

# Customer Views of Customer Empowerment

Synthesis Report on Field Research in  
India, Cote D'Ivoire, and the Philippines

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## 1. Introduction: Why customer empowerment?

*Customer empowerment* is one work stream under CGAP's broader focus on customer centricity. Empowered customers, as defined by CGAP, are able to make informed choices, to use services that are of value to them, and to have greater control over their financial lives. By building trust and confidence through an interactive relationship, both providers and customers can benefit. The vision is for a more interactive and dynamic relationship between provider and customer and an empathetic environment supported by all stakeholders.

The current interest in customer empowerment comes particularly from the experience of digital financial services (DFS) where uptake and use is still lacking in many places. DFS are often unfamiliar and require engagement through technology, thus requiring a big change in the way customers engage. Not only must they leapfrog from informal to formal financial services, but they must move from transacting in cash to transacting with digital technology that is often new to them.

The underlying hypothesis for [CGAP's work on customer empowerment](#) is that a more dynamic customer-provider relationship that is based on trust and that builds customer confidence will help improve access, reduce the problem of inactivity, and result in a win-win for both sides.

An empowered customer has the knowledge, experience, and confidence to make good choices, effectively use financial services, negotiate to ensure the service meets their needs, assert their rights, and find effective recourse when things go wrong. Where these elements are not in place we see that customers either do not access the service, do not use it effectively, or fail to influence design and delivery so that it meets their needs. The question for financial service providers (FSPs) then is what role do they play in supporting customer empowerment so that it leads to greater uptake and effective use of their services—particularly digital? Work to date has highlighted the role of providers in *customizing solutions that address the needs of diverse market segments and ensure a more open environment, transparency of operations, and greater respect for and listening to the customer. Customers should be encouraged to experiment and learn and to provide constructive feedback.* FSPs need to improve their interaction with customers to empower them to choose and use financial services.

## 2. Researching customer views on customer empowerment

The concept of empowerment although based on observation is an interpretation, rather than the views of customers themselves. To validate the vision of customer empowerment being used, CGAP commissioned research to better understand the customer perspective on customer empowerment. The research conducted in three countries—India, Cote D'Ivoire, and the Philippines—did not seek to be representative. Rather, a range of customers from different contexts and with different life experiences and experiences in the use of financial services were interviewed including women self-help group and savings group members, microentrepreneurs, low-income urban salaried workers (male and female), domestic workers, farmers, bank customers. The findings aim to highlight the

customer perspective and raise questions that will inform the emerging research agenda on customer centricity and provide insights for providers.

**Box 1. Who was interviewed in the research?**

In each country customers were selected to represent a range of experiences in the use of financial services.

In India the research included rural women self-help group (SHG) members in one of the least developed states, Bihar, where access to basic bank accounts was widespread due to the outreach of a government-owned bank. Male users of a rural bank and mobile kiosk were interviewed, along with those in low-income urban areas.

Cote D’Ivoire gave the perspective of a country with relatively high mobile money outreach and diversity of profiles (small cocoa farmers, female members of village savings and loan associations [VSLAs] in rural and urban areas, microentrepreneurs).

In the Philippines, the sample covered a rural area relatively close to an urban center. Customers interviewed had little exposure to mobile money, but were highly confident users of microfinance lending services and transfer services (due to the prevalence of Overseas Filipino Workers).

**Table B1-1. Basic Demographics of Study Participants**

Country	No. of Interviewees	Men	Women	Urban	Rural
Cote d’Ivoire	60	22	38	37	23
India	61	8	53	4	57
Philippines	51	6	45	27	24

This report provides a synthesis of learning from this research. Separate reports for each country provide more detailed description and analysis in [India](#), [Cote d’Ivoire](#), and [Philippines](#).

The research discussed in this report focused on two questions:

1. What does empowerment look like from a customer perspective? Or, more specifically, what factors affect choice, use, and voice in relation to financial services?
2. What is the customer journey to empowerment? What are the key drivers of increasing (or reducing) empowerment, and what potential role does an FSP have in supporting this?

The concept of empowerment or what makes you empowered is difficult to describe and cannot be meaningfully asked as a direct question. Empowerment is not a state of being—i.e., it is not something that is present or not—it is something that evolves over time, and the articulation of this process occurs along a continuum. There are structures that block and enable. Empowerment is the result of both internal and external factors and must therefore be understood *in relation to* the service provider and other actors, as well as the *specific context* of the customers.

