



**EDUCATION AS THE BRIDGE FROM CASH TO
DIGITAL WAGES: LESSONS FROM GARMENT
WORKERS IN BANGLADESH**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Microfinance Opportunities (MFO) implemented a research-action project to provide awareness-raising information and education to garment workers undergoing wage digitization. The project conducted extensive qualitative research with workers participating in MFO's [Garment Worker Diaries](#) to understand their experiences of wage digitization and how that experience might be improved. The action-research revealed that workers entered the wage digitization process with very little information and very little agency. Applying the financial services customer empowerment [framework](#) developed by the World Bank's Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP)—choice, voice, respect, and control—the results of the research suggest that workers are as likely to be disempowered by wage digitization as they are to be empowered, especially when digitization is first implemented. To address this issue, MFO co-produced, in collaboration with garment workers, an awareness-raising poster and education module designed to address the major concerns of the workers. After distributing the poster and conducting a number of educational trainings, MFO conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand what effect, if any, the poster and module had on the workers, especially those who were undergoing or had just undergone wage digitization. The results suggest that a little information and education go a long way. The data from the FGDs suggest that the poster and education module had a positive impact on workers' respect, voice, and control. The workers were:

- less anxious (respect);
- more prepared for trainings provided by their factories, able to use the materials developed by the project inside their factory to engage managers, and able to teach their peers (voice); and
- more equipped to use the account securely and efficiently (control).

There was little impact on “choice” because generally wage digitization initiatives do not give workers a choice of financial service provider or type of account.

The results of this project are very much in line with the [results](#) from the extensive project implemented by Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), in collaboration with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project provided extensive [education](#) on the use of digital accounts in collaboration with factories digitizing their wage payments to their employees. BSR used survey data collected from participants in the HERFinance project in Bangladesh to document its effect. The survey results documented improvements in savings, women's voice in household decision-making, and improvements in financial well-being.

What the results from both projects suggest is that education is necessary if wage digitization is going to empower garment workers to manage their money using all the functionalities that a digital account can offer. The feedback from the workers themselves contained clear recommendations about how a successful program of education might work.

- ✓ The program should not be restricted to one communication channel (in-factory training, for example) but should take advantage of multiple, complementary channels. For example, the workers requested online materials including YouTube videos as well as peer-to-peer learning. These are potentially complementary if (in a post-Covid-19 world) workers are able to watch videos together and discuss what they have seen.
- ✓ The program should be on-going and provide workers with ways to remind themselves of things that they have already learned. This might take the form of cheat sheets or the ability to call a helpline to ask a question.

- ✓ The program should not assume it is operating in an information vacuum; rather it should take into account that there are myths and rumors already circulating that need to be dispelled. This reinforces the need for an on-going program that can address new myths and rumors as they emerge.

INTRODUCTION

On April 20, 2020 the Financial Express of Bangladesh reported that Mobile Financial Services (MFS) providers had signed up 1.92 million garment workers to receive payments digitally from their employers. This massive increase in digital accounts, in a very short amount of time, was prompted by the Government of Bangladesh's loan program to support the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The program offers loans to RMG factories to cover workers' salary payments for the months of May, June, and July. One of the conditions of the loan is that the payment be made to workers digitally.

During 2019 and early 2020 Microfinance Opportunities (MFO), in collaboration with the Social Performance Task Force (SPTF), conducted an action-research project related to wage digitization in Bangladesh—leveraging MFO's strong relationship with garment workers developed through the [Garment Worker Diaries](#). The project focused on understanding garment workers' experience of the wage digitization process and the consequences of receiving their wages digitally. The action-research used the financial services customer empowerment [framework](#) developed by the World Bank's Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP)—choice, voice, respect, and control—to understand and develop a response to the needs and concerns of garment workers facing the digitization of their wages. Specifically, after conducting research on workers' experiences of wage digitization, the project developed an awareness-raising poster and education module and tested its effects on workers who had undergone the wage digitization process.

The project had a limited scope and scale—we were only able to engage 164 workers, distribute 2,000 posters and 1,000 leaflets, and conduct eight (8) training sessions with 77 workers. Nevertheless, the results provide important lessons for how wage digitization in Bangladesh will or will not empower garment workers in how they use financial services to manage their money.

