



GIZ Gender Competition 2024

# TRANSFORMING LIVES: EMPOWERING GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE SURVIVORS



# Social and economic empowerment of survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the Western province of Rwanda through training and employment in the tea industry

## Cooperation

Our project seeks to economically empower and successfully reintegrate 3,150 GBV survivors, among which 2,835 women, in seven districts of Rwanda's Western province. It is implemented by Health Poverty Action, a UK-based NGO, active in Rwanda since 1998.

Initially, the project focused entirely on the psychosocial support of GBV survivors through a collaboration with the Belgian development agency Enabel. However, to truly transform the lives of the beneficiaries, an economic empowerment module was needed. To achieve this, the project partnered with GIZ Invest for Jobs and 5 tea plantations to bring participants into decent employment, creating the economic conditions for an independent life free from GBV.

The project's success relies on a strong cooperation framework. HPA has a deep understanding of the root causes and cultural impediments influencing GBV in Rwanda. Cooperation Agreements with the tea factories guarantee meaningful employment and thus income security for the GBV survivors. And local leaders play a pivotal role in supporting beneficiaries at community level. Additionally, the Development Partners Enabel and GIZ provide technical assistance in the areas of psychosocial support and employment readiness trainings. This approach combines expertise, local insight, strategic partnerships, and key actor buy-in for impactful and lasting change.

## Skills development

At the heart of this initiative lies a commitment to comprehensive skills development for the target beneficiaries. Through a dual focus approach, they undergo sessions for a duration of 6 months, with 2 months dedicated to work readiness programmes and 4 months industry-specific skills training, including 4 hours of daily work-based tea plucking training, for which they earn an income based on the weight of tea they pluck.

The goal is to provide employment and to equip survivors with the skills necessary for long-term self-sufficiency with training in personal development, interpersonal communication, leadership, entrepreneurship, but also "financial fitness", to ensure sound management of earnings and savings to enable them to engage in additional small income generating activities.



## Economic empowerment

The project's primary focus is on empowering survivors of GBV and actively participating in a social reintegration initiative. HPA successfully onboarded 3,876 participants, among which 3043 women, with the goal to place at least 85% into employment and sustaining employment for 75% of them for a minimum of one year. Given the unique wage structure in the tea industry, where earnings are tied to the quantity of tea picked, beginners often face challenges in meeting the required weight to enable them to live an independent life. In response, the initiative strategically negotiated with targeted tea estates to create a distinctive employment approach. This combines tea plucking with additional tasks on the estates, ensuring that beneficiaries can attain a living wage within the initial month. As the project advances, the aim is for participants to progressively achieve a living wage solely through tea plucking, establishing a dependable and sustainable income source. This comprehensive strategy not only accelerates beneficiaries' earning potential but also cultivates the skills necessary to enhance their productivity.

Furthermore, recognizing the weight-based pay system, the initiative has proactively negotiated employment contracts for all beneficiaries. These contracts guarantee a minimum remuneration per kilo of tea plucked, providing a foundational level of stability. Looking ahead, the project envisions leveraging these contracts to advocate for the inclusion of social protection schemes in collaboration with the tea estates.