The approach adopted was to break down empowerment into a number of dimensions that relate to the process by which customers engage with financial services. The framework of choice, use, and

voice used by CGAP in the definition of customer empowerment proved to be relevant and helpful in exploring the customer experience and perceptions.

**Box 2. Research methodology**

The research explored the customer journey, looking for differences over time for individuals and among people in their choice, use, and voice. Focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews with a sample of a range of customer groups were used to capture different perspectives. Through this a picture of facilitating and hindering factors could be built. In addition, self-perception was explored using statement cards that asked customers to place themselves on a continuum between two extremes of disempowerment or empowerment.

**Table B2-1. Statement card options**

Choice	I can't choose which FSP will be the best for me.	I can choose which FSP will be the best for me.
Use	I am not able to use or make the most of the services on offer.	I am able to use the services on offer and make the most of them.
Voice	I don't talk to my service provider about what I need or want.	I talk to my service provider about what I need or want.

These cards highlighted an individual's perception of his or her own status. This exercise helped us to explore the customer's journey to get to this point, and enabled us to compare answers to get a sense of what factors might lead to movement from one state to another.

The methodology is outlined in detail in a [Field Guide](#).

### 3. Empowerment is relative

What are customer views of customer empowerment? Although there is no simple answer to this question, research has helped to deepen our understanding of customer empowerment from the perspective of customer experience. At the heart of this is the sense that there is no fixed view of empowerment—customers view issues in relation to their knowledge, personal life experience, and perspectives.

#### Customers are confident about what is familiar: “We know what we use”

One of the striking research findings was a sense of confidence among a majority of the people interviewed. Rather than communicating a sense of disempowerment and inability to find their way in the complexities of financial services, most customers talked about their experience getting to know a service and becoming confident using it over time. Often this confidence led to an openness to trying other services, and a belief in their ability to use new services.

However, the research highlights that customers may feel confident and empowered within their context, but from an external point of view they have very limited choice, use, and voice: customers are often *confident about what they know, but do not know what they don't know*. Thus, on the surface, customers—even many of the illiterate women in Bihar SHGs—give a sense of being empowered. But on closer examination it becomes clear that while customers are confident about services they know well, they may not fully understand the terms and conditions, do not know the obligations of their provider, do not know or use complaints mechanisms, and have made a choice of

provider based on a very limited process of analysis and comparison. These customers may also have little knowledge of the wider set of financial services that might be on offer to them. Thus, these customers who express a sense of empowerment may not objectively fit with CGAP's definition of empowered customers.

### **But few recognize their limitations**

Interestingly it was sometimes the most empowered customers who ranked themselves as less empowered as they had a better sense of their limitations in knowledge and competency to use the services. One of the most articulate and sophisticated customers we interviewed ranked himself as only moderately confident in terms of choice, use, and voice. Unlike many in the study, he was not just confident in using what was familiar, but aware of the products and services that he didn't know how to use—he knew what he didn't know.

### **Limited expectations and lack of information**

The experience of *disempowerment* is easy to relate to for most people. Customers talk of failing to understand the terms of a contract, feeling that a bank is not for "people like me," rudeness of staff, and procedures that are not convenient but have to be accepted. However, without a clear understanding of the role of formal financial services or their rights as consumers and the obligations of providers customers often have low expectations of providers. This affects their engagement as customers in a number of ways.

**Tolerance of poor service.** Low expectations were reflected in customers' tolerance of poor service quality. When probing choice, key aspects highlighted were respectful treatment, product features, cost, and perceptions of trust. There were complaints about technical problems, but this did not seem to be a major driver of choice. For example in India the sense of trust in the Post Office as a place to deposit long-term savings led to continued use of this service despite challenging and complex systems. In Cote D'Ivoire rural customers are very tolerant and understanding about problems encountered in relation to the liquidity of mobile agents. It may be that over time, with greater familiarity with the service and increased competition among providers that expectations will rise. This appears to be the case with loan customers in the Philippines where the presence of many providers has encouraged customers to compare services and to shop around if they are unhappy with their current FSP.

**Vulnerability to penalties and scams.** Lack of expectations and incomplete understanding about products and services leave customers susceptible to misuse or, even worse, scams. For example, customers in Cote D'Ivoire opened an account or took a loan thinking that they understood the conditions. Later they realize that they did not understand all of the terms applicable to their case. They complained about high bank charges or penalties only when they repaid their loan late. These examples highlight the potential value of specific financial literacy.

