviation strategies.

## ***Theoretical Framework***

The feminist theory forms the foundation of this study, as empowerment is considered the process of transforming the unequal gender power relations. Feminist scholars argue that women are subordination is not only due to lack of resources but also the result of social, social norms, cultural beliefs, and institutional structures that restrict their decisions - making and power. (Cornwall, 2016; Kabeer, 1999). The feminist theory focuses addressed both individual collective dimension of empowerment while must become more aware of their rights and capabilities, yet structural inequalities can transform through collective efforts.

The feminist theory framework explains how gender inequalities are created and sustained through social, cultural, economic, and political structures. It highlights how power relations between men and women are shaped by patriarchy and calls for the transformation of these unequal systems (Kabeer, 2011). It provides analytical framework to understand and address the social, political, and economic inequalities faced by women and marginalized genders. It critiques traditional theories that

often overlook gender dynamics and emphasizes the importance of women's experiences, advocating for gender equality and the dismantling of patriarchal structures.

In this context, feminist theory provides an effective lens on how women's participation, access to resources, and agency are connected to the broader for gender justice. It emphasizes the fact that empowerment is not a specific product, but a process, which is influenced by the capacity of women to negotiate, resist, and transform the circumstances that limit their existence. This theoretical lens hence forms the conceptual structure of the research, which connects the women's participation, women's empowerment, the role of local organization, as well as opportunities, to the broader objective of alleviating poverty.

### **Genda Transformative Approach**

A gender-transformative approach seeks to actively examine, challenge, and change rigid gender norms and power imbalances to promote structural and social transformation towards equality. It aims to reshape gender dynamics by redistributing resources, expectations, and responsibilities between women, men, and non-binary gender identities, often focusing on norms, power, and collective action. A gender focus was reiterated within the Millennium Development Goals and then again as Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (MacArthur et al., 2022).

Gender inequality is shaped by a combination of social, political, and economic factors, while cultural norms reinforce biases that restrict women's opportunities. To address these challenges, economic measures such as financial literacy, vocational training, and access to credit must be combined with educational and community activities that challenge traditional gender roles. Increasing women's representation in politics and enacting gender-sensitive legislation are essential components of inclusive government. In general, gender-transformative strategies need to address systemic biases and long-standing power dynamics to establish fair structures that allow men and women to fully engage in social, economic, and political life.

The concept of gender transformation increasingly incorporates intersectionality, which recognizes that individuals may experience multiple overlapping forms of oppression. Scholars like (Crenshaw, 1991) argue that effective GTAs must account for various identity markers such as race, class, and sexuality that intersect to shape individuals' experiences of inequality. This intersectional lens is crucial for designing inclusive interventions that address the diverse needs of different groups within society.

Despite the potential of Gender transformative approach several challenges remain critics argue that empowerment can dilute radical foundations of feminist agendas, shifting attention from systemic change to individual outcomes(Eybene, 2009). Moreover, the introduction of GTAs may be hindered by institutional resistance and ingrained societal norms. These issues are crucial in developing strategies that effectively address gender dynamics while navigating complex social and institution context.

Feminist researchers emphasize that poverty alleviation should eliminate the power dynamics that obstruct the inclusion of women. The past research on tourism and agriculture in Zanzibar demonstrates that the norms limit the abilities of women to develop skills and have the freedom to move (Kitunga & Mbilinyi, 2009; Pike et al., 2010). In addition, critics of empowerment frames emphasize the fact that the transition to the focus on resource access is associated with the instrumentalization of women and the subsequent erosion of critical acknowledgment and structural transformation(Lecoutere & Chu, 2024).

## **Methods**

### **Search Strategy**

This study uses qualitative approach and follows Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses Extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-SCR). The Publish or Perish software was used to retrieve relevant research from Scopus and Google Scholar. The literature search was conducted between January 2020 to May 2025 and focused on studies related to women's empowerment, women's participation, and poverty alleviation among low-income families. Journal articles were analyzed using VOSviewer to visualize keyword co-occurrences and identify major themes such as empowerment, participation, and poverty reduction. The selected studies were organized and reviewed using thematic analysis to classify common strategies, challenges, and research gaps. This systematic review provides insight into the current research trend and highlights area where further investigation is needed to support women's empowerment and poverty alleviation.

