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CONCEPT NOTE

MOBILE LEARNING WEEK 2015



PREFACE

Education empowers women and girls. It provides them with the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives. The positive ripple effect of education for women and girls is so far-reaching that a number of international organizations, UNESCO and UN Women foremost among them, have persuasively argued it may be the single most effective tool for development.¹

When girls receive education they:

- ◆ marry later;
- ◆ have smaller and healthier families;
- ◆ gain skills needed to enter and succeed in the labour market;
- ◆ recognize the importance of health care and seek it for themselves and their children;
- ◆ understand their rights and gain the confidence to insist on them.²

Several international frameworks have formalized commitments to improving learning opportunities for women and girls. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action called on countries to ensure equal access to education for girls, eradicate female illiteracy and expand the availability of vocational training for women.³ Girls' education was singled out again in the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action and codified as one of six Education for All (EFA) goals. The goal on gender established two specific targets: 1) eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and 2) achieve gender equality in education by 2015.

These agreements frame and add urgency to questions about the place of women and girls' education in the post-2015 development agenda. A consensus has emerged that renewed impetus is needed to fully – and finally – ensure that women have equitable access to high quality education. The question of how this is best accomplished and what role technology can play is the starting point for Mobile Learning Week 2015.⁴

THE NEED FOR FOCUS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

Without question, opportunities for girls to receive education have expanded significantly over the past several decades. From 1970 onwards female enrolments have increased faster than those for males at all education levels. Today the percentage of girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools either equals or surpasses the percentage of boys in many countries.⁵ Worldwide, women and girls have better access to educational opportunities than at any time in the past, and these gains are translating into improved social and economic opportunities. Between 1980 and 2008, a period of explosive growth in female access to education, 552 million women joined the labour force, and today 4 out of every 10 workers globally are female.⁶

Yet despite this commendable progress, the quality of education remains unsatisfactory in many contexts, and access to education is still inequitable across gender lines. The character and magnitude of inequity vary from country to country, but the most serious problems tend to be concentrated in Africa and South Asia. Alarming, gender gaps in sub-Saharan Africa have widened at higher levels of schooling, a reverse of the global trend towards greater parity: between 1999 and 2010 the ratio of girls in secondary

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school fell from 83 to 82 girls per 100 boys, and from 67 to 63 girls per 100 boys at the tertiary level.⁷ This represents not only stalled progress but a reversion to the deep gender inequalities that characterized previous eras. At the primary school level, impressive gains made in the early 2000s have levelled off. In several low income countries it is not atypical to find only 7 girls enrolled in school per every 10 boys.⁸ The 2013/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report summed up the situation unambiguously: Worldwide 'girls are more likely to miss out on primary education' than boys and are afflicted by the 'most extreme cases of inequality in secondary education'.⁹

These disparities result in disproportional literacy rates for males and females.¹⁰ Globally, two out of every three illiterate adults are women.



In a handful of countries the literacy rate for women has yet to exceed 50 per cent. There are parallel problems in the youth population: of the 126 million youth who are illiterate, 61 per cent are female. Solving the illiteracy crisis has, to a large extent, become synonymous with strengthening learning for women and girls.

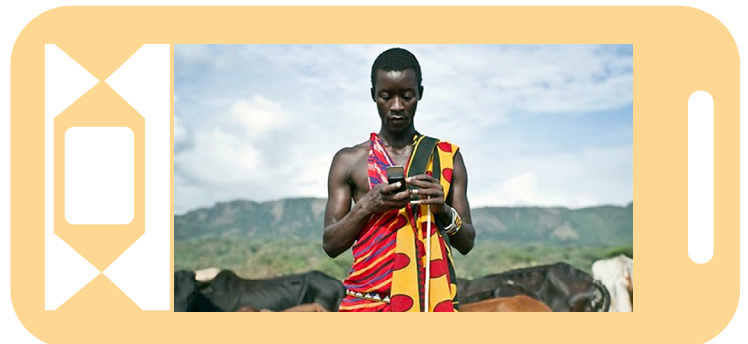
Gender inequalities in education are often exacerbated by socio-economic and geographic factors. Compared to men, women are far less likely to have access to quality education if they are poor and live in rural areas. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa 87 per cent of male children from rich, urban families complete primary school, but only 23 per cent of female children from poor, rural families do the same. Similarly, in South and West Asia nearly 90 per cent of rich, urban boys finish lower secondary school, versus only 13 per cent of poor, rural girls.¹¹ Girls, already at an educational disadvantage without accounting for class and geography, are at a substantially greater disadvantage relative to boys if they are poor and/or live outside of cities.