**Self-exclusion.** In the same way that customers may overestimate their ability to choose, use, and have voice in their financial services, lack of knowledge is also sometimes a barrier to access. Self-exclusion results from preconceptions customers do not seek to verify, such as a perception that "*banks serve only those with significant financial resources.*" Cote D'Ivoire this perception is at odds with policy that requires banks to open accounts free of charge for low-income people.

## Levels of empowerment

The research suggests that a nuanced view of empowerment is needed. Rather than a binary view of empowerment, or disempowerment it may make sense to think of empowerment in terms of a continuum:

- At one end are customers who do not directly access financial services, who delegate the management of their finances to someone else—a spouse or other family member.
- More empowered are customers who confidently and effectively use what is easily accessible and familiar.
- Further along are customers who are able to make effective choices among products, services, and providers based on an understanding of their value, price, terms and conditions, as well as other factors such as trust, reliability, respectful treatment, etc.
- At the other end are customers who are able to “think outside of the box.” To actively seek out products and services to address wants and needs and to engage in dialogue and negotiation with a provider.

## 4. Choice: Influence of personality, networks, and experience

The ideal of empowered customers with full knowledge and capacity to act in their own best interest needs to be tempered in relation to the context and norms in which customers live. The research revealed a complex range of factors that influence a customer’s ability to make effective choices.

### Barriers to access

For some potential customers there is no choice. Misconceptions, physical barriers, illiteracy, and intrahousehold or community dynamics may limit an individual’s ability to access particular financial services. This is especially the case with poorer, more marginalized, or illiterate people and more so with digital services where barriers are greater. Clearly the less familiar the product or service is the more likely that some people will be excluded. In the research, however, lack of access was not highlighted significantly—mostly customers talked about how they had successfully overcome the barriers to access, for instance, by opening an account with the help of a provider, friend, or employer (however, this may reflect a sampling bias in that the research focused on customers of financial services).

### Choice does not equal informed decision-making

In almost all cases that we encountered, the initial choice of a formal FSP is not based on an informed decision; customers did not seek out services based on their perceived need. There is strong third-party influence. The customers interviewed do not choose their provider after evaluating their own needs and analyzing the providers’ offer. Rather they chose providers that are well known, recommended by friends or family, or geographically close.

Most customers first engage in formal financial services through circumstance or necessity. So, for example, an external circumstance such as receiving a government grant, getting a job, or becoming a migrant leads to the opening of a bank account or using transfer services, or necessity such as the need for a loan, which leads to the customer asking a provider for a loan.

Providers also have some influence on customer choice, for example, through actively promoting and bringing access to services to potential customers where they live. This helps overcome physical and perceived barriers that exclude some potential customers from particular channels or products.

In the case of rural India, going to a village to open new accounts at the customer service point seemed to be a successful strategy; similarly in Côte D'Ivoire microfinance institutions (MFIs) promote their services by going into markets to inform merchants of their offerings and following up with phone calls.

### **Importance of respect, familiarity, trust, and proximity**

For most customers the key drivers of choice are factors that relate to their *immediate experience* with the provider, rather than product and services features. In Cote D'Ivoire and the Philippines, there was a reported lack of differentiation among providers, with a view that "all banks are the same." As mentioned, customers may complain about poor service, but this alone does not seem to be a major factor for most clients as they choose their FSP (although more empowered customers in the competitive Philippine loan and transfer markets do consider factors such as speed of transaction).

Customers seem to focus most on whether they will be treated with respect, can trust the provider, and the service is close by. They consider recommendations from friends and family and hearsay to decide whether they will use a product or service. Trust is strongly connected to how visible and established the institution is and through this familiarity (*branding*), rather than communication from the provider or direct experience using it. Customers will choose a provider or service that is familiar and delivered by an established organization even if it provides poorer service than a competitor. Similarly many cited proximity as their reason for choosing a particular provider.

Trust is also developed over time through direct experience with the institution personally or through observing others using a service: "I got convinced to join the FSP when I saw a neighbor receive insurance coverage over the death of a family member." Customers who participate in groups (such as savings and credit groups) strongly rely on the group to help them choose financial services. In the Philippines, few men participate in groups, and therefore they do not have trusted advisers in the form of a group to help them choose financial services. As a result many men continue to borrow from high-cost moneylenders rather than go to an MFI.

