Enabling Women's Financial Inclusion through Digital Financial Literacy
A Synthesis of FinEquity Members' Insights
May 2021

This brief is a FinEquity community effort and we hope it can help the financial inclusion community understand digital financial literacy and better address this component of the digital financial services gender gap. This synthesis is organized by enablers (**literacy, numeracy, access, awareness** and **design**) and their associated challenges, and highlights the **cross-cutting constraint** (social norms). This framework helps unpack the different dimensions of digital financial literacy and demonstrate why they should not be tackled in isolation as they are very much connected. The brief also includes four **case studies** of organizations addressing DFL in their work in countries such as Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Ghana.
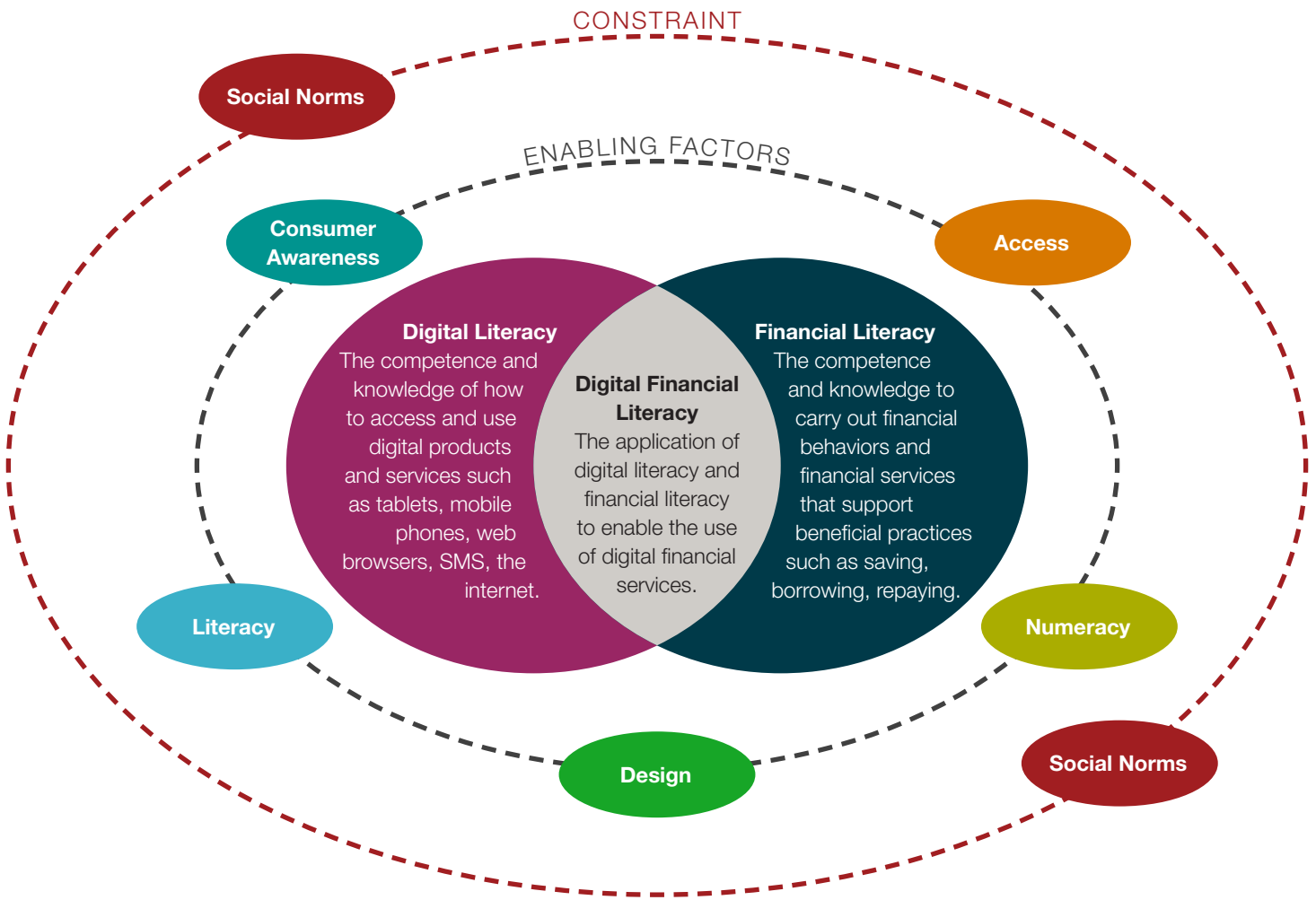
Introduction

The last decade has seen a rapid increase in digital and financial inclusion. Thanks to widespread mobile phone ownership and a rise in mobile and agent banking, more people than ever before have bank accounts that they can use in their everyday lives. However, a persistent gender gap in both mobile phone ownership (7 percentage points) and bank account ownership (9 percentage points), which impacts access to digital financial services (DFS), remains in developing economies[1]. Several factors, such as cost, accessibility, social norms, and digital financial literacy (DFL), are contributing to this disparity (Highet, Salman, and Singh 2020).

