



International
COCOA
Initiative



IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Village Savings and Loan Associations in cocoa communities

July 2025

This practical guide is designed for anyone interested in setting up VSLAs in cocoa-growing communities as a means to support child protection and address child labour.

The guide is divided into two parts. The first part describes the operating principles of VSLAs. The second part outlines how to design and set up a VSLA to support child protection and address child labour. Additionally, the guide offers practical recommendations for addressing common implementation challenges. It draws on ICI's experience implementing VSLAs in cocoa-producing communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

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VSLAs: An overview

What are VSLAs?

Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are community savings groups that encourage saving and borrowing in communities where access to formal financial services is limited. VSLAs provide a safe space for community members to save, access credit, receive support in personal emergencies, and build a social support network. These associations were first developed by CARE in Niger in the 1990s.

VSLAs are often targeted at women as part of efforts to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment in rural communities, where they may have fewer financial resources and opportunities than men.

Why set up VSLAs?

VSLAs are designed to help members of rural communities, regardless of their location or financial situation, mobilise financial resources on flexible terms, at low cost, and with very limited risk.

In cocoa-growing communities, where poverty and limited access to financial services are major challenges, VSLAs help increase household financial stability and contribute to overall well-being. By encouraging saving and enabling access to small loans, VSLAs allow cocoa-growing households to manage income fluctuations, afford child-related expenses, and cope with unexpected events, without relying on harmful coping strategies, such as child labour. Studies show that a VSLA in West African cocoa-growing communities mobilises an average of around USD 2,000 in savings per year and redistributes a large portion of this amount to its members in the form of internal loans (World Cocoa Foundation, 2024).

VSLAs are particularly impactful for women in cocoa-growing communities, including mothers of children involved in child labour. Through participation in VSLAs, women are empowered economically and socially through a new form of mutual aid tailored to their needs.

VSLAs can also contribute to the prevention of child labour and the promotion of child protection by strengthening household income and resilience, addressing poverty as a root cause of child labour. Furthermore, when women have greater income and economic independence, they are more likely to contribute to household expenses and take an active role in decisions that support their children's well-being, particularly their education, further increasing child protection and well-being.

VSLAs and child protection

By addressing the root causes of poverty in cocoa-growing communities, VSLA programmes help address child labour and promote children's welfare and protection.

- **Increasing household income and resilience.** VSLAs encourage savings and facilitate access to credit, allowing households to manage unexpected events and reduce reliance on negative coping strategies, such as child labour.
- **Supporting children's education.** Access to loans or savings enables households to cover school-related expenses, such as fees, uniforms, supplies, and meals, which helps reduce the likelihood of children accompanying their parents to work on plantations.
- **Empowering women economically and shifting household spending priorities.** When women have access to financial resources, they gain participation in household decision-making. This often leads to greater investments in their children's education, health, and well-being.
- **Strengthening community solidarity.** Access to a social fund enables households to cope with emergencies, without having to withdraw their children from school.
- **Reinforcing child protection through integration with CLMRS.** When in systems that prevent and remediate child labour, such as Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS), VSLAs can serve as a platform for raising community awareness of the harmful consequences of child labour.



PART ONE

How do VSLAs work?

VSLAs operate in cycles, which usually last between 9 to 12 months. During the cycle, VSLA members meet at regular intervals, usually once a week, and put their money into a common savings and loan fund. Each member deposits a fixed minimum amount, referred to as “one share”, which is defined by the group at the beginning of the cycle. Members can contribute more than one share per meeting, up to a maximum agreed by the group. These regular savings build the collective capital of the VSLA.

Once the fund begins to grow, members can take out loans, which they repay with a small interest or service charge. The maximum loan amount a member can receive is typically capped at three times their total contribution to the savings and loan fund, to prevent over-borrowing and encourage regular saving.

At the end of the cycle, on a date agreed in advance, the accumulated funds, including savings and service charges, are redistributed among all members, in proportion to their individual savings.

In addition to the savings and loan fund, VSLA members contribute to a separate social fund, which is managed and operated separately from the savings and loan fund. This social fund is designed to assist members facing emergencies and is granted either as a donation or as an interest-free loan. Members contribute to this fund in equal shares and decide, at the beginning of the cycle, the circumstances in which it can be mobilised (funerals, weddings, births, accidents, etc.).