WAGE DIGITIZATION AND THE CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

Over the past 40 years there have been a growing number of efforts to include low-income and marginalized people into the formal financial services sector first through microfinance and then through broader financial inclusion efforts characterized by “mass market” banking and digital financial services (DFS). In the face of these efforts, many stakeholders have expressed a concern that the needs and concerns of the target group are not been met and addressed.¹ The latest iteration of that concern is CGAP's customer empowerment framework, which identifies four dimensions of the customer experience that financial service providers should, but often do not, pay attention to:

- **Choice.** Give customers options and the information they need to make good choices.
- **Respect.** Treat all customers with respect and create an inclusive environment.
- **Voice.** Show customers that you're listening.
- **Control.** Give customers the tools they need to control their financial lives.

¹ MFO itself was founded in 2002 with that very concern in mind—its original tag line was “putting clients first.”

Wage digitization, on its own, cannot empower garment workers, at least not in the near term. As we document in a [report](#) published in October 2019, and in an accompanying [blog post](#), workers who received little or no training in the use of a digital wage account often felt *disempowered* by the process of wage digitization, this was especially true when it was first introduced in a factory context:

- Workers did not get to choose the financial service provider (FSP) through which they received their salary—invariably, the employer decided this:

I questioned to the floor in-charge. He replied that the change is compulsory for all of us. We all have to accept and open a bank account. I could question to our factory staff but not to the bank officials

- Closely related to this, workers were not respected during the process:

There was no other option given to us. Our owner was very rigid. He told us either you obey our instructions and do your job or you can leave from here

- Workers also lacked voice in the process because questioning the wage digitization process might have jeopardized their job:

I have very little courage to question. There was not much chance to make question. We all remain in pressure to complete the production. I kept my questions inside me, as I know it takes time to raise my questions

We had many questions in our minds but we could not express them all. We knew that we can talk but it is not always respected. This is also true that I may be terminated from my job if I say so many questions. As a consequence, many workers were refrained from saying their questions. I can raise my questions if other workers do the same. The factory authority gives value if most workers jointly shouted

- And workers ran the risk of losing control over how they got their money if they were not trained properly in the procedures they needed to use to cash out their digital wage payment:

In our factory, I did not understand what the management told me first and I asked one factory officer how could I withdraw money. He replied me that we will learn to see. We follow the way they withdraw money from booth. He was not responsible to convey more information or listening our questions and worries. He also told me you may get help from the guard posted at the ATM booth

Nevertheless, even in these cases, over time, workers learned to use their digital accounts and came to appreciate their benefits, such as:

- Enabling saving:

There are a few hundred taka remains in the bKash account after withdrawing. When the salary was paid in cash, the money would have been spent all at once after getting it home. I could not save much. Actually, I had to borrow money sometimes from others. The new salary payment in mobile helped me to keep some money in mobile account, which we can withdraw if needed.

- Being able to send money to someone else in an emergency:

In our village, once my brother had problem. I sent 200 taka at late night. I felt proud of myself that I did it even at midnight. They need this money urgently because there were in troubles. I delighted after doing this transfer

- Increased transparency in terms of how a worker gets paid:

We can check account balance and whether I got the actual bill according to pay slip. We have better idea about account section of our factory

The bridge between the confusion and concern with which workers may greet an initial announcement of a wage digitization process and an empowered worker using her new digital account to save, transfer funds, and keep track of her wages is, in part, built on education. Education is not the whole bridge—the behavior of financial service providers and factory owners play an important part—but, as this action-research project’s results suggest, education plays an important role.

A LITTLE BIT GOES A LONG WAY

Within the limits of a small budget and limited time MFO developed an awareness-raising poster and education module to see whether we could mitigate some of the problems workers faced as they underwent wage digitization.

AWARENESS-RAISING POSTER

In August and September 2019 MFO developed a heavily illustrated poster in Bangla meant to raise awareness of some of the benefits and challenges garment workers can expect as they go through the wage digitization process. The poster was designed based on the data and information collected during Phase 1 of the present study as well as feedback collected from garment workers enrolled in MFO’s Garment Worker Diaries. The poster (see figure 1) comprised of three main sections:

1. Advantages associated with wage digitization, namely:
 - Increased transparency: keeps a record of the salary received every month
 - Ease of transferring money to family and friends
 - Ability to shop at stores and pay for Mobile Talk from home
 - Increased safety
 - Tracking of expenses
 - Reduce daily expenditure
 - Increase savings
2. Graphic representation of a women quickly transferring money to her father during an emergency (demonstrating the ease and efficiency of electronic transfers)
3. Challenges of wage digitization and advice on how to deal with some of those issues:
 - Long lines and network problems at ATM during pay day
 - Recommendation: to wait a couple of days to withdraw money and pay with mobile accounts in stores whenever possible
 - Changes in money control and family dynamics, because digital payments are often transmitted along with an SMS with the payment amount and current account balance.

