December 2017

**ITU Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues (CWG-Internet)**

**GSMA Submission**

**Consultation Response**

The GSMA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the ITU’s CWG - Internet consultation to address gender equality for Internet users.

To date, mobile operators have connected 5 billion people around the world.[[1]](#footnote-1) The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting nearly 800 operators with almost 300 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations throughout the mobile ecosystem. The GSMA and its members are committed to connecting everyone and everything to a better future through all of our programmes in partnership with our members.

The GSMA [Connected Women programme](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/the-commitment) works with mobile operators and their partners to address the barriers to women accessing and using mobile internet and mobile money services. Connected Women aims to reduce the gender gap in mobile internet and mobile money services and unlock significant commercial opportunities for the mobile industry and socio-economic benefits for women.

1. **What approaches and examples of good practices are available to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls, including in decision-making processes on Internet public policy?**

The internet is rapidly becoming a force for social and economic development, delivering substantial benefits for both individuals and society. It is playing a powerful and growing role in democratising access to information and services, opening up global markets, and expanding people’s capacity for personal development. As the internet reaches previously unconnected regions of the world, connectivity and internet access is increasingly led by mobile. Mobile technology, and the access to internet services it facilitates, can make available information, services and life-enhancing opportunities, such as health information and guidance, financial services and employment opportunities, often for the first time. The increasing economic and social importance of the internet means that disparities in access threaten to entrench and exacerbate inequalities for traditionally marginalised groups; in particular women.

GSMA research estimates that women in low- and middle-income countries are 14 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone.[[2]](#footnote-2) There is significant variation in the size of this gender gap between and within regions, and even within certain countries. In South Asia for instance, women are 38% less likely to own a mobile phone then men.[[3]](#footnote-3) Moreover, even when women own a mobile phone, they report using them less frequently and intensively than men, especially for more sophisticated services such as mobile internet. This gender gap in mobile phone usage prevents women from reaping the full benefits of mobile phone ownership and internet access.

The digital gender gap is not going to close on its own. Its root causes are driven by a complex set of social, economic and cultural barriers. Targeted intervention is needed by industry, policy makers, the development community and other stakeholders to address the barriers faced by women. Stakeholders need to address issues of gender equality and social norms and focus on:

1. **Accessibility**: Ensuring that mobile and digital services are accessiblefor women as well as men. This includes considering issues such as ensuring women have access to quality network coverage, internet-enabled handsets, electricity, agents and formal IDs. For example, there is a gender gap in mobile phone ownership which prevents women from accessing mobile services. Women may find the internet particularly difficult to access in poor and remote areas where it may be predominantly available outside the home or in locations which are unsafe or inaccessible, and where social or cultural norms and safety concerns may constrain women’s freedom of movement. Women also face other accessibility challenges including difficulties experienced in obtaining identity documents required to open accounts.
2. **Affordability**: Ensuring that women can access mobile phones and mobile services is important but not sufficient to ensuring that they are used – once they are accessible it is also important that they are affordable. This includes considerations such as the cost and affordability of handsets, tariffs, data and transaction fees. Cost as a barrier tends to be quoted more often by women than by men and was reported as the greatest barrier to mobile phone ownership and use in our study on women’s access to and use of mobile phones in developing countries.[[4]](#footnote-4) Connectivity and device costs have a significant effect on women’s ability to benefit from the internet, as women often have limited financial independence, have lower incomes, and lack access to external sources of finance that are available to their male peers. As a result, women are often more price sensitive and women in many countries are also more likely to have lower quality (e.g., 2G) handsets and to obtain these later than male peers.
3. **Usability and skills**: Once mobile phones and services are accessible and affordable, it is important to also ensure that they are user-friendly, and that women have the skills and confidence to meaningfully use mobile phones and the internet. Technical literacy and confidence is a key concern for women. In many countries, a higher proportion of women are illiterate than men, and/or have experienced lower levels of education. Research studies suggest that women with such disadvantages often lack, or believe they lack, the digital skills and confidence needed to use the mobile, the internet and mobile money services, leading to them failing to gain access or restricting their use to a limited number of services and applications.
4. **Safety**: It must also be safe for women to access and use mobile phones and the internet. Studies show that safety and harassment fears are significant barriers that inhibit women from benefitting from or even wanting to access the internet. Relevant concerns range from physical violence, including vulnerability to theft, online harassment and fraud. However, it is important to note that studies also show that some women feel that mobile ownership and access to services can be used in ways that enhance their personal security.
5. **Relevant**: Policies, products, content and services must meet women’s needs as well as men’s. This includes ensuring women are being considered and that these are developed based on an understanding of women’s wants and needs. Linked to this there is the need for better gender-disaggregated data and consumer insights research to ensure that policies, products and services are relevant to women.

