

UK aid helps world's poorest access better mobile phone technologies

Millions of Nigerians are set to benefit from innovative global mobile technology that helps to provide access to vital services for the poorest communities, the Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin announced during a two day visit to Nigeria.

Mobile phones are an effective tool that can help lift people out of poverty and keep them safe by having greater access to healthcare such as lifesaving maternal and newborn child health and nutrition information. However, it's estimated that 2.5 billion people in developing countries are still without mobile internet, which is challenging for communities who need access to a range of essential services such as clean energy, water and sanitation as well as government services such as birth registration.

Visiting Abuja and Lagos, Minister Baldwin announced a £38 million partnership to support mobile technology trade body, the GSMA, improve access to essential digital services to over 26 million people around the world over the next 3.5 years.

In Nigeria alone, the Mobile for Development partnership, has supported mobile-enabled solar technology to help keep families in rural areas safe by allowing off-grid homes to have access to electricity. The lack of clean affordable power limits development, so UK aid has supported the development of a ready-pay power system which can be paid in instalments using mobile phones.

Energy company Lumos, working in partnership with Nigerian telecoms provider MTN, created and manufactured a solar power system that allows the 40% of Nigerians without access to electricity, to get access and pay via their mobile. Between December 2013 and June 2018, this has supported more than 1,000,000 people and is now expanding to the Côte d'Ivoire.

Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin said:

It was great to return to Nigeria. It is a country of tremendous opportunity, but I know it has significant challenges. The UK is working as Nigeria's longest partner and friend to overcome those challenges and deliver for its citizens.

From providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance to those caught in the North East conflict, cracking down on corruption and money-laundering, to harnessing the power of innovation and technology, the UK is helping ensure Nigeria has a bright, stable and prosperous future because when Nigeria prospers, Africa, the UK and the world prosper.

Technology and business innovations have the potential to create quality jobs needed to absorb the over 2 million young Nigerians joining the labour market every year.

The partnership with GSMA builds on UK aid programmes to boost digital and financial inclusion for women. A programme in Swahili has led to the development of Healthy Pregnancy, Healthy Baby, which is a free text message service for pregnant women, mothers with newborns and their supporters. Subscribers receive messages covering topics from prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, family planning, malaria prevention and postpartum care.

During the visit, Minister Baldwin also met female entrepreneurs improving the livelihoods of some of the most vulnerable families in Nigeria, from very small-scale rural farmers from the North, to heads of industry in Lagos.

Nigeria is Africa's biggest country by population and its largest economy. While visiting a UK aid supported ENGINE II school in Abuja, Minister Baldwin also heard how girls are being given the opportunity to develop life skills and empower them as future leaders.

She also visited the Cassa Nova's Factory which exports its cassava crisps around the world – including the UK where they are stocked in some Sainsbury's supermarkets. Bilateral trade between Nigeria and the UK reached £5.5 billion in 2018 and has potential to grow significantly.

She also met with the Nigerian Vice President Yemi Osinbajo and Lagos State Deputy-Governor to discuss improving trade and investment links, fighting poverty and a shared interest in developing a prosperous Nigeria.

Notes to editors

- The Mobile for Development partnership programme identifies and invests in mobile-enabled innovations and business models which can drive inclusion at scale. Further details can be found here: <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/>
- The programme will also lead to enhanced digital inclusion for women and people with disabilities, extended mobile connectivity across rural Africa and deliver mobile-based tools for climate resilience, whilst increasing youth employment opportunities.
- UK aid is also boosting digital and financial inclusion for women. A UK aid programme in Swahili is forging stronger links between the mobile and healthcare industries. Healthy Pregnancy, Healthy Baby is a free text message service for pregnant women, mothers with newborns up to 16 weeks old, as well as supporters of pregnant women and new mothers. Subscribers register for the text messaging service and the messages cover a broad range of topics from prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, family planning, malaria prevention and

postpartum care.

- The GSMA, which works with local network operators, start-ups and governments, estimate that by 2025 there will be nine billion mobile connections globally, with 75 per cent coming through on smartphones. GSMA Mobile for Development also contributes to all 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting more than 750 operators with almost 400 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors.