

LAUNCH OF THE IMM GENDER CHAPTER NEW TOOLKIT VERSION!



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WEBINAR: WOMEN AS CUSTOMERS – HOW CAN WE MEASURE OUR IMPACT IN CREATING GENDER INCLUSION?

With inclusive growth deeply embedded in the Biniyog Briddhi (B-Bridddhi) programme, the programme has organized a series of awareness creation events that shed light on the topic of gender inclusion via multiple angles. This also echoes with one of the recommendations from the [Bangladesh Impact Investing Strategy and Action Plan](#), highlighting the importance of gender inclusion via impact investing.

Following a prior webinar held at the end of 2021 focused on gender inclusion via impact investing, the B-Bridddhi programme continued to foster awareness by hosting another webinar discussing how impact measurement and management (IMM) tools can help yield insights around gender inclusion. Coinciding with the launch of the [Gender Chapter of the B-Bridddhi Impact Measurement and Management Toolkit](#), this webinar was hosted on Monday September 19th and featured the following esteemed panellists:

1. Natasha Dinham, Lead Advisory & Advocacy, Roots of Impact
2. Nilah Mitchell, Gender Lead and Head of Kenya Office, 60 Decibels
3. Ivy Huq Russell, Founder and CEO, Maya
4. Maxime Cheng, Lead Impact Intelligence & Education, Roots of Impact (moderator)

INTRODUCING WOMEN AS CUSTOMERS

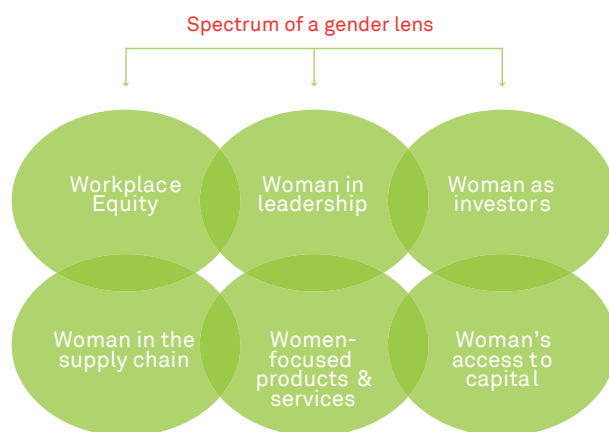
In Bangladesh specifically, female entrepreneurship is generally low. According to the [Asian Development Bank](#), only 13% of SMEs are owned by women and 5% are managed by women. While female entrepreneurs have made significant strides recently, they continue to face formidable structural barriers, ranging from difficulties in obtaining loans and startup capital, to the lack of formal support (such as enabling public policies, access to financial institutions, and professional training programs) and discriminatory social norms around gender roles.

Downstream, these challenges extend to female customers too, given that female entrepreneurs are more likely to develop products and services uniquely tailored to fit the needs of women. As the country becomes more digitized, many of these vital products and services tailored to female customers are being delivered using mobile

phones. However, the [2022 GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report](#) showed that Bangladesh had one of the widest gender gaps in mobile ownership globally, with 84% of men owning a mobile phone compared to 65% of adult women. Encouragingly, however, Bangladeshi women exhibited significant increases in weekly use of value-added mobile services between 2020 and 2021, indicating a notable shift in how mobile phones are providing greater value to female customers. According to GSMA research, women mobile owners increased their use of education services by 21 percentage points, paid entertainment services by 16 percentage points, health services by 14 percentage points and both government services and job applications by 12 percentage points.

At the same time, women are now accountable for \$39.6 trillion of the world’s wealth, up 25% from five years ago. A Boston Consulting Group [forecast](#) shows that women will control 75% of global discretionary spending by 2028. Their analysis found that women add approximately \$5 trillion to the wealth pool annually, a figure expected to accelerate and outpace global wealth growth over the next several years. Notably, Asia (exclusive of Japan) will be the fastest-growing hub of wealth creation for women. If growth continues at its current 10.4% annual rate, Asian women will be on track to hold more wealth assets than any other region except North America by the end of next year. While these figures demonstrate a compelling business case for serving female customers, they often remain underserved relative to their male counterparts due to the relatively limited data surrounding their consumer preferences. As such, all companies should be investing in ways to better understand this rapidly emerging customer segment.

In parallel, the topic of gender inclusion has gained prominence among impact investing ecosystem players recently. However, support towards female-led enterprises, employees, or investors tends to be the focal point of the discourse, rather than support towards women as customers and how to deliver products or services that best meet their needs. In fact, the topic of gender lens covers a spectrum of topics (see graph below), highlighting the importance of expanding dialogue around better supporting female customers. Specifically, the focus of this webinar was on the bottom circle, “Women-Focused Products and Services.”



Recreated by Roots of Impact based on criteria from the [2X Challenge](#)

THE GENDER CHAPTER OF THE IMPACT MEASUREMENT AND MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

With female customers in mind, both impact enterprises and impact investors can benefit from collecting gender-disaggregated data to better understand their impact around gender inclusion. Specifically, men and women experience products and services differently, so understanding the experiences of female customers individually, and also in comparison to men, is critical for both impact enterprises and investors to drive greater value through product design and go-to market strategy. To support ecosystem players to dive deeper into this topic, B-Bridhdi recently published the [Gender Chapter of the Impact Measurement and Management Toolkit](#). During this webinar, each panellist built upon aspects of the Toolkit by speaking to the importance of IMM for better understanding female customers.

A FUNDER’S PERSPECTIVE ON IMPACT MEASUREMENT

When introducing the newly launched Impact-Linked Fund for Gender Inclusive Fintech ([ILF for GIF](#)), Natasha Dinham from Roots of Impact highlighted the importance of IMM from a fund manager’s perspective. Unlike

traditional financing vehicles, the ILF for GIF backs emerging market fintechs by incentivizing them to achieve targeted outcomes that improve **female financial inclusion** and **financial health**. From a funder's perspective, gender inclusion can be best measured relative to baseline performance when enterprises adopt rigorous IMM data collection, disaggregation, analysis, and management. Without sound evidence backing up claims to meaningfully serve female customers, fund managers will continue to face challenges articulating their investee performance around gender impact to their own stakeholders. IMM is therefore critical for Impact-Linked Finance and other innovative results-based finance instruments to work effectively. Without it, fund managers would be unable to use data to assess progress among their investees on key gender inclusion outcomes.

USING LEAN DATA TOOLS TO COLLECT DATA FOR MEASURING GENDER IMPACT

Lean data, the IMM approach pioneered by [60 Decibels](#), has proven to be a valuable approach to collect data from marginalized groups to better understand their needs. Nilah Mitchell, Gender Lead and Head of Kenya Office at 60 Decibels, complemented Natasha by speaking about how their focus is to collect data by **listening to customers** via short phone interviews in local languages. However, despite their cost-effective and resource-light approach, obstacles remain around collecting data from female customers. For instance, Nilah highlighted how only 43% of the approximately 170,000 customers they've spoken with are women.

Obstacles to data collection are exacerbated by the gender-induced digital divide. From their work collecting gender disaggregated data, Nilah shared how women often do not have the agency to be able to speak to 60 Decibels due to entrenched gender norms in certain countries, for example. Other factors, such as the timing of when phone interviews take place, are important in determining if they can reach female customers.

Consequently, Nilah emphasized how imperative it is to build a rapport with interviewees to earn user trust and receive higher quality information. The order of the questions in phone interviews matter too. Even in a survey, it is crucial to plan questions in a manner whereby more factual questions occur in the earlier parts of the conversation before moving on to more qualitative, open-ended questions. This is especially helpful to allow women to share authentic information about their experiences using different products or services.

A FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR'S PERSPECTIVE ON MEASURING GENDER IMPACT

The importance of IMM was further emphasized by Ivy Huq Russell, Founder and CEO of Maya, who provided a perspective on how IMM can help tailor products and services to female customers. Founded as a healthcare blog in 2011, Maya has grown into a leading digital health platform providing timely, cost-effective physical and mental health services to users, of which about 45% are women. To date, Maya has conducted about 7-8 million consultations on its platform and supports nearly 350,000 monthly users in Bengali, local dialects, and other regional languages, which has enhanced the level of trust users feel when engaging with the app. Moreover, Maya trains its in-app experts to be neutral and non-judgmental when speaking with female users who have questions related to sensitive topics, such as pregnancy, menstruation, and other gynaecological issues. Their app also allows for anonymous messaging, which helps encourage greater freedom to share such information.

One of the key points Ivy mentioned relates to the difficulty of onboarding female users to the app. While the platform is designed to serve their needs regarding sexual and reproductive health, the big digital divide in Bangladesh prevents some women from directly accessing their services. Maya's app is only available on smartphones with reliable internet access, and women lack access to these two digital tools in comparison to men. Due to the sensitivity of the health information they share on the platform, female users may prefer to access the app away from home. Consequently, Maya has worked with the ready-made garment (RMG) sector

by collaborating with factories employing a high percentage of female employees. In rural areas, Maya has also partnered with telco operators to provide female customers who may lack smartphones with greater access to their platform.

While challenges remain for the most disadvantaged female customers, Maya has proven that it's possible to build products and services uniquely tailored to the needs of female users. Their ability to disaggregate impact data by gender helps them better understand how female users are engaging with their platform and pinpoint business strategies that help deepen gender inclusion.

STRIDING FORWARD

For entrepreneurs, the importance of **servicing female customers** cannot be overstated. Indeed, designing products and services tailored to women is an under-tapped market opportunity. However, effectively doing so necessitates taking an evidence-backed approach centred around using **gender-disaggregated data** to better understand their specific needs. Building a strong IMM system to measure outcomes related to gender inclusion can help entrepreneurs unlock potential sources of innovative startup capital, as well as make smarter business decisions to serve this important customer segment. Adopting a lean data approach to IMM, spoken about by Nilah Mitchell of 60 Decibels, is one cost-effective way that can deliver value to both impact enterprises and investors who seek insights emanating from this data. We heard from both Natasha Dinham and Ivy Huq Russell in this regard, which allowed us to see how useful it is to articulate gender inclusion data to propel more smart solutions with female users at the forefront.

“If we think about women as the next big emerging market with a lot of business value, what I would like to challenge all of us to go a little bit further on is...is it enough just to get the product or service into the hands of women, or can we do even better to understand if women are getting the same value out of this product or service as the other gender would get through their experience?” – Maxime Cheng, Lead, Impact Intelligence & Education, Roots of Impact.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you want to dive deeper into IMM for measuring gender inclusion, we highly recommend checking out our new [Gender Chapter of the B-Bridddhi Impact Measurement and Management Toolkit](#). Pages 7-11 specifically discuss how to disaggregate data to better understand the experiences of women users during their customer journey.



