An Exploratory Study on Co-Locating Voter Registration in Telecentres Case of Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how co-locating voter registration at telecentres can address some of the challenges in the electoral process of a developing country. A case in Malawi was analysed using secondary data. A general inductive approach was used to analyse media reports on voter registration. The general inductive approach supported the development of themes for explaining the role of telecentres in addressing some of the challenges for voter registration. The study showed that the voter registration process has problems without obvious solutions including operational, social and political issues. Some of the problems can be mitigated utilising the services in telecentres. The services were mainly technical, logistical and communication. The study proposes a model for collaborative service delivery which suggests factors to be considered when co-locating voter registration in telecentres.

KEYWORDS

Electoral Process, Malawi, Telecentre, Voter Registration

1. INTRODUCTION

A telecentre is "a physical facility that offers the community access to computers and Internet" (Gollakota et al., 2012, p. 186). There are different ways in which telecentres serve the communities in which they operate. The services of telecentres can be housed or co-located in other organisations or operate as a standalone service. Empirical studies have showed that telecentres services can be co-located in other organisations such as learning institutions (Huerta & Sandoval-Almazan, 2007), libraries (Chigona, 2006; Chigona, Lekwane, Westcott & Chigona, 2012), post offices (Chikumba, 2011) and government offices (Madon, 2004; Perera, 2013). Co-locating telecentres in other public organisations has mitigated some of the challenges that affect their operations e.g. securing infrastructure, awareness of services and sharing of operating costs (Gomez et al. 2012; Huerta et al., 2012). While most studies have look at telecentres housed in other organisations, this study aims to explore in turn the role of telecentres in supporting other organisations that deliver public services e.g. voter registration in the electoral process.

The study used the case of Malawi which represented a low-income economy in Africa. The country conducted general elections in May 2014. There were 51 operational telecentres in the country at the time of the study (Kayira, 2013; GoM, 2013). However, their role in supporting other organisations has not been adequately studied. The study was guided by the research question: How

can telecentres address some of the challenges for voter registration process? To answer this question the study analysed media reports confronting voter registration process. An inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) was used to generate concepts that could explain how telecentres can support voter registration process.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section review literature on telecentres in the context of developing countries. Section 3 highlights the approach to the study. Section 4 presents the summary of the results. Section 5 discusses the results. Section 6 summarises the conclusions drawn from the study.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

2.1. Role of Telecentres in Communities

Telecentres offer services including access to computers and Internet, email, bills payment services, access to e-government services, fax, phone, computer training and other value-added services (Chigona et al., 2012; Gomez et al., 2012). One of the objectives of telecentres is help communities in achieving social economic development. The services in the telecentres are offered for free or at a cost to the user depending on the objectives of the telecentre. The ownership and management of telecentre determines whether the services offered to the community to be free or paying (Gollakota et al., 2012). Private organisations, government and non-governmental organisations may own the telecentres.

Apart from providing access to ICTs, telecentres have the potential improve the well-being of communities through promoting social inclusion, increasing access to information, support addressing literacy and learning (Chigona et al., 2012; Huerta et al., 2012). Telecentres act as meeting points and information hubs in rural communities where people and organisations can obtain and disseminate information on microfinance, health, agriculture and education (Bailur, 2007; Gomez, 2012). The services can be categorised into online and offline activities for sharing information and communication (Bailey, 2009). Thus, telecentres offer diverse services depending on context (Gollakota, Pick & Sathyapriya, 2012).

2.2. Challenges for Telecentres

Telecentres are fraught with challenges which may affect achievement of their objectives and sometimes lead to failure. Some of the challenges are the sustainability of the telecentres, lack of demand for the services in rural communities, lack of interest in telecentres for the users (Gollakota et al., 2012). Other challenges relate to the understanding of technologies and maintenance of equipment for the telecentres, especially for the telecentre staff. Governance and power relations amongst the stakeholders may also affect the operations of a telecentre. Social norms and practices for communities where the telecentres are operating can affect the operations of telecentre (Gomez et al. 2012; Huerta et al., 2012).

Chigona et al. (2012) highlight challenges inhibiting utilisation of telecentres co-located in a library. The challenges were lack of identification documents for some users, economic hardship for the users, attitudes of users towards the services, inadequate facilities to serve a large group of users at once, lack of skills of the users and privacy concerns when using the ICT services. Some telecentre users had no identity documents and proof of address which required for the membership of the library. Only registered members of the library were allowed to use the telecentre (Chigona et al., 2012). Telecentre users raised concerns that there was limited privacy when doing online banking transactions at the telecentre. Despite these challenges, the study noted that there was still demand for telecentre services in the communities (Chigona et al., 2012). This demonstrates that co-locating services in an ICT public access facility may be challenging.

Gomez et al. (2012) noted success factors that may be considered to mitigate the challenges for telecentres. The success factors are infrastructure, support, sustainability, staff and needs-driven approaches. Infrastructure relates to resources supporting the operations for the telecentre should be adequate. Support ensures community buy-in raising awareness of the importance of the services of the telecentre. Sustainability concentrates on implementing a sustainable model that supports revenue generation for the telecentre. Staff focused on recruiting and maintaining committed and motivated employees to support the operations of the telecentre. Needs-driven approach to ensure that the telecentre services should be developed based on the needs of the communities (Gomez et al., 2012). These factors may be applicable in inter-organisation collaborations involving telecentres and other organisations in the delivery of public services.

