GSMA

Uganda Market Report
Ensibuuko case study



April 2025 | Radicle Development

Contents

3 **Background**
How are digital inclusion and poverty alleviation related?

6 **Case: Ensibuuko**

Ensibuuko Market Analysis

11 **Is Ensibuuko use related to poverty alleviation? If so, in what ways?**
Job creation
Poverty reduction
Livelihood improvement
Increased resilience

15 **What role do market conditions play?**
Savings and credit mechanisms
Fintech industry and regulation
Access to mobile phones and data
Mobile connectivity and quality of service
Digital literacy and technology adoption
Financial literacy and inclusion
Geographic disparities

22 **Conclusions**
Endnotes
Acknowledgements

Background

The GSMA Innovation Fund (GSMAIF) sources solutions leveraging digital and emerging mobile technologies and supports them to scale. The aim of stimulating digital innovation is to deliver sustainable businesses that can create large-scale socio-economic impact through digital technology and mobile internet.

Together with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the GSMAIF commissioned a series of research and evaluation projects to examine and understand the connection of its work de-risking digital innovation, specifically supporting businesses to scale who have a potential for follow-on positive outcomes. These potential outcomes include job creation, poverty reduction, livelihood improvement, and increased resilience to negative shocks (for example, climate events).

This case study is part of this series of research, exploring the following questions:

- How are businesses and their ability to scale affected by market conditions?
- How are businesses, in turn, changing their market environment?
- Who are the users of the business product?
- What is the impact of the business product on these individuals' livelihoods and socio-economic status? And what role did market conditions play in this impact?

Look for other cases in this series:
Lumkani (South Africa), GeoKrishi (Nepal), and TaskMoby (Ethiopia).

How are digital inclusion and poverty alleviation related?

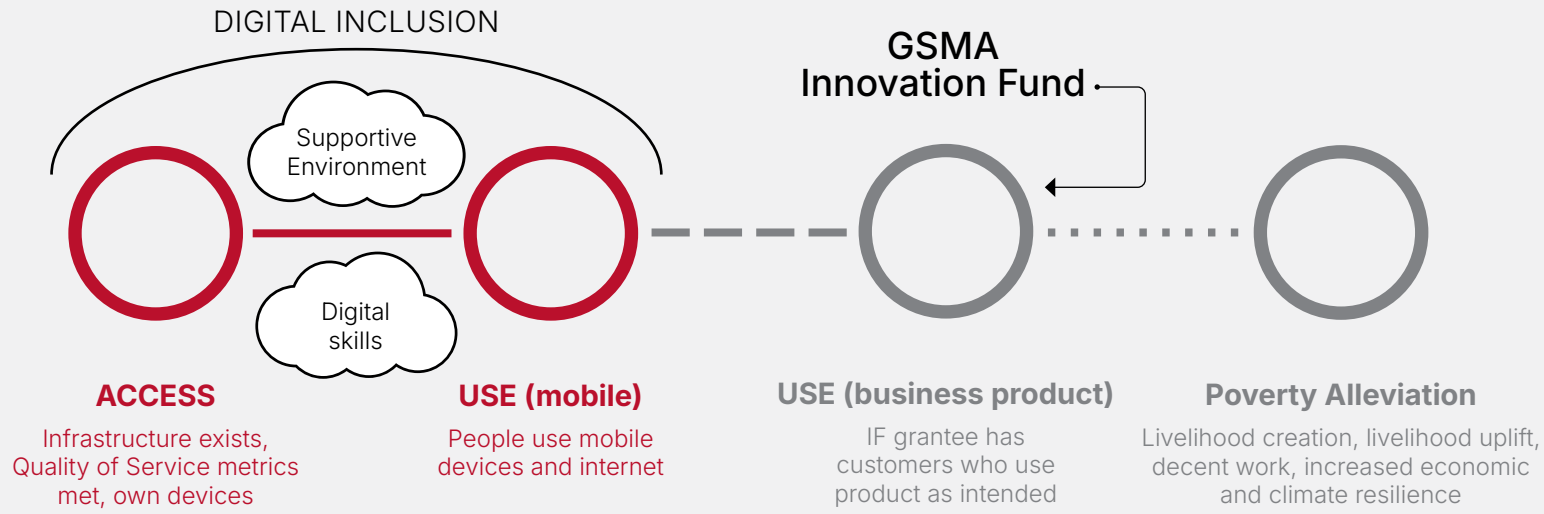
The GSMAIF looks to de-risk innovation in the digital space for businesses likely to have a positive social impact. Figure 1 shows the theory of change for the GSMAIF, drawing a pathway from digital inclusion, to the use of a business product, to poverty alleviation benefits.

The temptation is to read this chain of events from left to right, albeit with less and less of a direct link (i.e. increasing assumption) as you move from left to right, such that:

- **IF** GSMA member Mobile Network Operators and national governments, regulatory partners, etc. ensure access to mobile and use of mobile through digital inclusion,
  THEN people can use mobile products.
- **IF** the GSMAIF can de-risk the innovation of mobile products,
  THEN more products will reach people in poverty.
- **IF** products reach people in poverty,
  THEN there will be poverty alleviation.

While this is a nice story, these are aspects of a complex environment where causality, and even contribution, cannot be assumed to be linear.

