

M-governance: Exploratory Survey on Kenyan Service Delivery and Government Interaction

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Abstract: Mobile phones have been cited by many as the best technology for interacting with citizens due to widespread user uptake; as of September 2011, Kenya had 25.27 million mobile subscribers. However, understanding the opinion of the citizen users is important to assess the real viability of using such mobile technologies to improve service delivery and citizen-government interactions. Therefore, with the aim of investigating citizens' opinions on the best methods to interact with government, one-week of exploratory fieldwork was conducted in Nairobi in November 2011. This paper shares the initial findings from the fieldwork focusing on how Kenyan citizens understand governance and how they currently interact with the government. This information is important as a first step to studying the potential role of technology in Kenyan governance.

Keywords: M-governance; Kenya; Technology; Mobile Phone.

1. Introduction

Good governance has been cited as crucial in improving the welfare of a country's citizens, especially in developing countries. The achievement of this ideal governance has eluded developing countries such as Kenya that continue to be swamped by a myriad of problems of corruption, poverty and poor living standards, among others. Correspondingly, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have witnessed exponential growth in the last decade. This rapid growth has allowed even the poorest of people in the most economically challenged of countries, to communicate and express themselves. The potential of ICTs to improve governance and uplift peoples' lives is a fast-growing field.

This paper explores Kenyan citizens' understanding of governance and how citizens are currently interacting with government. These initial findings will be the foundation for additional fieldwork to be conducted in 2012 looking at the potential role of ICT use by citizens towards improving bottom-up governance.

1.1 – ICTs and Governance

E-governance projects and initiatives have had mixed results and limited success. In 2003, it was estimated that over 70-80% of e-governance projects in developing countries were total to partial failures [1]. Scholars such as Sasaki [2] attribute this failure to governments providing information that is not easily accessible or comprehensible. E-governance is also limited in developing countries where the majority of populations do not have access to computers, Internet infrastructure, or even electricity [3]. The limitations of e-governance

necessitated a re-thinking of how to reach people more effectively. This led to the introduction of mobile and wireless devices into the governance paradigm. M-governance can be considered a subset that facilitates e-governance or as a form of governance on its own [4]. Mobile governance is the use of mobile technologies (such as SMS, USSD) in the domains of citizen participation, provision of public services, information and public awareness to reach wider population segments as compared to those currently accessing the Internet.

1.2 – Mobile Phones

Mobile phones have been cited by many as the best technology for interacting with citizens due to its widespread user uptake. Estimated internet users in Kenya are around 12 million, with broadband internet subscriptions only 2.8% of the total internet subscriptions, and 98% coming from mobile GPRS/EDGE subscriptions [5]. The number of Kenyans with access to landlines stood at 0.97 per 100 inhabitants. In comparison, Kenyan mobile subscription has tripled in the last five years, and as of September 2011, there are 25.27 million mobile subscribers [6]. The Kenyan mobile penetration currently stands at 64.2 per 100 users [7].

These figures reveal how widespread mobile technology has become, making mobiles the easiest means by which to reach out to most citizens. Mobile technology ubiquity is attributable to several mobile phone qualities: relative affordability, low operational and maintenance costs, mobility, flexibility, wide range of applications such as SMS, camera, and internet access.

1.3 – Citizen views

Mwololo and Muthama [8] reported that 49.2% of Kenyans had used their mobile phones to access government websites. This was in spite of factors such as poor feedback from the government and outdated information on the government websites. The authors conclude that the potential for “better and extensive interaction between the government and citizens lies in mobile phones, hence the government needs to reconsider its e-governance strategy to include mainstream mobile phones.”

If the Government is to improve its e-government strategy, it is important to understand how Kenyans currently interact with government to identify areas where technology may be able to improve the process. It is imperative that new e-government initiatives properly address citizen’s concerns and have utility for Kenyans. The findings of this study will allow Government stakeholders, development organizations, mobile application developers, and those in the ICT4D sector to have a more accurate understanding of citizens’ current interaction with government and their opinions on the use of technology to facilitate interactions.