Effective, tangible and measurable action is urgently needed from a wide range of different stakeholders to overcome the digital gender gap and ensure that women can use and benefit from mobile services. It’s not a simple task, but it is imperative that we meet the challenge head-on to ensure that women are not being left behind. When women thrive, societies, businesses and economies thrive.

The following examples are initiatives taken by mobile operators and other industry stakeholders to address some of the complex social, economic and cultural barriers that prevent women from accessing and using mobile phones and mobile services.

1. **Vodafone India: Smart Snehidi**

Launched in November 2016, the Smart Snehidi programme seeks to improve access to internet-enabled smartphones among low- and middle-income female micro-entrepreneurs. The programme is led by Vodafone and Hand in Hand (HiH), a non-profit organization which assists women to build microenterprises, access finance through self-help groups (SHGs), and learn digital skills. Under this programme group members who are deemed credit-worthy and earn over INR 2000 (~$31) per month are offered a loan to purchase a smartphone, which they pay back over 10-12 months in instalments ranging from ~$10-$15. Credit-worthiness is assess by HiH who consider the women’s activity within the group, including repayment history. In addition, the peer-pressure and joint liability model which are inherent to self-help groups helps to ensure loan repayment.

The smartphone that women receive has a Vodafone SIM card that is pre-loaded with discounts to encourage use of voice and data. For example: a one-off INR 50 (~$0.8) worth of free talk-time, 200MB free data per month, subsidised data for pre-installed apps, and 50% off additional data purchase. Recipients also have three days of training from HiH on how a smartphone and the internet can help their business activities, such as finding suppliers, finding customers, and marketing their business.

As of April 2017, the programme has enabled 2,500 women to access smartphones in 3 districts across Tamil Nadu, India. Vodafone aims to reach 50,000 women with the Smart Snehidi programme in Tamil Nadu within three years (total 19 districts).[[5]](#footnote-5) Smart Snehidi has been particularly appealing as it tackles two key barriers—handset price and digital literacy

1. **Vodafone India: Sakhi pack**

In many low- and middle-income countries, women customers are reluctant to share their mobile number with agents when topping up, as they are worried that they will subsequently receive harassing calls and SMS from the agent, people in the shop who might overhear, or even friends that the agent passes their number to. This is such a widespread issue in India that Vodafone has developed a service that enables women to recharge anonymously.

In 2017, Vodafone India launched Sakhi pack, a SIM proposition that enables customers to top up using a One Time Password code without sharing their mobile number.[[6]](#footnote-6) Customers also receive 10 minutes of free local emergency calls per month, and 90 days worth of free SMS-based beauty and health information. The SIM is sold through temporary stalls in local markets in local female-friendly markets.

The private top up feature in Sakhi pack addresses the widely felt need for safer, more private top up facilities for women. Three months post launch, Sakhi pack had 15,000 subscribers, and by November 2017 it had been sold to over 120,000 people, of whom Vodafone estimated 80% were rural women.