Digital financial literacy (DFL), also called digital financial capability, sits at the intersection of digital literacy and financial literacy and enables users to take full advantage of DFS. To date, analyses specifically addressing DFL have been limited. The research and policy advice network for the G20, Think 20 (T20), noted the need to promote digital financial literacy for the digital age, highlighting it in one of its fifteen key policy briefs. Several other organizations, such as GSMA, USAID, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have indicated its importance and have undertaken work in this space. In mid-2020, FinEquity hosted an e-discussion to examine key factors that enable DFL, such as literacy, numeracy, social norms, design, access, and consumer awareness. During this three-

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1   See GSMA Connected Women, 2020 and Global Findex 2017

FIGURE 1. **Digital Financial Literacy**

FIGURE 1. Digital Financial Literacy

CONSTRAINT

ENABLING FACTORS

Social Norms

Consumer Awareness

Access

Digital Literacy
The competence and knowledge of how to access and use digital products and services such as tablets, mobile phones, web browsers, SMS, the internet.

Digital Financial Literacy
The application of digital literacy and financial literacy to enable the use of digital financial services.

Financial Literacy
The competence and knowledge to carry out financial behaviors and financial services that support beneficial practices such as saving, borrowing, repaying.

Literacy

Numeracy

Design

Social Norms

week exchange, more than eighty contributions were received, providing a rich picture of how women's DFL is being experienced and approached[2].

Digital financial literacy is increasingly seen as a key component to address women's limited use of digital financial services. For example, Women's World Banking (WWB) and the Center for Financial Inclusion (CFI) have recently published reports with a focus on this subject[3].

This FinEquity brief outlines how components of DFL promote digital financial inclusion, while taking into account the challenges to the various DFL enablers, offers a practical guide that helps the community think through the obstacles for the end-user, and provides recommendations to practitioners.

We have provided a *composite* definition for each enabler and constraint, demonstrating the key elements relating to DFL and a selection of some of the many key resources the

2   This conversation was referred to as a "DGroups dialogue" during the three-week online conversation, but it is referred to as an "e-discussion" in this document. Summaries of the six discussions can be found here

3   See: Women's World Banking *Empowering Women on a Journey Towards Digital Financial Capability* https://www.womensworldbanking.org/insights-and-impact/empowering-women-on-a-journey-to-wards-digital-financial-capability/ and forthcoming Center for Financial Inclusion's report *Building Women's Financial Capability: A Path Toward Transformation*

FinEquity community shared over the e-discussion. The synthesis begins by offering several cross-enable guiding principles, which apply to all enablers, and then showcases four case studies of organizations addressing DFL in their work.

Good principles for DFL program design

Throughout the six conversations, several recommendations were repeatedly made and applied to the enablers and constraints, acting as general good principles for program design.

- **Understand the user:** Don't assume or expect base levels of literacy, numeracy, or access, for example. It is important to start from a place of inquiry and understanding of the potential user's capabilities. By spending time with the user, understanding how she uses and thinks about financial services, acknowledging the creative solutions she deploys, and gaining a sense of the community that can support (or hinder) her journey into DFS, we can better inform the services we build.

- **Be wary of the solution in search of the problem:** As with *Understand the User*, it is important to lead with the problem (rather than a pre-ordained solution). This enables us to be more creative and to arrive at an outcome that is a good community fit – be it digital, paper-based, or other.

- **Look for teachable moments:** DFL can feel quite abstract until there is a clear need. Ensuring that there is guidance, appropriate support, and recourse mechanisms at the point of actioning newly learned skills can provide reinforcement of exercises that may have previously felt theoretical or intimidating. This requires employers, peer educators, agents, or other potential teachers to have appropriate information and advice at hand through the process.

- **Test, test, test:** It is vital to test early and often, even during the research phase. This will offer you a strong indication of how well your products and services resonate with your end-user and give you clear feedback on what is not working. In addition to this, as you are testing, pull your assumptions as far apart as possible, so you can tease out and understand what is constraining or enabling DFL, and, ultimately, position efforts to improve the end-user's DFL.

- **Use multi-pronged media:** Employing a combination of different approaches, such as storytelling, comic books, workbooks, and radio dramas helps us better impart knowledge to diverse audiences. Furthermore, repeating lessons with different formats can enhance the acquisition of this new knowledge.

- **Look for the gendered-social norms at play:** As noted earlier, *norms are a constraint rather than an enabler* and can deeply impact all enablers. This includes the ability to gain an education and consequently impact literacy and/or numeracy; access to a mobile agent, connectivity, electricity, and bank accounts, just to name a few brief examples.

- **Fun is fun:** There is no reason DFL has to be a burden for women: gamification and entertainment are highly effective ways of introducing and building knowledge around DFS in a manner that doesn't feel like a chore for the consumer, which can also dramatically improve uptake and usage.

Literacy as an enabler to DFL

"If we make literacy necessary for building (digital) capabilities, or even for onboarding first-time users into our DFS tools, are low-literate populations being needlessly left out from the use of these tools? How could our uncritical use of the written word exclude populations." — Matt Wallace, ONOW Myanmar

Key elements of literacy in the context of DFL

The ability and comfort level of the users to read the text in a language, script, and description that makes sense to them, alongside the attitude that acknowledges the value of being able to read the screen as well as the confidence to do so in a manner that will, eventually, allow them to act if they choose to.