2.3. Context of Malawi

Malawi is located in South East Africa and has a population of about 16.7 Million (World Bank, 2015). The majority of the population about 80% live in rural areas and the country depends on agriculture for its economy (NSO, 2012). The country has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US$774, mean schooling years of 4.1 years and life expectancy of 54 years at birth. The country is ranked 170 out of 190 economies and is classified under the category of low-income economies (UNDP, 2014). The internet teledensity is 5.83% and mobile teledensity is 32.33% (ITU, 2014). Adoption and access to ICTs remain a challenge for the majority of the population. Thus, calls for the need to improve access to ICTs especially for the large part of the population which resides in rural and remote areas. Telecentres are perceived as a means that can address the digital divide (Bichler, 2008; Kayira, 2013). Table 1 summarises the teledensity profile of Malawi.

Part of the population in Malawi has access to ICTs especially those in urban areas and the government with development partners are supporting the adoption and use of ICTs in rural areas (GoM, 2013). The government of Malawi, international development agencies and private sector organisations are collaborating to support adoption and access to ICTs. Some of the programmes are focusing on developing ICT infrastructure to increase ICT access in rural areas. Other programmes are focusing on international connectivity e.g. the Regional Connectivity Infrastructure Programme for Malawi (RCIPMW) funded by The World Bank. The programme aims to support the development of a country-wide internet backbone connected to the submarine cable and provision of ICT equipment and internet connectivity to the rural telecentres. International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is working together with the Government of Malawi in establishing telecentres in the rural areas of the country (Kayira, 2013).

Telecentres in Malawi are fraught with challenges like those in other developing countries. The problems include lack of local content, poor utilisation of services, lack of stable electricity supply in some parts of the country, the high cost of internet and lack of monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the telecentres (Chikumba, 2011; Kayira, 2013). Despite these problems, there are efforts to establish more telecentres. There are now over 50 telecentres across the country (GoM, 2013).

Table 1. Summary of Malawi teledensity during 2014 elections

Index	Value
Population	16.7 Million people (World Bank, 2014)
Internet teledensity	5.83% (ITU, 2014)
Fixed-line telephone teledensity	0.21% (ITU, 2014)
Mobile phone teledensity	32.33% (ITU, 2014)

2.4. The Electoral Process in Malawi

General elections are held every five years in Malawi as stipulated in the constitution of the country. The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) is responsible for organising and managing elections. The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act 1993 and Local Government Act 1999 are used as a guide in the electoral process. The previous presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014. The local government elections were held in 2000 and 2014.

Malawi held tripartite elections in May 2014 and voter registration process commenced in July 2013. A voter's roll is used in the electoral process. However, the voters roll is not continuously updated and often has inconsistencies. Therefore, the voters roll is re-created in each election and eligible voters must register to participate in the elections. The voters whose names do not appear in the voter's roll are not eligible to vote on the polling day (Chinsinga, 2009; Svasand, 2011).

The voter registration process involves identification of people and recording of personal data in the voters roll. The registrants should be citizens of Malawi who are 18 years of age and above. The data that is captured include name, date of birth, gender and a photograph. The records are recorded on manual forms and later captured and stored in electronic format on a database which is used to produce the voters roll. The registrant is issued with a laminated voter registration card at the end of the registration process. In the previous elections, the voter registration was problematic. Some of the reported challenges were logistics e.g. deliverable of materials to the registration centres, lack of adequate equipment at the registration centres, malfunctions of the equipment such cameras and printers (Chinsinga, 2009).

In addition to technical related problems, there were challenges that can affect voter registration highlighted in the literature. These include social and political issues. The barriers include inadequate administrative capacity, poor development of political institutions to support the process, limited participation of adult population of the electorate, lack of infrastructure to support the process, lack of public finance and widespread corruption (Svasand, 2011). Other problems that are related to electoral process are voter registration card buying, political intimidation, campaign irregularities and electoral violence (Bratton, 2008). Correras and Irepoglu (2013) suggest that unequal access to the media among political parties may also affect the electoral process and that young voters lack the motivation to participate in elections because they perceive that politics to do affect their lives. It is important to recognise these challenges in the electoral process and how they can be mitigated.

2.5. Inter-Organisation Collaborations

Collaborative service delivery is the process where organisations or public agencies work together in providing public services (Sowa, 2008). One of the aims of collaborative service delivery is to address challenges of fragmentation and duplication of services. The collaborations can take different forms such as single interagency collaboration to large networks of collaborations of public service delivery providers (Keegan, 1991). This may mean that there are variations in the interagency collaboration as demonstrated in the inter-organisational continuum (see Table 2).

There are potential advantages for collaborative service delivery. These include the reduction in duplication of services where organisations or agencies providing similar services may work together rather than in isolation. Another advantage is cost sharing between the collaborating agencies. In

Table 2. Summary of interagency collaboration (Keegan, 1991)

Mode of Collaboration	Description
Cooperation	Relationship between management and staff of different agencies or organisations
Coordination	Organisations or agencies working together to coordinate services yet remain independent
Service integration	Organisations working together in providing a service

addition, the collaborating agencies may share skills, knowledge and expertise (Brown & Barnet, 2004). There are also challenges associated with collaborative service delivery such as omissions, divergence, organisations cultures and constraints for resources (Hudson, Hardy, Henwood & Wistow, 1999). Omission challenges relate to the situation where important activities for one organisation may be omitted while concentrating on the collaborative activities. Divergence relates to actions for one organisation being embedded in the activities of the other leading to inability to attain the organisational goals. There may be challenges in the planning of activities in relation to constraints for resources such as time, staff and finances. Differences in organisations interests, values and roles may inhibit the success of the collaborative service delivery (Hudson et al., 1999). It is important to consider these factors in co-location of public services such as voter registration and telecentres.

