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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF FEMALES IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR THROUGH MOBILE PHONE TECHNOLOGY: EVIDENCE FROM ZIMBABWE

Gladys Siwela
PhD student, Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Zimbabwe
gladysiwela@gmail.com

Tavonga Njaya
Professor, Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Zimbabwe
njayat@zou.ac.zw

Abstract

This desk research confirms that mobile technology has brought transformative power to the non–banked and under banked population particularly females working in the informal sector in Zimbabwe. While mobile banking has become a major banking option to avert cash shortages, the major challenge that still needs to be addressed is that of affordability of mobile phones and the high cost of data. Affordability has emerged as a prohibitive factor in financial inclusion despite the extreme convenience, reliability and accessibility that mobile phones provide to the under banked and non-banked in Zimbabwe. The approach that was used to gather data for this paper is on-line explanatory desk research as well as review of relevant literature on mobile technology and mobile banking. The data was analysed qualitatively through thematic analysis. The study unveiled that opportunities brought by mobile banking to financial inclusion as recommended by the United Nations though the Sustainable developmental goals (SDG's), have brought relief to millions of previously excluded and underserved populations the world over. Mobile money service providers should also offer ancillary tools such as accounting and inventory management, in order to assist females in the informal sector to better manage digital payments.

Keywords: Mobile banking, digital financial inclusion; risk-coping; informal sector

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the Zimbabwe informal sector, which according to IMF (2018), is the largest in Africa has continued to grow and significantly contribute to the national economy. According to the IMF (2018) the informal sector accounts for at least 60 percent of Zimbabwe's economic activity and contributes up to 40 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The growth and increase in the contribution of the informal sector to the Zimbabwean economy has largely been driven by the growth and increase in the adoption of mobile banking, which in itself has allowed the measurement required to assess the extent and degree of the money flows in the informal sector, which in the past was regarded as the "black market" with no visible means to evaluate its contribution to the national economy. Mobile payments have captured the extent of the financial flows in the informal sector. According to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ Monetary Policy Statement, 2020) mobile payments were 98% of total national transactions by volume. The proliferation of mobile payments has enhanced the financial inclusion of the female market segment, who dominates the informal sector in Zimbabwe.

A study by Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (2018) indicates that as a result of mobile money services, there was an increase in access to formal financial services from 35 percent to 68 percent during the period 2011 to 2014. The study states that despite this increase in access and usage of mobile money financial services, 72 percent of females in Zimbabwe whether in the formal or informal sectors did not adopt the use of insurance services. The African Development Bank (ADB, 2020) reports that the GDP for Zimbabwe contracted by 12.8 percent in 2019 due to poor performance in agriculture, mining and tourism. Agriculture shrank by about 15.8 percent due to cyclone Idai in March 2019, prolonged drought, livestock diseases, and currency shortages. While the outlook by ADB (2020) for the medium term is that, fiscal and monetary reforms in Zimbabwe should stabilize, the economy still has to generate positive results in order to cover the income inequality amongst more than 60 percent of the population who fall below the poverty line. Employment opportunities in the formal sector continue to dwindle, leaving about 2 million people in rural Zimbabwe food insecure. ADB (2020) states that this figure is expected to rise to 5.5 million, with 2 million of those affected being Zimbabwe's urban dwellers. De-industrialisation persisted between 2011 and 2014, with 4,610 firms closing, resulting in 55,443 job losses. The report further states that was the reason informalisation deepened and resulted in informal employment rising from 80 percent in 2004 to 94.5 percent by 2014. Thus, the current prevailing economic environment is testament to the important role that the informal sector plays in financial inclusion in Zimbabwe, which provides a great opportunity to accelerate growth in the real sector.

This, in the context of Zimbabwe, has seen many commercial banks streamline their operations and have gravitated towards online banking services. Laurine and Patrick (2012) state that after the introduction of the multi-currency system, many banks moved away from offering conventional mobile banking units that served mainly low income earners. Their study revealed that although many banks had the capacity and the technology to deliver services to the unbanked, few had the appetite for this market. Laurine and Patrick (2012) further state that the inaccessibility of banks due to poor infrastructure, seasonal deposits, high transaction and monitoring cost as well as intermittent demand for services were some of the challenges faced by banks.

Problem statement

The world over, mobile banking is being touted as one of the solutions to financial inclusion. The majority of females in the informal sector remain unbanked despite high mobile penetration in the country. There is need to determine whether mobile banking is really a major driver for financial inclusion for females in the informal sector in Zimbabwe.

