



Mobile phones, social relations, and the gatekeepers to women's empowerment in Maasai households

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- Mobile phones are ubiquitous
- Phones have transformed our lives



Source: GSMA, 2019



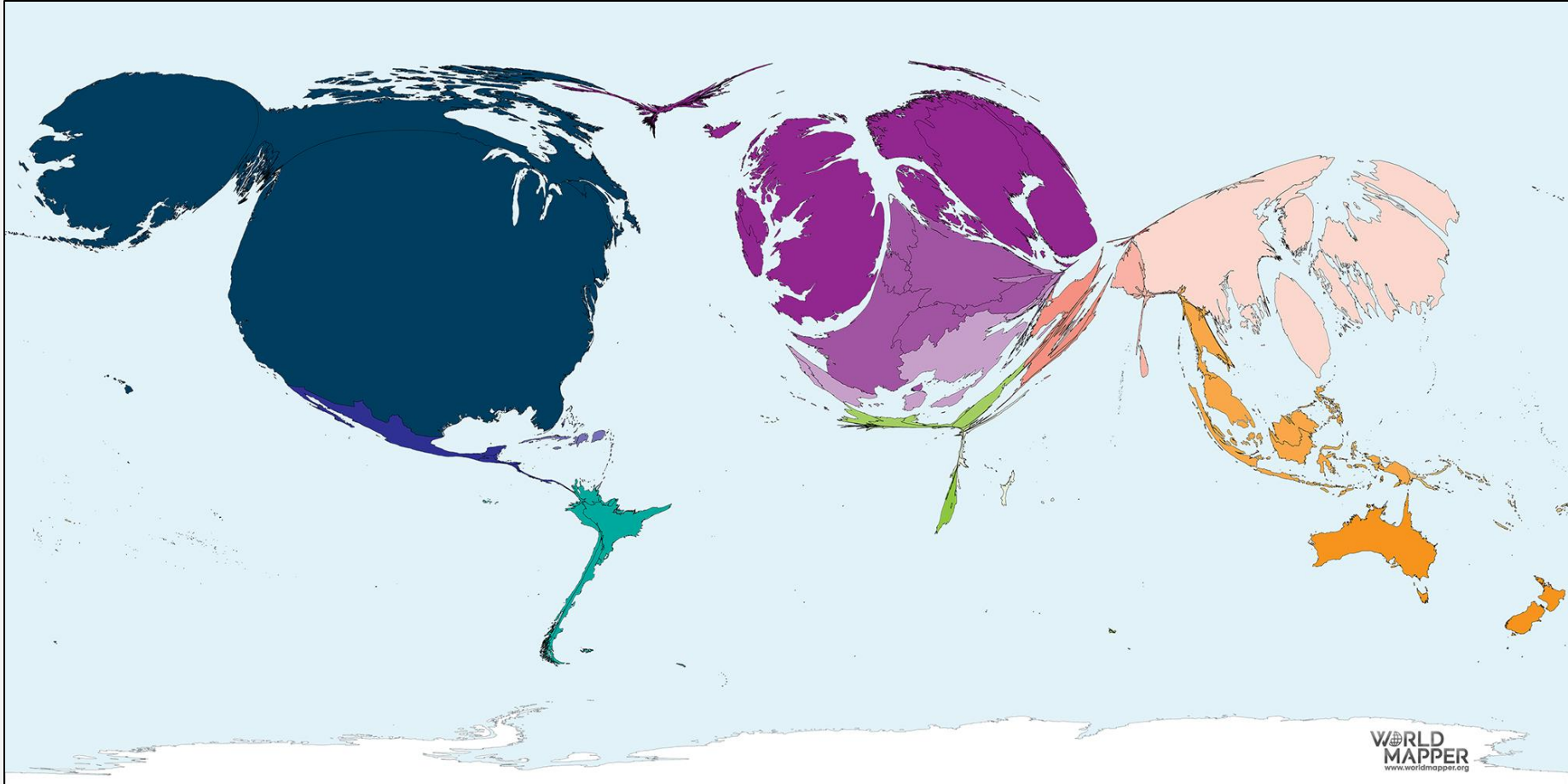
Source: Timothy Baird



Source: GSMA,
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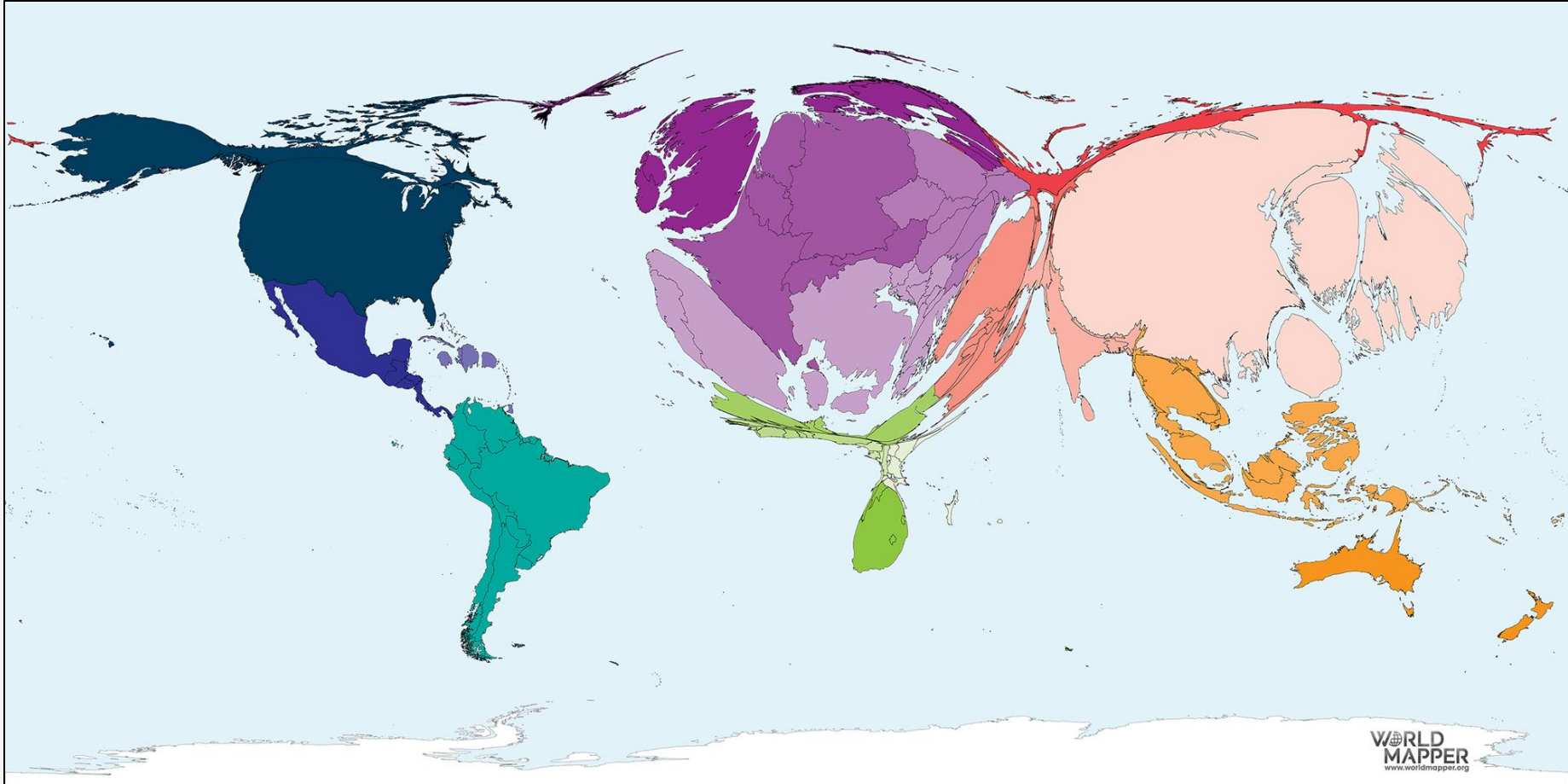


