

FINANCIAL INCLUSION **insights**

APPLIED RESEARCH FOR  digital financial inclusion

BANGLADESH

FII QUICKSIGHTS REPORT MOBILE MONEY USER AND NONUSER STUDY WAVE 1

May 2014

THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION INSIGHTS (FII) PROGRAM

The FII research program responds to the need for timely, demand-side data and practical insights on the use of mobile money and other digital financial services (DFS), and the potential for their expanded use among the poor.

The program covers eight countries in Africa and Asia at different stages of DFS development. Research was launched in fall 2013.

FII is operated by global research group InterMedia and sponsored by the Financial Services for the Poor initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. All FII data and research is publicly available through the FII portal: www.finclusion.org.

QuickSights reports provide initial findings from each FII research project. These reports feed into subsequent Wave Reports which synthesize the results from all projects conducted during a wave of research in a given FII country.

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STUDY DESIGN

Objectives

Twenty-four focus groups were conducted with users and nonusers of mobile money to:

- Provide insights into why participants use or don't use mobile money services.
- Understand barriers to and triggers for the uptake and use of mobile money.
- Understand participants' financial behaviors and current pain points and identify the potential for new digital financial services.
- Map common transactions to see where mobile money services can facilitate financial inclusion.

Key research questions

- If and how does digital literacy affect the use of mobile money services?
- Why do many users conduct over-the counter (OTC) transactions rather than registering and using their own accounts?
- Are nonusers aware of mobile money services? If yes, why are they not using it?
- What routine financial transactions do participants conduct, what goods and services do they buy, and how do they make those financial decisions?
- Which of these transactions are the most difficult to conduct?
- Can mobile money serve participants' daily transaction needs, and, if so, how?

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LOCATION & PARTICIPANT PROFILE

- Twenty-four consumer focus groups were conducted in two divisions of Bangladesh between December 2013 and January 2014.
- Sixteen focus groups were conducted with mobile money users and eight with nonusers. All users were over-the-counter (OTC) users of mobile money.
- Participants were between the ages of 25 and 40.
- Groups were divided by gender, urban and rural residents, and whether they fell above or below the poverty line.
- Focus groups were conducted in urban and rural districts in the Chittagong and Khulna divisions. The urban and rural location within each division was randomly selected from locations covered by the FII quantitative survey wave one in the respective divisions.

	Chittagong Division		Khulna Division	
	Chittagong Metro (urban)	Kaptai Upazila (rural)	Jessore Kotwali Upazilla (urban)	Kushtia Sadar Upazilla (rural)
User, above poverty line	2 male groups 1 female group	NONE	2 male groups 1 female group	NONE
User, below poverty line	2 male groups 1 female group	1 male group 1 female group	2 male groups 1 female group	1 male group 1 female group
Nonuser, below poverty line	1 male group 1 female group	1 male group 1 female group	1 male group 1 female group	1 male group 1 female group
Total	8	4	8	4

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Awareness of mobile money is high; many use it to send money, but there are still considerable difficulties with and misperceptions about conducting mobile money transactions

- **Awareness of mobile money – the bKash brand in particular – is extremely high even among nonusers.**
- **Whether users choose to register or conduct transactions over the counter, all find mobile money a safe and secure way to send cash.** Mobile money is considered more convenient to use, but not necessarily cheaper than using other means, such as a post office, courier or bank.
- **Whether registered or not, the perceived complexity in using mobile money is often an issue among users.** Transacting is a multistep process and network failure during a transaction is an issue that was mentioned often by participants.
- **Formal Bengali and formal English used in mobile money menus and for texting is considered difficult to understand** and most would prefer to have mobile money interfaces in conversational Bengali and English because it is easier to understand.
- **Mobile money transaction charges are considered high among users and a potential deterrent among nonusers.** Non-registered users are sometimes unsure about whether or not they are being charged the company-authorized amounts.