Figure 1

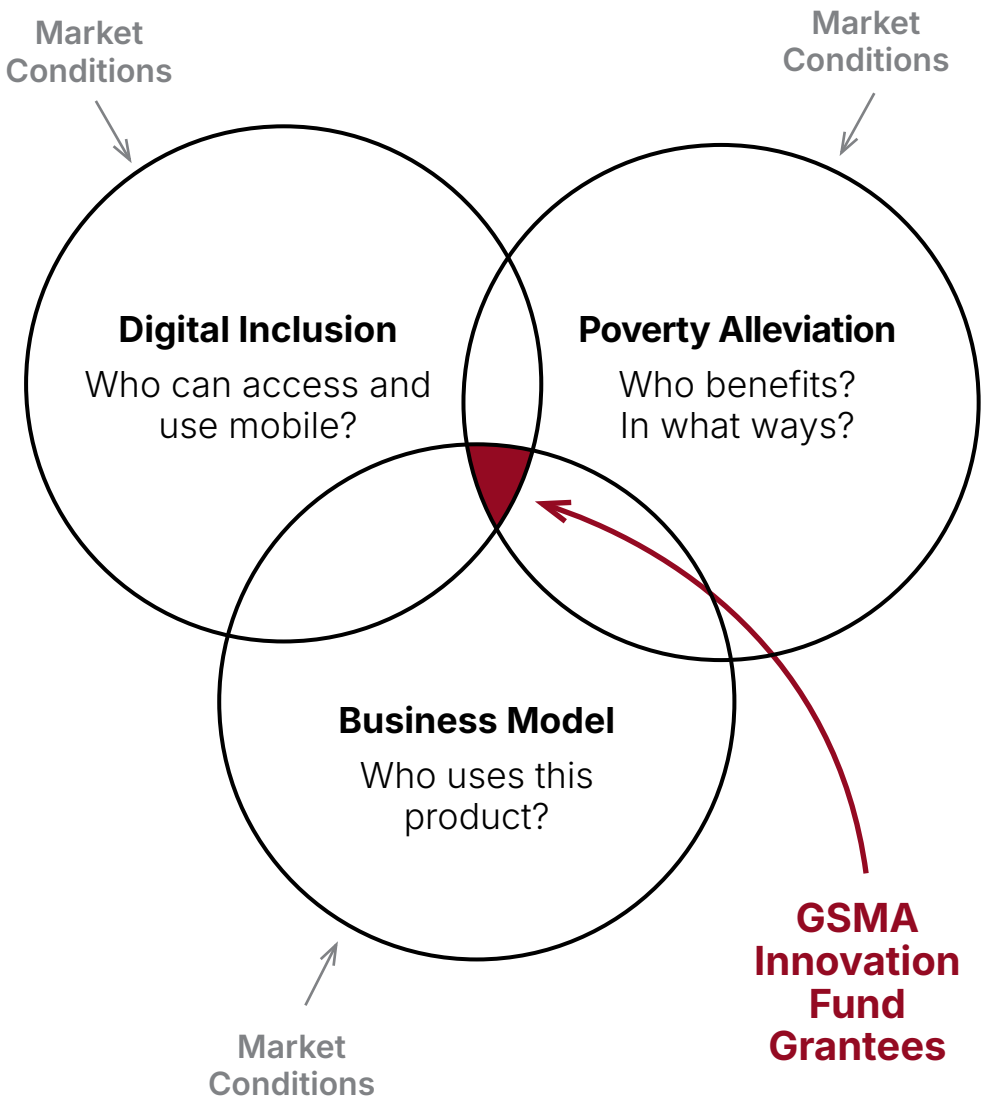


IMPACT STATEMENT:

Improved wellbeing, livelihoods and climate resilience, mitigation, and adaptation for low-income women and underserved groups through **improved access** to and **use of** mobile phones and digital service.

How are digital inclusion and poverty alleviation related?

Figure 2

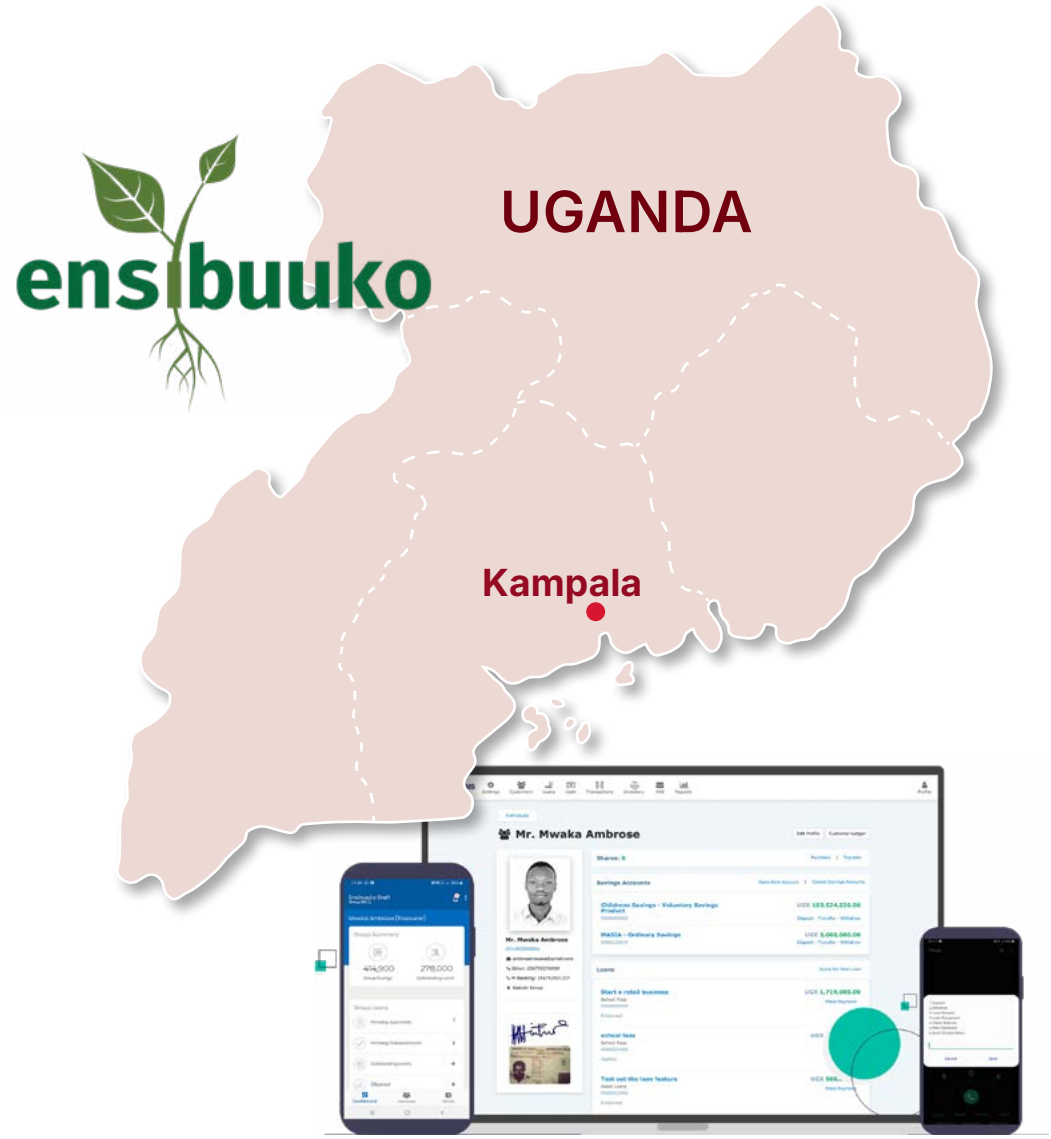


Reality looks more like overlapping domains such as in Figure 2. A business product might rely on mobile without ever touching people in poverty, many businesses might support poverty alleviation, without really relying on digital inclusion, and services might increase access to mobile (services and information) that supports poverty alleviation without revolving around a specific product or business. Finding the "sweet spot" of using a specific business model that includes digital inclusion as part of its main value proposition AND leads to poverty alleviation is not a given.

