UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS FUNDS:

An Untapped Resource to Close the Gender Digital Divide

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WORLD WIDE WEB FOUNDATION

A4AI ALLIANCE FOR AFFORDABLE INTERNET

UN WOMEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Achieving universal, affordable internet access is a key social and economic priority for countries around the world. The 193 member states of the United Nations agreed to work toward achieving this target by 2020 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, and most countries have policies in place to ensure that internet access and use is a reality for all.

To this end, many countries have established communal funds dedicated to expanding connectivity opportunities to unserved and underserved communities. These funds, known as Universal Service and Access Funds (USAFs), are typically financed through mandatory contributions by mobile network operators and other telecommunications providers.

Making effective use of these funds is a critical step on the path to realising our shared goal of access for all. We are on track to reach 50% internet penetration in 2018 — an exciting milestone, to be sure, but one that also highlights the distance we have to go. Connecting the last four billion will not happen through market forces alone; it will require targeted efforts aimed at connecting those least likely to be connected, including those in poor, rural and hard-to-reach communities. Above all, it will require efforts particularly targeted at connecting women, who comprise the majority of those offline today.

And yet, USAFs remain, for the most part, an untapped resource for working toward these aims. For this research, we set out to find out more about the use of USAFs in Africa — the region with the lowest rate of internet penetration (22%) and the widest digital gender gap (25%). How many of Africa's 54 countries have operational USAFs, if they have one at all? Are USAF funds being used to close the digital divide and, specifically, the gender digital divide? What can governments and fund operators do to improve the impact of USAF-funded initiatives and accelerate efforts to connect women and close the digital divide?

Our research has found:

Q **Over 68% of countries in Africa have a USAF in place; 62% of these funds are active.**

Q **Just 3 of the 37 countries with USAFs have universal access policies that explicitly aim to connect women and girls through the fund.**

Q **Just 23 African countries openly publish details on their USAF activities.**

Q **There is US$177 million sitting unspent in USAFs across the 13 African countries where these financial details are available.**

Q **Across all 37 USAFs in Africa, unspent funds total an estimated US$408 million.**

   This amount could bring approximately 6 million women online, or could be used to provide digital skills training to nearly 16 million women and girls.

Q **Disbursement rates for USAF funds are low, averaging around just 54% in 2016. Just four of the USAFs studied carry a zero balance: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda.**

Failure to take urgent action to close the digital divide — and to use resources dedicated specifically to doing so — will further widen the gulf between the digital haves and the digital have-nots, undermining economic growth and stunting global development in the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFICACY OF USAFS INCLUDE:

1. **Invest at least 50% of funds in projects targeting women's internet access and use.**

Establish clear targets to ensure timely disbursement of USAF funds, and measure fund performance using gender-specific targets for disbursements. Our analysis shows that in order to reduce the growing gender gap in internet use, USAFs should invest at least 50% of funds in projects aimed at bringing women online. This kind of targeted investment will be easier for the leadership and staff of USAFs where corresponding <u>universal access policies</u> also include goals and targets focused on internet access and use for women and girls.

2. **Make project design and implementation more gender-responsive.**

Open, consultative design and implementation processes are important to develop effective projects, but must take extra steps to include women's perspectives (e.g., via women-specific focus groups, targets for effective participation from both men and women) and perspectives from outside the ICT industry (e.g., partnerships with civil society and non-industry groups). USAFs should also work with mobile network operators and others to ensure that internet services meet the needs of both women and men.

3. **Increase transparency of fund financing, disbursements and operations.**

Ensure USAFs make data around fund contributions, disbursements, and project design and selection available to the public in an <u>open data</u> format, and that this data is disaggregated by gender and other factors (e.g., age, income), where possible.

4. **Improve diversity in USAF governance and increase awareness of gender issues within the USAF.**

Establish gender targets for USAF staff to ensure gender parity and introduce human resources policies that are supportive of both men and women (e.g., wage equality, maternity/paternity leave, etc.). USAF leadership should take steps to promote gender equality (and awareness around the importance of gender equality) within the USAF, and should consider deploying an internal gender audit to do so.

01

INTRODUCTION

The power of universal, affordable internet access to drive economic growth and social development is underscored by its inclusion as a goal in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as in national policies of most countries.

However, current trends suggest that we are unlikely to achieve this target. Across the globe, nearly four billion people are still offline — over two billion of these are women. Compared to men, women are less likely to access the internet generally, and the mobile internet specifically; even when they are online, women are less likely than men to use it to improve their lives. What's more, this digital gender gap is growing wider across the globe.

Working to close the digital gender gap is vital to making universal access a reality, and doing so requires urgent, targeted action to address the specific barriers to internet access and use faced by women.

This challenge is particularly acute in Africa, which currently has both the lowest levels of internet use (22%), and the largest gender gap in use (25.3%). Failure to address this gender gap in internet access and use will result in failure to achieve national and global access targets, which will in turn decrease the profitability of the ICT sector and overall socio-economic development.

Universal Service and Access Funds (USAFs) are a funding mechanism to incentivise the expansion of internet services in remote and underserved locations. These funds — typically financed through mandatory contributions from telecommunications service providers — are designed explicitly to address access and use gaps in communications services.

