



Mobile Money  
for the Unbanked | Connected  
Women

# Reaching half of the market: Women and mobile money

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SEPTEMBER 2014



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THE MMU PROGRAMME IS SUPPORTED BY THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION, THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION, AND OMIDYAR NETWORK



**M**obile money has been growing at a dizzying rate over the past few years, with urban men emerging as the early adopters of the services.<sup>1</sup> However, if mobile money operators are to reach scale and impact in their operations, they cannot ignore women, who make up 50% of their potential market.<sup>2</sup> In this publication, we examine the tactics used by pioneering mobile money operators to increase mobile money penetration amongst women.

This publication is part of a series of deeper insights into selected topics based on the findings of the 2013 State of the Industry Report on Mobile Financial Services.<sup>3</sup> For the first time in 2013, MMU was able to collect data on the gender of mobile money users through the Global Mobile Money Adoption Survey, which asked mobile money operators to report the gender composition of their customer base. Semi-guided interviews were then conducted with 10 of the operators that had reported high levels of penetration of their mobile money service amongst women in emerging markets and/or had implemented successful strategies to drive uptake and usage among women.

## SUMMARY

To reach scale and impact in their operations, mobile money operators cannot ignore women, who make up half of the potential customer base. However, penetration of services within this group remains low and there are many barriers that keep women from adopting and using these services, such as low levels of literacy and mobile phone ownership. Operators can use a number of tactics to overcome these gender-specific barriers, particularly changing their approaches to marketing and distribution. This includes product offerings tailored to the unique financial needs of women; updated marketing campaigns that women can relate to; and hiring quality female agents who help to build women's confidence and trust in mobile money services and turn them into loyal customers.

1. William Jack and Tavneet Suri, 2010, "The Economics of M-PESA", <http://www.mit.edu/~tavneet/M-PESA.pdf>.  
2. GSMA mWomen Programme, 2012, "Unlocking the Potential: Women and Mobile Financial Services in Emerging Markets", [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa\\_Unlocking-the-Potential\\_Feb-2013.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa_Unlocking-the-Potential_Feb-2013.pdf), p. 11.  
3. Claire Pénicaud and Arunjay Katakam, 2014, "State of the Industry 2013: Mobile Financial Services", [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SOTIR\\_2013.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SOTIR_2013.pdf).

## The case for reaching women with mobile financial services

Only 32% of respondents<sup>4</sup> to the 2013 Global Mobile Money Adoption Survey reported knowing the gender composition of their customer base, suggesting that operators may be overlooking a promising commercial opportunity.

- **Women represent half of the potential customer base in every market.** Mobile money operators that do not take account of the gender split of their customer base could miss out on a huge segment of the market.
- **Women are more likely to receive than send mobile money.** The interviews with mobile money operators revealed that, in many markets, women are more likely to receive mobile money than send it, while senders tend to be primarily men. This suggests that financially dependent women are a key market segment since they use mobile money to receive transfers from their relatives and social payments from the government or aid organisations. Mobile money operators have tended to focus on the ‘active’ side of the transaction (the senders), and less on the ‘passive’ side of the transaction (the recipients), forgetting that recipients are just as important to a successful network. Other groups of women<sup>5</sup> are promising segments as well; some operators are targeting female business owners or female students with a different value proposition.
- **To be successful, mobile money services must meet women’s unique financial needs.** Research conducted by the GSMA in partnership with the Visa Foundation<sup>6</sup> shows that women are active household financial managers with specific wants and needs when it comes to financial management:
  - *Convenience* – Women are time-poor and need financial tools that fit into their busy daily routine.
  - *Reliability* – Women need reliable financial tools that allow them to access money quickly in emergencies.
  - *Security* – Women need to trust the financial tool that is safeguarding their money.
  - *Privacy* – Women feel empowered and independent if they can save and spend their money how they like, without undue demands.

Informal financial services do not always meet these needs, but mobile financial services could have strong appeal for women.

*“The vision of Telenor is ‘Empower Society’, and society is made up of men and women; women make up 50% of the potential market so this is why we are actively trying to reach more women with Easypaisa.”*

– Telenor Pakistan

*“Initially, we wanted to attract more female customers because they are the household’s financial managers. Salary payment over mobile money is very popular in Somaliland, but men would usually withdraw the amount received to give it to their wife in cash. We wanted to attract more female customers so that men could send their salary to their wife over mobile money. This way, money stays in the system instead of being cashed out.”*

– Telesom

4. 32% of 92 respondents reported knowing the gender composition of their customer base.