Key challenges for low-literacy women in DFL

- **Unfamiliar terminology:** While terms such as "cash transfer," "insurance," or "PIN" may be well-known to practitioners, such terminology is not always obvious or succinctly translatable for the end-user, who may be encountering them for the first time and could, therefore, be unable to understand what capabilities the service has to offer.

- **User interfaces that are not designed for non-English scripts:** Not all interfaces (particularly those of basic and feature phones) allow different scripts (e.g., Khmer or Urdu), sufficient spacing, or correct direction for the script, which creates difficulties for those who are not literate in English or other default setting languages to navigate to the desired functions.

- **Literacy as a pre-requisite further disadvantages women:** When DFS are designed on an assumption of user literacy, they provide a further challenge to women, who are less likely to be literate than men. Providers do not always offer information in a format that works for the user but a format that is built on their own (provider) capabilities, that is, text-based instruction, which women cannot read. If gendered-social norms limit a girl or woman's education, this could result in lower literacy levels, which will, in turn, impact her ability to effectively engage with DFL.

Recommendations for practitioners

- **Design for both tech and human touch:** Literacy includes gaining comfort, confidence, and familiarity with technology. Even when a person has a certain degree of literacy, it is important to ensure that some physical assistance is still accessible to navigate digital financial products and services. This could be FSP staff, a family member, or others, but it is important to ensure that such support structures exist to bolster the literacy capabilities of the women who are struggling.

- **Leverage social norms in group engagement to employ peer-led training:** When groups of peers train other groups of peers in an everyday environment (for example a factory or market setting), there can be several positive outcomes. This approach can help entrench knowledge in the community by exploiting the ongoing presence of the "trained professionals" and making it easier for people to seek advice in an informal manner. It can also reach a greater scale through the "Training of Trainer" approach and empower some members as trainers. However, it is important to avoid

reinforcing existing power inequities within a community by selecting the existing power brokers as peer leaders.

Useful resources

- Microfinance Opportunities (MFO's) report on wage digitization in Bangladesh
- Good Return's work on nudging and tracking financial behaviors (using icons and audio)
- Brett Mathews' paper on the Hidden constraints to digital financial inclusion: the oral-literate divide
- The BOMA Project's Graduation Program in North Kenya

Numeracy as an enabler to DFL

"What do you think it would mean to be unable to read or write a number longer than 2 digits? How would it impact the life of a poor woman - perhaps one who has a mobile money account, or hopes to have one? Do you know any people like this?"
— Brett Matthews, My Oral Village

"Innumerate adults often write down phone numbers and dial them later. This has fooled many of us into thinking that a person who can do this can write a 'send' amount in a mobile wallet's input field without help. But to do the first we just copy digits. To do the second we must use place value to independently compose a digit-string."
— Brett Matthews, My Oral Village

Key elements of numeracy in the context of DFL

The skills to understand and work with numbers to navigate DFS in real-time, including the following three components: **sensory** (e.g., I see three 100 Kwacha notes, I can navigate the menu on my phone), **spoken code** (e.g., I ask the agent to help me send three hundred Kwacha to my uncle), and **written code** (e.g. I use my phone to send 300 Kwacha to my uncle and can see the 30 Kwacha fee deducted, I can read the time and date when I sent the money). In short form, it could also be described as *"the ability to read a number between $10 and $100 in the respondent's local currency, without help."*

Key challenges for low-numeracy women

- **Innumerate women can be dependent on visual shortcuts:** Female clients can also be reliant on mental hacks that allow them to navigate transactions but are not easily reflected in app interfaces and do not consider the way they may approach numbers. For example, she may be able to recognize the design and color of different money denominations, but if a product is based on an assumption of numeracy, it will remain out of reach.
- **Innumeracy creates a ceiling for the transactions women can engage in:** Women without greater numeracy (the ability to read and write digit strings such as 1,300) are unlikely to achieve meaningful formal financial inclusion. However, having such numeracy does not guarantee financial inclusion. Furthermore, if low-numerate women's movement and access are limited, they may not be able to leave the house or village to access translation of numeric code when they get messages, for example, an alert that they have received a government stipend or social payment.

Recommendations for practitioners

- **Employ group learning:** Savings groups, particularly salient among women, offer a potent context for the acquisition of numeracy. Individuals in these groups are already committed to participating more actively in the monetary economy. Commonly shared goals and the ability to leverage group members' numeracy skills also contribute to this model.
- **Leverage women's appreciation of money and business:** Practitioners should acknowledge and strategically use the way women relate to money and business as

well as their current interaction with a mobile phone. Their levels of numeracy could be learned post-school in a commercial environment, where the right guidance could create a "teachable moment."

- **Focus on women's strengths:** Efforts to address this barrier have centered around the absence of numeracy, rather than the plethora of other strengths that are required to function in a society that assumes numeracy, which includes a strong desire to learn and to act together in groups, an excellent memory, and a strong (adaptive) desire to learn when information is delivered respectfully in ways that they understand. Approaching design from a lens of opportunity rather than deficit will do a much better job of designing for markets where DFL is an issue.

- **Develop a common understanding of numeracy.** For example, if a person cannot read or write, we would not refer to them as "literate." But a person who can count and calculate fast in her head may be considered "numerate" even if she/he cannot read or write a single number. If financial inclusion stakeholders can establish an agreed framework to measure numeracy, it will be easier to learn from each other in design, clarify what they are trying to solve for, as well as allow them to build on each other's work.

