

Mobile Opportunities: Poverty and Telephony Access in Latin America and the Caribbean

Hernan Galperin, Universidad de San Adres, hgalperin@udesa.edu.ar

Access to telephony for low-income groups is largely based on different strategies of mobile telephony usage. The main goal of this research project is to explore the strategies employed by the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean to access and use mobile telephony services, as well as to identify the major market and regulatory barriers for increased penetration and usage. More generally, it seeks to contribute to the discussion on how access to mobile telephony contributes to improving the livelihoods of the poor – what we call mobile opportunities. Our results show that mobile telephony is highly valued by the poor as a tool for strengthening social ties and for increased personal security, and that it is beginning to prove useful for enhancing business and employment opportunities. Overall, the survey results suggest that the acquisition of mobile phones by the poor has an economic impact reflected mainly in improved social capital variables such as the strengthening of trust networks and better coordination of informal job markets. These findings reveal the continued need to develop innovative business models that extend the market frontier for mobile telephony. They also highlight the urgent need to rethink public policies that are premised on the mobile phone as a luxury good. Clearly, for the poor, mobile telephony has long been the most cost-effective and accessible alternative.

Bio:

Hernan Galperin (Ph.D., Stanford University) is Associate Professor at the Universidad de San Andrés (Argentina). He is also Steering Committee member for DIRSI, an ICT policy research consortium for Latin America and the Caribbean. Dr. Galperin has published extensively in major journals such as *Telecommunications Policy*, *The Information Society* and *Information Technologies and International Development*.