

Nguyen Huong inherited a small garments store from her father and has been running it for 10 years. Like all small merchants, she is ambitious and wants to expand her enterprise. However, after providing for household expenses, she lacks adequate capital to invest in the business. She finds it almost impossible to borrow capital from banks, which have complex application and authorization processes and insist on collateral.

As part of the MetLife i3 Program in Vietnam, MoMo and FE Credit introduced digital credit up to VND 50 million (~USD 2,150) at an interest rate of 2.92% per month without any income proof. An avid MoMo user, Huong was quick to try out the digital credit product. She has since used a loan of VND 10 Million (~USD 400) to add bags and women's accessories at her store.

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I inherited an old business but wanted to add new merchandise to serve younger people in my community. I was constantly on the lookout for credit but found it hard to come by. MoMo and FE Credit has helped small business owners like me with a digitally accessible, short-term, low-ticket size credit product with simple and fast processing”, says Huong.

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Le Thi Thuy Duy delivers food from a café in Hanoi on her motorbike. Her clients love her timely and polite service. Like many tech-savvy, urban Vietnamese, she uses a smartphone to access social networks and messaging apps, and also to make and collect payments. Duy covers her day-to-day necessities with her earnings. However, she wants to plan for contingencies and manage risks, especially those that arise from her occupation as a motorbike driver. However, her limited understanding of insurance and limited products continues to act as a deterrent.

As part of the MetLife i3 Program in Vietnam, MoMo and Bao Long Insurance introduced MoMo Bodyguard (Vệ Sĩ MoMo), a personal accident insurance cover with monthly premiums as low as VND 25,000 (~USD 1). Duy was quick to try out the insurance product. After one month of a free trial, she upgraded to a monthly premium payment of VND 100,000 (~USD 4.31), which provides her with a maximum coverage of VND 240 Million (~USD 10,329).

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I am happy to have found a digitally accessible and simple insurance product with easy sign-up, processing, and claim settlement. Vệ Sĩ MoMo has helped me to ensure that future risks do not affect my family adversely”, says Duy with confident poise.

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Banu is an illiterate 62-year-old woman who counts among the 4 million old-age pension beneficiaries in Bangladesh. She receives BDT 1,500 (USD 17.60) every quarter from the government under the Social Safety Net (SSN) scheme. She has to spend BDT 200 (USD 2.35) on travel to collect her pension at the nearest bank branch, located 5 km away. Banu spends around four hours as she travels to the bank and waits in queues there.

Besides being forced to spend time and money in collecting her pension, people like Banu face an additional burden due to illiteracy. Often, fraudsters take advantage of this and take money out of their accounts without their consent.

With MSC's help, the Government of Bangladesh's Access to Information (a2i) program redesigned the SSN disbursement process under MetLife's i3 program. It now allows people like Banu to visit the local Union Digital Center (UDC) and conduct biometric-enabled withdrawals. The process is quicker and safer.

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They take my fingerprint to verify my identity—the entire process takes about five minutes. I only carry my National ID. However, the best part is that I receive my benefit almost next door—no more traveling!” says a relieved Banu, who is absolutely delighted with the new process.

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Kabita is a grocery merchant from a suburban area near Dhaka. She is tech-savvy and active on Facebook. Yet without a digital payments system and an account, she was unable to serve customers who lacked cash. She lost business worth around BDT 5,000 (USD 59) per week. No digital player or bank ever approached her as she was “too small” for them.

Dmoney, a partner in MetLife’s i3 program, introduced its merchant wallet to Kabita and trained her to accept digital payments. Kabita now motivates her customers to pay digitally, as she knows the cash withdrawal charges a customer pays at an ATM or at a mobile money agent. She hopes that Dmoney will also help further digitize her supply chain, such as suppliers, transporters, and vendors.

Dmoney empowers small merchants like Kabita to make and receive digital payments part of their daily business and, in turn, they encourage their customers to keep money in their digital wallets.

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Mobile money has touched so many peoples’ lives in a positive way. Take me for example, I receive money from my customers in my business wallet when they lack cash. This helps me serve my customers better, increase my business, and gain respect in my community,” says Kabita.

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Like so many women across the globe, **Amina** has secret savings that she uses for emergencies and to finance the books and uniforms required by her children's school. She is frugal and quietly saves a little each week from the money her husband gives her to run the house.

Amina would hide these savings in the bamboo frame of her hut. Often she would lose the money—either her husband or the kids found the cash and spent it, or insects ate the precious notes.

That is, until Shakti Foundation introduced its voluntary savings product, developed as part of the MetLife project. Amina was delighted, and was one of the very first to sign up for the new voluntary Family Savings Account. She has already saved more than BDT 11,200 (USD 132).