Aim of the study

The major aim of this desk research is to determine the factors that continue to hamper financial inclusion of women in Zimbabwe despite the advances made in mobile technology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper is gathered through on-line explanatory desk research as well as review of relevant literature on mobile technology and mobile banking. The data was analysed qualitatively through thematic analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of mobile money

Braniff (2020) states that ever since mobile money emerged in the mid-2000s, businesses, researchers, and those working to advance financial inclusion have explored how mobile money can be further developed in the virtual and digital payments ecosystem. The objective is to broaden the functionality from the initial purpose in the early days, when mobile money was mainly used to make domestic remittance payments to those in remote areas. Evidently, the genesis of mobile money was to enable receipt and remittance of small value transactions and facilitate cash deposits and withdrawals with ease. This approach and narrative seems to have transformed during the last five years and the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic gave momentum to the revolution that was already under way.

Some markets have witnessed the emergence of mobile commerce accompanied by higher values circulating than exiting the global mobile money ecosystem. GSMA (2017) states that since the start of national lockdowns in the first quarter of 2020, close to USD18 billion is in circulation in the global mobile money ecosystem. The report further states that there have been more digital transactions than cash-based transactions, indicating that people are leaving money in their digital wallets and using those funds to make digital transactions.

According to the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (2016) no one has intentionally excluded females in accessing banking services but that by default banking statutes have historically allowed discrimination of females in terms of accessing services such as credit (Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, 2020). It is however important to note that even in the modern era, females are still maginalised in terms of accessing financial services including those that are digital, despite concerted efforts to include their participation in key economic events which can uplift the standards of living in communities (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2016). For instance, there is approximately 156 million more men than females that have an active account with a bank or other financial institution or mobile money provider (World Bank, 2014). This huge disparity is mainly because females in general, across the globe, have limited income sources and this leaves them unable to afford requirements to access financial services. Demirgüç-Kunt (2008) suggests that mobile phones play a critical role in promoting financial inclusion particularly so in areas where getting into formal banking is not easy. Mobile technology has helped improve the financial inclusion of women in informal sectors in Zimbabwe, as mobile phone networks have played a critical role in ensuring that financial transactions are conducted using funds that individuals maintain in their mobile wallets. Aker and Mbiti (2010) state that mobile banking allows customers to have access to their bank accounts through their phones. The distinctive feature is that customers transact only through a mobile network platform such as Ecocash, OneMoney and TeleCash. They are not required to have an account with a financial institution. Aker and Mbiti (2010) further state that mobile money can increase the speed at which transactions are made, reduce the cost of payments and can enhance security by reducing the transport of cash. Demirgüç-Kunt (2018) say mobile money increases transparency through digital accounting and therefore reduces corruption, provides an entry point into the formal financial system, and so helps promote increased saving and self-insurance against small adverse shocks.

According to World Bank (2015) digital platforms have helped to advance financial inclusion in that they allow females to access banking services while in remote places. This was supported by Gomber (2017) who posited that the advent of digital banking including mobile money services have brought in a magnitude of new products to the community through the innovative financial services. Through inclusive digital financial offerings, females have been able to benefit in the sense that banks and financial technology (Fintech) companies have been able to design financial products which are directly suitable to females. A lot of other financial institutions have also tailor made the existing services to ensure that they have variations which suits females and their special needs (Gomber, 2017).

Harnessing mobile money technology in Eastern and Southern Africa

Based on available information and data, on financial inclusion in three countries in East Africa; Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the researcher views these countries as pace-setters in financial inclusion in the region, having embraced it from as far back as 1999 (Lagarde (2014). In Southern Africa, South Africa and Zambia who are Zimbabwe's neighbors and trade partners that have made considerable progress in financial inclusion. The two countries have to a great extent developed and promoted cross border mobile banking with Zimbabwe. In general, Zimbabwe has borrowed considerably from the experiences of these Eastern and Southern African countries in its financial inclusion strategies and approaches.

Mugambi (2014), Gale (2010) and World Bank (2014) say that the East Africa region has played a fundamental role in shaping the financial inclusion agenda for the Africa region. Mckay (2016) states that innovation in financial services in East Africa has changed the global landscape in financial inclusion as the financial services sector in that region, continues to create appropriate financial products, that the poor need and trust at an affordable price. She further states that both regulators and development partners greatly relied on the supply-side data to measure progress. Mckay (2016) states that, more recently, there is an increased number of surveys that allow key players and researchers to access the demand aspect on financial inclusion.

