



# How audience research informed the development of Niambie project in Tanzania

A look at gender dynamics and its decision making

RESEARCH BRIEFING  
SEPTEMBER 2023

**BBC**  
**MEDIA**  
**ACTION**

## Context

This briefing summarises baseline and formative research that has informed the gender-focused Broadcasting for Change project in Tanzania. This long running (2019-2024) project is implemented by BBC Media Action, and funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).



Young women and girls in Tanzania face many barriers that prevent them from realising their social, political and economic rights. These include societal norms, and the attitudes and behaviour of both women and men.

Broadcasting for Change uses media communication to address gender stereotypes and transform gender norms, while also building online and offline platforms for dialogue, and working with media partners to enable them to amplify the voices of women and girls. Ultimately, this project wants young women and girls across Tanzania to be able to make their own decisions and access their rights, including participating in decision-making processes, and holding community and government leadership positions.

## Research approach

At the outset of this phase, BBC Media Action conducted research to understand the social, economic and political rights and decision-making powers of young women and girls in different parts of Tanzania, including their participation in politics and leadership positions. These results informed the design of Broadcasting for Change's media and communication activities, and provided a baseline against which to measure progress throughout the project.

1. In February 2020 a **qualitative study** explored gender issues, perceptions of female empowerment and power dynamics between men and women. Data was collected across nine Tanzanian regions (Dar Es Salaam, Songwe, Kilimanjaro, Lindi, Mara, Kagera, Dodoma, Shinyanga, and Manyara), and in Zanzibar (Unguja and Pemba islands). A total of 18 focus group discussions were conducted with separate groups of men and women. And in-depth interviews were held with key influencers and decision-makers, including local government leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, marriage counsellors, police gender desk officers, civil society organisation workers, health workers and teachers. The study also involved community mapping in Shinyanga, Manyara and Zanzibar, working with local women as 'peer' researchers.
2. In August 2020, a **national quantitative survey** surveyed 4,005 people reflecting the demographic breakdown of the Tanzanian population aged 15 and above. Respondents answered questions about their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to the social, political and economic rights of women and girls in Tanzania, to understand the drivers of – and barriers to – women's empowerment.

This briefing summarises the key insights from the research.

# Key insights

1

## Men are the main decision-makers at home, in the wider community and in politics

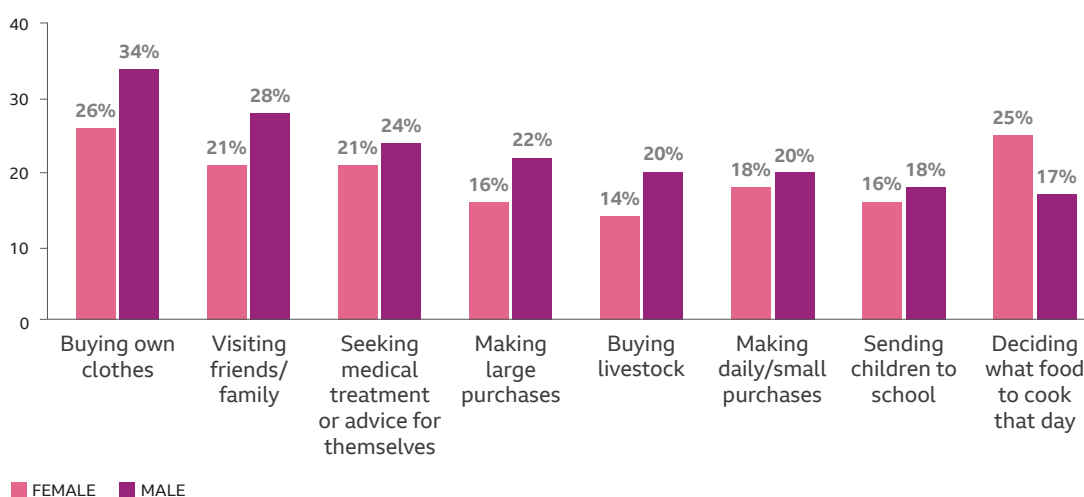
The research found that although most people in Tanzania believe that men and women should have equal decision-making power, this does not happen in reality. For example, research participants said that the practice of dowry payments for marriage creates a gender power imbalance, that cultural norms encourage women not to act confidently or speak their mind, and that women's commonly lower education levels hinder them in being able to make decisions within the household and in the wider community.

