

ICT for Basic Service Delivery - Case Study: Water Sector in Uganda

Ikae Catherine Omal

School of Computing and Informatics Technology, University of Makerere, Uganda

ikaecatherine@cit.mak.ac.ug

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Abstract

To be completed

1 Background, research hypotheses and objectives

Should include defined and justified objective (point2), problem definition (point3) and a short introduction of project description (point4) and the institutional framework and partnership (point9)

(Simon: I added two temporary list just for myself)

Temporary: Bigger Picture

1. Provide better water service through mobile ICT in rural Uganda
2. Collect data (context, location, text) from mobile users in rural Uganda

Temporary: Objectives

- (i) an analysis of the current situation (who are the people using phones, current phone penetration and usages, barriers to usage, type of phones used, frequency of ICT communication, forms of communication related to water issues)
- (ii) the design of the communication channels to provide the bottom-up information on water: nature of the message (sms, mail, voice), the language used, the actions required (forms, dialed-in choice selection, special number-to-action, voice messengers)
- (iii) the design of the response with the same problems and criteria as for (ii)
- (iv) the ability to test for the information effectiveness and efficiency of the different response/feedback solutions proposed
- (v) the ability to test for some social incentives, through peer pressure or some forms of "gamification"

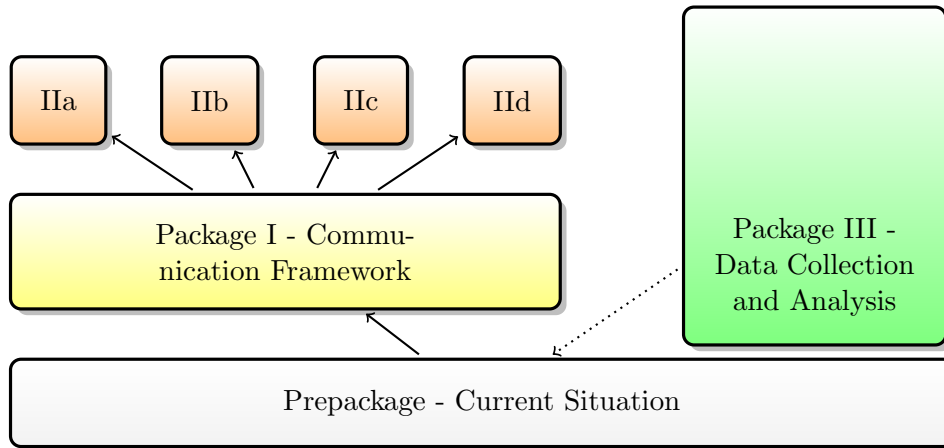


Figure 1: Research packages hierarchy

2 State of research in the field

Should cover state of research and references (point3), and innovativeness of research/ research methodology (point4) + corresponding logical framework (whatever that is)

(Simon: To Do)

3 Methodology

3.1 Methodology

Should give in full details the methodology to be used (point4)

Champanis and Rivett ? state:

“Based on our experience and focus on rural environments, our approach to ICT development has been that the investigation of the local context and solutions responding to local needs are more valuable and sustainable than a general one-size-fits-all design. Whilst this speaks against the notions of scalability, which is usually a desired outcome for IT solutions, we believe that rural and under-resourced environments require a more detailed and customised solution.”

A set of research packages is presented that allows to build up a well tailored but still scalable solution that - beside of helping people directly - gives space to investigate on research relevant questions in the field of computer science and further sociology, development aid and economics.

The small Prepackage analyses the context. In Package I the main framework for future project plug-ins is designed. The actual scientific part from a computer science perspective is done in Package II whose subpackages can be implemented individually. Package III is a parallel ongoing process that profits from improvements in Packages I&II (See Figure ??).

Prepackage: Analysis of the current situation

Goal Get an overview of mobile ICT usage and water management in rural Uganda.

Method In the field of mobile ICT information is aggregated from cooperation with governmental institutions, local service providers and in detailed literature study.

