GSMA

REQUEST FOR QUOTATIONS

Design sprint to identify messaging and marketing to improve women's adoption of internet-enabled phones in Uganda

Copyrights Notice

Copyright @ GSMA 2026

Antitrust Notice

The information contained herein is in full compliance with the GSMA's antitrust compliance policy

Design sprint to identify messaging and marketing to improve women's adoption of internet-enabled phones in Uganda

Introduction

The GSMA is a wholly owned subsidiary of the GSM Association, which represents the interests of the worldwide mobile communications industry. The GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators, as well as more than 200 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset makers, software companies, equipment providers, Internet companies, and media and entertainment organisations. The GSMA is focused on innovating, incubating and creating new opportunities for its membership, all with the end goal of driving the growth of the mobile communications industry.

The GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation, Inc. ("GSMA") is a U.S. 501(c)(3) charitable organisation that seeks to relieve poverty and improve living conditions throughout the world through identifying opportunities for social, economic and environmental impact and to stimulate the development of scalable, life-enhancing mobile services.

Within Mobile for Development, the Connected Women programme works with mobile operators and their partners to address the barriers to women accessing and using mobile internet and mobile money services. Connected Women aims to reduce the gender gap in mobile internet and mobile money services and unlock significant commercial opportunities for the mobile industry and socio-economic benefits for women. For more information, please visit: www.gsma.com/connectedwomen

For this project, the successful Respondent will contract with The GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation.

Project overview

Mobile phones are the primary means through which people access the internet in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), making ownership of an internet-enabled phone an important foundation for digital inclusion. In most LMICs, particularly across Sub-Saharan Africa however, handset affordability remains the single most important barrier, particularly for women, to owning an internet-enable phone. Addressing this barrier is not only a matter of lowering prices or expanding access to financing. It also requires strengthening consumers' willingness to pay by ensuring that handsets and associated offers are perceived as relevant, understandable and trustworthy.

Recent qualitative research conducted by the GSMA in urban and rural areas of Central and Eastern Uganda explored the handset features[1] and point-of-sale offerings[2] that influence women's purchasing decisions, how these could be communicated more effectively, and how preferences vary across different groups. The research included women and men with different handset ownership profiles and livelihoods, as well as handset sellers and private-sector stakeholders.

The research found that women particularly valued practical handset features such as battery life, durability, storage and processing speed. However, awareness and understanding of handset

[1] Handset features include screen size, battery life, durability, camera quality, button keypad vs touch screen, dual SIM capability, brand of device, colour of device, 3G/4G/5G capabilities, operating system, processing speed, storage capacity/approach, presence of pre-loaded apps.

[2] Point-of-sale offerings include free or discounted services e.g. data, mobile services, paid-for apps, insurance, device repair, power banks, screen protectors, charging facilities, ongoing customer support.

features and point-of-sale offerings were relatively limited among women, rural residents and people who did not own smartphones. Technical terms such as “mAh”, “GB” and “RAM” were often difficult to interpret, while descriptions framed around tangible, everyday benefits were more readily understood. The research therefore recommended that handset providers[3] retain technical specifications but accompany them with clear benefit-led language, recognisable icons and relevant imagery. It also highlighted the importance of showing how handset features can support women’s work, family responsibilities and everyday activities, rather than relying on generic messaging or assumptions about women’s preferences.

While the research identified the broad communication principles that providers should follow, further work is required to determine the specific marketing collateral i.e. messages, terminology, icons and imagery, that women understand, trust and find compelling.

Project objectives

This Request for Quotations is for a design sprint to identify the messages, terminology, icons and imagery that most effectively communicate the features and benefits of internet-enabled handsets to women in Uganda, and how that compares with men. The objective is to understand which marketing collateral women find most relevant, clear and credible, and to rapidly develop, test and refine concepts that handset providers can use across marketing, retail and point-of-sale materials. While the primary target audience is underserved women, the resulting materials should be inclusive, appealing to both women and men.

The assignment should identify not only which approaches resonate most strongly with women, but also why they resonate, how understanding and trust vary across different groups of women, and how this compares to men. The resulting materials should be socially impactful and commercially viable such that they can be applied responsibly by handset providers.

More specifically, the supplier will:

- Facilitate a design sprint to develop, test and refine the messages, terminology, icons and imagery that resonate with women, and how these compare with men in Uganda.
- Mock up a small number of the design sprint outputs into illustrative assets and evaluate these materials with a wider range of customers in Uganda to identify what most effectively communicates the features, benefits and point-of-sale offerings of internet-enabled handsets.
- Generate and communicate key findings from the design sprint to the GSMA in a marketing and communications resource pack.

Methodology

The supplier will have flexibility to define an approach and bring their expertise to the process, while addressing the expectations below:

- Undertake small-scale user research with underserved women to understand perceptions of existing marketing messages, imagery, icons and terminology related to internet-enabled phone offerings.
- Design and implement a rapid and targeted design sprint to develop, test and refine messaging, imagery, iconography, terminology and sales collateral designed to increase uptake of internet-enabled phones.
- Develop examples of marketing assets that can be used as illustrative samples.
- Evaluate these concepts and assets with target audiences.

[3] Handset providers include mobile network operators, asset financiers, governments, investors, donors, and other organisations involved in designing, funding, or implementing handset affordability initiatives.

- Ensure that engagement and testing activities are gender-intentional, including underserved women from both rural and urban areas, alongside a smaller comparison sample of men where appropriate.
- Prioritise approaches most likely to increase uptake among underserved women while maintaining or enhancing appeal among men.
- Consider the role of language and literacy levels, including testing and refining materials in English and relevant local languages where appropriate.
- Outline how the findings will be synthesised into actionable recommendations for handset providers.
- Advise the GSMA on areas requiring further investigation following completion of the design sprint.

Location

The design sprint will take place in a small number of rural and urban locations in Uganda with differing cultural and social contexts. The supplier should propose a limited number of rural and urban locations and provide a rationale for their selection, taking into account the intended target population.

Audience

The findings will be used by the GSMA Digital Inclusion team and handset providers in Uganda and other countries with similar market contexts, to inform messaging and marketing strategies to improve women's willingness to pay for internet-enabled phones. The findings are also likely to be relevant for those who support or work with handset providers, including other private sector actors, governments and the development community.

Deliverables

As a minimum we require the following deliverables but welcome comments and suggestions:

1. Kick off meeting with the GSMA (virtual or in the London office).
2. Design sprint methodology (narrative or process flow chart).
3. Detailed workplan, outlining the design sprint process, timelines and dependencies.
4. All necessary ethical approvals, permissions and licences for conducting user research in Uganda.
5. Weekly progress reports during delivery, including updates on activities conducted and highlighting any emerging risks or challenges.
6. Marketing and communications resource pack summarising the recommended messages, terminology, icons and imagery that most effectively communicate internet-enabled phone offerings to women. The resource pack should outline specific recommendations, including considerations around language and literacy levels, as well as the rationale for each recommendation. The resource pack should be accessible to partners without specialised design software.
7. Illustrative marketing collateral (e.g. above-the-line advert, in-store flyer, billboard advert etc.) mock-ups applying the tested messages, terminology, icons and/or imagery. The specific collateral formats will be agreed in consultation with the GSMA.
8. Consented photographs of the process (flip charts, end-user testing etc.).
9. Repository of the design sprint outputs including tested concepts, illustrative assets and supporting materials developed during the sprint.
10. If applicable, a qualitative summary report to document feedback from interviews or observations of participants during field testing.

This contract will be paid against a set of pre-agreed deliverables. Any level of effort that is not utilised (e.g. due to cancelled sprints) should be repurposed in discussion with the GSMA. The supplier will be required to submit a timesheet at the end of the design sprint.

All deliverables must be shared in English[4]. The language of daily communication with the GSMA will be English.

Deliverables and timelines

Phase	Key activities	Estimated timeline
Phase 1 – Inception phase	**Key activities/deliverables** - Kick off - Review existing GSMA research - Refine design sprint methodology - Develop detailed workplan - Preparation and submission of applications for all necessary ethical approvals, permissions and licences	Contract signing + ~2 weeks
Phase 2 – Design sprint and rapid user testing	**Key activities/deliverables** - Design sprint - Develop and evaluate illustrative assets	~4 weeks
Phase 3 – Reporting	**Key activities/deliverables** - Marketing and communications resource pack, including three illustrative marketing collateral mock-ups - Consented photographs	~2 weeks

Firm and proposal requirements

Required experience

- Demonstrable track record of completing design sprints and designing and conducting user research with women and underserved populations.
- Understanding of the Ugandan context, including cultural sensitivities.
- Telecommunications and device marketing and communications experience desirable.
- Full working proficiency in English, writing to publication quality.
- Language capabilities to conduct research in relevant local languages in Uganda.
- Proven ability to identify, assess, and effectively respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, particularly those faced in the field. And in the face of such challenges, the ability to take pragmatic decisions about user research design, with a good understanding of the implications for rigour.

The successful bidder is expected to:

- Provide a named key point of contact.
- Respond to emails from GSMA within two working days.

[4] Key words and phrases in the marketing assets are likely to be in the local language, but the GSMA will require English translations.

- Provide weekly progress reports.
- Secure all ethical approvals, licenses and permissions required to conduct user research in Uganda.
- Organise and lead weekly update meetings (same time each week) to report on project progress.
- Inform the GSMA about delays in the project in a timely manner.

Proposals should include a separate technical and financial proposal:

Technical proposal including:

1. A short (1 page) statement of suitability, highlighting recent relevant experience.
2. A short (2-4 page) discussion of the proposed approach.
3. Any proposed changes to the terms of reference.
4. Gantt chart outlining major project stages and timelines.
5. CVs, location of team members, and their proposed role(s) for the project.
6. Full breakdown of any required ethical and administrative permissions for conducting user research in Uganda
7. An outline of all potential risks and proposed mitigations.

Technical proposals should not exceed 15 A4 pages, excluding CVs.

Financial proposal including:

1. Level of effort (person-day) by activity.
2. Fee rates (per day in USD) by activity.
3. Total project cost (USD), without VAT[5].
4. The respondent's total price is inclusive of all costs, insurances, fees, costs, expenses, liabilities, obligations, risks, and all financial requirements for the performance of services and provision of deliverables.
5. Any charge not stated in this proposal, which extends above to the total price, is not permitted.

Due to GSMA compliance requirements, exact project budgets cannot be provided at this stage. You are, however, expected to provide different implementation/budget options that can help us assess value for money. The GSMA will align the project scope to the relevant budget after a supplier has been selected.

Proposal assessment and selection process

The proposal will be scored on the following set of criteria:

Criteria	**Importance**	**Weighting**
Cost	Proposal's value for money.	20%
Quality	Quality of the design sprint approach outlined in the proposal, including the degree to which it addresses the outlined project objectives and terms of reference.	35%

[5] GSMA Foundation Inc is a US registered 501(c)(3) charity and is exempt from VAT.

Bidder's capacity to manage the project on time and on budget	Demonstrated ability to manage the project on time and on budget.	20%
Relevant experience	Bidder's experience in successfully conducting similar projects.	25%

Request for quotes timelines

The request for quotes timeline is subject to change at GSMA's sole discretion. Applicants will be informed via email if there are any changes to these listed dates.

Date	Action
6th November 2026	Request for quotes issued
13th November 2026	Confirmation of interest and any clarification questions sent to connectedwomen@gsma.com
20th November 2026	Responses to all submitted questions shared to all applicants
4th December 2026	Cut off date for proposal to be received by GSMA at connectedwomen@gsma.com
7th December 2026	Estimated GSMA proposal assessment period
18th January 2027	Shortlisted bidder presentations via MS Teams (if required)
End January 2027	Supplier selection, contracting commences
Mid/End February 2027	Kick off

GSMA Mobile for Development
Foundation Inc.
Suite 910,
3445 Peachtree Rd,
Atlanta, GA 30326
United States.