# POLICY BRIEF

Examining Women's Access to Digital Platform: A case Study of Mobile Broadband in Uganda

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings from an evidence based study that examines the gendered aspects to women's internet access on mobile broadband connections. The outcome of the study will help to drive a well-tailored and specific advocacy around policy and regulatory practices in the industry to lower the cost of broadband connection.

The objective was to examine the gendered aspects to women's internet access on mobile broadband connections to guide advocacy around policy and regulatory practices in Uganda. Responses were: -

- 98% said that they use mobile phones as a means of mobile broadband, citing reasons of: "availability", "affordability" and "portability".
- The majority, (51%) said "WhatsApp" was the most accessed Digital Platform. This was followed by "Facebook" (29%), E-Market Platforms (10%), Instagram (5%) and Online dating (4%).
- On enabling factors for use of mobile broadband, "Affordable" was the first choice. This was followed by "Portable". "Private" and "variety of bundles to choose from" tied in the third position.
- Their source of money to finance data plans: 33% said "from their earnings", 26% "from their spouses" and 15% "from *kameza* money. "*Kameza*" is money their husbands on a daily basis leave on the table for buying food. Other options given were: "office wifi", "free monthly data" and "from relatives".
- They said they preferred that when developing a data plan that favors women, the following be considered: "lengthen time to expire" – 27%, "affordability" – 22%, "easy to load" – 20%, "unlimited bundles" – 11%, "easy to access upcountry" – 10%, "bundle should connect to other networks" – 7%, "expiry is customized to my desire"- 3%.

The internet remains a fundamental catalyst and pre-condition for growth and development in many developing countries, Uganda inclusive. It presents large scale potential benefits to the poor as well. Nevertheless, digital inequality continues to deepen for most of women and girls (GSMA, 2018).

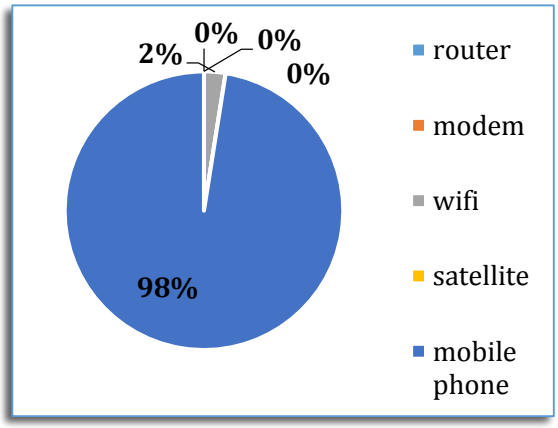
## 2 FINDINGS

### 2.1 ACCESS TO MOBILE BROADBAND CONNECTIONS AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

#### 2.1.1 Mobile Broadband Connections

The respondents drew a list of Mobile Broadband known to them. They were then asked to select the one they use most. Below are their choices of preference.

*Figure 1: Choice of Broadband – FGD Responses*




The majority (98%) said that they use mobile phones as a means of mobile broadband. Common reasons cited were: "availability", "affordability" and "portability" compared to the other options.

The remaining (2%) that chose "Wi-Fi" said it is because they have access to Wi-Fi in their places of work. Short of that, they too preferred "mobile phones".

It is important to mention that they did acclaim that if "Wi-Fi" offered the same options, they would choose it. The said this was because it was "faster".

### 2.1.2 Digital Platforms

By show of hands, a list of digital platforms familiar to them was drawn. The respondents were then asked to list three (3) main forms of digital platforms that they use most.

Half of the respondents said they use "WhatsApp" most. This was followed by "Facebook" and then "E-Market" platforms.

*Figure 2: Most accessed Digital Platform - FGD Responses*

On "WhatsApp" and Facebook, they meet long lost friends and make new ones, it is a main source of entertainment and trade purposes.

"E-Market" platforms was used to trade.

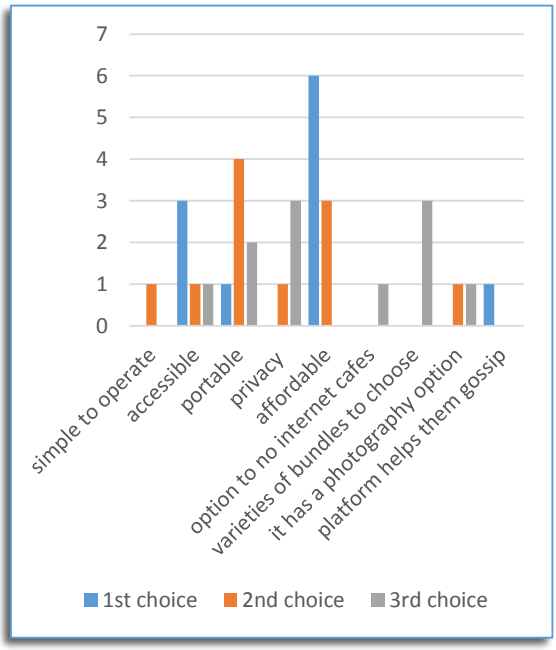
## 2.2 Usage of Mobile Broadband

All respondents said that it was the "mobile phone" among broadband options.