USAFs offer a promising path to develop and implement the policies and programmes needed to close the digital divide and, specifically, to tackle barriers to internet access and use for women. But, as previous research has shown, they are often an untapped or otherwise underutilised resource for financing universal access

efforts. This issue is compounded by the fact that information — let alone up-to-date data — on the use and effectiveness of USAFs is often kept behind closed doors, or is missing entirely.

This study represents an effort to tackle these challenges, and to learn more about if and how USAFs are being used to close the digital divide — and specifically, the gender digital divide — in Africa. Based on the findings of this research, we propose ways these funds could be better leveraged to improve internet access and use, particularly for women and girls. These findings should be used to support a serious discussion about the policy and regulatory changes needed to effectively use USAFs to connect the unconnected and close the digital gender gap.

WHAT IS A UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS FUND?

Universal Service and Access Funds (USAFs) are public funds — financed primarily through contributions made by mobile network operators and other telecommunications companies — intended to expand communications services to underserved areas and populations.

USAFs provide a mechanism for ensuring that the contributions made to the fund are put toward market developments that will benefit citizens, and will create new business opportunities for telecommunications companies and content providers alike.[1] Ideally, the services developed through the USAF will become commercially sustainable.[2]

Properly administered, a USAF serves as a collective investment mechanism for the telecommunications industry as a whole, rather than a vehicle for social welfare redistribution of private income. Since the financial benefits of extending service to these underserved areas (mostly poor and rural communities) may be slower to materialise, the USAF approach is designed to tackle this market failure and develop a 'win-win' situation for both industry and society by developing new markets and ensuring wider access to the social benefits of connectivity.

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1   This increased business may come through, for example, increased inter-regional call revenues, equipment purchases, and general online demand stimulation.
2   For a more detailed discussion of USAFs and how operate see: A4AI (2015) Universal Access and Service Funds in in the Broadband Era: The Collective Investment Imperative. Washington DC: A4AI. Available online:http://a4ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/A4AI-USAF_06.2015_FINAL.pdf

02

USING UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS FUNDS TO CLOSE THE GENDER GAP IN INTERNET ACCESS AND USE

Well-managed USAFs can make major, systemic <u>impacts</u> on efforts to close the digital divide by financing, for example, infrastructure expansion (e.g., fibre backbone networks), digital skills training, and free or subsidised <u>access</u> to devices and/or internet in community spaces (e.g., schools, libraries, health clinics).

The power of these funds to close the digital divide can be amplified by concentrating funds on efforts to tackle the growing digital gender gap, and programmes that specifically target the unique barriers to connectivity faced by women. These might include public access spaces designed with women's safety in mind, <u>public WiFi</u> spots or zones, <u>subsidised devices</u> for women or a <u>second device</u> for households, and <u>digital skills training</u> in schools and for women and girls.

Unfortunately, it appears that USAFs across the globe are failing to realise this potential. Worldwide, nearly 38% of low- and middle-income countries do not have a USAF, or have one that is inactive.[3] These instances of ineffective use and mismanagement result directly from lack of strategic planning and capacity, and failures of accountability, participation and transparency in USAF governance.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the use of USAFs to improve women's access and use largely remains a missed opportunity. The challenges here result also from USAF inactivity and mismanagement, and are compounded by the fact that many governments do not yet have <u>gender-responsive ICT policies</u> that, at a minimum, recognise the potential of USAFs as tools to help overcome the digital gender gap and work toward the <u>global goals</u> of universal access (SDG 9c) and women's empowerment through ICTs (SDG 5b).

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3   38% of the 58 low- and middle-income countries assessed in the A4AI 2017 Affordability Report.