1. Distribution of cell phones (by model, user age, area)
2. Usage distribution (by time, frequency and service)
3. Analysis of finances (income per user, cost of different services per user, money spent for different services per user)
4. Analysis of technology (cellular network standards, cell sizes, user per cells, quality of service, future investments, availability of electricity)
5. Analysis of hindrances for a more frequent usage (finances, ease of use, illiteracy, privacy concerns)

In the field of drinking water we can additionally profit from partnership with local NGOs.

1. Analysis of the drinking water need amongst population and its challenges
2. Further data we will be collected during the project as a result of Package III

Package I: Design of a communication channel

Goal Design an inter-user communication channel that is user friendly, low-cost, reliable, secure and information rich.

Method A first substep evaluates different communication channels. Text-, graphical- and voice based methods are compared on different generations of phones. Depending on their connection standards (GSM, GPRS, 3G) and application platforms supported (SMS, Java ME, Android) best possible options are chosen. Challenges occur in the following areas:

- Low cost feature phones (“a modern low-end mobile phone that is not a smart phone” [Wikipedia]) are widely available in Uganda. Their drawback is that software has to be implemented manufacturer dependent and in general allows just limited functionality ?.
- Access to provider data (calls with user id, text messages, cell info) is difficult to obtain. A possible solution is to use just mobile data services and transfer messages based on an extra developed service.
- Literacy rate of Uganda is around 66 percent [Wikipedia]. Tailored solutions for illiterates have successfully been implemented ?. By developing special input methods, one has to be aware that a very important reason for people to buy a phone is due to its associated status and not its features ?.

- Low cost transmission is necessary to achieve a high user participation. Prices for SMS make up a higher percentage of the monthly budget than elsewhere. An alternative approach is to provide hardware and airtime to selected user group to perform studies.
- Free hardware and airtime is likely to be misused. Champanis and Rivet report that “Users would fill up the phone with music and video downloads” ? to an extent that it is not usable for the experiment anymore.
- User trust and information security is one of Africa's biggest challenge, this due to weak privacy laws, user awareness, political instability and old technology. ?

In a second substep we analyse the information flow needed to provide a water quality information and monitoring network. The implementation (third substep) completes Package I. To the moment it remains an open question if a self designed device for data transmission over the mobile network would fulfil this purpose even better than a cell phone based service.

The success of such a system is unpredictable. Hence we suggest an iterative approach based on try and error method. Lessons learned from other projects are considered and results reported to the community.

Package IIa: Quality control

Goal Achieve high quality information collected at a centralised agency but also sent to individual receivers

Method According to ? supervised and unsupervised machine learning methods are feasible to classify manually generated data in health surveys in Tanzania and Uganda. Widely used machine learning algorithms could be modified in order to not just classify but rather rate user message according to a scale of trust. Additionally the knowledge of the crowd of users could be used to label messages and hence perform supervised learning on initially unlabelled data - similar to a supervised spam filter. Out of this, a general trust giving and learning (human and machine based) distributed network could be generated.

In this we see the following risks:

- The reported lack of data quality in surveys in low income countries could also be the result of the normally used top-down approach ?, whereas a bottom-up approach (where users have a personal interest on the quality of the data) might not even, or at least less face this problem.
- The question resides if a machine learning solution for such a difficult task is an actual benefit for a country where human workforce is cheap (and jobs needed) and technology expensive. We would not be surprised if a mixed solution - highlighting suspicious messages machine- and final classification human based - might be the best solution.

Package IIb: Context analysis

Goal

- Season and weather
- Location (Cellinfo, GPS)
- Analysis of communication channel (extend application to other uses)

Method

Package IIc: User mapping

Goal

Method

Package IID: Incentives and gamification

Goal

Method

Package III: Data collection and analysis

Goal

Method

3.2 Chances and risk associated with selected methodology

Critical assessment of chances and risks (points8)

4 Organization

Should describe in details the institutional framework and the partnership, explaining the contribution of all involved partners (point 5). Clear presentation of the supervision and backstopping (point 6).

5 Expected results

Expected results and strategy for their implementation (method or product to be developed and its relevance to end users) (point9)

6 Budget

Detailed budget for each year of the scholarship, differentiating all funding sources including those of the ETH chair and partner contributions (financial or in-kind) (point10)