2. Objectives

In order to fulfill the purpose indicated above, this exploratory survey sought to answer the following core questions:

- What are Kenyan citizens’ understandings of governance?
- What types of services do citizens receive from service providers or the Kenyan government?
- Do citizens feel they are able to raise issues or complaints to the government or service providers?
- What do citizens want to talk to the Kenyan government about?
- What methods do citizens believe are best to give information to government/service providers?

3. Methodology

This article is based on desk research and fieldwork conducted between September – November 2011. The evaluation was comprised of two parts. First, desk research was conducted over the course of thirty (30) days with the aim of identifying the current shortcomings in Kenyan governance and reviewing the potential tools available in the East African mobile and web application development community to address the weaknesses in Kenyan governance structures. The second component was fieldwork conducted in four different locations in Nairobi – an up-scale shopping and office building (Bishop Magua), a densely populated urban slum (Kibera), the Central Business District (CBD), and the University of Nairobi main campus. Fifteen (15) respondents were chosen at random from each of the locations drawing a total of sixty (60) respondents. Of the total 60 respondents, 30 were female and 30 were male. This exploratory survey took place over a period of four days between the 1st and 4th of November 2011.

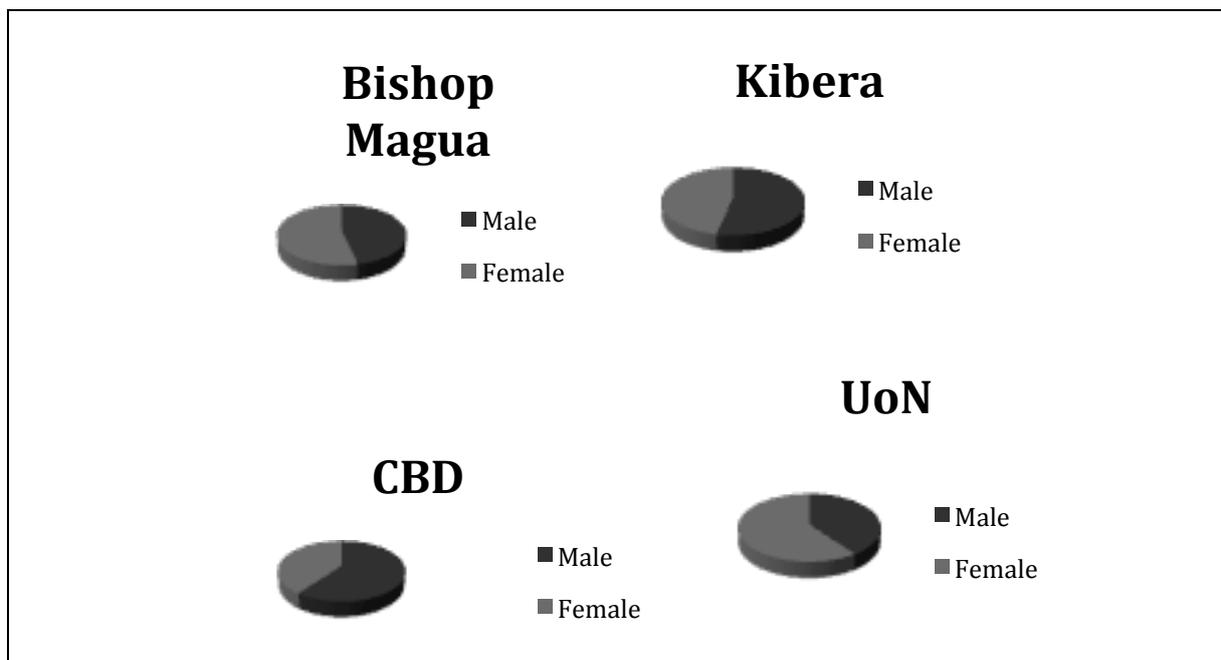


Figure 1: Composition of exploratory survey respondents

The semi-structured questionnaires were administered face-to-face in Swahili or English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. The questionnaire was comprised of yes-or-no, multiple-choice, and short-answer. Questions included:

- In your own words, what is your understanding of governance and what its about?;
- What are two services you have received from your Service Providers or the Kenyan government? Who did you interact with? On the whole, was the experience positive or negative? Why?;
- Are you able to raise issues or complaints to the government or service providers? (If Yes, How have you done so? i.e. What methods have you used?);
- What do you want to talk to the government or service providers about?; and
- What would be the best way for you to give information to government/service providers?.