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UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS FUNDS IN AFRICA
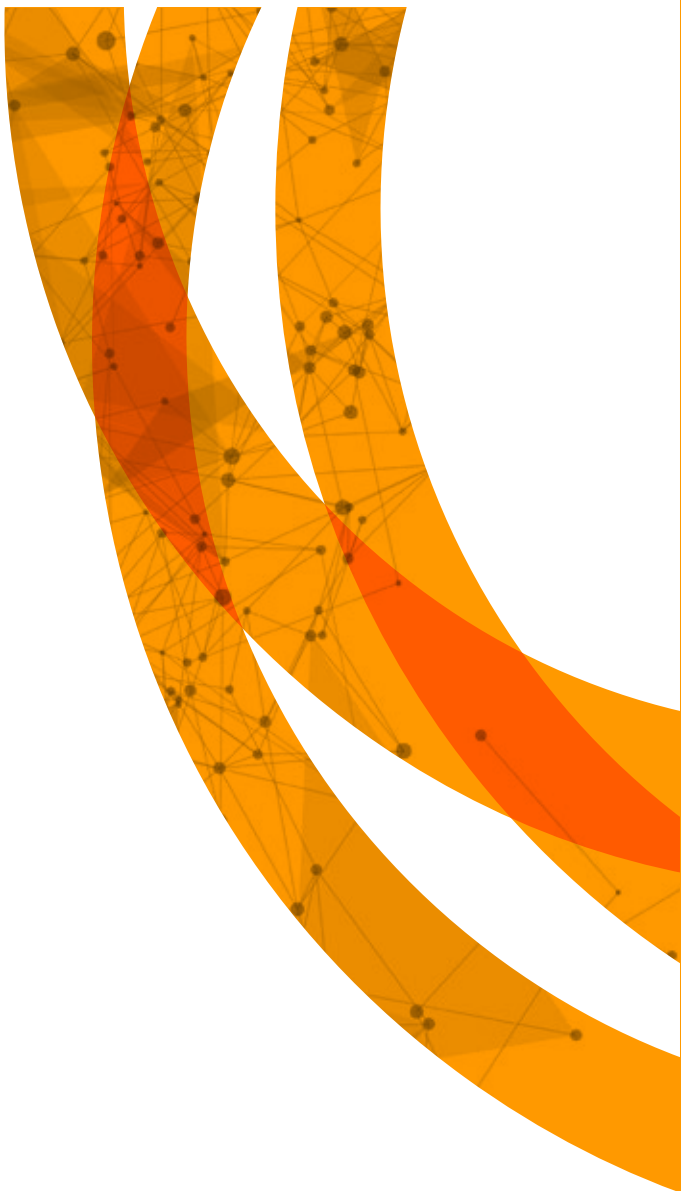
How active are USAFs in Africa?

A total of 37 countries in Africa (68%) have USAFs; 23 of these funds are active (i.e., there is evidence of project disbursements within the last five years).[4]

Table 1 — Status of USAFs in Africa

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES
ACTIVE	23
INACTIVE	14
NO FUND	5
NO INFORMATION AVAILABLE	12
TOTAL	**54**

Source: A4AI 2017

Of the 37 funds that exist in Africa, 23 publish reports on their activities (e.g., connectivity projects the USAF might have supported in a given period).[5] This summary does not differentiate between the levels of frequency with which these reports are produced — i.e., some reports are produced annually, others are not and are a few years old.[6] These reports may include project expenditures, however, they do not always include financial details of the fund itself. Thus, some USAFs might publish reports on their activities and not include details on revenues, expenditures, or unspent funds.

Figure 1 — Availability of reports and data on USAF activities

YES
23 COUNTRIES
(42.6%)

NO
14 COUNTRIES
(25.9%)

NO FUND
5 COUNTRIES
(9.3%)

NO INFO
12 COUNTRIES
(22.2%)
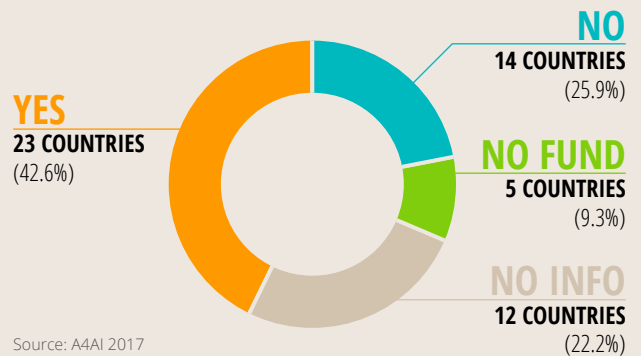
Source: A4AI 2017

4   We were unable to determine the status of the USAF (if any) for 12 countries, due to a lack of information. For a list of countries under each category, see the Annex.
5   The 23 countries that publish activity reports do not necessarily correspond to the 23 countries with active USAFs.
6   For a full list of countries under each category, see the Annex.

Are the funds collected in African USAFs being used?

USAFs are commonly criticised for collecting funds but not spending them on connectivity projects, or not spending the funds in a timely manner. Assessing this claim was challenging: Recent data on the level on unspent USAF funds in Africa was available for just 13 countries (out of the 37 that have funds).[7]

Across just these 13 countries, unspent USAF funds total approximately US$177 million.

An estimated US$408 million is sitting unspent across all 37 African countries with a USAF in place (active or inactive).[8]

This is a significant amount, especially when we consider the impact these funds could have in helping to bridge the digital gender gap. For example, putting these unspent funds toward a programme providing a 75% subsidy for mobile internet access for six months (covering both the price of an internet-enabled handset and a 1GB mobile data plan) could help to bring nearly 6 million women online[9] — an investment that could reduce the gap in the number of men and women using the internet in Africa by nearly 15%.[10] The same funds could also be used to train as many as 15.7 million women and girls across Africa — helping to tackle one of the main barriers to internet use among women and girls.[11]

Table 2 — Total unspent funds of USAFs in Africa (based on most recent reporting year)

COUNTRY	YEAR OF MOST RECENT REPORT	ESTIMATED UNSPENT FUNDS (US$ MILLION)
BENIN	2016	9.65
BOTSWANA	2016	14.02
BURKINA FASO (currently inactive and preparing for disbursements)	2016	77.71
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	2017	0.00
GHANA	2016	5.89
KENYA	2016	42.01
LIBERIA (currently inactive and preparing for disbursements)	2016	0.47
MADAGASCAR	2015	15.54
MOZAMBIQUE	2016	1.32
NIGERIA	2016	0.00
RWANDA	2016	0.00
SOUTH AFRICA	2016	10.00
UGANDA	2015	0.00
TOTAL		**176.6**

Source: A4AI Interviews with USAFs (2018), ECOWAS surveys (2017), and publicly available information.

7   Unspent funds refers to the balance remaining in the USAF at the end of the reporting year. We assessed this using the most recently available data between 2015 and 2017.
8   To determine this amount we calculated total funds collected using total annual operator revenues (ITU, 2017) from the remaining 24 countries with USAFs (active and inactive) and the reported annual USAF levy charged on operators (actual levy reported for 23 countries; for the remaining country we used average rate of 1.98%). Finally, we then determined funds unspent by using an average disbursement ratio (54%), as calculated in Table 3.
9   Using average price of 1GB of mobile internet data in Africa in 2016 (US$8.71) and price of a low-cost handset (US$40), a 75% subsidy on the combined cost of getting someone online for six months would be US$69.
10 Based on 2016 figures. .
11 Calculated using World Economic Forum estimated cost of US$26/person to provide target groups in East Africa with relevant digital skills training.

How efficiently are USAF funds disbursed in Africa?

While looking at unspent USAF funds can give insight into the effectiveness of a USAF, this indicator only provides a snapshot of a specific year for a fund that, in theory, continually receives and disburses money. As seen in Table 2 above, **just four USAFs carried a zero balance at the end of their last reporting year: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda.**

Of these four countries, two (Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire) have laws or other rules governing the USAF which require all money in the fund to be spent by the end of each fiscal year — rules that ostensibly promote timely disbursements, but whose effectiveness can be difficult to assess given the general lack of transparency around how these funds are disbursed. (For example, while Uganda's Rural Communications Development Fund carried a zero balance at the end of 2015, their annual report showed remittances worth UGX 16 billion made to other agencies; opaque official reporting around the fund and its disbursements makes it difficult to determine whether these remittances were in fact related to the USAF's access mandate and therefore whether these should actually be considered 'unspent funds'.)

A complementary approach is to look at disbursement ratios over time. This means examining how much of the revenue collected each year was actually disbursed.[12] For the purposes of our research, we looked at disbursements over a five-year period, in order to provide a sufficient overview of disbursements over time.[13]

Over the five-year period assessed, **the overall average[14] disbursement rate is low — ranging from 47% in 2012 to 54% in 2016**. This suggests that much more work can be done to disburse funds on a timely basis. We estimate that there is a similar pattern across other countries in the continent and that these slow rates of disbursements contribute to the level of unspent funds listed in Table 2 above.

Table 3 illustrates the range in the efficient disbursement of funds across the six countries for which multi-year data is available. For example, the overall average improvement in disbursements seen in 2016 (when fund disbursements grew to approximately 54% of revenues for that year) was driven in large part by Benin, Ghana, and Rwanda, where reported expenditures were 100% of revenues collected from fund contributors (e.g., mobile network operators, government sources, etc.). Mozambique follows with 35% expenditure, while Burkina Faso is still preparing project investment plans and has yet to disburse funds, and Kenya has not disbursed any funds in the two years for which we have data (2015 and 2016).

Table 3 — Annual USAF disbursements (as a percentage of revenues collected in each year)

YEAR	BENIN	GHANA	MOZAMBIQUE	RWANDA	KENYA[15]	BURKINA FASO
2012	0%	100%	NO DATA	60%	-	0%
2013	0%	100%	NO DATA	61%	-	0%
2014	31%	79%	NO DATA	100%	-	0%
2015	100%	84%	39%	86%	0%	0%
2016	100%	100%	35%	100%	0%	0%

Source: A4AI Interviews with USAFs (2018), ECOWAS surveys (2017), and publicly available information.

12 A disbursement ratio it is the percentage of revenues collected in a given year that were disbursed in that same year. Based on this definition, a fund may have a disbursement rate of 100% in a given year and still have an unspent balance at the end of that year because it carried over a balance from the previous year and did not spend all of it. Thus, some countries in Table 3 with a disbursement ratio of 100% still report an unspent balance in Table 2.
13 Given the limited financial data available, we were only able to examine the annual revenues and expenditures of six countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, and Rwanda. Data for these countries, summarised in Table 3, was collected through publicly available annual reports, or was provided by fund managers.
14 Using a two-year moving average.
15 According the Communication Authority's Annual Report (2014/15), Kenya's USF started collection of levies in March 2015.

04

MAKING USAFS MORE EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO REDUCE THE DIGITAL GENDER GAP

As the above analysis shows, USAFs remain an incredible and untapped resource for funding programmes and projects to close the digital divide and specifically, the gender digital divide.

While a few countries show positive signs, with little to no unspent funds and high disbursement ratios, USAFs in Africa, overall, have vast room to improve their effectiveness through, for example, more efficient disbursements, and increased investment in projects aiming to expand women's access to and use of the internet.

