

Key sheet - Women's Economic Empowerment and Disability Inclusion in Financial Services

Access to financial services, including banking, insurance and investing, help people take advantage of business opportunities, invest in education, insure against risks and save for old age. Financial inclusion is an enabler for inclusive growth and poverty reduction, and access to financial assets is recognised as a key drivers of women's economic empowerment. Accessible and inclusive financial services and products create new opportunities for financial institutions to profitably serve an expanded and diversified range of customers.

However, 31% of adults worldwide do not own a formal account, according to the most recent [Global Findex data](#) (World Bank 2017). Women and people with disabilities face particular disadvantage and barriers to access. Gender inequalities persist with a **seven percent average global gender gap** evident from Findex data in the last three rounds (2011, 2014 and 2017). This is even higher in developing countries, with a **nine percent average gender gap** in account ownership. In Bangladesh, Pakistan and Turkey the gap reaches nearly 30% points. This keysheet outlines the challenges, key tips, good practice examples, entry points and resources to help inform policy and programmes for greater inclusion in financial services.

THE CHALLENGE



Gender

Many barriers faced by women and girls in accessing financial services are common to other groups, such as: limited digital or other infrastructure, under-developed financial sector and conflict. Other barriers may be specific to women and girls, such as: discriminatory laws, regulations and social norms; digital and financial literacy gaps; lack of identity documentation; and unequal access to education, mobile technology or other digital infrastructure; and to land or other assets that can be used as collateral:

- There are **108 out of 190 countries** where the law does not prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender (World Bank 2021).
- Across lower middle-income countries, **women are 15 percent less likely than men to use the internet and 7 percent less likely to own a mobile phone**. In South Asia, there is a notably larger average gender gap in mobile phone ownership (GSMA 2021).
- Globally, **one in five unbanked women cite a lack of official ID** as one of the reasons why they do not have an account (World Bank 2017).



Disability

People with disabilities experience limited access to financial services, including traditional, online and mobile services. Barriers include inaccessible design and lack of reasonable accommodation; lack of awareness by service providers of the market potential; stigma or prejudice; physical and digital barriers including literacy, remote locations and security concerns.

- Even though persons with disabilities are approximately 15% of the population in developing countries, they comprise only **0.5% of microfinance clients** (CBM and CFI 2016).
- In a global survey of financial service providers in 2013, only **26% reported having services for persons with cognitive or learning disabilities** (G3ict 2015).
- Only **9% of countries have publicly available statistics or data on digital access** by persons with disabilities. In Latin America there is no data (G3ict 2015).

KEY TIPS



- National financial inclusion strategies that address the experience and needs of women and people with disabilities.



- Consultations with women, people with disabilities and their representatives, can identify constraints and inform design to overcome these constraints. Partnerships can be set up with institutional players who understand the specific market and services, including Organisations of People with Disabilities and Women’s Rights Organisations.



- **Data-driven design** based on market research can inform interventions to overcome the barriers faced by women and people with disabilities. Sex- and disability-disaggregated data can help to create a baseline, establish targets and monitor progress.



- Accessible and inclusive design of financial services give companies a competitive advantage as accessible design is better design for all consumers – often referred to as **universal design**.



- Inclusive access to financial services requires reducing environmental barriers, reducing barriers to accessing information and sensitising staff to work respectfully with persons with different disabilities.



- Shifting government payments from cash to digital accounts can be an opportunity to ensure they are interoperable with private sector payment systems and that the accounts are easily accessible and under the control of women/person with disability.



- Reform of discriminatory laws and actions to promote full rights and financial participation. Sharing data and coordinating responses among government departments can be valuable in addressing legal barriers.

Good practice examples



Employees at Standard Chartered Bank in India have developed a **mobile banking application for people with visual impairments**. In this app, standard keyboard-based input and touchscreen-based inputs have been replaced by voice assisted screen navigation and simple gestures. These features also make the app useful for the elderly and people who are illiterate (Mukherjee 2017).



Lloyds Banking Group **consulted with people living with dementia** to understand the effects of the syndrome on customer behaviour. Engagement with these clients culminated in a charter on Dementia-friendly Financial Services, which codified how banks should tailor products to clients with cognitive impairments (Musitwa 2018).



An **RCT trial in rural Uganda**, CARE Uganda found that women were significantly more confident in their ability to save when they participated in household counselling sessions aimed at equalizing the influence of women and men in financial management, followed by a mobile banking service with digital subwallet folders labelled for women, and a financial and technical training session (Scott 2020).



In Papua New Guinea, the UNCDF Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme, working with Women’s Microbank Limited (WMBL), have set up **six banking points in rural areas**. Aimed primarily at women, customers use biometric identification and authentication systems which ensures security of their money. The establishment of these banking points was a principal factor in raising WMBL’s customer base by 65% in one year. The support of women’s groups in raising awareness of the access points was a critical success factor (GPFI 2020).



