

Pakistan BOP doing well overall in telecom, but large gender divide still exists

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According to a recent study by LIRNEasia, Pakistan is doing well in terms of mobile access at the bottom of the pyramid compared to India and Sri Lanka; however a large gender divide in terms of both access and use exists.

A recent five-country survey of telecom use at the *bottom of the pyramid*, or BOP, has shown that mobile ownership at the BOP in Pakistan was found to be as high as 23%. Despite having the lowest per capita GDP among the countries studied, Pakistan beat both its South Asian counterparts Sri Lanka and India on this count, with mobile ownership at the BOP in these countries at 22 and 9 percent, respectively. Almost 66% of these mobile connections had been taken up in the preceding year (i.e., since mid-2005).

However, the findings also indicate that a significant gender divide exists in Pakistan at the BOP. Men appear to have more access to mobiles and public phones (including telecommunication centers, public pay phone booths, etc.) than females. Individually owned mobiles are used as the primary phone (most frequently used) by 30% of males, but only 11% of females (Figure 1); public phones are used as the primary phone by 45% of males, but just 24% of females. Among females, the preferred primary phone (48%) was either a neighbor or friend's phone or another household member's mobile phone (compared to 13% of males). A similar, but less pronounced pattern was seen in India, but not in any of the other countries studied.

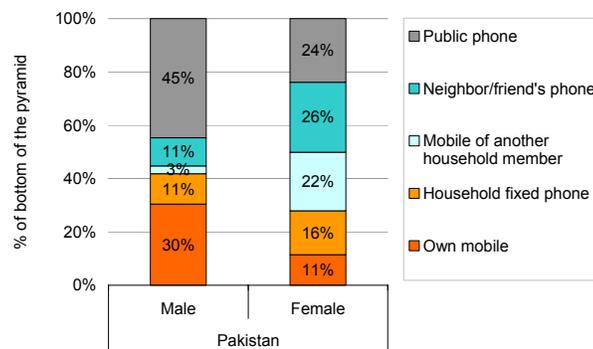


Figure 1: Primary phone used at the BOP: Males vs. females

In addition, phone ownership was lower among females (29%) as compared with males (43%); such differences were not seen in the other four countries.

Significant gender differences were also seen in the use of telephones at the BOP, in terms of number of calls made. Pakistan was the only country in the study where men made and received significantly more calls than women at the BOP and used more minutes per month; on average, men made 18 calls per month and received 25, while women made 10 and received 15 calls. These differences contrast with much of the existing research, based on small-sample studies in affluent developed countries; these studies generally conclude that women use telephones *more* than men.

The study, 'Teleuse at the Bottom of the Pyramid' (T@BOP) was conducted in Pakistan, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka & Thailand among a survey sample of 8,689. Data on usage was collected through the use of a diary, placed with 50% of the sample for a period of two weeks – an innovative technique which has not been used in a study of this kind before. The study looks at the use of telephones among the lower socio-economic strata, or BOP within each country; it looks at what kinds of phones people use, what benefits they obtain from them. It also takes a look at the perspectives of the non-owning user, and issues relating to getting and staying connected.

The fieldwork was conducted by AC Nielsen affiliates in the respective countries during July and August of 2006; the study was funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

LIRNEasia is a regional, non-profit ICT policy and regulation capacity-building organization incorporated under the Companies Act of Sri Lanka, No. 17 of 1982, in 2004. At present It is funded primarily by the International Development Research Centre of Canada. Additional information is available at <http://www.lirneasia.net>.

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