Yet, the GSMAIF theory of change assumes that the funded innovations reside in this coveted middle spot. While it's true that **sometimes** mobile access provides access to business services which then **sometimes** creates jobs, reduces poverty and improves livelihoods, but the case studies demonstrate this is not **necessarily** the case. Digital inclusion, product use, and poverty alleviation are not dependent on one another, nor are they mutually exclusive. Additionally, all three domains are subject to influence from context-specific market conditions.

Starting with the specific product/business model of a given case helps to locate within these overlapping circles—identifying where/what the relationship is to mobile, potential benefit to those living in poverty, and how market conditions are impacting it all.

Case: Ensibuuko



Ensibuuko is a financial technology company founded in 2014. It offers digital apps and products to Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs)— the less formal banking and savings options used by a large portion of the population in Uganda. Ensibuuko's mission is to drive financial inclusion by growing the digital financial infrastructure to connect the unbanked to the wider financial ecosystem.

Ensibuuko was a winner in the 2022 Inclusive Fintech 50 global competition to identify cutting-edge companies that offer a new value proposition, show early-stage traction, and have a noticeable impact on financially underserved people.

Ensibuuko has been funded twice by the GSMAIF:

- **Ecosystem Accelerator Innovation Fund (2018):** to design, build, and integrate a mobile banking platform to improve the quality and range of financial services available to SACCOS in Uganda
- **Innovation Fund for Mobile Internet Adoption and Digital Inclusion (2020):** to promote the adoption of internet-based products and services in rural areas by tackling the barriers of accessibility and digital skills.

Ensibuuko products

- **Microfinance Platform:** a customised product offered to SACCOs in order to track savings and loans and provide members with digital access to SACCO services
- **Savings Groups Platform:** the Mobis app offers digital bookkeeping to VSLA leadership and membership savings, and allows for money tracking and remote transactions via mobile money.

Increasing access to products

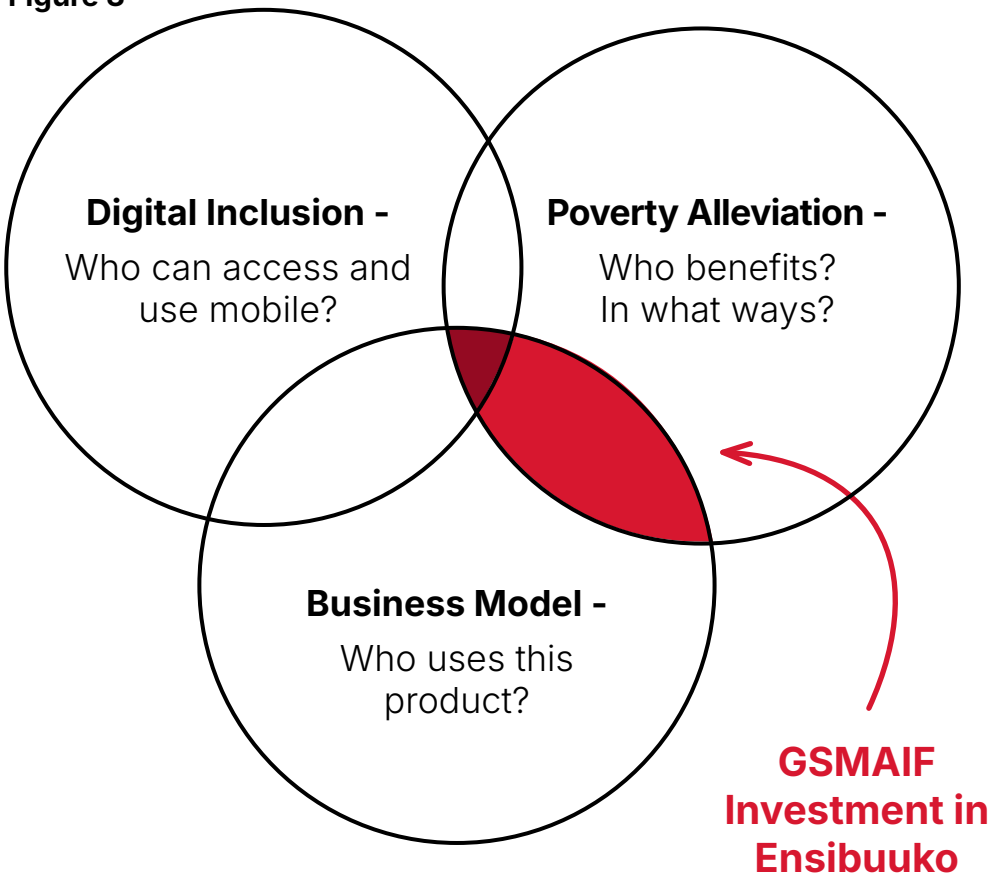
Digital literacy, affordability, and internet access are all vital for customers to successfully use Ensibuuko's products for financial inclusion. For these reasons the company:

- Uses a train-the-trainer model to deliver a digital technology and mobile inclusion curriculum specific to rural customers
- Empowers community-based digital support agents (DCEs) to provide local support
- Partners with mobile network operators (MNOs) to provide a reverse billing option to make internet use part of Ensibuuko's product, not a separate transaction for customers with the MNO
- Offers solar-powered chargers and smartphones to certain VSLAs
- Has a USSD platform option

How is Ensibuuko related to digital inclusion and poverty alleviation?

Ensibuuko is an entirely digital product offered through mobile devices. The benefits it offers are only available via digital means and record keeping—safer money transfer and savings, ease of record keeping burden, increased credibility for lenders and institutions, and access to other financial products. While Ensibuuko gets customers online and accelerates the effects of financial inclusion, poverty alleviation results more from the original VSLA or SACCO membership, rather than Ensibuuko per se. Thus, Figure 3 shows that we place Ensibuuko as operating largely between digital inclusion (promoting access to mobile) and its business promoting use of its product.

Figure 3



Ensibuuko Market Analysis

This market analysis, as a companion to the GSMAIF impact study, helps us understand how GSMA's efforts to de-risk digital innovation for businesses have connected to broader social and economic outcomes. These impacts do not occur in isolation. Grantees are both shaped by and have an influence on the markets they operate in.

By analyzing these market dynamics, we can better understand how they influence the depth, sustainability, and scalability of grantees' impact in local communities, such as job creation, poverty reduction, improved livelihoods, and increased resilience to challenges like climate events. This analysis also considers factors that may affect the replication of solutions in different contexts.

Who is using Ensibuuko?

There are two primary groups of users—**VSLA leaders and SACCO members**. Among 1,412 Ensibuuko users surveyed from both groups:

- Have been using Ensibuuko for an average of 26 months
- Are largely satisfied with the products, with an average score of 7.7 out of 10
- Almost none have stopped using the services since starting (99.5% retention among those surveyed)
- Reported being highly likely to recommend Ensibuuko to others

VSLA leaders

VSLA leaders use the Mobis app to help conduct VSLA meetings, move VSLA transactions online, and accomplish bookkeeping with ease. **These users closely mirror the average Ugandan population—** largely rural, financially at-risk, and with lower educational attainment. They are older than the average population, which is notably young, and are slightly less financially included.

