

# INVEST

## The Process for Unleashing SME Banking

Knowledge Product for TA Funders  
and TA Providers





November 2025



Note: This report was made possible through support from the Argidius Foundation on behalf of the Growth Firms Alliance. It does not necessarily reflect the views of other GFA sponsors, who did not participate in its development.

# INVEST comprises a set of knowledge products and tools to funders and banks through the process of understanding SME markets and developing profitable value propositions



	Executive summary	Knowledge product	Toolkit	Toolkit guide
	<i>A <b>high-level summary</b> designed to provide an overview of the INVEST Process and accompanying Toolkit</i>	<i>Document that <b>highlights the SME banking gap, and describes INVEST as an effective approach to address it</b>, backed by evaluations and case studies</i>	<i>An open and public <b>digital platform</b> that provides both TA funders and banks with a suite of tools to support them through INVEST Process to unleash SME banking.</i>	<i>An <b>overview guide</b> that introduces the INVEST Toolkit and offers an overview of its contents through descriptive one-pagers for each tool</i>
TA Funders and Providers		<div>Current piece</div> 		
Banks	Find the bank version <a href="#">here</a> .	Find the bank version <a href="#">here</a> .		Find the bank version <a href="#">here</a> .





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# The challenge:

*The SME financing gap  
and the limited impact of  
current approaches*





In emerging economies, SMEs represent:

70% of  
businesses

70% of  
jobs

35% of  
GDP

SMEs contribute to economic transformation by:

- **Enabling value addition.** Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of value chains in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), supporting the production of entire industries. *In Africa and South Asia, SMEs are responsible for ~65% of all food consumed, from production to distribution.*
- **Boosting productivity.** Greater access to finance helps SMEs adopt new technologies, improve management, and expand their operations, narrowing the productivity gap with larger firms. *Improving SME productivity is one of the keys to driving sustained GDP growth.*
- **Improving the livelihoods of underserved groups.** In LMICs, SMEs stand as the largest generators of formal and productive jobs. *Strengthening SMEs can lift millions of people out of poverty.*

# Yet, SMEs frequently lack access to commercial finance—resulting in a \$5.7 trillion SME funding gap

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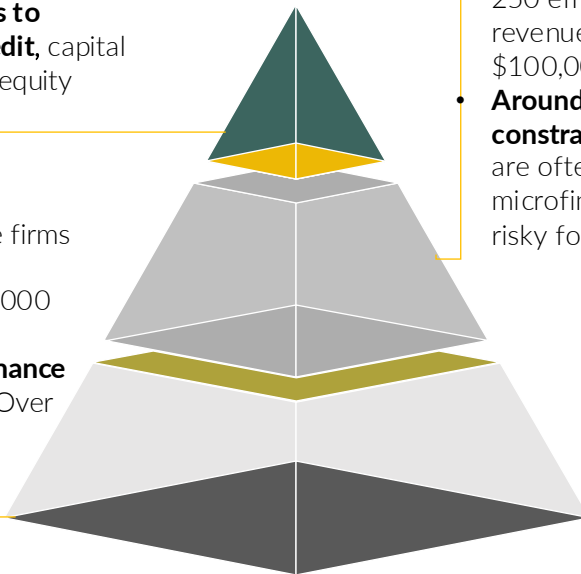
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## The challenge

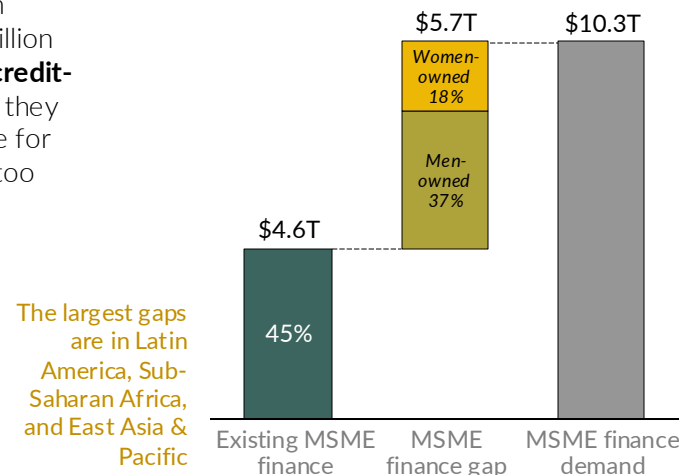
- **Large enterprises** are firms with 250+ employees, usually earning more than \$15 million annually
- **They have full access to commercial bank credit**, capital markets, and private equity

- **Microenterprises** are firms with <10 employees, typically under \$100,000 in annual revenue
- **They rely on microfinance or informal lenders.** Over 60% have sufficient financing.



- **“The missing middle” SMEs** are firms with 10–250 employees and revenues between \$100,000–\$15 million
- **Around 44% are credit-constrained** since they are often too large for microfinance but too risky for banks

**\$5.7 trillion**  
Annual financing gap for formal MSMEs  
in emerging economies



**SME definition:** The INVEST Toolkit focuses on formal SMEs, aligning with IFC’s SME definition (10–250 employees and annual revenues between \$100,000–\$15 million). Organizations are encouraged to adapt it as needed to align with their internal SME definitions and country context.

### Business case



**Stable repayment behavior:** With proper segmentation and business support, **SMEs repay as reliably as other segments**. For instance, only **1.5% of Kenya Commercial Bank's loans for the SME segment were non-performing**, partly due to the bank's relationship management model.



**Healthy margins:** SMEs often pay higher interest rates than large corporates and generate **~\$850 billion in annual revenue** for banks, a figure growing 7% annually. They also offer strong cross-sell potential. ACBA Bank **averages four products per SME client**, especially when credit is bundled with training or advisory. At KCB, SMEs are the **second most profitable segment**.



**Loyalty:** SMEs often become **long-term customers** when offered tailored products and non-financial support. For instance, KCB saw a **net promoter score of +43** in its SME segments, a figure close to the top performing traditional segments.



**Scale potential:** The SME market presents a **strong whitespace opportunity** for banks to scale their business lending portfolio and volumes. For example, KCB's **SME portfolio grew from \$4 million in 2017 to \$1.1 billion in 2025, with a \$2 billion commitment by 2027**, showcasing that banks can mobilize significant amounts of capital.

### Impact case



**Economic growth:** When SMEs grow, they increase employment and economic opportunities. In LMICs, high-growth SMEs can contribute up to **40% of the GDP**. These firms, which represent **15% of SMEs**, are also responsible for **over 50% of new job creation**.



**Gender outcomes:** Strengthening SMEs is a key lever for gender equality. **Women own ~37% of formal SMEs** and represent **~40% of their workforce**. Expanding access to finance for WSMs fuels broader impact, as **women reinvest up to 90% of their income** into education, health, and community well-being.



**Inclusion:** Because SMEs are more geographically dispersed than large firms and **more likely to operate outside capital cities**, they play a critical role in extending economic opportunity and jobs to secondary towns and underserved regions.