### **Influence of norms and cultural context**

Empowerment is hindered (or promoted) through accepted norms of how things are done. This influences many facets of customer choice and engagement with a provider. Cultural aspects also factor into how choices on whether to use a service are made. For example, in the Philippines, it is not culturally acceptable to complain to authorities, so rather than voicing dissatisfaction, customers tend to just stop using a service.

While much of the discussion of customer empowerment looks at the decisions and actions of individual customers it is also important to recognize the influence of the wider group of people associated with customers. Intrahousehold dynamics are important.

**Box 3. Influence of intrahousehold factors**

In India, most women don't have a separate bank account from their husband and often the husband controls the household mobile phone. This results in men being the predominant users of DFS. In fact, one agent reported that he had not had any female customers in his two years of operations. However, there is reportedly significant communication between spouses, to the extent that customers report making joint financial decisions, particularly for loans where repayment problems will impact on the whole family. In other contexts such as in Cote D'Ivoire, women are autonomous in managing their financial lives, and rarely do they learn from the experience of their husbands. Factors that empower a husband who has access to financial services will not result in access for his wife and vice versa.

While gender is clearly an important factor in these intrahousehold relationships, the significant differences among the three countries in the study mean that no clear pattern emerged. Even within one country there were surprising differences. For example, in rural India where one would expect more limitations on women because of traditional gender roles, migration of husbands has created a situation where women are heads of households and engage with the financial sector over a long period of time. In periurban and urban areas, where women live with their families, the male head of household leads the engagement with financial services. So women may have accounts, but men use them on their behalf.

Ultimately to achieve the highest levels of customer empowerment, customers would need the information, mindset, and confidence to move outside of these norms—for example, SHG members establishing and recognizing the value in having their own bank account that is separate from that of their husbands.

**Experience leads to more informed choice and decisions**

Over time as customers become familiar with a service they become more discerning and better able to identify the advantages and disadvantages among products and providers and make more informed choices based on direct experience: “to see is to believe.” For example, in the Philippines loan customers felt confident to shop around and make choices among providers, looking at factors such as terms of payment, speed of transaction, and complexity of procedures, generally making comparisons through what they learned from other customers. In India, rural customers opened bank accounts as well as accounts at the customer service point because of unreliable service, and more educated and more entrepreneurial customers use automated teller machines (ATMs) and some used mobile money.

A minority of more entrepreneurial or more empowered clients seem to learn from experience and reach a stage where they are able to assess products and services more in relation to their needs and to make choices from those that they are unfamiliar with or those that have not been recommended by their peers. For example, one of the rural customers in India indicated that she would like the functionality that she has in her bank account where she receives SMS alert for deposits in the service point account.



## **5. Use: Experience is a key driver of empowerment**

### **Positive and negative experiences affect confidence in using financial services**

For on-going use, particularly for digital services, the first experience is crucial. If the customer's first attempt to use a service is successful, the customer will gain the confidence to continue to use the service. If the first attempt is unsuccessful, they are likely to stop using the service: "I'll try it and if it works I'll use it; if it doesn't, I won't." For instance, in the case of mobile money services, customers gradually become more confident, for example, after making a deposit in the mobile money account, checking the balance often, or receiving a money transfer. If these first trials are positive, customers feel encouraged to use more services and may even pay his/her suppliers or invoices that way.

Negative experiences act as a barrier to access, affecting both choice and on-going use. This can be the direct experience of a customer or those in their network, of rude staff, complex systems, and unreliable technology, for example. In addition to successfully opening an account and using a service, being treated with respect and encountering reliable service are essential elements. While positive aspects such as being welcomed when entering a bank branch or being given guidance in using a new service were highlighted as an important factors in facilitating access and use, customers tended to focus on negative rather than positive experiences. Where experiences were generally fine, interviewees tended not to note the positive experience, which makes understanding customer empowerment challenging.

### **Learning by doing**

Where customers access a service, are open to using it, and are not put off by a negative experience the research in all three countries highlighted a sense of learning by doing. By engaging with a service over time customers gradually become more familiar and confident in their ability to use it. As mentioned, the support of friends and family are important in this process, and participation in a group such as Self Help Groups (SHGs) in India or Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) in Cote D'Ivoire can provide important support in this process.

This confidence has a broader impact on their confidence to use financial services in general and openness and confidence that they would be able to use new services. Interestingly most customers that had a positive experience with their existing providers reported a positive attitude in trying new things outside of their comfort zone such as mobile money.

The use of technology is seen as particularly challenging and highlights the positive reinforcement it gives customers when they overcome the barriers to using these new channels. In the Philippines, for example, the research highlighted a sense of pride for some customers who have conquered their fears to adapt to modern ways: "I am so good! I can withdraw money from a machine."