### **Data Extraction Process**

The references from each database were exported to Microsoft Excel, where the filter and sort function were used to identify and remove duplicates. The remaining abstracts article and titles were screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that met the eligibility criteria were selected for thematic content analysis and data extraction. Data extracted include the author, publisher, journal, year of publication, nation of the authors, study context, article, purpose, concepts or theories covered, health issues, research design, and methodology were among the information that was retrieved.

### **Result Synthesis Analysis**

To obtain a comprehensive grasp of how women's participation and women's empowerment are for alleviating poverty among low-income families in Zanzibar, the writers first became acquainted with the reviewed literature by carefully reading the chosen research. Second, each piece was given a summary note that included important insights about women's duties, empowerment tactics, and the role played by regional groups like Savior Women Empowerment (SWE). Recurring topics were then found using a qualitative inductive technique, coded, and categorized into key themes derived from these summaries. To identify important trends and gaps in the body of existing research, descriptive statistics were used to examine all extracted data records and content themes, including women's engagement, empowerment, poverty alleviation, gender-transformative change, and the role of local organizations.

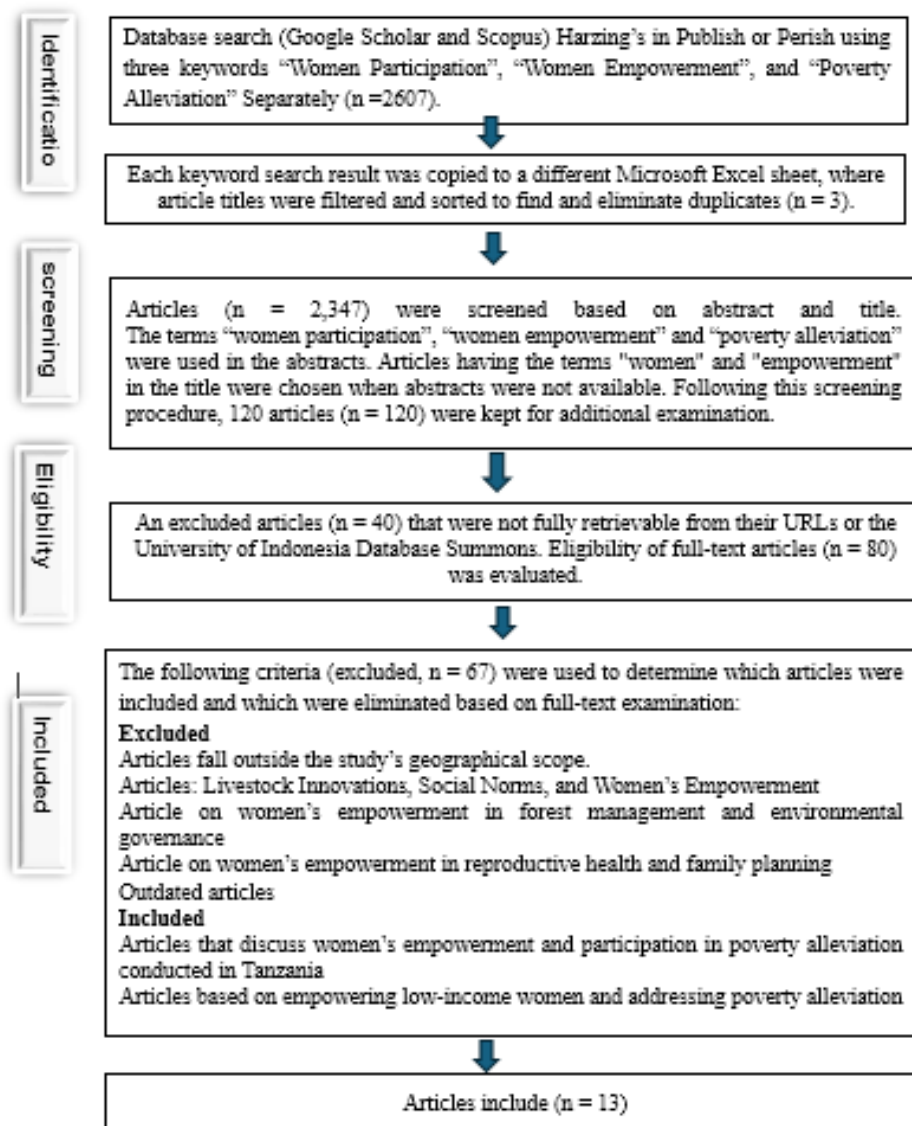


Figure 1: PRISMA- SCR Present Flow Diagram of Article Records Identification and Selection Criteria for Review

Rather than going into detail on the content of the chosen articles, this section describes the methodology utilized to carry out the literature review.

### Selection Included Article

Figure 1 shows the general flow of the article selection process. The Publish or Perish program was used to search Google Scholar and Scopus databases using the keywords "Women Participation," "Women Empowerment," and "Poverty Alleviation." The results showed 2,607 records in total. After exporting each keyword's search results to Microsoft Excel, duplicates (n=3) were found and eliminated using alphabetical sorting. Articles bearing the terms "women empowerment," "women involvement," or "poverty alleviation" were kept for additional evaluation after the remaining 2,604 entries were filtered based on the title and abstract. Titles were examined for relevancy when abstracts were not accessible.

After this screening procedure, 120 articles were judged appropriate for consideration of eligibility. Forty of these items were disqualified since not fully available, 80 full-text publications were left for a thorough evaluation since they could not be fully retrieved from their URLs or institution databases. 67 publications were eliminated after the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied because they were out of date, focused on other topics (such as livestock innovation, environmental governance, or the political empowerment of high-income women), or were not geographically relevant. As a result, 13 articles or 0.5% of the original search results that addressed women's empowerment and involvement in reducing poverty among Tanzanian low-income families satisfied the inclusion requirements and were combined for the final review.