Source: GSMA, 2015



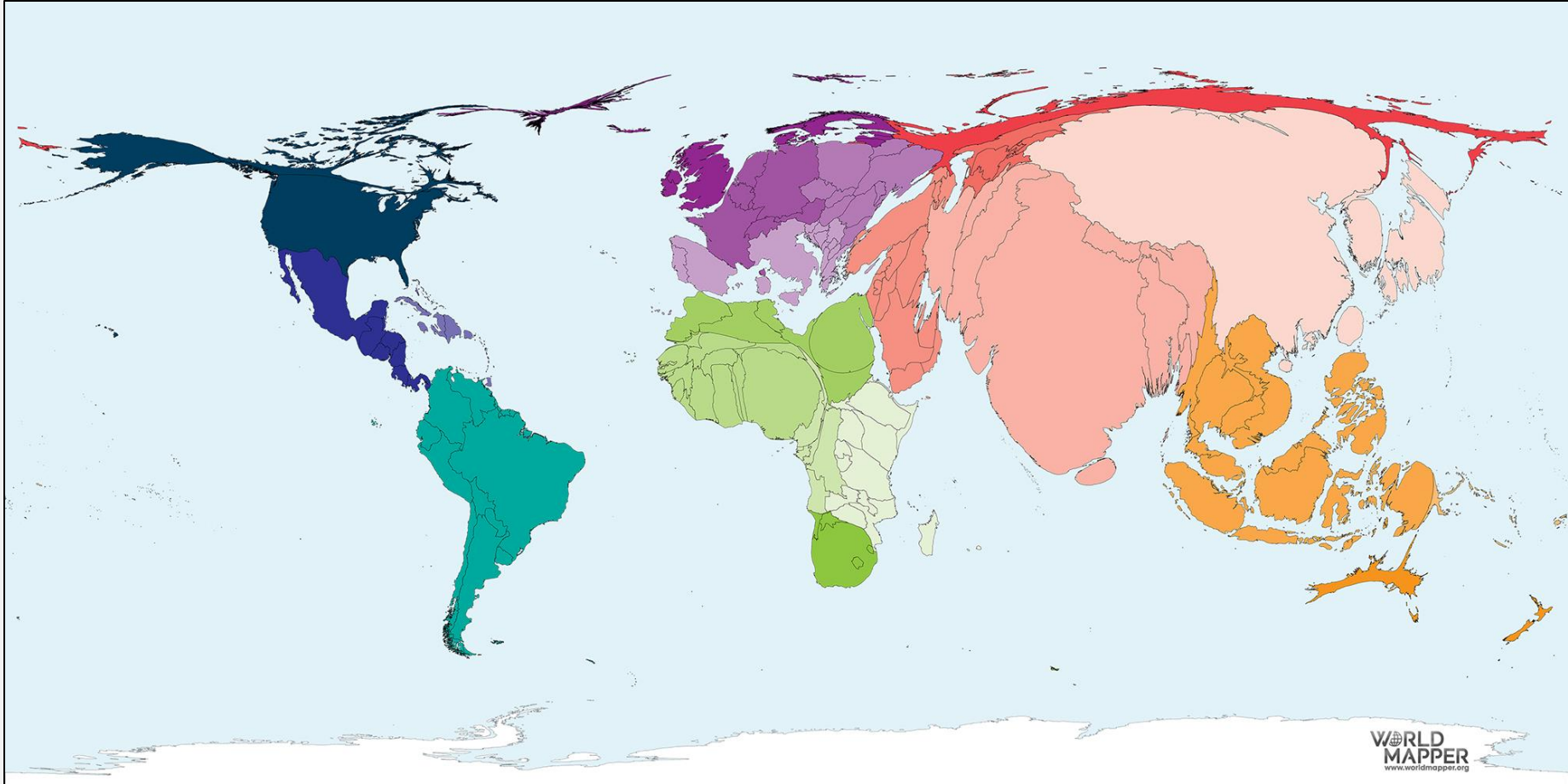
Source: worldmapper.org

Mobile phone subscribers **1990**



Source: worldmapper.org

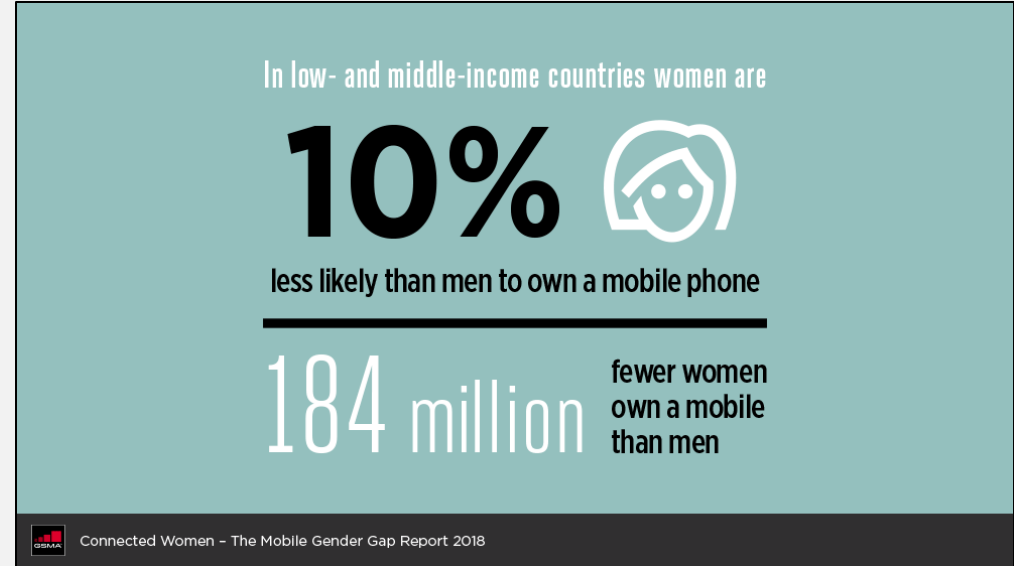
Mobile phone subscribers **2002**



Source: worldmapper.org

Mobile phone subscribers **2015**

- Who benefits from phone use?
- Catalyst for women's empowerment?



Source: GSMA 2018

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– Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
UN Executive Director
UN Women

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Improved role as a mother (Chib et al, 2014)

Strengthened family ties (Smith et al, 2011)

Increased autonomy (Tacchi & Kitner, 2012)

- Amplify disparities?
- Gendered dimension of phone use in Maasai communities



1. How do Maasai women access and use phones?

- Identify barriers to & strategies for phone use
- Identify reasons for & issues from phones

