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“Mobile Phones and Economic Development in Africa: Evidence from Policy and Field Experiments”
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After working for Catholic Relief Services as Deputy Regional Director in West and Central Africa between 1998 and 2003, Jenny returned to the University of California-Berkeley, where she completed her PhD in agricultural economics. Jenny works on economic development in Africa, with a primary focus on the impact of information and information technology on development outcomes, particularly in the areas of agriculture, agricultural marketing and education; the relationship between shocks and agricultural food market performance; the determinants of agricultural technology adoption; and impact evaluations of NGO and World Bank projects. Jenny has conducted fieldwork in many countries in West and Central Africa, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, DRC, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Sudan, as well as Haiti and Guatemala.

Abstract:
Mobile phone coverage and adoption has grown substantially over the past decade, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. In the absence of public goods infrastructure in many countries, mobile phone technology has the potential to reduce communication and transaction costs and improve access to information, goods and services, particularly for remote rural populations. Research suggests that mobile phone coverage has had positive impacts on agricultural and labor market efficiency in certain countries, but empirical microeconomic evidence is still limited. This paper presents the results of several mobile phone-related field experiments in sub-Saharan Africa, whereby mobile phones have been used for learning, money transfers and civic education programs. These experiments suggest that mobile phone technology can result in reductions in communication and transaction costs, as well as welfare gains, in particular contexts. Nevertheless, mobile phone technology cannot serve as the “silver bullet” for development, and careful impact evaluations of mobile phone development projects are required. In addition, mobile phone technology must work in partnership with other public good provision and investment to achieve optimal development outcomes.