

Wajibu: NMB Bank's Youth-Centered Savings Program

Despite the expansion of financial services in Tanzania, meaningful engagement with formal institutions has remained limited, particularly for women and youth. As of 2017, only 42% of women and 52% of men held a formal account, while far fewer actively saved through these channels. This gap highlights that access alone is insufficient; financial behaviors depend on habits and trust, which are most effectively developed early in life.

To address this, NMB Bank launched Wajibu, a youth-focused initiative combining tailored savings accounts for different age groups with financial education delivered in schools to both students and parents. Beginning with a pilot and later scaling to reach over 11,000 participants between 2016 and 2018, the program significantly increased saving behavior and strengthened family engagement with financial decision-making, demonstrating the value of pairing access with capability-building to drive sustained financial inclusion.

Quick facts

Barriers addressed



Product & Market Design

Inflexible product terms
Low scalability of products



Consumer Protection

Distance from financial service points

Segment focus

1 2 3 4

Geography

Tanzania

Customer Journey Relevance



Key stakeholders involved

NMB
Women's World Banking
Financial Sector Deepening Africa

NMB Bank's Youth-Centered Savings Program

Key activities

To improve youth savings and engagement with formal financial institutions, NMB implemented the Wajibu initiative between 2016 and 2018. The program combined age-appropriate savings products with school-based financial education. Together, these elements were designed to address the barriers that had historically limited young people's access to and trust in banking services.

- **Development of youth accounts:** Wajibu consisted of three products tailored to different life stages: **Mtoto Akaunti**, a parent-controlled savings account for children up to age 17; **Chipukizi Akaunti**, which allowed adolescents aged 13–17 to open and manage accounts in their own names; and **Mwanachuo Akaunti** for university students and young adults aged 18 and above. This tiered structure ensured that children, teens, and students could all access formal savings in ways appropriate to their age and level of independence.
- **School-based outreach and financial education:** Through the “Jifunze, Jipange – Wajibika!” program, trained facilitators delivered sessions in schools for both youth and parents. These

sessions taught the importance of saving, planning, and distinguishing between needs and wants. Posters and guides reinforced learning, while sessions with parents helped build family-level support for saving practices.

- **Institutional alignment and staff training:** Bank staff trained on youth engagement and deployed to schools to support account opening and deliver financial education.

Outcomes/results

- Among youth who attended training, the proportion saving increased from 23% at baseline to 61% at endline. Young people also reported saving larger amounts and were more likely to visit banks to seek information from staff. Girls were more likely to save money, while boys were more likely to seek advice directly from bank officials.
- While most youth continued to see their parents as their primary source of financial information, some students began encouraging their parents to save formally after the training: 73% of youth asked parents to open an account, though only 32% of parents eventually did open an account.

NMB Bank's Youth-Centered Savings Program

- Parents who attended the financial capability training became more likely to guide their children on financial matters. At the start of the program, about 73% reported doing so, and this rose to 81% by the end of the study. Parents also became significantly more likely to save in a bank, increasing from 13% to 37% over the same period.
- For NMB, the initiative created a structured approach to engaging the youth segment. Staff received training on youth engagement, branches were actively involved in school outreach, and financial education became part of the bank's customer engagement strategy.
- While the financial capability training produced strong gains in saving behavior among youth and parents, the increase in account openings was more modest. This underscored the importance of linking financial education more directly with product activation so that behavioral change is fully reflected in sustained account usage.

Key enabling environment factors for the intervention

- **Large youth population and unmet need:** Tanzania's young demographic and low levels of formal saving created both a challenge and an opportunity. Many adolescents lacked access to suitable products, while parents expressed concern about how their children managed money.
- **Supportive school leadership:** The cooperation of school principals and teachers helped sustain student participation. School staff coordinated sessions with NMB facilitators and reinforced messages about the value of saving, which was critical for ensuring continuity of engagement.
- **NMB's institutional commitment:** Internally, there was growing recognition of youth as a strategic segment for NMB. This alignment ensured that youth accounts and financial education received dedicated resources, branch-level participation, and sustained management attention. NMB's broad branch and agent network also provided a foundation for scaling outreach.