These users **have significantly higher internet access and mobile phone ownership** than average. Yet, this may be due to the adoption of Ensibuuko; 70.8% of VSLA leaders are **first-time users of this type of digital and financial tool**. Many receive training and even devices from Ensibuuko to do so.

SACCO member users at a glance

SACCO members use the customised Mobis app specific to their SACCO in order to access their accounts, make mobile money payments, apply for credit and manage their money.

SACCO members are significantly more urban, male, financially stable, educated and banked than the average Ugandan. They also have **much higher rates of internet access and mobile phone ownership** than the overall population, but unlike the VSLA leaders, they are not first time users of this type of product—**80% have previous experience with similar products**.

	Uganda national averages	VSLA leaders (n=452)	Ensibuuko VSLA leaders compared to Ugandan averages	SACCO members (n=960)	Ensibuuko SACCO members compared to Ugandan averages
Urban/rural	Urban: 27% Rural: 73%[1]	Urban: 26% Rural: 74%	= About the same	Urban: 41.3% Rural: 58.7%	↑ More urban
Below the national poverty line	20.34%[2]	NA	= About the same	NA	↓ Less poor
Below 200% of the poverty line	42.4%[3]	46.3%	= About the same	20.45%	↓ Less poor
Gender	Male: 49.6% Female: 50.4%[4]	Male: 53.5% Female: 46.5%	= About the same	Male: 61.4% Female: 38.6%	↑ More male
Average age of users	16.9 years[5]	35 years	↑ Older	36 years	↑ Older
% reaching secondary education	39%[6]	35.8%	= About the same	83.7%	↑ More educated
Formal bank account	66%[7]	61%	↓ Slightly less banked	75%	↑ More banked
Internet use	28%[8]	80%	↑ More access	82.5%	↑ More access
Mobile phone ownership	76%[9]	100%	↑ More phone ownership	100%	↑ More phone ownership

Why are they using Ensibuuko?

Ensibuuko users report the following reasons for using the product:



Saves time and effort doing bookkeeping digitally



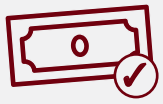
Improved record-keeping, eliminating errors and loss of data



Increases legitimacy and access to loans from microfinance institutions



Greater connection and transparency across groups



Increased ease in accessing funds—convenience and reduction in transportation costs



Reduced risk compared to working in cash

"I am now better informed. It has linked us to other groups through WhatsApp and also improved record-keeping. We no longer use paper."

—Male user

"Ensibuuko helps digitalise the village savings records, which help the saving groups to access microfinance institutions for loans."

—Female user

"It simplifies work and makes it quicker. It automatically calculates the loans and the interests on these loans, saving time that would be used to add figures manually."

—VSLA user[10]

Is Ensibuuko use related to poverty alleviation? If so, in what ways?



Job creation

Ensibuuko's product does not directly create jobs. **Many users (89.5%) self-report that Ensibuuko has helped them start or expand a business**. However, this effect should be considered in context with VSLA or SACCO membership, which are known to help start and expand businesses. Using an app to ease or increase participation with entities of financial inclusion (VSLA/SACCO) contributes to but is not responsible for end results. For example, this Ensibuuko user is saving because of her VSLA, but perhaps finds it easier to do so because of the app:

"The saving scheme has really brought great achievement in my life. Last year when we got our savings, I took the money and then I bought two goats—that is the importance of saving. If I was not saving, I was not able to get them."

–VSLA user focus group participant

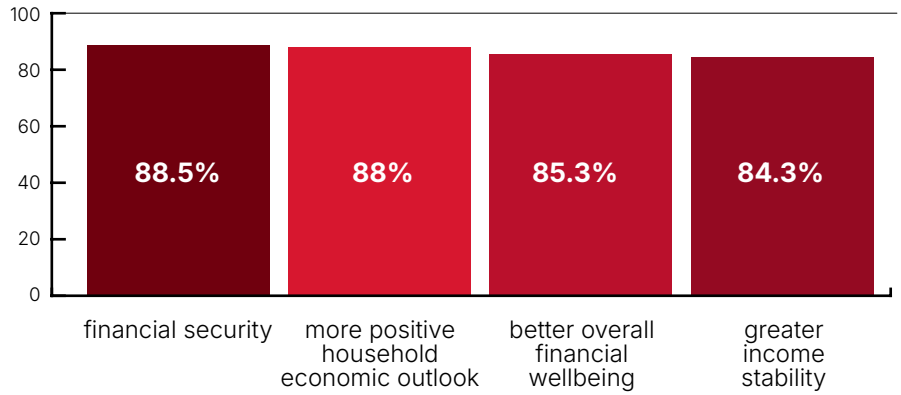
Ensibuuko may also boost other job creation effects, like increasing demand for mobile money agents in rural areas or stimulating local markets when hardware such as smartphones and solar chargers are provided (both reported in focus groups). These are important, albeit indirect, contributions to economic job growth.

Ensibuuko is a growing employer in its own right, directly providing 60 full-time staff positions in 2022.

Poverty reduction

The savings increase seen with VSLA and SACCO membership is crucial to long-term poverty reduction.

When surveyed about Ensibuuko's impact, respondents answered the following aspects had "improved" since use of Ensibuuko:



Much of this impact is due to VSLA and SACCO membership. Focus group discussions helped delineate some differences of participating in these groups digitally. For example, participants noted:

- Online convenience leads to **improved household financial planning** so that seasonal and emergency costs become more affordable.
- Digital savings helped members track expenses, **reduce unnecessary spending**, and prioritise financial goals.
- **Improved access to services such as medical treatment**, due to the ability to digitally prove their ability to pay.
- **More regular savings** with the ease of a fixed amount tied to a simple USSD code.

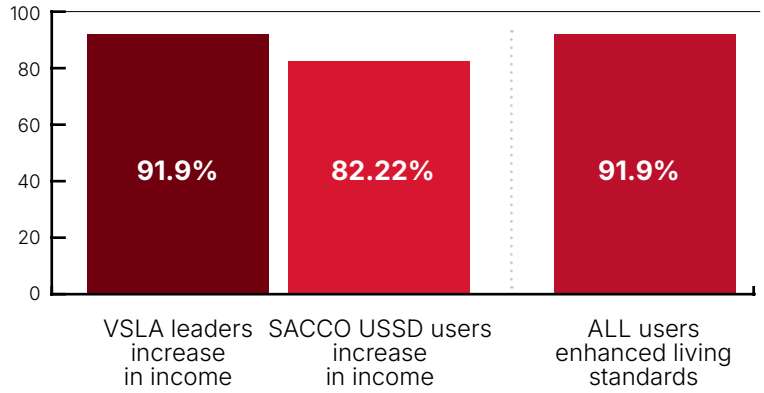
"It has influenced my savings because it's convenient, because if I have to transfer money to my account I don't need to move to the bank. I just simply put the money on the phone and forward it to the bank, so it encourages the savings culture."

