Lessons in Mobile Learning for Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment

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Mobile Learning Week Webinar
UNESCO Headquarters, Education Sector
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775 million illiterate adults worldwide, two-thirds of whom are women. (UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics, 2010)

About 32 million girls did not attend school in 2010. (Ibid)

Education is a fundamental human right and is essential for the exercise of all other human rights (Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights / UNESCO)

Literacy is a tool for empowering women to fight against injustice, inequality and social or cultural barriers. (EFA Global Monitoring Report et al)

Worldwide, there were approximately 6 billion mobile phone subscriptions at the end of 2011 though about half account for double subscriptions. (ITU, 2011; Nokia 2012)

Over the next 5 years, 2 out of every 3 potential new mobile phone subscribers will be women. (GMSA - mWomen, 2010)
Framing the Issue

Women and girls face barriers to accessing education...
(cultural, societal, religious, political, economical, their own attitudes, and geographic or security constraints.)

Learning through mobile devices can help overcome some of these barriers....
(Their unique features include portability, relative affordability, discreteness, potential content richness, wide-use and increasing social acceptability, and one-to-one learning advantages)

Despite this potential, women and girls are also hindered by a lack of access to the technology
(including poor technology-related infrastructures, cost, low levels of knowledge on how to use the devices, feelings of technophobia, embarrassment, or a lack of confidence in their use, misunderstanding of how mobiles can be relevant for them)
Framing the Issue

Thus, there is **growing interest in mobile devices’ contribution** in this area and a need to know more about:

- how mobile devices can provide **better access to education**, especially to women and girls; and
- how to overcome the obstacles preventing their **optimal use** for learning and improvement of livelihoods.

This UNESCO project addresses this interest and aims to uncover lessons learned and provide policy guidance.
Project Background

• Funded by the U.S. Government.

• Implemented by UNESCO HQ Education Sector, within the frameworks:
  *United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) Fund

• Field support from UNESCO offices and institutes, and others:
  *Bangkok & Regional Bureau for Education
  *Islamabad
  *Dakar
  *IIEP, Buenos Aires
  *Organization of American States

• June 2012 - May 2013

• Global comparative publication anticipated for May 2013, to prepare the background for future, country-level implementation activities.
Project Goals

Empowerment through learning and literacy via mobile (phones) for improved education and livelihoods

- **To empower women and girls** through education via innovative mobile technology-based learning and information programmes.

- **To obtain literacy and improve the use of literacy skills** of neo-literate women and girls through innovative mobile technology-based learning and information programmes.

- **To provide access to information** on issues, such as civic and human rights, health and hygiene, nutrition, agriculture, or banking.
Scope

- **Global in scope, regional approach:**
  *Asia & the Pacific*
  *Africa*

  **Highest illiteracy rates, large populations, highest and fastest growing rates of mobile phone subscriptions; where most initiatives are happening.**

  *Latin (and North) America & the Caribbean*

  *Arab States*

- **Focus on solutions for developing countries in particular**
Criteria for selection of initiatives for the publication:

Developing Literacy through Mobile Phones – Empowering Women and Girls

1st priority initiatives:
Empowering women or girls through literacy and learning via mobile phones.

2nd priority initiatives:
- Empowering women or girls via mobile phones (through general life skill initiatives).
- Literacy initiatives via mobile phones (gender neutral, with women included as participants and beneficiaries).
# Selected Case-Studies

**AFRICA**

1. **Jokko Initiative**  
Tostan International & UNICEF (Senegal)

2. **Project ABC – Mobiles 4 Literacy**  
Tufts University, University of Oxford, Catholic Relief Services (Niger)

   + **Nokia Life** by Nokia (Nigeria)

**ARAB STATES**

3. **Somali Youth Livelihoods Project**  
Souktel & EDC (Somalia)

**LATIN AMERICA & the CARIBBEAN**

4. **AlfabeTIC Celular**  
Organization of Ibero-American States (Argentina)
Selected Case-Studies

### ASIA & the PACIFIC

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<th>Description</th>
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<td><strong>5. Phone Revolution Project</strong></td>
<td>Oxfam – Digital Vision, Women for Prosperity (Cambodia), Nokia</td>
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<td><strong>6. The MILLEE Project</strong></td>
<td>Carnegie Mellon University (India, China)</td>
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<td><strong>7. Nokia Life</strong></td>
<td>Nokia (India, Indonesia, China)</td>
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<td><strong>8. Mobile-based Literacy Programme</strong></td>
<td>Bunyad Foundation, UNESCO Islamabad, Mobilink (Pakistan)</td>
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<td><strong>9. Mobile Literacy Program</strong></td>
<td>Afghan Institute of Learning, U.S.-Afghan Women’s Council at Georgetown University, Creating Hope International (Afghanistan)</td>
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Sources of input and insights

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<tr>
<th>Regional Reviews</th>
<th>Case Studies</th>
<th>Regional Consultation Workshops</th>
<th>Global Comparative Analysis</th>
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<td><strong>Overview of initiatives to foster or improve learning &amp; literacy among women or girls via mobile phones</strong></td>
<td><strong>In-depth analyses of initiatives, lessons we can learn from them and policy recommendations for future scaling-up of similar initiatives</strong></td>
<td><strong>Convening authors, experts, and policymakers to provide input on regional experiences, to identify preliminary lessons, and to consider initial policy recommendations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analysis comparing specific factors and pre-conditions for success, unique features, and lessons learned</strong></td>
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*Participants at the Asia & the Pacific Regional Consultation Workshop, Bangkok, Thailand 27-28 November 2012*
Guiding Framework for Mobile Learning

