



Product & Market Design

# Low scalability of products

This barrier refers to the perceived and actual financial and operational costs associated with designing, delivering, and maintaining products tailored to women customers. Serving low-income women is often perceived as high-risk, and misaligned incentives, data limitations, and institutional reluctance to invest in a new segment further inhibit the expansion and scaling of women-centered products to achieve financial sustainability and social impact.

### Why is this barrier important?

Scaling women-focused financial products is critical for both advancing inclusion and achieving commercial sustainability. The ability for a product to scale affects whether financial service providers (FSP) are willing and able to invest in a range of financial products and services that meet the needs of women customers, especially those who are low-income or underserved. Misperceptions about profitability, combined with real challenges like high upfront costs and limited internal capacity, often discourage institutions from scaling women-focused solutions.

### Connected Barriers



*Digital & Physical Infrastructure*

Poor digital & foundation ID infrastructure



*Product & Market Design*

Fragmented market collaboration

Low utilization of gender-disaggregated data (GDD)



*Entry & Capability Barriers*

Low data footprint among women

High cost of using DFS (incl. transaction costs)

### Most Relevant Segments

1

Excluded, marginalized

2

Excluded, high potential

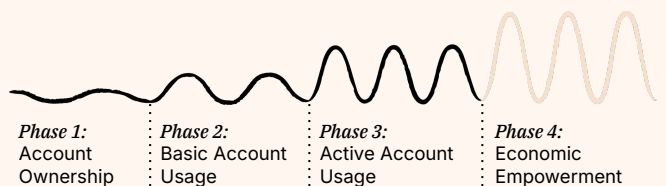
3

Included, underserved

4

Included, Not underserved

### Customer Journey Relevance





## Key evidence relevant to this barrier

### Evidence points to a clear business case for serving women customers.

Global evidence increasingly indicates that serving women is not only a social imperative but also a strong commercial opportunity. While financial service providers often perceive women as less profitable due to lower balances or smaller transaction sizes, data show that women customers tend to have higher lifetime value, are more loyal, and are more likely to refer others. As a result, products designed with women in mind often see strong uptake across all customer segments, underscoring that women-centered design can drive both inclusion and broader market growth.

- Fintech firms who tailor products/services towards women report higher customer lifetime value, despite occasionally higher costs. ([IFC, 2024](#))
- Women customers are less likely to switch to another provider and more likely to share positive experiences with a friend. ([IFC, 2024](#))
- Data show that it is actually too costly not to serve women. Financial products and marketing strategies designed with women in mind consistently demonstrate high uptake among men as well, proving that women-centered design is not only inclusive but also cost-effective. ([Women's World Banking, 2018](#))

### Many providers perceive serving women as costly.

Despite this potential for growth and evidence to the contrary, providers cite higher customer acquisition expenses driven by targeted marketing, tailored onboarding, and the need to address digital and financial literacy gaps, with some estimates suggesting costs can be up to 45% higher. These challenges are often operational and front-loaded, including additional time and resources required for onboarding and product design.

- Firms tailoring their products and services to women more frequently mention that the cost of acquiring women is higher than that for men,

citing the additional marketing costs of reaching specific women sub-segments, expenses related to providing services to overcome digital or financial literacy-related barriers, and costs associated with unique acquisition channels. ([IFC, 2024](#))

- Research from Women's World Banking highlights a persistent perception gap among finance executives. When asked why women make up such a small share of their customer base, many executives argued that women do not earn enough to save, tend to hold lower balances, and transact more frequently but in smaller amounts--making them appear less profitable to serve. ([Women's World Banking, 2018](#))
- A 2025 survey of financial services providers finds that 37% of those surveyed agree that offering products to low-income customers at scale is too expensive. ([Women's World Banking, 2026](#))
- The cost of acquiring a woman customer can be up to 45% higher than that of acquiring a man. For example, in Uganda, it typically takes an agent about five minutes to help a man with some English proficiency and basic financial understanding install a mobile app. In contrast, assisting a woman with limited language skills or low digital literacy can take 8 to 10 minutes, highlighting the additional time and resources required to ensure effective onboarding. ([IFC, 2024](#))

### Providers are beginning to identify pathways to viability.

These include leveraging strategic partnerships and subsidies, scaling customer volume, investing in digital infrastructure, and using data to refine offerings, demonstrating that while serving women may require different approaches and upfront investment, it can become both sustainable and profitable over time.



## Key evidence relevant to this barrier

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- Financial services providers in Kenya and Jordan emphasized that the higher costs of serving women customers are largely tied to the operational cost of designing and deploying tailored products. Strategic partnerships, such as subsidies from central banks, can help offset these expenses and improve the financial viability of women-focused products. (Women's World Banking, 2025)
- Research reveals that a fintech firm in Indonesia and payment provider in Cambodia navigate low-profit margins in serving rural women by scaling outreach, increasing customer volume, waiving fees, and utilizing digital loans to drive revenue--strategies that depend heavily on improved customer data and digital infrastructure. (Women's World Banking, 2025)
- Address structural and cultural issues that limit the scalability of women-focused products by advocating for policy reforms that simplify regulatory requirements (e.g., tiered Know Your Customer approaches and flexible documentation rules) and remove barriers that disproportionately exclude women from accessing financial services at scale.
- Collaborate through industry platforms and knowledge-sharing fora by joining shared-service models (e.g., interoperable agent networks or data-sharing initiatives) to reduce duplication and scale cost-effectively, while exchanging lessons learned on how to better serve women customers, including successful distribution models, pricing strategies, and customer engagement practices.

**Scaling financial services requires aligning incentives, reducing structural barriers, and adopting business models to prioritize long-term value and affordability.**

FSPs should create incentives and regulations that support the development and expansion of women-focused products, while collaborating across industry platforms to share infrastructure, reduce costs, and scale proven approaches. These efforts should be complemented by shifting toward customer lifetime value models and designing affordable products that reflect women's financial realities, ensuring sustainable uptake and impact at scale. Recommendations include:

- Working with policymakers to design financial incentives (e.g., tax breaks, blended finance or other investment vehicles) that reward FSPs for scaling women-focused products. This includes results-based financing models where institutions receive support or bonuses tied to measurable increases in women's enrollment, usage, or retention.

- Experiment with alternative models of cost evaluation, including a customer lifetime-based approach over product-level approach.
- Prioritize affordability as the cornerstone of scalable solutions. FSPs can expand uptake by designing products that match women's financial realities.