Mckay (2016) reveals that East Africa has made tremendous gains in financial inclusion in recent years with Kenya's access having increased from 27 percent in 2006 to 67 percent in 2013. One of the major reasons for the increase in inclusion is the rise in the number of mobile phone users and the concurrent increase in mobile money usage (Mckay, 2016). She further reports that while mobile money has played a critical role in making financial services more accessible to vulnerable groups, banks in Kenya also contributed by expanding their branch networks and creating more relevant products for lower income customers while at the same time generating profits. According to Mckay (2016), 86 percent of the Kenyan population lives within five kilometers of a financial access point.

Despite the marked improvement in financial inclusion in East Africa and the increased number of vulnerable groups that have access to affordable and safe banking, there is still much work that needs to be done to encourage continued use of formal banking services. Mckay (2016) points out that the Kenya Financial Diaries tracked financial transactions for 300 low income households over one year. Their research revealed that even with an increased up-take of mobile money, there was still a heavy reliance on traditional borrowing and lending groups known as the chamas. Pillow or mattress banking which refers to keeping cash in the home instead of in a bank, as well as shop credit which people have used for generations are also still very popular in Kenya. She further states that informal and socially embedded forms of finance are still being relied on, particularly amongst females in rural areas.

Mugambi (2014) state that one successful model for financial inclusion in Africa is that of M-PESA (M for mobile, pesa is a Swahili word for money). Mugambi (2014) state that M-PESA is the product name of a mobile-phone based money transfer service for a mobile operator which operates in Kenya and Tanzania called Safaricom. DFID (2008) state that the product was developed by Kenyans with financial support from the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) during the period 2003 to 2007, with the initial concept of M-PESA being to create a service which allowed microfinance borrowers to conveniently receive and repay loans using the network of Safaricom airtime resellers. This would enable microfinance institutions (MFIs) to offer more competitive loan rates to their users, at reduced cost compared to transacting in cash. DFID (2008) further state that the users of the service gained through being able to track their finances more easily. As the service was put on trial, customers adopted the service for a variety of alternative uses. M-PESA was re-focused and launched with a different value proposition: sending remittances home across the country and making payments.

Realini and Mehta (2015) state that M-PESA has made it easy for urban migrants to send money home to their villages, and for people used to queuing at banks for hours, to pay bills or school fees remotely. They further state that in 2010, M-PESA money-transfer service was used by 9.5 million people, or 23 percent of the Kenyan population. The transfers made were equivalent to 11 percent of Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) each year. The Guardian (2018) and The Economist (2013) state that the success story of M-PESA has inspired more than 60 similar schemes across the world including Zimbabwe.

The International Monetary Fund ranks Tanzania among the three (3) East African countries that lead Sub-Saharan Africa in mobile banking. Out of 28 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, more than 30 percent of the adult population in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya accounts for mobile phone account holders. According to Global Money Market Report (2018), Kenya leads the three (3) countries with 60 percent of its adult population having mobile phone accounts. The same report state that Uganda has 37 percent and Tanzania 35 percent while Rwanda is placed in the seventh position in the region with slightly less than 20 percent and Burundi is amongst the lowest in the region with about 2 percent of its adult population having mobile phone accounts. Regional Economic Outlook (2017) reports that mobile money transactions are growing rapidly in Tanzania and Uganda, where the transactions doubled in the last three years in terms of broad money, reaching about 30 percent in mid-2015.

IMF (2016) says in several African countries, namely Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Niger, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, the number of mobile accounts has already exceeded the number of traditional bank accounts. This development in mobile money has boosted financial inclusion, complementing traditional banking services. IMF (2016) adds that the number of banking transactions via mobile devices almost doubled in the region in the last two years. East Africa has led this trend, but mobile banking has also increased in other parts of Africa.

