

# Digital Innovations: Listening to Clients

Your Program Impact Report—Fall 2023

## OUR GRATITUDE



Esther, entrepreneur and mother, Ghana

*Since launching its mobile banking platform Sinapi Mobile in early 2019, Opportunity International's partner, Sinapi Aba Savings and Loans (Ghana), has experienced a significant gender gap in mobile banking. While this is a global problem, Sinapi Aba has been working to increase confidence in and usage of Sinapi Mobile and is now helping people like Esther (left) to carry out business transactions safely and with ease. When women are digitally included, they become empowered, gain new skills and confidence, and can access more services.*

**Thank you for enabling Esther and her family to build a sustainable, financially stable life.**

## THE NEED

Since our founding, Opportunity International has sought to serve people who have been overlooked by their countries, by other organizations, by the world. We serve people living in extreme poverty: farmers, women and girls, youth, vulnerable populations like refugees, and others in over 30 countries globally. Over 700 million people still live on less than \$2.15/day; we believe that recent technology advancements can bring new advantages to our clients and meet their needs in new ways, creating a pathway from extreme poverty to sustainable livelihoods.

## THE SOLUTIONS

Opportunity International's Digital Innovations team is committed to providing **high-touch, high-tech, high impact** solutions, with the people we serve at the heart of all we do. We are experiencing an inflection point in global technology: cloud-based services, middleware and platforms, and smart phones/devices can accelerate our capabilities to serve people living in extreme poverty effectively.

Digital technology has been a monumental force for good: Opportunity has supported our local partners to adopt cashless payments—including local point of sale, micro-ATM and bill payment systems, mobile wallets, and prepaid cards—and trial digital loan repayment methods. While digitization holds many benefits for microfinance institutions in scaling up their businesses, our focus remains on **ensuring these innovations also improve financial inclusion for the most vulnerable, including women.**

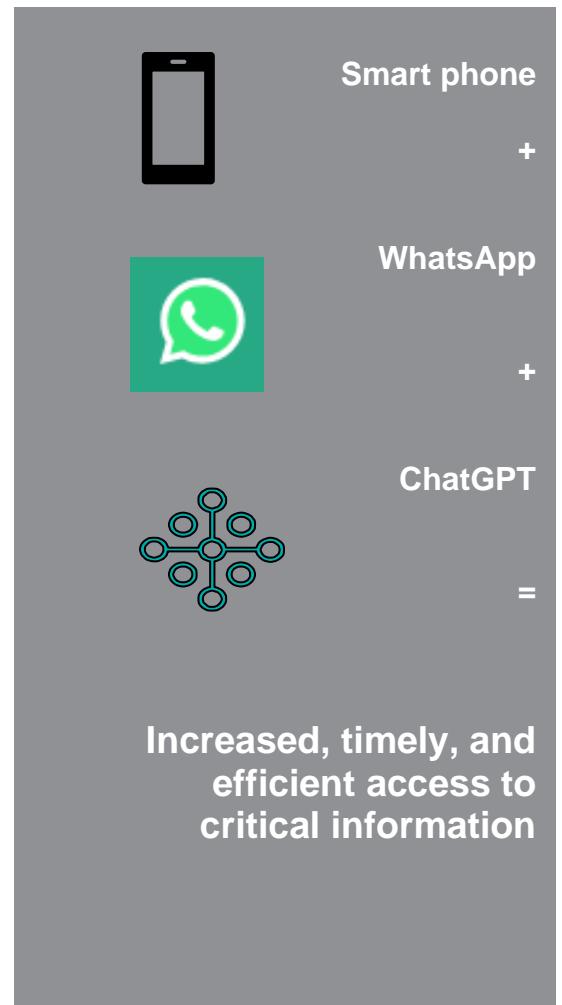
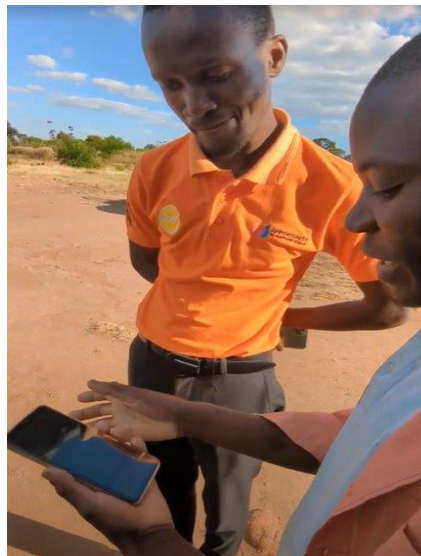
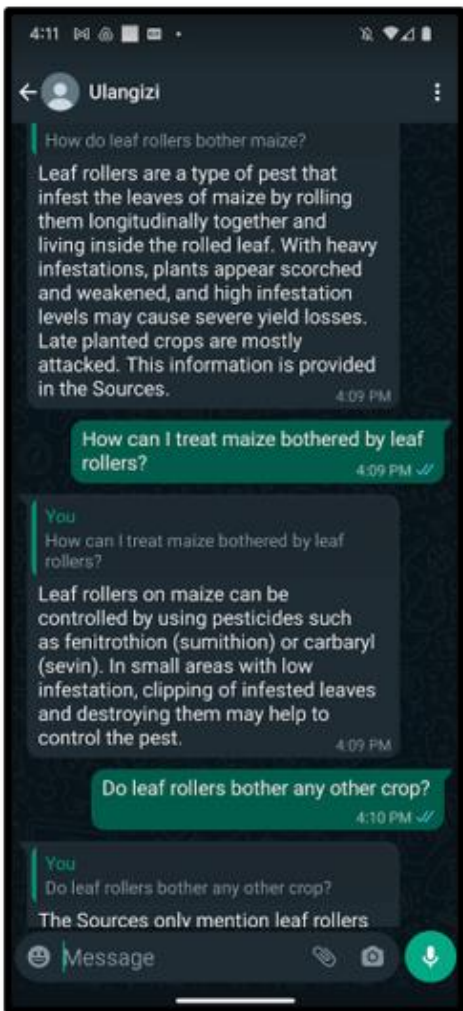
## SUPPORTING SMALLHOLDER FARMERS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY: Training and Support

