



Social Norms

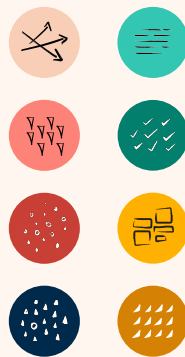
Expectation that men control household finances

This barrier refers to social norms that expect men to be household heads and to control finances. Women are, therefore, taken out of the picture as potential customers of financial services as there is an expectation they will not control or manage financial accounts for their household. The result is a decrease in women's bargaining and decision-making.

Why is this barrier important?

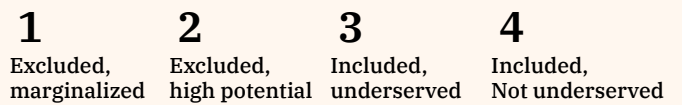
Because evidence shows that a lack of decision-making in the household reduces women's bargaining power and limits access and use of DFS. Incentives geared at addressing bargaining power and other power dynamics within the household promotes DFS adoption and use.

Connected Barriers

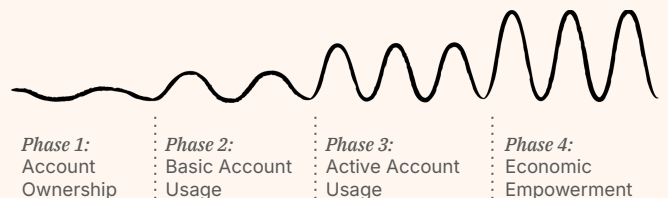


All Other Barriers
Social norms barriers influence and are connected to all other barriers

Most Relevant Segments



Customer Journey Relevance





Key evidence relevant to this barrier

- “Financial inclusion programs seem to work best when they address women’s bargaining power within a household. **If women have control over their own accounts—rather than sharing accounts with men in the household—they are able to invest their money how they see fit. Depositing salary or government transfers into a woman’s personal account can also increase her employment prospects.**” ([The New Humanitarian, 2018](#)).
- “A recent financial inclusion program in the Indian state of Rajasthan required women to be designated head of household when it came to receiving government benefits. This led to 66% of women who did not have a bank account prior to the program being signed up to a financial institution.” ([The New Humanitarian, 2018](#)).
- “Access to financial resources alone, without addressing household dynamics or gender norms, does not consistently improve women’s agency.” ([J-PAL, 2018](#)).
- “Women tend to have lower levels of decision-making power within the household regarding finances based on norms such as “women should not have financial privacy from their husband,” and “women should not have savings of their own.” ([CGAP, 2021](#)).
- Financial diaries of low-income women suggest that men are typically responsible for earning household income and managing large investments in assets such as land and housing. By contrast, women often handle daily expenses and risk management (which can include use of insurance products as well as less formal methods of scraping together emergency funds from disparate sources) and tend to make high-frequency and low-value transactions ([Zollman, 2016](#)).
- In 31 out of 189 countries, husbands are considered to be the legal head of households. This reduces women’s legal rights to sign documents, get a job, or open a bank account without the permission of their husband or male head of household ([World Bank, 2018](#)).
- The need for improvement in attitudes towards girls and women’s access to and control over household economics came up as a common barrier among women at different life stages (Kore Global, internal document, 2020).
- “Many women remain dependent upon their husbands. About one in three married women from developing countries have no control over household spending on major purchases. About one in ten are not consulted about the way their own earnings are spent.” ([IPA, 2017](#)).
- Research in Uganda found that “women who hide money from their husbands show increased economic outcomes, while those who don’t hide money obtain negative impacts. This is consistent with women having little control over resources, and so hiding money is the only way to retain control.” ([Fiala, 2017](#)).



The following Exemplar represents one evidence-based interventions 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

On Her Account: Can Strengthening Women's Financial Control Boost Female Labor Supply?

Like in many developing countries, female labor force participation in India has remained low. "Despite robust economic growth, the labor force participation rate for women aged 15-64 declined from 37% in 1990 to 28% in 2015. In 2015, Indian women were some of the least employed in the world (ILO, 2015), yet nearly one third of Indian housewives expressed interest in working outside the home." (Field et al., 2016).