1. **Dialog Sri Lanka digital education workshops**

In March 2017, Sri Lanka’s Dialog Axiata launched an island-wide programme to reduce the gender gap in mobile and internet use.[[7]](#footnote-7) Linked to the GSMA’s Connected Women initiative, this is an ICT awareness programme targeting rural women. By hosting a series of workshops, the programme intends to educate women about the benefits of using the internet for personal development and entrepreneurial opportunities, as well as cyber safety. The programmes outline the benefits of digital inclusion for women, including access to news and education, health and safety information, lifestyle, entrepreneurial opportunities and promoting their business. Another key topic is the responsible and safe use of the internet, including access and safeguards for children and young adults. Dialog will be rolling out further workshops in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.

1. **Telenor India: Project Sampark**

In Uttar Pradesh, India, there are strong social norms preventing women from owning and using a mobile phone. In the target area, initial research by Telenor revealed that 76% of men, but only 29% of women, used a mobile phone. Against this backdrop, Telenor launched a ‘combo-SIM’ product: two paired SIMs sold together with talk-time benefits between them. For example, adding credit to one SIM automatically credits the other, and the SIMs have free calls between them. They are marketed to men and women with the intention that one SIM is to be used by a woman and the other by her husband.

In addition, Telenor has recruited local female ‘promoters’ to market the product, who visit households to explain to families how a mobile phone can benefit women and their household. The female promoters are already trusted community members who have existing relationships with households, and can provide helpful post-sales support. As well as the above, Telenor also ran an awareness campaign involving street plays and puppet shows in the area, to raise awareness of how mobile can benefit women and their families.

This combined product, marketing and distribution approach has been able to challenge the social norms preventing women from using mobile phones in Uttar Pradesh. For example, it provides an incentive for men to see the value of female household members having a SIM of their own. It has also helped to overcome digital literacy barriers that women face, as the promoters help women to learn how to use a mobile. After 18 months Telenor had reached 72,000 subscribers across 87 villages, and planned to extend the pilot to cover 300 villages with 180 of these promoters.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. **Infolady initiative, Bangladesh**

This initiative is driving mobile internet adoption and use in Bangladesh. iSocial, short for “Infolady Social Enterprise Limited”, is a model for empowering communities through female entrepreneurship.[[9]](#footnote-9) Developed by Dnet in 2004, the Infolady model is a “women-for-women” family-based info-preneurship model. The women, known as Kallyani, travel between villages via bicycle equipped with devices (laptop, tablet, smartphone, Wi-Fi hotspot, digital camera) that villagers can use. The women have been trained to provide simple legal and medical advice, supporting marginalised communities to improve their well-being and make informed choices. They are empowered as entrepreneurs by charging for digital services for their communities. This model has already created more than 50 women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and these entrepreneurs have directly reached over 400,000 rural citizens till date. iSocial aims to have 9,072 Kallyani covering 60 districts by 2020.

1. **Google Internet Saathis, India**

Launched by Google India and the Tata Trusts Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives, Google Internet Saathis helps to address the digital gender gap in India by facilitating digital literacy among rural women. The programme trains women to become master trainers, or “saathis” (companions), who are given a smartphone or tablet and a bicycle to help women in their villages experience the benefits of the internet. The programme includes an awareness module and a hands-on training module using mobile devices in local languages. Sessions cover a wide range of topics relevant to women. By August 2017, 100,000 villages across 10 states were reached through 25,000 Internet Saathis. Almost 90 per cent of the women who attended the training reported having a better understanding of the internet.[[10]](#footnote-10) The training is particularly appealing as it is offered for women by women in their own villages, and is therefore deemed safe for women to attend. This “no strings attached” educational programme has appeal to those who want to find out more about the internet without the obligation of buying a phone.

1. **Hamara Internet, Pakistan**

This is an initiative supporting women’s rights to use the internet free from harassment, surveillance, or other digital threats in Pakistan.[[11]](#footnote-11) A project of the Digital Rights Foundation and driven by Night Dad, it aims to empower women and girls to thrive in the digital space and learn how to defend themselves in an increasingly connected world. The Hamara Internet team of digital defenders routinely holds digital security training workshops throughout Pakistan. The team also develops online safety tools and resources for women.