A key characteristic of these savings associations is that they are entirely managed by their members. Every cent saved or earned by the association is generated by the members themselves.

10 Key operating principles of VSLAs

- **Principle 1:** VSLAs are autonomous and self-managed.
- **Principle 2:** VSLAs have between 15 and 30 members.
- **Principle 3:** Membership is open to all economically active individuals. In cocoa-growing communities, the participation of women, especially mothers of children involved in child labour, is strongly encouraged.
- **Principle 4:** Members save through buying shares. The value of a share is determined by the VSLA members at the beginning of each cycle. At each meeting, members buy 1 to 5 shares.
- **Principle 5:** Savings are pooled into a savings and loan fund from which members can borrow and repay with an interest or service charge. The association determines the service charge rate, which typically ranges between 5% and 20%.
- **Principle 6:** The associations set up a social fund to which members also contribute equally. The social fund, which is separate from the savings and loans fund, can be mobilised without any fee in emergencies.
- **Principle 7:** VSLAs meet regularly at intervals defined at the start of each cycle. The associations should meet weekly during the first cycle. This frequency may be reduced to once every two or four weeks in subsequent cycles, if the members so wish.
- **Principle 8:** All transactions are conducted during meetings attended by all members of the association, ensuring transparency and accountability. To prevent transactions outside of these regular meetings, as well as unauthorised fund movements or falsification of accounting records, the association uses a cash box secured with three keys, each held by a different member of the group.
- **Principle 9:** Each member has an individual account book to record their savings and borrowings. The association maintains a central register and a credit register to compile information for the entire group.
- **Principle 10:** The VSLA cycle is time limited. At the end of the agreed period — typically between 9 and 12 months — the accumulated savings and service-charge earnings are shared out among members in proportion to their contributions (or savings) during the cycle. After the share out, members who choose not to remain in the group may leave, and new members may be invited to join. At the start of a new cycle, members may agree to adjust the value of the standard share.

Governance and operation

VSLAs are formed autonomously and on a voluntary basis. A VSLA operates on the principle of democratic governance and has two governance bodies: a General Assembly (all members), a Management Committee (elected members). Other committees can be set up according to the needs of the group, such as the control committee, the action committee, the conflict management committee, etc.

General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) is made up of all VSLA members and serves as the main decision-making body of the group. It meets regularly, typically once a week, although the frequency can be adjusted to bi-weekly or monthly depending on the group's needs and progress.

At the beginning of each cycle, the General Assembly defines the operating rules that govern the VSLA, including:

- The value of a share (minimum savings contribution).
- Conditions to access loans and repayment terms, percentage and period.
- The amount of regular social fund contribution.
- Conditions for accessing the social fund.

- The methods for sharing funds at the end of the cycle.
- Fines for rule infringements.

The General Assembly ensures **transparent and inclusive decision-making**: group decisions are made through voting, and no one person can set the rules alone. For a decision of the General Assembly to be adopted, at least two-thirds of VSLA members must be present at the meeting.

There are two main types of General Assembly meetings:

1. **Savings meetings:** Every GA meeting is a savings meeting. It is where members contribute their savings by purchasing shares.
2. **Loan meetings:** Held every 2 to 4 weeks, as agreed at the beginning of the cycle. In these meetings, members can apply for and receive loans.

While loan applications are handled during loan meetings, loan repayments can be made during any regular meeting, unless the group has specifically decided otherwise in its internal rules.

General Assembly meetings are also an opportunity to provide training and information to the group and serve as a forum for resolving conflicts.

Management Committee

The Management Committee consists of 5 members elected by the General Assembly and is responsible for ensuring the association runs smoothly and for making sure the group adheres to the methodology. The Management Committee applies and enforces the rules adopted by the General Assembly and is responsible for holding meetings and representing the VSLA in dealings with third parties.

The Management Committee is composed of:

- Chairperson
- Records keeper
- Box keeper
- 2 Money counters



Good Practice

In mixed groups, men often dominate decision-making and management positions. To foster more inclusive governance, it is recommended that at least three out of the five elected management committee members be women. This helps ensure that women's perspectives are represented and contributes to creating a safe, supportive environment for all women in the group.