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Challenges around conducting mobile money transactions lead to high numbers of agent-assisted, over-the-counter (OTC) transactions -- advantages of registration are not clearly understood

- OTC transactions, assisted by agents, dominate the Bangladeshi mobile money market. Many focus group participants, including several registered users, said they are reluctant to conduct transactions by themselves, even though this could be more convenient.
- Participants feel using an agent gives them some recourse should they encounter a problem.
- One common problem many participants said they have experienced directly or have heard of others experiencing: there are multiple steps in the transaction process, and the network often fails before completing all of these steps, forcing users to restart the entire process.
- Another common complaint: SMS mobile money transaction confirmations do not always come through and this causes some stress over whether or not money was safely delivered.
- However, most participants who have registered for a mobile money account found both registration and registered use easier than expected. They cite a variety of advantages of registration, including the ability to transact on their own at any time, increased security (e.g., the customer is given a unique security PIN), as well as reduced fees. Non-registered users were less aware of such potential advantages.

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The business case for added mobile-money services is clear

- **A few participants knew that value-added mobile-money services exist, such as those to pay utility bills; but most users and nonusers alike were not aware of mobile-money use beyond remittances.** When informed these services already exist, most said they would be interested in using them.
- **A majority of users said they want products that allow them to transact beyond remittances** (e.g., pay bills, make business payments and routine purchases).
- **Participants also stated that mobile money savings products would be useful,** especially if they were linked to popular Direct Pension Schemes.
- **Some use mobile money in a business context** (i.e., sending employees their daily wages via mobile money). Participants also can see the potential use of mobile money for wholesale purchases, but appropriate products are not yet available to them.
- **However, users and potential users said that value-added services will only be viable if network issues are resolved and the fee for each transaction is reduced.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

To respond to current and potential customer needs, mobile money service providers could:

- Establish customer service centers, either via agents or independently, to encourage registration and to ease registered users' fears over transaction problems.
- Advertise the reduced transaction fees associated with registered use more effectively.
- Increase marketing for products other than remittances (e.g., bill pay) to increase awareness and uptake.
- Explore the potential market for other customized and convenient mobile money products, including those that are business-related or link mobile money to routine purchases.
- Review the fee structure to ensure fees do not reduce the incentive to make multiple or large transactions, but, instead, encourage deeper mobile money use.
- Design mobile money interfaces using conversational Bengali and English so it is easier for users to understand instructions and text messages. Formal Bengali and formal English, currently used in mobile money menus and for texting language, is considered difficult to understand.

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DETAILED FINDINGS:

1. MOBILE PHONE USE



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The mobile phone is essential to daily life

- Most participants see the mobile phone as a critical tool in their daily lives. Being able to communicate instantly is key.

“I can inform my family members anytime. Where I am, how I am, everything. They may call me at any sort of emergency. If they call me right now, I can tell me them that now I am in Zoom Restaurant.”

(Male nonuser, below the poverty line, rural, Kaptai)
- Mobile phones are also a cost-saver and time-saver; precluding the need for travel expenses and time spent on personally conveying messages or even sending money.

“Whereas previously it would cost Taka 20 by rickshaw, it now takes Taka 2 by phone”

(Female, nonuser, below poverty line, rural, Kushtia)
- The mobile phone is also a tool for personal safety in case of emergency. It allows participants to quickly reach loved ones if in danger.
- Some with their own businesses (all men) say their phone is important for their business communications as it saves transportation costs and time.
- One participant said the phone is *“more than a husband, and serves as a companion.”* (Female user, above poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

Multiple SIM cards are common; registering SIMs is common, but not necessary for use

- Most mobile phone users buy registered SIMs, but occasionally they use unregistered ones because:
 - Some people buy SIMs but don't know they should register them.
 - Others know about SIM registration, but they are buying a SIM to give away or share with family and friends.
 - If a purchaser does not have the correct ID, he or she may register at a later date.
- Men in particular tend to have multiple SIM cards, with some (generally those above the poverty line) having up to seven SIMs. They do so mainly to access promotions from different SIM companies and to try out new services.
- Some participants reported using a second SIM card for privacy. One phone number is distributed widely; another is given only to a limited number of people.
- Women reported having one or two SIMs, most of which are registered, but not always in their names. Women said the process is straightforward, but that their husbands, sons, cousins, brothers (men in their lives) either registered their SIMs or gave them their SIM.

