



On Her Own Account: How Strengthening Women's Financial Control Affects Labor Supply and Gender Norms

Discussion

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1. Gender-sensitive Policies

The paper underscores the **role of integrating gender-sensitive approaches into economic policies** to address structural barriers and create sustainable improvements in women's labor market outcomes and societal norms.

Promote gender-sensitive policy design

- **Align incentives:** Incentivize programs and employers to create more opportunities for women, such as flexible work arrangements and gender-sensitive workplace policies.
- **Monitor and measure progress:** Establish metrics for tracking women's financial inclusion, labor participation, and empowerment over time to assess and refine interventions.
- **Strengthen legal protections:** Enforce anti-discrimination policies and safeguard women's rights to financial independence and participation in the workforce.

2. Scalable Tweaks... With Good Institutional Capacity

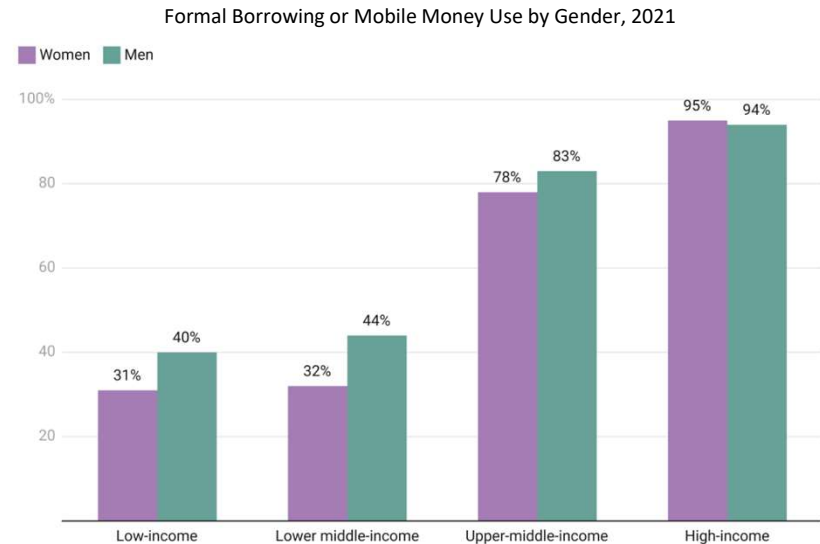
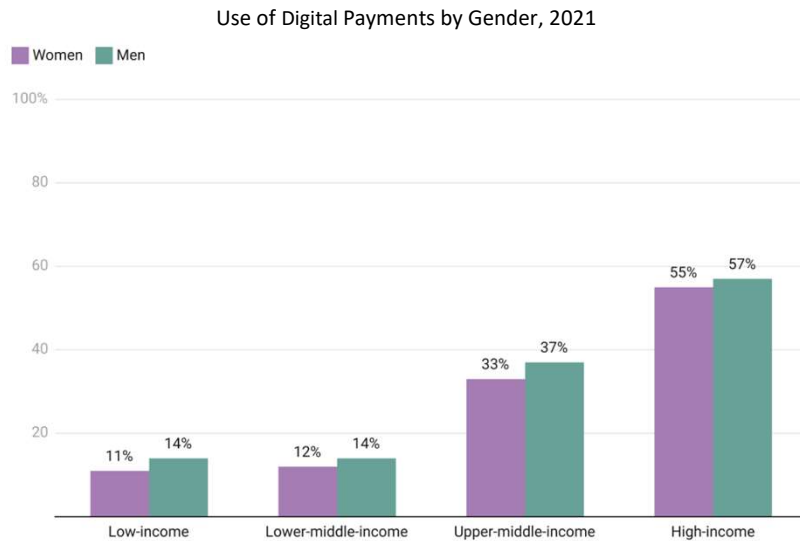
Accessibility to banking services and direct payments were foundational to the success of the intervention.

- The intervention leveraged the infrastructure of MGNREGS and the Indian banking system.
- Variations in institutional capacity (e.g., efficiency of banking systems and public programs) can influence the scalability of the intervention.

Strengthen financial inclusion efforts

- **Expand direct deposit programs:** Scale up initiatives to deposit women's wages directly into their individual bank accounts, ensuring universal adoption in programs like MGNREGS.
- **Improve banking infrastructure:** Enhance the availability of last-mile banking services, such as local kiosks, to make accounts accessible and usable for women in rural and remote areas.
- **Digitize payments across programs:** Expand the direct deposit model to other social protection and wage programs, emphasizing women as primary recipients.

Digital Payments and Mobile Money for Women



Source: Data from "The Global Findex Database 2021," World Bank Group, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalfindex/Data#sec1>.

- Digital financial services like mobile money offer a way to increase women's control over their resources by providing them with a private, secure place to store money in their name (Aker et al., 2016, Field et al., 2021, Riley, 2024)
- Recent research shows that increasing women's use of digital financial services raises their empowerment (Heath and Riley, 2024)

3. Complementary Role of Training

Knowledge dissemination and capacity-building matter for financial inclusion initiatives

Implement Complementary Training Programs

- **Financial literacy:** Provide women with practical training on using bank accounts, managing finances, and accessing banking services independently.
- **Empowerment-oriented workshops:** Focus on building women's confidence and mobility through capacity-building sessions that emphasize economic agency and decision-making.
- **Community awareness campaigns:** Conduct gender-sensitization programs targeting men and community leaders to reduce stigma and reshape norms around women's work.

4. Target Impact on Marginalized Groups

Largest gains among socially constrained women call for designing policies that prioritize disadvantaged subgroups

Target marginalized groups for greater impact

- **Focus on socially constrained groups:** Design tailored interventions for women in conservative or low-income households where barriers to work are highest.
- **Caste- and region-specific strategies:** Address local and cultural variations in gender norms to ensure that initiatives are context-sensitive and equitable.

5. Male Perceptions and Norms

Men's perceptions and societal norms matter to women's participation in the workforce. Addressing these misperceptions is critical.

- Rural Madhya Pradesh is characterized by restrictive gender norms and low female labor force participation (FLFP), similarly to many other low-income regions in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of the Middle East.

Address misperceptions of norms

- **Engage men as partners:** Run community dialogues and campaigns to correct men's misperceptions of societal stigma surrounding their wives working.
- **Normalize women's work:** Use public narratives, media, and role models to showcase the benefits of women's economic participation for families and communities.

Foster long-term norm change

- **Involve youth:** Educate adolescents and young adults on the importance of gender equality.
- **Leverage peer effects:** Use role models and peer influence to accelerate acceptance of working women in communities.
- **Embed norm change in institutions:** Partner with local governments, schools, and NGOs to integrate progressive messages about women's roles into their programs.

Conclusions

Role of integrating gender-sensitive approaches into economic policies to create sustainable improvements in women's labor market outcomes and societal norms.

Virtuous cycle: Female empowerment fosters labor force engagement, which, in turn, reinforces autonomy and norm liberalization.