Key holders

In every VSLA, three members are elected as key holders, each responsible for one of the three keys to the association's lockable cash box. These individuals play a vital role in ensuring the security, transparency, and integrity of VSLA operations. To maintain checks and balances and promote transparency, key holders are not permitted to serve as members of the Management Committee.

Adapting VSLA governance to mobile money

In many cocoa-growing areas, some VSLAs have begun using mobile money to handle all contributions, loans, and repayments using mobile phones, reducing the need for the traditional cash box. While meetings still take place in person, the group adapts its safeguarding mechanisms to suit the digital format.

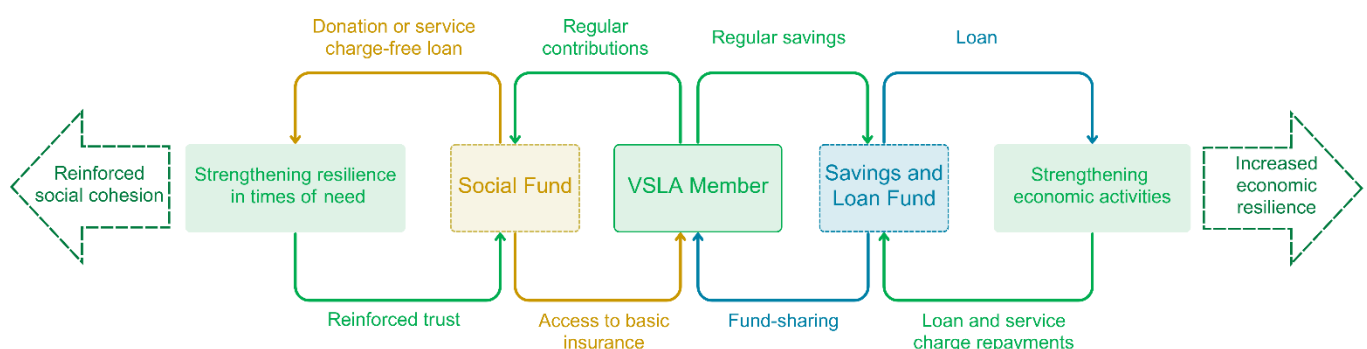
Instead of physical key-holders, designated members oversee digital transactions, verify mobile wallet balances, and jointly authorise or monitor all financial activities during group meetings. These roles serve the same purpose: ensuring accountability, transparency, and secure handling of the group's funds.

In a nutshell

- All members of the association are members of the General Assembly.
- All members have the same rights within the association. In elections, each member is entitled to one vote.
- A decision of the General Assembly can only be adopted if at least two-thirds of VSLA members are present at the meeting.
- All members have the right to be elected to the Association's Management Committee.
- Elected members of the management committee are not eligible to serve as key holders.
- The General Assembly elects the Management Committee for a term of office of 9-12 months at most. At the end of this term, new elections are held.
- The General Assembly, not the Management Committee, is responsible for establishing the association's rules and regulations through internal regulations.
- If the Management Committee fails to fulfil its responsibilities adequately, the General Assembly may replace it or any of its members by convening an extraordinary meeting to discuss the matter and vote on the changes.
- All members have the right to raise a point for discussion at meetings. These discussions take place at the end of the meeting, before closing.
- The General Assembly is the most powerful body of the association. It takes the decisions implemented by the Management Committee. In other words, the Management Committee works for the General Assembly.

Structure and management of funds

At the heart of a VSLA's operations are two key financial mechanisms: the savings and loan fund and the social fund. These funds are entirely built and managed by members, and they serve both economic and social purposes. Together, they enable members to access loans for income-generating activities, build resilience against financial shocks, and strengthen mutual support within the group. The diagram below outlines how these funds contribute to individual and community resilience.



The savings and loan fund

The savings and loan fund, also known as the "loan fund", is made up of:

- Shares purchased by members (savings).
- Loan service charges (interest rates).
- Fines paid by members for rule violations.

This fund allows members to take out loans. The maximum amount of credit available to a member is typically capped at three times the amount of their total savings. This restriction is agreed upon by all members at the start of the cycle.

The service charges, or interests, paid on loans belong to the members of the association. These are added to the fund and are redistributed at the end of the cycle in proportion to members' savings contributions.