Useful resources

- My Oral Village's paper on Measuring Numeracy for Financial Inclusion: Results of a Pilot Test
- Brett Mathews' paper on Oral Information Management Tools
- Microsave's Mobile Wallets for the Oral Segment (MoWO)
- CGAP deck highlights Karandaaz Pakistan's use of currency representations to demonstrate value

Access as an enabler to DFL

"Access to phones is a necessary but insufficient steppingstone for access and usage of DFS." — Yasmin Bin-Humam, CGAP

Key elements of access in the context of DFL
The right or opportunity to use or benefit from agents, physical banks/stores to manage agent liquidity, quality network coverage, handsets, electricity, agents, formal IDs, as well as the usability of handsets, content, and services.

Key challenges for women with limited access to appropriate mobile phones, connectivity or electricity, and agents in DFL

- **Lower handset ownership:** Gendered-social norms significantly impact women's ability to own and use a phone, the type of phone they have, and whether they can leave their home independently to seek mobile signal (connectivity) and electricity (if they live in remote areas) or visit an agent. All of these underlie the baseline requirement of having a digitally connected device to link to a financial product or service.
- **Limited privacy on shared devices:** Women are less likely to have a mobile phone, and when they do, they are more likely to have lower-quality (e.g., 2G) handsets. Device sharing is common, but this limits their privacy, ability to regularly practice and become familiar with the device and its services. Phone sharing is particularly challenging for a person who is expecting a remittance notification, for example.
- **Lower access to newer devices:** While smartphones offer a far broader range of services and adaptable usability, women are more likely to have more basic phones, often hand-me-downs from a male family member. Furthermore, for women with disabilities (where usability is even more important), the overwhelming majority still own basic or feature phones, which limit access to the mobile internet, sometimes required to access financial service apps on newer devices.
- **Lack of identity:** Layered on top of other challenges, regulated financial and mobile services routinely require formal proof of identity for women to open and access an account. One in five women globally cites the lack of ID as a key reason for their lack of account[4].

Recommendations for practitioners

- **Design for where you are, and what you have:** Adopting a whole new behavior (for example, transacting digitally) or asset (a mobile phone) may overly pressure a person's cognitive bandwidth. DFL initiatives should work with the technology at hand as much as they can and not require the purchase of new devices such as smartphones. Further to this, DFL training initiatives should consider women's often-time-stretched realities and look to ensure that they don't require significant time or travel that might be unrealistic. Trainings held in markets or workplaces can remove an additional hurdle for women looking to attend.
- **Find the hook:** A key component of accessing DFL resources is wanting to access DFL resources. For example, providers need to ensure that they demonstrate how

4   G20 Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion

digital solutions can add value to women's lives in a contextually resonant manner. This might be so they can access crop insurance, receive government stipends, or save for an upcoming expense. In any case, the potential benefits should be greater than the effort.

- **Leverage APIs for potential new partnerships or offerings:** Stakeholders should strive to guarantee a competitive ecosystem that ensures that basic channels are open to all, Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) are fair for non-incumbents, and consumers control their data. Competition is good for consumers and it is crucial to guarantee that new partners can enter the market and that it is not monopolized or concentrated around a few players.

Useful resources

- HERfinance's Digital Wages Tech Learning Tool for Workers, Toolkit for Managers, and paper on Digital Wages
- GSMA Connected Women's Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020

Consumer awareness as an enabler to DFL

"If we are trying to build trust, the language needs to be understood – not heavy in technical terms, not punitive, but both language and tone need to resonate with the user."
— Mary Griffin, moderator of social norms discussion

Key elements of consumer awareness in the context of DFL
The ability and understanding to use DFS confidently and safely to achieve financial goals or financial well-being, developing a sense of control over one's digital finances.

Key DFL challenges for women with limited consumer awareness
- **Women face unique risks:** Besides having more to lose in the case of a mistake or a fraudulent transaction, women require more trust-building and may seek additional assurance from agents or frontline staff as they sign up for/purchase new digital products and services.
- **Lack of "hook":** Providers do not always market or explain DFS in ways that resonate with their assumed audience. When it is not clear how adopting and using a product or service will improve someone's life, there is little incentive to consider it. Such awareness efforts cannot be generic e.g. *"saving for a rainy day is good practice!"* but should rather speak to the realities of women's lives e.g. *"use the Goodcash wallet to put away 2 Kina a day for your child's January school fees!"*
- **Insufficient access to information about DFS:** In-person explanations and conversations are important in improving awareness among women, but front-line staff or agents are not always well-informed about DF products and services or readily available. Women need a well-trained and easily accessible frontline staff member to communicate the basic product information and respond to common questions as well as concerns from consumers. Without this, they will be less able to impart confidence in users, making them reticent to adopt the products.

