

Smartphones empowering women in sub-Saharan Africa, evidence suggests

June 2 2020, by Bob Yirka



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An international team of researchers has found evidence that shows giving women in sub-Saharan Africa smartphones leads to increased use of contraception, increased HIV testing and lower infant mortality rates. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their study of data from a wide variety of

sources that document women's health and economic issues in different parts of Africa, and what they learned from it.

As the researchers note, people living in sub-Saharan Africa are not just poor; they are also isolated in a way that has left them out of the technology revolution. Many have no access to electricity, radios or television, much less the internet. Prior research has shown that such isolation has led to a general lack of information for women, such as where they can obtain [birth control](#), or help when giving birth, or how to prevent HIV infections. In this new effort, the researchers note that one kind of modern technology has been making its way to sub-Saharan Africa—the smartphone. They wondered if its introduction and use might be helping women overcome information access hurdles. To find out, they analyzed pertinent information in seven datasets that represented answers to surveys of 113,620 women in sub-Saharan Africa between the years 2015 and 2016.

The researchers focused on differences between women who had access to a smartphone and women who did not. They found that women who had access to the internet through a smartphone reported having more say in decision-making in their household and were also more likely not only to know how and where to get tested for HIV, but actually to get tested. They also found babies born to women with phones were less likely to die in childbirth due to better access to [healthcare facilities](#).

The researchers also analyzed data from other datasets of information on women's issues representing 209 countries and covering the years 1993 to 2017. They showed that improved conditions for [women](#) with smartphones in sub-Saharan Africa were not coincidental to other improvements in their lives—instead, they were able to show that access to smartphones made the difference.

More information: Valentina Rotondi et al. Leveraging mobile phones

to attain sustainable development, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1909326117](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1909326117)

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Citation: Smartphones empowering women in sub-Saharan Africa, evidence suggests (2020, June 2) retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2020-06-smartphones-empowering-women-sub-saharan-africa.html>

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