Ndlovu and Ndlovu (2013) write that electronic banking, or e-banking has in recent years become an integral part of banking, seeing less than 30 percent of financial transactions being conducted through brick and mortar branches in Zimbabwe. CGAP (2014) say that the most obvious difference between digital banking and brick and mortar banks is location and accessibility. Although banks tend to have a wide branch network, the reach and convenience of digital banks far outweighs what is offered by brick and mortar. Ndlovu and Ndlovu, (2013) state that mobile banking has the great potential of becoming transformational for the unbanked communities in Zimbabwe as it may utilise the power of mobile phone networks to reach low income earners. GSMA (2017) states that in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) financial inclusion has involved harnessing mobile money technology, through mobile money service accounts and the increase in bank agents that use mobile phones to reach rural clients. SSA drove up account ownership by a third – to 34 percent. Overall, 12 percent of adults in the region have a mobile money account, which is four times the developing world average. This indicates the depth and importance of financial inclusion in creating inclusive development.

SADC (2016) reports that The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Council of Ministers approved the SADC Strategy on Financial Inclusion and SME Access to Finance in 2016. The major objective of the strategy is to support efforts by member states in the development of their own financial inclusion strategies, in line with regional objectives.

According to the SADC (2016) the national strategies aim at progressing efforts on financial inclusion for households and enterprises, through a coordinated and comprehensive framework that would allow better access and better utilisation of financial services in support of sustainable growth and development. The overall goal is to improve level of access to affordable and appropriate levels, from 69 percent in 2014 to 90 percent by 2020. According to the Central Bank of Kenya (2016), 35 percent of females in SADC have formal bank accounts compared to 41 percent of males. The report further states that 18 percent of females, compared to 19 percent of males, have other formal non-bank accounts, 12 percent of females compared to 10 percent of males, have informal savings accounts and 35 percent of females, compared to 30 percent of males, are excluded.

The number of people in SADC that were financially excluded decreased from 34 percent in 2015 to 33 percent in 2017. The number of those using informal banking services such as rotating savings clubs and self-help groups (SHGs) increased from 39 percent in 2015 to 43 percent in 2017. The number of people who are financially included increased by one percentage point from 66 percent in 2015 to 67 percent in 2017. These informal groups assist individuals to have easy access to a lump-sum of funds during the life-span of the group. The activities of contributing and lending for such informal savings club run for a cycle of one year, during which period everyone would have contributed funds and received a lump-sum payout.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Zimbabwe's positive strides in financial inclusion

In Zimbabwe, the lack of access to cash has seen the emergence of mukando/maround and contributions being made through digital platforms such as mobile money services. This researcher argues that, information on financial inclusion data and mobile money services as well as its measurement, focuses on the demand-side of financial inclusion and not on the supply-side in SADC. There is, therefore, need to balance the two (2) in order to get a comprehensive picture of the financial inclusion landscape and how to engineer positive impact on economic development. A sizeable section of the Zimbabwean females, like in India are in the informal sector, and continue to remain excluded from accessing affordable services provided by the banking sector. This is despite the fact that both countries view financial inclusion as an important strategic approach to economic development and poverty reduction. Financial inclusion is also viewed as a viable business which provides a country with opportunities to channel finances into the formal banking sector for its benefit. To address financial exclusion in a holistic manner, it is essential to ensure that a range of financial services that include mobile money is made available to the unbanked and under banked communities.

Mechanisms should be developed to reduce the number of unbanked females in the informal sector through enhanced access and usage of mobile banking services, as this customer category plays a big role in economic development in Zimbabwe.

One of the suggested approaches to reducing financial exclusion in India is the setting up of brick and mortar bank branches in rural areas (Ravikumar, 2012). However, Ravikumar (2012) observed that the high cost involved in setting up and maintaining branch networks deters many financial institutions from setting up branches. There are proponents advocating for the establishment of microfinance institutions as a solution for financial exclusion. The approach should include the setting up of mobile money agencies in existing businesses such as grocery shops and mobile phone shops, in order to cut the cost of building brick and mortar structures. Ravikumar (2012) states that this approach can provide sustainable mechanism to meet some financial needs of some sections of the un-banked poor. This helps to ensure that banking is taken to the people rather than people trying to identify and approach microfinance institutions (Ravikumar, 2012).

Agent or mobile banking is a cheaper alternative to brick and mortar banking as supported by evidence from Kenya where in 2011, about 48 percent of the population was using M-PESA. Gale (2010) and Finmark Trust (2018) point out that mobile money products that are offered by mobile phone service providers draw some similarities from M-Pesa, which has a high mobile penetration rate.