Recommendations for practitioners
- **Customize initiatives that resonate with various audiences:** Consumer awareness needs to be based on data about customers' wants and needs. Just as no one financial product will suit every potential female DFS user, no single awareness initiative will either. Providers need to better research their users to be able to design and deliver effective DFS for low-income women. They need to address aspects such as product acquisition, retention, recourse mechanisms, and expansion challenges, which will allay the fears of new users.
- **Design learning materials along the customer journey:** Clients can gain a sense of control over their digital finances when consumer-awareness materials are designed to enable them to adapt and apply this learning to their specific settings. This could be around cash flow, quarterly expenses, repayment dates, harvest. Designing approaches that allow clients to develop a continuing awareness of their finances are likely to be more resonant.
- **Price transparently:** Since DFS transaction costs differ among services and providers, failing to elucidate the cost of DFS functions can create confusion and

uneasiness among users who may feel cheated or think there has been an error. Ensuring that these costs are clear upfront allows users to better budget and trust the service while spurring more digital engagement.

- **Provide clear explanations from the start:** Introducing key information upfront (e.g., recourse mechanisms, instruction, pricing) and in a manner that resonates with customers will help them build trust in the DFS and the providers as well as avoid any confusion among users who may feel deceived or believe there has been a mistake in charges further down the line. Making recourse processes clear before there is an issue will reassure nervous new customers and establish a strong foundation in the client-user relationship.

Useful resources

- IPA's publication on Building Evidence on Financial Capability
- Mazer and Rowans's paper on Competition in Mobile Financial Services: Lessons from Kenya and Tanzania
- GSMA's paper on Women and Mobile Money
- CGAP'S publication on Kenya's Mobile Money Price Transparency Rules
- CFPB's rules on Financial Wellbeing and tool on Creating a Cash Flow Budget

Design as an enabler to DFL

How can we design financial tools, services, and products that work for women instead of wondering why they are not using those we did create without them in mind?
— Sophie Romana , Strategic Impact Advisors

Key elements of design in the context of DFL
The specifications for the implementation or construction of a digital financial services process, product, or service.

Key challenges for women navigating the design of DFL initiatives

- **Design approaches that address DFL are often replicated** or barely adapted across several markets not tailored to or resonating with the local context. An approach that works well in one market can completely fail in another, even within the same country.

- **Many efforts to improve DFL require a significant effort on the part of the end-user,** forcing them to learn in a manner that is unfamiliar or inconvenient. Efforts that are born out of the assumptions of the service provider or practitioner and not the realities of the user will not meet the user's needs

> Whereas the previous four enablers focused on attributes of the consumer, this enabler focuses on the providers and ecosystem stakeholders. Although much more can be said about this topic, these are the two elements that members of the FinEquity community focused on during the e-discussion.

- **USSD menus that change:** Mobile money services generally use USSD menus and customers tend to memorize the USSD strings required to carry out different transactions (e.g. *288*2*3#). When there is any slight change in the menus or commands, it creates significant issues and disruption for both the customers and the mobile money providers.

Recommendations for practitioners

- **Keep checking your assumptions about "logical" design:** It is easy to think about design in terms of our preferences and, while this may sometimes bear fruit, unless we are the end-users, we need to temper this thinking. For example, don't assume that hierarchical menus make sense to everyone. Similarly, we should not assume that already-designed initiatives, which may appear to be a good fit and, perhaps, have been successful elsewhere, will be a good fit in a different context. No one community's needs are going to be the same as another.

- **Get up close to your end-users and observe norms:** Watch how people interact with DFS and the mental hacks they have created to manage challenges such as low literacy. These tactics can illustrate much about the DFL limitations and confidence levels, which you can further probe during prototyping. Observational and participatory research will likely be costly, but it will get you closer to effectively address DFL, increasing usage of DFS.

- **Don't forget recourse mechanisms:** It is important to understand how people respond when something goes wrong with a DFS transaction, and to plan for such incidents ahead of time. Finance can be a cause of great anxiety and people may need extra confirmation touchpoints, a clear system of recourse just in case a pin is forgotten, a phone is lost, or a payment doesn't arrive. Embedding design elements to help address people's concerns is a crucial step in building their confidence.
- **No one stakeholder group can alone execute product development:** There needs to be a wide array of perspectives in the room (i.e. not just the private sector, the development sector, or one demographic group, such as just men) to ensure both usability (in terms of DFL) and sustainability.
- **Embed design thinking in your organization:** Intentional design is not something institutions can do as a one-off, or pivot to on a dime. It requires a comprehensive approach and must also be integral to an institution's culture and modus operandi.
- **Don't think of design as a one-off exercise:** Design needs to be iterative and should not end with a product or service launch. Data is a crucial piece of this puzzle, particularly when trying to understand users' ongoing DFL. Successful onboarding is not only getting the customer to start using the product but also knowing enough about the customer that the data can continually be used to improve the product for customers, ensuring it remains relevant.