#### **Box 4. Examples of learning by doing**

**Support for new products.** For less empowered clients, such as rural SHG members in India, support during the initial stages of a new product or service was important, especially for mobile money services. For example, SHG members in India moved from a situation where financial matters are dealt with by their husband, to opening their own bank account when the bank opened a local customer service point and came into the village to help people open accounts.

**Experiencing the benefits of using financial services.** Customers who are able to access and use a new service talked about the value of these services and their desire to continue as users. In India for example, SHG members talked about the positive benefits of financial independence from their husbands—facilitated by the use of biometric technology that exclude their husbands from accessing their accounts.

### **Customer understanding of the financial services that they use**

The research highlighted the lack of full understanding that many customers have of the services that they are offered and use. For example, terms and conditions are often not fully understood, and customers do not seek information themselves due to transactions costs. This gap between customer perception and reality exposes customers to risk—for example, customers in Cote D'Ivoire having to pay penalty charges that they were not aware of. This highlights the importance of on-going processes to ensure that customers understand and act on their rights as customers. Furthermore, this is core to customers becoming more effective and consistent users of financial services.

While customers' knowledge and understanding does increase over time, the process is gradual, and there are opportunities to support this at different stages in the journey. Many customers talked about the role of providers (as well as friends and family) in giving information and support. This type of repeated interaction allows customers to gain experience and become comfortable over time.

### **Effective decision-making in the use of financial services**

Despite most customers' lack of sophistication in choosing services, it was interesting to see the way they were able to use these services. It seems that even if customers do not fully understand the terms and conditions, they are able to understand the functionality of a service and use this as part of their broader financial management landscape. For example, in India we saw rural SHG members making quite differentiated decisions among the range of products/services and channels to determine what is best for different needs, such as the use of different providers for short- and long-term savings needs.

## **6. Voice**

### **Limited feedback from customers**

The majority of the customers interviewed limit their relations with the provider to when the services are used and only give feedback when there is a problem: "No problem, no dialogue." Most customers feel that if they encounter a problem with practical issues, such as a delayed loan disbursement, they are able to approach the provider. However, we did not get much indication of the level of customer knowledge of formal mechanisms for complaints and communication with their providers. We heard few examples of complaints or other communication, and these complaints are often made at the lowest touch point (agent, client officer, etc.) and probably are not

registered by the provider. One exception was an SHG in India that is facilitated by a local nongovernment organization (NGO) that emphasizes women's empowerment. Here we heard of the group taking collective action to deal with problems.

### **Lack of knowledge limits scope for complaints**

Broadly speaking, there is a lack of knowledge of what to expect from providers, a sense that terms and conditions are fixed, and a power imbalance that does not make it easy for customers to complain. In addition, cultural factors make some customers feel embarrassed to raise concerns with their providers because they feel it is inappropriate to do so. It was reported in both the Philippines and Cote D'Ivoire, for example, that if customers are not happy they tend to just stop using the service, rather than voicing a complaint.

One gap was the lack of effective communication from providers about customer's rights and the obligations of the provider. There were some reports of providers collecting feedback from customers that was much appreciated. While complaint mechanisms may be in place, customers generally did not report using them. Overall the research showed very low levels of substantive interaction between customers and providers. Channels may be available but customers did not report that providers facilitate their use.

Despite this, the more empowered customers say they know how to make their voices heard. They believe they are heard and are capable of improving their relationship with the provider. Some, for example, talk about having developed a relationship with staff that allows them to demand personal attention to address any issues that they have, or interpret certain changes provider make as resulting from their suggestions.

### **Voice but no dialogue**

While customers generally felt they had a voice, there were no examples of customers discussing with providers their needs as customers. Products, services, terms, and conditions were seen as fixed, and customers felt they had no influence on these: "We were informed of these policies when we joined, and even if we did not like them, we accepted them so it is expected of us to abide by these policies."

The perception of power between customers and provider is unequal. In the Philippines, for example, customers were grateful for the providers and concerned to meet the expectations of the providers: "It is embarrassing to complain when we have benefited as borrowers of the FSP." Customers did not seem to hold providers accountable for poor services and did not appear to make demands for improvements based on their needs.

Personal relationships came across as a critical element in customer engagement with providers—relationships with their own social network as well as with the provider. There is a risk that a focus on digital services could erode the personal contact that is so crucial developing these relationships.