They were then asked to give three (3) reasons to support their answers and in order of preference.

See reasons in Figure overleaf for choice given.

*Figure 3: Reason for choice of the Mobile Phone amongst other Broadband Connection Options*

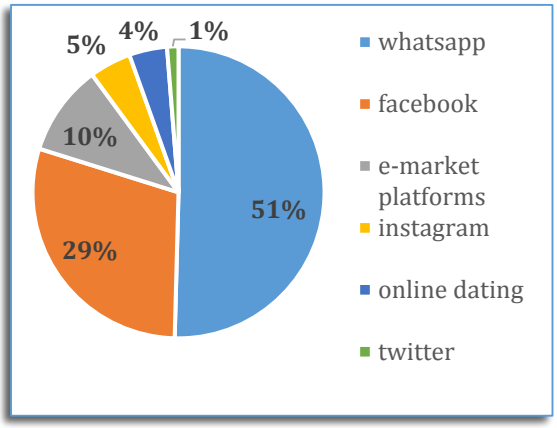



"Affordable" was the first choice. Buying a mobile phone is cheaper for them. With the existing telecom war, each telecom company tried to outweigh the other by bringing a cheaper phone and a more affordable bundle. This is to the benefit of the users.

This was followed by "Portable". The women can take the mobile phone with them.

"Private" and "variety of bundles to choose from" tied in the third position.

Passwords they said wade of the children and spouses. Whereas the children mostly want to share their data




bundles and without their knowledge, the spouses want to pry to their conversations.

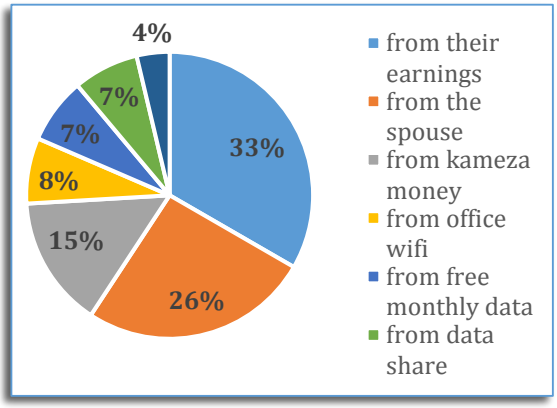
## 2.3 Sources of Money for Women to Purchase Data Plans

Money is a key ingredient to obtaining data on ones' phone. There are varying bundles to choose from, but without money, one cannot load bundles on their phones.

Each of the female respondents was asked where they obtain their money to buy data.

Interesting responses resulted: the majority, 33% said they obtain it from their earnings. Sources of earnings mentioned were: farming, kiosks and sale of second hand clothes. This was followed by 26% that they obtain this money mainly from their spouses. However, some were quick to say that this comes with added costs with the spouse demanding to know who else she communicated to with the data they obtained. Worse they said, is that this is a source of conflict in the home, some ending up as victims of domestic violence. See Figure 5.

*Figure 4: Sources of Women's Finance for Data Plans*




15% said they get their data from "*kameza* money". In most bantu languages, *Kameza*, literally means "table"; with the "ka" at the beginning referring to "something tiny or small". This is the money the male spouse leaves behind for his wife every day to take care of the days expenses especially food. They said it is normally UGX 3,000 – UGX 5,000. Factors that determine the amount they said are: (1) how much he has (2) the number of mouths to feed. The later is not an essential normally.

The least was obtaining money from friends and relations. See Figure above for more detailed options.

