

# EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY



The U.S. Department of State will promote public-private partnerships to increase access to mobile technology among women in developing countries, in conjunction with the GSMA mWomen Program, an initiative of the GSMA Development Fund. GSMA is a London-based organization that represents 800 mobile communications companies with over three million subscribers in the developing world.

Mobile communications technologies have proven to be a powerful tool for poverty reduction and women's empowerment, as demonstrated in a recent groundbreaking study sponsored by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women and the GSMA, entitled *Mobile & Women: A Global Opportunity*.

The use of mobile technology can improve women's lives in the following ways:

## Civic Participation and Activism

Women have used mobile phones to organize, advocate change, and participate in civic and community affairs. Mobile phones also support women's network building outside their immediate families, and their participation in public affairs.

## Safety and Protection

Studies show that 93% of women feel safer with a mobile phone. In both developing and developed communities, women with a mobile phone feel more connected with friends and family and can access emergency numbers.

## Justice

The State Department is working with the American Bar Association and others to explore ways that mobile technology can be used by victims of sexual and gender-based violence to report crimes and capture witness testimony. It can also be used to educate citizens about their legal rights and train local police in collecting forensic evidence. Mobile technologies also enable women and communities to communicate with law enforcement when attacks on women are taking place and provide access to justice for survivors of violence. They can

be used to seek and receive legal advice, as well as to provide training to community leaders and law enforcement officials.

## Economic Opportunities, Entrepreneurship, and Financial Inclusion

Forty-five percent of women believe their income and professional opportunities have increased with a mobile phone; and 80% of women business owners perceive mobile phone use as a way to increase productivity.

Mobile banking helps women become economic actors in the financial system and can lead to greater financial independence and economic empowerment.

## Food Security

For female farmers, who rarely receive expert assistance from extension workers or other agricultural professionals, mobile phones are an effective tool for accessing "just-in-time information" to increase their productivity.

## Maternal and Women's Health

Mobile technology has been used to improve maternal and women's health including improving access to life-saving health services during delivery, increasing use of health information during and following pregnancy, and improving the availability and quality of health services in the community and in health facilities.

## Education and Literacy

SMS-based (texting) literacy programs are effective in teaching literacy and promoting girls' education.

## Climate Change and Disaster Relief

Mobile phones can provide women with access to information about shifts in crop and weather patterns caused by climate change and about natural disasters.

## Mobility and Independence

Eighty-five percent of women feel more independent with a mobile phone and can leave home for work or school with confidence.