In this paper, the authors examine "the role of supply-side constraints linked to low household

bargaining power and traditional gender norms in suppressing female employment." They hypothesize that "increasing women's bargaining power could draw them into the labor force and may also increase their ability to control their own earnings and thereby further induce her to work." The authors argue that social norms – specifically norms internalized by men – play an important role in keeping Indian women out of the labor force, but that women are able to push back against these norms when they gain bargaining power (Field et al., 2016).

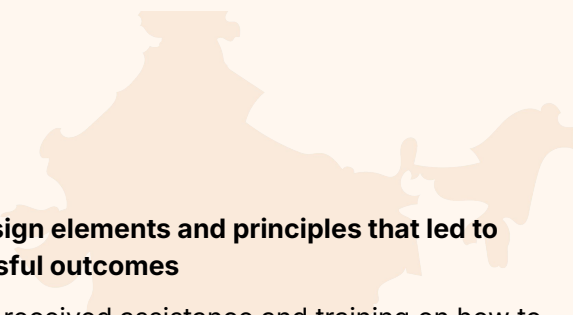
Key activities

- An RCT with 2,864 women in 197 local government units, called gram panchayats (GPs), in four districts of the Madhya Pradesh (MP) state with severe gender inequities and high poverty rates. The intervention had four treatment groups.
 - Accounts Basic: Eligible women were assisted to open an individual bank account located at a community banking kiosk.
 - Account Basic Linking: Eligible women opened an individual bank account and their account was linked such that they received their MGNREGS wages in their newly-opened community-based bank account.
 - Account Plus: Eligible women opened an individual bank account and received basic financial training to help them understand how to use their accounts more effectively.
 - Account Plus Linking: Eligible women opened an individual bank account, and their account was linked to their MGNREGS wages, and they received basic financial training.

- "Analysis combines administrative data from the MGNREGS public database, administrative bank data, and a detailed endline survey to generate results."

Outcomes/results

- **"Direct access to MGNREGS payments increased women's work and earnings:** Relative to women who received only a bank account, those who received linked bank accounts plus information on the utility of bank accounts were 34% more likely to be listed on MGNREGS payroll 15 months after the intervention. Moreover, the wages flowing into female-owned accounts was large. For women receiving a payment into an individual bank account, the average payment to women over the 15 month interval was \$61 – equivalent to 26% of women's annual income from non-MGNREGS sources."



Outcomes/results (cont.)

- **“Private sector employment also increased for those in the link plus treatment arm.** Household survey data show that, roughly six months after the intervention, labor force participation was 12% higher and annual private sector earnings increased by 24% among women assigned to ‘link plus’... The gains are concentrated among women who were least attached to the labor force prior to the intervention and among women whose husbands were most opposed to female work... Link plus women were more likely to engage in economic transactions outside the household and stated higher levels of mobility relative to the control group.”
- **“Receiving a bank account without supplementary information had no effects on employment or earnings:** Although the intervention roughly doubled the share of women who had bank accounts, receiving only a bank account—with or without supplementary information—had no observable impact on women’s employment or earnings. Thus, giving a woman a safe place to keep her wages is not enough; resources need to be explicitly directed to that savings account and women need to be given the basic tools to use it in order to precipitate behavior change.”

Key enabling environment factors for the intervention

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regulations require rural bank branches “to conduct new customer information sessions that provide an overview of the benefits of using bank accounts, including saving for the future and receiving government benefits.”
- Collaboration with the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (MP)

Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes

Women received assistance and training on how to open and use bank accounts. Initially, the project was designed to only give bank accounts to women, but feedback from the ground indicated that giving a woman a bank account that she does not feel empowered to access on her own, or does not trust, may not have an impact. Therefore, the intervention included assistance and training on bank accounts.

Recommendations from the research

Further data collection is needed to understand “longer-run impacts of the interventions, including impacts on slow-moving, difficult-to change outcomes such as gender norms.”