Purpose of the loan

VSLA loans are only granted to VSLA members and are primarily intended to support income-generating activities, but in practice, groups may also agree to allow borrowing for other needs, such as healthcare, education, or house repairs. The purpose and conditions for loans should be agreed upon collectively at the beginning of the cycle. When a member applies for a loan, they present their request to the group, which then deliberates to decide whether to approve it.

Loan conditions

At the beginning of the cycle, members agree on a set of rules for accessing credit to prevent favouritism and disputes. These include:

- Maximum loan amounts.
- Monthly service charge rates, typically ranging from 5% to 20%.
- Loan repayment period.
- Penalties for late repayment.

These conditions are outlined in the VSLA's articles of association and internal regulations. Loan applications are then presented at general assembly meetings.

In most VSLAs, members are not required to provide a guarantor to access a loan. However, depending on the local context and the group's internal rules, some associations may choose to require one, particularly for larger loan amounts or when the borrower has limited savings.

Loan repayment period

During the first cycle, it is recommended that the association set a loan repayment period of 4 and 12 weeks, according to the realities of the community. In most VSLA models, loan repayments are made on a weekly basis. However, the frequency may vary depending on the group's meeting schedule and the specific terms agreed upon when the loan is issued.

The social fund

The social fund is a separate fund created through regular, fixed contributions from all VSLA members. It is designed to provide emergency support to members during both fortunate and unfortunate events.

At the beginning of the cycle, the General Assembly decides on the amount of the contribution per member and the conditions under which this fund can be accessed.

This fund represents basic insurance for VSLA members, who can access it to obtain emergency aid in the form of a donation or a loan with no service charge, as decided collectively.

Setting up the social fund also helps to secure the loan fund, preventing members from going into debt when facing an emergency. This fund also encourages **mutual aid** and guarantees **solidarity** and **cohesion** between the members of the association, all **key factors in the sustainability** and smooth running of the VSLA activities.

Sharing funds

The distribution of the **savings and loans fund** marks the end of a VSLA's operating cycle. Each member receives:

- The total amount of their savings
- A share of the group's profits, which was accumulated through the service charges from loans and fines collected during the cycle, which are then divided among the members in proportion to the amount saved by each.

The **social fund** is separate from the savings and loans fund and belongs to the association. If any money is left in the social fund at the end of the cycle, members decide collectively how to use it. This fund can support community social actions, such as purchasing desk-benches for the school, repairing the village pump, or serving as start-up capital for the social fund in the new cycle.

By recovering their savings plus a profit, members have even more confidence in the VSLA methodology, unlike other systems such as traditional tontines.



In a nutshell

- Taking a loan in a VSLA is optional; members who do not need one may choose to save only.
- The social fund is not shared out at the end of the cycle and is kept by the group for emergency support and social purposes.
- As with all the other rules and regulations of the association, the General Assembly decides on the terms and conditions of the establishment of the social fund, as well as the general conditions of access to this fund (method of operation, amount of donations depending on events, etc.).

PART TWO

How to set up a VSLA?

The process to become a fully functional and self-sustaining VSLA typically takes between 9 and 12 months and consists of 4 phases:



The VSLA's success depends on careful preparation, community engagement, and sustained support. This section provides a step-by-step guide for implementers looking to set up a VSLA in cocoa-growing communities. These steps fall under the Preparatory Phase and outline key actions and good practices to ensure the group is inclusive, functional, and sustainable over time.

1. Identifying communities

The first step in setting up a VSLA is to identify the target communities where the groups will be formed. The following criteria can be considered during the community identification process:

- Child labour prevalence.** When VSLAs are implemented as part of a Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS), the primary criterion for community selection should be the rate and number of children identified as being in or at risk of child labour within the community. VSLAs can contribute to the reduction of child labour by increasing household financial stability and resilience, especially through women's economic empowerment, which is strongly associated with greater investments in children's education and well-being. However, it is also important to anticipate and mitigate potential risks. As women

engage in more income-generating activities, the demand for labour may increase, which, if not accompanied by child protection messaging, could unintentionally raise the risk of child labour. Integrating awareness-raising and monitoring into VSLA programming can help address this.