## Overview of existing challenges

### Lack of understanding of the heterogeneous market



The SME market includes a **wide range of firms**—based on size, maturity, and industry—with **very different needs and risk profiles**

*“SMEs are diverse in their size and nature, and their financing needs differ accordingly. There is **never** going to be a single model that ‘fixes’ the SME financing gap.”*

– British International Investment

### Lack of SME market segmentation



Banks often do not properly segment the SME market and **develop portfolios that are not reflective of financial and non-financial product needs**

*“Understanding the needs of SMEs and getting segmentation working is **very critical** to match these with the services offered.”*

– Stanbic, Head of Enterprise Banking

### Inability to appropriately price risk



Standard credit scoring and risk tools are not adapted to SME operations (e.g., informal accounting, seasonality), leading to overpricing or exclusion of viable SMEs.

*“Traditional risk assessment tools need to be adapted to take into account sector or geographic specificities.”*

– FERDI

### Lack of investment in SME strategy and business model



Banks often **perceive SMEs as risky and lack the data or internal tools to size the opportunity**, leading to **underinvestment in tailored program design**.

*“Banks need to be able to **determine the SME opportunity and have numbers** to justify investing in the business strategy.”*

– KCB Head of SME Banking

**National policies and regulations offer little incentive for banks to serve SMEs.** On the contrary, regulatory requirements such as strict collateral rules and loan classification standards discourage lending to agri-SMEs, which already receive less than 10% of commercial credit in East Africa.\*



# Funders rarely provide technical assistance (TA) to banks, overlooking a key opportunity to strengthen SME banking propositions

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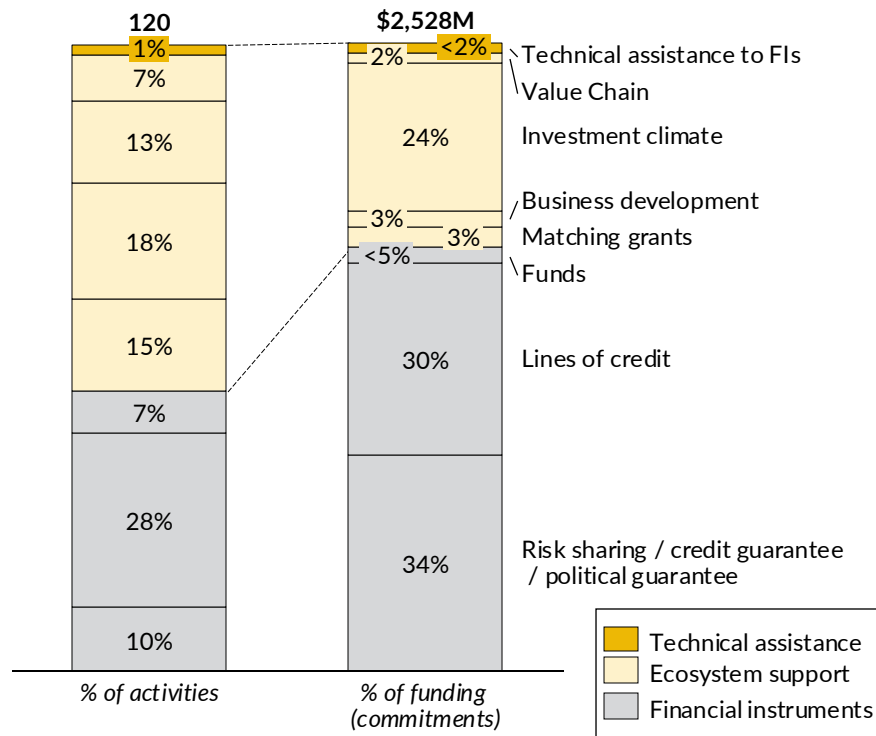
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## The challenge

World Bank Group<sup>1</sup> SME interventions evaluated, by type of support  
(Projects Evaluated by IEG 2014–18, #, \$M)



- Funders have **focused on providing funding** (e.g., lines of credit) **and advisory services** for ecosystem and institutional change (e.g., business environment reforms)
- TA to financial institutions is often overlooked, though necessary** to help banks improve their SME proposition and provide impactful, long-term SME banking

*TA helps lenders to adapt their business models to serve high-impact SME segments in a commercially viable way*  
**British International Investment**

*DFIs can play a catalytic role by offering TA focused on capacity building (i.e., staff training, risk assessment development) lowering upfront costs and improving SME banking delivery*  
**FERDI**



# What we've learned:

*Insights from 20+ SME  
banking initiatives where  
TA helps drive success*



# We reviewed 20+ TA-supported SME banking programs to identify what drives successful SME propositions



## Methodology

- **Comprehensive program review:** We analyzed over 20 TA-supported SME banking programs to identify success factors and lessons learned.
- **Thorough evaluation approach:** The review drew on program reports, summaries, stakeholder interviews, and additional desk research to ensure accuracy and depth.
- **Selection criteria:** We selected programs that had an active SME banking initiative, received TA support from a funder or development partner, and were located in an emerging economy.
- **Defining success factors and lessons learned:** We identified categories that capture key lessons and reflections on what enabled banks to offer strong SME value propositions.



