



mWomen



**Snapshot: Consumer Insights for Adolescent Girls –  
the case of BRAC in Bangladesh**

## Overview

The largest employer for young women in Bangladesh is the ready-made garment industry (RMG) sector – which employs almost 3 million people, 80% of whom are women and accounts for 76% of Bangladesh's exports and 10% of its GDP.<sup>1</sup> Employment opportunities are also perceived to be linked to English language skills, and are more limited for people who have lower levels of English. This is particularly true for women and girls, who have fewer opportunities to learn English and so fewer employment and livelihood opportunities than men. Therefore, creating mobile education and employment services that specifically target young women can enhance employment prospects for women and girls. The GSMA mWomen programme awarded an NGO Innovation Fund grant to BRAC Bangladesh in early 2014 to develop a mobile learning service for rural adolescent girls, in partnership with Robi Axiata and the British Council. The service aims to teach English through mobile platforms – delivered through voice and SMS – with a view to helping users be more employable in major industries such as garment manufacturing.

However, social and cultural norms mean that few mobile operators in Bangladesh have been able to carry out studies to explore adolescent girls' wants and needs. In order to design a service that incorporated findings on how to create the content, develop the platform, and then deliver and price the product for the target audience, Robi Axiata needed to carry out consumer insight research into adolescent girls.

## Conducting Consumer Insights Research on Adolescent Girls in Bangladesh

Trying to understand the adolescent girls market segment in Bangladesh is challenging for a number of reasons:

- **Limited existing data:** There is little data on the female segment in Bangladesh generally, since this is not a segment mobile network operators (MNOs) have traditionally targeted. That means that there was no data that Robi could draw on from previous consumer insights surveys. There is even less data on female adolescents, since the mobile regulatory body Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has stipulated regulations that mean that SIMs cannot legally be sold to users under the age of 18. So, even though young girls may be using phones, they are registered in the names of others, and hence data and usage patterns are difficult to track. There is also the difficulty in reaching these young women. Social norms in Bangladesh, a culturally conservative country, mean that adolescent girls are often still under the protection of their parents even if they are over 18 but unmarried. It is difficult to get access to them without permission from their parents, which in Bangladesh generally means their fathers. This creates a barrier that sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> IFC (2012) Ready-Made Garments: Challenges in Implementing a Sector Strategy

means the views of adolescent girls are not always fully represented in an honest and open way, especially if interactions with adolescent girls are in the presence of a father or other family member.

- **Rapidly shifting views:** There is a big difference between older and younger adolescents – a fifteen-year old and a seventeen-year old are at very different stages of school and life, and so their thoughts are also very dissimilar. Although the service is aimed at girls over the age of 18, Robi was also interested in insights into younger girls to drive uptake of the mobile product when they turned eighteen. Additionally, Robi was interested in how other family members could support or discourage mobile adoption for young women.

The dilemma facing Robi here was – how do you design a mobile service for an audience you don't know, who are so diverse, and who are also hard to get access to?

## Partnering to gain access and insights into young female consumers

Robi worked with Quantum, a specialist qualitative research firm based in Dhaka to help them design the study and understand their audience. They decided to do a qualitative explorative study using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, in order to understand the psychographic profile of the girls, their needs, wants and ambitions, as well as their willingness and ability to pay for a mobile learning service.

Because of the challenges outlined above of reaching rural adolescent girls, the benefits of partnering with an NGO such as BRAC became quickly apparent to both Robi and the research firm. BRAC has an extensive grassroots network of women and community service organisations across the whole of Bangladesh – and in order to reach adolescent girls at scale, the project plans to utilise the extensive network of BRAC's Adolescent Development Programme (ADP), which has over 8,000 informal after-school clubs for 250,000 adolescent girls across Bangladesh.

As BRAC has been working with rural communities for over thirty years and has reached millions of women across Bangladesh, they have built up a relationship and trust with these communities and have ready access to the 250,000 girls in the ADP clubs, as well as their parents. As such, they were able to provide Robi with ready access to their target segment. For more information on best practice partnerships between NGOs and mobile network operators, please see the recent GSMA mWomen [Partnerships Insights Paper](#).

Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with four target groups located in Dhaka, as well as in two rural areas outside Dhaka. These four different groups were important to talk to in order to get a 360° view of what the product needed to look like (see below table).