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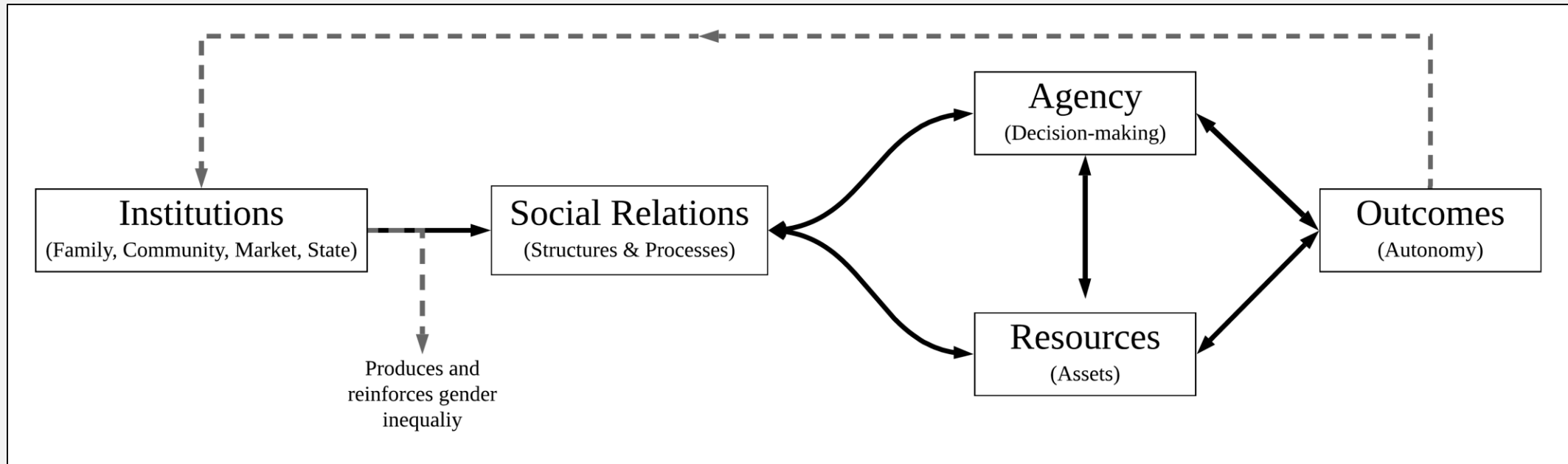
- Identify barriers to & strategies for phone use
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2. How are Maasai women's phone uses embedded in existing social relations?

- Examine intra-household social position and how it relates to phone use, resource distribution, and decision-making

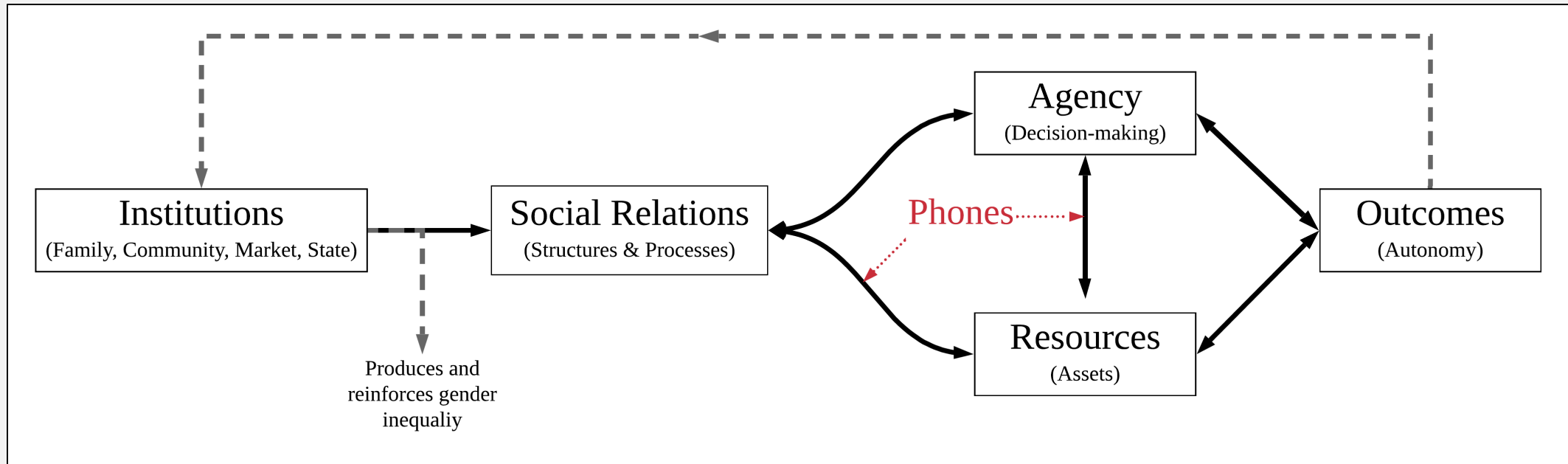
Empowerment – a process where strategic choices are made from options, with resources, and through agency to achieve a desired outcome by those who were previously denied this (Kabeer, 2001)

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Conceptual model adapted from **Sustainable Livelihoods** (Duncombe, 2014) & **Social Relations** (Kabeer, 1994)