— SACCO user focus group participant

There is one notable drawback to digital savings, which is that **easy access to funds can lead to impulsive withdrawals and a reduction in long-term savings** (reported by some focus group respondents).

Besides savings and financial stability, Ensibuuko users are also reporting income growth and improvement in living standards.

Chart:



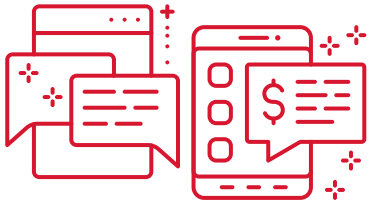
Users view Ensibuuko's role in income increases as very significant (49.4%) or somewhat significant (42.3%). Among VSLA leaders, 60.9% surveyed indicated Ensibuuko's role was "very significant" in income increases. Further research would be needed to tease apart the contribution of Ensibuuko specifically, versus the contribution of VSLA and SACCO participation.

Livelihood improvement

87.9% of survey respondents credit the Ensibuuko app with improved employment opportunities.

Increases in digital and financial inclusion through Ensibuuko contributes to business growth, entrepreneurship, and increased employment opportunities through several mechanisms.

Via increased digital inclusion



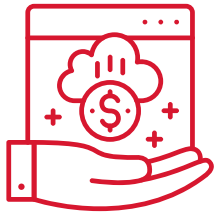
Ensibuuko contributes to greater digital inclusion, particularly among rural VSLA leaders. In a survey conducted with VSLA users in 2022, 60% reported having no prior mobile internet use and 44% had never used a phone to access the internet. Through Ensibuuko training they gained access to mobile and internet.

It is possible that digital inclusion — due to increased digital skills, access to information and other services, perhaps an expanded social network—is contributing to improved livelihood. It is unclear for whom that is happening or if it is consistent.

"My greatest challenge was the lack of skills and understanding of mobile phone usage, but after Ensibuuko training, I can comfortability use my mobile phone [for different uses] like mobile money, digitally pay agri-inputs merchants, and other applications like WhatsApp for communication."

—VSLA member[11]

Via increased financial inclusion



It is easier to see the link between livelihood improvement and financial inclusion, with many survey respondents and focus group participants directly linking the two. However, it is difficult to assess the specific boost given by the digital nature of savings and inclusion, above and beyond the benefits provided by VSLA and SACCO membership.

"The increase of the finances and the saving culture helps to create other businesses."

—VSLA member survey respondent

"My savings will have grown and I will use it to start a business and be self-employed."

—SACCO member survey respondent

The increase in financial inclusion is in large part due to greater access to loans, through digital ease, Ensibuuko facilitating connections to loan sources, and more accurate records demonstrating greater legitimacy. Loans help individuals expand their businesses, buy agricultural inputs, and begin new enterprises.

"We are able to get loans that help us to start businesses that keep improving our welfare."

—SACCO member survey respondent

Via increased skills from training

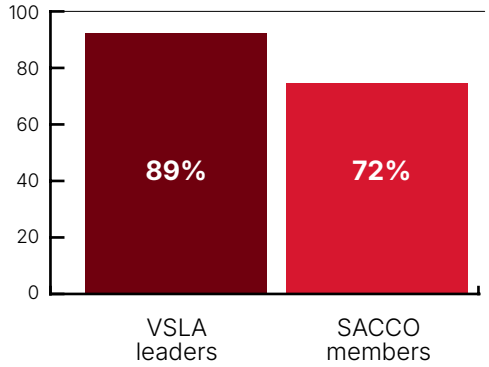
The second largest boost to financial inclusion and directly to livelihood improvement was through training Ensibuuko provided. Training reaches a majority of users, both VSLA leaders and SACCO members.

Training builds digital skills, business management skills,and increases confidence in savings and money management. Users are attributing improvement in their businesses to these new skills and confidence.

Ensibuuko training directly benefited livelihoods in some cases through:



Received training from Ensibuuko:



- **Improved record keeping and reduced errors** for better business accountability
- **Access to new employment opportunities** due to meeting different people in their group
- Enabling a small business to **receive payments, pay suppliers and manage cash flow** efficiently.

"[Ensibuuko] gives us the opportunity to learn new financial and digital skills that are useful in business management"

—SACCO member survey respondent

Increased resilience

Increased resilience is linked to the effects discussed under Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Improvement—increased digital and financial inclusion and attendant benefits. These same benefits extend to make households more resilient to economic shocks.

The other area of resilience is to the VSLA organisations themselves. Nearly all VSLA secretaries surveyed described their VSLA as having greatly or somewhat improved conditions since adopting Ensibuuko. Specifically, they report improved savings and loan management and that the platform supports investments from the VSLA into households and businesses. VSLA members benefit in the long-run as the association structure, day-to-day business, and legitimacy are strengthened.

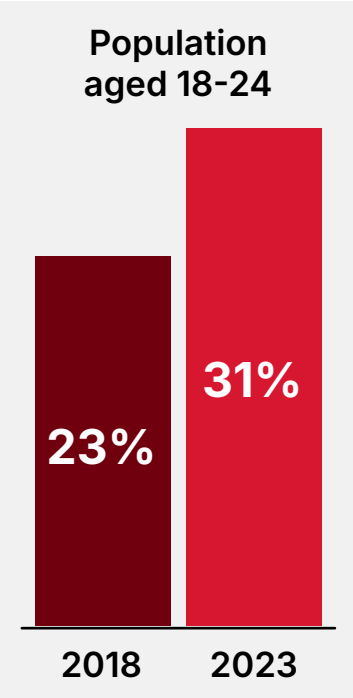
What role do market conditions play?

Uganda's population is rapidly getting younger.

In 2023, nearly 31% of the population was between the ages of 18-24, up from 23% just five years ago.[12]

Despite rapid urbanization (5.9% annually), the majority of Uganda's population remains rural. 73% of the population relies on agriculture as the primary source of income. 42% of the population live at or below 200% of the national poverty line. Secondary school completion sits at 39% of the population. These numbers skew considerably lower in rural areas.

Uganda's economy is relatively stable and grew at a rate of 6% in 2024. Its growth is due in large part to a growing oil sector, agriculture, and the successful implementation of the Parish Development Model, a government initiative aimed at shifting subsistence households into the formal economy. The first phase of the Parish Development Model has established 10,585 SACCOs and disbursed $239 million to 880,000 households—significantly boosting the economy.[13] Ensibuuko is a participant in the programme.