1. **Tigo Rwnda: Women Entrepreneurship**

Tigo Women Entrepreneurship Fund is an initiative by Tigo Rwanda was launched in March 2016 in partnership with the National Women’s Council of Rwanda. The US$65,000 fund aims to provide ICT and business management training, as well as startup capital to more than 300 women from across Rwanda to become Tigo cash agents. This case study illustrates how female agents can help female customers feel more confident when using mobile phones. Joint research between GSMA Connected Women and Tigo Rwanda revealed that both men and women interviewees agreed that female agents offer better customer service than male agents. Female interviewees also reported they prefer interacting with a friend or fellow woman, and that they would be more comfortable and confident using Tigo Cash if this person were to show them. So far, Tigo Rwanda has enrolled 70 women who now run their own agent outlets. This initiative along with others have increased the percentage of women in Tigo Rwanda mobile money customer base from 39% to 41% in only nine months. Tigo Rwanda is aiming to empower over 1,280 women agents by 2020.

1. **What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?**

The importance of gender equality in the digital society and the urgent need for action to address the digital gender gap is widely recognised internationally. Against this background, the Broadband Commission Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide has developed a set of practical actions that stakeholders can take to address the gender gap in internet access and use in order to realise this substantial opportunity.[[12]](#footnote-12) It identifies four specific action areas for closing the digital gender gap which provide a framework for action:

The **first** area is concerned with the need for gender-disaggregated data and for stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the relevant contexts and evidence base on how women and girls access and use mobile phones, mobile services and the internet. An important part of this is measuring the gender gap as well as understanding the factors preventing access and use in specific contexts. Gender-disaggregated data therefore helps inform policy and strategy development, implementation and monitoring.

Unfortunately, the reality is that there is a lack of gender disaggregated data. More specifically:

* There is limited availability and reliability of data on access and use.
* There is a lack of globally representative data sets.
* There is a lack of resources in national statistical systems to collect this data (e.g., lack of budget or human resources).
* There can be limited sharing of data by stakeholders.
* Stakeholders use different measures, which can lead to unclear or conflicting findings. For example, different definitions of what a ‘smartphone’ is.
* Contextual factors such as social norms can be difficult to measure quantitatively.

To address the digital gender gap there is a need for a more detailed and consistent evidence in order to inform policy and practice. Specifically, it is recommended that governments should:

1. **Collect, analyse, and track gender-disaggregated data** related to mobile and internet access and use.
* To do this, they should ensure that indicators to measure access and use from a gender perspective are integrated into existing official data collection requirements, such as collecting, analysing and tracking gender-disaggregated data related to mobile and internet access and use in national official statistics databases.
* Governments should also ensure national data to measure internet access and use from a gender perspective is collected in accordance with international guidelines, is openly accessible and undertaken in a manner that enables regular comparisons over time and between countries.
* There’s also a need to assess baseline indicators for all strategies, policies and plansrelated to mobile and internet access and use, and put in place measures to ensure that they are providing relevant, timely gender-disaggregated data which can be used for the development, implementation and measurement of future policies, strategies and plans.
1. **It is also imperative that governments research women's access to and use of mobile, mobile services and the internet.**
* For example, they should support robust, reliable, accurate and up-to-date research concerning women and girls’ access to and use of mobile and the internet to better understand their needs, circumstances and preferences in different local contexts and the factors limiting uptake (including cultural and social norms).
* They should also ensure that men are also included in research so that findings for women can be compared and contextualised
1. **Finally, it is important that governments publish and share data and research.**
	* For example, they should publish gender disaggregated data in a safe and secure manner and within the limits of data protection requirements and privacy considerations.

The **second group** is concerned with the integration of gender perspectives in relevant strategies, policies, plans, and budgets. Strategies, policies, plans and budgets that explicitly address women’s needs, circumstances, capabilities and preferences are essential if governments and other stakeholders are to tackle the digital gender gap effectively.

Unfortunately stakeholders have often neglected to effectively integrate a gender perspective into policies to help address the digital gender gap. Governments and other stakeholders often do not appropriately integrate gender and ICTs into strategies and policies in a holistic manner. There are two key issues here. On the one hand, gender-related policies often do not refer to ICTs or broadband, and on the other hand, ICT and broadband-related policies typically do not mention gender. For example, a broadband policy might not make any reference to a baseline or target for reaching female users. There’s also a lack of institutional capacity to develop and deliver gender-responsive policies and generally there is little or no consultation with women and relevant communities. Cooperation between stakeholders is often lacking and there’s insufficient flexibility to meet the needs of fast-changing ICT environments.

To help ensure that an explicit focus on gender equality is integrated effectively into strategies, policies, plans and budgets, and that these meet women’s needs, circumstances, capabilities and preferences, we recommend that governments:

1. **Establish gender equality targets and accountability structures**. Specific recommendations include:
	* Making sure gender equality targets are included across all ICT/broadband strategies, policies, plans and budgets to ensure they support women and girls in accessing and using the internet/mobile services; along with clear accountability structures to ensure targets are delivered.
	* Ensuring ICT/broadband access targets are included in gender equality and other related strategies, policies, plans and budgets (e.g., education).
2. **Governments also need to assess strategies, policies, plans and budgets for gender equality considerations**. Specifically, they should:
	* Use gender analysis tools to assess strategies, policies and implementation plans. This is to ensure that gender equality considerations are sufficiently reflected and prioritised. There’s also a need to establish processes to ensure gender analysis is included in the future development of all strategies, policies, plans and budgets.
3. **Governments must also consult and involve** **women and local communities** — as well as gender equality advocates and experts — from the outset in the development of strategies, policies and budgets to ensure policy development is centred on women.

The **third group** seeks to address barriers related to affordable access, threats that hamper access and use, digital literacy and confidence, and the availability of relevant content, applications and services. These barriers should not be viewed and addressed in isolation. A holistic approach is required if the gender gap is to be effectively addressed. Strategies to address these barriers should also seek to confront the structural inequalities between men and women in societies. They must also take into account the needs, circumstances, and preferences of women in different local contexts, and the factors limiting women’s access to and use of mobile and the internet, including cultural and social norms and the need to engage with men and boys.

**Affordability**:

Connectivity and device costs have a significant effect on women’s ability to benefit from mobile and the internet, as women often have less financial independence, lower incomes, and lower access to external sources of finance than their male peers. The key challenges to affordable access for women include:

* Lower incomes, less financial independence and limited access to external finance;
* Safety concerns which prevent them from going to certain locations;
* Social or cultural norms which may constrain women’s freedom of movement (e.g., to access agents, networks and public access facilities);
* Lack of identity documents required to open accounts.

**Accessibility**:

This is an issue because women may find the mobile services and the internet particularly difficult to access in poor and remote areas where it may be predominantly available outside the home or in locations which are unsafe or inaccessible. For example, places where social or cultural norms and safety concerns may constrain women’s freedom of movement. Women also face other accessibility challenges including difficulties obtaining identity documents required to open accounts. While models of public access can offer simple, yet effective, means for promoting broader access, a number of factors can limit the success of such facilities; these include funding difficulties, operating hours, the location and safety concerns.

To ensure affordable access for women it is recommended that governments focus on improving their understanding of affordability and accessibility issues:

