

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES



LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

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MOBILE NETWORK OPERATORS ARE DRIVING DIGITAL GENDER EQUALITY DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency to reach women with mobile technology. GSMA Director General Mats Granryd explains how connecting more women and helping them reap the benefits of mobile technology will support them and their families to navigate this global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency to reach women with mobile technology. As COVID-19 inevitably spreads across low- and middle-income countries resulting in tragic health and economic impacts, lockdowns, uncertainty, and misinformation, a mobile phone can be a lifeline. Mobile is the primary way most people in these settings access the internet, which is proving a vital tool for sharing information about the pandemic, supporting livelihoods, and enabling remote access to critical services such as healthcare and education. For women, mobile plays an important role by providing them with a gateway to critical information, services and opportunities, often for the first time. A mobile connection can support women during the current global crisis in a number of ways, including:

- **getting online medical advice or remote video consultations with doctors**
- **making and receiving voice calls which can be a comforting means of keeping in touch with friends and relatives during isolation**
- **using mobile money to send funds to family members affected by the pandemic, and paying for essential bills and services**
- **receiving digital welfare payments from the government during the pandemic**
- **accessing online educational content to support children with home schooling**
- **accessing virtual marketplaces for sustaining microbusiness or finding essential products**

Connecting more women and helping them reap the benefits of mobile technology will support them and their families to navigate this global pandemic. The mobile industry has risen to the challenge to enable women to access mobile technology and services including mobile money and mobile internet. As part of the **GSMA Connected Women Commitment Initiative** launched in 2016, mobile operators have collectively reached over 35 million additional female customers with mobile internet or mobile money services. Activities undertaken by operators participating in the Initiative include, for example, introducing

low-cost internet-enabled handsets, increasing the number of female agents, , improving digital literacy among women through educational programmes and interactive content, and developing and marketing use cases which appeal to women.

The first wave of operators to make or renew their Connected Women Commitment to reduce the gender gap in the customer base of their mobile money and/or mobile internet services by 2023 include: Grameenphone Ltd. (Bangladesh), Mobitel (Pvt) Limited – Sri Lanka, MobileMoney Limited (subsidiary of MTN Ghana), Ooredoo Maldives, Orange Finances Mobiles Sénégal (OFMS), Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (JIO) India, Robi Axiata Limited (Bangladesh), Safaricom PLC, Turkcell Turkey, Vodacom Congo (RDC) SA Democratic Republic of Congo and Vodacom Tanzania PLC.

Mobile operators are also supporting women to acquire advanced ICT skills and are working to increase female leadership and representation in ICT industries. Turkcell, for example, is supporting the ‘Women Developers of the Future’ programme, which has trained more than 770 women in Turkey and supported the launch of over 200 mobile apps designed by women. Vodafone has launched the #ChangeTheFace Initiative, a new industry-wide initiative calling on technology leaders and individuals to pledge to increase diversity and equality in the technology sector. AT&T has been recognised for its commitment to gender equality by the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index for the third year in a row.

The GSMA is committed to uphold the UN Women’s Empowerment Principles by bridging the gender divide both in its operations and in supporting the mobile industry’s efforts to accelerate digital and financial inclusion for women. This commitment is also reflected in the work it does around the world not least within global partnerships like **EQUALS**, which have proven critical in bringing the public and private sectors together as COVID-19 threatens to reverse gains made on the gender equality front.

To date 30 mobile operators have joined the GSMA in committing to the UN Women Empowerment Principles and fostering business practices that empower women. It has never been more important to address the mobile gender gap and ensure women can access and reap the full benefits of mobile technology and participate meaningfully in all aspects of the digital future. When women thrive, societies, businesses and economies thrive.

Women’s Empowerment Principles



High-level corporate leadership



Employee well-being and safety



Supplier diversity & marketing practices



Workplace HR



Measurement and reporting



Education and training for women



Community engagement