The questionnaire data was collected using a mobile data collection tool called Open Data Kit (ODK). ODK allowed researchers to input questionnaire responses while in the field using a mobile phone running on Android. Using a wireless Internet connection, the field team was able to upload the collected data to a server on the cloud, which is accessible in real time from the office using a laptop computer. Therefore, researchers in the office were able to analyze the results while the field team sent the data from various locations around Nairobi. The data was coded on ODK and analysed using SPSS software.

4. Findings

4.1 – Understanding of Governance

Respondents were asked for their understanding of the term, “governance.” Majority of the citizens interviewed understand governance to do with government and leadership. Other popular words to define governance were people, service, management, involvement, and resources, among others.

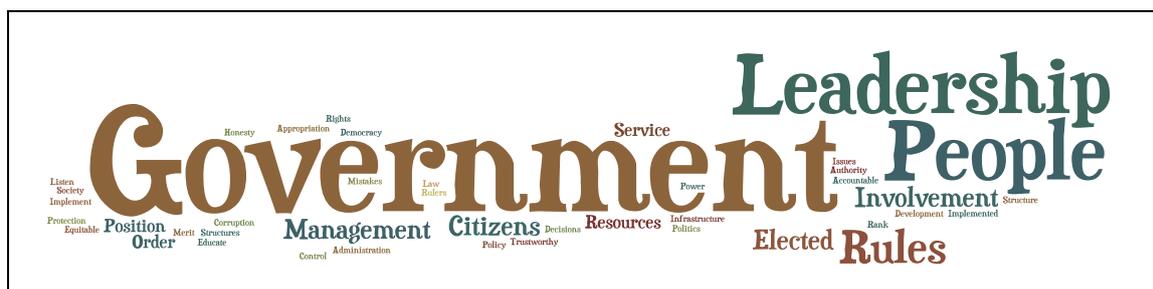


Figure 2: Word Cloud based on frequency of the words used to describe governance

Thirty per cent (33%) (n=20) of the respondents defined governance as government and leadership. Out of these, some qualified it further as leadership to bring development, unity and security to different people. 12% (n=7) of the respondents defined governance as administration, ruling and structures of law and order to implement government policy. 5% (n=3) of the respondents believed that governance is the involvement of all people, both government and the citizens in decision-making.

Three per cent (3%) (n=2) define governance to be proper and equitable appropriation of resources in the society. Other individuals (13%; n=8) understood governance to be about service to the people, i.e honest, trust worthy and ready to serve leaders as well as how elected leaders use their position. Democracy and being accountable in one’s elected positions or rank and how well one manages that position were also definitions given of governance. The remaining 33% (n=20) could not define governance and skipped answering the question.

The fact that 20 respondents had a hard time defining governance could be attributed to language issues. Most of the interviews were conducted in Kiswahili, although questionnaires were originally written in English. Some terms in English, such as “governance,” are difficult to accurately translate without losing the original or intended English meaning. This challenge revealed the fact that “governance” as we know it does not exist in the culture and lingo of most Kenyan people. The closest Swahili word to “governance,” is more closely translated to “rule”, “leadership”, or “government.” This translation also corresponds with the most common words used by Kenyans to explain their understanding of governance, as explained earlier.

A number of respondents gave comments about their opinion on the current state of the government and governance in Kenya. Of these, 54% were negative comments while 15%

were positive and the remaining 31% of comments advice on what government should do. Table 1 below summarizes these comments.