### Characteristics of the Included Article

There were thirteen studies in all, published (n=8) from mainland Tanzania and (n=5) from Zanzibar. Most of the research was written by Tanzanian academics connected to local universities. The articles were published in respectable national and international journals, such as the ACRN Journal of Entrepreneurship Perspectives, Discover Global Society, Accountancy and Business Review, International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, and the International Journal of Developing Country Studies. While four papers (n=4) used review or policy analysis approaches to evaluate social protection, gender equality, and poverty alleviation policies, studies (n =9) were empirical, using case studies, surveys, and mixed-method designs to evaluate women's economic empowerment, microfinance, and community-driven development programs. The papers' themes focused on women's involvement in savings cooperatives, microfinance organizations, and stressed financial inclusion, social capital, and institutional support as crucial factors influencing sustainable development for low-income women in Tanzania and Zanzibar and highlighted self-help groups as agents of empowerment and poverty alleviation.

Table 1. Characteristics of articles included in the scoping review

No	Authors	Publisher	Journal (Article Type)	Year	Author & Context	Aim	Theme
1	Pendo Shukaran Kasoga	ACR Publishing	ACR Journal of Entrepreneurship's perspective (Empirical)	2020	Tanzania Mainland (Mwanza)	To examine how microfinance organizations encourage women to engage in revenue-generating endeavors and improve their empowerment by providing them with access to financial services.	Women Empowerment
2	Ernest Nyanda	University of Dar-es- Salam	Women CBO in Manza Report (Empirical)	2020	Tanzania Mainland (Mwanza)	To examine how women's community-based groups support grassroots poverty alleviation, group involvement, and decision-making	Women Participation
3	Peter S. Mambosho & Germanus S Chole	University of Dar-es- Salam	Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting (Review)	2020	Tanzania Mainland (Arusha)	To assess how economic empowerment programs help reduce poverty among young people and women's organizations.	Poverty Alleviation
4	Zainab Salim	CARI Journal	International Journal of Developing Country Studies	2025	Tanzania Mainland	To find out how women's empowerment and involvement in formal workforce sectors are impacted by gender equality	
5	Tabia Maulid Miwita et al.	State University of Zanzibar	International Journal of Sustainable Development Research (Empirical)	2021	Tanzania Zanzibar	To evaluate the effect on poverty alleviation and women's empowerment by comparing their income levels before and after joining self-help groups.	Women Empowerment