- Recommendation: to personally own the SIM card used to open the account, and talk to family about the change
- Take advantage of the training provided by the factory (if any)
 - Recommendation: make sure you know how to withdraw money yourself, do not be afraid to ask questions

Figure 1: Awareness-raising poster



Box 1. Poster Development

Prior to its distribution, in November 2019, a version of the poster was shown to 434 respondents of MFO's Garment Worker Diaries project to collect their feedback on the information presented and be able to identify workers who had already been notified of an imminent change and would soon start receiving e-payments. 57 of the workers interviewed said they had already been notified and 134 were already receiving digital payments. It was decided that the poster was to be printed and distributed in the following manner:

1. 1,000 A4 leaflets to be distributed among the respondents who would start receiving e-payments soon. Each of these workers was given 10 leaflets and told to distribute them among their co-workers who would also need this information
2. 2,000 A3 posters to be placed near the building units where garment workers live and as well as other places frequently visited by them, as indicated during the survey, where at least 10 to 15 garment workers would have access to it; such as near factories, food markets and ATMs

The workers' feedback throughout the design and distribution of the poster was largely positive, with many workers helping the field team place the poster in strategic places (see figure 2) and asking for a copy of the poster for them to place inside their homes.

Figure 2: Workers help put up the posters



EDUCATION MODULE

To complement the poster, an education module was also developed to provide a more in depth-understanding of the content illustrated in it. A total of eight sessions with 77 workers were completed between November and December 2019, with the vast majority of the participants being women (74% or 57 workers). The sessions lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and were imparted during their off day (Fridays), during factory breaks (outside the factory) or after work. Encouragingly, in addition to the 77 workers registered at the onset of the session, other workers who got home after the session started would often join the session after it had started.

Sixty-one percent of the participants had been told by their factories that they would soon start receiving digital payments, while 39 percent had already gone through the digitization process but had not been given proper training. This allowed for the workers that were already receiving e-payments to not only learn how to make better use of their account but to also share their experiences, ask questions and raise important issues that would have not otherwise been raised.

The session was divided into two main topics for the men's groups and three topics for the women' groups, namely:

- *Digital wages*, to explore the group's knowledge and experience with other digital transactions or payments and how digital wages compare to that. It also covered how to withdraw, transfer money and check their balance, step by step
- *Benefits and challenges*, how to take advantage of the benefits of having a digital account and be prepared for the challenges that may come
- *Family dynamics and money control* (only in women's groups), to at least be aware of the loss of control and privacy over earnings often cited by married women garment workers and be prepared for it, if not know how to deal with it fully.

Given the time constraint (workers often expect to be paid for any meetings over 30 minutes), the sessions were structured like discussions where participants were encouraged to share their doubts and experience. This allowed for

the opportunity to answer common questions among the workers, debunk unfounded rumors (such as whether the bank keeps or deducts part of their money when checking their balance) and give them important information about topics not often covered by the factory training (fees, transfers, how to shop in stores and, importantly, changes in family dynamics).² They were also encouraged to use their newfound knowledge and posters to train their peers, who were also going through the process.

THE EFFECTS OF THE POSTER AND EDUCATION MODULE

In February 2020, MFO's field research team conducted 11 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in and around Dhaka, 8 with garment workers who were part of the education module and had already gone through the wage digitization process (or were about to) and 3 FGDs with workers who had also gone through the process but had not participated in the training sessions. The groups included a total of 61 respondents, 51 women and 10 men, with each group comprised of five to six workers each; 44 had been part of the training sessions and 17 had not (see figure 3).

Table 1: Evaluation FGD Participants

Group	# Participants	Gender	Before	After	Soon	Trained
1	6	F	4	0	2	Y
2	5	M	2	2	1	Y
3	5	F	3	0	2	Y
4	5	F	3	1	1	Y
5	5	F	4	0	1	Y
6	5	F	5	0	0	Y
7	5	M	3	0	2	Y
8	8	F	2	1	5	Y
9	6	F	n/a	n/a	n/a	N
10	5	F	n/a	n/a	n/a	N
11	6	F	n/a	n/a	n/a	N
TOTALS	61	0	26	4	14	

Discussions with workers who participated in the training session

The FGDs with workers who participated in the training sessions explored the following topics:

1. The effects of the poster and the training sessions on the workers' wage digitization experience
2. The workers' experience after the wage digitization process
3. Recommendations for improving the implementation and design of wage digitization education programs

Effect of the awareness (poster) and education module

The data from the FGDs suggest that the poster and education module had a positive impact on workers' respect, voice, and control. As reflected in Table 2, they were:

² The factories that do provide training are often focused on 2 main topics: security (how to keep PIN numbers safe) and how to access money (how to withdraw money from an ATM).

