

# Challenges and policy options

*By John Traxler*

It has been noted how lifelong learning plays a powerful role in enabling individuals and nations to reach their full potential. Without widening and deepening access to lifelong learning it will be increasingly hard to meet the challenges of the Education for All goals and adapt our economies and lifestyles to take account of climate change. The article will discuss the recommendations at the end of each of the earlier articles and articulate the reservations and limitations that come along with such recommendations. It is often tempting to make recommendations for *early childhood education*, for *vocational training*. This too is understandable since these create early credibility and momentum, and a straightforward account of cause-and-effect, but they should be integrated within a wider, more coherent and consistent framework and direction. This is not straightforward. Our incomplete examples, experiences and evidence will always support a variety of different interpretations and apparently plausible explanations that persuade us to construct the rationale and the narrative and discard the anecdote and the accidental.

A publication in 2005 from the Commonwealth of Learning, *Unleashing the Power of Learning*, [http://www.unleashinglearning.org/](#) & [http://www.unleashinglearning.org/](#)





Many of the team's recommendations show a concern for equity and fairness, that voluntary civil society organisations, rural areas, indigenous peoples, poor and marginalized communities, people with disabilities, do not get overlooked, disempowered or ignored by universal mobile technologies, that the skills development and the lifelong learning not only reach them but recognise and involve them. Alongside these recommendations are others that remind us that mobile technologies will not remove digital divides but will in fact complicate and reconfigure them, and other recommendations that recognise that mobile technologies are of an ethically problematic. So whilst the team completely endorses the potential of mobile technologies for enhancing, supporting and delivering skills development and lifelong learning, the team also recommends vigilance and caution.

There are also recommendations from the team that encourage educators, managers and officials to recognise that the mobile technologies are changing the world in fundamental ways, ones that require flexibility and imagination, and the courage to work outside the old norms, procedures and practices. Other recommendations ask us to think about the totality of mobile lifelong learning and mobile skills development, to think of tariffs, bandwidth, pollution, electricity supply, participative design and sustainability alongside technology and pedagogy.

Given that resources are always finite, the obvious priorities for national policy makers, institutional programme managers and the donor community should be:

-

These should enable the reporting of failure as well as success, and the understanding of culture.

Strategies for implementation should take account of resource implications such as connectivity costs, bandwidth limitations, technical support and ensure safe access to electric current in 'off-grid' areas.

Strategies should deploy technical solutions to ensure privacy of personal data and to protect vulnerable learners from inappropriate content and intrusion, but also incorporate online safety into training programmes.

### **Role of network operators**

Network providers (MNOs) should adopt a shared values approach and seek to balance business benefit with their corporate social responsibility and develop pricing policies and network

infrastructure that will widen and deepen access to learning.

### **Role of training and education providers**

Training should be provided for educators in the formal and non-formal sectors. This should include selection and creation of content that reflects local contexts, workforce needs and uses local languages where appropriate.

Educators and trainers should consider employing the full range of applications of mobile learning including participative design, learner collaboration and user-generated content.

### **Environment**

As mobile devices contain toxic materials, planning should include collection and safe disposal when devices are returned to a

<sup>1</sup> Traxler, J., and Kukulska-Hulme, A. (2005). *Using Technology to Enhance Learning* (G. Chin, Series Ed.). Vancouver, BC: Commonwealth of Learning.

<sup>2</sup> Traxler, J. (2013). *mlearning Solutions for International Development- Rethinking the Thinking*. *Journal of International Development*, 5(2), pp. 74-85.