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The Gender Digital Divide: Evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys (AS83)

An Analysis Brief from The DHS Program

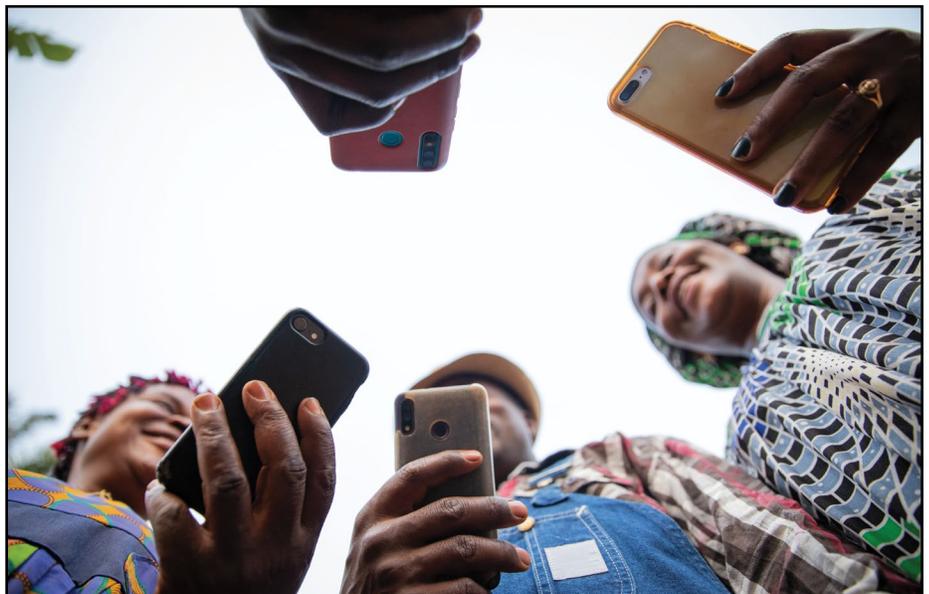
Why study women's and men's access to and use of digital resources?

While digital resources such as the internet and mobile phones have become a big part of people's lives all over the world, women may have less access and use digital resources less often than men. The "digital divide" refers to the gap between populations, some of whom face greater difficulties accessing and using digital resources than others.

Which countries were included in the study?