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Maasai Household

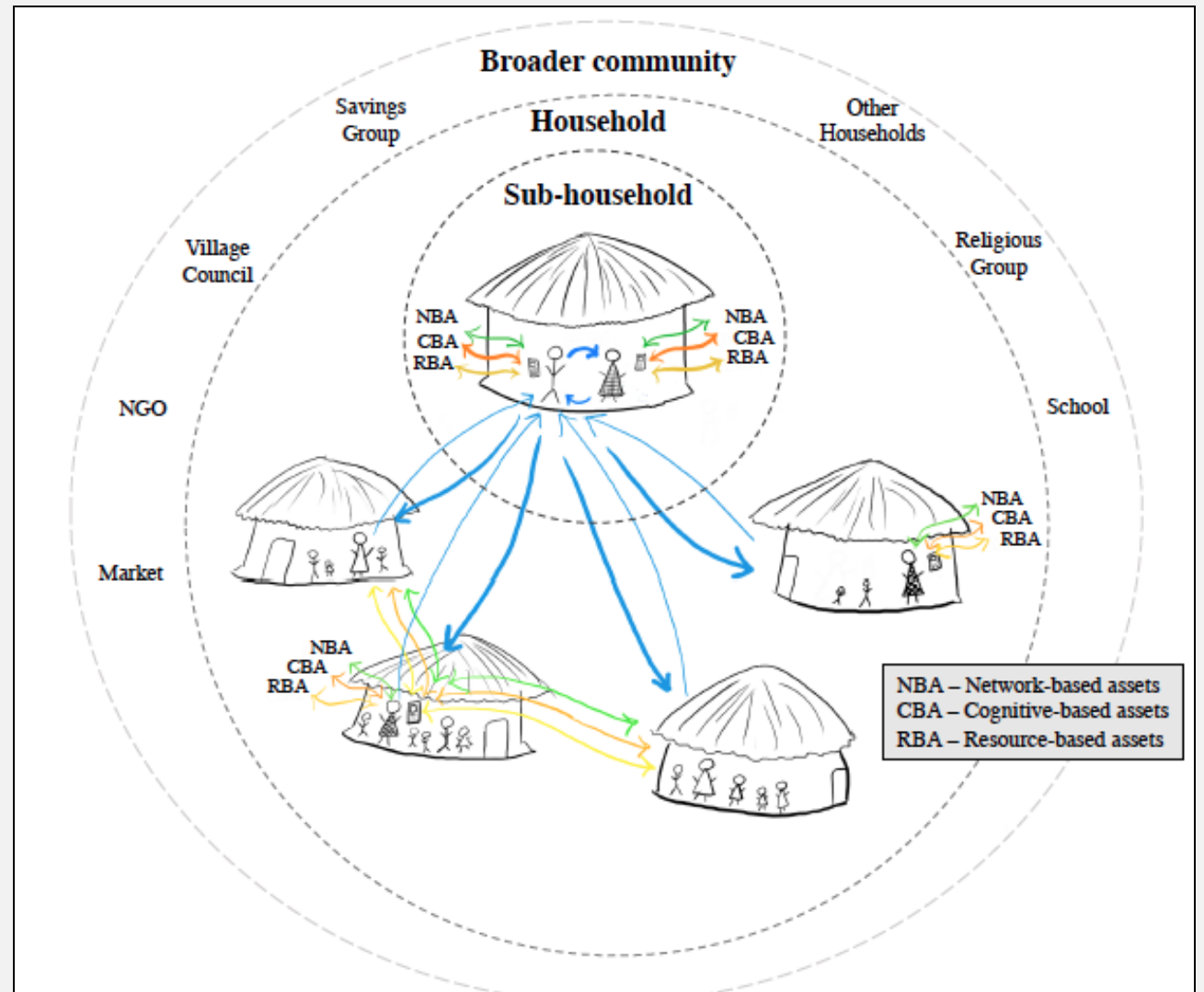
- Reframe concept of household to fit local context (Carr, 2005)
- Polygyny
- Household made up of multiple sub-households