# After reviewing 20+ TA-supported SME banking programs, we identified what drives successful SME propositions

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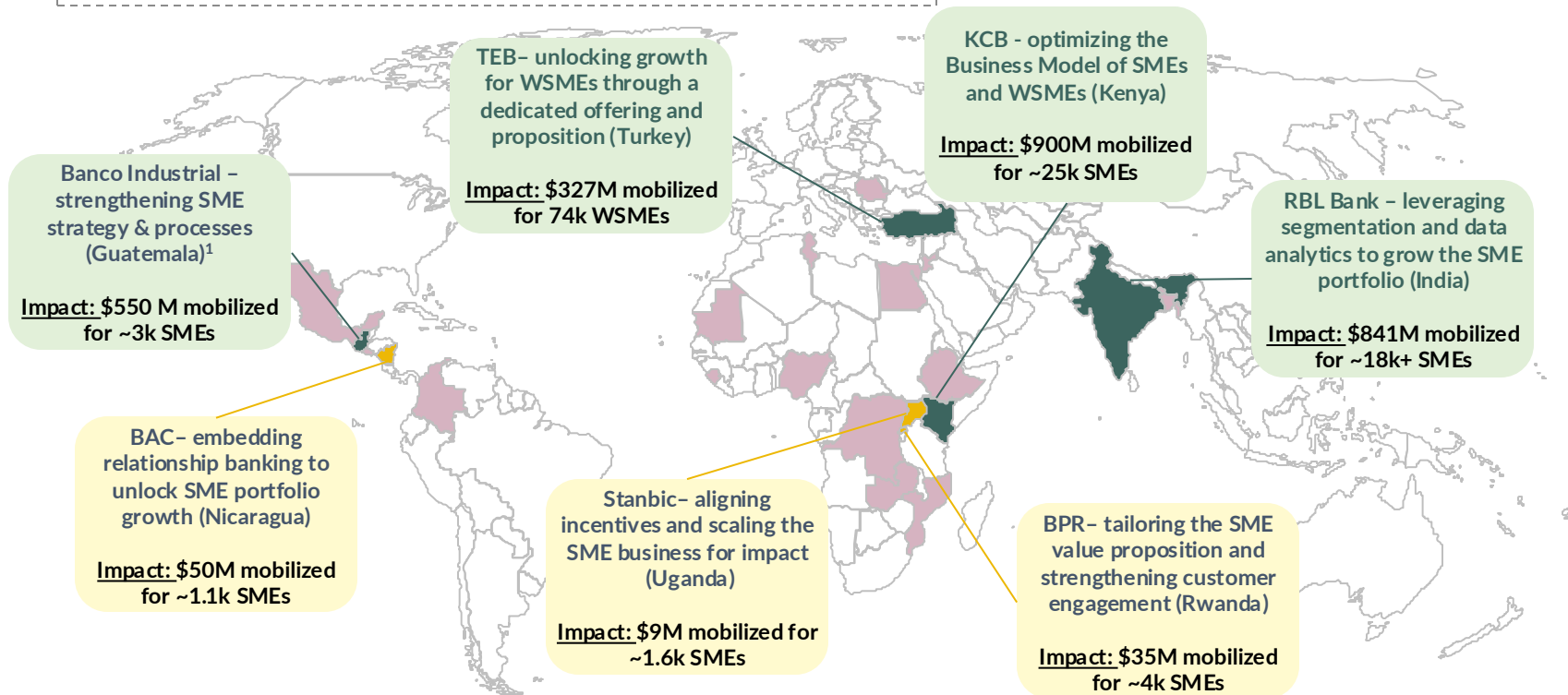
## Key learnings

### SME banking programs by outcome

High impact

Emerging impact

Additional initiatives reviewed



Detailed case studies can be found in the [Annex](#)

Note: <sup>1</sup>A full case study could not be developed for this program given the limited information currently available.



# What good looks like: The exponential growth of KCB's billion-dollar SME banking portfolio

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## Key learnings



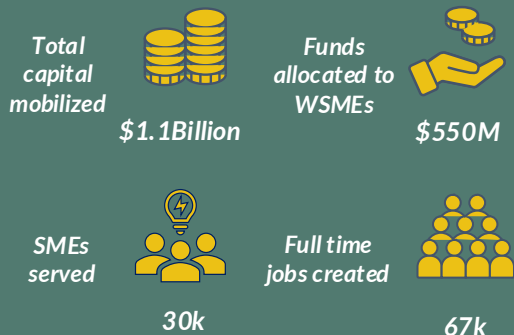
Partners



**Outcomes** KCB's SME portfolio grew from \$4 million in 2017 to \$1.1 billion in 2025, with a \$2 billion commitment by 2027

By 2025

SMEs are KCB's 2<sup>nd</sup> most profitable segment



*"It is like walking into a totally different bank."  
- Small Enterprise Owner, Female - Machakos*

## Context and problem

In Kenya, **SMEs (and in particular, WSMEs)** lacked financial resources in large part because **banks did not offer products and services tailored to their needs.**

In 2016, Women's World Banking, with the support of Argidius, partnered with Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) to conduct a field study to **understand the constraints** that limited banks from better serving SMEs. These included:

- A lack of understanding of SME needs and gaps due to insufficient customer research and lack of gender-disaggregated data
- A fragmented business model under which SMEs were commonly served through multiple points of contact at a bank
- A lack of SME-appropriate lending products—e.g., most were collateral based, which often limited access for SMEs that nonetheless had sufficient cash flow

The assessment indicated that KCB had **tremendous potential to further serve existing customers.** Of the bank's ~1 million MSME account holders at the end of 2016, only 7% had a loan with the bank and only 1% utilized non-financial services offered through the SME membership program "Biashara Club".





Partners



## Approach

Following the assessment, Argidius, WWB, and CCX supported KCB through a three-year TA program, starting with a 10-branch pilot and reaching 200+ branches by 2020. The TA focused on improving KCB's SME offerings by:

### 1 Conducting in-depth research and bank diagnostics

KCB began its research phase by:

- Analyzing the market and segmenting WSMEs to understand their unique financial and non-financial needs
- Identifying the bank's capabilities and gaps in serving WSMEs

### 2 Designing an optimized business model

Building on its research findings, KCB improved the value proposition of its SME offerings by:

- Upgrading the bank's use of data and customer management
- Implementing a new cash-flow-based credit assessment
- Shifting toward a relationship-based management model
- Upgrading the non-financial services offering

### 3 Building institutional alignment

The bank used a top-down approach to ensure change management at all levels and successfully serve women-owned SMEs by:

- Building staff buy-in through internal communication campaigns
- Providing continuous training to embed a women-focused culture
- Giving the Biashara Club team a strategic position within the bank

## Intervention

### Strengthening of the portfolio performance management

- Upgraded its CRM system to tag clients separately as individuals or businesses and to track gender-disaggregated data, enabling a clearer understanding of its customer base.
- Designed reports and dashboards to allow staff across levels to regularly monitor financial and non-financial service performance.
- Worked with the Head of SME Banking to determine KPIs and the reports IT and MIS teams should provide to support SME tracking.

### Implementation of a cash-flow based credit assessment

- Shifted away from collateral-based credit assessments by equipping relationship managers with cash-flow-based credit assessment models, visiting businesses to build deeper understanding, and introducing credit panels at the branch level to strengthen assessments.

### Development of a relationship-based banking model

- Developed a relationship management model which enabled KCB to foster relationships with SMEs, especially WSMEs.
- Trained 78 staff in relationship management throughout pilots; fully rolled out training to 560+ staff via KCB's training academy.

### Expansion of KCB's non-financial services

- Transformed KCB's Biashara Club into an effective provider of non-financial services offering business networking and workshops, informed by better needs assessments and a partnership with the African Management Institute (AMI)



# Why don't all SME banking programs match KCB's success?

## The challenges and lessons learned of building and growing SME segments

### Key challenges<sup>1</sup>

Lacking incentives to align priorities

Taking a product-first approach

Disregarding change management

### Description

Even when banks commit to SME banking, they often lack clear internal incentives and accountability to treat it as a strategic priority. As a result, SME business lines underperform or fail to reach their full potential.

Many banks and their backers take a product-first approach to SME banking. Launching generic offerings without appropriate market, institutional, and client level analysis. This limits the ability to develop coherent and compelling value proposition that resonate with banks and SMEs.

Banks often launch SME initiatives without ensuring that they can manage the organizational change this requires. Without strong change management, these efforts lose momentum and fail to scale.

