

BETA Savings Account in Nigeria

In Nigeria, lack of physical proximity and mobility constitutes as an important barrier for accessing formal financial services, which leads to a significant portion of the population being unbanked. Most of those not having access are women. The gendered discrepancies have inspired financial actors to orientate towards this market segment.

Diamond Bank in Nigeria (now called Access Bank) introduced a financial product designed for women, the BETA savings account and increased level of service, in the aim of shifting away from its typical banking procedures, which were much more complicated, lengthy and inaccessible. Customers had to visit the branch, provide identification, proof of address or income, fill out forms and include references from other Diamond Bank customers. The most important element of the project that tackles physical distance is the rollout of so-called BETA Friends, banking agents that directly visit customers' businesses (focusing on women owned-businesses, but not excluding men).

Quick facts

Barriers addressed



Accessibility

[Distance from bank/FSP/CICO agent >](#)



Social norms

[Biases that center men as financial customers >](#)



Information Availability & Capability

[Unclear or difficult process to open an account >](#)



Product & Service Quality

[Lack of products that meet women's needs >](#)
[Lack of products and services that create value >](#)



Consumer Protection

[Fraud and scams >](#)
[Fear of making mistakes >](#)

Segment focus

1 2 3 4

Geography

[Nigeria >](#)

Sources

[WWB, 2014](#); [WWB, 2019](#).

Customer Journey Relevance



Key stakeholders involved

Diamond Bank (Now Access Bank)
Women's World Banking
EFInA
Visa

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Key activities

Design of the program:

- Creation of the BETA account, an innovative digital savings account, targeting self-employed women.
- The Savings account was launched in 21 of Diamond Bank's 240 branches.
- BETA includes:
 - A transactional savings account; a commitment savings account (Target Savers), value-added services (balance inquiry, transfers, airtime top-up); mobile credit product
 - Introduction of "BETA Friends" – agents that visit a customer's business to open accounts, handle transactions

The launch of a pilot program in 2013, which resulted in 38,600 accounts opened (original goal was 16,000) (WWB, 2014).

Continuation of the program, with the latest results available from 2018 (WWB, 2018).

Outcomes/results

BETA Savings Accounts:

- Number of customers increased from 335,119 in July 2016 to 601,245 in July 2018
- In July 2018, 38% of BETA customers were women
- On average, active BETA customers conduct five transactions a month and the gender gap in number of monthly transactions disappears with account maturity." (WWB, 2018)

BETA Target Savers Accounts:

- "During the period between July 2016 and July 2018, the total number of Target Savers customers nearly quadrupled from 9,994 to 52,355, of which 38% are female."

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Key enabling environment factors for the intervention

Nigeria's enabling regulatory environment simplifies opening accounts as there is requirement for IDs.

- Accompanied by the active participation of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in the integration of unbanked populations into the financial system, which inspired its regulation to adapt to these goals (for example facilitating microfinance) (WWB, 2014)

Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes

Favorable BETA account features that made them accessible, such as (WWB, 2014):

- No need for ID, forms, signature
- No minimum balance, monthly or deposit fees
- ATM card provided in starter pack
- Reward scheme with cash prizes
- 3,6% yearly interest

Multi-channel delivery: Partnerships with mobile money providers that enabled customers to deposit and withdraw through their agents.

Incentive based system encourages BETA friends to scale up their customer bases, as they get paid based on account openings (and a service incentive for accounts with regular transactions).

Potential for scale/replicability

There is a clear progression of the program based on the report available on the pilot program from 2013 and the research from 2018. During the pilot, 38,600 accounts were opened, while this number increased to 601,245 in 2018, which is a clear evidence of the scalability of the project.

Challenges encountered during the program

Competition with existing informal financial services that have established social support: ajo and adako. BETA however has a competitive advantage as customers don't have to rely on others (as with the group savings with adako), and provides 24/7 access to savings (contrary to ajo, which pays at the end of the month).

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While the BETA Savings design was explicitly geared towards women (while it didn't exclude men), only 40% of the account holders were women, which indicates that the project had difficulty in reaching their target audience. It appears that it is harder to convince women to open an account that they are not familiar with, as they require more information and might consult a friend or family member before making a decision (which doesn't seem to be the case for men). It is also useful to note that there does not seem to be a progression in this percentage from the launch of the pilot until the newer data from 2018.

Recommendations from the research

It was evoked that women tend to make decisions differently – a way to make the program more inclusive is to make more information available (as this point was raised in the analysis provided by Women's World Banking).

There is no mention on the identity of BETA Friends. The program didn't take into account the importance of inclusion of female agents and their potential positive role. Increasing female agents can potentially increase the percentage of female beneficiaries as well.

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