



WEE-DiFine NEWSLETTER

Women's Economic Empowerment and Digital Finance (WEE-DiFine) is a multi-year research initiative of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), Brac University, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. WEE-DiFine support rigorous quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research studies that examine the causal links between digital financial services (DFS) and women's economic empowerment (WEE) in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia.

A promotional graphic for the BIGD International Conference. The background is a photograph of a woman in a colorful sari holding a white smartphone, with a young child sitting on her lap. The text is overlaid on the image. At the top, it says 'BIGD International Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh' in red. Below that, in large white letters, is 'Making Digital Finance Work for Women'. A white box with a black border contains the dates '21-22 June 2023' and 'Save the Date' in red. Below the box, it says 'Learn more @ bigd.bracu.ac.bd'. The BIGD logo is in the bottom left corner, and 'Photo: BRAC' is in the bottom right corner.

Save the Date for Making Digital Finance Work for Women

21-22 June 2023

BIGD's two-day international conference in 2023 will convene leading academics, industry leaders, and policymakers from around the world to share insights on how to make digital finance work for women's economic empowerment. Themes will include women-friendly approaches to digital microfinance and phone distribution programs in Bangladesh.

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Highlights of 2022



Completion of RFP 3

18 December 2021

The WEE-DiFine team launched its third competitive RFP in December 2021. This funding cycle, WEE-DiFine offered extensive support to help research teams craft the most competitive proposals possible. Ultimately, the Initiative added six rigorous studies to its portfolio, for a total of 18 studies across 9 countries.

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International Conference on Digitalization and Service Delivery for Inclusive Development

22 June 2022

The WEE-DiFine Initiative was featured at BIGD's International Conference, "Digitalization and New Frontiers of Service Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges." Speakers presented WEE-DiFine's objectives and portfolio, foundational white paper, and the Initiative's flagship studies on [Digital Finance and Economic Empowerment: Experimental Evidence on the Role of Transaction Costs and Digital Financial Services, Transaction Costs, and Women's Empowerment: A Qualitative Analysis](#).

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Expanding Women’s Financial Inclusion: Global Implications of the Findex Gender Note 2021

14 December 2022

BIGD in partnership with The World Bank, released the Findex 2021 Gender Brief, “[Women in Financial Inclusion](#)” during a webinar titled “Expanding Women’s Financial Inclusion: Global Implications of the Findex Gender Note 2021.” World Bank Lead Economist and Global Findex founder Leora Klapper presented the findings. The webinar also featured Mary Ellen Iskenderian, CEO of Women’s World Banking, lighting presentations by WEE-DiFine supported academics, and a panel discussion with leading international and Bangladesh- based financial practitioners.

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Funded Projects



Making Index Based Finance Fully Available for Women

A [multi-arm randomized controlled trial \(RCT\)](#) in northern Kenya tests whether digital asset insurance, in conjunction with an ultra-poor graduation program, sustainably builds and protects the assets of pastoral women vulnerable to climate change. Results illustrate that for exotic risk-management products like insurance, a temporary subsidy is necessary for learning about insurance to take place. However, learning is highly complimented by efforts to frame insurance as relevant to rural women’s needs. The two in tandem offer a promising way to empower women sustainably.

