

participatory learning and action

Number 59



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PLA 59 author Roxanna Samii has also published her article on mobile phones on her personal blog. Source: www.rsamii.blogspot.com

Roxanna Samii blog

This blog talks about development, knowledge management, change management, organizational behaviour, ICT, rural livelihoods, leadership, management and other related subject matters

SATURDAY, 7 MARCH 2009

Mobile phones: the silver bullet to bridge the digital divide?



The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimates that there are 3.3 billion mobile subscribers. The vast majority of these mobile users never part from their ubiquitous mobile phone. For those living in developed countries, the mobile phone started off as a status symbol and a cool gadget to have. Today, however, the mobile phone is also our mobile office. It is our oxygen, our livelihoods, an object that is more than an object; it is an extension of ourselves. If we happen to "forget" our mobile phone, we feel completely lost and disoriented. This is because our little hand-held device has our daily appointments, our address book, our emails, photos of our children, our favourite music and allows us to access the internet.

The mobile phone is also the lifeline and an equally important source of livelihood for our brothers and sisters in developing countries. It has revolutionized the lives of millions of urban and rural poor by connecting and involving them in viable economic activities.

Mobile telephony is a success story because the handset is an affordable, scalable, self-sustaining and empowering tool which is paving the way for men and women to achieve socio-economic goals and provide food security to their family. It is a tool that provides a wide range of services at a reasonably low cost.

It is a success because it is providing timely, localized and relevant access to knowledge which in turn has led to reducing production and transaction costs. For example, poor rural people use mobile telephony to get commodity price information via Short Message Service (SMS), gather market intelligence and find out the market needs so that they can make "targetted" trips and save on travel and transportation costs.

As the predominant mode of communication in developing countries, it has contributed substantively to the reduction of the digital divide, something other ICTs such as computers did not manage to achieve. They are definitely more appealing a more viable tool than the \$100

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