



Instant Networks Programme

THE VODAFONE FOUNDATION BRINGS MOBILE TECHNOLOGY TO A DISPLACEMENT CAMP IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Phone booths are an abandoned technology in most countries, where the majority of people rely on personal, mobile phones to communicate on the go. The Vodafone Foundation is revolutionizing what phone booths can be in the wake of disaster and displacement, by offering those most affected a way to connect and keep in touch with distant family members. The Vodafone Foundation's 'phone booths' provide displaced people access to free, mobile phones to make and receive calls and text messages, and to receive money via SMS (short message service), a welcomed resource in the face of limited economic opportunities and decreasing aid.

The Vodafone Foundation believes that mobile communication technologies can address some of the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges and improve people's lives. This notion has driven the foundation's investment in emergency response telecommunications since 2001. The Vodafone Foundation invests in the communities in which Vodafone—a British, multinational, telecommunications company headquartered in London—operates and is at the center of a network of Vodafone's global and local social investment programs.



Key Info



COUNTRY

Democratic Republic of the Congo



TARGET POPULATION

Displaced persons, refugees



APPROACH

Mobile technology

Well before mobile technology was ubiquitous, a French-based non-governmental organization (NGO) called Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) realized that in addition to water, food, shelter, and health, there was a real need for telecommunications in humanitarian efforts. TSF is credited with inventing the concept of humanitarian telecoms in terms of access to communications for relief workers as well as disaster victims. The Vodafone Foundation started funding TSF in 2002. After supporting TSF for several years, the foundation realized there was plenty more to do to provide communication-related aid to agencies and victims in emergencies. As a result, the Vodafone Foundation developed the Instant Networks Programme, to quickly provide information and communications technology (ICT) in the wake of an emergency like the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Eastern DRC has been plagued by ongoing civil unrest and violence resulting in mass displacement. In 2013,

“The Vodafone Foundation aims to be one of the first responders in a disaster, providing instant communications and fundraising support over our networks.” — Andrew Dunnett, The Vodafone Foundation (from the report *Mobile Technologies in Emergencies*)

in response to the most recent uprising, the Vodafone Foundation brought the Instant Network Programme, in partnership with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), to Mugunga 3, a displacement camp housing almost 20,000 Congolese, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Goma, the capital of the North Kivu province. There, the Vodafone Foundation set up four ‘phone booths’ providing a total of 20 mobile phones for IDPs living in the camp. Each

Learn More

To learn more about the Vodafone Foundation’s Instant Networks Programme, read the connected GrantCraft case study at grantcraft.org/case-studies/technology-has-come-a-long-way.



‘phone booth’ is equipped with five mobile phones: four phones for making and receiving calls, and one phone to send and receive text messages and money transfers through a service called M-Pesa.

IDPs are allowed five free minutes of calls per week. These parameters are flexible especially in case of emergencies, like the death of a family member.

“There is mobile coverage in Goma and its surrounding areas. A five-minute call costs about 50 cents but people in the camps are living on less than one dollar a day. Five minutes of free calling allows them to save half of their available income while staying in touch with their loved ones,” shares Instant Network Programme manager Oisín Walton. “By connecting family members, it enables IDPs to access their support network and hopefully get



positive news from their villages about when it may be safe to return home.”

The ‘phone booths’ also provide IDPs with access to support in the absence of livelihoods opportunities

and aid. Two years after the height of the crisis, food distributions in Mugunga 3 were reduced to once every two months due to decreased funding. This is not enough to cover the needs of the average family. If relatives can send money via M-Pesa, this is one more way to support those most affected by the conflict and displacement. M-Pesa is service provided by Vodacom, the local brand of Vodafone in the DRC, which allows users to transfer money via SMS. Callers can ask family members to send money to the one phone dedicated to text messaging and M-Pesa. Once received, a Vodacom staff member can transfer the money onto an approved mobile phone in the camp or cash the money to provide the recipient with cash-in-hand.

The same phone that operates M-Pesa allows family members and other connections to send messages back to those residing in the camp. When messages are received, Vodacom staff record them and then deliver the messages. This means that even if a camp resident and one of their contacts cannot arrange a time to connect voice-to-voice, they can still communicate.

Instant Networks Programme has offered about 160,000 free calls since operations started in October 2013. This allows those uprooted from their homes, living in arduous conditions, to maintain some semblance of normalcy by connecting with relatives. Oisín explains: “Just a few free minutes provide those who have lost almost everything with something: the ability to reach out to family or friends.” The program has been very successful in the DRC. Oisín admits: “It’s easier to manage and offer these services in countries like the DRC, Kenya, and Tanzania, where Vodafone operates the cellular network.” However, the Vodafone Foundation has also implemented

The Impact of Mobile Services



For women, new mobile services can improve their quality of life and livelihood: 90 percent of women feel more empowered with a mobile phone and 41 percent have greater income generation opportunities.




300 million fewer women than men own a mobile phone and 15 percent of women in areas with mobile coverage never use a mobile phone.



Countries benefit from 1.2 percent more in GDP, for every 10 percent increase in mobile penetration.



Mobile technology boosts economic development through job creation and greater productivity and efficiency but many women miss out because they don’t own a mobile phone.



similar programs in countries outside of Vodafone's coverage, working through a partner operator. "There is a growing trend of operators getting involved in disaster response to help clients through difficult times and support agencies bringing in aid; and to get the networks up and running as quickly as possible so that business continues."

can play in addressing certain challenges," highlights Oisin. From keeping in touch with loved ones, to accessing education and even financial support from distant relatives, mobile technology plays a pivotal and growing role in relief efforts to better meet the needs of those most affected by crisis. The Vodafone Foundation is driven to continue to push the

"In an emergency situation, speed of communications is critical and can be the mean difference between life and death."

— Andrew Dunnett, The Vodafone Foundation (from the report *Mobile Technologies in Emergencies*)


"The humanitarian community has come a long way since 2001. Not to say that food and shelter are not paramount in the aftermath of a disaster. It is more a growing recognition of the role that technology

larger development field to recognize the impact technology can have, and to view it as a vital need as opposed to a luxury.

The Red Alert Campaign

The Instant Networks Programme isn't Vodafone's only intervention that leverages SMS technology. Vodacom, the local brand of Vodafone in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), pledged money and launched a fundraising and awareness raising campaign on domestic and sexual violence in the DRC. The campaign reached out to employees and customers and invited them to donate money via

SMS. This Red Alert Campaign raised almost \$150,000, which was donated to the Panzi hospital in Bukavu in the province of South Kivu to build a facility for survivors of domestic and sexual violence to receive medical treatment. Fundraising was accompanied by a national campaign including television ads, events, demonstrations, and appearances by local government officials to raise awareness of these issues.



Mobile technology isn't a luxury,
but a lifeline for people affected by
disaster and displacement.

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This case study was written by Virginia Zuco and developed for Foundation Center's Equal Footing project.

Photographs provided courtesy of the Vodafone Foundation.

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