**“According to Tanzania[n] culture and beliefs, women are not allowed to make decisions. So men are the ones who decide everything, and women must follow the decisions that men make.”**

*Civil society organisation worker, Dar es Salaam*

Although many survey respondents said that key personal and household decisions are made jointly by men and women, there were some decisions that men are more likely to make (see Figure 1). For example, 34% of male respondents said they could decide to buy clothes for themselves without consulting anyone else, compared with 26% of women. Similarly, 28% of men said they could decide to visit friends and family without consulting anyone, versus 21% of women. However, women were more likely than men to decide by themselves what food to cook that day – 25% of women said they could make this decision alone, compared with 17% of men.

Figure 1: Ability to make autonomous decisions, by gender



Percentage who said that they can decide these things by themselves (n = 4,005)

In public spaces, it is widely seen as acceptable for both men and women to speak up and challenge other people's opinions – 80% of respondents believe that men and women should be able to voice their opinions equally in community decision-making and public meetings. However, a sizeable minority (15%) still thought that men's voices should be prioritised.

Men also feel more confident about speaking up in public. Some 37% of women respondents said that they strongly believe that they can challenge other people's views in a public forum, compared with 46% of men. Qualitative research participants also mentioned that women lack confidence to speak in community meetings.

**“ Even if [women] have an important thing to share in a meeting, they will keep quiet – fearing how the community would think of them. ”**

*Village executive officer, Haydom, Manyara*

Despite most Tanzanian respondents self-reporting that men and women should have equal ability to run for political leadership roles, 16% still believed that men are more able to do this. This perception was particularly prevalent in certain areas. For example, 41% of survey respondents in Zanzibar said that men are more able to run for leadership roles.

The qualitative research showed that there are still many negative perceptions towards women in Tanzania standing for leadership positions, particularly young women. This indicates that people know the right answers to give but there are entrenched norms that actually prevent positive action. Research participants across different regions said that young women campaigning for leadership positions are not supported by their communities, because of perceptions that they are too young to be leaders and that women are weak and not as wise as men. This was particularly the case in rural areas.

**“ Women in our country don't make the right decisions. Their decisions are usually based on their moods or emotions. As for men, they tend to make the right decisions and stand by them. I am not saying that men are superior to women, but according to our customs men's decisions are better than women's. So, in my opinion, the disadvantages of having a woman as a leader are higher than the advantages. ”**

*Male focus group participant, Kilimanjaro*

The barriers to women in Tanzania taking on leadership positions come from women as well as men. Qualitative research participants in some communities, such as in Kilimanjaro, said that even women do not support other women to stand for leadership positions, while participants in Kagera felt that women would vote for a fellow woman. Women also expressed less confidence in their own abilities, which prevents them from participating in politics – 30% of the women surveyed felt very confident that they could stand for community leadership positions, compared with 38% of men.



