Chapter 10

E–Government Status and M–Government Readiness in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the readiness of the Malawian government to engage in mobile government (m-government). It explores the exciting potential of mobile technologies to leapfrog the conventional model of e-government in some Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) where e-government has not achieved the desired benefits due to the lack of fixed communications infrastructure and citizen access. The chapter starts with an assessment of the current e-government context and status in Malawi. The research then uses a qualitative approach by interviewing more than 20 important government and non-government stakeholders to assess Malawi’s readiness to embrace m-government. The theoretical framework to assess the Malawi government readiness is a combination of the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework and the Task-Technology Fit (TTF) model. The findings are that although e-government was never fully realized in Malawi, the country is, to a large extent, ready to embrace mobile government and leap-frog e-government model, which is based on a fixed-line communications structure. It is hoped that other LDCs, in Africa and elsewhere, can benefit from the framework factors and themes which are uncovered and determine their mobile readiness.

INTRODUCTION

Information Systems (IS) and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become core operational and managerial elements of public administrative reforms. Electronic-government (e-government) plays a central role in good management and socio-economic development as it can help to narrow the digital gap (Kreizman & Fraga, 2003). Government institutions need appropriate information to formulate effective strategies to make comprehensive developmental decisions.
E-government can be a driver for social-economic development and universal service delivery (Reimer, 2001). ICTs can improve the ease of access to information to ensure transparency as well as accountability of government (Ndou, 2004). Therefore, the governments in least developed countries (LDCs), just like their counterparts in more developed countries, have investigated the use of ICTs to enhance good governance to effectively achieve national government initiatives. However, e-government is proving to be problematic to implement in LDCs. The main problems are the high costs of infrastructure development and the lack of skilled human resources. But mobile government (m-government) is a promising vehicle to uplift e-government implementation through the use of mobile technologies (MTs). M-government is an alternative method for elevating e-government service quality and delivery. M-government can also leapfrog (jump over) some areas of e-government.

This research investigated the potential of, and readiness for, m-government in Malawi, using it as a reference case study representing African LDCs. Malawi, a small and landlocked country in Southern Africa, is classified as an LDC (ITU, 2011b). The motivation of the research is that mobile network coverage is over 85% in Malawi and there is an ever increasing number of cellular subscriptions, with 29% penetration (ITU, 2009b). This network coverage and penetration can influence the leadership to consider m-government services. There is currently very little research that has been conducted on m-government readiness for a least developed country in Africa, and certainly not that has considered an African country’s unique culture, opportunities and constraints.

The key research problem addressed in this chapter is: To what extent are governments of least developed countries, using Malawi as a typical case, ready to realise mobile government? The supporting research questions are: What are the factors that influence readiness for m-government? What mobile services can users utilise in m-government? What are the other enabling factors for m-government readiness? What are the awareness levels of mobile technology usage?

As the majority of LDCs are in some stage of adopting e-government, our findings can inform government organisations seeking to embark on an e-government strategy. The research lays down the foundations for advocating and promoting m-government as a significant instrument for government service provision. The results of the research will help government top leadership, in consultation with civil societies, to consider implementing m-government in their countries. Hopefully other researchers studying the field of e-government in LDCs may be able to use some of the findings in their research.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

E-Government and M-Government Interactions

The advances in ICTs since the early 1990s prompted many governments to start providing public services using ICTs. Internet technology with compatible protocols enhanced the development and use of the World Wide Web (WWW) in government institutions, to provide public services, policies and citizens’ political participation (Moon & Bretschneider, 2002). The introduction and intensification of ICTs in government organisations resulted in e-government creation through explicit programs to build innovative aspects of social and economic advancement (Banerjee & Chau, 2004). E-government was created to deliver services to citizenry, various government departments and employees. It entails computerisation of manually documented processes that result in innovative approaches to management (Carroll, 2005). E-government has four major stakeholders: citizens, businesses, governments, and employees. Electronic business transactions between government and stakeholders represent the e-government
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