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This account lets me save in confidence, and the SMS confirmations every time I make a transaction allows me to keep track of how much I have. Yet best of all, it is my account and my secret savings”, says Amina with a furtive smile.

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Saving for the future—the case of Jahanara

Like many poor people, Jahanara dreams of a better life for her children and wants them to be successful. She experienced back-breaking poverty throughout her life and constantly fears for her 12-year-old granddaughter, Alifa.

She worries about the circumstances Alifa might have to face after she grows up, especially when Jahanara herself is no longer around to help her. Jahanara had always wanted Alifa to have a good education and become a doctor, but she could do little to help this.

Now the Shakti Foundation’s Lakhpati savings account helps her gradually realize her dream. Jahanara saves BDT 340 (USD 5) every week and will continue to do so until the total reaches BDT 100,000 (USD 1,250). She finds that keeping track of her rising savings also gives her great satisfaction. Jahanara has found this product to be easy to use, transparent, and, with its multiple maturity options, flexible. She is more determined than ever to save to secure Alifa’s future.

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I always feared for Alifa’s future. With this account, I at least have the satisfaction of seeing the funds grow and knowing that I am doing the right thing to help her have a life of dignity,” says Jahanara.

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Transaction alert SMSs to increase trust—the case of Noora Bano

Like any other micro-entrepreneur, Noora Bano is afraid of losing her hard-earned money and aspires to keep it in a safe and secure place. She also wants to keep track of her savings.

Noora and her husband have a wide range of small, daily cash inflows. She would use an old biscuit container that she secretly kept in her kitchen cupboard to store what little she could put aside each day. However, it soon became difficult to keep track of how much she had saved and how much she had spent from her precious savings. She also had to deal with awkward moments when her husband inquired about the amount she had managed to save. Despite these challenges, Noora was not willing to open a savings account at a bank as she worried she would not be able to keep track of it and might lose money to bank charges and unscrupulous cashiers.

However, she has been a member of the Shakti Foundation for many years and has come to trust its new, voluntary savings account. She likes the simple and transparent product policies and appreciates the SMS messages she receives immediately after every deposit or withdrawal. These also help her monitor and plan her savings and expenditures better. A small step of signing up for an account has enhanced her financial capacity enormously.

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Last month, I withdrew BDT 5,000 (USD 63) from my family savings account and immediately received an SMS about the deduction and the remaining account balance. I trust Shakti with my money and feel like I have made a major transition by discarding my tin container!

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Convenient loan repayments through mobile money wallets—the case of Kamrul

No entrepreneur can afford to lose crucial business hours by shutting up shop. Yet most of the small and medium enterprise (SME) customers in Bangladesh have to travel to the branch of their financial institution to deposit their loan installment.

Mohammad Kamrul earns his livelihood from a hardware shop located in the busy shopping complex of Savar in Dhaka. In the past, he had to travel to the bank and wait for hours in a long queue to repay his loan. The opportunity costs of doing this were hard to bear.

Kamrul finally got the assistance he needed in the form of an SME loan from the Shakti Foundation under the Unnati SME loan program developed under MetLife's Digital Microfinance program. The option to make loan repayments through a bKash mobile money wallet is more convenient, saves time, and mitigates the substantial risk of carrying cash.

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My friends and I have been using bKash for a long time now—we make payments to our suppliers using bKash. By giving an option to make loan installment payments through bKash, Shakti has made my life so much easier. I do not need to travel anywhere, so I can focus on my business more.

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A safe and easy way to receive loan proceeds—the case of Shah Alam

Shah Alam is a small businessman in Hemayatpur. He knows all too well that cash in hand encourages unnecessary expenditures.

Alam looks back and rues that he has spent most of his earnings on non-essential items, such as high-end phones, restaurants, and going out with friends.

He had a growing fear that these casual expenditures, combined with his poor financial management skills might land him and his family in trouble. Yet he did little to overcome this behavioral challenge.

However, a solution was at hand. He had applied for a business loan of BDT 500,000 (USD 6,250) at the Shakti Foundation when the staff there asked Alam to open a bank account. The Unnati SME loan was transferred directly into his bank account. This enabled him to increase his working capital, which yielded more income and allowed him to plan his purchases and make a greater number of cashless payments to his suppliers. This, in turn, reduced the risk of carrying cash. But more importantly, the account helped Shah Alam to take control of his expenditures. He began to budget and compare his expenditures to his plans and derive satisfaction from seeing the balance in his account rise. He now knows he is finally securing his family's future.

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I like this process more. With the ATM card, I can make direct payments to the vendors or I can withdraw cash as and when needed. This curbs any unnecessary expenses and my money is protected from theft.

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