Source: OverflightStock – Juan Carlos Munoz

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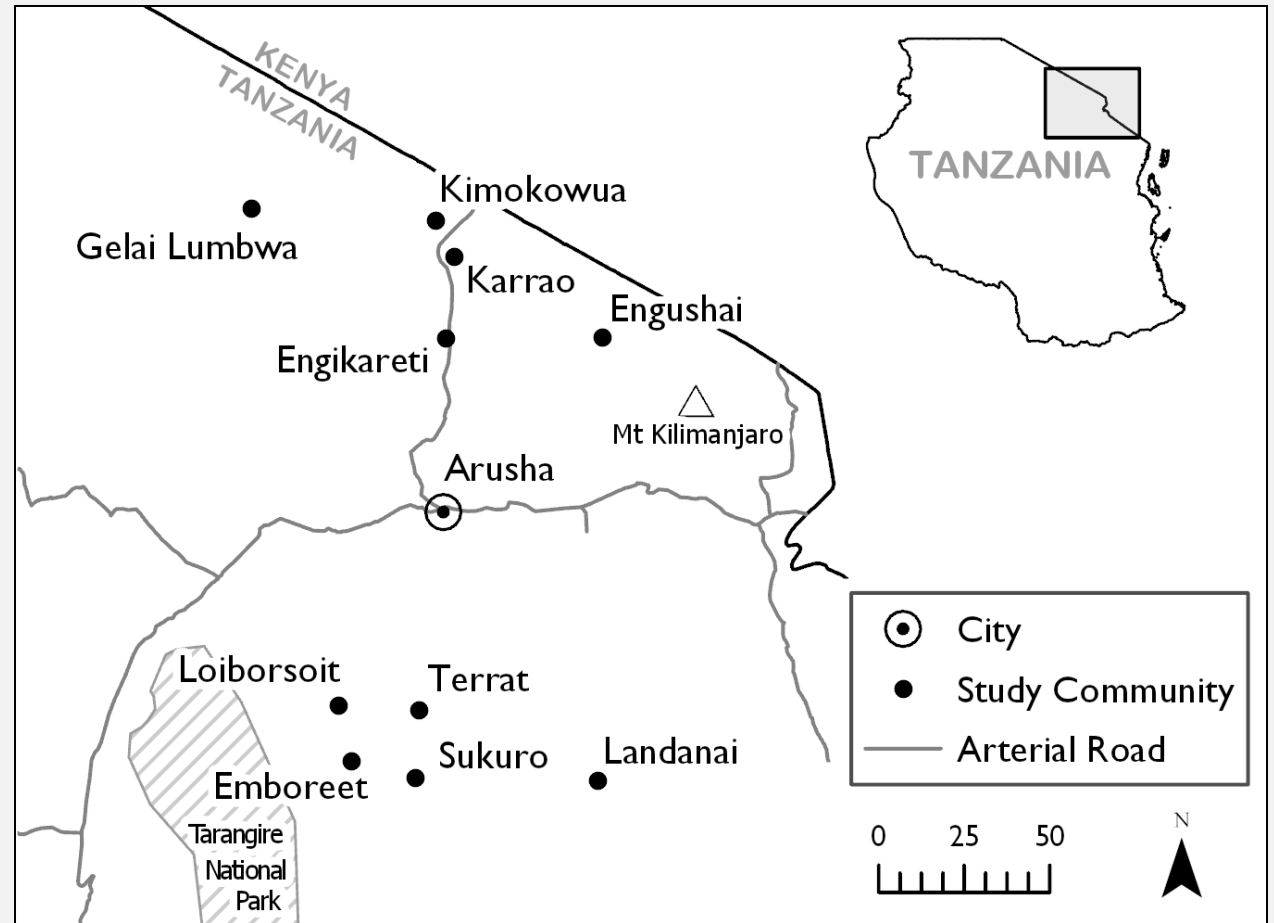


Qualitative

- Group and stakeholder interviews (N=13)
- Participatory methods

Quantitative

- Household survey of a female *sub-household* head





1. Phone access is more than just handset ownership

Material resources

- Electricity, voucher, SIM, money

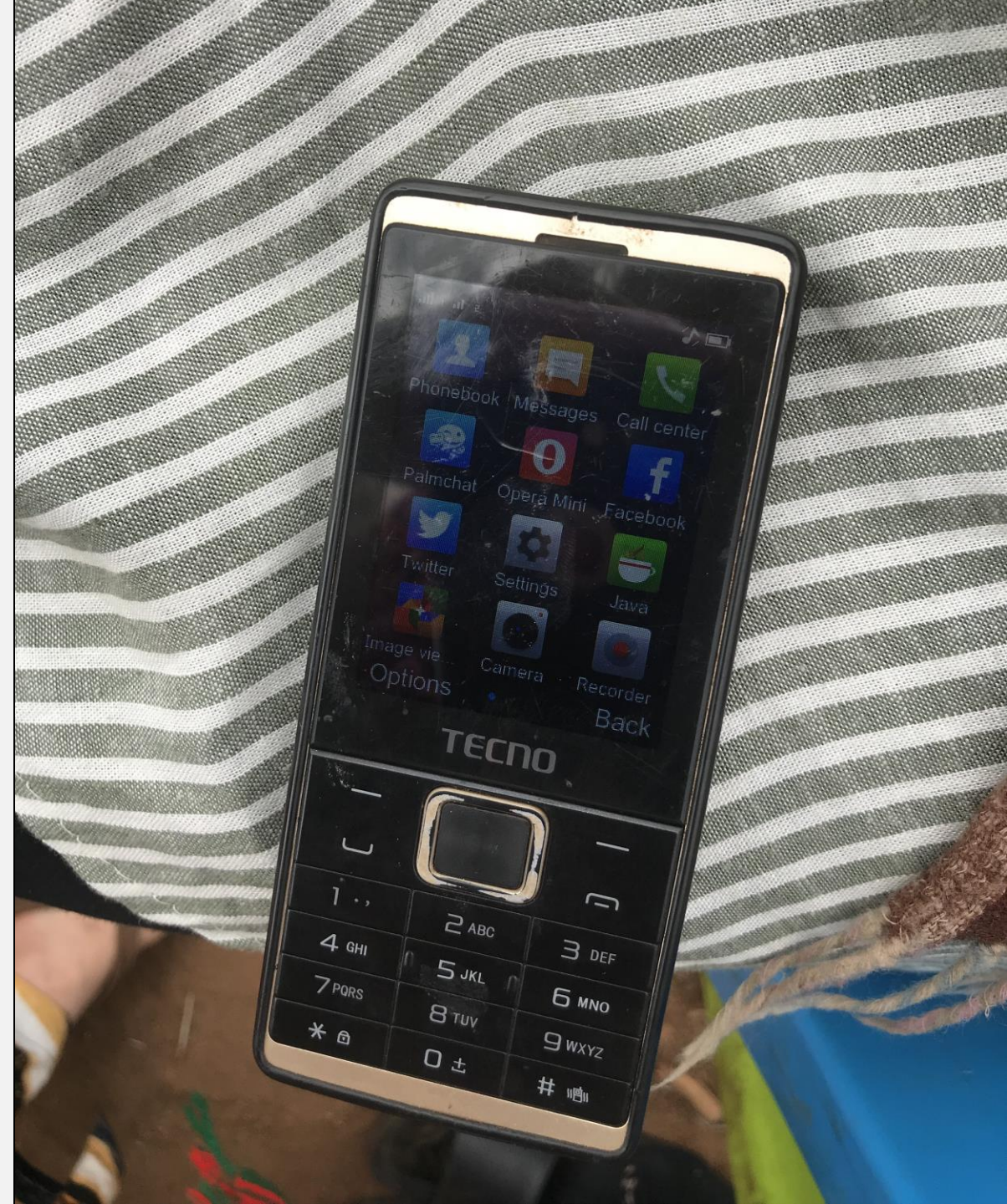
“But first is the challenge of having the money. If you don’t have, then you stop communicating.”



