Chapter 2

Municipal Mobile SMS Services: An E-Government Initiative of the Municipality of La Paz, Bolivia

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ABSTRACT

The Municipality of La Paz (MLP) has been a pioneer municipal institution in applying Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for its benefit and the benefit of La Paz’s citizens in the last 10 years. In 2009 the Government of the Municipality of La Paz (GMLP) developed a new Master Plan, with the objective to further improve its management and to further reduce bureaucracy and corruption. This Plan consisted of several elements, one of them related to ICT, was the introduction of 18 new Web Services of which 9 are Web Geographical Services and 9 are Mobile Short Message System (SMS) Services. This Chapter presents how the MLP developed into a modern and efficient institution while providing services and information to its citizens through these e-Government initiatives and ultimately through the use of mobile phones using SMS. Municipalities and governments in general that are applying mobile services and information are now called “Mobile Governments” or “M-Governments”.

INTRODUCTION

The Municipality of La Paz (MLP) has been a pioneer municipal institution in applying Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for its benefit and the benefit of La Paz’s citizens in the last 10 years. Its Mayor, Dr. Juan del Granado Cosio has been in office precisely 10 years and has provided constant leadership and support to all initiatives that lead to transform the municipality into a modern and efficient institution. Municipal ICT services are currently under the responsibility of the Organizational Development and Information and Communications Technologies Direction.

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On the other hand, 84% of the citizens of La Paz have mobile phones, mostly with SMS services (GMLP, 2008). Based on these facts, the DDOTI developed a Master Plan for the year 2009, with the objective to improve the efficiency of the municipality and to present better information about the entire services platform while further reducing bureaucracy and corruption. The Master Plan considered the introduction of 16 new Web Services on top of the 7 existing Web services. Of the 16 new Web services 9 are Web Geographical Services and 9 are Mobile SMS Services as seen in Table 1. The Mobile Services introduction constitute the first instance of the GMLP towards a “Mobile Government” or “M-Government” that extends the benefits of remote delivery of government services and information to those unable or unwilling to access the Internet, at a lower cost and ease of use, as mentioned in a World Bank Background Note (World Bank). The existing Web services and the new Web Geographical Services and the new Mobile SMS services are presented in Table 1 (DDOIT, 2009).

Municipal services trough Web pages are not new and have been used worldwide for many years, whereas Mobile SMS services have been introduced in the last few years. Some examples of municipal mobile SMS services can be seen under the Literature Review section. Consequently, the GMLP has shown leadership and is in line with the process of making available the above mentioned e-services through mobile phones, so that many more citizens, mostly from low to medium incomes, will have access to them at a reduced cost.

Mobile SMS services are emerging as the new ICT tools for the following reasons: (i) they reach more people as there are more mobile phones than Internet access points, (ii) they reach more distant places including rural areas, (iii) they are less costly to operate than Internet, (iv) they are easier to operate and learn than PC’s and the Internet, (v) they can be used for payments and other financial interactive services and (vi) they can be upgraded...