

Workshop Report: Collaboration in East Africa

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Abstract: A follow-up to the Nov'08 "First M4D Workshop in East Africa", Kampala, was held during the M4D 2008 conference focusing on areas for concrete project planning, esp. networking, dissemination, and coordination.

1. Background

A lot has been said about mobile phone usage and its potential to spur development in developing regions. But have we really seen anything interesting that goes beyond voice communication and simple SMS? Many may have heard about the developments in the Philippines, and in Kenya the m-banking application called M-PESA is fairly well discussed and known. A few might have heard of the innovative usage of FrontlineSMS¹ and RapidSMS² (SMS bulk tool and management systems that allow mass-messaging, monitoring and data collection) by civil society organisations in the region. The M4D conference in December 2008 has shed light on some more application types, but let us step one month back. "The first M4D Workshop in East Africa", sponsored by Sida and organised by the Directorate of ICT Support at Makerere University, Uganda, Knowledge Consulting Ltd and UPGRAID, clearly showed that there are far more applications around than the well known m-banking and mass-messaging tools.

More than 80 participants from all over East Africa, some travelling all the way from South Africa, UK and Sweden, came to Kampala the 5th and 6th of November, 2008, to learn more about mobile application development and share knowledge regarding mobile developments in the region. The main conclusion drawn from the workshop was the realisation that there was need for more collaboration and networking, across different sectors and across borders. This will help the mobile fraternity to learn more about what is going on in different places, facilitate generation of new ideas and strategic partnerships, and hopefully help learn from one another by building on what has come before and through this moving forward. The workshop proved that open, inclusive and neutral multi-stakeholder forums are key in facilitating knowledge sharing, awareness building and networking among a diverse field of stakeholders.

All the participants have played an important role in generating the "M4D in East Africa Plan of Action". It consists of four main themes, which attempt to address many of the challenges identified by the participants. The themes include:

1. The creation of a **M4D in East Africa Forum** with specific working groups for continuous networking, sharing of ideas, knowledge and developments. Six specific working groups have been/will be created, namely:

¹ www.frontlinesms.com

² <http://sourceforge.net/projects/rapidsms>

- East African m-health Association,
 - East African Programmer/Tech Association,
 - East African m-agriculture Group,
 - M4D Research Group,
 - M-banking Taskforce, and
 - East African mGovernment Group.
2. To make the **M4D in East Africa Workshop an annual event** and use it as a mechanism to evaluate progress, see what needs to be done and brainstorm on solutions. The M4D in East Africa Forum will facilitate in-between the workshops, helping to provide continuity.
 3. Setting up **M4D Innovation Centres** to pilot and scale-up projects. The innovations centres will be connected to the East African Universities.
 4. The development of a sustainability **M4D Tool Kit** for mobile application projects consisting of standards, regulations, sector reviews, compatibility, funding etc.

It is now up to key stakeholders to push the East African agenda forward. In line with this call, SPIDER sponsored a workshop in conjunction with the M4D 2008 Conference in Karlstad, Sweden, 11th and 12th of December, 2008. The workshop was meant to build directly on the outcomes from the Kampala workshop and had as its goals to:

- Bring the knowledge and experiences presented in Kampala to Sweden;
- Have experts (academics and practitioners) within SPIDER's network + some additional experts to meet around the Kampala themes;
- Investigate and discuss some selected project ideas/proposals raised in Kampala in order to form strategic alliances with already formed groups in East Africa for further collaboration.

2. Karlstad Discussions and Outcomes

After a plenum presentation at the M4D 2008 conference about the workshop sponsor SPIDER by Karoline Beronius, the workshop itself (consisting of 20 specially invited persons and several interested conference delegates) started by providing an overview of the current situation regarding mobile telephony usage in East Africa. Data from Research ICT Africa's *Household e-Access and e-Usage Survey* was presented. Conducted in 2007 and 2008, the survey covered 23,000 respondents across 17 countries in Africa. Sticking to the East African context, amongst the population of 16 years old and above, 52% in Kenya have a mobile phone or an active SIM card. In Rwanda the figure is 10%, while in Tanzania and Uganda 21%.

When it comes to expenditure, people seem to spend more or less half of their disposable income on mobile communications as summarised in the table below. This seems to resonate with a few presentations in other sessions at the conference that examined whether mobile expenditure was diverting meagre resources away from other critical needs of the poor.

Table 1: Monthly mobile expenditure

	Kenya	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda
Monthly mobile expenditure in US\$ / monthly income US\$	16,7%	10,3%	15,4%	10,8%
Monthly mobile expenditure in US\$ / monthly disposable income US\$	52,5%	65,5%	28,9%	48,6%

2.1 Challenges and obstacles

The RIA survey also shows that people below the poverty line are not gaining money by owning a mobile phone. Given this background, challenges and obstacles regarding mobile phone usage were articulated and discussed. Some of these included:

- There is a lack of training and skills development (both in relation to application development as well as usage)
- Language is still a big barrier in different ways. There are plenty of local languages to take into consideration. Local language literacy is also an issue as fluency in speech does not necessarily equate to fluency in reading and writing that particular language
- Documentation of actual network coverage is not authoritative (or the actual quality of the network), while subscriber numbers are computed in a myriad of ways
- Issues of total cost of ownership and affordability for end-users are not always given due consideration or when considered, are not made explicit to end-users
- Awareness of what has been done before and lessons learnt from the process is rather limited because of the limited documentation and sharing (regarding existing applications, solutions and possible usage)
- Sustainability is still a big deal and is not given due consideration from the onset of most projects. Hence many projects tend to die as development partners or other initiators move on
- Scaling-up applications and solutions is still a big challenge. Many tend to stagnate at or fizzle out at the pilot stage
- Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders across different sectors as well as across borders is practically non-existent
- Plenty of regulatory issues still need to be addressed and these will require some form of harmonization across East African for better impact
- Appreciation of consumer rights and their enforcement as well as understanding of customer obligations are all still largely under-developed