5. For examples of female segments of the market (or other demographic groups), see “Women and Mobile: A Global Opportunity”, [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/GSMA\\_Women\\_and\\_Mobile-A\\_Global\\_Opportunity.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/GSMA_Women_and_Mobile-A_Global_Opportunity.pdf), p. 9.

6. GSMA mWomen Programme, 2012, “Unlocking the Potential: Women and Mobile Financial Services in Emerging Markets”, [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa\\_Unlocking-the-Potential\\_Feb-2013.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa_Unlocking-the-Potential_Feb-2013.pdf), p. 11.

**BOX 1****CLOSING THE GENDER DATA GAP****LACK OF GENDER DATA**

Only 32% of respondents to MMU's 2013 Global Mobile Money Adoption Survey (29 out of 92 respondents) reported knowing what percentage of their customer base was represented by women — a clear indication the mobile money industry is not capturing sufficient information about gender. There are two main reasons for this:

- *Gender data is not always readily available* or tracked in know your customer (KYC) procedures. Mobile money operators must then use other methods to gather this information, such as customer surveys.
- *Gender data is available but not easily accessible*, either because it has been recorded on paper forms that have not been digitised, or because databases and platforms are not flexible enough to allow operators to filter their customers by gender.

**GENDER DATA IS NOT ALWAYS RELIABLE**

When gender data is available, it usually comes from KYC information. Most of the mobile money operators interviewed (6 out of 10) had collected information on gender during the customer registration process.

However, even when data is available, it is not necessarily reliable. For example, in one market, mobile money agents must take a photo of every new customer they register as part of the KYC process. However, many customers — particularly women — are reluctant to let agents take a photo of them. As a result, many agents end up using random pictures (often from the newspaper) to complete the registration, and many women customers are associated with photos of men in the operator's database. In other markets, operators have noted a tendency for men to register on behalf of women, which makes the KYC information less reliable.

**USING GENDER DATA TO BOOST MOBILE MONEY PERFORMANCE**

Mobile money operators can leverage gender data in two main ways:

1. They can use it to *understand* the different usage patterns of male and female customers. This type of analysis is key to identifying the barriers to women adopting the service, as well as developing strategies to remove them. This is a useful starting point for operators to increase women's uptake of their services.
2. Once operators have a good understanding of how women are currently using mobile money, they can use gender data to *measure the effectiveness* of their tactics to drive usage. None of the interviewees had specific KPIs on mobile money usage by women, just general KPIs on overall mobile money penetration levels. Driving women's usage of mobile money was often perceived as a way of achieving overall targets for mobile money penetration, and mobile money managers have closely monitored the effectiveness of the activities they have put in place.<sup>7</sup> For example, Nationwide Microbank in Papua New Guinea has included financial literacy training as part of their BTL activities and aim to get at least 75% of women attending the training to open a mobile money account.

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7. For more insights on the differences between KPIs and operational metrics in the context of mobile money, see the GSMA MMU reference guide on mobile money KPIs: <http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/new-mmu-reference-guide-on-mobile-money-kpis>.

## Barriers to women adopting mobile money

A number of barriers exist that can prevent women from adopting mobile money services. While the economic, social, and cultural context varies dramatically from market to market, mobile money operators reported six common and persistent barriers. These barriers are neither unique to women (although women tend to experience them more often and more acutely than men) nor are they insurmountable, but operators will need to have strategies to address them and maximize the potential of women in the mobile money market.

- **Low literacy and education levels** – Women tend to be less educated than men in most developing and emerging markets, which makes it more difficult to raise awareness and educate them about the benefits of mobile money and how to use it. Operators rated this the greatest barrier to adoption.
- **Lack of easy access to mobile money agents** – Easy access to a mobile money agent is crucial to women, and uptake and continued use depend on agents being available to help them trust the service. Women also tend to have less spare time than men<sup>8</sup> and might struggle to find the time to reach a mobile money agent to perform transactions.
- **Lack of identification documents** – In many markets, women are less likely to have the official identification documents required to open a mobile money account. In other markets, a man's signature is required for women to open an account and make domestic money transfers.<sup>9</sup> In all cases, the use of tiered KYC can help streamline the registration process and make it easier for women to sign up for the service.<sup>10</sup>
- **Lack of confidence** – The operators interviewed for this publication also indicated that women typically have less confidence in their ability to use mobile money than men<sup>11</sup> and identified this as a potential barrier to uptake of mobile money services.
- **Low levels of mobile phone ownership** – This remains a challenge in several markets where the digital gap is still prevalent. For example, a survey on financial inclusion reported that in Pakistan, 80% of men owned a mobile phone, while only 38% of women did. In India, 68% of men owned a mobile phone, while only 31% of women did.<sup>12</sup>

8. GSMA mWomen Programme and Visa, 2012, "Unlocking the Potential: Women and Mobile Financial Services in Emerging Markets", [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa\\_Unlocking-the-Potential\\_Feb-2013.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa_Unlocking-the-Potential_Feb-2013.pdf).

