

ICT4D

Learning how to harness Information Communication Technologies for Development



DFID funded research is helping to build more open, better networked societies through the use of digital technologies. The ICT4D programme, which was co-funded with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), examined the positive and negative impacts that ICT can have on the lives of the poor. Research findings are helping to inform emerging policy that looks to empower the world's poorest people through technology. For example, in Bangladesh, action research effectively demonstrated how a planned national tax on mobile phone usage would have effectively 'cut off' half of the poor population. The programme has improved the global knowledge base of how connectivity can be positively harnessed for social and economic development.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies have become part of the economic, social and political fabric of countries in recent years. ICTs have a wide range of uses from the transmission of information and facilitation of efficient public service delivery, to enabling citizens to hold their governments to account and participate more effectively in political processes. These technologies can therefore foster participation, transparency and good governance, and if used appropriately can act as crucial tools for poverty reduction and development.

DFID funded research has sought to improve global knowledge of how to harness the potential of ICTs for social and economic development, through the building of open, networked societies.

Co-funded by DFID and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the ICT4D programme has examined the positive and negative impacts of ICT on the lives of the poor. The research aimed to empower the poor in Africa and Asia to address their key development challenges through effective use of ICT. From 2007-2011, the ICT4D program initiated hundreds of projects that have had major and lasting impacts in numerous areas including Health, Education, ICT regulation, Gender Analysis and Governance.

Research into Action

There are a range of examples of ICT4D research evidence informing national policies and influencing government decision making processes.

In one notable project, LIRNEasia – a think tank based in Sri Lanka - examined mobile expenditure

patterns in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Thailand. This study showed that poorer people spend a much greater share of their monthly income on mobile services. In other words, the poorer the individual, the greater share of income that is devoted to mobile services (see figure 1). The findings were published in the journal article *Bottom of the Pyramid Expenditure Patterns on Mobile Services in Selected Emerging Asian Countries*. This research has influenced fiscal policies that facilitate access to information and communication technologies by the poor in Bangladesh.

advocate for reversing these proposals to levy additional taxes on mobile phones by engaging with the media and highlighting the negative impact the tax would have. In June 2012, the proposed tax on mobile phone bills was withdrawn.

Wider Environment

The study of mobile phone use in Bangladesh is part of a wider initiative in which ICT4D has invested in partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in order to build the field of knowledge and evidence of using ICTs to achieve development outcomes. ICT4D has funded the production of multi-country comparative communication cost data, which has catalyzed reforms that led to lower costs of access across the African continent. This data has, for example, led to a wave of price cuts by several mobile operators in South Africa and Namibia and has influenced the South African government's broadband policy.

Next Steps

DFID has funded collaborative research with IDRC in this area since 2007. The first phase of work was completed in 2011, to which DFID contributed £5m. Recognising the potential impact that further research in this area could have, DFID has since agreed to contribute another £6.3m towards the Information and Networks in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa programme (INASSA), which is co-funded with IDRC and set to run until 2018.

INASSA explores how the emergence of open models of development, made possible by digital technology, has the potential to transform international development. Research focuses on the growing role of mobile technologies to support poverty reduction efforts in the areas of Entrepreneurship, Education, Governance and Science. For example, a set of impact studies are comparing the use of open education resources against traditional teaching materials.

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For further information please visit the IDRC website:

<http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Publications/Collections/ICT4D/Pages/default.aspx>

The research article *Bottom of the Pyramid Expenditure Patterns on Mobile Services in Selected Emerging Asian Countries* evaluates expenditure patterns of mobile phone services among five income groups – particularly low-income, unskilled and less-educated users.

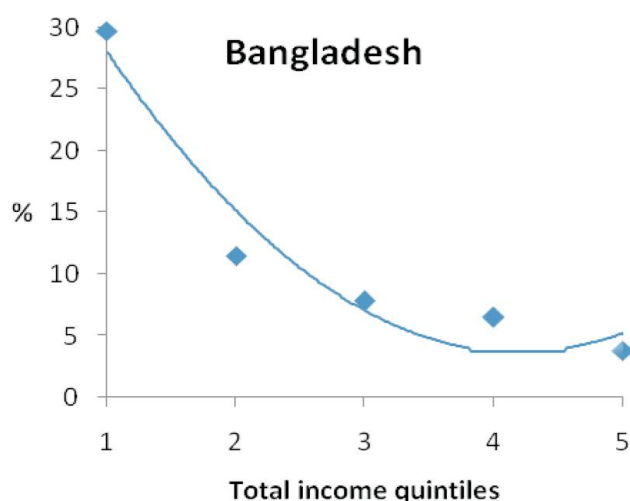


Figure 1: Share of mobile expenditures (Source: [Bottom of the Pyramid Expenditure Patterns](#))

The authors conclude that mobile phone services are necessities at the “bottom of the pyramid” and that any increase in price or tax adds the greatest burden on the poorest of the poor in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka the Philippines and Thailand.

Research Impact

In an effort to generate more revenue, the government of Bangladesh proposed a two percent tax on all mobile phone bills in the 2012-13 budget. However, surveys conducted by LIRNEasia on mobile phone use found that nearly half of all poor people in Bangladesh own a mobile phone, and this fixed tax would therefore have a severe impact on the poorest people. Backed by research evidence, LIRNEasia was able to successfully