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Digital literacy varies and participants want conversational Bengali used on phone menus

- Mobile phone use is varied due to differences in digital literacy:
 - Many participants use a variety of phone functions including SMS, watching videos and storing numbers.
 - Women who fall below the poverty line are more likely to need help from family and friends to operate functions other than making/receiving calls because of the lack of digital skills and/or literacy.
 - Some (men and women), who fall below the poverty line, have internet access on their phone but experience a number of technical difficulties such as problems accessing apps like Facebook, phones freezing up, or running out of memory space.
 - Women, in particular, said they ask their husbands or children to help them with functions or reading messages if they have difficulties.
 - Both users and nonusers identify the mobile phone as a tool for financial transactions.

Almost all say: Switch to easy Bengali or use simple English

Nearly all participants said that neither the formal Bengali nor the formal English provided in their phones was helpful in communicating with others via text or understanding standard menus and instructions. Many said they communicate in their daily lives using a combination of conversational Bengali, interspersed with some English words, and that is how they prefer communicating on their phones as well.

- Most who send texts, use Bengali words but type them using the English alphabet; this is considered easier than using the Bengali script. They also may use some English words typed in Bengali script.
- Formal Bengali and formal English are also a barrier for many when using phone functions or menus, and sometimes key English words are more familiar than official Bengali.

“The Bangla [Bengali] language they use in the mobile phones is very difficult. It should be as simple as the informal language we usually use.” (Female user, above poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

“It is easy for us to understand if Bengali words are written using English alphabets.” (Male nonuser, below poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

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2. MOBILE MONEY USE



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Mobile money awareness is high among nonusers, and mobile money is perceived as safe and reliable among users

- Mobile money is viewed as a very reliable form of money transfer.
 - Both users and nonusers view mobile money as more convenient and easier to use than using couriers or the post office to send money, though it is not always considered the cheapest method.
- Using mobile money is also considered safer than using cash.
 - Users often referred to the safety of mobile money in terms of their physical well-being; they felt they would not be ‘hijacked’ or robbed; money cannot be “snatched” from them.
 - Many users said “your money is safe and secure even if the phone is lost” because of the PIN number. The PIN was referred to as a safety measure for the security of their money.
- Women, in particular, spoke about feeling safe transacting via mobile money:

“My husband does government service. So, he normally sends money on the first or second day of the month. If I go to bank on that time someone can follow me easily but this does happen in case of bKash.” (Female user, above poverty line, urban, Jessore)
- Interestingly, in some cases, perceptions of safety existed despite users saying they have heard several reports or personally experienced problems such as money transaction fraud, loss of money, money not reaching the right recipient, network issues and negative experiences with agents.

“Doing bKash”

- All participants had heard of bKash; it is the most well-known mobile money brand. In fact, money transfer is often referred to as “doing bKash,” even among nonusers. DBBL comes in second with over half the respondents mentioning it.
- Most associate mobile money with the specific banks that provide these services, such as BRAC Bank with bKash, and Islami Bank with mCash.

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For many nonusers, deepening understanding of the transaction process can encourage use

- Most nonusers have heard about “doing bKash” (i.e., money transfers using a mobile phone). They are familiar with it from TV and newspapers ads, or from friends and family. They see its potential advantage.
- But beyond awareness, the **process** of using mobile money is unclear to them: “If you register for a SIM card are you registered with bKash?”
- Where users are comfortable with using their unique PINs and conducting transactions securely, nonusers say they don’t know enough and feel unsure.
 - There is also some confusion about what would happen to their money if the phone is lost. Some nonusers had heard stories about an agent running away with customer money.
 - Some also said they worried about what would happen if the agent sent money to the wrong number: “Who would help us? Is the money gone?”
 - Some are also deterred by the possibility of transaction fees. They think only those who are wealthy would use this service.
- Most nonusers said they haven’t used mobile money because they have no need to; but they would be willing to adopt it in the future if someone sends them money via mobile money. **In fact, some nonusers get introduced to mobile money by needing money urgently and someone sending it to them.**

“I had an emergency one day. I was a driver back then. The two wheels of my truck were punctured. I called the owner and he asked me to look for a bKash agent. As I didn’t know anything about bKash so I asked my assistant. He helped me to find out a bKash agent. The agent talked to my owner and I had the money with me.” (Male nonuser, below poverty line, rural, Kushtia)

Lacking clarity about transactions

Many nonusers have heard about mobile money and that it can be used for money transfers. But beyond this, knowledge about transactions and fees is unclear.

