

Webinar & E-discussion Summary

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Despite an overall and global increase in financial inclusion, women are still more excluded from the formal financial sector with the gender gap remaining at 9%.
- There is no strict definition on women's financial inclusion and thus the depth and breadth vary highly in SDC programs.
- Financial literacy and hence financial education are primordial.
- Inclusion of men and boys is instrumental for social norms change.
- Technical advisory services to financial institutions are key to develop gender sensitive products and services.
- Women are mainly excluded because of:
 - Legal hurdles
 - Time and mobility constraints
 - Social norms
 - Lack of access to education
 - Financial institutions having a limited understanding of gender issues
- Digital Finance is an opportunity because:
 - Women don't have to travel to far-away bank branches
 - It allows secure financial transactions, whenever and wherever
 - It offers women a means to be financially independent.
- However, studies and figures show that women are still less likely than men to have access to financial services as on average they are 10% less likely to own a mobile phone than men.
- Social norms change is the key to women's economic empowerment to reach financial inclusion. For a lasting emancipation, projects should include men and boys and work with the entire community for women to become key actors in economic, social and political development.



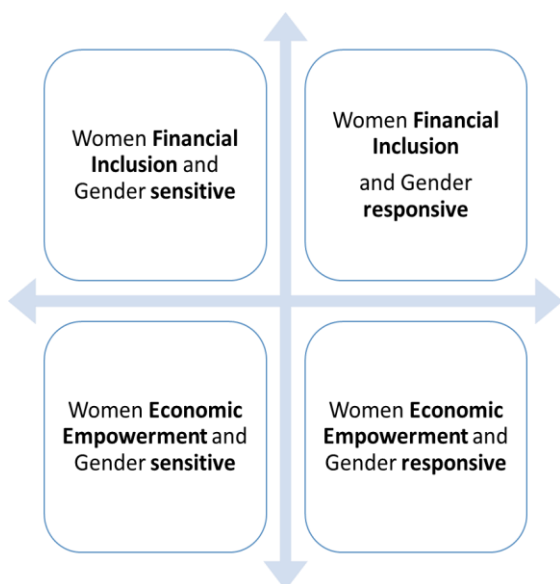
Introduction:

In November 2017, SDC's Focal Points (FPs) on Employment & Income (e+i) and Gender decided to capitalize their experience on women's financial inclusion. Both Focal Points realized that Women's Financial Inclusion has little visibility in the strategic and operational work of SDC and that it is not always reported upon systematically. It has been decided to conduct a stock taking of SDC programs focusing on or contributing to women's financial inclusion. 50 projects have been received and analyzed, out of which 10 were selected for an e-consultation and then, the working team opened the floor to a webinar and a two days long e-discussion to discuss women's financial inclusion approaches – and what gaps need to be addressed and filled. This is a summary of its content.

The webinar:

After a brief introduction on what is financial inclusion, the webinar went into detailing why the discussion on women's financial inclusion and why the gender gap persists (9 points) as women keep on being mainly excluded from the formal financial sector.

From the 50 projects analysed none of the projects have a clear definition on women's financial inclusion, nor do they have a common rationale, however a categorisation has been possible along the 4 axes below:



The webinar, then, showcased two cases on women's financial inclusion projects:

Financial education for female entrepreneurs, Azerbaijan, presented by Simone Haerberli, SDC Regional Coordinator Caucasus: The goal of the training was to help women create and realize business ideas, run a business and systematically manage it to ensure sustainability of the business. The training also taught how to access and use financial services. At the end of the training course participants had their business plan developed.

During the presentation the focus was on the fact that male family members were invited to trainings. This had a significant effect: when male family members attended such trainings jointly, they started themselves advocating for this type of capacity building and displayed strong support to their wives, sisters etc. The women in turn got more confident and felt more supported by their families.

MENA Financial Inclusion: Women Banking Champions Program, presented by Christine Lewis, SECO: The goal of the program is to increase access to financial services for women in the MENA region through the provision of advisory services to financial institutions (banks and MFIs), thus improving women's financial inclusion. The program- to be started- will provide support to financial intermediaries in key MENA markets to establish them as women banking champions, in turn creating a demonstration effect in their respective markets. The support provided will help financial institutions expand their offering, including financial and non-financial services, such as networking opportunities and trainings, to women clients.

For the presentation slides of the webinar please click [here](#).

The e-discussion

Day 1: Digitization: how is this an opportunity for women's financial inclusion and what are the main obstacles and solutions?"