## 2

### Women are unable to make their own financial decisions and lack control over productive resources

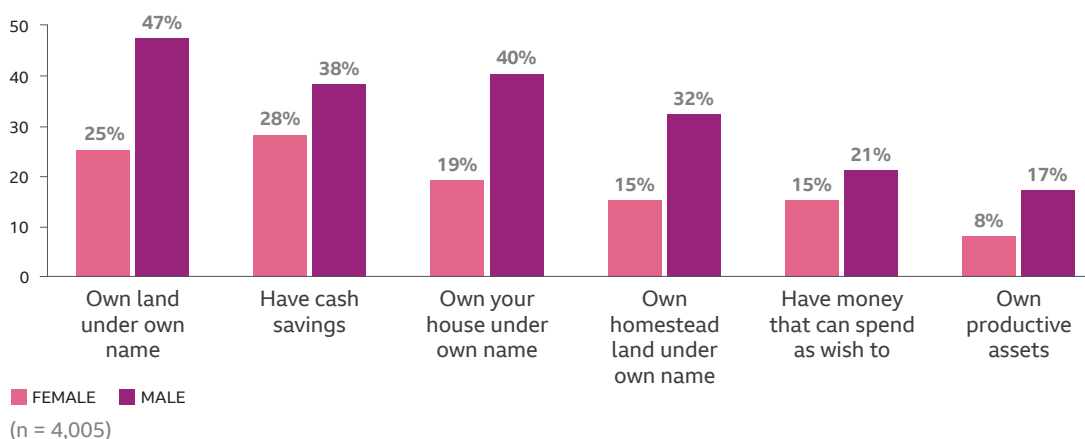
Women's economic empowerment helps to give them autonomy in their own life choices and enables them to challenge other norms, including those restricting their political rights. Research showed that financial decisions in Tanzania are generally made by men, even when resources are earned through a woman's labour. For example, qualitative research participants said that even where women are the main farmers and livestock keepers, men usually make all major decisions about selling the harvest. A woman may make some decisions about selling poultry or food crops, but still does not have a say over how the proceeds are spent.

**“In this community, when it comes to farming, the woman produces and the man is the user of the money obtained. The woman has no voice, she cannot question [his decisions].”**

*Peer researcher, Manyara*

Qualitative research participants said that when marriages fail, the Tanzanian custom is that the man keeps the household resources. While there are avenues for negotiation, such as via religious leaders, local leaders, courts and government legal aid, the survey found that only 16% of women were aware of paralegal services available in their community and only 3% had ever used them. Family inheritance practices also favour men in Tanzania. Research participants said that women are given lower priority in sharing our inheritances as providing for women is seen as their husbands' responsibility rather than the responsibility of their birth family. The survey also showed that men are more likely than women to own land, a house or other productive assets (such as cattle or agricultural equipment), and to have cash savings.

Figure 2: Ownership of resources by gender



Men in Tanzania are expected to support their families financially. Consequently, only 35% of Tanzanians said that they strongly believe that women should have the same right to work outside the home as men. This finding was higher among women – 38% of women said they strongly believe this, compared with 33% of men. People living in coastal areas were most supportive of women having the same right to work outside the home – 44% of coastal dwelling respondents said they strongly believe this, compared with only 22% in Zanzibar.

Women also expressed less confidence than men about their own decision-making power related to taking up paid employment or spending their money, although both genders had low confidence levels in this – 26% of men said they strongly believe they can make independent decisions about taking up paid work, compared with 21% of women. Similarly, 22% of men said they strongly believe they can make independent decisions about spending their own money, compared with 19% of women.

The qualitative research showed that despite these attitudes around women's work, many women are forced to engage in business because their husbands do not earn enough to support the family. However, only certain types of work are seen as appropriate for women – including informal or small-scale businesses such as selling food, fresh produce and alcohol, and hairdressing. Research participants felt that there was stigma around women doing 'masculine' work, such as driving a taxi.

**“ I have seen a young woman driving a motorcycle and I have heard somewhere a young woman is a taxi driver. She was feeling bad because she was discriminated against. [People] felt like she was not normal.... They get surprised to see a young woman doing that. ”**

*Health worker, Mara*

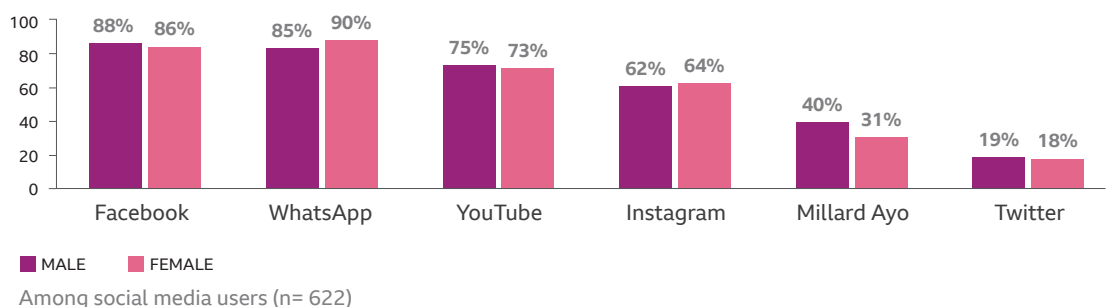
### 3

#### Men have more access to media and information than women

Men in Tanzania also have more access to media platforms than women. This gender gap is widest for the internet and social media, leaving women with less access to information and platforms where they can voice their concerns.