Savings and credit mechanisms



Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the population save (71%) and use credit (77%).[14]

The most common method of saving is as a member of a VSLA, followed by cash at home and mobile money. However, SACCO use has seen a 10-point increase in just five years, in large part due to the Parish Development Program.[15]

Similarly, primary informal sources of credit are VSLAs (56%) and friends and family (50%). Formal sources of credit are most often SACCOs and mobile money, both used by 16% of borrowers.[16]

Influence

Ensibuuko's growth and product use

There is a sizable potential market for Ensibuuko's product. It aligns with SACCO growth promoted by the Parish Development Program.

Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

VSLAs and SACCOs are recognised among communities and by the government as **trustworthy places for building credit and accessing financial services**.

Fintech industry and regulation



The Bank of Uganda reported that in just two years, the number of regulated fintech companies doubled, jumping from 24 to 43.[17] Ensibuuko is included, as it holds a microfinance banking license and is also one of more than 200 members of the Financial Technology Service Providers Association of Uganda (FITSPA Uganda). This association acts as a unifying platform connecting fintech providers, regulators, and end-users, to create a supportive environment for growth.

Uganda has updated policy and regulations to address these financial and technology realities. In 2009, the government established the National Information Technology Authority-Uganda (NITA-U), a statutory body that coordinates and regulates information technology services. This body began issuing mobile money guidelines in 2013 and has progressed to create clear policies specific to digital financial transactions.

Currently, SACCOs in Uganda have multiple regulators such as Uganda Microfinance Regulatory Authority, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives and the Bank of Uganda. There are efforts to harmonise the laws governing operations of SACCOs in the country.

Influence

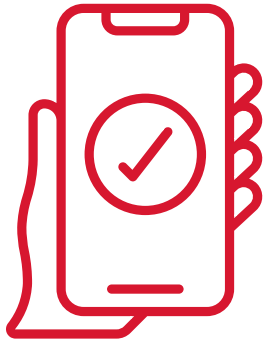
Ensibuuko's growth and product use

While regulation demands that fintech companies become licensed and meet certain criteria, **it also creates clarity and an equal playing field**. Having fit for purpose regulation (rather than retro-fitting policies made for more traditional interactions) has **fostered innovation and spurred growth** within the fintech sector overall, earning government and consumer trust in services.[18]

Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

Many focus group respondents cite excise taxes of 10-15% on mobile money transactions as a sizable disincentive to use. Additionally, many telecoms charge a flat fee for USSD transaction code use. If a user is transferring money to a SACCO and again to mobile money, **they may pay the same fee twice**. This accounts for some hesitancy to engage with this part of Ensibuuko's platform.

Access to mobile phones and data

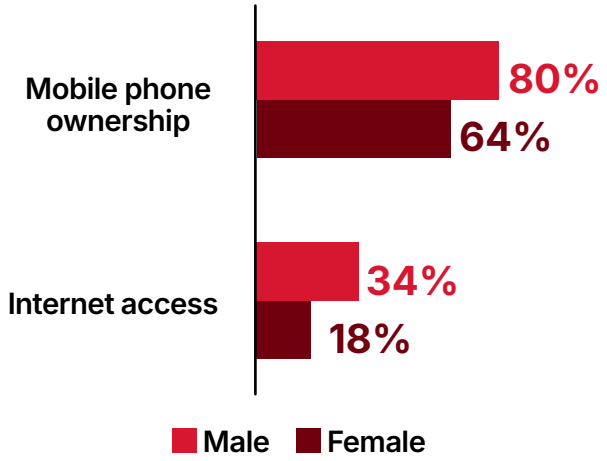


Three-quarters of households in Uganda have mobile phones, with many preferring basic phones due to cost.[19]

More than a third (38%) of VSLA users surveyed said the cost of mobile data was a barrier to access.[20]

Cost is a particularly important aspect of ensuring access to mobile as many Ugandans are in a place of financial precarity. In the last five years, households experiencing unexpected expenses from more frequent negative economic shocks have skyrocketed from 37% in 2018 to more than 90% in 2023.[21]

Access also differs across gender lines.



Source: FINSCOPE (2023) FSD Uganda

Influence

Ensibuuko's growth and product use

Ensibuuko works with telecom partners to address access through:

- Internet data reverse billing so VSLAs can use the app without purchasing internet separately
- Integrating mobile money within the Ensibuuko app
- Providing basic digital literacy training
- Distributing SIM cards, phone and mobile money registrations.[22]

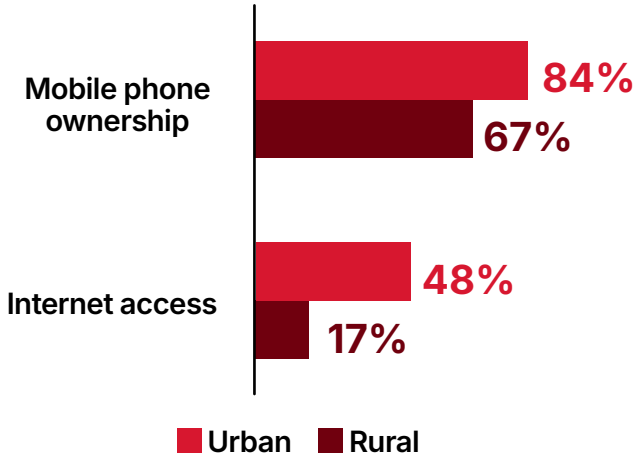
Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

Limited digital literacy and access to smartphones, data, and electricity have prevented some VSLAs from adopting Ensibuuko's platform. **Training and supplies are essential to ensuring broader, equitable access to Ensibuuko products**.

Mobile connectivity and quality of service



Despite improvements in connectivity, Uganda still lags behind regional peers on the GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index (score of 40 out of 100).



Source: FINSCOPE 2023, FSD Uganda

This results in poor connectivity for many in rural areas, necessitating travel of up to 4-5km to reach a connection point. It also creates unstable connections

In order to reach customers, companies like Ensibuuko are having to move features offline and sync the app later when the internet is reconnected.[23]

Influence

Ensibuuko's growth and product use

Nearly half (48%) of VSLA users surveyed said poor connectivity was the main barrier to using Ensibuuko,as it makes the service unpredictable. To adapt, Ensibuuko has invested in USSD technology and developed more offline options to engage. These workarounds add to company costs and limit the use of other methods which, while could be useful, would depend on better connectivity.

Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

There are frequent power outages in rural areas. This and smartphone hardware and battery issues lead to users having difficulties accessing services such as Ensibuuko.