1. **Governments should look at strategies for improving network coverage, capacity and quality**. For example, by encouraging increases in network coverage, capacity and quality, particularly in underserved areas where a significant population are women and girls. Here, they could, for example, facilitate access to available capacity, promote infrastructure sharing, release spectrum at an affordable cost, and consider the use of public finances or Universal Service Funds to incentivise the rollout of, or access to, infrastructure in underserved rural areas.
2. **Governments should also establish a predictable, equitable and transparent regulatory environment for stakeholders and investors**.
3. **Governments can help by supporting and investing in the provision of safe and accessible public access facilities**, where women and girls can use, and learn to use, the internet.
4. Some **initiatives governments can use to drive** **device affordability** are:
* **Subsidies**: governments can effectively subsidise handsets for marginalised populations in partnership with mobile operators to help remove the affordability barrier. For example, the Pakistan government utilised its Universal Access and Service Funds (USF) to provide smartphones to 30,000 low income women. Similarly, the government of Colombia recently launched the Internet Móvil Social para la Gente initiative to address total cost (handset and data costs) of ownership for low income and marginalised populations.
* **Tax policy**: removing handset import duties can help to reduce the cost of handsets for consumers and could significantly improve affordability and penetration. In 2009, the Government of Kenya removed VAT from mobile handsets, resulting in a 200 per cent increase in handset purchases, and a 20 per cent increase in the penetration rate.
* **Capital for asset financing**: Governments can partner with financial institutions, including MFIs, to provide risk capital for smartphone loans at lower interest rates, where there are target populations that would benefit from access. For example, in Pakistan, the government of Punjab is partnering with Telenor and Tameer Bank on a pilot that aims to increase access to smartphones amongst small-holder farmers across the province.

**Threats that prevent access and use**

While mobile and the internet can give women access to empowering information, access can also provoke an online or offline reaction that increases women’s vulnerability, especially if women are considered to transgress gender norms. Social or cultural norms can restrict women’s freedom to access mobile and use the internet. There are a range of concerns that inhibit women from benefitting from or even wanting to access mobile phones and the internet. Women can face concerns of physical violence in respect to devices they own or borrow. This can include vulnerability to theft as well as domestic violence associated with phone use (e.g., when use of a mobile phone is considered to be ‘wasting time’, a barrier to ‘fulfilling household duties’ or ‘causing unnecessary costs’ or when there is fear that women are using mobile phones for inappropriate contact with men). Concerns around a women’s use of a mobile phone can lead to removal of (or restricted) access to the phone. Women may also struggle to use amenities such as public access facilities and retail stores, due to unsafe roads or because facilities are in some way considered unsuitable for women. Moreover, women may have safety and harassment concerns related to being contacted by strangers on a mobile, and this can be a greater barrier for women than for men and can deter women from using mobile phones especially if they are suspected of being willing victims. Finally, women may also have concerns related to goingonline, such as fear of intimidation, harassment, violence, fraud, surveillance, illegal data retention, identity theft, misuse of personal images and data and exposure to explicit content. Safety concerns and a generalised perception of threats pertaining to mobile or internet access and use should not, however, be used as an excuse for denying women access. Instead, the mobile and the internet’s ability to empower women should be emphasised.

Recommendations for governments to reduce threats that prevent women’s access and use of the internet include:

1. **Governments should conduct research on the threats**, as well as the cultural and social norms, that prevent women and girls from accessing and using mobile services and the internet in different social and cultural contexts.
2. **Governments should also look at** **ways of increasing awareness of both what constitutes harassment and also what threats exist and how they can be addressed or reduced**. This may include using awareness campaigns, digital literacy programmes and in formal education programmes or curriculum to help address the issues. Also, both men and women should be targeted in education and awareness activities. This would help tackle both the cause of the problem -- some men feeling it is acceptable to harass women in this way -- as well as help prevent issues arising -- for example by explaining to women how to use call blocking apps. It also important to that these programmes explain what to do if you become a victim.
3. **Governments also have a role to play in developing safety applications and services**. This can include investing in or encouraging the development of applications and services that make it safer for women and girls to access and use mobile services and the internet, such as anonymous top up services.
4. **Governments should strengthen protection measures and reporting procedures to protect women and girls against ICT-mediated abuse and harassment**. This includes introducing legal and policy frameworks that recognise and address ICT-mediated abuse, harassment and fraud. These should cover measures that promote access to justice; making it easy and safe for women and girls to report online abuse. Governments must also ensure that such reports are responded to quickly and effectively.