9. Sushma Narain, "Gender and Access to Finance", The World Bank, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGENDERSTATS/Resources/SushmaNarain-AcessoFinanceAnalyticalPaper.doc>.

10. It is recommended that regulators implement the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations, design risk-based KYC regimes that allow for simplified customer due diligence based on the specific risk of each product, and leverage operational and transactional mitigation measures. See Simone di Castri, "Mobile Money: Enabling Regulatory Solutions", <http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MMU-Enabling-Regulatory-Solutions-di-Castri-2013.pdf>.

11. GSMA mWomen Programme and Visa, 2012, "Unlocking the Potential: Women and Mobile Financial Services in Emerging Markets", [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa\\_Unlocking-the-Potential\\_Feb-2013.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa_Unlocking-the-Potential_Feb-2013.pdf).

12. Financial Inclusion Insights, 2014, country data for Pakistan and India, <http://finclusion.org/country-pages/>.

## Effective tactics to increase mobile money penetration amongst women

Mobile money operators can use a number of tactics to overcome barriers to adoption, particularly changing their approaches to marketing, distribution, and user experience. It is important to note that **mobile money operators do not necessarily need to design a new service, marketing campaign, or distribution model** to attract more female customers to their services. In most cases, tweaking existing products and services and the way they are marketed and distributed is enough to ensure greater uptake by women as well as men. This section features examples of successful tactics used by pioneering mobile money operators that can be easily replicated in other markets.

### Insight 1: Successful ATL campaigns include women

Above-the-line (ATL) marketing campaigns are important to raising customers' awareness of a mobile money service and its potential value to them. Ensuring that women can relate to an ATL campaign is an important step in increasing uptake of the service. It is not necessary to create a dedicated ATL campaign – only half of the mobile money operators interviewed by MMU had rolled out ATL campaigns specifically targeting women. The rest reported that women were featured in their regular marketing campaigns.

In many cases, featuring women in ATL campaigns is enough to make the service appealing to the female market. For instance, Telesom in Somaliland developed TV advertisements showing women using its mobile money service ZAAD for merchant payments and savings – the two use cases it thought would be most appealing to women.



It is also important to ensure that ATL campaigns are visible in locations frequented most often by women and/or at times when women are most likely to see them. For example, in Sri Lanka, where women account for 30% of Dialog's eZ Cash customers, the company featured eZ Cash ads in shopping malls, which women visit frequently.

### Insight 2: Roving agents reduce barriers to access for women

From a logistical perspective, it tends to be more difficult to reach women with mobile money services than men. Recent studies have shown that in developing countries, especially in rural areas, women tend to be both time-poor and busy,<sup>13</sup> looking after the house and children and contributing to the household income as well. In more conservative countries, women are not allowed to run errands outside the house on their own. It can therefore be challenging for women to visit a mobile money retailer to perform transactions.

Many of the mobile money operators interviewed by MMU identified these as barriers to access, and although deploying roving agents may be expensive, six out of 10 operators considered this an effective way to address these issues and reach more women with their mobile money service.

13. GSMA mWomen Programme, 2012, "Unlocking the Potential: Women and Mobile Financial Services in Emerging Markets", [http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa\\_Unlocking-the-Potential\\_Feb-2013.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GSMA-mWomen-Visa_Unlocking-the-Potential_Feb-2013.pdf), p. 11.

### Insight 3: A helpful and trusted agent network draws long-term female customers

Several of the mobile money operators pointed out that women usually require more interactions with agents than men before they feel comfortable using the service. Female customers tend to be more risk averse than men and take more time to trust the mobile money service. Women are also more inclined to seek help from agents more often than men do. Building a network of helpful, trustworthy, and patient agents can help operators address these challenges.

*“Women usually require 5 to 10 interactions on average compared to 3 to 5 for men before they are confident to use the service and initiate transactions.”*

– Tigo Ghana

The fact that women need more interactions to feel comfortable using the mobile money service should not deter operators from investing resources in building women's trust and confidence in the service. In fact, several studies<sup>14</sup> have shown that once women are familiar with a service and are comfortable using it, they tend to be more loyal customers than men, which yields long-term commercial benefits for the operator.