- less anxious (respect);
- more prepared for trainings provided by their factories, able to use the materials inside their factory to engage managers, and able to teach their peers (voice); and
- more equipped to use the account securely and efficiently (control).

There was little impact on “choice” because generally wage digitization initiatives do not give workers a choice of financial service provider or type of account.

Table 2. Effect of Poster and Training Sessions

Effect of Poster and Training Session	1	2*	3	4	5	6	7*	8
Lessen Anxiety	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Teach Others	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use Inside Factory		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Wait before withdrawing	✓		✓			✓		✓
Better prepared for training			✓				✓	✓
Use own SIM card	✓	✓	4 of 5	✓	✓	4 of 5		✓

*Male group

The general reaction to the poster was very positive with many workers offering to help place it in different places with high concentration of garment workers and asking for copies to keep at home. The graphic depiction of a woman sending money to her family in times of need was cited as the most compelling part of the poster, while the most commonly cited criticism was that the poster should be bigger. Two FGD groups also mentioned that it should have been clearer that the poster was meant for garment workers to get their attention.

The FGDs indicated that workers who had taken part in the education module felt more at ease with the prospect of receiving digital payments as it helped them better understand how the system works and how they could access their salary and savings.

I had very little idea before about digitization. I thought I couldn't get back my salary if I keep money in the digital account. So, many of my colleagues were afraid about this. Some workers also tell us negative things that feared us more. But after your session I thought this is a good system and felt fully prepared

Additionally, the vast majority of workers felt empowered to teach others their newfound knowledge, with all groups reporting discussions with co-workers and friends about what they learned in addition to sharing and explaining the poster to them.

We felt that we should all know how to use our digital account fully. I shared this knowledge with my peers in a group meeting. They were delighted to get all this information.

In half of the groups there were discussions about how they brought the poster to their factories to not only show it to their coworkers but to also bring it to the attention of their supervisors to demand for training.

Most of us liked the poster and all its messages so I decided that I will bring it to our factory. That day I brought the poster to the factory and show the poster to my line supervisor he actually appreciated your efforts and he showed it to our manager. Our manager also appreciated it and assured us that we will be trained like this.

Many of the workers also mentioned the different ways in which they have been putting into practice the lessons learned, such as:

1. Asking questions and taking advantage of the training provided by the factory
Your education-training module helped me gain the courage to ask some important questions during our meeting with PM sir. I asked him to give a formal training about the digital payment system. Then made contact with GM sir and the GM sir arranged a formal training with representatives from the bank. Many of us were not able to claim our rights like that. I taught them to ask some important questions at our training later
2. Opening their accounts using their own name and personal SIM card; and
3. Waiting a couple of days after pay day to withdraw their salary to avoid long lines and network disruptions.
I have discussed with my colleagues about the poster messages and later the training session. Most of my colleagues rush to cash out on the day when the factory releases workers' salaries and there was big line and often there were bad incidences. I learnt from the poster and your training that we should wait a couple of days, which I shared with my colleagues. I also told them that they could keep the additional money in the account, which helps your savings

It is worth pointing out that even though the majority of the workers refer to the last point as an advantage, a couple of workers see it as a disadvantage since they now have to wait longer to access cash. It was also seen as an insufficient measure where there are only a few ATMs near their factories or homes.

Most of the ATM booths around our factory remain out of service for many days after paying day. For that reason, even after seven days after paying day, I had to walk around for a long time to find out a booth to withdraw my money

Importantly, only 15 (out of 44) workers reported receiving some training from their factories before or after taking part in the education module (see Figure 3. Other Training for more details), the majority of the workers (29) cited the training session offered by the MFO field team as the only formal training they had received.

