

LIVES (Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational System)

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Mobile technology is having a revolutionary impact in the developing world. Today I introduce LIVES, which is a collaborative project of the Commonwealth of Learning and the University of British Columbia (UBC). Its aim is to improve the lives and the livelihoods of rural people by helping them learn their way to greater prosperity.

LIVES is an acronym for Learning through Interactive Voice Educational System. Computer scientists at UBC have joined a mobile phone network to a learning management system.

This makes it possible to send out audio messages in ways that allow for individual interaction but can operate at scale. In one application 6,000 women in India who earn their living by rearing goats receive between 4 and 6 short audio messages each day giving advice on how better to feed and care for their goats. Many of these women are not literate and these messages are in their local language or dialect.

When each woman receives a message she can respond to a short quiz – which allows the LMS to assess the effectiveness of the message – or she can reply with a question or comment that will be picked up and responded to later by an expert.

What are the advantages?

First, of course, the system reaches the women where they are, often in the fields herding their goats.

Second, the messages can be customised by dialect or by purpose, for instance whether a particular group is rearing goats for meat or for wool.

Third, the very fact of owning the mobile phone empowers each woman who can also make personal use of it.

We all know how difficult it is to evaluate the effectiveness of learning for development, but here we could take a short cut by studying the goats. A large scale study by a veterinary expert

showed that goats being reared by the women using LIVES were bigger, healthier and had more kids, than goats whose herders did not have the benefit of these audio lessons.

Healthier and more fertile goats mean greater prosperity for these women and their families.

The Commonwealth of Learning and the University of British Columbia are proud to have developed this advanced technology which is substantially enhancing the lives of poor rural women.

LIVES improves lives.