

Tools for Integrating Mobile Phones in the Community Learning Programme

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There are several technologies that can enable integration of mobile phones in the Community Learning Program (CLP). Here, we cover four of those tools: (a) Frontline SMS, (b) FreedomFone, (c) GRINS, and (d) vChannel. We first provide a brief introduction to each of the tools followed by a table describing capabilities of each tool. We then present a discussion on how each of the tools can be used in different activities related to the CLP. Readers interested in using any of the tools can contact the author of the article or the editors of the publication for more information.

Frontline SMS: Frontline SMS is a simple, easy to install, and easy to use tool that allows an organization to create and manage groups of mobile numbers, and send messages to and receive messages from these groups. In addition, it can automatically add a sender to a group by processing the text received in the SMS. Frontline SMS is often used to send reminders or spread information that can be delivered via SMS, or to collect information from a large group of people. For example, it has been used in providing farmers with information about best farming practices and in election monitoring. A new variant of Frontline SMS called FrontlineSMS:Radio, that is specifically designed for community radio, is expected to be available soon. FrontlineSMS is free and can be downloaded from www.frontlinesms.com.

FreedomFone: FreedomFone is an easy to use IVR system designed specifically to enable community based organizations to provide information to its communities over phone calls. FreedomFone requires a dedicated computer, which then acts as the IVR server. It allows an organization to put pre-recorded audio on the server, which can then be listened to by the community by calling into the server. FreedomFone also allows an organization to receive SMS, conduct polls over SMS and also receive feedback from the community through an answering machine built in the system. An online demo of FreedomFone is available at <http://demo.freedomfone.org/>, where you can try the system out. FreedomFone is free and can be downloaded from www.freedomfone.org. However, it is harder to install than FrontlineSMS.

GRINS: GRINS is a radio automation system designed specifically for community radio stations. While GRINS can carry out several tasks, we only focus on mobile related aspects of it as that is of relevance here. Contrary to FreedomFone, where a caller talks to a computer, in GRINS a caller talks to an RJ at a radio station. The conversation between the RJ and the caller can be put live on air or can be recorded for later use. Depending on hardware in use, GRINS can enable conferencing between multiple callers, and the conference itself can be put live on air or recorded for later use. GRINS allows building a listener database by saving the name, number, and location of the caller. It also allows categorization of call recordings for obtaining statistics about the calls. Finally, GRINS also allows setting up an answering machine to receive feedback from callers. A demo video of GRINS is available at <http://tinyurl.com/grinsdemovideo>. GRINS is free and can be downloaded from <http://gramvaani.org/community-radio/>. However, using GRINS in a community radio station generally requires configuration with the station's mixer, which may require a technical resource person.

vChannel: vChannel is a specialized tool that allows an organization to operate a phone based channel similar to a TV channel. However, unlike a TV channel this is a participatory channel. Community members can call in to the vChannel server to access the channel. They can leave questions or comments about radio programs or even news about activities in their locality. These questions, comments, and news can then be heard by other community members who can respond to them if they like. The organization can also listen to and respond to the comments through a web interface. The same web interface also allows the organization to moderate the audio snippets heard over the phone and even download the snippets to use them in a radio program. More details about the tool can be obtained by contacting the author of this article or the editors of this publication.

Table 1 below outlines capabilities of each of the above tools.

Table 1: Tools for integrating mobiles in community learning programs.

Tools	Can Do	Can Not Do
Frontline SMS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send and receive group SMSes 2. Receive MMS 3. Automatically create a database of numbers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot handle voice calls. 2. No pending messages list. 3. Not more than 160 characters. 4. Cannot cancel pending messages. 5. Cannot conduct polls.
FreedomFone	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receive SMS 2. Conduct polls 3. Answering machine 4. Provide multiple recorded audios over phone call. 5. Export audio for editing 6. Call frequencies and caller database. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot send SMS 2. Cannot make calls 3. Cannot allow conversation between two people. 4. Depending on hardware may not handle parallel calls.
GRINS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make and receive calls between two people. 2. Export audio for editing. 3. Record all phone conversations. 4. Answering machine. 5. Categorize recordings: caller, topic, location, etc. 6. Caller database. 7. Depending on hardware can conference multiple calls. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot send and receive SMS. 2. Cannot make automated calls. 3. Cannot provide audio over incoming phone calls. 4. Cannot conduct polls.
vChannel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can record audio messages 2. Allows callers to listen to others' messages. 3. Allows moderation of messages. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot do anything else that the above three tools do.

We now look at how the above tools can be used in different aspects of a CLP. At a high level, aspects of CLP where mobile integration is possible are:

(a) Learning materials: Providing learning material in the form of text or audio to the learners. (b) Learner support: Providing avenues for the learner to ask questions or have discussions with other learners or facilitators.

(c) Logistics: Enrol and track learners as they join and leave the program. Track the amount of learning materials the learner has been exposed to.

(d) Evaluation: Test knowledge, attitude, and practice changes in learners as a result of the exposure to the program.

Table 2 below provides some examples of how FrontlineSMS, FreedomFone, GRINS, and vChannel can be used in the above aspects of a CLP.

Aspect	How to use a tool?
Learning Materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Put learning audio on FreedomFone or vChannel 2. Deliver key messages and links using FrontlineSMS. 3. Advert on CR to encourage listeners to SMS in/call in and thus collect feedback/material for learning materials.
Learner Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send reminders using FrontlineSMS. 2. Receive questions and comments by learners and get them answered by experts using vChannel. 3. Enable discussion between learners via vChannel. 4. Receive questions and comments through answering machine of GRINS or FreedomFone and broadcast the responses over radio.
Logistics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use FrontlineSMS to register/unregister learners. 2. Receive calls using GRINS and record details of the callers. Obtain statistics about who calls and how often from GRINS.
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use “please call me” followed by call outs asking what the listeners learned. 2. Ask listener groups to call in to the answering machine using GRINS or FreedomFone, and collectively leave a message about what they learned.