This analysis includes data from 23 Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) conducted since 2015 in

Armenia, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Jordan, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



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What methods were used to conduct this analysis?

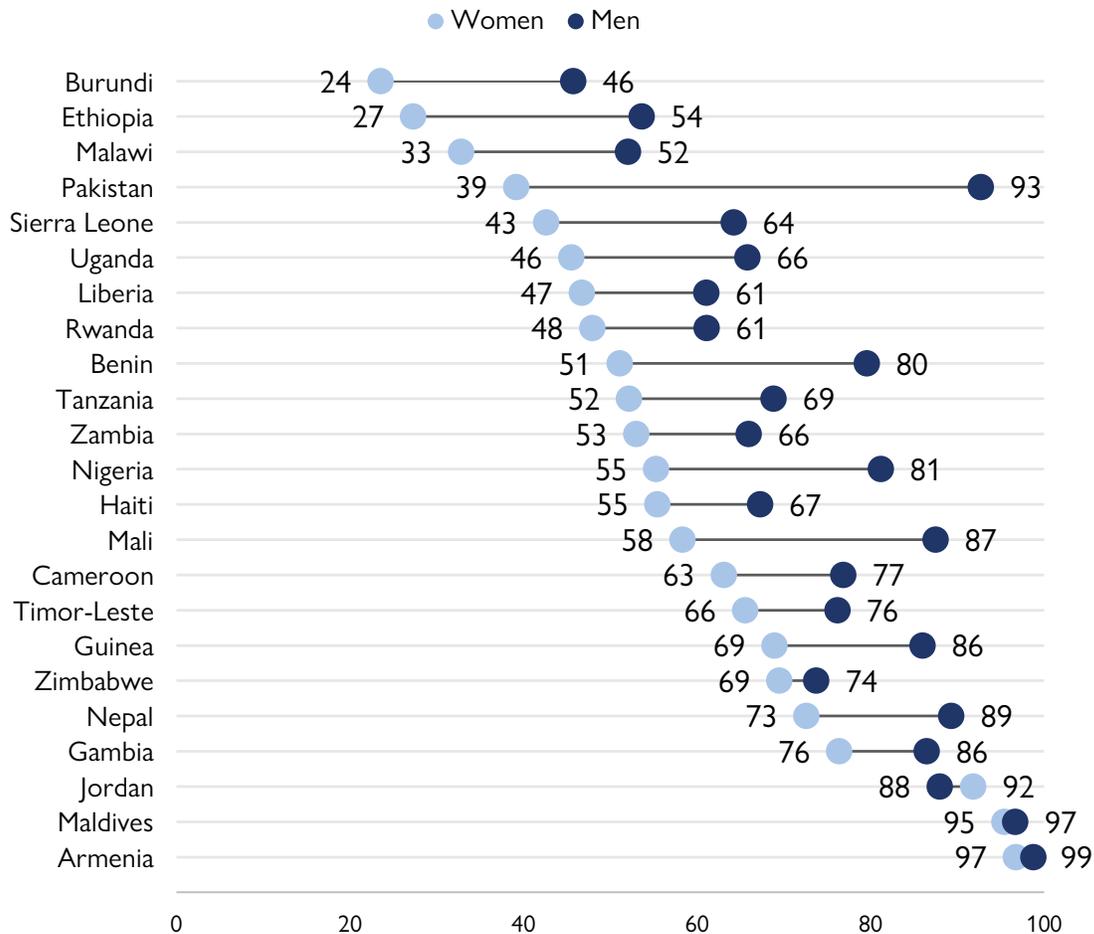
This study documents and describes the gender digital divide, comparing access to or use of digital resources (mobile phone ownership, use of a mobile phone for financial transactions, and internet use) among women and men and across residence, age, and wealth for women and men separately. This study also compares frequency of internet use with that of radio and television.

