

Chapter 10

Access to Learning Through Mobiles: A Socio-Technical Tale of Mobile Learning Actor–Network Among Smallholder Farmers

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ABSTRACT

The common myth that mobile learning cannot propel in a rural setting is null and void. The influx of modern ICTs like mobile technologies can revolutionize information access among the less privileged in many African communities. Using the Actor-Network Theory as a methodological tool, the chapter explores opportunities of increasing knowledge access through mobiles, by understanding the networks involved in farmer's mobile learning practice, with reference to Uganda. The chapter reveals that mobile technologies offer affordable individual and group learning opportunities to smallholder farmers. Learning is a socially constructed activity, where farmers with access to ICTs like mobile phones share knowledge

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among those with no access. Through a socio-technical discussion, technological initiatives ought to be pro-people where farmers' needs are key considerations in the mLearning actor-network. For sustainable impacts, all actors need to work collaboratively, negotiate different realities, and appreciate the local challenges within which mobile technologies can support learning.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have great potential to facilitate growth and development in many developing regions (Heeks, 2008; World Bank, 2016). While the contribution of ICTs has been noticeable in ICTD research, there has been a remarkable breakthrough regarding the rise and use of mobile communication technologies (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2009; Svensson & Wamala, 2012). This has given rise to new research fields like Mobile for Development (M4D) (Svensson & Wamala, 2012). M4D falls within the broader ICTD research, whose origin emanates from mobile phone usage that offers a range of possibilities to empower and transform people in developing regions. The influx of modern technologies has revolutionized information, making it possible to avail knowledge and awareness to the end-users (Oladele, 2011). Modern ICTs, like mobile technologies, offer solutions to developing regions like Sub-Saharan Africa since such technologies require less infrastructure investments and are equally available in many African communities (Duncombe, 2011; Oluwatobi & Olurinola, 2015; Traxler, 2018). These new technologies have been considered a chance for Africa to blend into the world of better economic activities and social wellbeing (Alzouma, 2005). There is considerable emphasis on personal media as opposed to mass media given the vantage that lies in its portability and low cost. In personal media, the individual has access to educational content any time anywhere, which aids learning processes (Ekanayake & Wishart, 2014; Garcia-Cabot, de-Marcos, & Garcia-Lopez, 2015; Elsafi, 2018). What matters is not the nature of technology and how sophisticated it may be, for as long as that technology is simple, cheaper, and reliable. Mobile Learning (mLearning) to support farmer's livelihoods fit this overall view of more affordable and reliable technological solutions. Correspondingly, instead of introducing new ICTs to address citizens' challenges in developing regions where the cost of ICT installations has been a challenge, using mobile technologies

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