

## Letter

### One mobile per child: a tractable global health intervention

#### Summary

*The purpose of this perspective is to introduce the idea of a One Mobile Per Child. Currently the One Laptop Per Child program is a championing program in enabling the use of ICT in underserved regions. This view suggests another alternative that could be based on the same philosophy as the One Laptop Per Child but with a far reaching audience.*

It is time to change the emphasis of One Laptop Per Child program to One Mobile Per Child. The One Laptop Per Child program has highlighted the impact technology can have in improving living standards. The One Laptop Per Child too expensive in cost, power and requires computer literacy. Better alternatives do exist.

The launch of the One Laptop Per Child program aimed to bridge the digital divide by providing affordable machines that allow access to the Internet, the target group being children in developing countries. However, by comparing the Internet penetration figures and the mobile phone penetration figures it can be seen that, especially in the developing world, the penetration rate of mobile phones is significantly higher than the internet penetration rate. A report by Informa Telecoms & Media (2007) estimated that by mid-2007 mobile networks covered 90 percent of the global population and that in 2009 worldwide mobile phone penetration will surpass 50%, with well over 3 billion subscribers. With the increasing mobile coverage and the expansion to rural areas, mobile technology is a more tractable solution for making health prevention and medical care more effective for the world's poorest people.

Over the last few years mobile telephony has become the principal gateway to ICT access and use. The marked increase in mobile phone penetration rates in developing countries especially should be recognised as a potential "digital bridge" for the digital divide. According to the Information economy report 2007-2008 (2008), the number of mobile phone subscribers in the developing world has tripled in the last 5 years. The growth has been phenomenal and now these subscribers make up 58% of all mobile phone users worldwide. At US\$100 per laptop that is still an expensive

solution, if the same economic formula was applied a Mobile per Child should cost US\$10 (or even less). Venezuela have launched "the Vergatario" \$15 mobile phone and India talk about a "people's phone" costing \$12.

One Mobile per Child would be more affordable and realistic solution in networking communities in the developing world and within underserved communities in developing countries. Mobiles are small, portable, affordable and much more useable and useful than laptops. The large amount of ideas and tools that go with new technologies are becoming mainstream. Frontline SMS, for example, is a free open source software that turns a laptop and a mobile phone into a central communications hub. Twitter and other micro-blogging tools that work equally from mobile phone and computer are also mainstream. This indicates that many mobiles and one laptop per village is more tractable than one laptop per child.

With the new faster next-generation version of the Internet already penetrating many countries like Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6) and mobile phones marching to the beat of one standard like long term evolving (LTE) 3G and 4G MOBILE phone networks are here. Put the two together and the users get what they want, which is information, on everything, at anytime, and anywhere at their finger tips. Plus of course they have the option of using the audio capabilities of mobile phones to speak to other people. One mobile per child seems achievable.

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