“I myself don’t know much. My brother used to go to the shop to bKash before, now he does it from home. I have heard from him that you can send money by sitting at home.” (Female nonuser, below poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

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OTC transactions are common even among registered users; they want to be near an agent while transacting in case of problems

- The main reason for high over-the-counter (OTC) use is that many, including registered users, are hesitant to conduct transactions by themselves. Even though they know it could be faster and more convenient to transact on their own, many think the transaction process is complex and may not always work.
- Some users cited the multiple steps that have to be taken to transact and the network often failing while completing these steps, forcing them to restart the transaction process.

*“Normally to send money through bKash there is a number *247#. If I want to send the money to any retailer or cash out the money, we need to go to several options step by step. Such as, should I give the money to the agent, then comes the agent’s number. Then comes the amount which I want to send and finally PIN number. My point is as we have to follow five to six steps; several times the network goes down. Then we have to restart the steps from the beginning. So it would be convenient for us if we could complete the task in one to three steps instead of five to six steps.”* (Male user, above poverty line, urban, Jessore)

- Many users also said SMS confirmations of mobile money transactions do not always come through and this causes some stress over the safe delivery of the money sent.
- As a result, most users prefer going to a mobile money location and conducting transactions in the presence of agents, in case something goes wrong with the transaction.

Encouraging registration may require more education and increased promotion of benefits

- Registered users found the process easier than expected and said they register for a variety of reasons – the ability to transact on their own at any time, increased security, as well as reduced fees. (More than half of the mobile money users in the focus groups were registered users.)
- **Some experienced users reported, after overcoming the learning curve, they preferred conducting transactions on their own.**
- But of those who are not registered, many, especially women, said they perceive the registration process to be complicated and they don’t understand it. In some cases, users have heard about the advantages of registering from agents, but still believe it is unnecessary.
- However, urban women users above the poverty line claimed that the registration process was easy as they are “educated.”

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Mobile money is still used mainly for remittances

- Mobile money is most commonly used for money transfer. Most users are familiar with using mobile money for depositing, sending and withdrawing money.
- A few use mobile money to pay monthly utility bills, but this is rare.
- Some commonly stated advantages of mobile money are:
 - Ease and speed of transactions

“I used to send money via courier before. It usually took two to three days to be delivered. Now it can be done in no time from the agent shops.” (Female user, above poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)
 - Safety and security of transactions

“There is no possibility of hijacking of the money.” (Female user, above poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)
 - No need to carry cash
 - Ability to withdraw cash if you need to
 - Can be used to purchase products in shopping malls
 - Money remains safe, even if the mobile phone is stolen

Users spread the word to others

Often users who trust mobile money recommend it to others they know:

Participant 1: *“I helped out one of my tenants and some of my neighbors, and showed them how to do it.”*

Participant 2 : *“I show other people the process of doing it.”*

Participant 3: *“Now most of the transactions are made through these services.”*

Participant 4: *“Now everybody knows about it.”*

(Group of female users, above the poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

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Transaction fees are some cause for confusion and dissatisfaction

- The level of transaction fees is the most commonly stated disadvantage among mobile money users.

“They charge too much. They charge 18.50 Takas per thousand cash out.”
(Male user, above the poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

- Transaction fees are perceived to be higher than those of alternative service providers such as post offices or banks. One factor influencing this perception is the pricing structure of mobile money compared with its competitors. For instance, post office fees go down per Taka sent, as more money is transacted. Mobile money rates, in contrast, are a fixed fee per given amount sent, regardless of how much money is sent.
- Some OTC users, especially women, say they have not seen rate cards and don't know if the agent is charging an official amount or adding unofficial fees to it. Many also don't know what proportion of fees goes to agents and what proportion goes to the companies.
- **For nonusers who don't always have accurate information about actual transaction fees, the perception of high transaction fees acts as a deterrent to use.**

Concerns about overcharging

- Despite preferring to conduct transactions at the agent location, with the agent present, users say they are concerned about paying unauthorized fees for agent-assisted transactions.
- Participants understand they will be charged fees, but users (unregistered and registered) said there are instances where agents do charge more than the official amount.
- This is especially true for registered users, who are using their own account, but with agent assistance.