The United Nations (UN) has specific targets through Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) for the achievement of gender equality to empower females and girls (United Nations, 2015). Through SDG's, the United Nations advocates for reforms targeted at giving females equal rights with men towards economic resources. This includes equal opportunities to own and control properties, access to natural resources, land and financial services including those that are digital (United Nations, 2015). SDG 17 specifically requires cooperation of everyone all stakeholders in order to achieve the sustainable developmental goals. In this regard, access to financial services, particularly for marginalised communities such as females in the informal sector can be done through mobile banking.

Samans (2017) report that financial services in a number of developing countries including Zimbabwe are not readily available to the majority of the population, particularly marginalised communities. For an economy like that of Zimbabwe, which is sluggish and has a high rate of unemployment, the informal sector can act as an important shock absorber. As an alternative to formal employment through which a substantial amount of money exchanges hands daily, there is need for concerted efforts to promote financial inclusion. This will also alleviate poverty. It should be noted that fintech is playing a growing and critical role in financial inclusion. Fintech offers accessibility, which brick and mortar banks do not have despite having a wide branch network. Mobile banking has the great potential of becoming transformational for the unbanked communities in Zimbabwe as it may utilise the power of mobile phone networks to reach low income earners.

Some challenges in mobile banking for females in Zimbabwe

Factors that continue to hamper financial inclusion of women in Zimbabwe despite the advances made in mobile technology and provision of financial services via telephony services include education, financial literacy, technology penetration rates and affordability which are discussed below.

a) Lack of identity documents

Mobile technology has lowered the barrier for the inclusion of women in Zimbabwe, however, some females have not been able to access mobile banking because of the nature of their work and lack of identification documents among other reasons. A study by Bhowmik and Saha (2013) concluded that females venture into small and low earning activities like informal vending, creating stalls and other unregistered activities as they have limited access to national identity documents. Without national identity documents, it is very difficult for females to register a mobile phone sim card, which is a pre-requisite to access digital financial products. This is further exacerbated by the fact that banks still have daunting processes which are a hurdle to digital financial inclusiveness. Females in the informal trading have little income and hence they are unable to sustain accounts offered by financial services providers (Bruhn and Love, 2014) .

b) Low education levels

The fact that females have traditionally not been given equal opportunities to advance their education compared to their male counterparts limits their ability to acquire formal employment which would guarantee regular income (UN Women, 2018). Manyika, Lund, Suger, White and Berry (2016) state that in many communities in Africa, the rights of females to education are still being violated. Angelow and Weselina (2016) also state that violation of a right to education which also leads to financial suppression leaves females subordinate to their male counterparts. In turn the females fail to access critical information that leaves them ignorant of their rights to be included in key decisions affecting their lives such as being financially included. The paper argues that failure to access information makes it difficult for females to appreciate the impact of financial products and services upon their lives. Low levels of literacy also hinder the ability by females to use mobile gadgets which are needed to access banking and insurance services as these services are integrative and self-service (Alliance for Financial Inclustion, 2016).

Education and financial literacy have a direct causal relationship. Findings by AFI (2016), indicate that females, on average are less financially literate and this continues to negatively impact against financial literacy and how digital financial dynamics can positively impact the lives of females. As a result of illiteracy, some females cannot use mobile gadgets and this makes it difficult for them to take advantage of measures on financial inclusion that are being availed to them (Global System for Mobile Association, 2018).

c) Discriminatory customary laws

According to Rahman (2013), customary and statutory laws in many developing countries still discriminate against females as norms restrict females from having their own bank accounts. These discriminatory tendencies, also take away the right for females to get involved in deciding on family expenditure and household purchases. As such, this limits females in budgeting for internet costs yet digital financial services like internet banking are largely accessed through the internet (Arora, 2010).

Alliance for Financial Inclusion (2016) states that in the studies that they conducted, the estimated gender gap in financial inclusion in developing countries is an estimated 9 percentage points. UN Women (2010), states that one of the challenges faced by females, which in turn is one of the impediments to financial inclusion is gender based violence. A study in Papua New Guinea by Darko (2015) and Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (2020) found that approximately 67 percent of females in the country had experienced some form of gender based violence. The studies further state that in such patriarchal societies where females greatly depend on males for financial support and financial decision making, they suffer in silence because of the fear of losing their marriages. This is supported by the Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (2020) which states that financial exclusion is exacerbated by cultural norms which give men power and authority over their wives once they have paid lobola for them. This problem is characterised especially in African cultures. This has traditionally made banking services a privilege for the males as females were relegated to home based care duties. Even with the increased numbers in mobile phone penetration, females still have very low figures in terms of accessing digital banking services or digital insurance services (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019). Females are still behind in getting the gadgets like mobile phones that access digital financial services because they do not have sufficient income to allow them (Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, 2020).