6	Peter S Mambosh, Germanus S. Chole \$Lekumok Kironyi	University of Dar-es-Salam	Discover Global Society (Empirical)	2025	Tanzania Mainland Babati District	To find out how household poverty can be decreased, and women's collective empowerment can be strengthened through community-driven development initiatives.	Women Participation	
7	Coretha Komba & Felician Andrew Kitole	Springer Nature	Discover Global Society (Empirical)	2025	Tanzania Mainland Babati	To determine how household poverty decreased, and how women's collective empowerment is strengthened through community-driven development initiatives.	Women participation	
8	Lambian, R., Nyysola, M&Bernigaud, A.	Poverty Alleviation policies in Tanzania: Progress and challenges	Elsevier (Review)	2022	Finland Tanzania	To assess national policies on social protection and evaluate their impact in boosting women's empowerment and poverty reduction.	Poverty Alleviation	
9	Halima Faki Awesu et al.	State University of Zanzibar	IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (Empirical)	2021	Tanzania Zanzibar	To evaluate how the participation of women in Meli Nne SACCOS impacts the economic and social resources and empowerment	Women Participation	
10	Amiri &Mohd Khan	Mdole Yaseen	Independent Scholars	Journal of entrepreneurship and development studies (Empirical)	2022	Tanzania Zanzibar	To examine the socioeconomic empowerment tactics used by women's organizations to maintain their standard of living and combat poverty.	Women Empowerment
11	Anonymous Authors	University of Arusha	Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting	2024	Tanzania Mainland Arusha	To study how economic empowerment programs contribute to women's involvement and the well-being of households.	Women Participation	
12	Isack Crispin Mwakusye et al.	Wiley Online Library	International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis (Review)	2025	Tanzania Mainland	To investigate the ways that women's employment helps lower poverty in homes headed by women.	Poverty Alleviation	
13	Fatma Hamid Ahmed & George Julius Babune	University of Daresalam	Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (Empirical)	2024	Tanzania Zanzibar	To explore the socioeconomic empowerment tactics used by women's organizations to maintain their standard of living and combat poverty	Women Empowerment	

## Findings

Based on the content of the thirteen reviewed articles in Table 1, three major findings emerged regarding the intersection between women's participation, empowerment, and poverty Alleviation among low-income women in Zanzibar.

### Women's Participation

Four reviewed articles describe women's participation in economic and community projects, emphasizing how it might change household welfare and group agency. According to studies by (Kasoga, 2020) and (Nyanda, 2020) Women from low-income families who actively participate in microfinance associations and community-based organizations (CBOs) develop not only financial independence but

also self-confidence, decision-making authority, and leadership skills. Beyond generating revenue, participation fosters social inclusion, shared accountability, and peer learning, enhancing women's visibility as contributors to the welfare of their households and communities.

Similar findings were made by (Mwita, 2021) and (Awesu, 2021), who found that women's income stability and ability to manage finances were improved by joining self-help organizations and SACCOS programs in Zanzibar. This allowed them to invest in small businesses and support their families. Women's full participation is nonetheless constrained by structural obstacles, such as patriarchal attitudes, limited access to capital and land, and low literacy rates. Notwithstanding these challenges, involvement fosters group empowerment, enabling women to gain leadership, management, and negotiating abilities that enhance domestic well-being and communal resilience.

### **Women's Empowerment**

Empowerment is a multifaceted process that includes social, psychological, and economic transformation, according to a review of six studies. Economic empowerment programs and agricultural support programs boost women's ability to generate money, which raises household living standards and decreases dependency, according to empirical data from (Mambosho, 2024a) and (Mambosho et al., 2024). Similarly, (Mdoe & Khan, 2022) and (Ahmed & Babune, 2024) noted that vocational training and entrepreneurship development programs improve women's self-worth, business independence, and leadership in the home and community.