Mobile money not useful for large transactions due to fees

- The Central Bank of Bangladesh places limits on transaction amounts.
- When a customer needs to send a large amount of money urgently, they do it over the counter, in multiple transactions, paying a fee for each transaction. They would prefer a flat fee for larger transactions, rather than paying a percentage of the transaction amount, which is seen as too expensive.

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Agent interactions can be better, and mobile money providers can liaise with customers directly

- Most users said agents are helpful while conducting transactions but some have encountered rude agents who do not provide any help.

“Once, when I went to an agent to withdraw cash, the way he [the agent] behaved, it felt like I was begging him for money.” (Male user, above poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

- Some users said they were not fully satisfied with their agent interaction and want a better connection with mobile money providers directly.

“If there were special outlets for bKash it would be helpful. Because, not all agents are equally helpful.” (Female user, above poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)

“Even a fruit seller is also doing bKash now. So they must open some customer care centers.” (Male nonuser, below poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro]

- Some mobile money users suggested mobile money providers establish customer service centers, either via agents or independently, to help teach users how to use these services themselves.
- Often agents are not trained to provide additional information or assistance (e.g., registration benefits and process).
- A well-publicized customer service center that helps them learn to navigate the transaction process may encourage users to conduct their own transactions, and may help establish deeper and direct relationships between the providers and their customer base.

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3. FINANCIAL BEHAVIOR



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Most routine transactions are in cash, and near home

- Most people conduct routine transactions within a 2 km radius of their residences. Most say they walk to their transaction points but sometimes take rickshaws or taxis if needed.
- Most of their routine transactions (see list) are made in cash.
- Those living in urban areas spend their money on a greater variety of goods and services, and also do so more frequently. These include fees for school, traveling, clothing, utility bills, servants' pay and even loan repayments. Money is sent more often to family from urban to rural areas.
- Banks are commonly used to pay utility bills. Distances to bank branches are not an issue for urban residents, but long queues can be a problem. The bills are either paid in cash or by checks if they have a bank account. Paying school fees is difficult for those with school-going children, as it is usually 4-5 kms from the house, and participants said they have to go to the school every month to pay the fees.

Routine transactions

- Most people purchase some goods such as rice, beans, oil, salt and sugar in large quantities, monthly, and go to the market weekly or daily for other purchases
- Mobile-phone credit recharge is a frequent transaction from nearby outlets
- Monthly electricity, water and gas bills are also regular expenses male members of the household, or caretakers of apartment buildings, pay at banks or in cash
- Rent payments, where applicable, and generator bills (for electricity use during blackouts)
- Local transportation costs for using a rickshaw, CNG (three-wheeler taxi) and bus depending on distance
- Newspaper, monthly cable TV bills
- School fees (monthly)
- Medications
- Gifts for weddings and other occasions; visiting people also requires a small gift purchase
- Many pay a monthly salary to household help, in cash

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Annually, money is spent on visiting homes in rural areas for leisure, business

- Many participants living in urban areas visit their homes in villages at least once a year. Participants travel anywhere from 200-400 kms to visit these villages.
- These trips are a sizeable expense for participants, both in terms of transportation costs, and expenses for buying goods and products to take back.
- These visits can be both for leisure and seeing family; and, for some, the trips are planned around business purposes.
- Some participants report getting additional income from villages – such as from farming or small businesses. Sometimes, money is sent from these income sources to urban residents on a monthly basis, usually in cash.
- Only one participant said that earnings from a tea stall he owns in the village are sent to him via bKash on a monthly basis. In the future, mobile money products like bKash can make such money transfers more convenient for people.

DPS is a very popular tool for savings

- Many people have long-term savings with the Direct Pension Scheme (DPS).
- DPS requires monthly installments of fixed amounts with a large payout at the end of the term. There are penalties for not making the installment payments and a few missed payments can mean termination of the plan. There are penalties for early withdrawal.
- Only one person mentioned they make their DPS payment with bKash. A few others said they would like to be able to make payments for long-term savings programs via mobile money services such as bKash.