3. APPROACH TO THE STUDY

The study is of exploratory in nature. Davies (2006, p. 111) describes exploratory research as "a methodological approach that is primarily concerned with discovery and with generating or building theory…" The study is considered exploratory for a number of reasons. First, the issue of co-location has limited theoretical explanation for public or communal Internet access facilities. In pursuing this aim, the study draws data from media reports to generate concepts that may explain the issues for co-location of voter registration in telecentres (Lee & Baskerville, 2003). Media shapes the construction of reality through individuals or collective consciousness. Information presented to individuals or communities through newspapers, radio and Internet may shape the way people interpret the world around them (Allen & Hatchett, 1997). Reports in the media may shape decisions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the general public on social issues (Cukier et al., 2008). Second, literature was used to describe the concepts generated from the media reports (Thomas, 2006). The literature on challenges for telecentres and voter registration process may be used to describe the concepts that emerge from the analysis of media reports (Bowen, 2009). Although most exploratory studies do not provide a specific strategy, this study has attempted to highlight the steps taken in the process (Davies, 2006). These steps are summarised in the subsequent steps.

3.1. Data Collection

The online news websites were used to gather articles for reports on challenges of voter registration. The articles were restricted to those published within a period of three months (July 2013 to September 2013). The online sources of the media reports included Nyasatimes (www.nyasatimes. com) denoted as NT, Nation Malawi (www.mwnation.com) denoted as NW and The Dairy Times (www.times.mw) denoted as DT. The selection criteria for the articles were limited to the articles that were highlighting issues for voter registration. The articles were sourced using search terms: "voter registration", "MEC", "elections" and "tripartite elections". The search yielded 67 articles (NT = 21, DT= 20 and NW = 26).

3.2. Data Coding

The articles were analysed following the coding process for inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006). The iterative process for coding started with reading of the articles and interpretation of issues for voter registration. Table 3 summarises the coding process.

The text in the articles was segmented and noting key issues for registration. The process yielded a total of 132 themes. The segments were then labelled into sections to create categories which were consolidated to reduce redundancies among the categories. The final stage was the formulation of a model with propositions (Thomas, 2006). The steps in data analysis were repeated to ensure important issues from the data were reflected in the results. The discussion on the proposed model is presented section 5.

Table 3. Summary of coding process (Thomas, 2006)
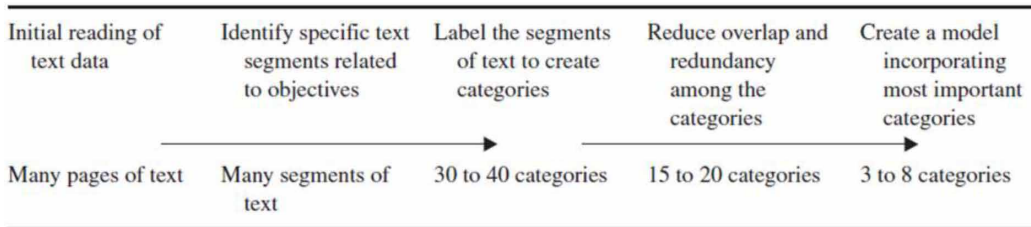
4. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This section presents the results of data analysis on the challenges for voter registration process reported in the media and how telecentres can be used to mitigate some of the challenges. The first part summarises the availability of telecentres in the districts and the time frames for the voter registration in the districts. The second part focused on issues reported in the media that can be addressed by telecentres. The third highlights issues related to the voter registration process issues which were beyond the scope of telecentres services. The results are presented in the subsequent subsections.

4.1. Availability of Telecentres

It was important to establish the location of the telecentres within the districts where voter registration was conducted. There were 4, 449 registration centres across the 29 districts in the country. The voter registration was conducted in July 2013 to January 2014 and was divided into ten phases. Table 4 summarises the phases for the voter registration, the districts and the telecentres available in the districts.

Table 4. Summary of the voter registration calendar (MEC, 2013; Kayira, 2013)

Phase	Dates	Districts	Telecentres Available
1	22 July to 4 August 2013	Blantyre City, Mwanza, Chikhwawa, Nsanje & Neno	Blantyre, Neno, Khudze, Mwanza, Nchalo, Bangula & Nsanje
2	8 to 21 August, 2013	Chiradzulu, Blantyre District, Blantyre City, Thyolo	Goliati, Thyolo, Blantyre & Chiradzulu
3	25 August to 7 September 2013	Thyolo, Luchenza Municipal Council, Phalombe & Mulanje	Phalombe, Goliati, Thyolo, Mulanje Boma & Mulanje Post office
4	11 to 24 September 2013	Balaka, Machinga, Zomba District, Zomba City (central)	Balaka & Zomba
5	28 September to 11 October, 2013	Dedza, Ntcheu, Mangochi district, Mangochi municipal council,	Dedza, Limbika (Mangochi) & Mangochi
6	15 to 28 October, 2013	Dowa, Lilongwe City, Dedza	Dowa, Lilongwe, Linthipe & Dedza
7	1 to 14 November, 2013	Dowa, Mchinji, Lilongwe District	Dowa, Mchinji & Magawa
8	18 November to 1 December, 2013	Kasungu District, Nkhotakota, Ntchisi, Salima	Nkhamenya, Nkhotakota, Vikwa, Ntchisi & Salima
9	5 to 18 December 2013	Chitipa, Karonga, Rumphi, Mzuzu City	Chitipa post office, Chitipa, Lupaso (Karonga), Rumphi & Mpherembe
10	22 December 2013 to 4 January 2014	Nkhatabay, Mzimba, Likoma	Nkhatabay, Chintheche & Mzimba

As can be seen in Table 4, there were 10 phases and each phase was allocated 14 days in line with Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act and the Local Government Elections Act. The voter registration centres were open between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. during the registration period.

4.2. Summary of Voter Registration Challenges Related to Telecentres

The problems related to telecentres were conceptualised as challenges that were hindering telecentres to provide their services to communities. These were categorised into technical challenges, logistics problems and communication barriers. The identified categories are summarised in detail in the subsequent sub-sections.

4.2.1. Technical Challenges for Voter Registration

Technical challenges were related to problems with equipment as a result of lack of skills or faults developed while using the equipment that can affect voter registration process. The technical challenges included lack of technical training of staff, printer malfunction, operating premises, limited technical support experts, inadequate equipment and cameras malfunctioning. Table 5 summarises the categories of the technical challenges for the voter registration.

The voter registration staff related lack of skills for the voter registration staff to effectively conduct the registration and use the equipment in the registration process. It was reported that the voter registration staff were trained in using the equipment. However, the voter registration staff lacked experience in using the equipment which contributed towards the breakdown of the cameras.

The other challenge was the malfunction of the equipment including printers for producing the voter cards and the cameras. The technical issues affected the progress of the voter registration in delays for the process. In addition, the equipment used in the voter registration process was not adequate in some of the voter registration centres in compared to the number of the voters to be registered in a day. The situation meant that the available equipment was being used beyond its capacity.

Table 5. Examples of categories for technical challenges in voter registration

Category	Description	Examples of Statements
Theft of equipment	Equipment used for registering voters being stolen by some of the voter registration staff	"The party also demanded an explanation from MEC on the whereabouts of a camera alleged to have been stolen by a registration staff" (NT29)
Technical training of staff	Lack of training on technical skills to handle the equipment used in the voter registration process	"It could be that some printers are not good enough, but the other major cause, according to our findings, is that those employed to operate them are not well versed in the equipment" (NT30)
Slow registration process	Delays in the process of registering the voters due to technical and administrative challenges	"This can create another challenge in handling the long queues often so far witnessed at registration centres" (NT08).
Printer malfunction	Printer for producing voter cards not working due to technical problems	"The biggest challenge we have is that the printers are breaking down in some areas. This, we are afraid, will slow down the whole process," (NT29)
Limited technical support experts	Inadequate personnel to address technical issues in the voter registration centres	"… Technicians to deal with faults of equipment such as cameras will be based at the Boma (District Commissioners Office) for prompt action in case of problems…" (DT7)
Cameras malfunctioning	Cameras used for capturing the facial image of the registrants not working	"Faulty picture printers have marred the 2014 tripartite elections voter registration in Thyolo, forcing some centres to go a day without carrying out the exercise, District Commissioner said" (DT32)

Despite having technical support teams to assist the voter registration staff, the technical support services were not adequate to efficiently support all the voter registration centres. Some voter registration centres were not saved on time which led to delays in the voter registration process. In some cases, equipment had to be transported to the District Commissioners Office for service. To mitigate the challenges of malfunction of equipment and cameras, response teams were deployed to the registration centres to repair the faulty equipment or replace if the equipment could not be fixed immediately.

Other technical challenges were related to inadequate facilities in the operating premises and theft of equipment. Some of the over registration centres lacked basic storage facilities that could be used to safely store the voter registration materials and equipment used in the voter registration. Alternative storage facilities were used to mitigate the challenge but resulted in logistical problems when the materials run out in the registration centres. There were also reports of equipment theft especially cameras that were used in capturing the biographical data of the registrants.

4.2.2. Logistics Problems for Voter Registration

Logistics problems were related to barriers in the process for managing the flow of resources (material, products and staff) from one location to another and other activities such as production, packaging, warehousing and security of voter registration materials. The logistics problems included challenges in the distribution of materials, availability of the materials at the centres and the operating times. It was reported that during the voter registration process there were issues of availability of materials such as lamination pouches:

The Commission had an intermittent supply of lamination pouches but this did not hamper registration as registration staff were directed to continue with registration and to advise the registrants to collect their certificates when the lamination pouches were in stock. The Commission was able to supply the pouches to the centres which had run out before registration closed and the registrants collected their certificates (NW21)

The availability of the registration was crucial for the staff to register the voters. In cases where the materials were not available or run out, it meant that the voter registration could not carry out their registration and the registrants had to wait until the materials were available. Such delays affected the registration process because each centre was allocated a registration period and any delays could have affected the whole voter registration schedule. To mitigate challenges for the availability of materials, the registrants were encouraged to proceed with part of the process e.g. data recording and image capturing and advised to collect the registration cards at a later date.

Operating times for the voter registration centres were also challenges in cases where voter registration centre was allocated time. The registrants had to turn up at the centres during the designated period and in some cases the number of people was overwhelming which registration staff could not cope to the extent of sending registrants way: "So far, we have had no problems with the equipment, but we are always turning away people because we're not enough to effectively serve everyone who comes each day." (NT21). In some cases, there were requests to extend the times for the voter registration in the centres: "Various stakeholders, including political parties and the National Initiative for Civic Education (Nice) Trust, have called on MEC to reopen centres that were closed and extend registration in centres where the exercise is in progress, arguing a number of people are being left out due to MEC's poor planning." (NT12). This was crucial to ensure that some voters were not left out in the registration.