### Lessons learned

**A** Focus efforts on banks with strong internal incentives to develop and expand SME banking

**B** Follow a process of Research & Diagnostics, Pilot and Refinement, and finally Rollout

**C** Manage internal change to sustain SME momentum

A

**Focus efforts on banks with strong internal incentives to develop and expand SME banking**

**Successful SME banking programs start with selecting banks that already show commitment and internal motivation to grow their SME segments.** Once these banks are identified, TA can be most effective by embedding SME priorities across the institution by defining and integrating them into KPIs, performance structures, and support systems to sustain momentum.

## Good practices



**Centering SME banking as a strategic commitment**, including leadership accountability, helped ensure sustained prioritization and funding.



**Developing SME growth targets** linked to portfolio and staff performance motivated teams in deepening SME relationships and growing portfolios.



**Tracking SME banking performance** in Management Information System (MIS) increased visibility of SME results and highlighted areas for improvement.

## Examples

**Access Bank** embedded SME inclusion into its corporate sustainability agenda through the “W” Initiative, which secured executive sponsorship and maintained consistent investment across multiple African markets.

**BAC Nicaragua** launched the CreditMujer product with the clear benchmark of women-led SME loans constituting 20% of its SME portfolio within five years.

**RawBank** upgraded its systems to track SME loan disbursements, cross-sell activity, and RM training participation, enabling managers to link bonuses to accurate, real-time performance data.

B

Follow a process of Research & Diagnostics, Pilot and Refinement, and finally Rollout

**Developing a strong value propositions requires banks to start by understanding the SME market.** This means shifting from a product-first approach to a process-driven one by strengthening institutional capabilities, designing customer-centric products, and adopting relationship-based delivery models.

## Good practices



**Segmenting SMEs** to design offerings aligned with SME needs increased product uptake and customer loyalty.



**Incorporating cash-flow-based credit assessments** increased lending to SMEs, which often don't have collateral or fixed assets.



**Integrating non-financial services**—such as training, advisory, and networking support—improved portfolio performance, as SMEs were more prepared to grow.



**Establishing a relationship-based SME banking model** helped build trust with SMEs to better support them in their growth.

## Examples

**BLC Bank Lebanon** segmented the SME market to identify that women owned 33% of businesses but held only 3% of bank loans, which led them to design targeted products for women entrepreneurs.

**COSAMI's** introduction of cash-flow based lending was in high demand, especially in the agriculture sector, due to the prevalence of seasonal cash flows tied to production.

**BPR Rwanda** embedded workshops on taxation, bookkeeping, and marketing into its Biashara Club offer, which enhanced members' business practices and provided opportunities to cross-sell.

**KCB** trained SME bankers to be relationship managers with a comprehensive view of customers' needs, increasing product uptake and client satisfaction.

C

## Manage internal change to sustain SME momentum

**Sustaining SME momentum requires banks to manage internal change effectively.** This means securing leadership buy-in, embedding SME practices into systems and staff capabilities, and adopting flexible implementation approaches that keep propositions relevant as markets and client needs evolve.

### Good practices



**Ensuring leadership buy-in around SME initiatives**, including appointing champions with decision-making power, helped institutionalize SME processes and teams.



**Promoting institutional capacity and learning in SME banking** by integrating SME practices into systems, staff skills, and monitoring frameworks has enabled banks to build robust SME portfolios.



**Allowing adaptive and versatile implementation of SME initiatives** helped banks better respond to market and client realities and keep offerings relevant.

### Examples

**KCB** framed its women-SME proposition as a bank-wide change effort led from the top, which smoothed rollout across branches and locked in resources.

**TEB in Turkey** trained over 600 SME bankers through a certified two-year program, creating a group of in-house experts capable of delivering results regardless of relationship manager turnover.

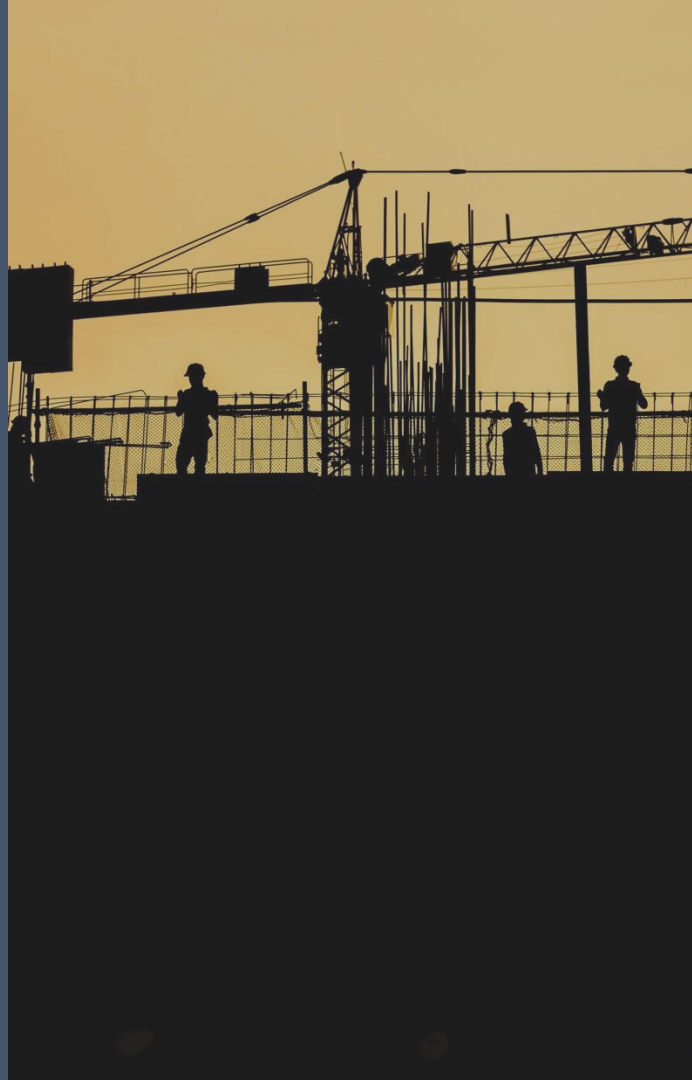
**Stanbic Uganda** moved business bankers from head office into branches and paired them with on-the-job coaching so client conversations directly informed refinements to the SME value proposition.