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to unlock educational opportunities. Worldwide, men are far more likely than women to use ICT both for learning and for professional purposes. Part of this is a problem of access. In low to middle income countries a woman is 21 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than a man, and the divide is similar for internet access.¹² Nearly 25 per cent fewer women than men have internet connectivity in developing countries and this gap rises to nearly 50 per cent in some regions.¹³ Another problem relates to ICT training. While access to technology is important, the mere availability of ICT does not always translate into its productive use. Targeted training helps people understand how to utilize mobile technology effectively, yet this training, when it exists at all, is often aimed at men or reflects male biases. This puts women at a disadvantage. In the twenty-first century, ICT proficiency is a core competency and increasingly a prerequisite for employment. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'if girls are to leave school ready to participate equally in the knowledge economy, then they too [like boys] will require the benefits of ICT-assisted instruction, including the knowledge, skills and attitudes imparted by using these tools!'¹⁴

Even in situations where girls and boys have equal access to ICT and ICT training, girls tend to lag behind boys in technology-related fields. A number of studies indicate that girls lack confidence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and, as a result, do not regularly pursue high-paying careers in fields like computer science.¹⁵ These perceptual problems can be traced to gender stereotypes, cultural barriers, inappropriate pedagogical practices and a dearth of gender-sensitive teaching and learning content. Gender gaps in STEM have persisted for far too long and solutions are urgently needed, particularly as employment prospects in STEM-related fields expand.

Collectively, the information above tells a clear story: despite progress over the past three decades, the goal of gender equality in education remains unfulfilled.



MOBILE LEARNING WEEK 2015

Mobile Learning Week 2015 (MLW 2015) will seek to illuminate how increasingly ubiquitous, affordable and powerful mobile technology – from basic handsets to the newest tablet computers – can be leveraged to accelerate high quality education for women and girls, especially those living in disadvantaged communities. The event aims to help direct the world towards greater gender equality, both in education and beyond.

MLW 2015 will provide a venue to learn about and discuss technology programmes, initiatives and content that are alleviating gender deficits in education.

Although not a panacea, mobile technology is a promising vehicle for improving education, due to a proliferation of educational content tailored for use on widely owned mobile devices. Current estimates from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) indicate that of the seven billion people on Earth, over six billion now have access to a working mobile device, meaning that mobile technology is now common in areas where women are underserved and educational opportunities are limited.¹⁶ Concurrent with this trend, a burgeoning number of programmes are utilizing mobile devices for learning and many have successfully targeted women and girls.

MLW 2015 will give participants a venue to learn about and discuss technology programmes, initiatives and content that are alleviating gender deficits in



education. The event will further encourage conversations about gender-sensitive approaches to the application and use of ICT in education. Participants will demonstrate how mobile technology can provide a tool for closing the access, knowledge and confidence gaps between males and females worldwide. The gender theme of the 2015 event will allow UNESCO and UN Women opportunities to engage questions that are not

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strictly about teaching and learning. For example, research indicates that women feel safer when they have and know how to use a mobile phone.¹⁷ In light of this, MLW 2015 will seek to improve participants' knowledge of strategies for using mobile devices to improve women and girls' safety and security, especially within the context of education.

It is vital that mobile learning's challenges are understood as clearly as its benefits. MLW 2015 will explore difficulties associated with the integration of mobile technology in education as well as its opportunities and advantages. The event will also examine mobile learning from a value perspective: that is, how the return on mobile learning investments compares to other non-ICT educational investments. As in previous years, MLW participants are encouraged to ask hard questions. The event aims to avoid boosterism and instead cultivate an atmosphere of critical inquiry, where sceptics as well as advocates of mobile learning can engage in constructive dialogue.

THE PATH AHEAD

With 2015 marking a major crossroads for a number of global normative agreements on education and development, the stakes for MLW 2015 could not be higher. Despite decades of progress, the world still has not achieved gender equality: women account for the majority of people living in poverty;¹⁸ one in three women will be a victim of violence;¹⁹ in most countries women's wages are between 70 and 90 per cent of men's wages;²⁰ less than 22 per cent of national parliamentarians are female;²¹ and only 18 per cent of companies worldwide have a top-level female manager.²² Mobile learning, if implemented appropriately, has the potential to begin reconciling these sobering deficits and move us closer to a world that embraces women as equal to men. MLW 2015 will explore how this crucial goal is best realized.