Recommendation 1:

Invest at least 50% of funds in projects targeting women's internet access and use

USAFs are instruments designed to implement universal access and national ICT policies. In many cases, they do a reasonable job of adhering to the strategic goals outlined in those policies. However, as we have noted, they will not succeed without also targeting the growing digital gender gap. This kind of targeted investment will be easier for the leadership and staff of USAFs where the corresponding universal access policies also include goals and targets focused on internet access and use for women and girls. Such policies can be articulated through the Web Foundation's R.E.A.C.T. framework, which calls for policies that focus on improving online **rights**, ICT skills **education**, **access** to affordable internet, creation of local and relevant **content**, and which contain concrete, time-bound **targets** for achieving the above.

A review of the existing 30 universal access policies for USAFs in Africa (that we were able to access) shows that only three countries make specific reference to underserved groups, such as women, in their strategies: Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda. This is unacceptable, particularly given the scope of the digital gender gap on the continent.

Unfortunately, it is not altogether surprising: these policies are frequently based on international good

practice targeted at closing the digital divide and **'good practice' on the design of universal access policies too often ignores the digital gender gap**. For example, many USAFs employ access gap models to identify where the market can potentially provide access and service and where it is not financially feasible for mobile network operators and other ISPs to do so without a subsidy or other support. This is precisely the point at which an analysis of the gender gap would be useful, but such analyses are not typically included in access gap models.

Where universal access policies do lay out gender-based targets (e.g., increase internet use among women by 25% in the next five years), clear and concrete USAF disbursement targets are needed to help realise access goals. These disbursement targets can specify investments in programmes aimed at connecting women and closing the gender, and wider, digital divide. **Yet, none of the funds we examined contained gender-specific disbursement targets**.

Earlier, we estimated that the total sum of unspent funds sitting in African USAFs could be used to subsidise mobile handset and data costs to bring as many as 5.9 million women online. Using data from the six countries in Table 3, we found that if these USAFs allocated 50% of disbursements toward such a programme, it would take, on average, around 12 years to eliminate their gender gap in internet access.[16] If they allocated 100% of funds toward such a programme, this gap would be eliminated in just six years.

Given the range of factors influencing the size of the digital gender gap in Africa, we argue that, at a minimum, **USAFs should set a target to allocate at least 50% of funds toward projects to increase internet use among women over a five-year period**, with opportunities for review after this period.

Recommendation 2:

Make project design and implementation more gender-responsive

The development of gender-responsive universal access policies must be complemented by **gender-responsive and participatory project design**. Project design needs to take into account the needs of all — regardless of gender, political, religious, and ethnic affiliations. Several of the USAF managers we spoke to highlighted their use of such a participatory approach, underscoring the fact that they regularly invite local governments and communities to share inputs on their needs, appropriate solutions, and project design.[17]

At face value, this participatory approach to project design seems like it would take into consideration the needs of all groups; however, this approach assumes that everyone has an equal voice and opportunity to contribute — an assumption that was echoed by a number of the (male) USAF managers we interviewed.

Unfortunately, **participatory design does not necessarily accommodate women's perspectives**. Indeed, even where inputs from both men and women are sought in project design, social norms and other circumstances can prevent women from fully participating. As one USAF manager we spoke to noted:

"There is less interest in rural communities by women in participating in ICT …. On the basis of tradition (norms), they are not interested in participating in digital spaces. This has an impact on policy and programme design."[18]

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16   Assuming that the gender gap remains at the same level over this period. In 2017, the ITU reported that Africa was the only region in the world where this gap is growing.
17   USAF Interview, February 2018.
18   USAF Interview, February 2018.

When it comes to addressing the lack of adoption and use among women, incorporating women's perspectives in project design is critical. To overcome social or other barriers to female participation, USAFs should consider using women facilitators in community and other design sessions, hosting gender-balanced or, where necessary, women-only focus groups to get feedback, and setting out clear targets for effective participation from women, men, and other groups.

Project design can also be strengthened and made more gender-inclusive by **partnering with groups outside the ICT industry** (e.g., civil society, wider government ministries, and companies working across industries). The Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC), for example, partnered with several national trade associations to determine access needs among Ghanaians and, based on the information learned through this partnership, decided to use USAF funds to support an ICT skills training programme for hairdressers and others working in the services sector.[19] A more systematic approach to encourage regular consultation and partnership with non-industry groups, including women's rights organisations, would lead to greater impact. Indeed, public expenditure — which often overlooks the needs of women — can be made more equitable and effective when gender perspectives are considered.[20]

USAF policies and programmes should also work to consider all aspects of women's access. While tackling barriers around cost (via free or subsidised internet access and equipment) and digital skills (via ICT training programmes) are critical, the impact of these investments can be strengthened by investing in projects that look beyond these two areas. For example:

- Funds can partner with mobile network operators to ensure that the mobile data plans they offer — and the content they subsidise as part of many of these plans — are appealing to both men and women. Our research has shown that men are more likely than women to save money by purchasing service-specific (e.g., social media) data bundles and larger full-cost data plans (e.g., over 1GB, which are cheaper per MB); greater insight into women's access and

content needs would allow operators to offer plans tailored to women.