Material resources

Human resources

- Technical and actual literacy



Material resources

Human resources

Relational resources

- Rely on social relationships



1. Phone access is more than just handset ownership
2. Men are gatekeepers to phone access



Men mediate resource access

- Husband checks phone and take phone away

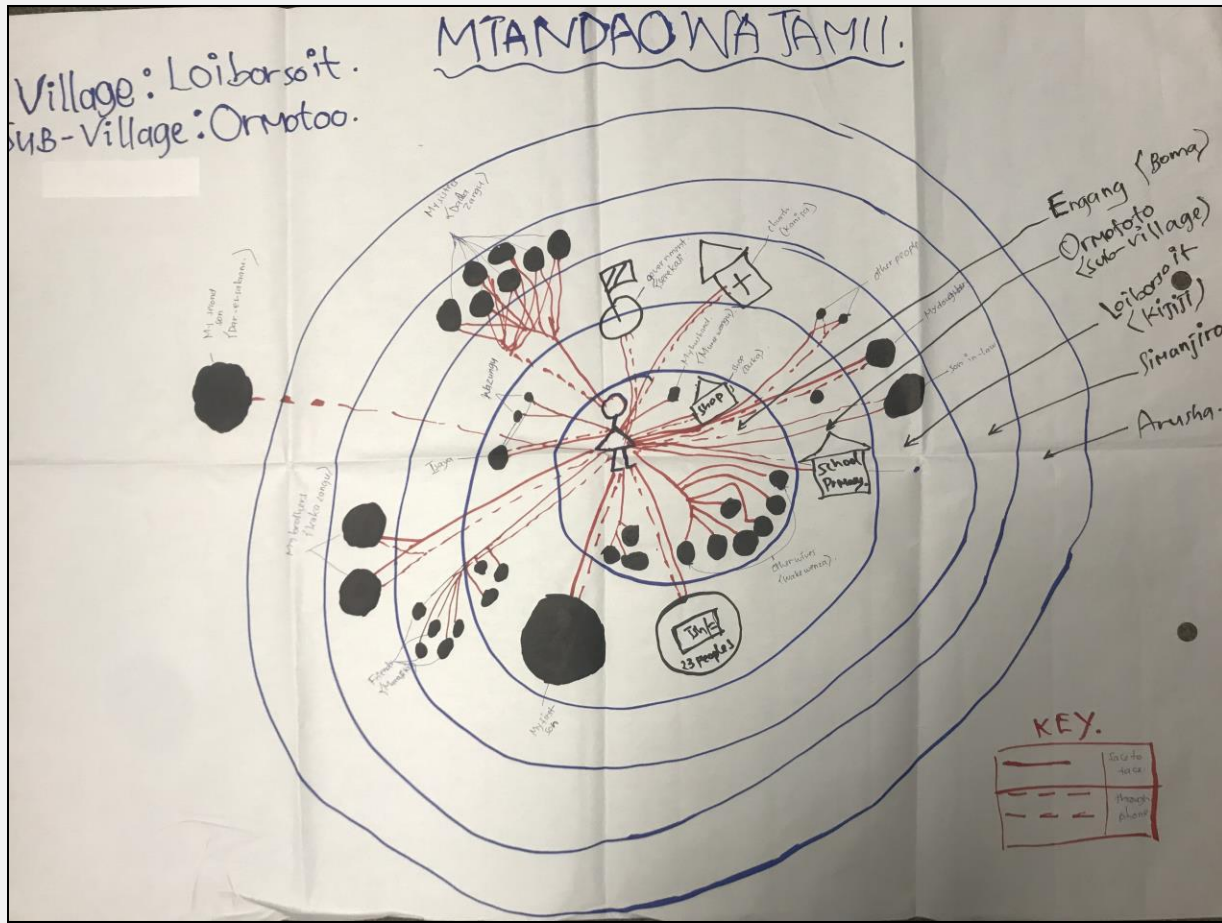
“If the husband takes the phone away, the woman is without a phone and without communication”



Men influence household norms

- Cooperation and working together
- Favoritism

“[Women] do not own anything. ...Can’t do anything without telling the husband first. If they don’t they will be punished. Men are free without asking for permission.”