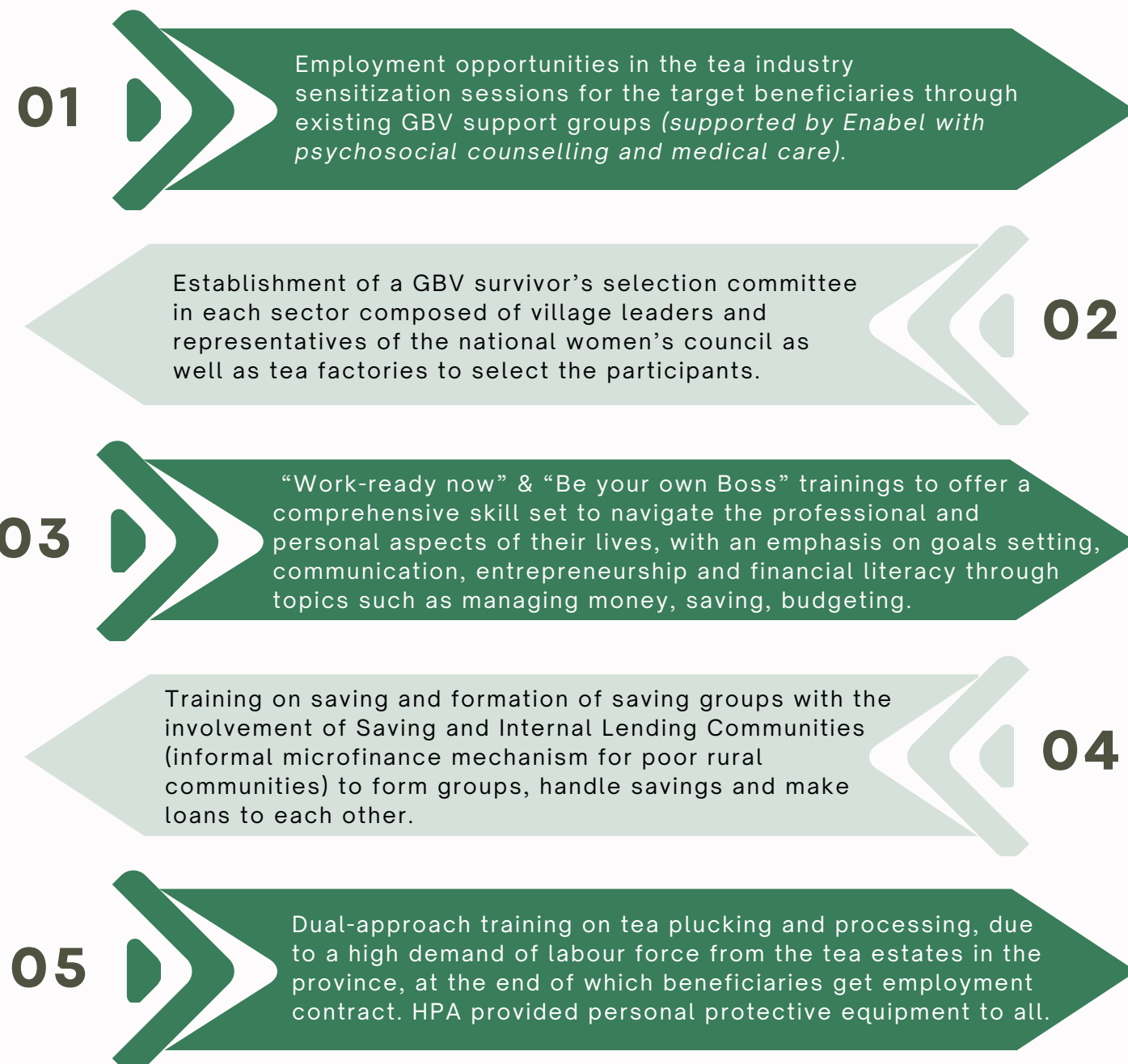
## Co-operative entrepreneurship

In the pursuit of holistic empowerment, the project encourages beneficiaries to embark on cooperative entrepreneurship ventures within or around the tea factories. The overarching objective is to empower at least one-third of the beneficiaries to initiate their own income-generating activities.

By conducting market assessments and establishing MoU with tea factories, the initiative identifies and facilitates business opportunities for the beneficiaries. This approach aims to create sustainable income sources beyond traditional employment. Through the establishment of microfinance linkages, mentorship sessions, and strategic support, the project sets the stage for beneficiaries to not only rebuild their lives but also actively contribute to the economic fabric of their communities.