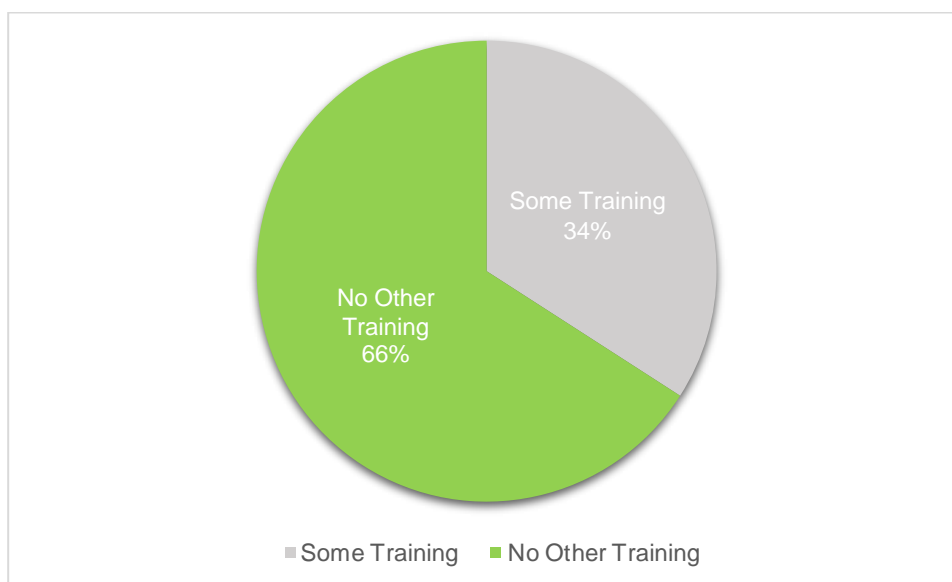
We attended your training session, that's it. No other organization came here to organize training session.

Moreover, the ones that had received training were mainly taught how to withdraw their salary and the importance of keeping their PIN safe, either through 30-minute sessions by bank agents or a factory representative or through loudspeakers while they were still working.

In our office, there were training sessions for 30 minutes. Some workers as group leaders received training from bKash and later they became trainers. Each group leader provided training to 20 workers. Our company organized these training sessions with the help of bKash. Our company organized these trainings before you have given training a month ago. Our garment factory organized training sessions without demanding it.

Yes, the precautions were announced in our factory loud speaker. But it happened before your training session. For example, they explained in the loudspeaker how to insert card perfectly, how important it is to avoid inserting wrong PIN code because in that case the card would get stuck in the machine. They also explain how to open an account. They told us to bring our passport size photo and ID card. They are announcing this each month because many of us fall a victim to this problem. They also suggest our reporting officers to train us and help us about the new payment system.

Figure 3. Other Training Provided



Workers' experience after the wage digitization process

Table 3. Benefits Experienced

Benefits Experienced	1	2*	3	4	5	6	7*	8
Safer alternative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased savings / reduce unnecessary expenses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Easy access to money when needed	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ease of transfers		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Mobile recharges at home		✓			✓		✓	✓

Benefits Experienced	1	2*	3	4	5	6	7*	8
Buy at stores		✓						
Reduction in fees				✓				
Paid on time and more regularly							✓	
Pay bills from home		✓						

*Male group

As expected, once workers started receiving their payments digitally their attitude towards the process became more positive and the doubts they had about the system started to dissipate. In all the FGDs completed in this Phase, e-payments were seen as a safer alternative than cash payments that also made saving easier.

I was not certain about how to withdraw small amount of money that stay in my account once I withdraw a round figure of money. Eventually I understood that I can withdraw that money the next month once it becomes a round figure again. Besides I can keep the money there and save it for a certain period of time. This is a most secure way to save money. In this way, I can always have money in case I need it for any unexpected event

Workers also cited the ability to access cash easily and at any time as an advantage, as well as being able to transfer money and recharge their mobiles from their home. In one male FDG the ease of paying bills from their home and paying for items at a store without cash were also cited as advantages of the system.

One of the advantages is that I can withdraw money from anywhere in Bangladesh. I can also recharge my mobile balance from it. I can also send money to any friend if necessary. For example, if my friend wants 500 taka from me - I can send him the money from my digital account immediately

One worker in a female group also mentioned a reduction in fees when transferring money, since she no longer has to pay an agent, and another group discussed how the new system meant they were now going to be paid in full, on time and more regularly.

In terms of the disadvantages, by and large the most commonly cited were: not having cash right away, not being able to withdraw 500 takas or less, and problems associated with ATMs and withdrawing their salary such as: long lines, distance to an ATM or agent, network issues, and ATMs running out of money.