Useful resources
- CGAP's Customer Centricity Guide, and Change Management Toolkit, Smartphones & Mobile Money: Principles for UI/UX Design (1.0) and Customer Experience Toolkit are useful for practitioners looking to identify and implement a customer experience project within their organization.
- IDEO.org's Women and Money Research and their work helping bKash design their first smartphone app.
- GRID Impact and BRAC's "learning by doing" approach to mobile money and women in Bangladesh.
- GRID Impact's study on financial education for microentrepreneurs with the Inter-American Development Bank and Banco Pichincha in Ecuador, and the RCT that found these fascinating results.
- IDEO.org, BMGF, and Google's work on Designing for Digital Confidence

Gendered-social norms

"My husband handles the money; I don't need to know about these things."
— Brett Matthews, My Oral Village

"Gendered social norms significantly influence women's DFL, both as a constraining or enabling factor for women's DFL. As a constraint factor, social norms shape women's agency and the extent to which women themselves see DFL as a necessity and something that they have the ability to learn. As an enabler, women can see DFL as a pathway to financial inclusion, enabling them to access DFS and work around social norms."
— Uloma Ogba, UNCDF

Key elements of gendered-social norms in the context of DFL

Gendered-social norms, a subset of social norms, are collective beliefs and expectations about how different genders should and can access digital tools, engage with financial services, and access information.

Key challenges for practitioners

- **Social norms are pervasive and cross-cutting:** They can disrupt the entire DFS customer lifecycle for women, from deprioritizing women's and girls' education to the belief that women owning phones or bank accounts poses a risk to the traditional power structures and family dynamics. Social norms don't just affect one enabler.

- **Short timeframes to make an impact:** For programs that aim to shift or change social norms, the process can require a significant amount of time, generally beyond a typical 4-5-year donor program cycle. Progress is rarely linear and can unexpectedly slow down or backfire, which can be challenging to address in a single funding cycle.

- **Limited perception of product/ service relevance:** Gendered norms can also manifest themselves in how women see themselves and their roles (and the roles of others) as well as the beliefs about what they can and can't do in terms of accessing and using DFS.

Throughout this e-discussion, it became apparent that certain gendered-social norms act as barriers to women's digital financial literacy. When you achieve the enablers detailed in this synthesis (access or literacy for example) there is greater likelihood of improving your DFL. However, the presence of particular gendered-social norms has a different effect. When they don't exist, then everyone begins from the same neutral starting point, but when they are at play, they assume a negative starting point where women are faced with inequity, which acts as a constraint, not an enabler. Social norms are pervasive and influence all market actors: consumers, providers, policymakers, infrastructure as well as other support functions.

The exploration of normative constraints is a key part of FinEquity's agenda. As the work from FinEquity's Gender-Transformative Solutions learning theme has detailed, it is crucial to undertake diagnostics to identify and understand which gendered-social norms apply in a specific context.

It is also important to acknowledge the significant influence that gendered-social norms have on the enablers described above as they affect a woman's ability to become numerate and literate as well as to access financial services.

Recommendations for practitioners

- **Leverage clear use cases to motivate behavior change:** Not all women segments will have similar or existing use cases; thus, the approach to DFL will also have to be tailored. Understanding the customer's perspective – her responsibilities and realities – will help inform a use case that resonates with her, increasing her case for adopting such products and services. Personas (descriptive summaries of representative primary users and the key stakeholders that influence their behaviors, including an overview of their situation, context, needs, motivations, and benefits) can play an effective part in identifying and understanding the different realities and use cases for women and DFL.
- **Employ behavioral hacks:** Nudges and existing thinking and behavior patterns can motivate women to engage and learn in new ways. In the context of DFL, this could include showing examples of women who use DFS in their daily lives, motivating other women to reconsider their skills and capacities to have the confidence to try new things.
- **Highlight contradictions or inconsistencies between expectations and personal beliefs:** When examining norms, it is useful to understand their components.
    - **Personal belief:** People's individual preferences, independent of what others do or what is deemed to be appropriate: e.g. *I would like to be able to have a mobile wallet, so I can keep my own money safe and separate.*
    - **Empirical expectation:** People's beliefs about "what others do": e.g. *women don't need to save or use phones for digital transactions, their husbands should take care of all financial responsibilities.*
    - **Normative expectation:** People's beliefs about "what others think should be done": e.g. *she does not need her own phone or mobile money account, her husband has one.*

When we understand the components of norms and how they are received societally, we can better understand how our efforts could most effectively change behaviors and encourage relaxation of the norm with the most success, minimizing possible unintended consequences and harm. This understanding can encourage families and communities to reconsider the roles and norms applied to women.

- **Harness open dialogue to correct false perceptions:** It is important to encourage people to share their personal beliefs in a safe space. For example, hearing concerns around what neighbors would think of them having a mobile phone and learning how others may have a similar opinion can spark an internal shift among these men and demonstrate this evolution. It can also show how it is increasingly acceptable to have a personal belief that is in contradiction with the expected prevailing norm that mobile phones are a men's domain.
- **Identify who holds influence:** Understanding where power sits and which groups yield power over the target group whose inclusion you are seeking is a first step in influencing the influencers. This kind of knowledge can help practitioners design more enduring interventions that help challenge norms around DFL and DFS.
- **Identify socially acceptable entry points for women's DFL:** This could be a government scheme that requires a child to authenticate her biometrics along with her parents to receive a school expense stipend or a women's health group with a financial

literacy component. Leveraging "acceptable" interactions to introduce and normalize women's DFL offers a way to introduce new norms.

Useful resources

- CGAP's blog on Social Norms and Women's Financial Inclusion: The Role of Providers
- CGAP and FinDev Gateway blogs, drawing on work in Turkey
- MicroSave Consulting's Gender Centrality framework and Financial Services Space (FSS)

Overarching resources

The resources below were shared throughout the three-week e-discussion and are applicable across enablers and the constraint.