Leading apparel companies—H&M, Marks & Spencer, Target, Li & Fung, Lindex, Debenhams and Fast Retailing—collaborated with each other on the **Business for Social Responsibility HERfinance programme**. By joining forces, participating companies influenced supplier garment factories in Bangladesh to improve worker well-being through payroll digitization. Key results include a 75-91% increase in mobile phone ownership among women workers and garment factories experienced a 53% savings in staff time for their administration and finance team, pointing to a clear business case for inclusion (GPFI 2020).

ENTRY POINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

	Minimum – do no harm <i>Basic needs and vulnerabilities</i>	Empowerment <i>Practical needs (assets, capabilities, opportunities)</i>	Transformation <i>Strategic needs (equal power, legal/institutional change)</i>
REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulators enforce the collection of sex- and disability-disaggregated data on financial institutions. Depending on data collection capacity, requirements could also include gender pay gap reporting, a regulation for all business and not just financial institutions. See the work of the Women’s Financial Inclusion Data Partnership (data2x 2018). Proportionate ‘Know your customer’ (KYC) requirements that facilitate women and people with disabilities opening basic accounts without significant ID verification problems. In Peru, for example, banks do not have all KYC requirements over and above ownership of a national ID card, which are held by over 99% of the population. Banks can digitally verify client ID card. Policy makers research whether requirements for automatic enrolment in pension schemes will boost access by women and people with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government campaigns to expand access to basic accounts and follow up on the infrastructure and incentives needed to ensure accounts are actively used (e.g. India Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) programme). Financial sector supervisory authority to ensure license applications for new products demonstrate likely impact on women and people with disabilities before licensing products Effective consumer protection and enforcement on disclosure/transparency of product pricing to address the risk of fraud that disproportionately affects women. CGAP has researched a range of examples, including improved disclosure of loan terms and conditions and marketing approaches that promote responsible borrowing (CGAP 2017). Promote the ‘Regulatory sandbox’ approach to fintech – providing flexibility for innovation and piloting that may help women and people with disabilities. A regulatory sandbox is a framework that allows FinTech start-ups to test and pilot new products on a small scale in a controlled environment under regulatory supervision. The concept was developed by the UK Financial Conduct Authority but has been adapted around the world. Sandboxes focused particularly on financial inclusion have been established in Sierra Leone and Malaysia (CGAP 2019). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote requirement for women’s names to be recorded in legal documentation of joint ownership of assets used as loan collateral. Change collateral requirements for banks allowing them to accept moveable or unconventional collateral, such as machinery or intellectual property, as an alternative. Legislate to remove any bank requirements for a male relation’s signature to enter into contracts or open a bank account. Remove legal barriers to official ID. Ideally digital ID securely linked to a unique official identity that is not tied to their spouse or a male relative (GPFI 2020). Support establishment of financial ombudsman and procedures accessible to women and people with disabilities. The Reserve Bank of India, for example, has established the Ombudsman for Digital Transactions. Equalisation of pension ages between men and women. Enact anti-bias regulations, such as requiring institutions to review data and underlying algorithms. Legislation that requires Financial Service Providers to provide clear and easy-to-understand product terms, to account for limited financial literacy.
SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS <i>(Training and research institutions, credit bureaux, asset registries, business associations etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client-centred and universal design principles in research and training to fintech start-ups, focusing on financial needs and obstacles faced due to gender and disability status. Fund publicly available research on barriers to access to finance for women and people with disabilities. Draw on big data and behavioural patterns, to evaluate usability, accessibility, product adoption, abandonment and features that motivate or frustrate customers. Examples include the W Initiative implemented by Access Bank in a number of African countries (KIT 2021). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster more market entry for women and people with disabilities through hackathons, accelerators and partnerships. Examples include the Women’s World Banking Fintech Innovation Challenge (Women’s World Banking 2021). Entrepreneurship training should include reasonable accommodation and explicitly encourage people with disabilities. Harmonised private industry association guidelines in delivering accessible services (G3ict 2015). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster more accurate credit-rating models and data insights on the credit needs of women, to enable banks to lend to more women. Support the establishment of collateral registries that can improve access to finance for women and people with disabilities through use of movable collateral. IFC has been providing technical assistance for the creation of registries in Latin America, with positive impacts in terms of increased lending to women owned MSMEs (IFC 2016).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund market studies to understand what financial products exist and what is most valuable to the local disability community e.g. loans, savings, or insurance products. This could include an accessibility audit in partnership with disability organisations. • Fund research and data that demonstrates the business case for gender and social inclusion to the financial sector businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote industry leader and inter-industry collaboration and relationships to share best practices, adopt standards, accept shared accountability to ensure all products and services are inclusive. 	
SUPPLY SIDE ENTRY POINTS <i>(Financial Service Providers)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of sex- and disability-disaggregated data— both external market data and internal customer data—to capitalize on the full business opportunity of the market for women and people with disabilities. • Code of ethics with specific guidance on how to treat clients and potential clients with disabilities and monitoring of compliance. • Review policies, guidelines and practices, examine client recruitment methods, loan application and interview processes, staff incentives, and the way information is collected, stored and presented. Ensure that all references to direct or indirect discrimination against persons with disabilities are amended or removed. • Presence of an accessibility champion or disability champion in financial service providers that pushes for change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot products and services designed to meet needs of women and people with disabilities. Accessible design could include: alternative credit scoring, zero opening fees or low or zero withdrawal costs, easing of restrictions on minimum document and ID requirements, privacy or digital payment systems to give women more direct control over resources (CFI 2021). • Establish partnerships with Organisations of People with Disabilities to join project planning team and support accessibility audits, inclusion gap analysis and implementation. Assign a financial service provider as the liaison. • Ensure compliance of tools, training courses and guidelines with local legislation, policies and needs by subjecting them to review by Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) and other stakeholders. • Conduct disability access audits to inspect the built environment and technology used and develop and roll-out an accessibility retrofit implementation plan if required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity and/or accessibility training for all employees, including awareness of national and international legal framework concerning the rights of persons with disabilities Training of loan and field officers e.g. on non-discriminatory language about people with disabilities (G3ict 2015). • Recruitment and human resource policies strategy to increase diversity at all levels of people qualified for the roles. Visible hiring of women and people with disabilities in the ‘access points’ of providers, including bank branches and bank and mobile money agents.
DEMAND SIDE ENTRY POINTS <i>(Clients)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage persons with disabilities and persons with different abilities in marketing campaigns to increase awareness and commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Effective communication and marketing and publicity campaigns, including on social networks, to increase awareness and visibility of accessible features. • Offer basic financial literacy training (including digital) alongside information on the types of financial products and services available to new customers from traditionally unbanked groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and technical assistance for women and people with disability owned/managed enterprises on business planning, readiness for investment etc. 	



