

Executive summary

Introduction

In the past decade, the mobile communication technologies revolution and the growth of high-speed broadband and wireless access have begun to make a considerable impact on economic and social development worldwide, reinforced by the expansion of the public sector's capacity to leverage the use of ICTs to improve its internal functioning, as well as its interactions with citizens and businesses. However, the level of access to fixed broadband, particularly in developing countries, is lower than the access to mobile technology. This is due, in great part, to the high cost of the broadband technology and required infrastructure, in comparison to the cost-effectiveness and impact of mobile technology on citizens' lives and on their interaction with governments.

By creating new and expanded communication channels, mobile technologies provide access in areas where the infrastructure required for Internet or wired phone service is not a viable option. The development of mobile communication technologies has not only created a new venue for governments to reach out to a much greater number of people than ever, but it has also brought citizens previously unimaginable opportunities to communicate with each other conveniently, and to access both public and private information and services, with diminishing time and space boundaries and limits. Cheap and ready-for-use mobile devices are removing existing barriers and are empowering citizens to connect to governments to access a wide range of information and services in a number of policy areas, *e.g.* legal information, health, education, finance, employment, transportation and public safety. Furthermore, new generation mobile phones, or "smart phones", and the realisation of 3G and 4G networks with new built-in functions and a plethora of mobile applications, are providing unprecedented possibilities in terms of communication, networking and interactive experiences to actors across the globe.

M-Government – the adoption of mobile technologies to support and enhance government performance and foster a more connected society – can help improve government performance and strengthen public good governance provided that the emphasis is not placed on the “m”. Focus should be indeed on the needs of the public sector and of the end-users, be these citizens or businesses, to ensure that technology is exploited to reorganise the way civil servants work and to meet the needs of citizens through improved service delivery”.

Innovating service delivery

M-Government is not intended to eliminate existing on-line and off-line modalities of service delivery, but it affords powerful and transformational capacity to the public sector not only by increasing access to existing services, but also by enabling the design and delivery of new services (e.g. through new levels of civic engagement in policy development and democratic decision-making). Hence, it supports those governments that recognise that they have reached ‘the limits’ with their current approaches to service delivery. Examples include considerable advancements in education and innovative health services.

Empowering digitally deprived citizens

By empowering citizens, m-government is improving the quality of life of many individuals who were previously digitally excluded. Specifically, mobile technologies enable convenient access to public information and services. Citizens in remote areas can, for example, receive improved m-health assistance, notifications and emergency medical alerts. Mobile technologies also facilitate financial transactions (e.g. process cash transfers, deposits and withdrawals, payroll credits, international remittances and similar banking activities) and allow the delivery of educational content to students who would normally have limited access to public education. However, as there are still limits in the capacity of m-government to reach out to certain segments of the population, and in order to not widen the digital gap, governments should avoid enforcing the use of mobile channels, and provide access to new technologies only to those who are willing to use them.

Intensifying partnerships and exchange between the public and private sectors

Mobile technologies are also bringing new momentum to the business world. Key advances in wireless technology, faster and wider networks, larger device displays and better technical platforms for applications are creating opportunities for citizens, while allowing companies to reduce costs of both subscriptions and physical infrastructure. The private sector's growing knowledge and expertise may have a major impact on public sector activities. For example, more sophisticated mobile technologies are being used to support more efficient business processes in the public sector, through real-time communication and quick data access, and more agile and mobile public work forces. This is a key driver for exploring intensified and new public-private partnership models that allow governments to understand what is possible and adequate, and the private sector to better comprehend the public sector's needs and offer relevant solutions.

Enhancing public sector performance and good governance

Mobile communication technologies can be expected to provide governments with significant opportunities to achieve greater cost optimisation, improved communication, and data exchange, expanded service delivery and stronger digital equality. With mobile technologies, information and actions can be co-ordinated in any location and among agencies, improving collaboration and co-ordination between public authorities across levels of government; this is particularly critical in emergency response and crisis management. Furthermore, mobile phone penetration extends outreach and access to groups which are often difficult to reach, *e.g.* citizens in rural areas, and expands governments' accountability and transparency to a higher number of citizens.

In conclusion, the rapid uptake of mobile technologies – even in remote locations of low-income countries – together with the emergence of many innovative mobile applications and services, has radically increased the potential for ICT to play a constructive role in supporting ubiquitous good governance, and in fighting poverty. In the years to come, governments worldwide will be challenged by the need to look into developing m-government by adopting strategies that will enable them to harness the opportunities offered by mobile technologies and maximise their benefits in order to achieve the policy goals highlighted in this report.

Mobile government builds upon two decades of governments developing their e-government capacity. This experience shows that adopting any new technology implies adjustments which in most cases are not quick and bear costs in terms of infrastructural, organisational and cultural changes.

Adoption rate, demographics, and economy will influence the transition time, and governments will need some time to design, develop and implement national m-visions. This will not be an easy task and the extent to which the potential of m-government will be exploited will depend on governments' capacity to capture new opportunities brought about by mobile technologies in a meaningful manner, given the national needs; on their ability to build on progresses already made in e-government development; and on their readiness to address the challenges and barriers to m-government also highlighted in this report.