THEME AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

MLW 2015 will examine how various stakeholders can best utilize mobile devices – now and in the future – to achieve gender equality in education. This overarching theme will be underscored by four sub-themes, each with their own guiding questions:

1) EQUITABLE ACCESS

For women and girls to benefit from mobile learning they must be able to access, use and ideally own mobile technology. However, in many parts of the world women – whether for economic, social or cultural reasons – are unable to access even inexpensive devices such as basic mobile handsets. In low to middle income countries, 300 million more men than women own mobile phones,²³ and men are far more likely to use them to connect to the internet and download applications that increase economic, professional and educational opportunities.²⁴

How can access to technology be expanded to ensure women participate equally in mobile learning? How can gains in mobile device ownership for women be strengthened and sustained, especially in countries where there are cultural barriers to female technology use? What are the strategies for providing women and girls access to education through mobile technology? What are the best ways to assure the safety of women and girls who use mobile technology?

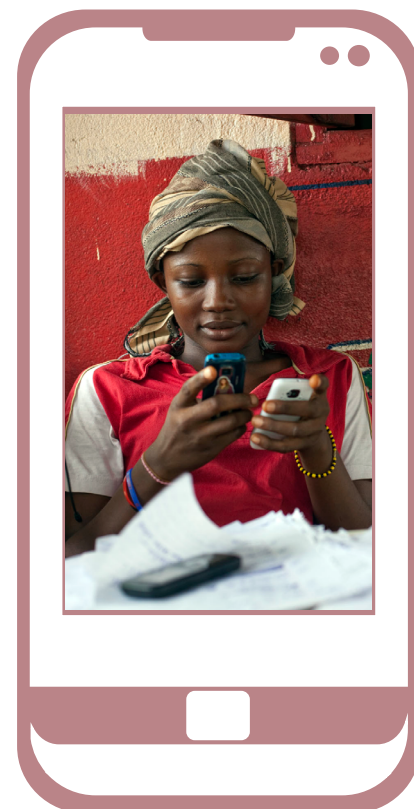
2) GENDER-SENSITIVE CONTENT & PEDAGOGY

Mobile learning content is often created without taking into account the specific needs of women and girls and the contexts in which they live. Existing content may perpetuate counterproductive gender stereotypes or rely on material which is either culturally irrelevant or inappropriate. Mobile learning initiatives should embrace gender-sensitive approaches and draw on lessons learned from previous initiatives. Also, because mobile learning content is frequently built from scratch, educators have a window of opportunity to incorporate gender-responsive material into mobile resources and pedagogies from an early stage.

What gender-sensitive mobile content and instructional approaches have worked well to encourage the equitable engagement of women and girls in education and combat negative attitudes and stereotypes? How can mobile technology



contribute to the development and distribution of gender-sensitive content, curricula and teacher training? In what ways can mobile devices be used to recruit and support female teachers? How can mobile learning address gender gaps in STEM subjects and facilitate women and girls' engagement in topics such as innovation, entrepreneurship, empowerment, individual rights and reproductive health?



3) LITERACY

Due to a history of educational inequity, many more women than men are illiterate: globally, 64 per cent of illiterate people are women.²⁵ Limited access to physical books and other learning materials disproportionately affects women, particularly in developing countries. Cultural norms can make it difficult for girls to leave home in order to attend literacy trainings or participate in outreach activities. Motherhood and assumed family obligations can further prevent women from building literacy skills in formal education settings.

How can mobile learning interventions break through barriers and promote literacy for women and girls in ways that are sustainable and scalable? How can mobile technology help develop essential literacies beyond reading and writing, such as media and technology literacy?

4) SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

In addition to supporting growth in traditional academic disciplines, mobile technology can be leveraged to help women find work, achieve autonomy and overcome poverty. Mobile devices can also help women connect with others and build networks to support learning and empowerment. Additionally, mobile technology can provide women with a portal to financial services, allowing them to gain access to credit and start businesses.

How can mobile technology promote gender equality in society at large? How can mobile learning help women transition from education to employment and become active citizens in their communities? How have mobile technologies helped to enhance the learning of women and girls outside of school, through lifelong learning programmes, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) initiatives, and efforts to bridge informal and formal education?

OBJECTIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCE

MLW 2015 has four core objectives, aligned with the four tracks of the week-long event:

- ◆ Build the capacity of mobile learning practitioners through knowledge-sharing **workshops**.
- ◆ Convene government representatives, education and mobile learning experts, gender specialists, project managers, researchers, and industry partners to share mobile learning innovations and best practices as they relate to gender equality during a two-day **symposium**.
- ◆ Provide a **policy forum** for government representatives to discuss ideas for mainstreaming and scaling up successful mobile learning interventions to promote gender equality in education. Building on existing policy and programming recommendations – such as the Education for All goals and the Beijing Declaration on the Status of Women – the forum will also ask officials to deliberate the role mobile technology should play in the post-2015 education and development agendas.
- ◆ Inform the future development of mobile learning to support gender equality through the sharing of research. The **research seminar** will provide insights into what questions need to be answered and how the field should move forward to extend the benefits of mobile learning to more women and girls. The seminar will further examine how to ensure women are actively engaged in shaping the future of mobile learning research.

MLW 2015 aims to cultivate an atmosphere of critical inquiry, where sceptics as well as advocates of mobile learning can engage in constructive dialogue.

MLW 2015 will host a diverse audience made up of:

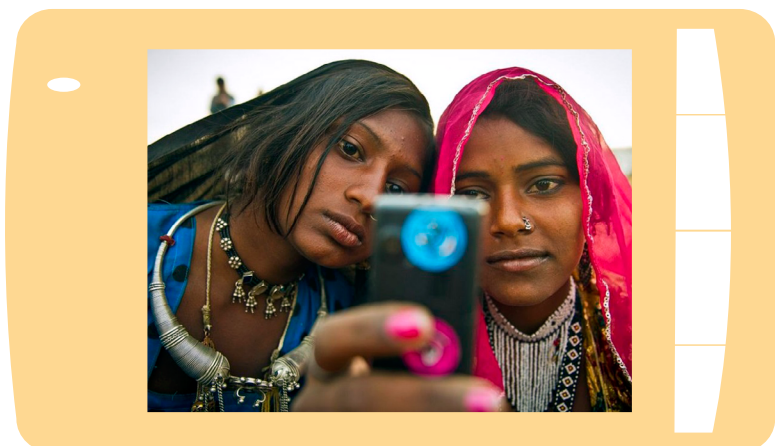
- ◆ Representatives of intergovernmental organizations and government sectors, particularly representatives from ministries of education, gender, ICT and finance.
- ◆ Civil society actors with a focus on gender and/or education.



- ◆ Researchers and practitioners in mobile learning and gender.
- ◆ Leaders of schools and teacher training institutions.
- ◆ Private sector stakeholders.

EXHIBITION

Since the first MLW in 2011, UNESCO has hosted an exhibition space where companies, individuals and NGOs are invited to showcase mobile learning initiatives, innovations, content and technology. The exhibition adds value to the overarching event by giving participants an outlet for disseminating information. It also ensures the participation of the private sector, which is a major stakeholder in the field of mobile learning.



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

The MLW 2015 week will be broken into four distinct tracks to engage a wide range of participants, including policy-makers, project managers, educators and researchers.

Monday, 23 February	Tuesday & Wednesday, 24–25 February	Thursday, 26 February	Friday, 27 February
WORKSHOPS	SYMPOSIUM	POLICY FORUM	RESEARCH SEMINAR
The workshops will be dedicated to hands-on training and interactive demonstrations of mobile learning content, technology and interventions.	The symposium will feature keynote speakers, expert panels and numerous breakout presentations. An exhibition will accompany the symposium, allowing various organizations opportunities to showcase work and share information.	The policy forum will bring together senior representatives from different countries to discuss how mobile learning can accelerate progress towards gender equality in education. The event will also explore how new educational technologies can contribute to post-2015 development priorities.	The research seminar will allow participants to share findings from investigations of mobile learning implementations. The seminar will also help improve communication between the research community and other stakeholder groups.

KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION EVENTS

New UNESCO and UN Women publications will be presented at MLW 2015. Anticipated UNESCO reports include a series of papers that describe and analyse mobile learning initiatives targeting women and girls; a comparative review of mobile learning projects to support teacher development in Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and Senegal; and information about an ongoing review of national mobile learning initiatives in Latin America. Relevant UN Women publications and documents will also be shared. UNESCO and UN Women further plan to release a joint statement articulating the potential of ICT to promote the education of women and girls.

IMPORTANT DATES

- October 2014** Registration opens; call for presentation proposals (workshops and symposium)
- December 2014** Notification of selected proposals
- February 2015** UNESCO Mobile Learning Week

EVENT WEBSITE

www.unesco.org/new/en/mlw



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