4.2.3. Communication Barriers in Voter Registration

Communication problems were situations related to inadequate resources that affected the means for delivering and receiving information or messages in the process for voter registration. The communication challenges included limited fair reporting on issues and incidents, lack of equipment for the journalists engaged to report on the voter registration, few journalists recruited to report on the voter registration process and limited access to the Internet to support broadcasting and sourcing of information. Table 6 summarises the themes for communication challenges for communication during the voter registration.

Another challenge was fair reporting of incidents and events during the voter registration process. MEC engaged stringers to report on the activities in the electoral process. However, the numbers were low and that they could not cover all the areas and, in a way, some areas were left out in the reporting process. Further, the journalists who were responsible for reporting on electoral process had limited access to communication facilities such as the Internet. This affected the way the public was informed on voter registration e.g. issues could not be reported on time to the administrators and technical teams at the district commissioner's office where the technical teams were located. Thus, communication was an important factor in the voter registration process to support fair reporting on issues that are affecting the process and bring to attention to the management to address the problems. It was important to report on voter registration issues in the media which some of the electorate use as a source of information on what is happening in their areas.

4.3. Summary of Voter Registration Challenges Not Related to Telecentres

There were also challenges that were not directly related to the telecentres but had implications if the voter registration was to be co-located in the telecentres. These challenges included human resources issues, social problems, illegal practices, registration period and inclusive registration process. Although the challenges were not directly related to the operations of telecentres, they could have affected the voter registration if co-located in telecentres. In addition, there were also problems that emerged during the analysis but could not lead to a category due to insufficient statements in the corpus. These statements were important to note and were categorised as other challenges e.g. weather conditions, parallel registration and voter card security features. The challenges are discussed in subsequent subsections.

Table 6. Examples of communication challenges for voter registration

Communication	Description	Examples of Statements
Fair reporting	Biased reporting on reporting electoral issues and focusing on politics	"The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) has warned its stringers to desist from taking part in any political affairs during their coverage of the forthcoming 2014 tripartite elections" (NW17)
Limited number of journalists participating in reporting	Limited number of journalists recruited to participate in voter registration reporting	"MEC recruited 76 Stringers in the 2009 general elections to cover the electoral process that many stakeholders including the international organizations described as the most successful. This time around MEC has reduced the number to 40" (NW28)
Inadequate equipment	Lack of equipment for the journalised recruited to report on electoral processes and events	"There is fear that next year's tripartite polls might suffer minimal media coverage due to lack of proper equipment and access to the internet by reporters otherwise known as stringers that Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) deployed to all districts in the country to report on elections" (DT18)

4.3.1. Human Resources Challenges

Human resources were shortages of competent staff, low motivation of staff and low remuneration of staff in the voter registration centres affecting the registration process. Human capacity was crucial to the success of voter registration process. The staff that were recruited lacked the skills to cope with the challenges they were facing during the registration process:

We admit the challenges, but they occur only during the first two days of the exercise and we are able to sort them out. Challenges are mainly on the part of clerks because they are new, but with time they get used and we are also able to deploy more clerks in centres where people are coming in large numbers (NW12)

This was attributed to lack of experience since the staff were recruited for the voter registration exercise only. The voter registration was a once off activity taking place during each national elections e.g. every 4 years according to the constitution of the country.

Another problem was remuneration of voter registration staff. There were delays in payments of voter registration staff:

There was commotion at Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) head offices in Blantyre on Thursday afternoon when its contracted voter registration officers staged a protest, demanding their allowances. Close to 50 voter registration staffs people from Blantyre City, who are mostly teachers, stormed MEC's offices, chanting songs of discontent, demanding to be paid their dues … (NT23)

The voter registration resorted to protests which affected the schedule of the voter registration and the performance of the exercise because some of the members were not happy in performing their duties and resulted in low staff motivation. For example, it was reported that law enforcement offers were not willing to perform their duties at the registration centres because of the low pay:

… comments come against the background of frustrated teachers, security officers and MEC staff who have expressed displeasure at the allocated allowances (NT03)

The law enforcement officers were important in ensuring the safety of staff and resources for the voter registration process and maintain law and order at the centres. In cases where law enforcement personnel were absent at the centres, it was difficult for registration staff to deal with criminal issues e.g. multiple registrations and foreigners registering for the election. Similarly, newly recruited staff were not happy with the remuneration. It appears that remuneration of the staff was not fully articulated to ensure that the recruited staff were happy with their pay and paid on time.

Other issues that appeared in the analysis with limited occurrence in the data were professionalism in the conduct of voter registration, timely deployment of staff in areas that required additional staff and staff turnover during the phases of voter registration. It was important to mitigate these challenges because they may also affect the registration process.

4.3.2. Social Issues

Social issues were related to values and norms that people hold and influenced their practices and actions in relation to electing political leaders for their communities and the country. The social issues related to voter registration were categorised into religious beliefs, lack of interest in registration and youth participation. It was reported that local chiefs encouraged members of communities to register for the elections and vote after noticing that some members were not participating in the registration. Men in most communities did not register:

Samples from data collected during the first five days reveal that many men are not registering to vote in the 2014 Tripartite Elections in the district (NW12)

Part of the reasons for few men registering for the elections was that men were giving more priorities of their time to pressing economic and social issues such as searching for jobs than to register for the elections. This was contrary to the case of the youth who were more interested in registering for the elections as noted in the following statement:

It is more interesting to see that the youth have taken it upon themselves to come and register. This is more encouraging and it shows that they are also exercising their right to vote for their rightful candidate in next year's elections. (NT68)

The increase in participation of the youth in the voter registration may be attributed to calls from different stakeholders such as religious leaders, local chiefs, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Youth groups. Another motivating factor was that the voter registration card was to be used as an identity. Other uses of voter registration cards highlighted in the following statement:

... many villagers use the voter registration certificate cards as their identity cards in various activities of the district like banks and during the distribution of farm input subsidy programme. Having an identity card is one privilege of voter registration, but all of us should register with the aim of taking part in voting next year (DT31)

The voter registration card was free to obtain unlike other documents used for identification such as passport or drivers licence which require an application fee. The voter registration card was to be used during the elections and in other government programs after the elections.