d) Limited knowledge of mobile banking

As argued by Angelow and Weselina (2016), recognition of the role of females and equal opportunities can easily translate into increased participation of females in mobile banking. Females in many developing countries still remain unable to consume digital banking products as they lack knowledge and capacity to access these financial products and services. The low uptake of financial products by females has been explained by Alliance for Financial Inclusion (2016) who state that females are naturally slow in taking advantage of financial services including those that are digital. The report further states that some females tend to be highly risk averse and conservative compared to men when it comes to making decisions which relate to banking. Silverstein and Sayre (2009) states that while females tend to be slow in making financial decisions compared to men, when they make such decisions, they tend to be more for the benefit of the whole family.

Another factor that affects inclusion of women in the informal sector is low levels of mobile phone penetration. Although mobile phone service penetration in most countries is still growing, Bank (2018) states that approximately 1.7 billion females in the world do not have access to a subscriber identity module (SIM). Alliance for Financial Inclusion (2018) states that societal barriers in developing countries makes use of mobile phone gadgets by females lower than that by men. The report further states that females working in the informal sector are inhibited by cost, network coverage and lack of technological literacy to access digital banking services.

e) Banking services culture

The reason why some countries have low numbers of females who use banking services is also explained by Wagh (2017) who points out that in some countries, most bank officials are men and this is a hindrance and a challenge to female customers who may feel uncomfortable and less confident to interact with males. The other challenge is that financial services are designed as a one size fits all and do not take into account that females have unique needs. With regards to expenditure, females tend to have many small value transactions which most banks charge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many females, who are currently active and have a huge potential to contribute to the economic growth of Zimbabwe are in the informal sector as stated in a research by FinMark Trust (2012), which indicates that this target group is currently partially banked or unbanked.

The Government of Zimbabwe should continue to employ strategies which aim to increase financial inclusion from the current 69 percent to their target of 90 percent by 2020 (FINMARK TRUST, 2014) and (Chipika, 2020). In view of the significant role that females play in economic development, research on new modes of ensuring that their needs and expectations in banking are taken into consideration is crucial.

a) Mobile money service providers should offer value-added tools

Opportunities brought by digital inclusion digital financial inclusion as something that has been recommended by the United Nations though the Sustainable developmental goals (SDG's), have brought relief to millions of previously excluded and undeserved populations the world over. Mobile money service providers should offer value-added tools to help females in the informal sector to better manage digital payments. They should provider such applications that assist with accounting and inventory management.

b) Consider unique needs and preferences of females

Methods to promote digital financial inclusion of females in the informal sector should include their unique needs. Some developing countries are designing digital financial products that take into consideration the preferences and needs of females. Helms and Brigit (2013) state that in Lebanon an organisation called in Al Majmoua, has created a free loyalty card called Bitakati. The service which they offer is dedicated at attracting and retaining female borrowers. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2019) report that in Malawi, NBS Bank in collaboration with Women's World Banking designed a Pafupi service, which is a savings account in which sales staff are deployed to serve female customers. Women's World Banking (2015) points out that the bank used emotional appeal and highlighted peace of mind, affordability and lack of thresholds to attract female customers.

c) Reduce the cost of transacting

Villasenor, West, and Lewis (2015) state that the exclusion of females from access to and usage of formal financial services has a negative impact on economic development. The study by FinMark Trust (2012) reveals that key disablers that hamper financial inclusion in rural communities in Zimbabwe include the high cost of financial service delivery, females not owning assets especially in rural areas, dilapidated infrastructure, lack of tailor-made financial products and lack of trust and confidence in the financial sector as a result of the adoption of the multi-currency system.

d) Make mobile account maintenance affordable

The financial services sector must plan and avail affordable products that will promote the utilisation of banking services by females in the informal sector. Affordability is one compelling idea which should be outlines among the array of benefits for having a mobile money account (Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, 2020). Access to digital banking services for females brings with it an array of opportunities which are associated with accessing financial services. With the help of government regulations and the lobbying of gender centered non-governmental organisations financial services organisations in Zimbabwe should devise methods to transform their financial services to be a vehicle to offer their services even to those in informal businesses (GPFI, 2016).