# *The INVEST process:*

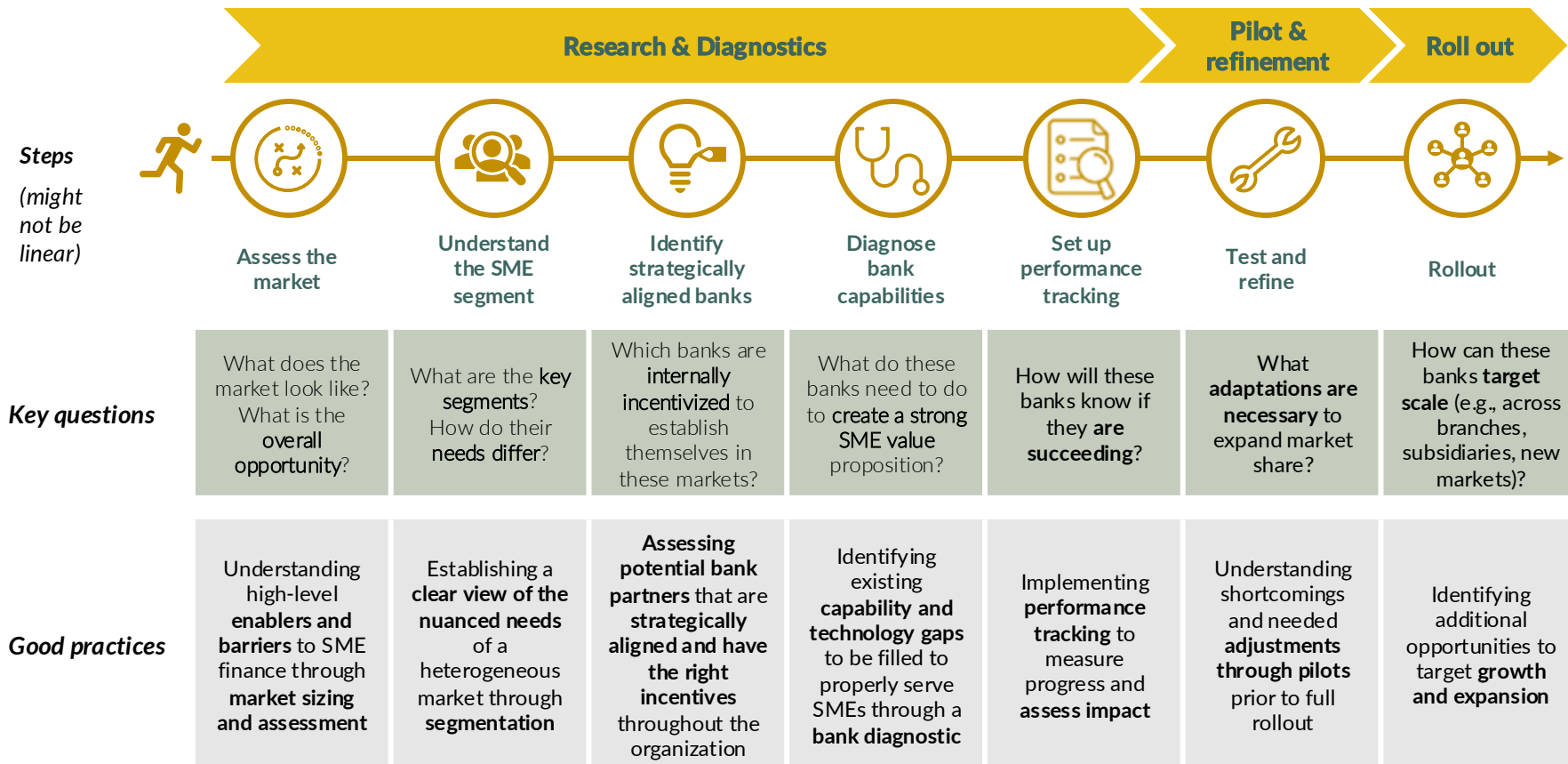
*A roadmap for mastering  
SME banking*



# INVEST is a process that supports funders and TA providers through the key steps and critical questions at each stage of the SME banking journey

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INVEST process



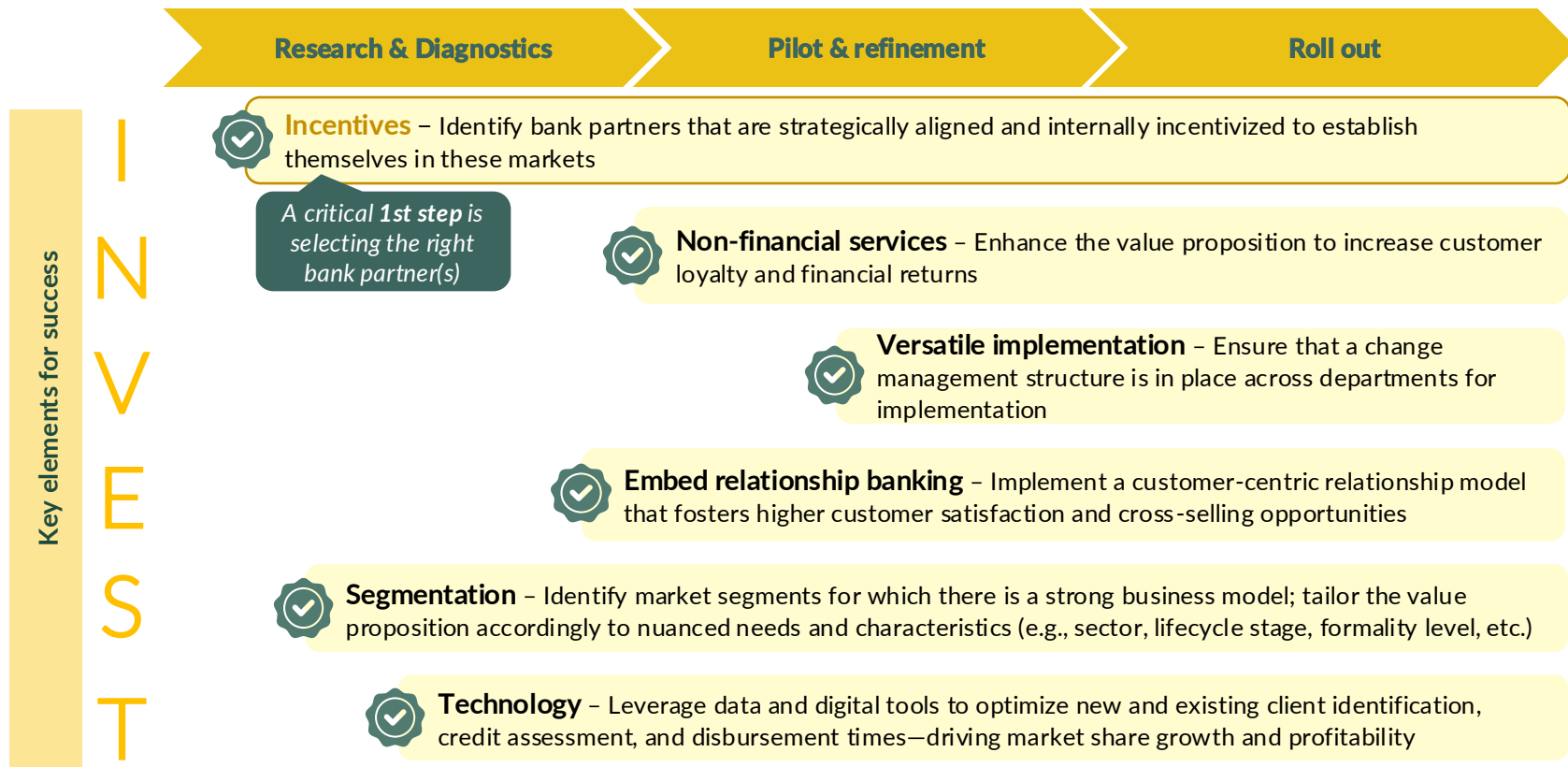
Note: The INVEST framework provides a simplified and generalized representation of elements of success applicable to the SME banking journey. It is intended for guiding purposes.