- Funds can also be used to tackle issues around availability of local and relevant content, by partnering with local content developers (and particularly women developers) to fund the creation of content relevant to women and girls.

- Finally, governments are justifiably keen on supporting entrepreneurs as their work can have wider socio-economic impacts. This points to an opportunity for USAFs to invest in ICT entrepreneurs, including women (see box below).

USAFs Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

- The Rwanda Universal Access Fund supports the Ms. Geek Africa programme — a competition run by Girls in ICT Rwanda, which aims to encourage girls to participate in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Girls aged 13-21, who are citizens of a SMART Africa member country, are eligible to enter the competition, which awards prizes for the most innovative technical solution that addresses some of Africa's challenges. Winners receive prizes in cash and equipment, as well as training and mentorship to further develop their innovations.

- In Ghana, GIFEC has invested in the Digital For Inclusion programme, which includes, among other things, mobile financial services via a digital payment platform. The program has reserved 60% of the local agent positions that sell services for the platform for women.

- In Benin, l'Agence Béninoise du Service Universel des Communications Électronique et de la Poste (ABSU-CEP) has supported the OWODARA project, which developed a mobile phone-based system to provide prices of local agricultural goods (e.g., corn, millet, soybeans, peanuts, etc.) for the benefit of rural women entrepreneurs.[21]

19 GIFEC Interview, February 2018.
20 Stotsky, M. J. G. (2016). Gender budgeting: Fiscal context and current outcomes. Washington DC: International Monetary Fund.

21 ABSU-CEP Interview, February 2018.

Recommendation 3:

Increase transparency of fund financing, disbursements and operations

Just 23 states openly publish details on their USAF activities — and these details may not always include complete financial details. Though published details often list projects that have been financed through the USAF, it is difficult to determine why these projects were selected, who participated in their design, and who the intended beneficiaries are. For USAFs to have a meaningful impact, they must operate using non-discriminatory rules (including the selection of projects, award of contracts, and disbursements). In order to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of USAFs and possible paths for improving efforts to reach unserved and underserved populations, more transparent reporting around USAF financing and disbursements is required. This level of transparent reporting will also benefit the USAF's own planning and targeting efforts, and offers an opportunity to demonstrate to the fund's contributors a clear return on investment.

One way to achieve this is through the use of open data that is disaggregated by, for example, gender, age, or income.[22] USAFs can adopt and employ open data practices when providing data on annual revenues and disbursements, project information, and other metrics tracking fund performance. Ensuring this data is also disaggregated by gender can help to more accurately track progress toward access targets for women and girls, and improve overall monitoring and evaluation. There are also several potential benefits to this approach, from improved public accountability and confidence in fund management, to support for data-driven research which can, in turn, improve the operations and targeting of the fund, and encourage entrepreneurial opportunities.

Recommendation 4:

Increase awareness of gender issues and improve diversity within USAFs

Telecommunications is often thought of, mistakenly, as gender neutral. Technology, both in its design and deployment, affects men and women differently; for this reason, programmes and initiatives designed to increase ICT access and use for all require different and targeted approaches. In order to truly make progress toward closing the gender — and wider — digital divide, USAF managers must consider gender dimensions in project design and fund disbursement.

Based on our interviews, there are three commonly held beliefs that lead people to dismiss the importance of gender-responsive project design and management:

The government has already taken steps to address gender equality (e.g., adopting a national gender policy). Unfortunately, as we have shown, there is no evidence that these broad policies translate into actual impact on the management of USAFs.

USAFs are already investing in projects to reduce the digital divide and these should be sufficient to meet the unique needs of women. This statement assumes that the benefits distributed are equally accessible by all; the reality is that women commonly face additional barriers when accessing public resources. Though public access centres are open to all, women have reported feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in male-dominated spaces. Additional measures to overcome such challenges (e.g., separate computer areas for women, public WiFi hotspots, etc.) are required to ensure access is truly available to all.

At least gender discrimination in our country isn't as bad as it is in other countries.[23] The reality is that most gender discrimination is systemic and a function of everyday norms that we all take for granted, even when laws are in place to prevent it. Without programmes designed specifically to tackle these barriers to access for women, the digital

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22   Unfortunately, very few governments actually provide publicly available open data sets. See https://webfoundation.org/research/open-data-barometer-fourth-edition/
23   This attitude is not unique to Africa; this point was also raised in separate discussions we've had with policymakers in Latin America and the Caribbean.

gender gap is likely to continue growing wider. Ensuring these programmes are effective in their goals will also require increasing and improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data, and data on the gender gap itself.[24]

It is important to point out that no special skills are required to incorporate gender issues into USAF operations: **USAFs do not need a specific 'gender expert' on staff in order to address the gender digital gap**. In fact, one of the indirect (and positive) outcomes of the interviews we conducted is that they encouraged the USAF managers to think about the importance of gender at several levels of the USAF's operations — an issue many had not previously considered.