e) Cheap internet costs

Public policies should make instruments to close the gender gap in terms of mobile phones access. As long as this gap remains, females will still have a hurdle to access the available digital financial solutions available for them even if they have identity documents. This should be coupled by cheap internet access. A digital ID along with the SIM cards which are registered should also be made available for females (Demirguc-Kunt, Clapper, Singer, Ansa & Hess, 2018). In some countries, females have been given cellphones and internet access for reduced costs as a way of promoting females to include females in banking. That was also supported by the regulations to accelerate creation of digital banking accounts for females by allowing them to access new financial services accounts at no cost. To subscribe in the initiatives females were lured by availability of credit lines at a cheap cost that the prevailing markets rates. According to a study by Alliance of Digital inclusion (2017) females in the informal trading would only see the value of banking and opportunities associated with it once they first access credit to facilitate opening of bank accounts.

f) Encourage interoperability

An interoperable digital financial payment system is a fundamental facility if digital financial inclusiveness for females is to be effective. While interoperability benefits the whole society, females stand to benefit more as men can easily own more than one mobile phone than females (Banthia, Greene, Kawas, Lynch, & Slama, 2011). Governments especially in developing countries should pass laws that promote competition between banks, insurance companies and mobile network operators (MNO's). By so doing financial services players will have more incentives to tailor make their products so that females are well catered for (Demirguc-Kunt, Clapper, Singer, Ansa & Hess, 2018). This way females may be encouraged to transfer money and to make payments to people who even use different financial players (Darko, Smith, & Walker, 2015).

g) Make access to identity documents easy

Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (2020), states that one in every five unbanked females say that they lack identity documents. The understanding is that once the barrier is lifted females can easily open bank accounts. Zimbabwe should within its ability support this cause by putting in place mechanisms to ensure that all females are able to access identity documents.

h) Provide for direct access into digital bank accounts

The government should create mechanisms that make females access money directly into their digital banking accounts. This is a feasible solution as there is evidence that approximately 140 million females on the planet have opened their first account with the purpose of receiving a pay-out which include public sector wages, pensions and social benefits (Delechat, Corrine, Monique, Rui Xu, & Fan Yand, 2018). These payments should not be facilitated through the accounts of husbands or relatives as the history of transactions will determine credit worthiness in future (World Bank Group, 2019).

i) Female friendly consumer protection laws

Comprehensive consumer protection is required for females to benefit from digital banking activities. Banking products should be well described and should be made easy to use for females who are less educated and in the informal businesses. Banks should take into account the financial capability of females and their experience. Fraudulent cases should be very minimum (World Bank, 2016).

CONCLUSION

In the context of this desk research, targeted financial inclusion policies should ensure that marginalised groups, particularly females in the informal sector, have access to cheap digital financial products and services. Making access to digital financial services easy, facilities other ancillary activities such as saving, investing in education and other activities which are fundamental for a healthy community (McKee, Katharine, Kaffenberger, & Zimmerman, 2015).

According to the (World Bank Group, 2019), financial inclusion of females is greatly hampered by social and cultural norms. The findings by the World Bank (2016) are that in 31 countries in the world, females cannot choose both a living style and where to live. In 16 countries, females cannot freely move away from home to do their personal business. In such countries, the gender gap in terms of financial inclusion is double to that in countries where females do not experience such restrictions. Without access to national identity documents, the gender gap in financial inclusion will continue to affect societies in Africa and spill over into other problems for females (Hyland, Marie, Simeone, & Goldberg, 2019).

SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDIES

i. To enhance the up-take of formal banking by females in the informal sector, there is need for this population group to have access to credit facilities. Countries in East Africa have started developing digital lending business models that provide loans to small businesses. A study can be conducted on how the Zimbabwe financial services sector can convert informal savings methods such as *maround* or *mukando* to improve the number of savings accounts and provide micro-insurance. The study can also explore how digital lending services can be used in order to enhance financial inclusion of marginalised groups.

ii. Studies can also be conducted on the impact of transaction taxes and the general cost of mobile transaction fees to financial inclusion. This is particularly pertinent considering that the government introduced a 2 percent tax on mobile phone transactions in 2018. The cost of maintaining a bank account is always a major aspect that the banking public constantly considers when making decisions on banking products and services.

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