Media access also varied by age – young people aged 18–24 were the most likely to have internet access. Among men and women in Tanzania who access social media, the most popular platforms were Facebook and WhatsApp. However, Instagram was more popular among women than men.

Figure 3: Access to social media platforms, disaggregated by gender



Male research participants said they like to watch and listen to programmes relating to music, documentaries, educational topics, current affairs, politics and comedy, while women prefer films, soap operas, entertainment and music programmes – particularly *Taarab (delightful)* poetic songs. This means that engaging women and men in media content on political issues and current affairs requires gender-specific approaches that use different platforms and formats.

# What does this mean for the Broadcasting for Change project?

These research findings helped BBC Media Action's project team to identify women's political participation and representation as a key focus for the Broadcasting for Change project in Tanzania.

Women's equal and meaningful representation in decision-making bodies, and their participation in political and civic life, including in leadership roles, is key to ensuring that women can access their rights across all spheres. The project is tackling this through multi-format and multi-platform media content to prompt changes to social norms and behaviour. Alongside this, the project seeks to strengthen the capacity of media organisations to transform gender norms around decision-making, provide online and offline platforms for dialogue, and amplify the voices of women, particularly young women, in households, communities and in political decision-making.



The project focusses on supporting young women and girls to make informed decisions regarding their social, economic and political rights. The project aims to build women's and girls' agency contributing to long-term social, and behaviour change. It aims to do this by increasing the audience's

understanding of women's rights (*including political rights*) and the benefits of gender equality (*including equality in leadership, political participation and representation*), building people's confidence and motivation to support women and uphold their rights (*including in political participation*), increasing the use of existing support services and challenging discriminatory and harmful social and gender norms (*including those hindering political participation and representation of women and girls*). "Future briefings will explore how these harmful social and gender norms are shifting throughout the course of the project."

## The project's outputs include:

- Weekly national radio programmes – Niambie and Tuyajenge – focused on women's rights and gender equality produced for young women and men, with corresponding social media platforms.
- Capacity-strengthening of young reporters and producers from partner radio stations to design and create gender-transformative media content that supports the social, economic and political rights of young women and girls.
- Research to help us understand the barriers that young people (and particularly young women and girls) face to participating fully and actively in civic life in Tanzania and monitor the projects outputs with an endline survey to measure the impact of the outputs.
- Growing connections with locally available resources and services that support the social, economic and political rights of women and girls.

## Acknowledgements

This research briefing was prepared thanks to funding from Global Affairs Canada and the Embassy of Switzerland in Tanzania (formerly SDC).

The content of the briefing is the responsibility of BBC Media Action. Any views expressed should not be taken to represent those of the BBC itself or of any donors supporting our work.

The authors would like to thank the BBC Media Action research team in Tanzania who carried out the fieldwork, as well as all the respondents who participated in this research.

The authors are grateful to the Georgetown University for the training and guidance on research understanding social norms. We would like to thank our colleagues Anna Bwana, Sonia Whitehead and Neema Yobu for input and feedback.

**Authors:** Jasmine Shio, Catharine Buckell and Kaushiki Ghose

**Copy editor:** Lorna Fray

**Designer:** Marten Sealby

**Cover image:** From the *Niambie* social media page

Follow us on social media:



**Registered charity number (England & Wales):** 1076235

**Company number:** 3521587

**Registered office:** Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA

**Tel:** +44 (0) 20 7481 9797

**Email:** [media.action@bbc.co.uk](mailto:media.action@bbc.co.uk)

**Web:** [bbcmediaaction.org](http://bbcmediaaction.org)

©BBC Media Action 2023