4.3.3. Illegal Practices

Illegal practices challenges were activities that were not consistent with the regulations and standards for the voter registration process. The illegal practices were practices that were considered inappropriate and also unlawful in relation to the voter registration process. Some of the examples of the illegal practices were voter card buying, multiple registrations and perseverance of fake voter registration certificates and practices that could lead to voter disenfranchisement. Further, there were security lapses in the centres during the voter registration.

Some of the political parties were engaged in malpractices of buying voter cards so that they can skew the number of registered voters particularly in the areas where the parties were not popular:

… the alleged buying of voter registration cards and transportation of voters from Blantyre to Chikhwawa Central-as reported in the press speaks volume on how porous and insecure the electoral system is at the moment (NT5)

The practice of voter card buying led to voter disenfranchisement where citizens that had initially registered but sold their voter cards were denied the right to vote in the elections. The standard practice was that all voters must produce their voter cards and be registered in order to vote. Those without a voter card or having a voter card but not registered for the elections could not be allowed to vote during the polling day.

Another challenge was multiple registration of voters. In some cases, the voter lost their cards and attempted to register without notifying the registration staff:

The Nkukula Magistrate's Court in Lilongwe on Thursday fined two women K10 000 (about $25) each for registering twice during the voter registration exercise… The two told the court that they registered twice because they wanted to have two voter passports in case one went missing. (NW25)

The reasons noted for multiple registrations meant that the general public was not aware of the reasons to avoid multiple registrations and that part of the voter civic education was necessary to emphasise on the consequences of multiple registrations. The illegal activities could be minimised through the presence of police in the voter registration centres. However, there were other registration centres operating without security offers due to issues of remuneration.

It was reported that some people were producing fake voter registration. The people were not part of the MEC and produced counterfeit voter cards which were being sold to the voters:

It never rains but pours for the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC). With dust yet to settle over an alleged syndicate producing counterfeit voter identity cards, police in Mzuzu have arrested four people who duped 194 people by posing as MEC officials (NW36)

MEC officials indicated that the voter registration card had security features and assured the voters and political parties that the electoral staff were trained to identify the fake registration cards. The cases of counterfeit identity cards created mistrust in the voter cards especially from the opposition political parties that lamented on potential effects on the elections results.

4.3.4. Registration Period

Registration period was related to the constraints in the number of days assigned to each centre to register the eligible voters. Execution of execution of electoral activities on time such as voter registration was important to fulfil the electoral plan. The process was done in phases where each ward was assigned a specific period of time. It was reported that due to other operational challenges, the voter registration process had time constraints e.g. the registration phase for each ward was 14 days. Some of the constraints related to time included the limited number of staff at the voter registration centres, inadequate resources which led to the request for the extension of the voter registration period as noted in the following statement:

The party is also concerned that some of the centres remain under-staffed and are not being punctual. The party is also concerned that MEC officials are also sending back registers at 3:00 pm in preparations for their knock-off time which is 4:00 pm. Some centres are understaffed resulting in long queues and consequently registrants failing to register and materials also a challenge (NT64)

Other challenges related to inclusive registration were a large number of registrants during the end of the registration period which led to pressure on staff and resources. Despite the challenges in time and resources, there were reports that the registration period was not extended in most centres as indicated in the following statement:

MEC does not have plans to extend the process. We will critically assess the situation and make necessary recommendations. It is not our intention to make adjustments. We will only do that on specific cases, said [MEC-Commissioner], adding that they have been impressed with the registration so far (NT66)

It was important for MEC to consider specific needs of each centre because the activities in the communities around the voter registration centres affected the operations of the centres. This was important to ensure that the times of the registration accommodated the eligible voters to be registered.

4.3.5. Inclusive Registration

Inclusive registration was related to the process of ensuring that at all eligible citizens were able to participate in the voter registration process. Lack of consideration of requirements for people with special needs in the voter registration process e.g. the elderly, the deaf and the blind could perpetuate exclusion of political participation. The process of developing the awareness programs for voter registration did not include some of the stakeholders:

The plea was made on Wednesday during a voter registration awareness workshop which targeted the visually impaired at Likoma and Chizumulu islands. We wonder why we are not included in these committees while our counterparts, those with other disabilities, are considered, said one participant (NW25)

It was important that the voter registration to support the inclusion of people with special ensure that their need can be heard participate in public activities. Other problems that were related to supporting people with special needs was that in cases where voter registration staff assisted the people with special needs, people protested and the situation led to violence in the registration centres:

For instance, if a visually impaired person comes to vote, Presiding Officers do not allow other monitors to assist him or her in the voting process. This sometimes causes violence (NT23)

Another problem was the relocation of communities especially those who live in flood-prone areas. The voter registration centres were supposed to operate in areas commutable for the communities:

… the exercise failed to commence at one centre in Nsanje after the targeted people were found to have relocated to another area. The relocation was as a result of the nomadic life people practise in the district due to the perennial floods (DT24)

Some centres were not being operational because the communities had relocated. There was a need for the electoral organisation to also consider the culture and practices of the citizens in the in the respective areas where the voter registration was conducted. This was important to ensure participation of the citizens in the electoral process.