- CGAP's Smartphones & Mobile Money: Principles for UI/UX Design
- UNICEF's guide to User Testing with Girls
- UNCDF's Recommended Practices and Lessons Learned in Providing Financial and Non-Financial Services to Youth
- USAID's paper on the Five Attributes of Trust in Increasing Women's Access to Finance through Digital Technologies and the Gender ICT Survey Toolkit for measuring the digital gender divide
- CGAP's Customer-Centric Guide

Case Studies

These four case studies have been selected to reflect how DFL enablers play out in practice. In some cases, solutions are proven, while in others, initiatives are still in their nascent stages – however it is instructive to see how the provider is addressing challenges through research and iteration.

CASE STUDY 1

My Money Tracker (Cambodia)

Good Return's CAFE Initiative

Enablers: **literacy**, **access**, **design**

It is very difficult to make positive financial decisions when you are not aware of your personal and business money flows. In Cambodia, Good Return, an Australian NGO focused on livelihood development programs and improving access to financial services in Asia Pacific, is supporting microbusiness owners to improve their financial capability[5]. As part of their services, they developed the app My Money Tracker to address some of the barriers they encountered around money management, such as tracking income, expenses, debt, and credit, which was difficult for people primarily living and working in a cash economy.

Designed in Cambodian Khmer and English, and available on Android phones, My Money Tracker is the first financial planning app designed specifically for Cambodian microbusinesses in the cash economy. Informed by a deep understanding of Cambodian micro-business owners' needs and situations, the app helps them keep track of their money habits[6] within their daily routines.

Good Return had previously developed a paper-based money tracker for business owners in Cambodia and Nepal. Along with further interviews and surveys, the app leveraged the design and learnings of the paper-based money tracker tool. My Money Tracker was designed to mirror users' existing money routines to make the transition from paper to digital as seamless as possible. This meant re-ordering the steps for recording income and expenses and adjusting the credit-tracking process to keep it in line with existing behaviors.

The Khmer language presented a challenge for the transition to an app format: key concepts (e.g. one-time pin) within the app needed to be translated in a succinct way that was easily understood by low-literacy users, which required multiple rounds of testing, feedback, and adjustment.

To date, around 7,500 users have downloaded the app. Survey data shows that users feel more organized in managing their money. A significant 74% of users surveyed reported increased ease to keep track of their cash flows as well increased confidence in discussing money habits within the household. Still, some difficulties remain - high drop-off rates are challenging with only around 30% of users remaining active after

5   See: https://www.goodreturn.org.au/cafe
6   See: https://www.accenture.com/au-en/case-studies/digital/good-return-money-tracker

the first month; low-literacy workers are still struggling without in-person support and guidance. In 2021, Good Return will launch a social media initiative using analytics to understand the drop-off point and to focus on those users for re-engagement through ads and targeted video content as well as to improve consumer awareness of financial products among women.

CASE STUDY 2
HERproject (Bangladesh)
BSR

Enablers: **literacy**, **access**, **design**, **consumer awareness**; Constraint: **social norms**

Globally, more than 230 million adults receive their private-sector wages in cash – an inefficient practice which carries risks for employers and is disempowering for women who have less control over cash-based wages (Global Findex, 2017). In Bangladesh, an estimated five million people work in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, with women making up over sixty percent of the workforce. This scenario offered a real opportunity to try to engage women garment workers in the formal financial sector. HERProject engaged managers, brands, and financial service providers through focus groups, rapid assessments, and interviews to understand payroll and financial behaviors among garment factory workers in Bangladesh and persuaded factories to digitize their payrolls to enable low-income women working in global supply chains and bring them into the formal economy[7].

HERProject works with both employers and workers by creating a range of tools and resources to help smooth the transition to digitization through films, quizzes, and animations to engage workers and support DFL efforts in the workplace. Key themes include gender-sensitive training, technical aspects of new payroll accounts usage, financial planning, discussions of finances within families, which are shared through toolkits for factory managers as well as a training curriculum and a tech learning tool for workers. HERProject also asked employers to provide female workers with a formal letter to share with families, explaining that they needed a SIM/phone to be paid, in order to lessen the social constraints that women may have faced around phone ownership and usage. By the end of the program, 83% had their own SIM (up from 23% at the start of the program) and 13% had a shared one. Although smartphone penetration is low, mobile money payroll accounts can be used on feature phones.

Despite its initial success, this initiative has not been without its challenges. On the supply side, there were concerns around digitization and HERProject had to work closely with brand and financial sector partners to alleviate their fears around costs and demonstrate the business case in digitizing wages. Even though the adoption of digital wages can be a bigger step for female workers, HERproject ensures that wage digitization is gender-responsive and helps women access, use, and, ultimately, benefit from their financial accounts.

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit Bangladesh, wage digitization accelerated with the government's support package to the garment sector, which included wage digitization. This gave hundreds of factories the impetus to digitize, leading over one million workers to open accounts. To date, HERProject has seen very positive results in the form of[8]:

- **Increased business efficiency:** Administrative time spent on payroll was cut by more than half and worker production-time lost on payday was reduced by more than three-quarters.

