

WTPF  
Backgrounder  
Series

# WTPF Strategic Dialogue

## Session Two: Broadband Driving Development 13 May 2013

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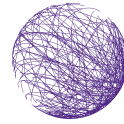
*This Session considers the benefits of broadband for accelerating development. Broadband promises to transform the provision of healthcare and education in developed and developing countries alike. How can broadband improve people's lives? Are Megabits or mobiles most helpful to the citizens of developing countries? What is the size of the remaining business opportunity from connecting the world, and connecting women, remote communities and marginalized groups? And how can broadband infrastructure and services be made to work to the best benefit of developing countries? This Session considers the applications of broadband infrastructure and services for improving people's lives and accelerating achievement of the MDGs.*

- Applications of Broadband for healthcare
- Applications of Broadband for education
- Applications of Broadband for other MDGs

Today, over half the world's population now has access to a mobile phone, with nearly 7 billion mobile subscriptions and 2.5 billion Internet users worldwide by the end of 2012 (ITU, 2013). However, these are more than just bald statistics – today, modern ICTs are genuinely changing people's lives for the better. As broadband, and mobile phones in particular, reach the hands of more and more people living in low-income and rural areas, a growing number of people are becoming empowered, able to access information on demand and readily contactable – often for the first time. Today, due to this large subscriber base, mobile communications are argued by many observers to offer the single biggest delivery platform for development.

Poverty reduction is the overarching development goal of the United Nations, which is becoming increasingly urgent in the wake





of the global financial crisis, but for many people in developing countries, information poverty rapidly becomes actual poverty. Lack of education, illiteracy, lack of nutrition or access to health resources, lack of aspirations – the causes of poverty are complex, persistent and difficult to overcome. Figures vary, but around 10 million people still die every year from hunger, and present trends in rising food prices and the global economic crisis may have pushed tens of millions more back into poverty, with women and girls often the most at risk, according to UN analysis. For many people, better access to information could make a real and significant life-changing difference.

#### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF BROADBAND IN HELPING IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIVES?**

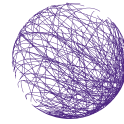
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Mobile applications and customized services can deliver concrete benefits promoting healthcare and education to raise awareness and help achieve public health goals. m-Health applications offer huge promise through lower costs and greater coverage to improve the quality of healthcare, as well as shifting the focus in behavior towards preventative healthcare, rather than curative healthcare. Examples include: the treatment and management of health (e.g., by reminding, registering or transmitting readings for diabetes or blood pressure); better health data to improve decision-making; applications for treatment plans (e.g. in HIV retroviral adherence plans); or applications for awareness-raising and information dissemination throughout the community at large, following community-based approaches towards achieving improved health outcomes as a social construct.

In education, mobiles could put a teacher into the hand of every schoolchild, woman and parent. Educational apps are being devised with local language content to teach literacy, numeracy, geography or safety or hygiene awareness. Children can learn more about prospects and opportunities in certain fields. Even more valuable, they can familiarize themselves with ICTs and learn fresh skills – skills that will stand them in good stead in a field where the shortfall between labour requirements and skilled labour is projected to widen significantly over the next ten years.

More broadly, expanding access to mobiles can open up young and old minds alike to new opportunities, new sources of information and fresh perspectives. They may also create an enabling environment for innovation, experimentation and fresh thinking, even within





established societies with traditional perspectives – for example, in agricultural or rural societies, which can experiment with new and innovative development initiatives.

### **IS BROADBAND ESSENTIAL, OR CAN EVEN SIMPLE SMS TRANSFORM PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND HELP SAVE LIVES AND RESOURCES?**

Are Megabits or mobiles most helpful to the citizens of developing countries? If even basic Internet access is good for triggering change, fresh thinking and a spirit of entrepreneurship, can faster speeds help more, through the delivery of more advanced and effective services? More advanced infrastructure and services are not always the most reliable. Does the speed of Internet access matter significantly to citizens in developing countries in delivering practical education and health information services?

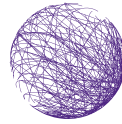
And are we talking about the services people really need or the services people really want – are end-users really just after mobile games and entertainment? In a rapidly converging industry, it is not always easy to predict the applications or content that will successfully win over new consumers in new markets where different consumer tastes, cultural factors and online behaviour shape consumers' Internet access needs.

Another key goal is promoting gender equality and empowering women. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stated that “Equality for women and girls is not only a basic human right; it is a social and economic imperative. Where women are educated and empowered, economies are more productive and strong. Where women are fully represented, societies are more peaceful and stable”. There is also growing evidence of the link between education of women and girls and issues such as infant mortality, women's land rights and family health. Broadband and mobile phones are being used to improve education and lift women out of poverty. Countries such as the Philippines are providing digital literacy training to women and succeeding in lifting women out of poverty. This includes ICT-based language literacy training, vocational training and using social networks to enhance women's on-going entrepreneurial activities.

At the same time, many studies indicate that job opportunities for those with engineering, science and IT skills are on the rise. For example, the European Commission has estimated that there is a



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skills gap for the ICT sector of some half a million skilled ICT workers. There is a need to ensure that women receive the necessary skills to meet this demand. Educating and training women in developing countries to enter the growing ICT sector will not only meet industry's need for a skilled workforce; it also promises to lift more women out of poverty and help meet a range of MDGs.

This Session considers the benefits of broadband for boosting empowerment, helping improve public education and healthcare outcomes and helping improve people's lives. It also examines how encouraging more women and girls into the ICT sector could help lift women out of poverty, while addressing the industry's need for more skilled workers.

**Potential questions for this Session could include:**

1. *What is the role of broadband in helping improve people's lives?*
2. *Does Internet access speed really matter in delivering the services that are most helpful for achieving the MDGs – is broadband essential, or can even simple SMS transform public healthcare delivery in developing countries and help save lives and resources?*
3. *What is the size of the remaining business opportunity from connecting the world, and connecting women, and marginalized groups?*
4. *What changes are needed in policy and regulation to facilitate growth in the services, applications and content that people need to improve their standard of living?*

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