A high-touch, high-tech, high impact approach to agriculture finance empowers people facing poverty, gender, and age barriers to connect with financial services.

Farmer Support Agents continue to use smart phones and tablets to train farmers in successful, sustainable farming—including regenerative ag practices and “Farming as a Family Business” that encourages collaboration with all family, including women and youth which leads to financial inclusion and

stability. Fiscal year to date (as of July 2023), we have 1,123 Farmer Support Agents supporting 157,224 farmers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda, and Uganda.

In response to the needs of smallholder farmers in Malawi, we piloted an AI ChatGPT tool that farmers can use to answer questions they have about farming practices. The system is populated with content from local sources—the government’s agriculture manual of best practices and Opportunity’s Agriculture Finance training material—together with ChatGPT-like conversational interface in WhatsApp, implemented through cloud services and application programming interface that enables scalability. This advanced technology allows more timely access to critical information, in a familiar interface that lowers the learning curve for smallholder farmers. We anticipate replicating and scaling in other countries.



### ENCOURAGING SAVINGS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY: Savings Groups

Savings and loans groups (sometimes known as Village Savings and Loan Associations) are a proven solution to increasing financial inclusion for people left out of the traditional financial system, such as smallholder farmers, subsistence businesspeople, women, refugees, and youth. In Uganda, we have **piloted digital savings groups** for people with disabilities, teaching members of the group to use a digital app.

We are planning the further digitization of an **additional 300 groups** over the next 12 months:

- 150 savings groups for people with disabilities
- 50 savings groups for refugees in Nakivale, Rwanda, and Urban
- 50 savings groups for youth in Mityana Opportunity Zone
- 50 savings groups for agriculture finance clients

## **EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH TECHNOLOGY:**

### **Women Banking Agents in India**

As in many under-resourced areas of the world, in India bank branches are physically and socially distant for many women, who face significant barriers to travelling to banks, entering intimidating facilities like bank branches, and interacting with the predominantly male bank staff. In response, the Government and banking associations are expanding a system of business correspondents who are government certified, community-based agents who offer convenient and culturally appropriate bank services leveraging digital platforms – linking unbanked populations to a bank.

We partnered with the Center for Development Orientation and Training to expand the agent program across multiple states and bank partners, allowing more agents to reach remote regions. We are specifically committed to training female agents to serve women clients. A female agent explained, “We can serve more women. New brides and others who are unable to visit male agents come to us.”

Today in India, our partners’ **5,000+ female banking agents** have reached more than 6 million people, and 45-55% of the customers they serve are women. We estimate the number of people reached annually via the agents in India in 2025 will be **10 million people**, with at least 45-55% of customers expected to be women.



**Renju, Business Correspondent Agent, India**

Opportunity International recruits entrepreneurial women to become banking agents who work from small shops or offices and earn commissions on transactions. Equipped with tablets or smartphones to provide banking services in hard-to-reach communities of India, this network of female agent bankers connects women to financial services with remarkable success.

**Advances in technology happen at incredible speed and scale. Opportunity International never loses sight of the people we serve—people like Esther and Renju—whose lives and the lives of future generations can be positively impacted by the work we do. Providing affordable access and the right tools and resources, we can build a path out of extreme poverty, a path to financial inclusion and sustainable livelihoods. Thank you for making our work possible; thank you for investing in truly life-changing work.**

### **What excites us the most right now?**

- ▶ **Digitizing banking:** We are accelerating the number of clients using mobile devices to access their bank accounts and execute transactions, with a specific focus on financial and digital inclusion for women.
- ▶ **Credit assessment solution:** Currently our Education Finance and Agriculture Finance automated credit assessment tool is used by financial institution loan officers to assess loan applications quickly and automatically; we’re exploring expanding the use of this tool to micro-enterprises.