What are the key results?

- **Internet use lags behind use of traditional media like listening to the radio and watching television.** Radio use is lowest in Pakistan (4% among women and 8% among men) and highest in Haiti (63%, 79%) and Rwanda (62%, 80%). Fewer than 50% of women and men watch television at least once per week in most surveys. The majority of women and men access the internet weekly in only four countries (Armenia, Gambia, Jordan, Maldives). Elsewhere, fewer than one in four women use the internet this frequently.

- Mobile phone ownership is common in most countries**, more common than weekly Internet use. In all countries except Jordan, mobile phone ownership is more common among men than women. Figure 1 illustrates that the gender gap is lowest in Armenia and Maldives, where mobile phone ownership is also the most common among all study countries. The largest gender gap in mobile phone ownership is in Pakistan.

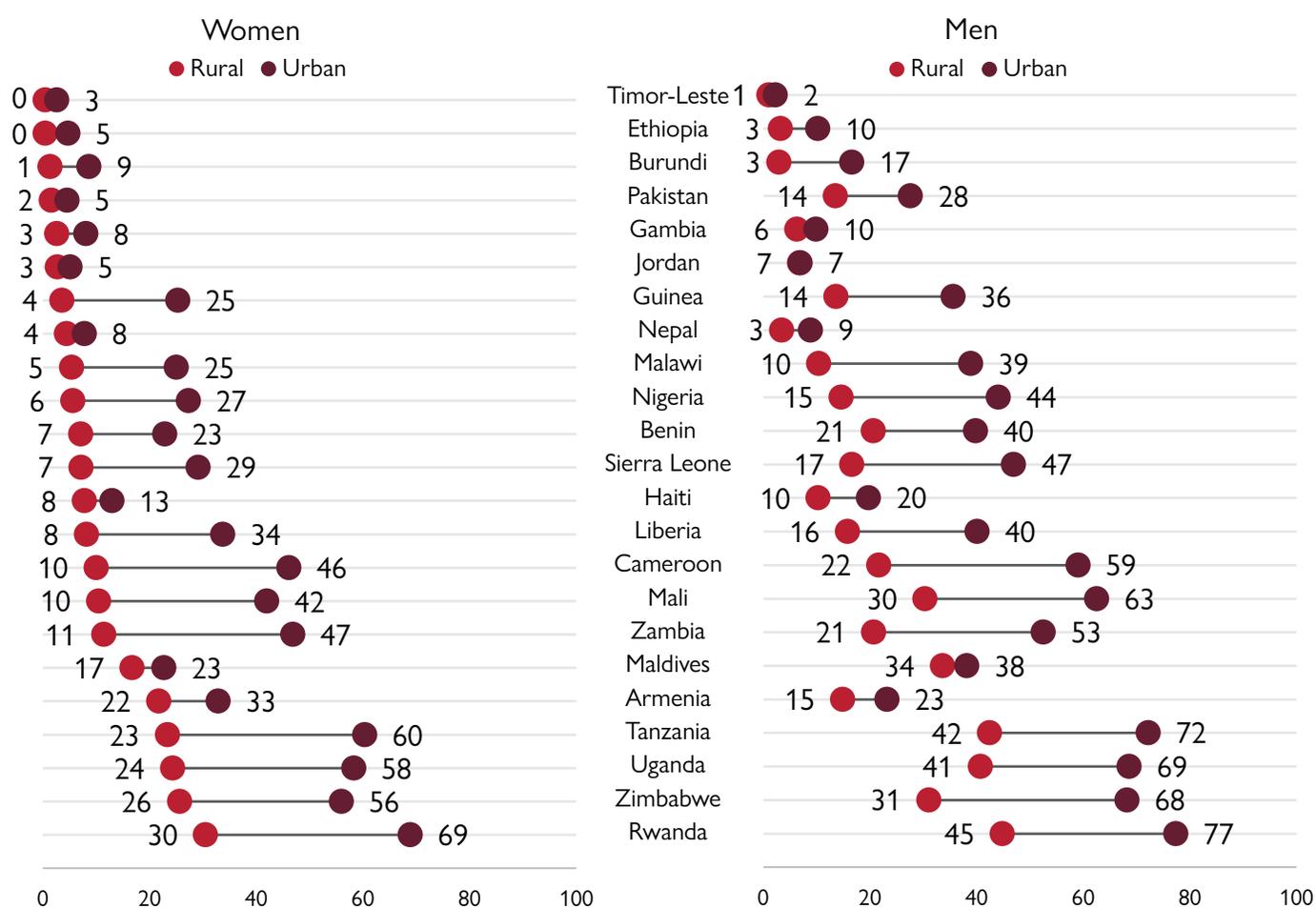
Figure 1. Percent of women and men who own a mobile phone.



Equiplots like the figures in this report and brief show the levels of an indicator for different groups and the gap between each group. Some equiplots, like in Figures 1 and 2, present indicators for two groups, such as women and men or rural and urban residents. Some equiplots, like in Figure 3, present digital resource access and use indicators for multiple groups, such as different age categories or wealth quintiles. These equiplots highlight patterns in digital resource access and use among different groups. Note that each equiplot is sorted lowest to highest by indicator value for women, so the order of study countries is different in each figure.

- **Overall levels of using a mobile phone for financial transactions are lower and gender gaps are smaller** compared with mobile phone ownership. In all countries but Armenia, men are more likely than women to use mobile phones for financial transactions. Women and men in urban areas consistently use their phones for financial transactions more than those in rural areas (see Figure 2).
- As can be seen in Figure 2, the urban-rural gap in use of a mobile phone for financial transactions is of a similar size for both women and men. The difference is largest for Rwandan women (38 percentage points between rural and urban residents) and Zimbabwean men (37 points difference).