To achieve the points laid out above, it is important to consider the gendered impact of technology interventions, as well as the gender makeup of the institutions implementing those interventions. The staff of most USAFs is composed mostly of men, with women making up just 18% to 30% of staff.[25] Though a number of fund managers we spoke to suggested that there are equal opportunities for both men and women to join the staff, the low level of women's representation suggests that current recruitment practices are insufficient.

Having more women on staff — particularly in the selection, design, and implementation of access and use projects — will improve the impact of these projects for women, as well as for the full population. Doing so will require a proactive approach to reaching gender equity among staff at all levels. For example, USAFs can actively promote their work at girls schools and similar organisations, develop mentorship programs for junior staff, ensure that recruitment

teams are gender balanced, and include gender-balanced representation (e.g., photos of both men and women) on all reports, websites, and publicity materials.

It is also important to consider the internal human resource policies of the USAF. Such policies can be important in ensuring that the workplace environment is supportive for women and men. This includes having policies that support wage equality for similar positions, flexible work policies, policies to prevent and address sexual harassment, and mandated maternity/paternity leave. In some cases, the USAF will be a public sector agency and will defer to the government's wider public sector policies, implying that efforts to improve such policies will require engagement with other government organisations.[26] When asked about the digital gender gap, some respondents acknowledged that introducing gender-based criteria throughout USAF mechanisms (e.g., project selection and design) would be helpful. A similar gender consideration process may be useful to USAF staff across the board.

One way to engage in such an exercise would be to conduct a 'gender audit' within the organisation responsible for managing and disbursing USAF funds. Such an exercise would allow staff members to examine the implications of considering — or not considering — gender issues in their work, ideally through individual surveys and group discussion. The goal of such an exercise would be to ensure that by promoting gender equality internally, the USAF will be able to deliver more gender equitable interventions externally, and ultimately move faster toward universal access.

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24 See https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/ and https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2018/Individuals%20using%20the%20 Internet%20by%20gender%20-%20Jan2018.xls

25 This data was only available for three funds, and only one —the Rwanda Universal Access Fund — published data on the gender makeup of its staff (although even in that case the data was for the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, which manages the fund, and not for the staff directly responsible for the fund.

26 In Mozambique, the government's public sector human resource policy applies to the staff of the USAF and was recently updated in 2017. It now allows up to three months maternity leave, and one week paternity leave.

CONDUCTING A USAF GENDER AUDIT:

A step-by-step approach [27]

1. Prepare the organisation. Ensure buy-in from all staff, including senior management, and explain the rationale for and process of the exercise.

2. Conduct a survey of staff perceptions and attitudes toward gender issues internally and externally. This should include questions that probe some of the assumptions raised above.

3. Based on the results of the survey, conduct focus group discussions with staff members to look at the some of the problems raised, and to identify solutions the USAF can adopt to improve gender equality internally.

4. Develop a gender action plan, based on survey results and focus group discussions. This will lay out strategies and next steps for integrating gender perspectives into organisational processes and increasing staff awareness around gender.

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27 Adapted from The Gender Audit Handbook (InterAction, 2010).

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ANNEX
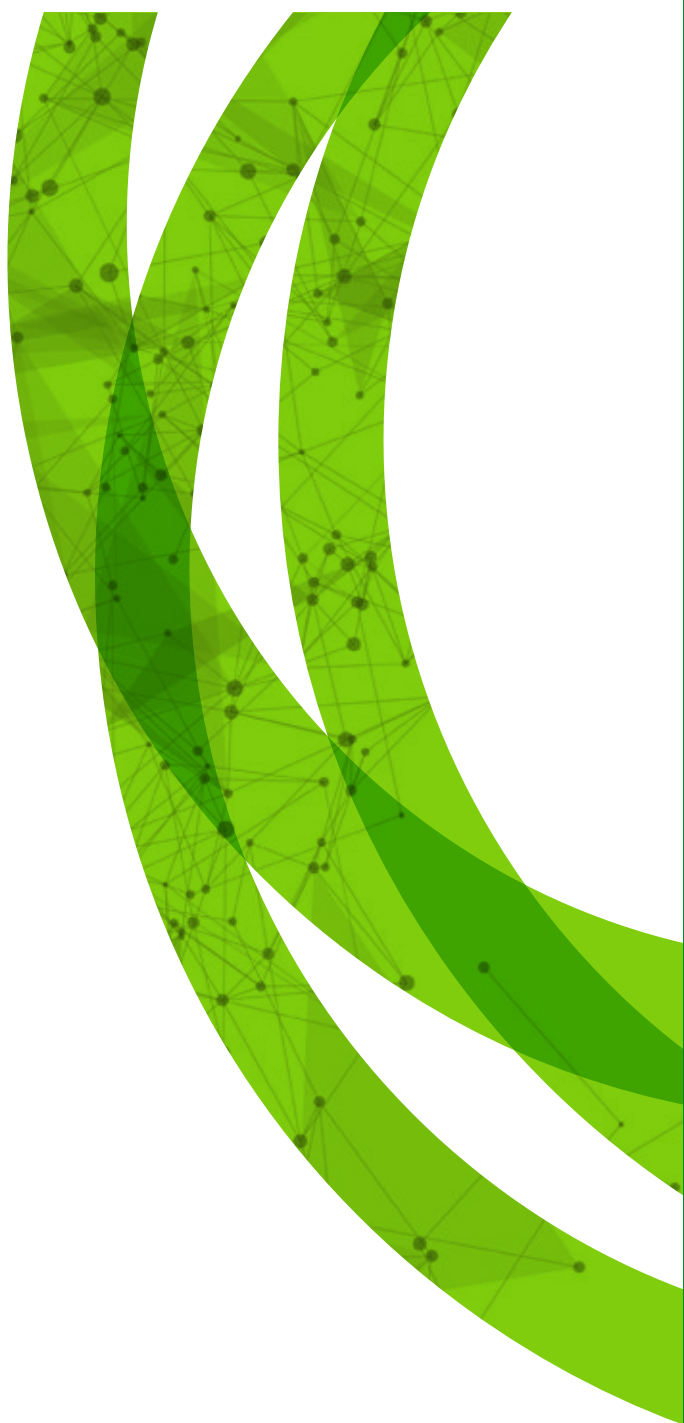
Research Background and Methodology