"We have limited internet access. For example, when you go to some areas to get mobile money services, you have to move for almost three or four kilometers and if someone has sent you money on mobile money, to go and withdraw you have to incur transport costs"

- VSLA user focus group participant[24]

Digital literacy and technology adoption



According to the Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecard, Uganda has a low level of readiness for digital based on digital literacy capacities across its population.[25] The dominant cultural norm is not to conduct business or financial transactions on a phone. People express skepticism, concern about security and fear of fraud, and even occasionally suspect witchcraft.

This hesitation to adopt a new innovation can be minimised with seeing neighbors have success in use, and through in-person agents and training.[26]

Influence

Ensibuuko's growth and product use

Ensibuuko has had to deploy Digital Community Educators (DCEs) in rural areas for sensitisation and training sessions. This adds cost to growing the number of users.

Gender disparities in adoption can show up if the person recommending the technology is unknown, particularly for women, due to gender norms. **Ensibuuko has seen an increase in female VSLA users (to 51%) since shifting from roaming digital agents to community-embedded digital agents**.[27]

Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

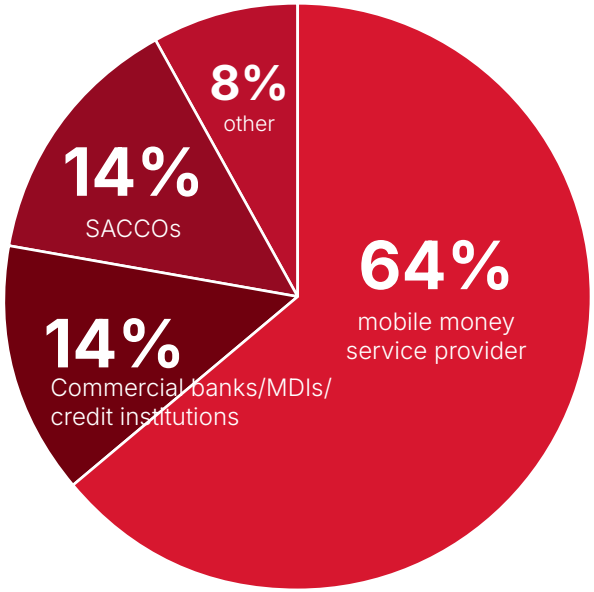
Users report struggling to interact with the app and needing frequent refresher training. This is particularly true for older users who may rely on younger relatives for guidance.

Financial literacy and inclusion



The value of Uganda's mobile money transactions has very recently grown enormously. Mobile money is driving financial inclusion in what are considered "formal" banking services, while VSLAs lead in the "informal" services.

2023 Uganda formal financial services use[28]



This growth is not surprising in light of Uganda's government intentionally influencing financial inclusion through things like the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023-28, National Development Plan III, the Parish Development Program, and the Digital Transformation Roadmap.

Influence

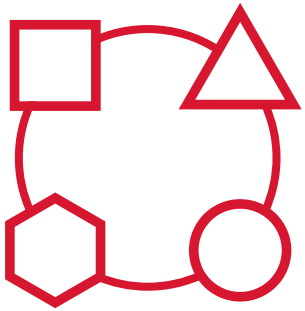
Ensibuuko's growth and product use

The market supports continued financial inclusion. As mobile money leads the way, applications like Ensibuuko that integrate and build on mobile are likely to also see continued growth, and have government support.

Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

As mobile money becomes the norm in Uganda, being able to access and use digital financial tools is increasingly essential, or people risk being left behind and financially excluded. Platforms like Ensibuuko, combined with the digital and financial literacy training they offer, play a key role in bridging this gap—helping users gain the skills and tools they need to participate fully in a growing digital economy.

Geographic disparities



The four main regions in Uganda vary in their demographic profiles and digital and financial inclusion rates. Disparities between regions can be stark. For instance, of Ensibuuko user survey respondents in the central region, 89.5% completed secondary school. In the northern region this was only 38.9%.

Generally, the northern region lags behind the rest of the country on metrics such as poverty rates, formal bank account ownership and internet access. There is more variability across the other three regions with some outperforming others depending on the measure.

Influence

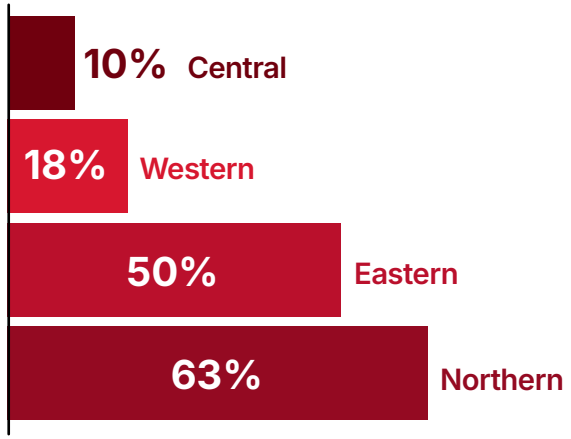
Ensibuuko's growth and product use

Regional differences highlight the potential need for tailored financial literacy and digital training initiatives to ensure equitable access to Ensibuuko's services.

Potential impact for Ensibuuko users

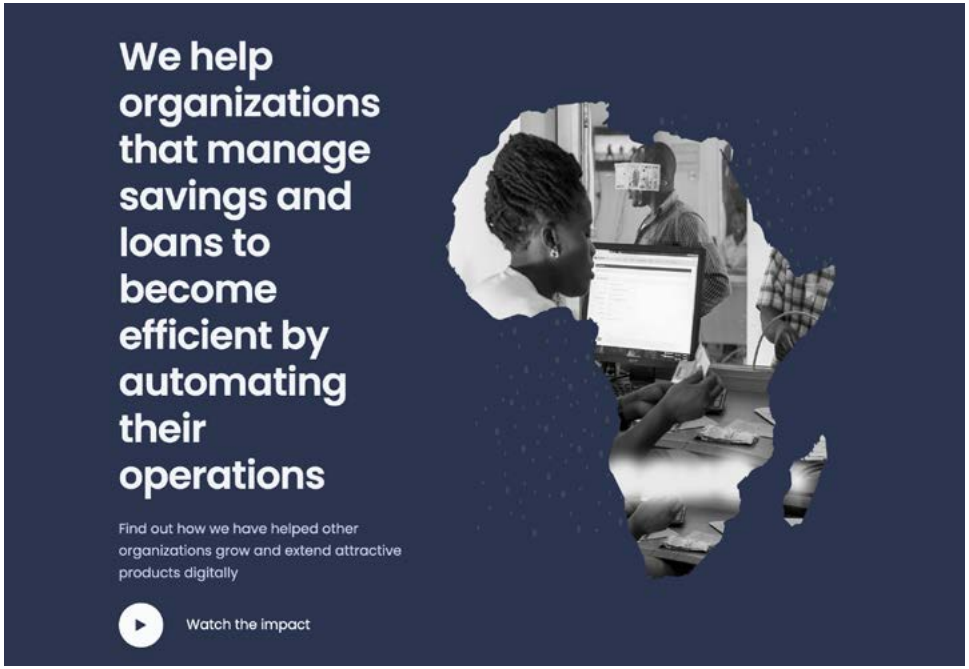
Depending on where a customer lives, their likelihood of using a similar product prior to Ensibuuko is drastically different. Therefore, their capacity and openness to trying a product like Ensibuuko is also likely to be different and may require different support.

