



WSIS Forum 2011 Outcome Document



Action Line C7 e-Agriculture (FAO/UNCTAD/ITC)

Wednesday 18 May, 16:30 – 18:00, Room IX

The PROMISE of MOBILE TECHNOLOGY:

MOBILE MONEY SOLUTIONS for SMALL ENTERPRISES (part 1)

WHAT is the SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT on RURAL COMMUNITIES? (part 2)

The role of mobile technology in development is now undeniable. Supporting sound economic growth, while reducing socio-economic disparity is essential.

Following a successful collaboration between the e-business and e-agriculture action lines and UN agencies last year, UNCTAD, ICT and FAO have collaborated again, to create two interactive dialogues that allowed both onsite and remote participants to interact with leading thinkers and practitioners.

Building on the latest experiences and looking forward, this session considered the broad potential benefits and impacts created by the use of mobile technology in rural areas. Expert researchers and practitioners provided their perspective on some of the trends, from both public and private sector perspectives, involving mobile technology in development. In particular the dichotomy of positive and negative impacts was addressed. The guest panelists included:

- Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol, Co-director, Research Program “Mobile Communication, Economy & Society”, IN3
- Internet Interdisciplinary Institute, Open University of Catalonia
- Harsha Liyanage, Managing Director, Sarvodaya-Fusion
- Oumy Ndiaye, Chef de Département at Centre Technique de Cooperation Agricole et Rurale ACP-UE (CTA)
- Roxanna Samii, Web, Knowledge and Internal Communications Manager, IFAD
- Tim Unwin, Professor of Geography and UNESCO Chair in ICT4D, Royal Holloway University of London

Starting where the preceding session MOBILE MONEY SOLUTIONS for SMALL ENTERPRISES (part 1) left off, this session highlighted the challenges faced and the role of different organizations in supporting positive sustainable development in rural areas with mobile technology and mobile-based services, and it looked to action that should be pursued going forward.

Key questions that were addressed included:

- What are the key characteristics that make mobile technology so important to rural and agricultural communities?
- What are the main socio-economic benefits that mobile technology can facilitate in rural communities?



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- Why is mobile technology not only creating positive benefits in rural communities, and what are some of the challenges that must be faced to rectify this situation?
- What mobile services are most needed in rural and agricultural communities now?
- How can the positive benefits of mobile technology be brought to a wider range of rural communities, enhancing economic development and food security?
- What policies and support mechanisms should governments put in place to foster the positive impact of mobile technology in rural areas?

It was observed that while the developing world accounted for 25% of world's 700 million mobile phones in 2000, today, beyond any of our expectations at the time of WSIS, that has grown to 75% of world's 4 billion mobile phones being in the developing world. The potential for good is unquestioned. The positive value of disruptive power of technology is elusive to harness. However, mobile technology is not the single answer and we must not lose track of this.

We are not succeeding to insure that our experience and good practices become part of the broader development scenario. (It was observed that the draft of LDC4 conference only mentions ICTs in one place - in the infrastructure section - which leaves out many key issues of LDC development.)

More effort needs to be placed in collecting and disseminating information on experiences and good practices, as well as promoting the existing communities of practice that work in this area.

Research has identified critical success factors in using modern ICT for development, including:

- Context - specifically socio-cultural factors, and the expectation that mobile phones in fact can increase or perpetrate inequality;
- Trust - echoing a key issue in the previous session;
- Creativity - interventions need to be more creative, look at informal sector for guidance.

There must be recognition of the need to support the long term timeframe of rural/agricultural development.

The critical role of CSOs and their national campaigns are weak in ICT4D arena compared to other areas of development. Their potential is not tapped sufficiently. We should have a better understanding of why this is and how to improve.

We need to working with communities to develop an impact evaluation model, for example the 5 indicators identified by Fusion in order to monitor and improve the impact of ICT used in rural communities of Sri Lanka.

Gender is not an issue of sex (female or male), but an issue of equity, and it is an issue that must be taken into consideration in ICT4D projects. There continue to be too many situations where it is not addressed, resulting in one key area where ICT does have a negative impact on rural communities.



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Now we must move forward. It is our collective responsibility to address the greatest challenges (the ICT "have nots") head on. This is where the responsibility of development lies.