This key sheet has been written during the COVID-19 pandemic. With lockdowns and quarantines in place, access to digital financial services have become critical. Across low- and middle-income countries, many people with disabilities are resorting to informal financial support mechanisms, which may heighten the risk of **financial abuse and violence** (Meaney-Davis 2020). Globally, a survey conducted in May 2020 with a sample of 26,000 business owners and managers in over 50 countries with an active Facebook Business Page found that women-owned businesses were **5.9 percentage points more likely** to have closed than men-owned businesses (Goldstein et al. 2020). Women-owned SMEs are disproportionately affected as they are often needs based and informal with limited access to insurance.

Lines of credit and meso-financing can provide much needed liquidity to women-owned firms in times of crisis (World Bank 2020). Women and people with disabilities **are to part of the response and recovery processes and decision making** to ensure their specific needs are addressed. Governments providing financial support to businesses impacted by COVID-19 are to monitor the gender and disability status of owners to ensure these businesses have fair access to these funds (GPFI 2020).

GENDER

- **[FinEquity \(2020\) Gender Data in Financial Inclusion](#)**: this brief analyses the current availability of gender data and highlights how sex-disaggregated data can support women's financial inclusion. The annex maps key financial inclusion datasets.
 - **[Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion \(2020\) Advancing Women's Digital Financial Inclusion](#)**
This report sets out key trends and barriers to women's financial inclusion and provides ten key policy options for G20 members and other governments to rapidly work towards digital financial inclusion for all women.
 - **[Financial Alliance for Women \(2020\) How Fintechs can profit from the Multi-Trillion-Dollar Female Economy](#)**: drawing on a survey of 168 fintechs, 30 investors and other ecosystem players from around the world, this report explores how fintech have been approaching and serving the women's market and offers insights and recommendations in six key areas.
 - **[IFC \(2020\) COVID-19 and the Insurance Industry: Why a Gender-Sensitive Response Matters](#)**: this guidance note highlights insurance industry best practices on engagement and support to women clients and agents, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It covers insurance operations, branding and engagement, product innovation and new distribution channels.
- [UNHLP \(2017\) How to Build Assets—Digital, Financial and Property](#)**: this toolkit provides some key resources, next steps to accelerate inclusion for women and provides innovative examples structured around the key recommendations from the second High Level Panel report.

DISABILITY

- **[G3ict \(2015\) Inclusive Financial Services for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities: Global Trends in Accessibility Requirements \(2015\)](#)** this report details the rationale and mechanisms to achieve accessibility in financial services, with a strong focus on digital technology. It summarizes the barriers, international mandates and frameworks, and accessibility needs, details examples of effective practices and solutions, and lists several recommendations.
- **[Center for Financial Inclusion \(2014\) New Financial Access Frontier: A Framework for Disability Inclusion](#)**: aimed financial service providers at the base of the pyramid, this framework integrates research findings into six categories for consideration at the initial project planning stage. It also provides reflections from a project partner on how they have carried out each step.
- **[World Bank \(2016\) Bridging the Disability Divide through Digital Technologies](#)**: this paper summarizes the opportunities and barriers presented by digital technologies. There is a short chapter on financial inclusion.

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