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Future potential for mobile money products – paying bills and making routine purchases – but current awareness is focused on remittances

- **Almost all users and nonusers said they would like to pay their doctors' fees, grocery bills, school fees, transport costs, and shopping purchases with mobile money.**
- **Very few mobile money users currently use mobile money to pay monthly utility bills even though this service currently exists.** Once these types of services were mentioned, most said they would be interested in paying their bills via mobile money. But most say they don't know enough about how this works. The lack of awareness about these services points to a need for greater marketing of these products.
- **Some users also said it would be useful if they could book train tickets or pay for bus tickets using mobile money.**
- **Another potential mobile money use cited by respondents was for routine purchases.** Some said it would be useful to maintain their monthly bill payments with grocery stores via mobile money, since most maintain a monthly credit they settle via cash at the end of the month. Products could be tailored to make the cash and credit relationship between worker and vendor easier to transact.
- **Participants who were businessmen and entrepreneurs thought it would be useful to be able to pay for wholesale purchase of goods and employers' salaries via mobile money.**

"If the bill of the shops can be made by bKash then it will be helpful. We can make the wholesale payment through bKash. And we shall make the retail shopping in cash." (Male user, below poverty line, urban, Chittagong metro)
- **But most lack clarity about how these services would work and if there would be charges.** Many hope that it would be free, some are not sure if they would use it if there was a fee associated with each transaction.

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Barriers exist to mobile money uptake beyond remittances

- For the most part, all participants, both users and nonusers, are interested in value-added mobile money services beyond remittances (whether they currently exist or not) as they felt they would make their lives easier. But some hesitation remains:
 - Charges and fees:
 - Some users believe that the transaction fees are too high to use for routine/small purchases, but would like to use mobile money for larger purchases and especially routinized payments like utility bills.

“If these things [routine grocery purchases] need extra charge then we will not do bKash. Because I need 280 Taka to buy 1 packet of cement. If I do it by bKash then it will need extra charge. Why should I give extra charge?”
(Male user, below poverty line, urban, Jessore)
 - However, rural participants did not mention fees as much as urban –rural participants benefit greatly from conducting transactions without the added travel expense.
 - Lack of knowledge of products and services: Many users and nonusers are unaware of mobile money products and services beyond remittances.
 - Availability and access: Users mentioned they would use mobile money for a greater range of transactions if they knew the people they needed to pay or transfer money to were aware of and using mobile money to accept payments.
 - Network problems: Users liked the idea of using a variety of mobile money services but were concerned about network problems (including delayed SMS confirmations).

“It would be better if the charge was less and the network was good. Then there could be different apps for mobile banking, which would be good for us.” (Male user, above poverty line, urban, Jessore)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **Agent** – A person or business contracted/registered by a DFS provider to provide services to DFS customers using their own bank or mobile money account.
- **Below/above the poverty line** – In this particular study, adults living on less than \$2.50 per day, as classified by the Grameen PPI.
- **Digital financial services (DFS)** – Financial services that are provided through an electronic platform (mobile phones, electronic cards, the internet, etc.). **For this particular study, digital financial services include bank services and mobile money services.**
- **Financial inclusion** – A state in which all people who are able to use them have access to a full suite of quality financial services, provided at affordable prices, in a convenient manner, and with dignity for the clients.
- **Grameen Progress out of Poverty Index (PPI)** – A poverty measurement tool from the Grameen Foundation wherein a set of country-specific questions are used to compute the likelihood that a household is living below the poverty line. PPI has been widely accepted in the sector of financial inclusion as the basic measure of poverty.
- **Mobile money (mm)** – A service in which a mobile phone is used to access financial services.
- **Nonuser** – An individual who has not used a DFS on their own or somebody else’s account.
- **Over-the-counter (OTC) users** - Mobile money users who accessed the services over the counter via a mobile money agent.
- **Remittances** – Money or its equivalent (food or goods) sent from one person to another (P2P payments).
- **SIM card** – A removable micro-card that contains a subscriber identity module that securely stores the electronic codes used to verify subscribers’ identities on mobile phones and computers.
- **Taka** – The national currency of Bangladesh. The only currency for mobile money transactions.
- **Urban/rural** – Urban and rural persons are defined according to their residence in urban or rural areas as prescribed by the national bureau of statistics.

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