This article presents findings from Gamos led research into the use of telecommunications services in African countries. The research is intended to address the lack of field data on customers in rural and low-income areas of Africa, and to inform policymakers, private-sector service providers, and the donor community about issues concerned with universal access.

Surveys were conducted in Botswana, Uganda, and Ghana with an overall sample of 1,800, stratified by access to ICTs services. Survey data from the countries is gender disaggregated, enabling an analysis of the gender differences in patterns of use of services, and of attitudes that act as barriers and drivers to the use of services.

The data shows that:

- The use of services is remarkably similar between sexes. This is true not only of voice telephony (fixed and mobile), but also of points of public access (primarily telephone shops and public booths); it is less true of data services such as internet and SMS.
- However, analysis of attitudes shows that there are different priorities and concerns which lie behind the use of services by men and women. For example, men tend to be more concerned with business and livelihood related uses of phones. Cost savings of the phone over other means of communication is an important factor for men, indicating that they have high priority communication needs, although these may be related to both business issues and family matters (e.g. funerals). Women, on the other hand, are more concerned with issues relating to security, reflected in their view of the risks associated with travel, their concerns with queuing (especially at public phone booths), and their ability to use phones to contact people in emergencies.

Many of these differences reflect different gender roles. However, policymakers need to ensure that the concerns of women are taken into account and their access to services not impeded in the rapidly expanding telecommunications market.

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