# The INVEST approach highlights that effective SME banking is a process, not a product, built on key elements for success

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INVEST process

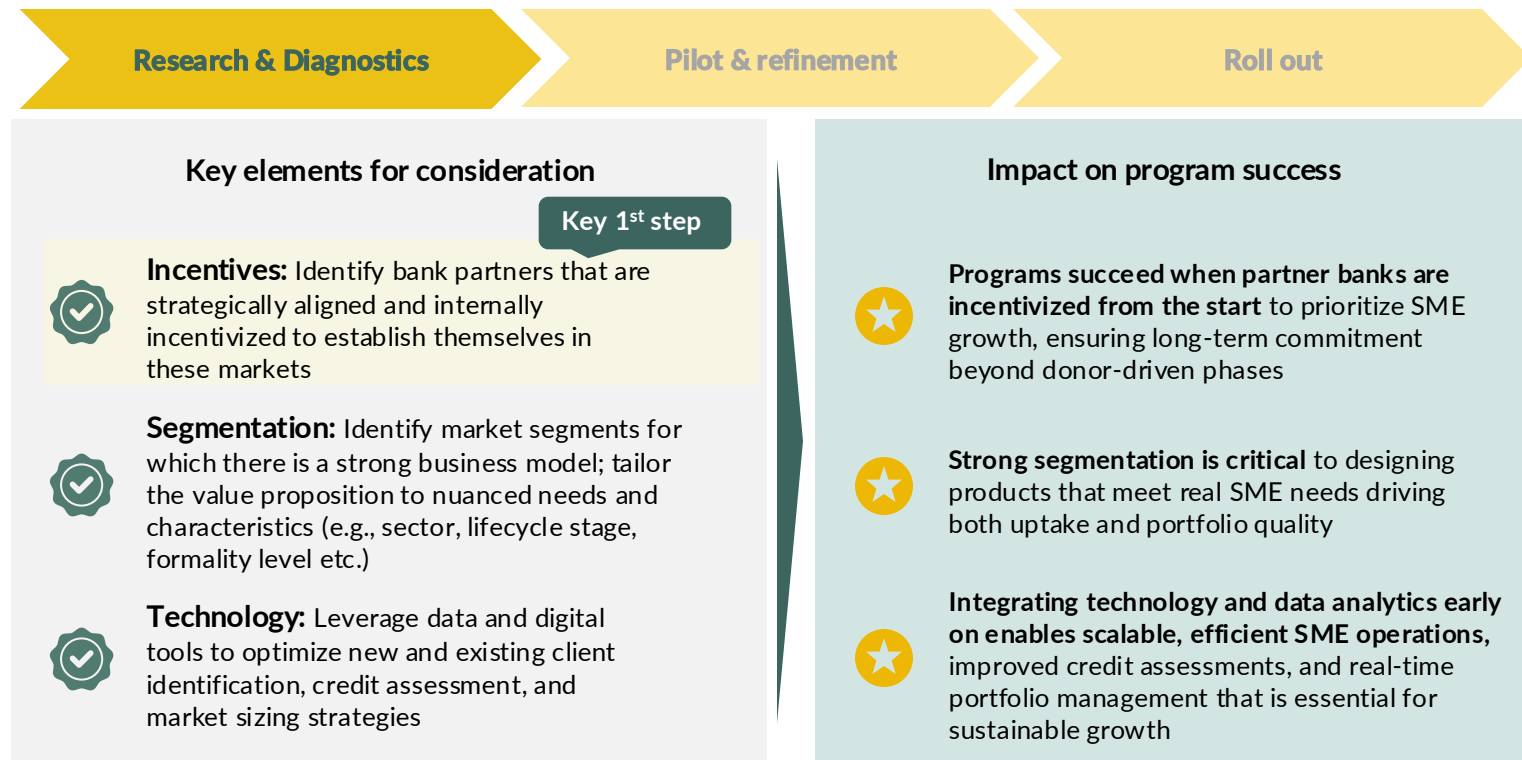


Note: The INVEST framework provides a simplified and generalized representation of elements of success applicable to the SME banking journey. It is intended for guiding purposes.



# The INVEST process starts with a research and diagnostics phase to identify the right partners and assess SME market potential

## INVEST



# The pilot and refinement phase is essential for testing and adapting SME banking models to ensure that they are effective and scalable

## INVEST

### Research & Diagnostics

### Pilot & refinement

### Roll out

#### Key elements for consideration



**Embed relationship banking:** Implement a customer-centric relationship model that fosters higher customer satisfaction and loyalty



**Non-financial services:** Broaden SME offerings beyond lending (e.g., transaction services, tax support, ESG advisory) to enhance the value proposition and expand cross-sell opportunities and financial returns



**Versatile implementation:** Ensure that a change management structure is in place across departments for implementation



**Technology:** Implement strong systems and strategies from the offset to enable quick decision-making, risk management, and performance tracking<sup>1</sup>

#### Impact on program success



Testing trainings and **designing a scalable relationship model** can support staff transitioning to customer-centric engagements



**Piloting non-financial services** helps tailor content, test delivery channels, and refine incentives to ensure relevance and scalability



**Designing change management structures** to ensure buy-in across key departments and weather personnel changes



**Introducing robust performance management systems** can help identify what's working and what needs to be adapted for scale-up



## INVEST

Research & Diagnostics

Pilot & refinement

Roll out

- ⊕ **Institutionalize and sustain:** The rollout stage can serve for standardizing the SME banking model within the bank's core systems, structures, and culture to ensure long-term sustainability.
- ⊕ **Align incentives at scale:** Ensure group-wide incentive structures and KPIs consistently reinforce the SME strategy across all branches and departments.
- ⊕ **Strengthen leadership continuity:** Focus on maintaining senior leadership engagement and cross-functional alignment to preserve momentum through staff changes, restructures, and transitions.
- ⊕ **Build performance monitoring discipline:** Prioritize using real-time dashboards and regular performance reviews to keep SME banking on leadership agendas and drive continuous improvement.
- ⊕ **Deliver consistently at scale:** Ensure that SME products, non-financial services, and the relationship model can be delivered consistently across all markets and branches, adapting where necessary for local contexts.