Ultimately customer empowerment aims to create a two-way relationship where *customer and provider are accountable to and respectful of each other*. The customers in the research were a long way from this, and they highlighted the value of building channels for communication and promoting dialogue. This not only gains the trust and confidence of customers, but builds their experience and knowledge and ability to engage with the services on offer.

## 7. Customer empowerment, a complex interplay of factors

### Personality and disposition is important...

The personality of customers seems to be an important factor in understanding the route to customer empowerment. Therefore, it may be useful to consider the role of personality in addition to the usual market segmentation by age, gender, etc., when looking at helping different client segments move toward a more empowered state.

The marketing concept *diffusion of innovation theory*<sup>1</sup> highlights the value of looking at the disposition and behavior of different groups of people in taking up and using new ideas:

- Innovators and early adopters are first to try new ideas, processes, goods, and services, relying on their intuition and vision to choose carefully;
- The early majority generally wait to see whether a new thing proves to be successful in practice, watching early adopters for cues; and
- Late majority and laggards dislike change and adopt innovations only when forced, relying primarily on recommendations from friends, neighbors, and relatives.

While these categories are not necessarily directly relevant to customer empowerment, they highlight the important role of personal disposition in determining how customers will interact with financial services.

The capacity of customers to act in their own best interest is determined by a complex mixture of internal and external factors. While external factors are important in creating an environment where barriers are low and engagement is incentivized, both the perceptions of customers and their actions are strongly driven by who they are as people.

In part this can be explained in terms of education or familiarity with services—clearly people who live in more isolated areas or are less educated (particularly illiterate) have less knowledge and confidence. In Cote D’Ivoire, for example, a clear difference was reported between literate people and those with low levels of literacy. In part, lack of literacy creates a practical barrier to access, but it seems to go beyond this. Illiterate customers often lack confidence in their own abilities or fear making a mistake and therefore require support not just to access but to use financial services (particularly digital). Thus, there is a need for an external help to facilitate and support access.

Conversely, some groups have an innate ability to take advantage of opportunities when they arise or are more amenable to risk. In Cote D’Ivoire, for example, the presence of “*digital natives*”—young people who have greater familiarity and confidence in using technology that older people—was observed (in both urban and rural areas). We also noted that migrants, who tend to be more risk-taking and entrepreneurial, had a much more positive attitude toward using and trying services. In India, the migrants were the two examples of people who had lost money taking a risk on high return chit funds. These migrants were more confident than others and aware of their ability to interact with service providers and explore new possibilities. In the Philippines female entrepreneurs who were some of the most empowered people interviewed, demonstrated an optimistic attitude where failures are seen as part of life and learning opportunities. This leads to an openness to engage with FSPs as allies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Everett Rogers](#), *Diffusion of Innovations*

### **...but its more complex than this**

Even where a person may not have an empowered disposition, this is not necessarily unchangeable and can vary over time. It can be influenced by positive and negative factors, i.e., customers can move between personality segments.

The role of mediators, particularly for less empowered people, was a recurring theme in the research. Mediators may be family, friends, group members, or provider staff (often a security guard). These people are key to helping customers learn about and build trust in new products and services and negotiate the initial experience of using them. In all countries the role of friends and family in providing guidance, advice and support was stressed. Involvement in a group, with a focus on mutual support, was highlighted in India and Cote D'Ivoire as an important factor in building confidence and willingness to try new things among a group of women who would be expected to be much more cautious.

Life circumstances may similarly create the context where people need financial services and thus they need to become familiar and more comfortable with the process. For example, women whose husbands are migrant workers by necessity interact on an on-going basis with providers. Again, these women expressed their confidence and recognized their empowerment and, although limited in experience, were more open to new experiences than others.

The research also highlights that events in customers' lives can affect how they feel or act at a particular moment, and lead to a change in their profile. For example, in the Philippines loan customers talked about how a decline in their economic situation created a loss in confidence and affected their ability to interact with a provider, particularly in relation to taking a loan. Confidence and decision-making in relation to financial services may thus be influenced by wider life experience and psychological well-being.

Overall the research validates CGAP's understanding of empowerment in terms of choice, use and voice. Over time and through experience customers may become more empowered and lead to more effective use of financial services; but negative experience equally may block this. For providers it is important to recognize that while there may be opportunities throughout the customer journey to support empowerment, ultimately there is thus a complex interplay among personal disposition, life experience, and engagement with financial services that drive specific choices, use, and voice for customers.