Studies like (Lambin, 2022) and (Salim, 2025), on the other hand, showed that although financial empowerment is increasing, social empowerment is still limited by ingrained gender norms and male dominance in decision-making institutions. Some men subtly oppose women's success because they see women's financial independence as a danger. Gender-transformative approaches, which integrate financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and gender equality awareness, have been found to have the most effective empowerment models. These interventions lead to long-term changes in attitudes, self-perception, and institutional support for women's inclusion in development processes.

### **Poverty Alleviation**

The six studies reviewed collectively reveal that poverty reduction among low-income women in Zanzibar was achieved through practical, community-centered, and policy-supported interventions. Schemes such as revolving funds and agricultural support programs (Mambosho, 2024) enabled women to access financial capital, develop business and farming skills, and generate stable incomes. Welfare, reduced dependency, and promoted self-reliance. Community-driven programs like TASAF (Komba, 2025) empowered women to participate in decision-making processes related to local resource allocation, which not only strengthened accountability but also created broader social and economic benefits for families and communities.

Additional data from (Lambin, 2022), (Mwita, 2021), (Babune, 2024), (Mwankusye, 2025) demonstrate that integrated strategies combining social protection, financial inclusion, and income diversification were successful in reducing poverty. Especially for households headed by women, these efforts gave women more options for a living, improved access to essential services, and financial security. Three main strategies were used to reduce poverty overall: increased training and financial resources, participation in participatory development initiatives, and diversification of sources of income. When taken as a whole, these procedures helped low-income women in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar become more economically independent and less vulnerable.



## ***Discussion***

The systematic Literature Review examines women's participation and women's empowerment for alleviating poverty among women from low-income families in Zanzibar. The three main issues of women's engagement, empowering tactics, and obstacles to reducing poverty are interrelated and have a big impact on how effective interventions are overall.

First, improving women's socioeconomic standing and promoting community welfare depends on their involvement. According to the study, participation in groups such as the Savior Women Empowerment Organization (SWE) boosts women's earnings while also fostering the development of critical abilities and self-assurance. Women are empowered to participate in decision-making processes through active engagement, which fosters a sense of agency and aids in community development. To end the cycle of poverty and empower women to have a positive influence on their families and communities, this kind of group involvement is essential.

Second, empowerment has been identified as cooperative projects, vocational training, and microfinance are essential to raising women's standard of living, making it easier to acquire the money and expertise needed to create a steady income. Though these programs show promise, they frequently fail to address more fundamental systemic problems, including gender discrimination, restricted market access, and cultural norms that limit women's economic opportunities. It is essential to have a more comprehensive approach that considers the larger sociocultural environment in addition to emphasizing immediate empowerment.

Lastly, major obstacles still stand in the way of women's empowerment and participation initiatives. The report draws attention to systemic issues such as limited access to capital, discrimination based on gender, and cultural norms that restrict women's rights to decision-making and land. The potential advantages of empowerment programs are hindered by these systemic problems, which prolong cycles of poverty and dependency. These obstacles must be removed for women to reach their full potential and help reduce poverty.

## ***Conclusion***

This review provides insightful information about women's participation, women's empowerment, and poverty alleviation among low-income families in Zanzibar, a crucial but little-studied topic. The results emphasize the value of active engagement, successful empowerment techniques, and the enduring obstacles that women encounter. It is crucial to comprehend and put these tactics into practice to promote long-term poverty reduction and enhance the socioeconomic circumstances of women in the area. But also efforts require to deal with systematic problems like gender discrimination, restricted access to resources, and cultural norms that hinder women's advancement must be addressed. The writers focused on recent material to keep it relevant to today's issues and used a methodical approach to guarantee transparency in the review process.

However, the review's small sample size and narrow emphasis on Zanzibar may limit the findings' wider relevance. Future research ought to consider broadening the geographic focus and utilizing a greater range of materials, such as articles written in languages other than English and grey literature like community reports and case studies. This will improve knowledge about women's empowerment in many settings and offer useful insights into practical methods for reducing poverty. Additional study in this field can aid in the creation of context-specific solutions that sustainably strengthen women's contributions to social and economic development.

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## Conflict of Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interests

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