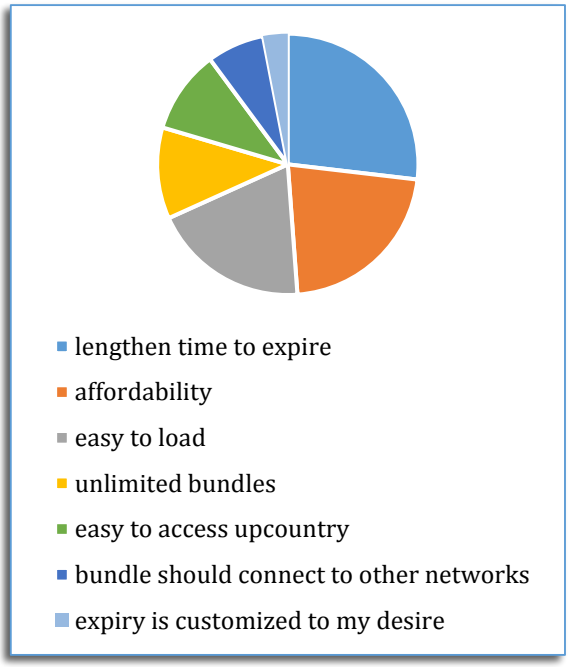
## 2.4 Developing a Data Plan for Women

A data plan for women? This lit up every respondents' face. It sounded like a vision to them, something unattainable. The figure below presents their views.

The majority, 27% of the respondents said that this package should not expire so fast. They were quick to mention that the cheaper data packages took a very short time to expire. More, they insisted that the daily packages were not favorable because when their spouses came home, they got agitated every time they found them using the phones. This means that loading a daily package was unfavorable too because the phone is inactive for 12 hours despite their desire to use it.

Closely following, 22%, talked about the package being "affordable". A lot has been said on this already and so emphasis will be on the issue that scored third highest. – "easy to load". The respondents said that many steps were required to reach the final step. An interesting quote to share. See Figure 6 for details.

*Figure 5: Facts to consider when developing a Data Plan for Women*




This is an extreme expression but stresses the time and need for concentration a woman undergoes when loading data.

"A bundle should connect to other networks" also raised an interesting discussion. Some of the female respondents agreed that they have more than one sim card. When probed further as to why, they said that these sim cards are on different networks and their reason for keeping them is to enable them continue their conversations after the spouse confiscates the sim card. When asked to relate this to the tabled topic, they explained by saying that for whatever reason, if one cannot use the sim card, then they should be able to switch the cards and continue with their conversations.

How will the telecom company know that the bundle is being accessed by a female? This is a question one of the respondents raised in the heat of the discussion.

During registration for the National ID in Uganda, gender is among the information requested. That said, ability to implement is an option the telecom companies can advise.

# 3 PROPOSED POLICY ACTION

WOUGNET enabled Government, through UCC - Uganda Communications Commission, UWOPA – Uganda Women of Parliament, MGL&SD – Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development and MoICT&NG – Ministry of ICT & National Guidance liaise with Civil Society and Telecoms to develop telecom packages that include the women's concerns.

*Figure 6: Proposed Action Points*

**Government**

- Capacity building
  - This is of communities to know the power of social media and other digital. We particularly need to engage the unconnected women.
  - More, conducting digital literacy trainings on the usage of data bundles, including how to save on data.
  - Conducting trainings for policy makers at Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Gender and ICT committees at parliament and Gender Departments in all the districts in Uganda on gender and ICT policy issues.
- UCC revamp the ICT centers once established in the upcountry towns; and provide free and/or subsidized internet to women in the rural areas.
- More women need to be brought on the internet governance decision making table. We need to have more MPs and policy influencers who are knowledgeable about these policies and issues to help us change the trend.
- Member of Parliament to be the advocates for gender mainstreaming into all the programs that are initiated by Parliament. They should also be active in government ventures.
- UCC and MoICTre examine the practicality of OTT tax which poses hindrances to access and usage of the internet especially among the women in Uganda.
- UCC makes it mandatory for telecom companies to collect disaggregated data on access to digital platforms by sex

**Civil Society**

- WOUGNET through UWOPA to conduct sensitization sessions for all Members of Parliament on some of these ICT and gender issues that need to be integrated into the policy documents which can be done around February of every financial.
- WOUGNET to conduct community sensitization to meaningfully use ICT enabled tools like phones and also be able to identify those tools that are counterfeits as this affect meaningful access and usage
- WOUGNET to further conduct research focusing on local content, for example understanding what women use the phones for, and what kind of information they are accessing from the phones and internet.
- WOUGNET to engage directly Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic development to raise these issues and find a way forward especially on the issue of over the top tax and high cost of ICT tools.
- Take on the government set trainings seriously by attending and building on their knowledge about the bundles available for use

# 4 CONCLUSION

Telecoms will desist from producing packages for profit only. They will be tasked by UCC to indicate how they have included and addressed gender issues and concerns in all their packages: data and voice. it is only then that the packages will become women friendly as well.