4.3.6. Other Challenges

There were also challenges related weather conditions, voter card security features, vote rigging panics and issues for parallel registration. It was reported that some areas were experienced bad weather conditions such as heavy rains and people in remote communities were not be able to register for the elections because some roads were not accessible:

Civil Society Organisation Network has asked the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) to consider shifting voter registration dates from December to October as the district has a lot of hard to reach areas during rainy season that might affect the exercise (NW10)

Some stakeholders made request to the MEC to shift the voter registration due to weather conditions. The requests in some cases were granted but with consideration of the planned registration schedule. Another concern was on security features on the voter registration card. It was reported that the new voter registration cards were had improved security features:

The commission will conduct fresh registration for 2014 which means new voter IDs will be issued. The new cards are different in design and colour from the old ones and they are coming with improved security features. There is no way a person holding a fake ID can vote (NW32)

Despite the new design for the voter registration cards (e.g. the voter registration cards in colour to improve the security features), there were reports on the production of counterfeit voter registration cards. The situation raised concerns about the credibility of MEC in handling the electoral process with some members of the society expressing concerns about vote rigging. The opposition political parties expressed concern over potential vote rigging:

I strongly feel that there will be electoral fraud and maladministration. We are also reliably informed that the Malawi Government and the Donor Community have not yet funded the commission as promised a development that is directly crippling the activities of the Commission. Such tendencies are the ones that directly points to the rigging of the elections as some quarters may think this is a deliberate ploy by the ruling elite and the Commission to control voter registration that those areas deemed to be opposition strongholds should not register en masse (NT54)

The members of the opposition political parties feared that there was going to be rigging in the elections and some reported to the MEC to take drastic measures in the voter registrations process. The politicians felt that the electoral process was the responsibility of all the stakeholders and considered that all problems should be solved collectively.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

We recall the key question of the study: how can telecentres address some of the challenges for voter registration process? The findings have demonstrated that telecentres some of the challenges for voter registration is supporting the processes and activities related to logistics, technical issues and communication. The results of the study showed that telecentres can act as points for storage and distribution of materials that were used in the voter registration. Further, technical issues related to ICTs for voter registration e.g. printers and camera can be maintained by the ICT staff in the telecentres. In addition, facilities in the telecentres such as Internet, emails, fax and telephones can be used to support communication with management, support staff and other parties engaged in the voter registration activities. It was interesting to note that there were challenges in voter registration that was beyond the capacity of telecentres. These include operational, social and political issues. Operational issues included the need to extend the voter registration dates, remuneration of voter registration staff and inadequate human capacity of the voter registration staff. Social issues were the beliefs about voter registration and political issues were illegal practices and trust in the voter registration by the political parties. These challenges could not be addressed by a single organisation. Hence, it was necessary for the telecentres to collaborate with other public organisations to effectively address the problems. The other parties can include government departments and law enforcement to address challenges related to weather challenges, inclusive voter registration and unlawful practices in the voter registration process.

Previous studies have shown that telecentres can be co-located with other public services such as post offices, libraries, government offices and learning institutions (Chigona et al., 2012, Chikumba, 2011; Huerta et al., 2007; Perera, 2013). This was consistent with the idea that telecentres can support the voter registration process through collaborative service delivery. The previous studies highlight the challenges for co-locating telecentres in other organisations that include lack access to the telecentre services due to lack of user identification documents and issues of privacy when conducting internet banking (Chigona et al., 2012). These insights were useful when considering the challenges that may

arise when considering co-locating voter registration in telecentres. The findings take the discussion further to highlight the challenges of voter registration and how the telecentres can remedy some of the problems e.g. logistics and technical issues.

While the themes for the problems in voter registration can be categorised into operational, social and political issues, the challenges can be viewed from demand-side (challenges of providers of the voter registration) and supply-side (challenges of the electorate registering to vote). The examples of supply-side challenges include inadequate skills of voter registration and telecentre personnel, resources and technical challenges. The challenges are consistent with issues highlighted in the telecentres located in libraries and post offices (Chigona et al., 2012; Gomez et al., 2012; Chikumba, 2011). Some of the demand-side challenges were problems of identification and social issues in voter registration. Some of the eligible registrants had no identification documents: "Those eligible to register are required to produce a valid identification document such as a passport, even though it might be expired, a driving licence, a student identity card, a marriage certificate, a birth certificate, an employment identification document or an old voter certificate" (NW15). The social challenges were related to limited participation of men in the voter registration. The challenges related to identification were consistent with the findings on access to telecentres cohabited in a library (Chigona et al., 2013). However, the findings on participants contracted the previous studies that indicated the domination of men in using the telecentres (Terry & Gomez, 2010). This may be attributed to the nature of the key activities using the telecentres.

The results also showed the presence of a telecentre in each district in Malawi. However, the telecentres may not serve all the people residing in the district. The telecentres may not be within a commutable distance for most all the electorate in remote rural areas. In this case, the telecentres would be ideal to support the challenges related to logistics and supporting the voter registration within their locations. Another interesting finding was that some of the supply side challenges were beyond the capacity of telecentres. These include identification of voter registration, illegal practices, registration period, inclusive registration process, security features for voter registration cards, weather and potential vote rigging. These challenges may be classified as complex because the issues emerged without prior indication of their occurrence. Managers in the collaborative setting have to make decisions with limited information to support their decisions (Bailur & Masiero, 2012).