- **Community interest and motivation.** Community selection should be based on the strong motivation of its members to participate, a willingness to learn, logistical accessibility for training, monitoring, and supervision activities. Additionally, the presence of existing informal savings or credit practices that can be strengthened may indicate a community's potential interest in adopting the VSLA model.
- **Social dynamics and cohesion.** Communities with high levels of trust, cooperation, and mutual support among different ethnic, religious, and social groups are more likely to sustain a successful VSLA. For the VSLA to function sustainably, it is essential to have a stable socio-political environment, free from internal conflict or risk of displacement. The active support and commitment of local leaders is key to long-term success.
- **Presence of existing VSLAs in the community.** To avoid confusion between different structures and prevent duplication of efforts, it is recommended not to establish new VSLAs in communities where similar groups have already been set up by other organisations. However, if establishing new groups in these areas is necessary or appropriate, it is advisable to engage with the existing VSLA community facilitator to coordinate facilitation and training efforts.

2. Mobilising the community and identifying members

Once the target community is identified, the next step is to secure approval from community leaders and carry out community mobilisation to identify potential members for the savings group.

Community mobilisation

Community mobilisation is a crucial step in establishing a VSLA. It begins with engaging and presenting the VSLA objectives and methodology to local leaders, including community leaders, cooperative managers, and other officials. The goal is to secure the endorsement and support of community leaders, as this is essential to building trust, encouraging participation, aligning with local norms, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the VSLA.

With their backing, an information session is then organised for the wider community. This session should aim to:

- Present the project and its objectives.
- Explain why the community was selected for action implementation.
- Discuss the advantages and limitations of group association.
- Present the specific benefits of the VSLA model in comparison to traditional tontines.
- Briefly explain how the VSLA model works.



Good Practice

In some communities, women's participation in financial activities may challenge traditional gender norms or be met with resistance. To ensure inclusive participation and avoid potential tensions within households, it is important to engage men early in the process. Organising dialogue sessions with husbands, family heads, and community leaders can help address concerns, clarify the objectives of the VSLA, and highlight the benefits of women's economic participation for the whole household, particularly in terms of children's well-being and household resilience. These conversations can foster greater understanding, mutual support, and buy-in from all members of the community.

Member identification

The VSLA model is based on free and voluntary membership.

At the community information meeting, all community members interested in participating in VSLA are invited to form groups of 15 to 30 people based on their relationships of trust. Mutual trust and social cohesion are fundamental principles of this methodology.

While members choose freely whom to join with, it is recommended that they consider the following characteristics when forming their group:

- Known and trusted by other members.
- Available to attend weekly meetings.
- Able to save consistently, particularly through an income-generating activity.
- Reside in the same community or village.

VSLA composition can be adapted to suit the specific objectives of different programmes. For example, women-only VSLAs, known as CFRECs (Cellules Féminines de Renforcement Économique) in ICI programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, are tailored to the unique needs of women in rural areas. These groups can be implemented as part of child protection initiatives and can provide women with a safe and supportive space to carry out their activities, which fosters confidence and active engagement in the life of the group.

VSLAs and child protection

When the establishment of a VSLA is part of broader efforts to prevent and address child labour, such as through a CLMRS, specific child protection considerations can guide community mobilisation and group formation.

During the preparatory phase, a targeted awareness-raising campaign can be organised to encourage the participation of households who may benefit most from the VSLA's protective efforts, including :

- Households with a large number of children.
- Households with children who are in school, not in school, or have dropped out.
- Individuals in vulnerable situations.
- Heads of households with at least three school-aged children.

In addition, CLMRS Personnel can play an active role by encouraging the households they monitor, particularly those at risk of child labour, to join a VSLA if they believe it would contribute to the household's stability and child's well-being.

3. Selecting a Community Facilitator

Although VSLAs are entirely managed by their members, their activities are continuously supervised and monitored by a Community Facilitator, a trusted community member. On a voluntary basis, the facilitator guides the members throughout the operating cycle, provides training, and prepares the group to manage their VSLA activities independently.

The Community Facilitator is recruited from within the community. Their candidature must be endorsed by VSLA members and approved by community leaders. This strong community anchoring strengthens trust and contributes to the sustainability of the group.

The Community Facilitator receives comprehensive training from the implementing organisation in all technical aspects of the VSLA methodology, including recordkeeping and financial literacy. They are also equipped with

key facilitation and community engagement skills, such as community mobilisation, awareness-raising techniques, conflict resolution, group dynamics, and participatory training methods. Additionally, it is recommended that the Community Facilitator be trained in child protection and safeguarding to ensure they are sensitive to child well-being and welfare concerns.

