
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Information and Communications Technology

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Mobile applications in Asia and the Pacific

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Information note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. The expansion of mobile networks has been impressive in Asia and the Pacific. From 2005 to 2009, the region continued to demonstrate one of the highest growth rates of mobile subscriptions in the world, with the low-income countries collectively recording the highest compound annual growth rate, nearly 70 per cent. Furthermore, the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries in the ESCAP region showed nearly 60 per cent compound annual growth rate. Another distinctive characteristic of mobile growth is the fact that the predominance of mobile phones vis-à-vis fixed telephone lines increased in significance in least developed countries. For instance, 99 per cent of all telephone subscribers in Cambodia are mobile subscribers.

2. With the mobile subscriber base further expanding into remote and rural areas and one of the goals of the Geneva Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)¹—ensuring ICT access to half of the population—being achieved in an increasing number of countries, a pertinent question to ask is how these new networks and capabilities which cover the previously under-serviced and unconnected areas in developing countries can be capitalized on and used to expand business and employment opportunities, improve agricultural outputs and health-care services, and make disaster risk reduction and management and natural resources management more efficient, among other things. The development of mobile networks has so far been mostly call- and short message service (SMS)-based, and the potential for using the networks and applications for socio-economic development has not fully materialized, although some countries have started social and economic applications to deliver public services to previously under-serviced people. Enhanced communications, information and knowledge sharing will help to accelerate the achievement of

¹ A/C.2/59/3, annex.

internationally agreed development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the WSIS goals, and the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

3. ESCAP is currently reviewing regional trends on m-payment and m-remittances for poverty reduction and m-health to improve health-care services in Asia and the Pacific. Much more could be done in a more systematic manner to make full use of the existing mobile networks and capabilities and accelerate efforts towards poverty reduction and universal achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific.

4. These new dynamic developments are taking place at a time when ESCAP member countries are fully recovering from the economic crisis and shifting their focus back to achieving various internationally agreed development goals, including achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In their efforts to sustain economic growth and achieve the Millennium Development Goals, ESCAP member countries may wish to take full advantage of expanding mobile capabilities, in partnership with the private sector.

II. Focus of the panel

5. A panel will be convened to review and discuss recent developments in mobile communications and how they can be applied for the universal achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development in Asia and the Pacific. The panellists are expected to share their views on the most critical issues which should be addressed as a priority by ICT policymakers.

6. For instance, which policy and regulatory requirements and considerations have proven to be effective in promoting mobile applications? In which applications could the private sector take the lead, and in which areas should the public sector take the initiative? What would be the incentives for the private sector and how could the government ensure healthy growth of the industry and inclusion of the marginalized and poor? What would be a good mechanism to ensure the sustainable involvement of other ministries, such as the health, education and agriculture ministries, in providing information and services through mobile applications?

III. Format

7. The panel will take the following format:

- An introductory presentation will be made by the ESCAP secretariat (5 minutes).
- The discussion will be moderated by a distinguished panellist.
- Panellists will have 10-15 minutes to make comments or presentations about the topic and their views and experience, and to make recommendations and suggestions on the topic.
- The floor will be open for questions and answers addressed to the panellists.
- The moderator will briefly summarize the session.

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