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7   See: https://herproject.org/resources/herfinance
8   See: https://herproject.org/files/reports/HERproject-digital-wages-positive-impact-for-women-business.pdf

- **Increased account access:** Around 50% of female workers opened new mobile money accounts and 21% of workers (male and female) started saving regularly.
- **Increased women's economic empowerment:** A reported 19-percentage-point increase in women indicating making joint decisions about the use of their salary.
- **Increased financial resilience:** Approximately 60% of peer educators had savings to fall back on during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HERProject Digital Wages programs also take place in Cambodia, Egypt, and India.

CASE STUDY 3

Aflatoun International (Bangladesh)

Government Social Safety Net Cash Transfer (SSNP)

Enablers: **design, access**

When the United Nationals Development Program (UNDP) started supporting women's financial inclusion in the Sathkira District in Bangladesh, it found that beneficiaries of the government's Social Safety Net Program (SSNP) had very low levels of financial inclusion. UNDP asked Aflatoun, an NGO focussed on children's financial education, to design a financial literacy curriculum and training for the Bank Asia mobile phone application, the central delivery mechanism for the government's SSNP payments, after becoming aware of women beneficiaries' limited literacy, low consumer awareness, and often shared phones[9].

Aflatoun had to think creatively to address these challenges with time-poor women in the district. Following a field assessment with participant and stakeholder interviews, Aflatoun determined it would be most effective to first train Bank Asia's agent banks (entrepreneurs/shop owners) and UNDP field facilitators, who were better placed to work directly with the ultra-poor women recipients of SSNP. After the initial training, these parties used a core curriculum, which involved participatory learning methods, such as dramas, group work, role-play, and games over several structured one-hour lessons to train groups of ten women[10].

The agent banks were already providing several banking services to their local community, including cash deposits, cash withdrawals (giving the agents the moniker "human ATM"), cash transfers, loan processing, as well as SSNP cash payments. All the agent banks had smartphones equipped with the mobile banking application, ideally placing them not only to facilitate these transactions but also to onboard women, helping them open accounts, which enabled them to receive the cash transfer payment from the government and brought them into formal financial inclusion.

During the six-month program, Aflatoun trained 36 agent banks and UNDP facilitators, who in turn trained approximately 3,240 women beneficiaries, who then accessed the SSNP through the "human ATMs." By the end of the project, the "human ATMs" were successfully facilitating limited capacity banking services to the community. This led Bank Asia to commercialize the concept and rename the "human ATMs" as "micro-merchants," turning this service delivery channel into a lucrative profession for many.

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9   See: https://www.aflatoun.org/
10 See: http://socialprotection.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Financial-Literacy-Curriculum.pdf

CASE STUDY 4

Hey Sister! (Ghana)

Strategic Impact Advisors (SIA)

Enablers: **literacy, consumer awareness**

Hey Sister! is an interactive voice response (IVR) campaign designed to provide women with basic skills that enable them to use DFS with confidence[11]. Hey Sister! was designed by SIA, a global consulting firm focused on digital technologies as a response to the push from central banks to increase DFS during the pandemic. It offers 2-3-minute skits voiced by actors in local languages. The storylines follow three friends, Annette, Josephine, and Myriam in their daily interactions as they help each other learn how to use the services. The conversations of the three friends address everyday issues: Annette's pregnancy and need to pay for prenatal care; Josephine's inquiry on how to use mobile payments for her son's school fees; or Myriam's brand-new Merchant ID for her shop. The ten mini-lessons focus on themes such as opening a mobile money account, recognizing fake news, sending and receiving money, and scam protection. The episodes can be listened to on Viamo's 3-2-1 service, (a global social enterprise leveraging mobile technology to improve lives that has partnered with SIA), which is free of charge to callers. They are also available as downloadable audio files, making them easily accessible in places where mobile network coverage may be limited.

SIA, which operates in Ghana, Malawi, and Uganda, has partnered with diverse local organizations (NGOs, MFIs, and the private sector) and has provided them with a "training of trainers" so they can instruct their members with the curriculum. Independent champions can also access the audio files along with a facilitator's guide and written scripts to train women on their own.

Audio delivery of content has proven powerful for low-literacy women, with 89% of all listeners, the majority of whom are women, reporting that the material is relevant to their lives. For greater reach, SIA also added Bluetooth speakers to improve listening experiences and support socially distanced learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, around 48,000 unique calls to the toll-free line have been reported and over 3,900 women have been trained.

Until very recently, SIA was not able to provide customization of the curriculum to their specific product, which created challenges in finding appropriate local partners to train women, ideally, savings groups, FSPs, and MNOs, to integrate it into their programming and ensuring sustainability. However, this is no longer the case and such partnerships are now possible.

Phase II will launch in May 2021, with additional partners in Malawi, Ghana, and Uganda, and potentially one or two new geographies. New content will be added focusing on supporting women entrepreneurs using digital tools to grow their businesses by obtaining credit, saving, paying their vendors, and, in some cases, paying employees, as data collected showed that a majority of listeners (67%) are entrepreneurs. Myriam, our empowered shopkeeper, will play a central role in the new content. SIA plans on continuing to use audio files, which have been so well-received by the audiences given their portability.

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11 See: https://www.siaedge.com/show-me-the-mobile-money

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