Due to the nature of the service for voter registration where there may be concerns over issues of trust and accountability (Chinsinga, 2009), collaborative service delivery may be ideal for voter registration (Brown & Barnett, 2004). Management of telecentres and electoral organisations with other stakeholders such as NGOs, Political parties representatives can work together to address the issues of trust and accountability. Mutual understanding and striving to reach common goals are paramount (Brown & Barnet, 2004). In this regard, collaborative service delivery may facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, time and resources. For instance, telecentre staff with expertise in ICT applications and maintenance of hardware may support voter registration staff. Reporters and electoral staff may utilise the communication facilities in the telecentres. Telecentres can also act as logistics points for storage and distribution of voter registration materials. From this point the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 1: When co-locating voter registration in telecentres, inter-organisation co-ordination is necessary to achieve collaborative governance.

Other important factors related to voter registration are practices, resources and time. The analysis has shown that voter registration requires specific practices governed by electoral laws and any deviations to the practices are regarded as illegal practices (Bratton, 2008; Correras & Irepoglu, 2013). One of the important factors is the voter registration time where voter registration was designated a specific number of days. Availability of resources such as materials and electoral staff to maximize

the time for the registration are critical. These factors should be taken into account when co-locating voter registration in telecentres.

As can be seen in Figure 1, concepts that can explain co-location of voter registration in a Telecentre are suggested and they include collaborative service delivery, telecentre related factors and voter registration factors. The three categories are summarised as follows:

1. **Collaborative service delivery:** Collaborative service delivery consists of inter-agency coordination between the telecentre, electoral organisation and other stakeholders;
2. **Telecentre related factors:** Telecentre related factors that are relevant to support collaborative delivery consist technical, logistics and communication;
3. **Voter registration related factors:** Voter registration factors that should be considered when collaborating with other services comprise of practices, time and resources.

In the context where voter registration is co-located in telecentres, collaborative service delivery may include diverse stakeholders that play distinct roles in their organisations but can share resources and experiences to meet the needs required in the voter registration process (Brown & Barnet, 2004). The services in the telecentres such as communication, technical support and logistics can support the activities for voter registration to achieve successful outcomes. In addition, services for the voter registration can consider the acceptable practices, setting the appropriate time for the activities and ensuring that the resources are available for the voter registration process (Evrensel, 2010). The following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 2: When there is consideration of telecentre and voter registration factors in co-locating voter registration in telecentres, collaborative service delivery is more likely to succeed.

The assumptions for the concepts and the propositions were that there is mutual understanding between the different stakeholders engaged in co-location of voter registration (Brown & Barnet, 2004; Evrensel, 2010). Further, due to the legal implications for the voter registration issues of trust

Figure 1. Conceptual model
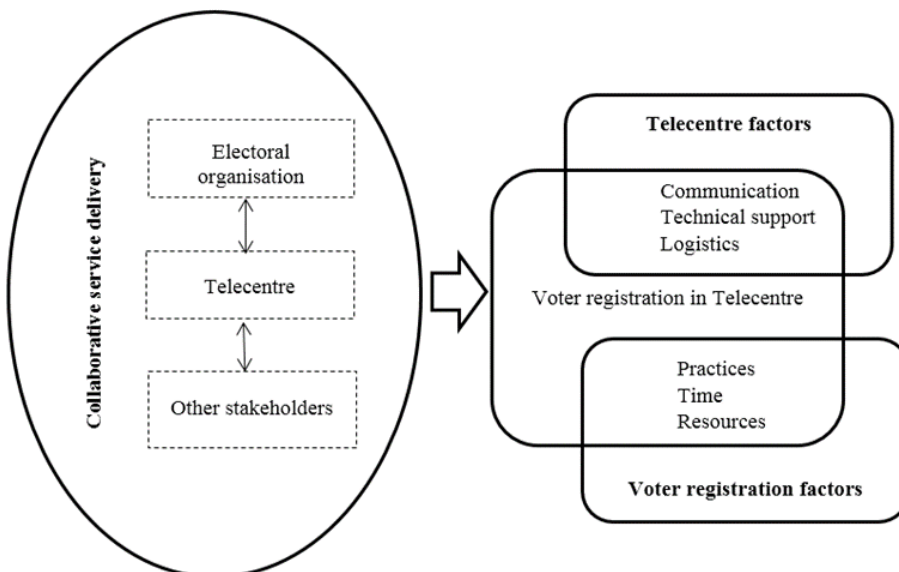
in the roles of the participating organisations or stakeholders should be clarified. This can be in form of service agreements among the stakeholders (Kwon & Feiock, 2010).

6. CONCLUSION

This study was exploratory in nature and attempted to develop concepts that can explain the role of telecentres in addressing the challenges for voter registration. The study used the case of Malawi that had tripartite voter registration in 2013. The findings showed that despite the country having 51 telecentres, the electoral organisation can utilise some of the services e.g. communication, ICT support staff and storage facilities. However, there were challenges that were complex that telecentres could not address. Some of the challenges included lack of identification documents of some of the registrants, voter card buying and registration schedules.

While we are able to articulate the challenges on co-locating voter registration in telecentres using reports in the media, there are still some open questions that can be explored further. This includes perspectives from the electoral officials on how they perceive the role of telecentres in addressing voter registration problems, the views of telecentre managers in addressing issues of trust from political organisations and other public organisations. These form basis for the further research arising from the current study. In addition, the proposed concepts that have emerged from the analysis required to be validated and improved.

The study made the following recommendations for practice and policymakers engaged in electoral process when considering co-locating voter registration in telecentres (a) to clarification on roles of agencies and common objectives and goals in collaborative service delivery (Brown & Barnet, 2004) (b) to consideration technical and social issues in the context in which the telecentres operate (Gollakota et al., 2012).

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