



Social Norms

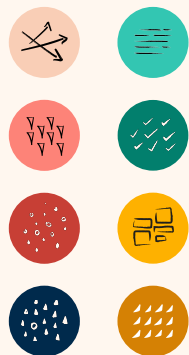
# Biases that center men as financial customers

This barrier refers to the concept that men are the primary financial customers in a market, due to prevalence in the workforce, earning potential, and other socioeconomic factors. As such, financial service providers tend to design products and services with their experience in mind rather than the diverse and, often unique, needs of female customers.

**Why is this barrier important?**

Because current research shows that a majority of FSPs are taking a gender-neutral approach in their service and product offerings which defaults to the preferences and needs of men. Cultural norms promote the idea that men control finances and are the default decision-makers in households, which results in products and services that are designed and marketed for men. Women who are often seen as homemakers with no financial independence or bargaining power are not typically considered as viable customers.

**Connected Barriers**

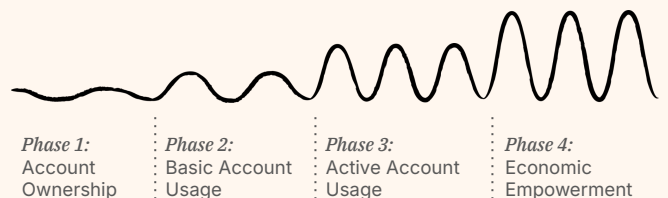


*All Other Barriers*  
Social norms barriers influence and are connected to all other barriers

**Most Relevant Segments**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Excluded, marginalized	Excluded, high potential	Included, underserved	Included, Not underserved

**Customer Journey Relevance**





### Key evidence relevant to this barrier

- “Most FSPs assume that data on financial services is gender-neutral. However, **evidence shows that gender-neutral data on financial services defaults towards men’s needs and preferences...** Traditional credit scoring models can be biased against women, even when female applicants have the same characteristics as men in terms of income, business size, and more.” ([Data2X, 2020](#)).
- Product design and delivery do not typically factor in women’s livelihoods. In a majority of developing countries, many women are self-employed. Digitized wages can not easily reach them because they are not considered as formally employed. On the other hand, they will not receive government cash transfers if they do not meet the stipulated poverty threshold ([CGD, 2018](#)). Further, in Bangladesh loan officers analyze repayment capacity based on the household income and expenditure which is often owned and controlled by men ([CFI, 2021](#)).
- Women’s feelings that formal financial services are not made for them coupled with gender-blind marketing of products “can also result in women not accessing information on products” ([IFPRI, 2019](#)). This might mean women do not seek out how to apply for financial products or information on how to use them. **As a result women feel underserved and misunderstood reporting this as one of the main barriers to accessing financial services** ([Global Banking Alliance for Women, 2016](#)).
- “Bank opening hours can also be problematic for women as many banks are often only open when women are carrying out their household duties or economic activities.” ([IFC, 2016](#)).



The following Exemplar represents one evidence-based intervention that has shown success in addressing this particular barrier. There may be other Exemplars for this barrier in the larger [Barriers & Exemplars Analysis](#) compendium deck.

## Exemplar

### *Digital Sub-Wallets for Increased Financial Empowerment of Women*

The Digital Sub-wallets program (DSW) is a BMGF funded initiative, which has demonstrated that social norms work needs to be closely aligned with traditional financial inclusion efforts to achieve women's economic empowerment. CARE worked with PostBank Uganda to design digital sub-wallet – pockets of savings designated for a particular use to help women achieve their set goals (saving, particularly for school fees, medical emergencies, and longer-term purchases such as land).

The project's theory of change recognizes that women's power over their own money, as well as their participation in household decision-making are very limited. The authors hypothesized that providing married women with greater autonomy and voice in household decision-making would facilitate achievement of their own financial goals especially those believed to alleviate poverty, such as keeping children in school. The project has supported more than 1400 people in Western Uganda since 2017.

#### Key activities

- A multi-method study, using an RCT, psychological scales (scientific method of measuring empowerment), bank data, two extensive surveys, and a large sample of semi-structured interviews with 1,423 total participants (1,112 women with male partners, 213 women who did not have male partners, and 93 men)
- Two treatment groups for the RCT: "A mobile banking service with digital sub-wallet folders labelled for women, and the same service coupled with a course of seven household counselling sessions aimed at equalizing the influence of women and men in the context of family money management."

#### Outcomes/results

- 38% of previously unbanked women signed up for bank accounts and increased their account ownership
- More participatory behavior among male partners regarding household budgets
- Women reported they are increasingly respected for their financial needs by their husbands, and a significant improvement to women's mental and emotional wellbeing
- 61% of women said their spouse now shares household financial decision-making with them

#### Key enabling environment factors for the intervention

Project conducted a pilot which found that the household practices anticipated by the theory of change were as expected, and increased uptake for both interventions.



### Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes

- Project included gender and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and protection training as part of the intervention. All trainers were trained in gender sensitivity and prevention of GBV to enhance their skills in supporting women during household dialogue sessions.
- The research resolved issues of measuring women's empowerment by basing the measure of empowerment on the woman's experience, specifically by using established psychometric scales that have previously been validated through rigorous scientific testing.

### Recommendations from the research

- "Collect additional data in order to better understand the reasons behind the effects on both married and unmarried women."
- Standardize the of measures of women's empowerment to allow comparison across projects. Having a reliable way to measure empowerment, as opposed to the number of accounts opened, is important for showing an independent impact on women. Using proxies is a problem because the uptake of an intervention does not necessarily lead to empowerment.

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### *Additional Exemplars*

BETA Savings Account in Nigeria

Empowering MSMEs: Creating a Better Banking Experience for Women-Led Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises in Kenya