Who?	Why?	How?
Female ADP members aged 13-19	Robi split the girls into two groups: older girls, who were more likely to start looking for work and had realistic ideas of what work opportunities were available to them; and younger girls, who gave Robi an insight into their career aspirations and values	10 focus group discussions.  Robi gained access through BRAC and so parents were with their daughters attending the FGDs
Mothers and fathers of the ADP girls	To test willingness to pay and price points as the parents are likely to be the people paying for the service	8 in-depth paired interviews with the mothers and the fathers of the ADP girls  Robi also conducted 8 separate individual interviews with the mothers alone, which Robi found were more likely to give different, more honest, opinions, when not with their husbands
Current female workers aged 18 – 25 who have at least one year's work experience	In order to understand what future employees need to learn. It was important to talk to current workers to see what they felt they needed for their current work, and what they thought might have helped them get their job	6 focus group discussions
Current employers in the RMG sector	To check that the content was relevant to the industries and that the people who would potentially be employed would have the skills that employers wanted	16 in-depth individual interviews with heads of HR, supervisors, middle managers and industry experts

## Key findings of the research

- Young women were aspirational about their employment prospects – they wanted to either join the RMG sector as mid-level managers rather than at entry level, or join the ICT sector. Generally, the manufacturing side of the RMG sector was not what the adolescent girls wanted for their careers and their lives – they aimed higher.
- Both mothers and fathers wanted their daughters to use their education as a means to social mobility – if parents were to invest in their daughters' education past the age of 16, they wanted their daughters to make the move from 'blue collar' to 'white collar' jobs and increase their social status. If there was a mobile education service that could help their daughters to do this, they would be willing to pay for it.

These two findings were extremely important for the design of the product – Robi had not expected young women and their parents to be so aspirational and to aim so high in terms of career prospects. This was indicated very early on in the FGDs with the adolescent girls and current RMG employees, leading to Robi deciding to include another industry into the research. The ICT sector was the chosen alternative industry, as it was rapidly growing to become the second-largest sector in Bangladesh, and was further emphasized - particularly for women - through the Bangladeshi government's Digital Bangladesh-initiatives. Feedback from the FGDs and interviews on including the ICT industry proved very positive. It became clear that it was a sector both adolescent girls and their parents aspired to working in, and industry experts identified English skills as an entry requirement to the industry. Robi have now decided to include the ICT industry in the mobile service, and create content geared towards this industry as well as the RMG sector.

What this finding shows is the importance of conducting in-depth consumer research with the range of stakeholders that influence a product – from the families and communities in which the girls live to potential employers in the sector, to inform product design. Robi needed to change their focus towards both the ICT and the RMG sector because of the findings - by speaking to all of the relevant groups, they were able to identify this early on and get a wide range of viewpoints on what the mobile service should look like.

## Next steps

Robi and BRAC now have in-depth understanding of their audience and key design elements that need to be integrated into the product. This project is a good example of how an MNO designed a product and developed an understanding of their audience and the ecosystem in which young women live and work through thoughtful consumer insights research with multiple stakeholders. Robi also mitigated risk and discovered a new opportunity by identifying early on that there may be alternatives to the planned service/product, in this case the ICT sector as well as the RMG sector, and testing that alternative with the market segment.

For more information on the project and to receive updates on progress, please follow the GSMA mWomen [blog](#) and [twitter feed](#).

#### **About the GSMA**

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide. Spanning more than 220 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators with 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in industry sectors such as financial services, healthcare, media, transport and utilities. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress and Mobile Asia Expo.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at [www.gsma.com](http://www.gsma.com).

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#### **About Mobile for Development - Serving the underserved through mobile**

Mobile for Development brings together our mobile operator members, the wider mobile industry and the development community to drive commercial mobile services for underserved people in emerging markets. We identify opportunities for social and economic impact and stimulate the development of scalable, life-enhancing mobile services.

For more information, please visit the GSMA M4D website at: [www.gsma.com/mobileforddevelopment](http://www.gsma.com/mobileforddevelopment)

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#### **About the GSMA mWomen Programme**

The GSMA mWomen Programme aims to increase women's access to and use of mobile phones and life-enhancing mobile services in low- and middle-income countries. The programme objectives are to encourage the mobile industry to serve resource-poor women, increase the availability of relevant mobile services, and promote innovation to overcome adoption barriers. GSMA mWomen offers hands-on advisory and financial support to design and launch mobile services for women. The programme also generates and shares insights on the commercial and social value of serving women with mobile, as well as tools and evidence on what works.

Visit [www.gsma.com/mwomen](http://www.gsma.com/mwomen) to learn more about how to participate.

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