### Insight 4: Including financial education in BTL activities attracts new customers, especially women

While below-the-line (BTL) activities are key elements of any successful approach to educating customers, this seems particularly true for operators that want to reach women. Interviews with mobile money operators revealed that including financial education in BTL activities was an efficient way to attract new customers to the service, especially women. Women not only tend to require more in-person interactions to feel comfortable using the service, but they also tend to have lower financial education levels than men. Including financial education in BTL activities can be a powerful way to bring more women to the service.

In Papua New Guinea, Nationwide Microbank (NMB) has been delivering financial training to potential new customers and this has helped them to significantly increase their active customer rates. NMB's BTL activities include the delivery of financial training in rural villages and plantations to educate women about financial services. At the end of the training, women are provided with a MiCash mobile money account. While this training has a cost, benefits are two-fold: first, it helps NMB to register more customers; second, active customer rates are higher because the majority of people who register in the service will have received some training. In fact, over 90% of MiCash accounts are active on a monthly basis, which is significantly higher than the global average of 30 percent.<sup>15</sup>

### Insight 5: Good quality female agents can help drive women's uptake of mobile money

Managing agent quality is essential to the success of any mobile money distribution network. However, good quality female agents can be particularly strong assets for a provider seeking to attract women to its service and drive uptake. Nine of the 10 operators interviewed recognised that female agents tend to attract more female customers than men. This is especially true in countries where cultural and social norms make it difficult for women to interact with men.

First, female customers may be more comfortable sharing their KYC information with a woman than a man. In Somaliland, agents are required to take a photo of the customer at the time of registration. A significant number of women in this Muslim region wear the niqāb and are not willing to remove their veil in front of a man. The Telesom ZAAD team quickly became aware of this challenge and decided to hire female staff in their main centres to register new ZAAD female customers. The number of registered women increased quickly, from 17% of the customer base in 2009 (before they hired female staff) to 24% one year later.

Some of the operators also reported that female customers tended to trust female agents more than male agents. Tigo Ghana shared anecdotes of female customers being harassed by male agents who used their mobile phone number unprofessionally. Its female customers also worried that male agents would violate their privacy and inform their husbands about the frequency and amounts of transactions. Tigo Ghana believes the first interaction women have with the service is key to establishing trust. This is why it wanted its roving education teams to be made up of 50% women – much higher than the percentage for their regular fixed agents (35% of whom are women).

14. Valentyna Melnyk, Stijn M.J. van Osselaer, and Tammo H.A. Bijmolt, July 2009, "Are Women More Loyal Customers Than Men? Gender Differences in Loyalty to Firms and Individual Service Providers", Journal of Marketing, 73 (4), [https://archive.ama.org/archive/AboutAMA/Pages/AMA%20Publications/ AMA%20Journals/Journal%20of%20Marketing/TOCs/SUM\\_2009.4/Are\\_Women\\_More\\_Loyal\\_Customers.aspx](https://archive.ama.org/archive/AboutAMA/Pages/AMA%20Publications/ AMA%20Journals/Journal%20of%20Marketing/TOCs/SUM_2009.4/Are_Women_More_Loyal_Customers.aspx).

15. GSMA Mobile Money Intelligence

It can be challenging to hire women as agents, given that women may have lower literacy and numeracy skills than men, and may have less ability to invest in a service. To attract more female applicants, some operators have developed dedicated recruitment and training opportunities for women. With support from the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, Tigo launched an initiative in Ghana to specifically engage women entrepreneurs and support them with loans and small business management training in a mobile money retail chain. About 350 women agents have benefitted from this initiative, and the Tigo Cash team has noticed an improvement in the business performance of their female agents.

## Conclusion

Women make up half of the mobile money industry's potential customer base, but penetration of services within this group remains low. Achieving greater gender equity in the mobile money market and higher levels of mobile money penetration has required operators to address the various barriers that keep women from adopting and using their services, from low literacy and education to more practical challenges, such as a lack of identification documents or easy, regular access to a mobile money agent or mobile phone.

The mobile money operators surveyed and interviewed by MMU are responding to these challenges in various ways: with product offerings tailored to the unique financial needs of women; updated marketing campaigns that women can relate to; and hiring quality female agents who help to build women's confidence and trust in mobile money services and turn them into loyal customers.



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