

Gender snapshot:

What is the Savings Evidence Map and what does it tell us about policies and practices to support women to save?

Snapshot #01



What is the Savings Evidence Map?

The Savings Evidence map is an excel based tool that provides consolidated access to **380 studies** related to savings-focused financial inclusion. The map primarily organizes evidence – by **type of results** grouped into client, institutions and ecosystem level results and by the **type of savings intervention** documented in the evidence – interventions focused on product type, product design, product distribution channels and target markets.

The Evidence Map was updated annually, with the final update in 2022. It is accompanied by a Synthesis Report that provides users with a brief analysis of where the evidence is clustered and where we still have gaps, as well as a summary of our approach to developing the map and our inclusion criteria.

But users can do so much more with the map. For example, learning more about how provider policies and practices effect the outcomes of their savings initiatives focused on women.

We walk you through the steps needed to identify the relevant evidence and we then highlight some of our key takeaways from the research.

1. How to identify the relevant evidence

The Savings Evidence Map houses 51 studies that assess the impact of savings from a gender perspective. These studies cover a broad range of impact areas related to clients, institutions and the overall financial inclusion ecosystem. Studies can be tagged multiple times, depending on the impact areas and intervention types discussed in the research. Additional papers in the map include a degree of analysis around gender (for example, they provide gender disaggregated data) but gender if not focus so they have not been tagged as such.

For example, if you are only interested in reviewing evidence of savings initiatives from a gender perspective from **Sub-Saharan Africa** that are based on **Case Studies**, they can apply the Region and Types of Evidence filters and quickly see how many of the studies meet these criteria.

2. What is the evidence saying?

Within this bank of resources, six studies look specifically at gender at the ‘institution’ level of the Map. These studies document institutional level outcomes of savings initiatives focused on women. We’ve pulled out a couple of the key findings that resonated most with us.

Firstly savings groups and self-help groups (SHGs) continue to provide substantial (non-financial) benefits for women.

The benefits of savings groups are well documented. In an early, yet still relevant study, Parida and Sinha¹ looked at the sustainability of SHGs from a gender perspective in India and find that “all-female SHGs ... were more focused and united, adhere to basic objectives of groups, ... [and] took membership in the group as a means to educate themselves and confront social, political, and economic problems.” Similarly, Patil and Kokate² show that most female members have positive attitudes towards their SHGs and they strengthen their leadership and managerial qualities as a result of group membership.

This finding is backed up by evidence across the ‘client’ and ‘ecosystem’ sections of the map. For example, a global evidence review by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (2019) shows that women that are part of SHGs are on average more empowered – economically and socially– than non-SHG members. This includes better access to and ownership of resources, higher mobility, and greater household decision-making power.

The social dimension of savings groups is therefore important, and emerging evidence shows that this continues to hold despite emergence of mobile money and the digitization of savings group activity, particularly brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Sanyal et al.³ looked at the impact of COVID-19 on rural SHGs in Odisha, findings that SHG group members missed the socialisation spaces that SHGs provided during the lockdown period when physical SHG activities had come to a halt.

Secondly, while informal banking is highly valued, mobile money accounts are the preferred method of banking for female entrepreneurs in Africa, reminding us that women should not be seen as a homogenous group

Asare⁴ finds that female entrepreneurs are more likely to choose mobile money than other alternatives, such as informal, formal and no banking. Informal bank accounts are valued because of poor infrastructure and a largely informal economies which have prevented traditional banks from providing financial services across the continent. However, there is a strong demand for mobile money by female entrepreneurs, finding that regular cash transactions, online transactions, income quintile, and education are important variables that could influence the choice of banking method. This is an important insight on variables that providers can examine when conducting customer research to inform product development for women entrepreneurs.

Finally, it is not enough to design savings products that overcome barriers for women, it is also important to invest time to engage women and support them to use the products and services over a longer period.

For example, NBS Bank in Malawi developed and launched a dedicated savings account for women (Pafupi Savings).⁵ The product was designed specifically to meet the needs cited by women during the research phase of the project and received strong positive feedback from potential women clients. However, the specific segment of women that NBS was trying to reach had never participated in the formal financial system and uptake was lower than expected.

In general, women tend to take more time when adopting both new financial services and new technologies because of lower literacy levels, informal or irregular income, lack of legal identification documents or formal collateral, time constraints, as well as legal and mobility constraints in many cultural contexts. Onboarding these women as clients therefore takes more time and commitment, though women are seen to be loyal and active savers once they are brought on board. Though the features of Pafupi Savings addressed many of these barriers, educating potential women clients on these features turned out to be an ongoing process.

This is an important insight for providers targeting this segment as they need to build in realistic expectations on the time horizon required to onboard female customers and achieve scale.

The study lists a range of recommendations targeted at providers that we would encourage you to read in full. This includes using sales incentives to reach gender-based targets, training for staff on how to communicate and establish relationships with women clients, and the need to engage with local regulators to align the legal requirements with the needs of low-income women.

What more

In summary, these insights remind us that women's needs are varied. A multi-pronged approach is needed by the banking and development community to ensure the wide variety of women's needs are understood and that products and services are tailored to their needs, and that gender sensitive engagement activities are utilized to encourage women into the financial sector.

However, these are just a few highlights and we encourage you to explore the Savings Evidence Map to discover more research.

References

- 1 Parida, P., Sinha, A. (2010). Performance and Sustainability of Self-Help Groups in India: A Gender Perspective
- 2 Patil, S., Kokate, K. (2017). Identifying factors governing attitude of rural women towards Self-Help Groups using principal component analysis. *Journal of Rural Studies* 55, pp.157-167
- 3 Sanyal, K., Mukherjee, S., Thatte, P., Sarangi, B. (2021). Impact of Covid-19 on Rural SHG Women in Odisha. Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy
- 4 Asare, E., Nakakeeto, G., Segarra, E. (2018). "Determinants of the choice of a savings option: "The case of African Households"" 2018 Annual Meeting, February 2-6, 2018, Jacksonville, Florida 266868, Southern Agricultural Economics Association
- 5 UNCDF, Mastercard (2018). Pafupi Savings: Expanding Financial Inclusion to Rural Women