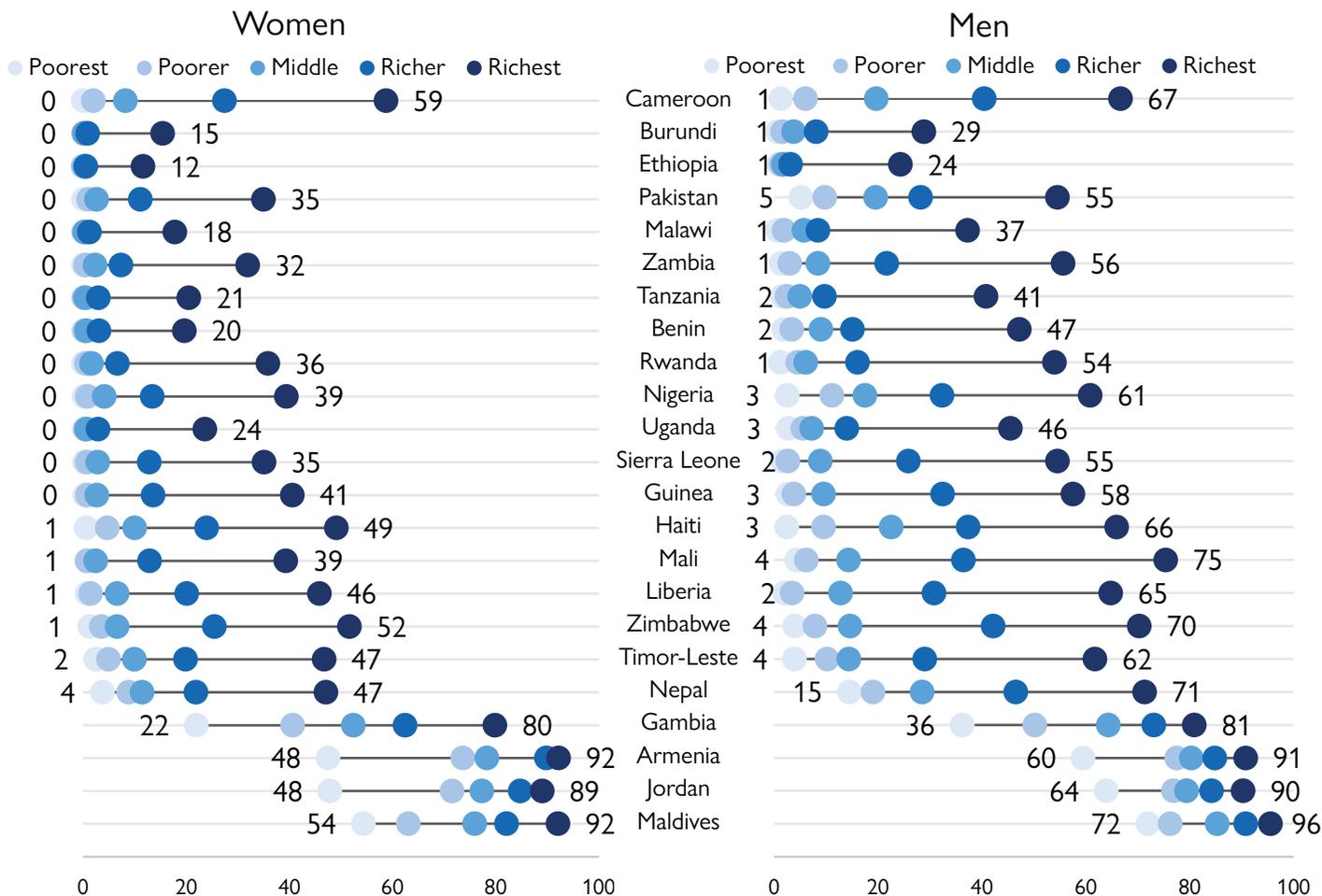
Figure 2. Percent of women and men who use a mobile phone for financial transactions, by residence.



- **Overall, weekly internet use is lower than either listening to the radio or watching television across study countries.** There is a clear gender gap favoring men. Internet use, like mobile phone ownership and mobile phone use for financial transactions, is highest among urban residents, the middle age groups, and richer groups.

- Figure 3 shows internet use among women and men by household wealth quintile. Internet use is most concentrated among the richest wealth quintile for In most study countries, internet use is nearly non-existent among the poorest women and men.

Figure 3. Percent of women and men who use the internet weekly, by household wealth quintile.



There are clear gender gaps in mobile phone ownership, their use for financial transactions, and weekly internet use, with the biggest gap in mobile phone ownership. Use of all three digital resources is higher among urban residents and wealthier groups.

How should these results be used?

Mobile health interventions should account for existing inequalities related to access and use of digital resources, innovate ways to reach intended target populations, and guard against unintentionally worsening existing health inequalities. A second report, [The Relationship between Digital Access and Use and Health Outcomes: Evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys](#), explores the impact of digital resource access and use on various health outcomes.

This brief summarizes The DHS Program’s Analytical Studies No. 83, by Kerry L. D. MacQuarrie, Jeffrey Edmeades, and Rebecca Rosenberg with funding from The United States Agency for International Development through The DHS Program implemented by ICF. For the full report or more information about The DHS Program, please visit <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-as83-analytical-studies.cfm>.