Table 1. Summary of comments by respondents on the current state of the government and governance in Kenya.

Positive comments	Negative Comments	General Comments
<p>There is now citizen participation</p> <p>The government right now is more democratic than in the previous regimes; everybody has a say.</p> <p>It's good government in place.</p> <p>Members of Parliament (MPs) guard the welfare of ordinary Kenyans.</p> <p>The government has changed from dictatorial being more democratic.</p>	<p>Poor service delivery.</p> <p>We are not seeing this 'governance'.</p> <p>Poor leadership.</p> <p>Service delivery is not optimum.</p> <p>The government is for the rich and corrupt.</p> <p>The economy is too bad.</p> <p>The leaders are the bosses and we cannot reach them or influence them.</p> <p>The government is doing nothing other than harassing us.</p> <p>The government does not help us.</p> <p>I have no confidence or trust in the government.</p> <p>There is lack of transparency in the government.</p> <p>Corruption and evil because people elect bad leaders.</p> <p>Leaders not doing a good job.</p>	<p>Citizen involvement in government is important, but some issues should remain exclusive to the government.</p> <p>The voices of the youth should be listened to.</p> <p>Government should provide services.</p> <p>Without good governance there will be chaos.</p> <p>A complete metamorphosis is needed in governance.</p> <p>We should elect leaders who are going to represent us.</p> <p>(The Government) should do good things for the people.</p> <p>The government should look at citizens' welfare and use revenue well.</p> <p>I don't want to be involved in government issues.</p>

4.2 – Service Delivery

In terms of service provision, respondents interviewed have interacted with the government through various means in order to receive services. These services vary from basic amenities like water and electricity services, to immigration documents like ID and passport, to other major services such as education and health services. In these interactions, respondents had different experiences.

Health, Education and Immigration services were among the most popular services that these respondents had received. While a few had positive comments on the service delivery, there were also a number of negative comments. These services could, therefore be possible key indicators to study on how ICTs can promote governance. These experiences are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of the service received by interviewees

Services	Number of people received service	Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
None	28	No comments	“We still pay for so-called 'free' services” “They (the government) are not helpful, we have to follow up” “I don't like the queues, waiting for 3 hours and not served!” “They are not there (the services)”
Health	14	“The services were good” “The services are better and faster, they have improved”	“They delay too much and there's a lot of bureaucracy.” “Someone almost died, emergencies are not considered.” “Hospitals have no medicine.” “ They are slow; poor low quality services.”
(Free Primary) Education	11	“The services were good”	“There is poor provision of education services; officials not friendly and ask for bribes.”
Immigration ministry (ID, passport)	10	“There are straight forward government officials in the ministry”	“Government officials at high levels are professional but at the low levels corrupt, rude, slow and unhelpful.”
HELB Loan	4	No comments	“They are not efficient at first.”
Water	3	“Services were efficient, payment of bills is efficient”	“The queues are long.”
Budget	1	No comments	No comments
Land ministry	1	No comments	“There is a lot of Bureaucracy, and one had to rely on know-who, not know-how. It's frustrating!”
Road network	4	No comments	No comments
CDF/Bursary	2	No comments	No comments
Legal services /The new constitution	2	“Very good legal services.”	No comments

4.3 – Communication channels with Government and Service Providers

The majority of interviewed respondents did not think it was possible to raise complaints with the government or service providers in general, either due to lack of means to do so or no confidence in the existing media to raise complaints.

Only 40% (n=24) of those interviewed in the exploratory survey believed that there are communication channels at their disposal to do so. Of these, ten respondents actually tried to contact the government/service providers to raise issues, mainly by visiting the concerned offices/departments, online using websites, calling in to the offices and radio stations, or writing a complaint letter. The remaining 60% (n=36) of respondents did not believe there are any channels of communication available or did not know of such channels to raise complaints about service delivery. These respondents were skeptical about raising complaints; some people said that they had tried raising issues before and no one had responded while others said that they had to bribe officials before their issues were

resolved. Further, some respondents were afraid of being victimized should they raise any issues with the government. One person did not see any need to raise complaints as he thought it was normal to receive poor service.

