

# **Female entrepreneurship and institutional transformation in Tanzania**

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## **Abstract**

Female entrepreneurs have received increased attention from policy makers, development organizations and researchers in recent years. As it is believed that promoting female entrepreneurship will create employment, improve household welfare and reduce poverty, the promotion of female entrepreneurship has become a key policy focus in much of Africa. Extant research has been dominated by research on female owned micro-businesses in the informal sector and has shown that women face a number of gender related barriers to sustain, grow and formalise their business stemming from the institutional environment. Although female entrepreneurs experience relatively high failure rates and most female-owned businesses remain small and informal some clearly do manage to sustain, and formalise their business. Moreover, in recent years a range of initiatives have been put in place to foster women's entrepreneurship, some of them stemming from female business owners themselves. Based on interviews with nine women-owned formal businesses in the food-processing industry in Tanzania and representatives from women's business associations, this paper examines how female entrepreneurs are navigating a challenging institutional environment. Drawing on insights from feminist theory and neo-institutional theory the paper contributes with knowledge about the gendered character of the institutional environment, the tactics that female entrepreneurs employ to overcome gender-related institutional barriers, and sheds light on how women entrepreneurs may act as institutional entrepreneurs in an African context.