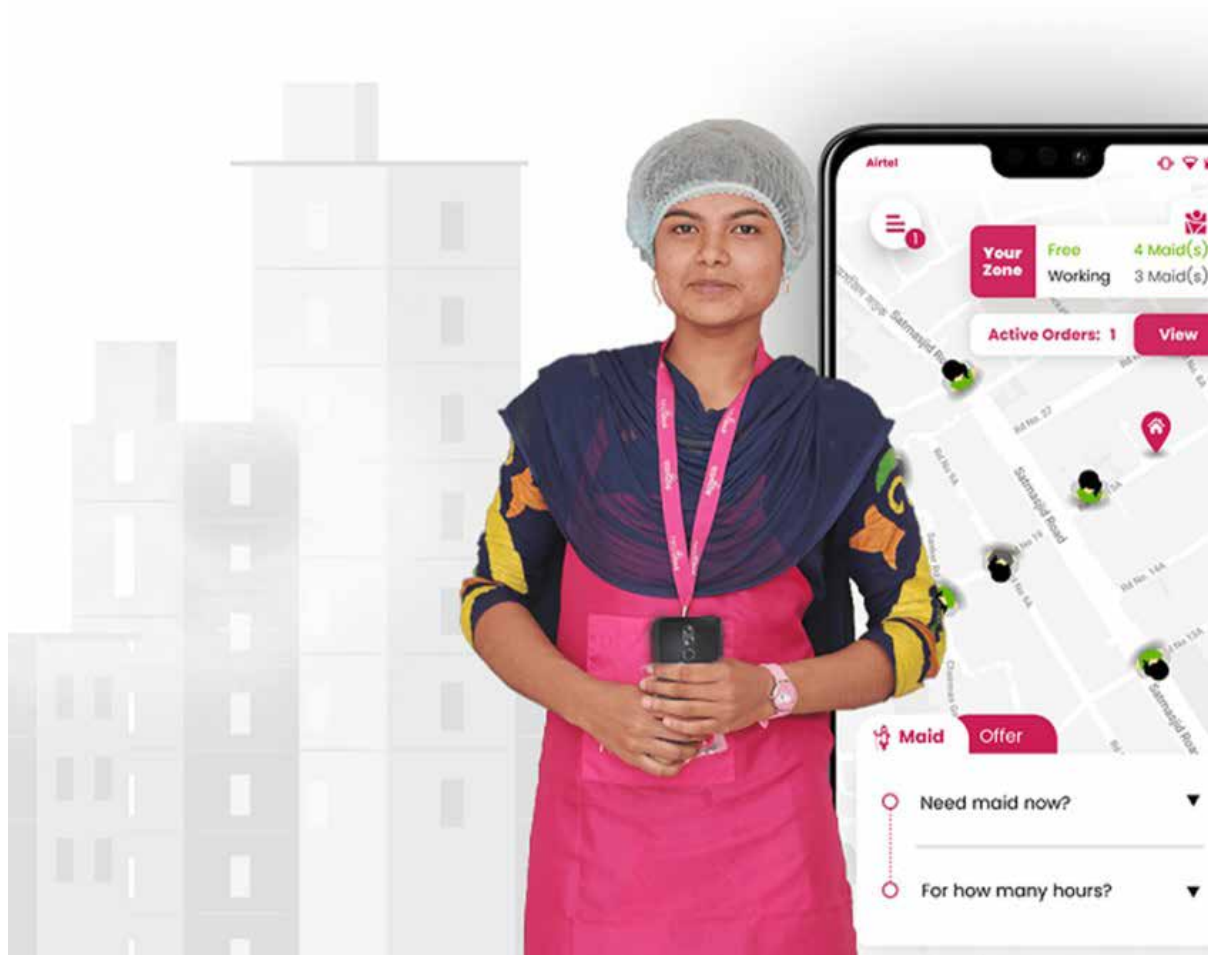
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An Experimental Analysis of the Impact of Smartphones and Household Property Rights on the Uptake of Digital Financial Services

An [RCT](#) in Malawi is uniquely positioned to identify what works with regard to smartphone distribution programs. Midline results illustrate that rates of women's phone ownership did not increase with income. Additionally, ownership of a smartphone and fluency in the use of mobile money did not result in a greater number of mobile money transactions. Finally, women benefited more from smartphone ownership when their spouses collaborated in its use. Future analysis will examine impacts on household and community norms and women's empowerment.