Given the opportunity, the people interviewed would like to talk to the government about different services and issues pertaining to their welfare. 45% (n=27) of the respondents said that they would like to talk about efficient service delivery and customer care. This is especially with regards to infrastructure development, water, electricity, and provision of health and education services. A similar number of people would like to talk about standards of living, the economy, inflation, prices of commodities, and food security.

A number of respondents (43%;n=26) would also like to talk to the government about youth employment and working conditions, (13%; n=8) about security, and 18% (n=11) about use of taxes, government expenditure, and management of resources. Corruption (15%; n=14) and health (8%; n=5) are other major issues raised that citizens would like to talk about with the Kenyan government. A few other individuals were interested in talking to government concerning gender equality, and the needs of the disadvantaged. Further, there was one respondent who wanted to discuss opening up the channels of communication between citizens and government, and civic education.



Figure 3. Topics that Kenyan citizens would like to discuss with the government

A large proportion of those interviewed favor physical interaction as an efficient means of communicating with government. Media was also viewed as a very good means of collecting information and passing it on to government. 72% (n=43) of the total respondents believe that face-to-face meetings are a very effective method to give information to the government/service providers. Some commented that unless it is face-to-face or personal, communication with government/service providers will not work. In the same vein, 63% (n=38) people believed that interactions with government and service providers at community meetings were an effective means of passing on information. However, some opposite views were given by individuals stating that time constraints would hinder them from physically interacting with government/service providers. Further, some were sceptical of government officials availing themselves for these meetings or receiving an immediate response. People also feared intimidation and victimization during face-to-face meetings.

Only 42% (n=25) of the respondents believe that telephone (including calling, Short Message Service [SMS], and USSD) would be an effective way of giving information to the government/service providers. The remaining 58% who disagreed stated that the

telephone could be expensive. Disagreeing respondents said that they would not trust the government's response on the telephone because SMS can be deleted and ignored, or callers can be lied to during calls. It is interesting to note that none of the respondents from the urban slum of Kibera believed telephone to be a viable way to communicate with government and other service providers. These respondents said that they did not think government officials would respond honestly or check their messages. Others were afraid of being identified and arrested for their views.

Despite a large number (48%; n=29) thinking of email as effective means of giving information to government, some were concerned about their privacy and security issues like hacking should they use email to communicate. Similarly, 24 (40%) respondents favored social networks to communicate with government. Most youth are computer users, and thus using social networks would be a convenient means for them. Some of those who were opposed to the use of email and social networks said that they were not computer literate and did not understand how the Internet works.

Another popular means of effectively giving information to government was found to be the use of radio call-ins with 30 (50%) respondents categorizing media as a feasible means of passing messages to government. However, a few had misgivings about response by government and services providers to issues raised in this manner.

Twenty-seven (27) (45%) of those interviewed said that sending information through leaders (community and religious) was effective. Those who disagreed said that community leaders were not appropriate trusted representatives as they could easily be bribed. A suggestion box was least popular with only 9 (15%) respondents agreeing it could work. One person said that the suggestion box could work because it is anonymous. However, the majority said they lacked confidence in this mean due to the fact that suggestion boxes were never opened or ignored, and those that were opened were never acted upon.