# *The INVEST Toolkit:*

*Tools that enable the SME  
banking journey*



# The INVEST Toolkit provides funders and TA providers with tools to apply the INVEST process and strengthen SME banking practices across diverse contexts

1 2 3 4

Order of use

## Research & Diagnostics



To evaluate the market opportunity and identify strategically aligned partners

- 1 Market assessment
- 2 Market sizing
- 3 Partner screening tool
- 4 Business case

## Pilot & refinement

## Roll out

Tools for TA funders

Tools for banks



To understand the TA needs of banks to effectively focus capacity building

- 5 Bank diagnostic
- 6 Segmentation tool\*
- 7 Enterprise needs assessment
- 8 Credit risk management primer



\*Note : Additional gender-focused resources—such as the WSME segmentation, WSME Toolkit, and additional case studies developed with WeFi Initiative —are available on the INVEST Toolkit website.

*"This is the first time I've seen such a comprehensive diagnostic for SME banking – it helps banks understand where they stand and how to move from transactions to real SME partnerships."*  
- Advisory Services Lead, DFI

*"This toolkit is very helpful – it takes out the real lessons, the pain points, and clearly how to overcome them. It's something I would recommend to everyone."*  
- Senior SME Banking Executive, Sub-Saharan Africa



To effectively track and communicate impact of programs

- 9 Bank performance dashboard
- 10 Case study template\*

\*Note: the case study template can also be leveraged to gain strategic alignment and advocate for program funding.





The INVEST Toolkit [can be found here](#)



# Each tool supports funders across the INVEST process, reinforcing key drivers of SME banking success

Order of use	Tools	Description	Key questions answered	Success factors reinforced
	1 Market assessment tool	<b>Excel-based model to help actors identify high-potential markets</b> for SME banking expansion, based on key enablers and constraints	What does the market look like?	<b>INVEST</b>
	2 Market sizing tool	<b>Excel-based model</b> to estimate MSME market size by firm type (e.g., micro, small, medium) and gender. Predicts headcount, financial needs, and revenue potential.	What is the <b>overall opportunity</b> ?	<b>INVEST</b>
	3 Partner screening and prioritization tool	<b>Excel-based partner screening and selection tool</b> to help TA funders screen and prioritize strategically aligned bank partners to deliver SME banking programs.	Which banks are <b>internally incentivized</b> to establish themselves in these markets?	<b>INVEST</b>
	4 Bank diagnostic tool	<b>Excel-based template</b> to help funders and banks assess existing capabilities and gaps that need to be addressed to deliver an SME-aligned value proposition.	What do these banks need to do to <b>create a strong SME value proposition</b> ?	<b>INVEST</b>
	5 Segmentation tool	<b>PDF conceptual overview</b> which provides a structured process to identify distinct SME profiles based on business characteristics, behaviors, and financial needs, with reference to two external Excel-based segmentation tools.	What are the <b>key segments</b> ? How do their <b>needs differ</b> ?	<b>INVEST</b>
	6 Credit risks management primer	<b>PDF primer</b> highlighting key internal credit risks banks face in SME banking, along with mitigation strategies and the potential role of TA, supported by real-world examples	What makes SME credit risk hard to assess? How can FSPs <b>strengthen their credit risk management processes</b> ?	<b>INVEST</b>
	7 Case study template	<b>An editable PowerPoint</b> template to help TA funders present their SME banking efforts, highlighting outcomes and program learnings	How will these banks know if they are <b>succeeding</b> ? And how can I <b>communicate outcomes</b> ?	<b>INVEST</b>



	Executive summary	Knowledge product	Toolkit	Toolkit guide
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TA Funders and Providers		 Current piece		
Banks	Find the bank version <a href="#">here</a> .	Find the bank version <a href="#">here</a> .		Find the bank version <a href="#">here</a> .

# The toolkit reflects the collective expertise of stakeholders and experts across the SME finance ecosystem

## Consortium partners



## Participating institutions / banks



Note: This report was made possible through support from the Argidius Foundation on behalf of the Growth Firms Alliance. It does not necessarily reflect the views of other GFA sponsors, who did not participate in its development.



*For more  
information visit*



*Thank you!*

**Dalberg**





# Annex

SME banking case studies  
and spotlights

# RBL Bank in India grew a multi-million-dollar SME portfolio by strengthening institutional capacity and embedding SME banking into its core business strategy



## Context and intervention

RBL Bank India implemented a multi-year SME banking program (2013–2016), with support from IFC and British International Investment, focused on:

- 1 **Adopting advanced screening and analytics tools** to design tailored SME credit products for underserved and high-growth businesses.
- 2 **Building SME-focused staff capacity** through extensive training in credit risk, relationship management, and liability management.
- 3 **Expanding non-financial services** by implementing a financial literacy program that reached over 35,000 individuals in rural areas.
- 4 **Piloting digital lending platforms and MIS upgrades** to strengthen data-driven decision-making, automate risk scoring, and improve SME loan tracking.

## Outcomes

Total capital mobilized



\$301M

Beneficiaries



18k+ SMEs

Jobs created



+5,600

## Lessons learned

### Enablers

- **Establishing strong institutional foundations for SME banking:** With IFC and BII's financial and advisory support, the bank strengthened its operating model, governance, and SME product suite.
- **Making SMEs a strategic business priority:** Defining SME finance an explicit pillar of RBL's business plan allowed leadership to allocate resources and align incentives toward growing this segment intentionally.
- **Upgrading governance and management capacity:** Strengthening corporate governance, risk oversight, and ESG systems improved management's ability to plan, supervise, and de-risk SME portfolios.

### Constraints

- **Limited gender integration:** The bank's SME initiatives could have incorporated a stronger gender focus, as lower outcomes among WSMEs highlighted the need for more targeted outreach and product design for this segment.
- **Limited resilience to external shocks:** SME activity declined sharply during India's demonetization, underscoring the need for stronger risk planning and adaptive mechanisms to sustain SME operations disruptions.
- **Gaps in measurement systems:** Reliance on self-reported and short-term data limited the bank's ability to track SME outcomes comprehensively.



Türk Ekonomi Bankası (TEB)

Partners



## Context and intervention

Since 2015, TEB has partnered with EBRD on the Women in Business initiative to expand opportunities for WSMEs in Turkey by:

- Providing business coaching and training for bankers** at the branch level to increase the internal capacity to work with WSMEs.
- Tailoring financial solutions** the unique business cycles, collateral preferences, and financial needs of WSMEs.
- Institutionalizing non-financial services for WSMEs** by launching dedicated trainings for WSMEs through a TV series format and creating an SME club to provide networking and peer support opportunities.
- Upgrading systems to track WSME progress** by implementing gender-segmented portfolio tracking, customer needs assessments, and improvements in outreach, targeting, and impact analysis.