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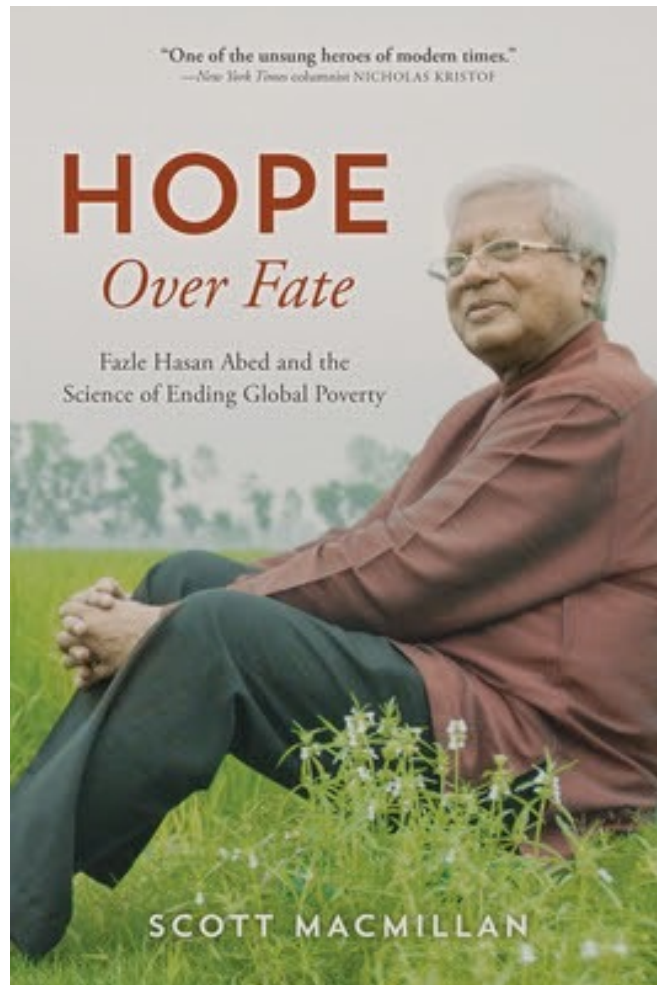


Empowering Poor Urban Women in Bangladesh through Digital Financial Services: Does Wage Payment via Mobile Money translate into Economic Empowerment?

A [pilot RCT](#) in Bangladesh is one of the first studies to examine whether wage digitization can influence women's labor force participation and economic empowerment. Baseline results indicate that a sample of female domestic workers have limited use of DFS, driven by a lack awareness of the various functions of DFS, as well as the link between economic independence and account ownership. Digital literacy training and wage digitization may deepen these women's engagement with DFS.

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On Our Reading List



[Hope Over Fate](#) by Scott Macmillan is the biography of Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, the founder of BRAC, and according to Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times, “one of the unsung heroes of modern times.”

[FinEquity Knowledge Guide: Digital Financial Literacy](#) presents selected resources on digital financial literacy from three angles: good practice guidelines, implementation criteria, and sample training materials.

[African Women’s Report 2021- Digital Finance Ecosystems: Pathways to Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa](#), published in the fall of 2022, highlights key barriers to women’s access of DFS in Africa.

[Women’s Empowerment and The Intrinsic Demand For Agency: Experimental Evidence From Nigeria.](#) This recently released working paper by M. Mehrab Bakhtiar, Marcel Fafchamps, Markus Goldstein, Kenneth L. Leonard, and Sreelakshmi Papineni discusses the results of a lab-in-the-field experiment on the decision- making process of married couples in rural Nigeria.

Looking Forward

Launch of RFP 4

WEE-DiFine's fourth RFP will launch in mid-2023 and will focus on shoring up thematic gaps in our portfolio. Presently, the causal mechanisms of safety, systematic discrimination, and breadth of support network are the least commonly addressed by our projects. Stay tuned for further details!

Partner Opportunities

[FinEquity's 2023 Annual Meeting](#) will be held virtually on February 7th and 8th! Dr. Michael Carter of the University of California, Davis, and leadership from the BOMA Project will be discussing their WEE-DiFine supported [research](#) at #FinEquity2023! Tune in to learn how DFS can help empower women in rural Kenya vulnerable to climate change.

[The Center for Effective Global Action \(CEGA\)](#) is accepting research proposals addressing the impacts of digital credit on consumer welfare on a rolling basis until Friday, April 28, 2023.

[Women's World Banking's 2023 Making Finance Work for Women Summit](#) will be held in Mumbai, India on 23-25 May 2023. The summit will bring together over 300 leaders in financial services, investors, and policy and technology communities to bring solutions to economically empower women through financial inclusion.



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