Once trained by the implementing organisation, the facilitator takes full ownership of the VSLA methodology and plays a key role in strengthening its adoption. **The Community Facilitator does not manage or control the group's funds; their role is strictly limited to providing technical support.**

Main responsibilities of Community Facilitators include:

- Providing initial training and capacity building for members.
- Attending all meetings during the intensive phase.
- Monitoring and supervising the group throughout its operating cycle.
- Offering technical support and overseeing group operations.
- Assisting with administrative tasks, such as maintaining the register and completing members' account notebooks when no literate secretary is available and supporting the drafting of key group documents.
- Facilitating mediation and conflict resolution when needed.

Desired qualities of Community Facilitators include:

- Basic literacy – ability to read and write.
- Numeracy skills – ability to perform basic calculations.
- Reliability and integrity – trusted by the community and committed to ethical conduct.
- Motivation and availability – willing and able to dedicate several hours per week to VSLA activities.



Good Practice

The VSLA methodology does not require the Community Facilitator to be a member of the group they supervise. However, ICI's experience shows that facilitator membership in a VSLA can enhance their motivation and commitment to monitoring and supervision activities.

4. Training members

The member training process plays a fundamental role in the establishment of a VSLA and is carried out over a period of four months.

During this period, VSLA members receive training designed to prepare them to manage their association independently. Most of the training will be delivered by the Community Facilitator. Training sessions are held weekly in the form of meetings, during which a specific thematic training module is presented to the group. The seven training modules are as follows:

- **Module 1:** Group formation, leadership, and elections
- **Module 2:** Development of policies governing the social fund, savings/share-purchase, and loans
- **Module 3:** Drafting of the association's internal regulations
- **Module 4:** First savings/share purchase and recordkeeping meeting
- **Module 5:** First loan disbursement and recordkeeping meeting
- **Module 6:** First loan repayment procedures
- **Module 7:** Fund sharing and end-of-cycle procedures

The first six modules should be delivered within the first three months (intensive phase). The 7th module, focused on fund sharing, is delivered at the end of the cycle.

In addition to the core VSLA training modules, complementary modules may be integrated to align with the specific objectives of a given project, while also ensuring ongoing training for the members. This is particularly relevant when VSLAs are implemented as part of broader efforts to prevent and combat child labour. These modules reinforce the contribution of VSLAs to child protection and gender equality, and may include:

- Key concepts related to the worst forms of child labour, child protection, and awareness-raising techniques.
- Gender and women's empowerment training.
- Simplified recordkeeping and household budget management.
- Child protection and safeguarding.
- Literacy training.
- Entrepreneurship and income-generating activities.
- Responsible use of pesticides.



Good Practice

Integrating the [Gender Action Learning System](#) (GALS) methodology into the VSLA approach is a best practice that enhances both the economic and social impact of the groups.

The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) is a community-led empowerment methodology that uses participatory processes and simple diagram tools to help women and men take greater control over their lives. It promotes positive change at the individual, household, community, and organisational levels.

Topics covered during GALS training often include parenting skills, communication and conflict-resolution within couples, equitable roles and decision-making in the household, and financial planning. These sessions help participants build respectful, collaborative relationships while aligning household priorities with long-term goals for well-being and prosperity.

While the VSLA model provides a structured framework for savings, loans, and financial solidarity, the GALS approach introduces a critical dimension of individual and collective empowerment, particularly for women. It encourages members to reflect on life goals, challenge restrictive gender norms, and build a shared vision rooted in equity and social justice.

This synergy not only strengthens group cohesion but also drives lasting transformation in power dynamics within households and communities. In this way, the integration of GALS into the VSLA model is more than a methodological enhancement; it is a strategic lever for more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development.

5. Equipping VSLAs

To ensure that VSLAs function effectively, the implementing organisation should provide a complete equipment kit to support the smooth operation of the group during its first cycle.