## Outcomes

Total capital mobilized



\$327M

Beneficiaries



74k WSMEs

Share of SME loans



53% of loan book

## Lessons learned

### Enablers

- Designing for women's specific barriers:** The bank intentionally adapted lending and service models to address barriers that typically exclude women entrepreneurs (e.g., introducing gold collateral and flexible risk assessment methods).
- Defining and measuring the WSME segment:** Establishing a clear bank-wide definition of WSMEs and embedding measurement practices across departments strengthened targeting, data accuracy, and portfolio oversight.
- Investing in non-financial services as core business support:** Treating non-financial services as integral to business delivery, through coaching, peer networks, and retention-focused engagement, helped improve client satisfaction and loyalty and strengthening TEB's value proposition.

### Constraints

- Gaps in outreach and engagement:** Awareness of the full suite of WSME services remained limited, suggesting the need for stronger pre-onboarding.
- Limited tailoring for diverse WSME capacities:** Training and advisory services were not sufficiently differentiated by financial literacy or business maturity levels, limiting effectiveness for certain businesses types.
- Limited post-training business development support:** The bank's programs provided strong training but lacked mechanisms to connect women entrepreneurs to markets, constraining long-term business growth.



## Context and intervention

Between 2013 and 2015, BAC Nicaragua partnered with Enclude, with funding from the Argidius Foundation, to expand access to finance for SMEs by:

- 1 **Strengthening the SME Unit by embedding an SME banking specialist** within the bank focused on enhancing its strategy, operations, and staff capacity.
- 2 **Building staff capabilities** through formal training and coaching on SME relationship banking, marketing, credit analysis, and negotiation.
- 3 **Improving data and performance systems** by developing KPI-based reporting, portfolio monitoring tools, and process automation for the SME Unit.
- 4 **Strengthening SME processes** through workflow redesign, cash flow-based lending, and alignment with international SME banking best practices.

## Lessons learned

### Enablers

- **Developing specialized SME expertise:** Building internal capacity helped institutionalize SME best practices and strengthen relationship-based lending. This improved credit quality and positioned the SME Unit as a core growth area.
- **Enhancing staff capacity through training and mentoring:** Training on relationship banking, sales, and negotiation improved staff performance and client engagement, supporting portfolio growth.
- **Improving data-driven management:** Introducing KPI-based monitoring and mentoring MIS and product teams enhanced decision-making and accountability in SME portfolio management.

## Outcomes

Total capital mobilized



\$57M

Beneficiaries



+1.4k SMEs

NPL



2.8%  
(down by half)

### Constraints

- **Maintaining leadership continuity:** High staff turnover within the SME Unit reduced institutional memory and slowed implementation..
- **Strengthening coordination across departments:** Decentralized decision-making slowed automation and workflow upgrades. Stronger collaboration, especially with IT, could have improved systems integration.
- **Aligning incentives to performance:** Uniform pay structures limited SME officer motivation. Linking incentives to portfolio growth and client acquisition could have improved results and retention.

# BPR has mobilized \$35M at an increasing rate of disbursements, and reached 4,000 SMEs by enhancing its SME business banking proposition



Banque Populaire du Rwanda



## Context and intervention

Between 2019 and 2023, Banque Populaire du Rwanda (BPR) partnered with ConsumerCentrix (CCX) and the Argidius Foundation to strengthen its SME banking model and customer engagement. The program focused on:

- 1 **Building staff capacity** through training on relationship management, credit analysis, and portfolio oversight.
- 2 **Implementing a non-financial services strategy** to provide SMEs with business training, advisory, and networking opportunities.
- 3 **Refining customer segmentation** to tailor SME offerings to diverse market needs.
- 4 **Developing a performance dashboard** to track portfolio performance and staff engagement and enable robust decision-making.

## Outcomes

Total capital mobilized



\$35M & growing

Beneficiaries



35k SMEs

Staff trained



+40 staff members

## Lessons learned

### Enablers

- **Optimizing the SME business model:** The bank revised its segmentation, credit processes, and lending methodology to better reflect SME realities, enabling more accurate targeting and faster loan turnaround times.
- **Positioning SME banking as a strategic priority:** Leadership embedded SME growth into the bank's strategic agenda, which improved staff motivation and alignment around a unified SME value proposition.
- **Investing in customer-centric propositions:** Programs such as the Biashara Club, partnerships with the African Management Institute, and the SME Response Clinic created new touchpoints for learning and advisory support, helping SMEs build capacity and maintain engagement during COVID-19.

### Constraints

- **Managing transitions more proactively:** Leadership changes and the merger disrupted program momentum. Stronger SME ownership and continuity could have maintained progress during restructuring.
- **Aligning business targets with market potential:** SME goals focused on loan volume rather than outreach or diversification. Broader performance metrics could have better reflected market opportunities.
- **Reducing staff turnover to sustain training outcomes:** Frequent rotation of SME bankers limited the long-term impact of training.

# Stanbic Uganda's SME initiative illustrates how segmentation and non-financial services can strengthen SME engagement - even at modest scale



Stanbic Bank Uganda



## Context and intervention

Between 2019 and 2023, Stanbic Bank Uganda partnered with ConsumerCentrix (CCX), with funding from the Argidius Foundation, to strengthen its SME banking model through three main areas:

- 1 **Defining a clear SME strategy** by developing an SME segmentation study and a roadmap that included business model adjustments.
- 2 **Deploying capacity building** to strengthen bankers' SME capabilities through targeted upskilling opportunities.
- 3 **Strengthening non-financial and digital services** to enhance SME support, broaden reach, and increase client loyalty and cross-selling.

## Outcomes

Total capital mobilized



\$9M

Beneficiaries



1.5k SMEs

Users of Business Info Hub



6.5M unique users

## Lessons learned

### Enablers

- **Applied segmentation insights:** The bank used the SME segmentation findings to identify new opportunities (including WSMEs) and restructure its SME operations through the creation of the Business Centre.
- **Expanded non-financial services:** The bank strengthened SME engagement through the Business Incubator and the Business Info Hub.
- **Invested in staff capabilities:** Training business bankers in relationship management helped shift mindsets from transaction-based to consumer-centric banking, enabling cross-selling and deeper client engagement.
- **Leveraged digital channels:** The bank used digital platforms and social media to engage SMEs, increasing outreach and maintaining visibility during the pandemic.

### Constraints

- **Leadership turnover and limited ownership:** Frequent leadership changes and restructuring weakened continuity and ownership, hindering institutionalization of SME banking practices.
- **Insufficient internal communication and advocacy:** The SME strategy and results were not consistently communicated across departments or Group entities, limiting alignment and buy-in.
- **Strategic priorities not well understood across Group:** While SMEs were a clear priority for Stanbic Uganda, this was not the case at Group level, resulting in limited support for necessary structural changes.
- **Weak cross-department collaboration:** Limited coordination among key functions slowed follow-through on SME initiatives.
- **Lack of institutionalization:** SME processes, tools, and learnings were not fully embedded in core systems or performance frameworks, constraining sustainability beyond TA support.