Endingi – least favorite wife



Other wife

1. Phone access is more than just handset ownership
2. Men are gatekeepers to phone access
3. **Women develop strategies to overcome barriers**

Resource variability

- Income-generating activities
- Savings and loans groups

There is struggling as a woman. But if [women] do business, they feel stronger because they have capital....

Women used to depend on their husbands, but now they feel strong because they have opportunities to get their own money.



Controlling husbands

- Hide phone
- Disregard husband's wishes

“Ah, the network is bad.”



1. Phone access is more than just handset ownership
2. Men are gatekeepers to phone access
3. Women develop strategies to overcome barriers
4. **After access: patterns of phone use are also varied**

Reasons for

- Maintain existing relationships
- Rarely to seize new opportunities

Issues from

- Growing addiction
- Damaged relationships



- Phone access is fluid



- Phone access is fluid
- There is no single pathway between phone access and empowerment



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- **Women use phones to maintain relations, not diversify**



- Phone access is fluid
- There is no single pathway between phone access and empowerment
- Women use phones to maintain relations, not diversify
- **Social position and intersectionality matter**



- Men are **inextricably linked** to women's empowerment
- Mobile phones are **just tools**
 - *How men and women leverage these tools matters*



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References

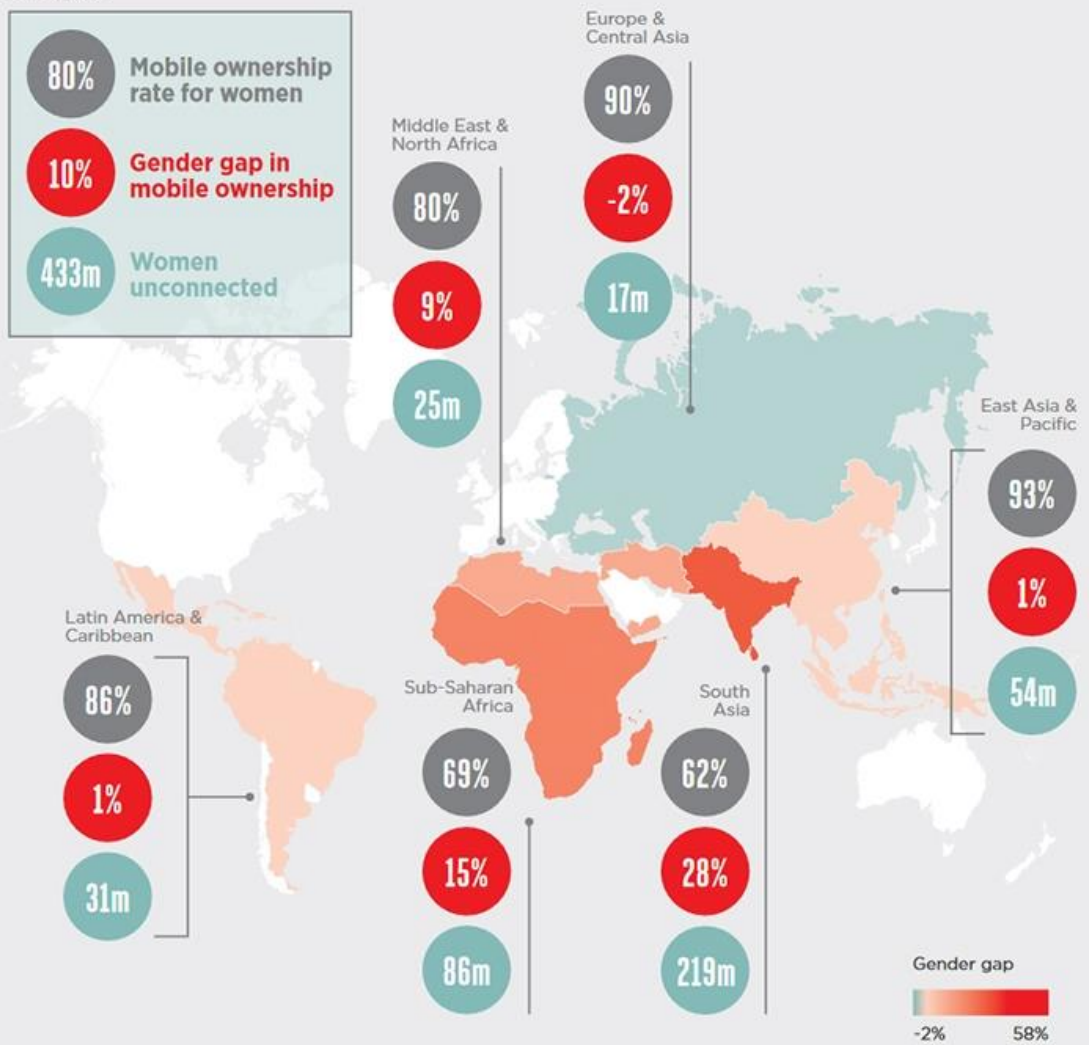
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Thank you!



OVERALL

- 80% Mobile ownership rate for women
- 10% Gender gap in mobile ownership
- 433m Women unconnected



OVERALL

- 48% Proportion of women who use mobile internet
- 23% Gender gap in mobile internet use
- 1.1bn Women not using mobile internet