Socio-cultural ecological approach to mobile learning (Pachier et al., 2010). Guiding framework provided by the Asia & the Pacific Regional Review author, Dr. Hyo-Jeong So
Some preliminary lessons

• Non-exhaustive

• Still under development and elaboration

• Grounded in specific contexts and informed by case study and regional review authors, programme managers, subject-matter experts, and local policymakers, particularly from the Regional Consultation Workshops for Africa / Asia & the Pacific / Latin and North America & the Caribbean
General typography of lessons learned

- Education and Learning
- Context and Content
- Gender Relations and Empowerment
- Stakeholders
Preliminary Lessons Learned: Education and Learning

- **Equal mobile opportunities for equality of education**: Equal access to, ownership of, and control over mobile phones should be protected as a basic human right in policy statements in order to avoid excluding females from emerging learning and empowerment opportunities enabled by mobile technologies.

- **Need to think about the educational (and contextual, including social, psychological and physical) needs first**, then if, how and in what way technology can most appropriately fit those needs.

- **Need to think about what is effective pedagogy**, which should happen in real-life learning contexts.

- **Do not underestimate the importance of the human factor**: interaction and face-to-face learning should not be underestimated. Mobile phones are a valuable tool, but they cannot replace the teacher or physical learning community that is cultivated amongst learners.

Background Photo: Mobile Literacy Project, Pakistan - Bunyad Foundation
Preliminary Lessons Learned: Education and Learning

• The value of providing learning as “snacks and bites” to not overwhelm or intimidate learners.
• An added barrier includes needing to come up with new and effective pedagogies for specific contexts and needs.
• Need to determine useful indicators to measure the effectiveness of programmes (for example, learner attendance, participation, academic performance).
• Take the time to ensure teacher quality. Mobiles can assist teachers, but they cannot transform poor teaching into good teaching. Reinforce the capacity of teachers before programme implementation.

Background Photo: Mobile Literacy Project, Pakistan - Bunyad Foundation
Think of **different educational settings** with mobile learning (contexts when you need to start with face-to-face literacy followed by mobile phones as support, for example).

- For program design in empowerment, think about content to go **beyond women-specific info**; Combine literacy training with income generation programs.
- **Make content useful** to the beneficiaries.
- Importance of **using local language, context, accents, needs** in literacy curriculum.
- Barriers are often determined by the interplay of social norms, control and language.
- **Local content and capacity building** must go hand-in-hand with the technology.
- For programmes, **keep them simple, interactive and fun** to motivate and incentivise.
Preliminary Lessons Learned: Gender relations and empowerment

- **Importance of including men and boys** in the programme design and as beneficiaries, where culturally appropriate.

- **Gender relations and decision-making factors:** In contexts where much control and decision-making is made by men, particularly in terms of education and ICTs, women are not as comfortable, less confident to learn language and ICT skills. Efforts should be made to create programmes that take this into consideration. On a policy level, **an environment must be fostered which addresses and possibly circumvents these barriers.**

- In those communities with high rates of gender-based discrimination and reticence in letting women and girls learn on phones, it is particularly important that the project **incorporates a dialogue with the community/village** in advance so that families and leaders understand the positive aspects and broader community benefits to be gained. This was the case for projects in Pakistan and Afghanistan projects. (Community or social mobilization programmes to “prepare the soil” for empowerment.)
Preliminary Lessons Learned:
Gender relations and empowerment

• Need to give reasons, structures and spaces where women can leave their homes, without needing consent. (They don’t have much interaction with people, which is important for literacy: Community learning model, with phone as a connecting and reinforcement tool).
• Keep in mind the violence, security, harassment and issues against women stemming and potentially reinforced by mobile phone use, but also the potential in the device for providing added security and fighting against violence and harassment.
• The importance of the programme design for social influence (social inference for showing women’s empowered role in society - changing socially constructed ideas and beliefs about women and girls in the community).
• Remember that women teachers can be important and influential role models for girl (and boy) learners.
Preliminary Lessons Learned: Stakeholders

- Importance of **building partnerships** with organizations having the proper expertise and especially those concerned locally, but recognize the challenge of cultivating those partnerships.
- Barriers to mobile learning are often about **convincing people** (parents, teachers, administrators).
- Importance of **government involvement from the start and throughout process**; putting mobile learning and literacy for women and girls on the political agenda.
- Governments need help to contribute to developing mobile ecosystem and educational environments sensitive to the needs of girls and women.
- Foster more **participatory design processes**; involve beneficiaries from start to ensure needs are met, content is relevant, context is understood, timing is appropriate, and a better chance for sustainability is ensured.
- For **sustainability, the local partners and beneficiaries** must help design and take ownership/responsibility for the programme.
Future Directions

Pilot Study(ies)
Pilot study(ies) based on findings of effective practices in successful case studies and regional reviews, with a view to consider lessons learned for scaling up high quality and cost effective initiatives.

Implementation & Evaluation
Full-scale implementation at country level with evaluations and impact assessments.
Special Thanks

For the input and insights, a very sincere thank you to:

Case study and regional review authors

Programme partners and managers of initiatives for sharing information and their willingness to exchange good (and not so good) practices

Workshop participants who attended the expert regional consultations on Asia & the Pacific, on Africa, and on Latin and North America and the Caribbean

Co-organizers of workshops - the UNESCO Bangkok office and the Organization of American States

Also, a special thank you to the programme participants - women and men, girls and boys – who aspire to increase their learning levels, who have overcome the challenges in accessing quality education, and who inspire us all!
Thank you for joining!

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