We always got the salary on our paying day when we were paid in cash. But now we wait for one or two days out of idleness and out of the fear of long queue. Another challenge is to find out the booth which has less queue and which is not out of money

Table 4. Disadvantages

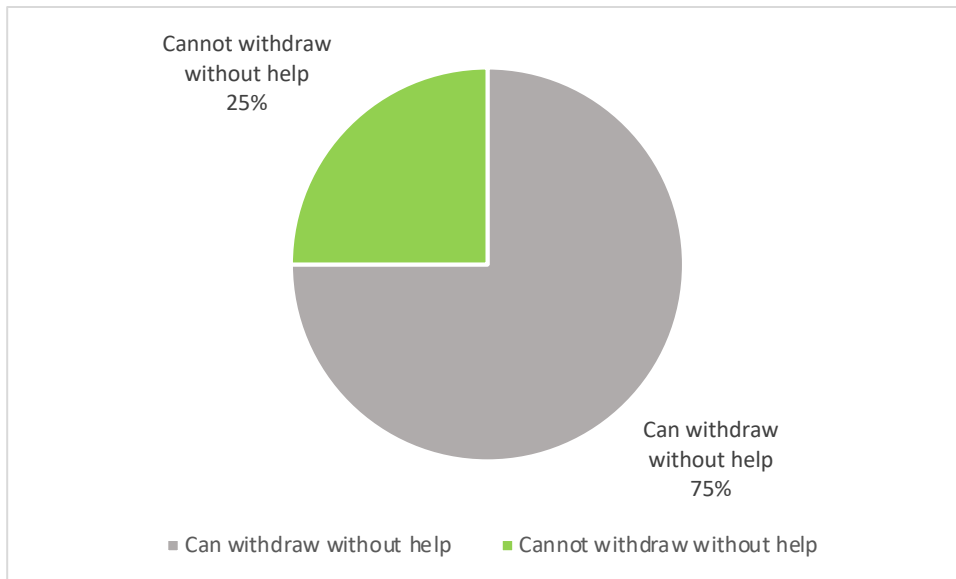
Disadvantages	1	2*	3	4	5	6	7*	8
ATM / agent problems	✓		✓ ₃					✓
Access to cash			✓ ₁		✓			✓
Cash out limits						✓		
Fees			✓					

*Male group

It is important to note that of the 3 groups that did not cite any specific drawbacks, 2 were male groups. The only female group not to cite these specific disadvantages mentioned having a few difficulties at the start but that the overall benefits outweighed those problems for them.

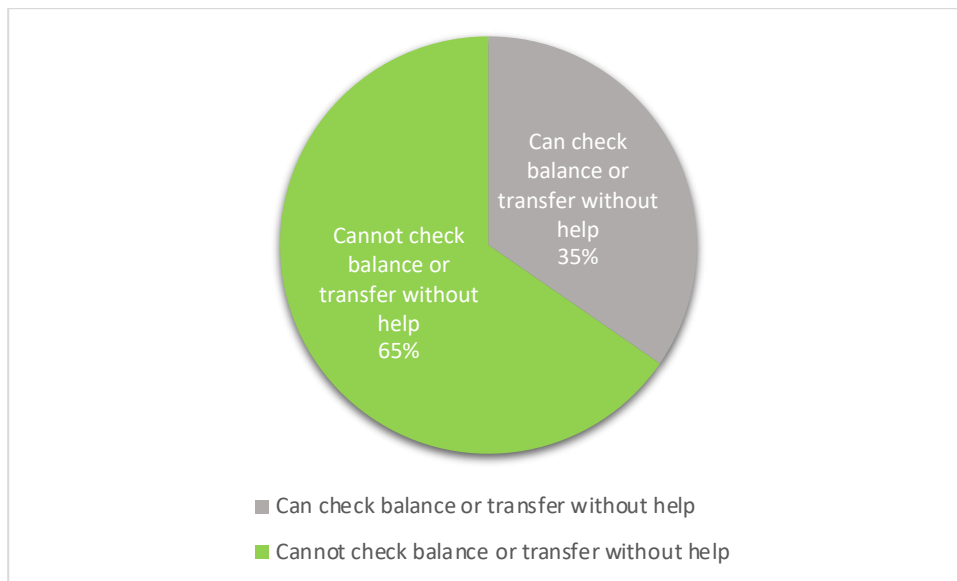
Additionally, when asked if they were able to withdraw money from the ATM without help, 24 of the 32 workers that answered this question said they could. When asked if they could check their balance or transfer money without help, only 9 of the 26 workers that replied to this question felt they could. This demonstrates that, while certainly needed and helpful, one training session is not enough for workers, particularly women workers, to be fully independent and feel comfortable with the new system. All 10 male workers that took part in the FGDs said they were confident they could withdraw money without help.

Figure 4. Capacity to Withdraw Money Without Help



³ Issue addressed by one factory hiring agents to be on-site that allow workers to cash out while at work

Figure 5. Capacity to Transfer or Check Balance Without Help



Family Dynamics

Similar to the findings of the initial FDGs in Phase 1, women who are unmarried, independent or live with their family have a better transition to digital wages than married garment workers, since families tend to be supportive of the change.

I also shared with my parents. We use the account for shopping as a family. I saved some of my money by not withdrawing. In this way the money in my account can later be used for shopping.

Many married women garment workers lose control over their finances, having to give their salaries in full to their husbands who now learn exactly how much their wives have earned through the SMS from the bank or mobile money provider. The FDGs suggest many workers have opted for deleting the messages, though this may not always work and may result in more tension in the family if discovered. Making sure women workers know how to withdraw their salary themselves is crucial, that way they can continue to decide how much to give to their husbands. However, many feel powerless in that despite knowing how to withdraw money or the need to keep their PIN safe, it is their husbands who withdraw the money.

Yes, I know the process. But my husband always withdraws my money.

Some continue to share their accounts with their husbands or use their husbands' account to get paid. This despite the fact that the vast majority of the FDGs participants claimed to have followed the advice provided by the poster and during the training session to open their own accounts with their name and personal SIM card.

It is important to point out that while widespread and common, not all married workers suffer from these issues.

My husband was happy to hear it because in this way we can save more money in a secure way

After hearing this news, my husband and I decided that my husband will withdraw the money and I will manage the expenditures from that money for the family. There is no misunderstanding between us. When my factory told me to open the account I told them that my husband has a bKash account. They did not approve and suggested that my account should be opened with my own name. My husband then brought me a new phone and a SIM card.

Discussions with workers not exposed to training

Three of the 11 FGDs were comprised of 17 workers who had undergone the wage digitization process but had not been previously exposed to the poster or training session imparted by the MFO research team. As expected, the initial fear and anxiety reported was the same to that expressed by the workers who took part in the project. Twelve of those 17 workers (2 of the 3 groups) received little to no training from their factories and were scared and intimidated by a system that seemed foreign to them. Most of these workers stated that they relied on the advice given by their friends and family, as well as security guards, to learn how to withdraw their salary.

My factory also did not give any training like that. They just said to follow those who received salary on digital account and withdraw money from there

The five remaining workers are employed by what they referred to as a “foreign” and “not a Bangla factory”, which appears to have provided comprehensive training prior to the implementation of wage digitization. The factory has also given them on-going support such as a “gate pass” for 1 hour during pay day to withdraw their salary.

Our line chief and supervisor explained us the process and told us how to get the card and the pin code from the bank. Then they described how to withdraw money from the ATM booth by inserting that pin code

My factory actually allows me 1 hour by giving a gate pass for withdrawing money

If we keep money at home, it is spent away much faster. On the contrary, the money kept in the digital account is not spent away that easily. The administration in our factory assured us that the money in the account will not be lost unless we withdraw it

Generally speaking, once the workers started receiving their payments digitally, they became accustomed to the process and the initial anxiety started to slowly subside. The most commonly cited advantages (increase safety and savings, mobile recharges) and disadvantages (ATM/cash out issues, loss of control for married women) were similar across all three groups and to the ones described by the workers who had been exposed to the poster and training session. However, the difference between the two groups that had not received any training with the one group that had received comprehensive training by their “foreign” factory (as well as the groups that had been trained during the project) is clear by 2 main findings:

1. Only 3 of the 12 workers without prior training claimed to be capable of withdrawing money on their own, the rest had to rely on friends, family members or the security guard to withdraw their salary. All of the members of the remaining/trained group were able to both withdraw and check their balance without assistance.

- All 5 workers of the group that was trained by the factory were said to be happy with the change and preferred getting paid this way whereas 7 of the 10 respondents of the group that received no training still believed cash was a better way to get paid, despite 4 of them getting paid digitally since 2018.

I do not like to keep money like this in my account and I withdraw everything each month. I love to keep cash money at hand all the time. If I was offered to get paid again in cash, I would obviously take it

In terms of family dynamics and the effect of digital payments on married women garment workers across these three groups and when compared to the eight FGDs described above, there are no discernible differences.

BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH

Despite the success of the poster and education module in helping workers navigate the wage digitization process, the intervention was limited and, even within its limited scope, could have been more effective. The workers themselves gave MFO feedback on what we could have done better, as summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Recommendations for Improvements

Recommendations	1	2*	3	4	5	6	7*	8
Smaller groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
YT/Video preference		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Regular/recurring training				✓		✓	✓	
Practical demonstrations				✓		✓		✓
Peer to Peer						✓	✓	
Longer session		✓				✓		
Address unfounded rumors			✓					

*Male group

One group believed efforts should be made to debunk the many ‘myths’ or unfounded rumors that are associated with having a mobile account such as the fear that the factory owns the account and could “steal” the money or that is not safe to save money this way since the money could be “lost” if kept in the account.

With respect to the delivery method and how to impart these lessons, many workers believe one short session is not enough and would prefer regular training, one that is not only theoretical but also practical.

I think your last training session was good. I think I learned most of this. One training session is not enough for us

This is evident in Figure 4 and 5 above, which show that even after a step-by-step lesson on how to withdraw, transfer and check their balance, workers need detailed supporting materials and recurring sessions to be comfortable doing it without help—one session is not enough.

Our company did not organize any training before or after your training but I have learned from my older sister. You have given training but I forgot most of what you have provided in your training session. I think we can learn if you came again and conduct another training session

Since they spend most of their time working at the factory, they believe the factory should provide regular sessions during their free time. Seven of the eight groups mentioned the need for these sessions to be smaller (with as few workers at a time as possible) and two wanted them to also be longer (of about 60 minutes), including practical demonstrations and exercises.

I think your last training session was good. I also think there should be a following session after 10 to 14 days and it could be arranged more practical with demonstration. We got most of the information in that session.

Two of the FGD groups would support the development of a peer-to-peer model by their factories.

Almost 100 workers in our department work together. If one person knows of this system, within 3 hours everyone can be notified or taught at least something of the process. I have been paid digitally for a couple of years and I have been helping and teaching many people this process

Five of the eight groups mentioned YouTube or online videos as an interactive way to both receive information and send feedback or ask questions through the comment section.

This is a digital era. If you make a video explaining the whole digital payment process I think we should all get benefit from it. You should particularly show us how to insert the card, how to insert the PIN number and then how to check balance and how to withdraw money. We can also ask you questions in the comment section if we have any

While there seems to be an increasing use of YouTube and digital methods, a comprehensive training program would probably need to include a combination of traditional and online methods since the use of smartphones among garment workers is not widespread.

YouTube is a great device for learning this type of things, I believe. But all of us do not own a smartphone. Besides if Bank arranges training like this they would arrange it big, so big that the people from back row would not get enough attention. A representative from factory or third party on the other hand would train us in a friendlier manner

In terms of the content of the sessions, five of the FDGs mentioned the need for detailed 'how to' information, such as step by step guides (with pictures) on how to withdraw, transfer or check their balance as well as how to insert the card in the right way or what to do if they lose their card. A (male) respondent in one group mentioned how information about how to pay bills or pay at shops using their account would be helpful and in two FDGs security and protection against 'hackers' were also raised as issues they would like more information on.

You should mention how to avoid the cheating of hackers. This is a very crucial point and should have been added to the poster. Everyone should be taught not to share PIN code or existing account balance with anyone or any circumstances.

Surprisingly, information about fees was only raised once.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The results of this research-action project are very much in line with the [results](#) from the extensive project implemented by Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), in collaboration with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project provided extensive [education](#) on the use of digital accounts in collaboration with factories digitizing their wage payments to their employees. BSR used survey data collected from participants in the HERFinance project in Bangladesh to document its effect. The survey results documented improvements in savings, women's voice in household decision-making, and improvements in financial well-being.

What the results from both projects suggest is that education is necessary if wage digitization is going to empower garment workers to manage their money using all the functionalities that a digital account can offer. The feedback from the workers themselves contained clear recommendations about how a successful program of education might work.

- ✓ The program should not be restricted to one communication channel (in-factory training, for example) but should take advantage of multiple, complementary channels. For example, the workers requested online materials including YouTube videos as well as peer-to-peer learning. These are potentially complementary if (in a post-Covid-19 world) workers are able to watch videos together and discuss what they have seen.
- ✓ The program should be on-going and provide workers with ways to remind themselves of things that they have already learned. This might take the form of cheat sheets or the ability to call a helpline to ask a question.
- ✓ The program should not assume it is operating in an information vacuum; rather it should take into account that there are myths and rumors already circulating that need to be dispelled. This reinforces the need for an on-going program that can address new myths and rumors as they emerge.