# A transformative journey

According to a report by the International Labour Organization survivors of GBV often face challenges in securing and maintaining employment due to the psychological and economic consequences of violence. Work readiness programmes, coupled with employment support, not only address these challenges but also contribute to breaking the cycle of violence by fostering economic autonomy. HPA, on the ground, has observed firsthand the positive influence of such programmes on survivors' self-esteem and overall well-being and embarked on an ambitious journey with the support of Invest for Jobs:



## Zoom on one of the building blocks for a successful economic empowerment of the project beneficiaries

In our commitment to enhance the economic empowerment of our beneficiaries, HPA implemented a comprehensive strategy that involved both training sessions and the establishment of Saving and Internal Lending Communities (SILC). Recognizing the challenge faced by formal financial institutions in reaching the most economically vulnerable, particularly women, SILC serves as a crucial avenue for providing income-generating opportunities and self-managed, savings-led financial services to boost household income.

Our initial focus centered on equipping group members with fundamental financial management skills, fostering sustainable, transparent, and flexible savings, and internal lending practices within their communities. This approach aimed to empower individuals, primarily women, by avoiding excessive debt or interest charges. The SILC process also served to safeguard members' limited resources by redirecting their funds from insecure locations to investments in the businesses of group members, establishing sound saving habits and immediate access to financing from savings and loan groups. Committees, including a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, were elected by SILC group members, ensuring that groups are owned and managed by their members, promoting long-term sustainability and financial independence. Each SILC group established a set of rules to guide its activities, including the agreement on interest rates for loans, which members borrow and repay to invest in and expand their businesses. This approach resonated with participants, who found value in initiating groups with others who shared the same training and information. HPA provides mentorship to the SILC, working collaboratively with local leaders to ensure ongoing facilitation and sustainability beyond the project's conclusion.

To date and since March 2022, 3,876 GBV survivors (833 men, 3,043 women) have undergone SILC training, leading to the creation of 62 SILC groups, all linked to local micro finance institutions. A total of 29,327,550 Rwandan Francs (≈ 20,000€) were saved by all groups. HPA has identified opportunities (mainly in pigsty, poultry and horticulture), which HPA has subsequently communicated to the groups. Currently, the groups are engaged in internal discussions to plan and initiate their inaugural activities.



Dianne Mwavita was born in 1995 and lives in Rusizi district in a family of ten children. She was not able to pursue her secondary education because she was impregnated during her third year. In an attempt to make a living, Diane started selling vegetables, earning less than 10,000 Rwandan francs (RWF) per month. At the beginning of her technical training, Diane plucked 1 kilo of tea leave per day. Now, she can harvest between 40 to 60, earning on average 62,500 RWF per month. She also joined a SILC and in addition, started livestock farming and now owns one goat and one pig. Diane aspires to increase her production and reach 80kg per day and her dream is to run a shop. with the start-up capital hopefully coming from the SILC.

# Impact (so far..)

The project, initiated in October 2022 and scheduled until March 2024, addresses the pervasive and systemic issue of GBV, particularly against women and girls. Despite Rwanda's commendable efforts through laws and policies, GBV remains a significant obstacle to national development, evidenced by a 19% increase in cases between 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. This concerning trend was observed even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further exacerbated the challenges associated with GBV.

One of the primary challenges faced by GBV victims is economic dependence on the perpetrator. Empowering women in the economy and closing gender gaps in the workforce are crucial for achieving the 2030 SDGs Agenda. This project contributes to gender equality (SDG5), promotes full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG8), addresses poverty (SDG1), and reduces inequality (SDG10).

Commencing with 3,876 participants, including 79% women, the initiative encountered individuals leaving the programme at various stages, often due to relocation and life events. However, among those, some participants opted for entrepreneurship even before completing the programme, initiating impactful ventures. The following section will highlight the transformative impact of the project on the beneficiaries who successfully completed partially or entirely the programme.