**Digital literacy and confidence**

Digital literacy and confidence related to using a mobile phone is a key concern for women. For example, in many countries, women’s access to and use of mobile phones is constrained by structural inequalities between men and women, including lower levels of education and literacy. Women with such disadvantages often lack the digital skills or confidence needed to use mobile services and the internet, leading to them failing to gain access or restricting their use to a limited number of services and applications. This can also compound other challenges (for example, a lack of awareness of privacy and safety settings might make women more susceptible to online threats). Furthermore, women often rely on social circles and family networks who may also lack the relevant digital skills and discourage women from learning due to negative perceptions of women using mobile services or the internet.

These are recommendations for governments to help overcome the barriers related to women’s lack of digital skills and confidence, and ensure women become active mobile and internet users:

1. **Governments need to understand women’s needs and interests**, and be sympathetic to local contexts in order **to design appropriate education and digital literacy initiatives**.
2. **Governments should also invest in education and capacity building initiatives** that increase women and girls’ digital literacy and confidence, across all levels of education, income and familiarity with mobile and the internet. There is also a need for governments to emphasisemobile internet in school curriculum and ICT training, (especially primary schools), with particular attention to meeting the interests and advancement of women and girls. Training should incorporate practical mobile internet skills and use cases tailored to women’s needs, and explicitly address any misconceptions about mobile and the internet, as well as safety and security concerns.
3. **Governments can also play a role when it comes to providing women and girls with opportunities to** **develop their mobile and digital skills and confidence**. This can happen through different channels, including by public access facilities, leveraging existing initiatives and networks, and supporting women and girls to learn on their own. Or it might mean leveraging women’s groups and organisations created by existing government programmes (for example, self-help groups and *Anganwadis* community crèches in India) to train women to use mobile internet.
4. **Governments can also make online government content and services more accessible to women with limited literacy, language and ICT-related skills and confidence.** To make this a success they should ensure that women with lower literacy levels are included in the pilots and user testing of these services.

**Relevant content, applications and services**

There are various challenges when it comes to ensuring the internet has relevant content, applications and services for women:

* First of all: some women who are not connected to the internet feel that it has little to offer them, while others cite the lack of relevant content and services as a reason for not making more extensive use of the internet.
* Products and services are developed and designed without sufficient attention being paid to women’s circumstances, needs, capabilities and preferences.
* Women have often not been effectively considered or involved in the design, testing and implementation of applications and services.

The recommended actions for governments to help increase mobile and internet access and use among women include raising awareness of, and encouraging the production of,relevant content, applications, and services for women. More specific recommendations are to:

1. **Build awareness of the potential value of services and the benefits to women’s lives**. For example, by highlighting the life-changing benefits of health information, job searching opportunities, and mobile financial services.
2. **Develop relevant and meaningful content and services** **to stimulate demand and use**. In particular by encouraging the development of an ecosystem of quality, non-stereotypical services, applications and content relevant to women and girls**.**
3. **Consult and engage all types of women when designing and testing government content, applications and services**. This includes involving women from diverse backgrounds, including those in low-income groups and those who do not currently make use of mobile services.

The **fourth** and final group concerns the need for supporting stakeholders to collaborate more effectively in addressing digital gender gaps by sharing good practices and lessons learned.

Addressing the gender gap really does require action by many different stakeholders working together. Cooperation between stakeholders will be crucial in enabling the development and delivery of policies that are targeted effectively towards women’s needs.

It requires action by and cooperation between:

1. **Different departments within government** **including the ICT departments, gender divisions and other relevant departments such as the education department.**
2. **Government and other stakeholders such as the private sector**, **non-governmental organisations, research institutions, and the women and men directly concerned.**

The importance of gender equality in the digital society and the urgent need for action to address the digital gender gap is widely recognised internationally. The digital gender gap is not going to close on its own. Its root causes are driven by a complex set of social, economic and cultural barriers. Targeted intervention is needed by all stakeholders to address the barriers faced by women. By doing this we ensure that women are an equal part of the digital future.

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