While the content of the kit may vary slightly depending on country-specific practices and implementing partner preferences, a typical VSLA kit includes the following items:

- 1 compartmentalised metal box with three keys (Dimensions: 30 cm L × 22 cm W × 20 cm H) for storing funds
- 3 padlocks to secure the cash box
- 30 passbooks (around 40-50 pages each) to record individual member transactions

- 3 plastic bowls of identical size and different colours (yellow, dark green, white), each approx. 0.5 kg for collecting different types of funds (savings, social fund contributions, fines).
- 3 cloth bags with drawstrings, matching the bowl colours (yellow, dark green, white); purse-size: 30 cm L × 20 cm W for storing different types of funds (savings, social fund, fines)
- 2 wooden stamps to mark in members' passbooks the number of savings shares contributed by a member
- 1 ink pad for stamping
- 1 wooden measuring stick (double decimetre, 20 cm) to record entries in the central cash register
- 1 wooden ruler (30 cm) to record entries in the central cash register
- 2 ballpoint pens (one red, one blue) to mark the transactions (red for fines, blue for regular transactions)
- 1 12-digit desk calculator to aid in accounting and performing calculations
- 1 cash register to record and centralise all transactions (savings + fines + social fund contributions).
- 1 loan and repayment register to centralise and monitor all credit-related transactions.
- 1 meeting minutes book to record group meetings, decisions made, etc.
- 1 member register to keep a register of group members.
- 1 visitor's logbook to document external visits.

Keep in mind

- Using **lockable cash boxes** is essential for promoting and maintaining **trust in the system**. A lockable box ensures that transactions can only be carried out in the presence of all members and that records are only modified with the collective consent of the group.
- The exact **content of the kit may vary** across the contexts. For example, some VSLAs may use only two plastic bowls/two cloth bags – one for the savings and loan fund and another for the social fund. While other VSLAs may use numbered cards to identify the members.
- Most items in the kit can be reused across multiple cycles. However, **personal account notebooks** must be **renewed** by the VSLA **at the start of each cycle**.
- To facilitate the acquisition of passbook, it is recommended that the implementing organisation establish a **partnership with a local printing provider** and **sell the notebooks directly to VSLAs** that need them. It is also advisable to **print the price on each notebook to reduce the risk of fraud by intermediaries**.

6. Supporting long-term sustainability

The fund-sharing process marks the end of the VSLA's operating cycle, and consequently, concludes the mandate of the Management. To initiate a new cycle, the outgoing Management Committee convenes a General Assembly. If some members have left the association by the end of the cycle, the committee also invites new individuals interested in joining. Once the membership for the new cycle is confirmed, a date is set for the next meeting, during which the association will restart the entire process from the beginning.

It is not uncommon for spontaneous VSLAs to emerge within communities following the successful implementation of a formal VSLA. When members recognise the benefits of the model, they often replicate it independently. This demonstrates strong community ownership of the methodology. Most of these groups continue to operate autonomously for several years, often lasting over three cycles. Community Facilitators should therefore be aware of this phenomenon and prepared to support the creation and training of VSLAs that are spontaneously formed beyond the project's originally intended reach.



Good Practice

A number of factors can contribute to the sustainability of VSLAs, ensuring their continued operation and long-term impact within the community:

- **Strong social cohesion:** A strong sense of mutual understanding and trust among members fosters cooperation and enables effective collective management of the group.
- **Continued Monitoring & institutional support:** Continued support from implementing organisation and local authorities can play a crucial role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of VSLAs.
- **Adaptation to the local context:** Although the VSLA model is already functioning effectively in the country, it is essential to analyse the specific social, cultural, and economic contexts of each community. This enables the implementation of the activity — such as awareness-raising activities and member identification criteria — to be adapted to local realities, ensuring that the approach is better understood, accepted, and effective on the ground.
- **Strengthening income-generating activities:** Providing support for the creation and maintenance of income-generating activities, in a way that is *context-specific* and *aligned with the real needs and capacities of local communities*, can contribute to the sustainability of VSLA activities.
- **Ongoing training:** Regular support through refresher trainings can help maintain member motivation and ensure the correct and consistent application of the core VSLA methodology.

Additional resources

- Learning into Action brief: [VSLA in cocoa communities](#)
- [VSLA 101](#) (Care International)
- [VSLA Facilitator Guide \(International Rescue Committee\)](#)
- “Through village savings groups, farmers benefit from financial tools and improved household dynamics alike”, [World Cocoa Foundation](#), 2024
- [VSLA Constitution Template](#)
- [VSLA Meeting Procedure](#)



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