Q1: This discussion started on women's financial exclusion in general. ***Why are women excluded? And why more than men? An estimated two billion people do not have access to formal financial products and services. What are the reasons?***



In general, both men and women face a set of similar obstacles in terms of accessibility (e.g. living in remote rural areas), convenience (products and services not tailored to the needs of the low-income populations) and affordability (products and services too expensive for low income segments of populations). Women face additional obstacles: for example, legal hurdles (e.g. not owning land, no ID), time and mobility constraints due to their role as primary caretakers and due to social norms, lack of access to education resulting in high illiteracy rate, just to name a few, giving them a riskier profile. On top of that, financial institutions have limited understanding of gender issues and most are yet to develop policies and

strategies that would promote women's financial inclusion.

There are conservative social norms, legal discrimination, and inequalities in endowments and assets which constitute underlying constraints that contribute to gender inequality.

Q2: The vision set for 2020 is that digitization of financial services ("DFS") is on its way and promises to increase financial inclusion and reduce the gender gap. ***How is digitization an opportunity to address the financial inclusion gap for women? What are the challenges faced by women in the digital context?***



DFS is an opportunity as women don't have to travel far-away to bank branches to deposit their money or take a loan. Mobile money allow women to make secure financial transactions, when and where suits them best. It's secure, private and convenient - offering women a means to be financially independent. This is particularly relevant in contexts where women's mobility is limited by the social and cultural norms.

However, studies and figures show that women are still less likely than men to have access to financial services as they have restricted access to mobile phone (i.e. phone ownership), and a limited digital literacy on top of previous mentioned barriers in Question 1.

Day 2: Social Norms, the role of men and women's financial inclusion: what are challenges and what are good practices

Q1: Already during the first day of the discussion, the topic of social norms was raised as one of the main challenges in women's financial inclusion. **Hence, how can we take social norms better into account?**

Some ideas shared by the participants:

- ✓ Start by diagnosing norms before developing strategies. In the context of financial services, the diagnostic is equivalent to market research where the tools are focused on qualitatively understanding norms.
- ✓ Introduce minor changes at the bank level, such as recruiting female banking officers to increase women's access to banks.
- ✓ Donors and governments should work together to create a conducive environment for women to be able to run profitable businesses and repay.
- ✓ Consider not only social norms but the root cause of those norms, like: historical aspects, religious factors, contextual background in a given society, institutions and ideology, people's values and visions towards women.
- ✓ Start where conservatism is less strong and gradually expand the project based on positive previous results.

"The biggest challenge is the social norms that stop a woman from obtaining and using both banking services and mobile phones. Sometimes people talk about social norms as the 'soft' challenge, but in my mind it's definitely the hardest"
Catherine Hight, CGAP, World Bank

Q2: It is necessary to take a holistic approach, including men and boys in the work for women's financial inclusion. **Where is the role of men within this frame?**

Make men aware of the importance of gender equality and respect for women's rights is to make them allies of change.

Some ideas shared by the participants:

- ✓ Men should be engaged as actors of change in: developing women entrepreneurs and as leaders in market/private sector; ensuring women's participation in all the steps of value chains; and ensuring legal and policy frameworks that would address practical and strategic needs of women.
- ✓ Men should be part of the social norms discussion as they outnumber in economic activities and have control over productive resources (e.g. land, house, machine, business skills etc).
- ✓ Deeply held patriarchal mind-sets, perceptions, and informal institutions (e.g. norms, beliefs, values) offer more spaces for men to develop themselves economically and politically, while marginalizing women. Therefore, men should be involved in discussion around social norms and the impact it would have on political and economic empowerment of women and girls.
- ✓ It is necessary to work with men from young ages. It is much more difficult to change their attitudes towards women in later stage.
- ✓ When talking to women, it is important to sensitize them for their responsibility they have as mothers. Being mainly responsible for raising children also gives them the opportunity to a certain extent to choose on how they want to raise their children. Perpetuating the traditional role models or try to bring more justice and opportunity to the life of their girls and boys.

Thanks to all contributors

The facilitation team thanks all contributors of the e-discussions for their valuable questions and comments (in chronological order):

Manohara Khadka, SDC, Nepal	Thierry Pleines, Agridea, Switzerland
Nathalie Wyser Vizcarra, SDC, Switzerland	Nino Edilashvili, SDC, Georgia
Yasmine Khaled Aly, SDC, Egypt	Karina Harutyunyan, Strategic Development Agency NGO, Armenia
Shodiboy Djabborov, SDC, Tajikistan	Damir Bisembin, SDC, Kyrgyzstan
Maja Rueegg, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Switzerland	Nisha Singh, World Bank, USA
Catherine Hightet, World Bank, USA	Almir Tanovic, SDC, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Luiza Mamarasulova, IFC, Kyrgyzstan	

Links and contacts

If you have any questions, please contact the facilitator team:

Selina Haeny selina.haeny@eda.admin.ch

Siham Boukhali siham.boukhali@helvetas.org

Website of e+i network: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/EI/Pages/Home.aspx>

Website of Gender Equality Network Platform: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Gender>