We began the research for this project in mid-2017 by examining all countries across sub-Saharan Africa to determine the status, existing funding, and disbursement levels of USAFs — where they exist — and to provide the most recent data on unspent USAF funds (the 2014 GSMA Universal Fund Study provided updates on this spending up to 2011).

In order to (1) determine levels of USAF activity among African countries and (2) examine ways in which these funds could be used to improve access and use for everyone including women and girls, we used a combination of approaches and sources.[28] This was needed given the paucity of information about USAFs in general. Our approach included desk research using publicly available documentation and analysis about USAFs in Africa from governments, regulators, mobile operators, and the media. We also partnered with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to conduct surveys of governments and their use of USAFs in that region.[29] Finally, we interviewed the management of USAFs in Mozambique, Ghana, and Benin. The interviews examined the experiences of the USAFs in improving efficiency as well insights on the challenges and opportunities for leveraging USAFs to reduce the gender gap.

28 Although comprehensive, one of the limitations of this study was that for a few countries we were not able to gain any information on the status and details of the USAF (if any). Further research could look at these countries in more detail. Also, a more thorough assessment of the financial status of USAFs should include independent financial audits, something outside the scope of this study. Another limitation of this study is that we use "gender" in a binary sense, i.e., male and female. Additional research can also look at access and use issues across different gender identities. Finally, intersectionality is also overlooked, meaning that in order to maintain a narrow focus on gender we do not address differences in internet access and use among women (and men) of different income levels and race/ethnic groups.

29 This was part of a larger project to revise and implement ECOWAS' Supplementary Act on Universal Access and Service.

Table A1 — Status of USAFs in African Countries (compiled July 2017)

ACTIVE	INACTIVE	NO FUND	NO INFORMATION AVAILABLE
BENIN	ALGERIA	BURUNDI	COMOROS
BOTSWANA	ANGOLA	CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	DJIBOUTI
CAMEROON	BURKINA FASO	ETHIOPIA	EQUATORIAL GUINEA
CHAD	CAPE VERDE	GAMBIA	ERITREA
COTE D'IVOIRE	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	MALAWI	GUINEA-BISSAU
EGYPT	GUINEA		LIBYA
GABON	LIBERIA		MAURITANIA
GHANA	MALI		REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
KENYA	NAMIBIA		SAO TOME E PRINCIPE
LESOTHO	NIGER		SEYCHELLES
MADAGASCAR	SIERRA LEONE		SOMALIA
MAURITIUS	SUDAN		SOUTH SUDAN
MOROCCO	SWAZILAND		
MOZAMBIQUE	ZIMBABWE		
NIGERIA			
RWANDA			
SENEGAL			
SOUTH AFRICA			
TANZANIA			
TOGO			
TUNISIA			
UGANDA			
ZAMBIA			

Table A2 — List of Countries that Publish Report on USAF Activities in Africa (compiled July 2017)

PUBLISH ANNUAL REPORTS	DO NOT PUBLISH REPORTS	NO FUND	NO INFORMATION AVAILABLE
ALGERIA	ANGOLA	BURUNDI	COMOROS
BENIN	BURKINA FASO	CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	DJIBOUTI
BOTSWANA	CAMEROON	ETHIOPIA	EQUATORIAL GUINEA
COTE D'IVOIRE	CAPE VERDE	GAMBIA	ERITREA
GHANA	CHAD	MALAWI	GUINEA-BISSAU
GUINEA	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO		LIBYA
KENYA	EGYPT		MAURITANIA
LESOTHO	GABON		REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
MADAGASCAR	LIBERIA		SAO TOME E PRINCIPE
MAURITIUS	MALI		SEYCHELLES
MOROCCO	SIERRA LEONE		SOMALIA
MOZAMBIQUE	SUDAN		SOUTH SUDAN
NAMIBIA	SWAZILAND		
NIGER	ZAMBIA		
NIGERIA			
RWANDA			
SENEGAL			
SOUTH AFRICA			
TANZANIA			
TOGO			
TUNISIA			
UGANDA			
ZIMBABWE			

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