How can these challenges and obstacles be addressed? Different ideas were mentioned during the workshop and many of these were already captured in the Plan of Action, which was commended as a good starting point. A challenge especially highlighted at the Karlstad workshop was the need to identify willing and responsible actors and defining reasonable time lines within which different action points would be accomplished. Further, it was recommended that a business model/plan should be developed and written for each and every action point. A question was also raised concerning quality assurance mechanisms and how the actors would be able to measure real impact. This would not be something only for the donors' sake, but is also important in helping to make the applications and services more sustainable and scalable. Suggested reading on this topic is the newly published compendium *Impact Assessment of ICT4D Projects* (Richard Heeks and Alemayehu Molla, 2008³).

2.2 Initiatives in other parts of the world

In order to make the M4D in East Africa initiative successful it is important to network with already existing initiatives in other parts of the world wherever possible. India, the Philippines and South Africa were mentioned as interesting countries to partner with.

³ www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/research/publications/wp/di/di_wp36.htm

Some other ideas were to link the M4D Tool Kit theme with Tactical Technology Collective⁴ who recently developed a tool kit called *Mobiles in-a-box: Tools and Tactics for Mobile Advocacy*, which is a collection of tools, tactics, how-to guides and case studies. The actors of the M4D Tool Kit idea should also look at Betavine⁵ that supports and stimulates the development of new applications for mobile phones.

Actors responsible for the M4D Innovation Centres should look at iDISC, the infoDev Incubator Support Center,⁶ which is a virtual networking and knowledge sharing platform for incubators and technology parks leveraging ICT to facilitate entrepreneurship and new business creation in developing countries and learn from their successes and failures. It should also be in line with EPROM (Entrepreneurial Programming and Research on Mobiles) and their Mobile Phone Programming Curriculum initiative⁷.

2.3 M4D Innovation Centres in East Africa

Regarding the notion of setting up M4D Innovation Centres in East Africa to pilot and scale-up projects – this was something discussed and developed quite extensively during the workshop. An idea was mooted to start a collaborative program and deployment to be run by Eastern African universities and collaborating EU universities to promote a regional mobile content and services provider sector, with the aim of promoting sustainable economic development through mobile technology and services. Such a program will promote collaboration between Eastern African universities, with universities and research centres abroad and the mobile industry for a sustainable social and regional economic development. A data base of research areas and innovative mobile services research and development works in Eastern African universities will speed up the setting up of incubation support for venture start-ups, on mobile technology and services.

Makerere University in Uganda and University of Nairobi in Kenya will brainstorm and explore different avenues that will help them to generate a proposal to make the M4D Innovation Centres idea a reality.

2.4 Gaps and a Government Digest on M4D

Other issues discussed during the workshop were the gaps between academics and practitioners, and between developers and end-users.

Given the hierarchical decision making structure in the East African society, we need to find ways to bridge the gap between the technical people (and their solutions) and the senior management (the ones in power who are looking for solutions) in the private sector. The East African M4D Forum should strive to identify mobile champions in companies and government institutions and get them interested and involved. In the discussion that followed a brief m-governance presentation the conclusion was that there are many possibilities using the mobile phone in citizen-government interaction: during emergencies, civic education such as health and environment campaigns, and in attempts to empower the citizens (through transparency, accountability) etc. Innovative mobile phone usage will also, most certainly, reduce man-to-man interaction which will lead to fewer possibilities for 'kitu kidogo' (kiswahili for something small). But how to bridge the gaps mentioned above, and the gaps between middle and senior management? An idea that came up is to create a regular "Government Digest on M4D" that goes out to senior managers and ministers periodically, which should empower them and make them look wise by educating them about available solutions that are yet to be rolled out or have been rolled out elsewhere.

We need to benchmark, map, document, and present case studies to demystify the technology. This is valid not only for senior management but also the end users too. Related

⁴ <http://mobiles.tacticaltech.org/>

⁵ <http://www.betavine.net/>

⁶ <http://idisc.infodev.org/>

⁷ <http://eprom.mit.edu/>

to this – **M4D research should be available and presented in an understandable format** not only meant for academics but for all, including the end-users.

2.5 Duplication of efforts

New initiatives need to connect to and build on already existing or past ones to avoid duplication. At the moment, too many pilots are doing more or less the same thing without taking into account what their counterparts might have already learnt. It is important to ask the question what is the application good for and what is the business rationale? Someone will need to pay for the solution in the end, let it be the government or the end-user. In the discussion that followed, the question of why mobiles are not used more among organisations in developing regions did come up. The key factors, according to one of the participants include: cost factors, lack of technical know-how, and the suitability of applications to people's existing needs.

2.6 Conclusions: Reaching decision makers, sharing knowledge, long-term views

It was agreed that there is a need to identify and make the decision makers in the East African region aware of the possibilities of using mobile phones for development. This coupled with more and better avenues for knowledge sharing amongst the different mobile initiatives will help to provide a solid foundation for mobile application development in East Africa. If/when donors have a role to play in it they should commit themselves for a long term and not only fund assessments, workshops and ad-hoc projects. This will increase sustainability, local ownership, and the much needed scaling up.

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Read more

<http://m4d.kcl.co.uk/>

<http://groups.google.co.uk/group/M4DinEA>

<http://m4d.humanit.org/>

<http://www.spidercenter.org/>