Ensibuuko survey respondents' first time use of digital financial services by region



Conclusions

Ensibuuko demonstrates how **digital financial services can amplify the poverty alleviation effects of traditional savings groups** through improved record-keeping, increased loan access, and stronger financial resilience. **Operating within Uganda's supportive policy environment** for financial inclusion, the **company has adapted to connectivity challenges** with offline functionality and addressed digital literacy gaps through targeted training. While Ensibuuko primarily boosts existing VSLA and SACCO benefits rather than creating new poverty reduction pathways, its contribution to both digital and financial inclusion represents significant progress toward economic empowerment in underserved communities.



What were the main benefits and for whom?

Who

VSLA leaders - Rural, financially at-risk, with less formal education.

SACCO members - Urban, financially stable, educated, banked.

Main benefits

Ensibuuko, through training and their product, is increasing digital and financial inclusion including first time use of a smartphone, better access to credit, digital record-keeping, etc.

This **boosts the known impacts of VSLAs and SACCOS**.

Ensibuuko **amplifies** the following effects:

- Increased entrepreneurship
- Increased earnings through effective business management and growth
- Increased savings through better planning and data
- Overall stronger financial resilience.

What market conditions influenced these results?

Uganda's robust fintech market, supportive government plans and regulations, and rapid increase in SACCO creation and financial inclusion all make Ensibuuko's value proposition timely and relevant.

Accelerators:

- Rapidly rising financial inclusion rates
- Regulation specific to fintech
- Large VSLA and SACCO customer bases
- Government planning actively supports digital and financial inclusion

Decelerators:

- Geographic disparities
- Poor connectivity and quality of service
- Low digital literacy
- Financial instability and mobile affordability

What does digital have to do with it?

It is not possible to use or realise the benefits of Ensibuuko without digital skills, mobile connectivity and access to a device. Digital is central to the value proposition for all customers and any poverty alleviation benefit.

Additionally, one of the main benefits of Ensibuuko is increased digital inclusion through accompanying training and promotion of the app.

"My greatest challenge was the lack of skills and understanding of mobile phone usage, but after Ensibuuko training, I can comfortably use my mobile phone for different use cases like mobile money, digitally pay agri-inputs merchants, use other applications like Whatsapp for communication."

—VSLA member

The poverty alleviation benefits linked to Ensibuuko, however, are not independent of VSLA and SACCO membership. Moving participation in these important institutions to digital provides an amplifying effect but is not the driving force of these results.

Importance of digital to Ensibuuko's impact



Endnotes

1 A. O'Neill, Statista (Nov. 2024) Uganda Urbanization from 2013-2023.
2 World Bank (April 2023) Poverty and Equity Brief: Uganda.
3 Ibid.
4 A. O'Neill, Statista (Jan 2025) Uganda: Total population from 2013 to 2023, by gender.
5 Worldometer (2025) Uganda Demographics.
6 FSD Uganda, (4 Nov 2024) FinScope Uganda 2023 Survey.
7 E. Nshakira et al., UNCDF (26 Jul 2023) Digital Credit in Uganda: Where are we & where do we want to go?
8 S. Kemp, Datareportal (3 Mar 2025) Digital 2025: Uganda.
9 Watchdog Uganda, 56.7% Of Uganda's Population Doesn't Have a Mobile Phone-Report.
10 60 Decibels (September 2022) Ensibuuko, Uganda Impact Report.
11 60 Decibels (September 2022) Ensibuuko, Uganda Impact Report.
12 FSD Uganda, (4 Nov 2024) FinScope Uganda 2023 Survey.
13 Ibid.
14 E. Nshakira et al., UNCDF (26 Jul 2023) Digital Credit in Uganda: Where are we & where do we want to go?
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 M. Oketch (17 Jan 2025) Number of BoU-regulated Fintechs doubles.
18 R. Santosdiaz (16 Jan 2025) From Mobile Wallets to Neobanks: Uganda's Financial Services Evolution.
19 Watchdog Uganda, 56.7% Of Uganda's Population Doesn't Have a Mobile Phone-Report.
20 60 Decibels (September 2022) Ensibuuko, Uganda Impact Report.
21 FSD Uganda, (4 Nov 2024) FinScope Uganda 2023 Survey.
22 Ensibuuko, GSMA Final Report.
23 GSMAIF (internal document) Ensibuuko Scalability Endline Survey September 2022 Results.
24 Ibid.
25 UNDP (23 May 2023) Uganda's Digital Transformation Journey.
26 60 Decibels (September 2022) Ensibuuko, Uganda Impact Report.
27 Ensibuuko, GSMA Final Report.
28 FINSCOPE (2023) FSD Uganda.

Acknowledgements

The GSMA is a global organisation unifying the mobile ecosystem to discover, develop and deliver innovation foundational to positive business environments and societal change. Our vision is to unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry, and society thrive. Representing MNOs and organisations across the mobile ecosystem and adjacent industries, the GSMA delivers for its members across three broad pillars: Connectivity for Good, Industry Services and Solutions, and Outreach. This activity includes advancing policy, tackling today's biggest societal challenges, underpinning the technology and interoperability that make mobile work, and providing the world's largest platform to convene the mobile ecosystem at the MWC and M360 series of events.

We invite you to find out more at www.gsma.com

GSMA

The GSMA Innovation Fund accelerates digital tech solutions that are addressing key global challenges. Through grant funding and tailored venture building support, we enable innovative organisations in LMICs to scale and amplify social and environmental impact.

For more information, please visit: www.gsma.com/innovationfund

UK International Development
Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

This initiative has been funded by UK International Development from the UK government and is supported by the GSMA and its members. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

Radicle DEVELOPMENT

Radicle Development

Radicle Development is a consultancy committed to supporting transformation within and for organizations seeking social change. Using evaluation, strategy, and design, we get to a root understanding of how systems work and what new learning, strategy, or action can help positive change grow.

Authors

Anna Martin, Co-founder, Radicle Development
Jennifer Compton, Co-founder, Radicle Development

Visual Design

Julie Visco

Contributors

We would like to thank the following experts and innovators for their valuable contributions to this research:

Ruth Orbach, Director of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), M4D: Central Insights Unit

Caitlin Blaser Mapitsa, consultant to GSMA Innovation Fund

Jamie Robertson, consultant GSMA Innovation Fund

TripleLine Consulting

TRIPLELINE