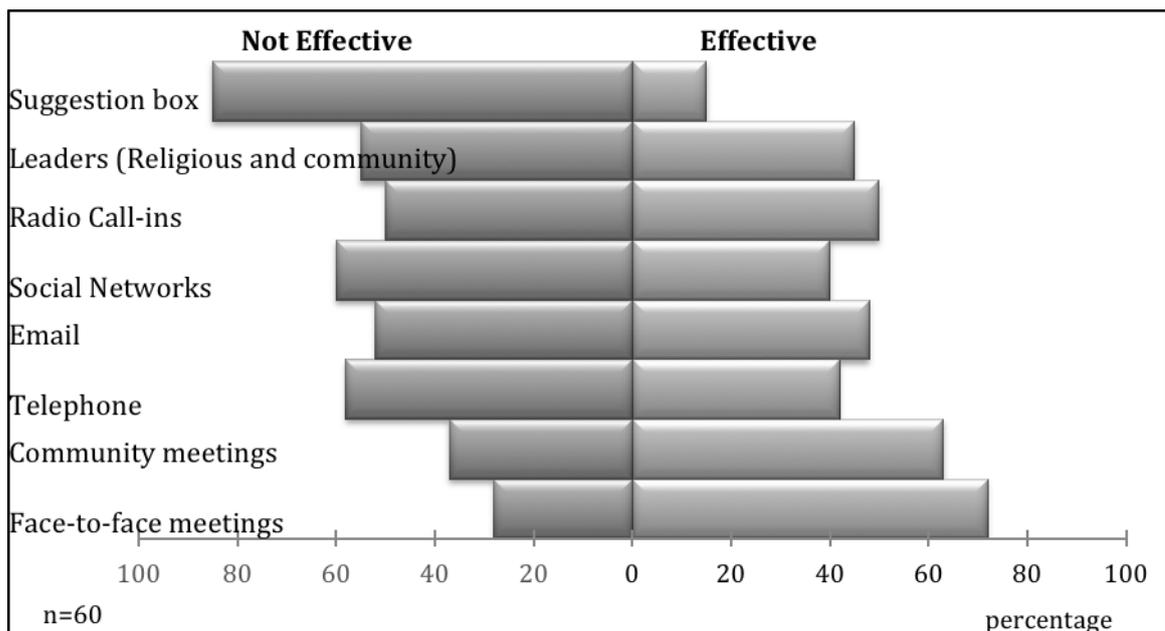


Figure 4. Kenyan opinions on effective and not effective methods of communicating with the government.

Other means suggested of giving information and raising issues with the government/service providers were demonstrations and open forums with reasons being given such as: "Leaders do not pay attention to individual voices..." and "the most effective means of communication is mass action." Generally, the respondents felt that follow-up was crucial to effective communication. Many stressed on anonymity as well, stating the importance of avoiding victimization.

5. Conclusions

This exploratory work sought to understand how Kenyan citizens view the term governance, interact with government service providers, and which communication methods they believe to be most effective to voice their concerns to government. The initial findings reveal that Kenyans believe governance is all about the government. This suggests a perception that governance is top-down and originates from government. Only 5% (n=3) of the respondents stated that governance involves both government and citizens in decision-making. This popular mind-set that governance is something that is done by the government and others in leadership needs to be amended if a more participatory role is to be taken by citizen stakeholders. Civic education and other programs to inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities may help to alter the view that governance is something implemented by government leaders. Important to also keep in mind is that people asked do not necessarily always know what they need, especially with limited knowledge regarding the possibilities to communicate with government that exist. This aspect should be addressed when designing the scaled-up survey that will be carried out by iHub Research in 2012.

Data on citizen interactions with government service providers reveals that the respondents on the whole had more negative experiences than positive experiences. This indicates that there is room for improvement in Kenyan service delivery. Further investigation using a larger sample size should be done to understand which specific sectors Kenyans believe would benefit most from technology applications.

One of the most important findings from this research came out of citizens' opinion on the most effective communication methods for engaging government. While the mobile telephone was still considered one viable method, it was not the most popular. In fact, the feedback from citizens revealed the limitation of using the mobile phone to call, SMS, or USSD. Further research must be done to test the viability of mobile phone applications. Also important to note is that the exploratory study was limited to residents of the capital city, Nairobi, where it is much easier to have face-to-face interactions with Ministries and service providers. In contrast, it is much less viable for citizens in rural communities that can be over nine hours away from Nairobi to meet face-to-face with Ministries. It will be important to include these rural communities in the larger sample study to be conducted in 2012.

Acknowledgments

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