



# Understanding the mobile disability gap

Summary of findings from fieldwork in Kenya and Bangladesh



Global Disability Innovation Hub

**15%** of the global population has some form of disability and many of them live in a low- or middle-income country.<sup>1</sup>

Mobile technology has the potential to deliver services to persons in need, but there has been limited research to understand the impact of mobile technology on the lives of persons with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

Our research quantified the gap in mobile access, ownership and usage amongst persons with disabilities in **Kenya and Bangladesh** and characterises the mobile disability gap in these contexts. The report also highlights the role of mobile as an enabler of inclusion of persons with disabilities.

## 1 Awareness of accessible mobile products

In both countries, lack of use and awareness of accessibility features impacts the perceived value of mobile phones as assistive technologies.



Mobiles are mostly unaffordable to persons with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>



Relatives and caregivers play a key role in the pathways to access and ownership of mobile.



## 2 Accessing and owning a mobile

Mobile ownership by persons with disabilities is high in Kenya and Bangladesh.

Yet, a mobile disability gap in ownership of over

**10%**

exists in both countries.



Persons with disabilities who do not own a phone, borrow one from friends or relatives, facing restrictive use and/or associated cost.

More than

**70%**



of disabled mobile phone owners have a basic or feature phone. A significant disability gap exist in smartphone ownership.



Level of education



Type of disability



Gender

can be determinants of mobile ownership, including the type of mobile owned.

**Visually impaired persons are less likely to own a smartphone,** even if they are **not** the least likely to own a mobile.

1. WHO (2011). 'World Report on Disability'.

2. GSMA (2018). [Leveraging the potential of mobile for persons with disabilities.](#)

3. Thompson S. 2018. Mobile technology and inclusion of persons with disabilities. K4D Emerging Issues Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

### 3 Use of mobile and mobile-enabled services

Persons with disabilities can be “power-users” of some services.

In Kenya

63%

of smartphone owners with disabilities use mobile internet daily.

Compared to

56%

of non-disabled smartphone owners.

Also in Kenya, persons with hearing or speech impairment have higher ownership of mobile money accounts than non-disabled persons.



96% vs 94%

But, in Kenya and Bangladesh, only around

10% of mobile owners use accessibility features.

Access to accessibility features seems to drive higher mobile usage by persons with disabilities.



### 4 Gender and the mobile disability gap

Gender and disability are factors that can determine ownership and access to mobile.



In Kenya, there is a **negative gender gap** amongst non-disabled persons and persons with disabilities.



In Bangladesh, **being a woman is a higher determinant factor of mobile ownership than disability.**



**Disability is a more determining factor of usage than gender in both countries.**

### 5 Conclusions and opportunities for mobile operators

Mobiles have become **life-changing devices** for many persons with disabilities. The gap in ownership needs to be addressed not only because of the value that these devices bring to persons with disabilities, but also because they can indeed be regular customers if appropriate products and services are provided.

To maximise the potential of mobile as an assistive technology, the mobile and disability ecosystems need to work together to **improve the accessibility, affordability and relevance** of mobile products and services for persons with disabilities. This requires that persons with disabilities gain the necessary digital literacy skills to take advantage of the mobile opportunity.

Providing solutions that **satisfy the needs** of customers with disabilities **creates a business case** for mobile operators, a great opportunity to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to leaving no one behind when it comes to access to mobile technology.



Read the full description of the methodology, context and research findings in the main report – download now. [www.gsma.com/understanding-the-mobile-disability-gap](http://www.gsma.com/understanding-the-mobile-disability-gap)