A notable aspect is the economic value the project brings, enhancing its scalability. Before the project, partnering tea factories were confronting declining productivity due to a shortage of skilled workers. Through the intervention, more than 2,000 skilled workers could be added to the tea factories' workforce in a short period of time. This led to remarkable production increases for the tea factories of up to 12.45%. This success has translated into heightened demand, with six additional tea estates expressing interest in enrolling in the programme, underscoring the initiative's positive impact and growing recognition.



**53%**  
employed at a tea factory

**12%**  
self-employed


3,433 participants started the technical tea plucking training, with 84% successfully completing it. The 802 participants who could not reach a living wage through tea plucking but expressed a keen interest in continuing their journey toward employment within a tea factory were not left behind. They are presently undergoing a refresher training to improve their skills and productivity, with the aim of subsequently securing employment contracts.

2053 participants have already signed employment contracts with a tea factory. Partners are still working on finalizing contracts for the remaining successful participants interested in being employed in a tea factory.

Moreover, 457 participants have chosen to start their income-generating activities, with women constituting 73% and men 27% of this group. The entrepreneurs in the dataset are predominantly engaged in five recurring types of businesses: boutiques, tailoring services, wholesale trade, mobile money services, and various farming activities, including modern farming and livestock. Many participants who became entrepreneurs are doing well financially, with 52% now earning more than 30% above the minimum wage.

## Unveiling transformative social protection initiatives and enhanced well-being

  
The project is committed to ongoing vigilant monitoring to evaluate job sustainability, SILCs, and business creation impact, emphasizing the project's transformative effect on beneficiaries' lives and long-term economic independence.

  
The project seeks to enhance social protection policies in tea estates, advocating for improved employment policies, including maternity, paternity, and sick leave, leveraging its position to negotiate and potentially integrate these enhancements into the contracts.

  
On the social protection front, an additional focus involves initiating discussions with tea factories to advocate for participants to engage in *Ejo Heza*, a voluntary long-term saving scheme overseen by the Rwanda Social Security Board, aiming to ensure long term financial security.

  
The project is addressing the lack of Early Childhood Development centers for 1,357 children on tea estates, collaborating with partners to repurpose existing facilities and exploring innovative solutions to ensure safe and efficient environments for working mothers.



# Feminist development in action

## Economic inclusion



Women residing in socioeconomically marginalized, remote, or rural areas face increased vulnerability to GBV. The project has already empowered 2,510 participants from this demographic, including 1,997 women, promoting equal participation in the social and economic life of their communities. This was accomplished through job creation and promoting women-owned businesses, generating valuable economic opportunities. The initiative also generates vital social protection discussions to address challenges faced by these women.

## Skills development and access to resources



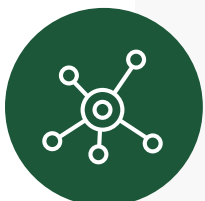
The initiative prioritizes skills development with a comprehensive learning trajectory which emphasizes on interpersonal communication, workers' and employers' rights, financial literacy and entrepreneurship. The curriculum prepares participants to make informed financial decisions and fosters an entrepreneurial spirit. Mentors are also accompanying participants in the creation of saving and internal lending communities, providing access to resources, ensure long-term financial independence.

## Empowerment strategies



The success of this initiative can be credited to a comprehensive strategy that blends psycho-social and medical support with an economic empowerment component. The first initiative (supported by Enabel) provides free medical and psychological assistance, legal services and workshops addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights. Local medical teams were trained in GBV case management and continue to engage with participants during savings group meetings. This enables survivors to receive treatment but also participate in a support group led by trained professionals.

## Collaboration and community engagement



The project strategically engages with key stakeholders, including development partners, tea factories ensuring clear outcomes for programme participants. Local leaders and the national women's council were pivotal in participant selection and serving as initiative ambassadors for sustained post-project support. Additionally, a civil society organisation serves as implementing partner, leveraging its long-standing presence, live and institutional experience of gender inequality in Rwanda and understanding of the local context and cultural impediments.