NMB Bank's Youth-Centered Savings Program

Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes

- **Practical delivery mechanisms:** To ensure accessibility, NMB relied on simple, low-tech delivery tools. Passbooks were provided to help youth track balances and develop saving habits, and school visits created a trusted environment for interaction with bank staff. Parent-controlled accounts and youth-managed accounts were both integrated into this model, reinforcing the role of families alongside students in building sustainable savings behavior.
- **School networks as trusted entry points:** Schools provided a centralized and credible platform for reaching youth and parents. By partnering with school leadership, NMB facilitators were able to deliver financial capability sessions, coordinate account opening activities, and integrate financial education into students' everyday environments.

Potential for scale/replicability

NMB's youth savings initiative shows clear potential for scale and replication across youth populations. The model leverages existing infrastructure and behaviors and can be adapted to different regulatory and educational contexts.

- **Scalable delivery via school networks:** Working through schools provided efficient access to large numbers of students and parents in trusted settings. While the original program operated in selected schools across regions between 2016 and 2018, this channel can be extended to additional schools and geographies where similar school partnerships are feasible.
- **Replicable youth-product architecture:** Offering a tiered set of accounts that map to life stages (parent-controlled for children, independent teen accounts where permitted, and student accounts for 18+) is a product pattern other institutions can adopt, with parameters tailored to local regulation on minors, consent, and identification.
- **Evidence of engagement, with a conversion gap to address:** The program generated strong behavioral shifts among youth

NMB Bank's Youth-Centered Savings Program

youth and parents. At the same time, account uptake was modest relative to reach. For scale, institutions should plan explicit bridges from education to activation (e.g., on-site account opening with guardians present, simplified documentation within regulatory bounds, follow-ups after training).

- **Institutional readiness as a prerequisite:** NMB's broad branch/agent footprint and staff mobilization supported implementation at the time. Institutions seeking to replicate should ensure cross-department coordination, branch participation in school outreach, and clear ownership for youth segments before attempting to scale.
- **Timeframe note for replication:** Although the pilot and rollout took place in 2016–2018, the design lessons remain relevant. Replication today should adapt to current regulations on youth banking and contemporary school engagement practices, while retaining the program's central linkage of education with age-appropriate products.

Challenges encountered during the program

- **Complex account opening requirements for minors:** Opening accounts for those under 18 required coordination with parents or guardians. In rural areas, this often caused delays when parents could not easily attend school-based account opening sessions.
- **School policy constraints on access:** In some schools, students were not permitted to leave campus to visit banking agents or branches. To address this, NMB delivered account opening activities and financial education sessions directly in schools, reducing the need for students to travel off-site.
- **Sustaining engagement beyond initial uptake:** Many students showed enthusiasm at the point of account opening, but maintaining regular saving behavior required consistent motivation and reinforcement, which was difficult to sustain across dispersed schools.
- **Operational and resource challenges:** Reaching dispersed schools and coordinating with parents, teachers, and facilitators required significant logistical planning and staff commitment.

NMB Bank's Youth-Centered Savings Program

Recommendations from the research

- **Design products that match youth realities:** Account for the role of parents or guardians in financial decision-making and offer tiered, age-appropriate products that evolve with a young person's independence.
- **Leverage schools as trusted access points:** Schools can be effective entry points for reaching large numbers of youth and parents in a structured setting to provide financial education, facilitate account opening, and build trust in banking.
- **Simplify account opening for minors:** Reducing requirements around guardian consent and ID, while maintaining compliance, can significantly improve access.
- **Sustain engagement through continued education:** One-time interventions are not enough—continued financial education plays a critical role in maintaining saving habits.
- **Ensure institutional readiness:** Youth-focused programs require strong institutional commitment. Banks must invest in staff capacity and inter-departmental coordination.

“

Wajibu increased saving behavior and strengthened family engagement with financial decision-making, demonstrating the value of pairing access with capability-building to drive sustained financial inclusion