

Mobiles for good

When you think of mobile phones, you probably think of them as a social device for texting or speaking to friends, but new technology means mobiles are now a way of ensuring a better life for many people in poorer countries.

One important new service is for health. About a quarter of drugs sold in poor countries are fake and tens of thousands of people die each year from them. A new free service in Nigeria and Ghana means that when people buy medicine, they can text a number on the packet and the reply says if the drug is fake. This could prevent thousands of deaths a year.

Another service is for farming. A United Nations report in April 2011 showed how one farmer in Africa increased his production last year by over 400% just by getting accurate weather forecasts from his mobile phone. This made it possible for him to plant at exactly the right time. In India, when farmers have problems with crops or animals, they can text for advice and information. For example, one farmer's plants had a disease, so he texted his question about what pesticide to use and the reply told him the right thing to do to control the disease.

Another way that mobiles are useful is in preventing dishonesty in government services. In some countries farmers need to do paperwork to get a loan and government workers sometimes ask for a bribe. Now there is a service in one state in India which allows farmers to do the paperwork using a mobile, without seeing a government worker and possibly having to pay a bribe.

Mobile money is another important service which lets people transfer cash by text. It is available in more than 40 countries, where people use it to pay salaries and bills. This service is very useful in sub-Saharan Africa as more people have a mobile phone than a bank account. In India there is now a 'branchless' banking system with more than three million users. People can get money by using a special mobile with a fingerprint reader, and a small printer to get a receipt. In one state the government uses the system for paying pensions.

The increase in mobile phone users in developing countries and new mobile services mean more people can get information and money they really need, which could really improve their lives.

1 Which paragraph(s) in the text (1–6) talks about the following?

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1 using a mobile so you don't need to go to a government office | paragraph _____ |
| 2 using a mobile to make sure your medicine is real | paragraph _____ |
| 3 using a mobile to get money without going to a bank | paragraph _____ |
| 4 using a mobile to know when to plant your crops | paragraph _____ |
| 5 mobiles for a better life in developing countries | paragraph _____ |

2 Read the article and decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1 Most drugs sold in poor countries are fake. | T/F |
| 2 In two African countries you can text to check if the medicine is fake. | T/F |
| 3 Texting to get an up-to-date weather report can increase production. | T/F |
| 4 In Africa, you can text to get information about plants and animals. | T/F |
| 5 In one state in India, you don't need to go to an office to get a loan. | T/F |
| 6 In a few countries, you can use a mobile for banking services. | T/F |
| 7 In Africa, you can use your fingerprint and a special mobile to get money. | T/F |

3 Match the words in the box to their meanings.

accurate crop disease ensure loan pension prevent transfer

- 1 to stop something from happening _____
- 2 to make certain that something happens _____
- 3 correct or true in every detail _____
- 4 plant grown for food, usually on a farm _____
- 5 a condition like an illness that affects plants _____
- 6 an amount of money that a person borrows, especially from a bank _____
- 7 money that someone gets after they stop working, paid by their company or the government _____
- 8 to move something from one place to another _____

4 Complete the sentences with one word from exercise 3 above.

- 1 Farmers sometimes need to do paperwork to get a _____ .
- 2 In Africa, people can text to get an _____ weather forecast.
- 3 Texting to check if a drug is fake could _____ thousands of deaths in poor countries.
- 4 When people are 60 or 65, in many countries they get a _____ from the government.
- 5 In India if a farmer has a problem with his _____ he can text for advice.
- 6 A mobile money service means people can _____ money by texting.
- 7 New technology and mobile services could _____ a better life for poor people in some countries.
- 8 If a plant has a _____ , one mobile service will help farmers know which pesticide to use.

5 Which word from each group has a different underlined vowel sound?

- 1 /ɪ/ think system receipt service
- 2 /i:/ disease bribe free people
- 3 /aɪ/ service life die mobile
- 4 /e/ friend health tens year
- 5 /ʌ/ drug thousand bt countries

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Which new mobile service do you think could help poor people most?
- Which of the mobile services do you think are available in your country?
- Which of the mobile services would you find useful?
- What other new mobile services do you think would be useful in the future?

Glossary

available (*adj*) – if something is available, you can get it

branch (*noun*) – shop or office of a large company or organisation in a particular area

bribe (*noun*) – money given to someone so they will help you by doing something dishonest or illegal

control (*verb*) – the ability to stop something from increasing or becoming dangerous

device (*noun*) – a piece of equipment that does a particular job

dishonesty (*noun*) – doing things that are not honest

fake (*noun/adj*) – made to look like something real in order to trick people

fingerprint (*noun*) – a mark that you leave on something showing the pattern of lines on your fingers

increase (*verb*) – make something become larger in amount or number

disease (*noun*) – a condition like an illness that affects plants, people or animals

pesticide (*noun*) – chemical used for killing insects, especially those that damage crops

plant (*verb*) – to put plants, or seeds in the ground so that they will grow there

plant (*noun*) – a living thing that grows in soil, has leaves and needs water and light to live

production (*noun*) – the amount of something that is made for sale

receipt (*noun*) – a piece of paper that you get showing that you have paid for goods

weather forecast (*noun*) – a report on probable weather conditions for a period of time in the future