

Enhancing the quality of government service delivery through the use of mobile technologies: A South African context

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INTRODUCTION

Among the duties of governments all over the world is the provision of services such as health care, education, housing, welfare, etc., which have become very important. Provision of housing and welfare have been incorporated into these duties with the progress and advancement of culture, science and technology, as well as the development of human societies in the information age. Many governments have poor reputations with respect to service delivery, which in many cases involves repetitive and manual operations at government offices, thereby causing time delays and affecting worker morale. Low throughput, coupled with traditional communication channels, which are expensive and require intensive human processing, as well as a lack of a single point of contact with government are identified as key problems with the service provision of traditional governments.

However, the challenges which are faced by governments in implementing e-government systems to ensure delivery of services, such as limited or no access to the internet by many citizens, have led some governments to shift their attention to m-government as the ultimate target of e-government. This is due to recent developments in mobile technologies.

Mobile-government is a new channel for the delivery of government services and information to citizens. It is not a replacement for, but rather a complement to e-government. M-government is the use of devices such as mobile phones, PDAs and wireless communication technology by government, and/or government administration, in its delivery of government information and services to citizens.

The purpose of this research is to explore ways to address the difficulty in implementing mobile activities and services for any government. In addition, a major output of this project will be a framework for understanding m-government as a vehicle for delivery of government services to citizens.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The key high-level objective of this research is to explore how government can incorporate the use of mobile phone technologies to improve the provision and reach of its services. This will help us present a framework for the delivery of m-government services to citizens.

However, to meet this main objective, the following will be covered as part of the objectives for this research project:

- Exploring ways in which governments can effectively deliver services through the use of mobile cellular technologies
- Exploring the development, deployment and provision of an open and inter-operable framework that can be shared by different and relevant authorities in delivering government service to South African citizens through mobile devices.

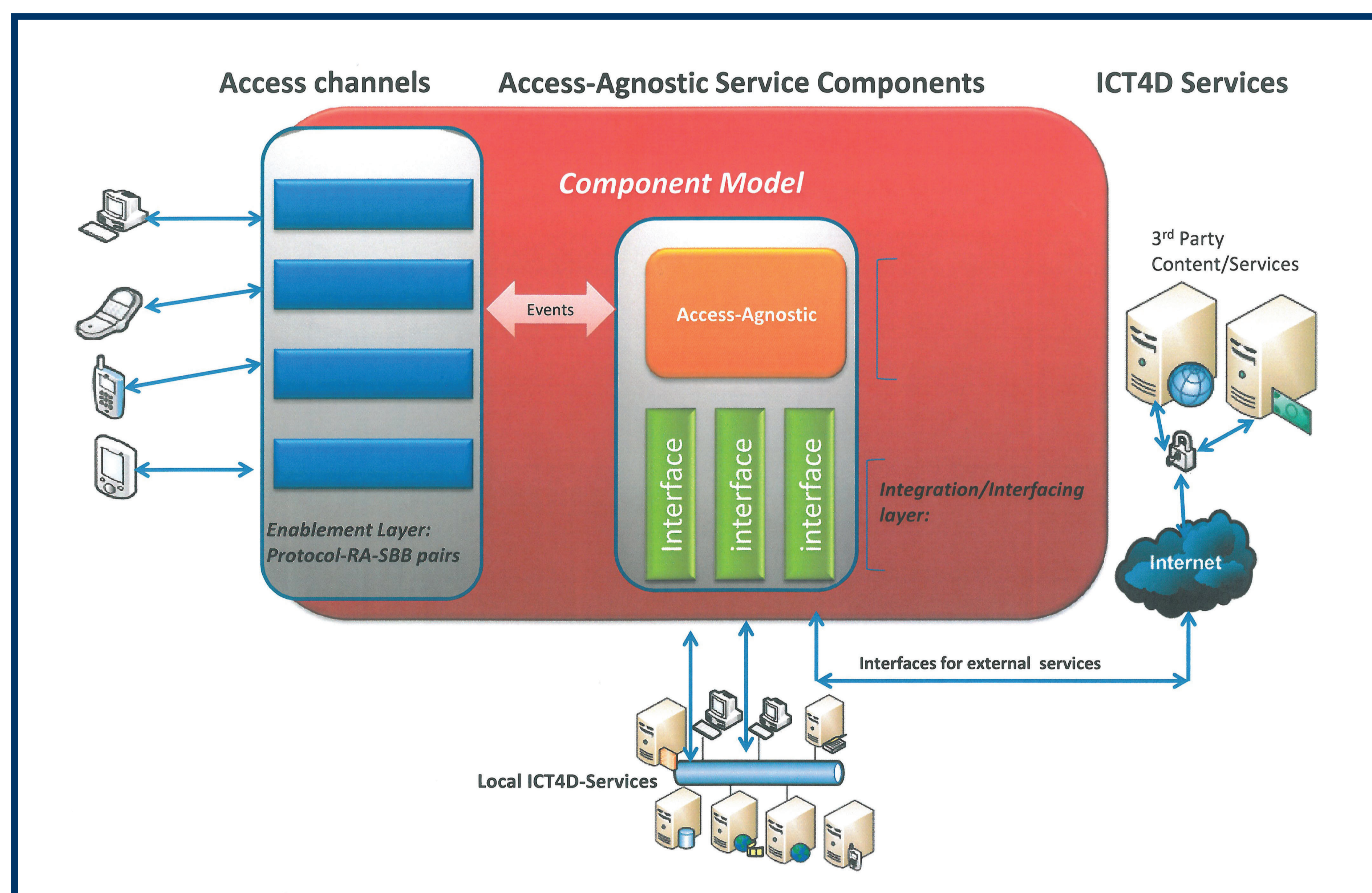
RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question for this research project is:

- How can government incorporate the use of mobile technologies to improve the provision and reach of government services?

In order to answer our main research question, the following sub-research questions will be asked:

- How can governments effectively deliver services through the use of mobile phone technologies so that people will use the technology they already have (i.e. mobile phones) to access government service(s) in a way that adds value to their lives?
- How can government implement the use of mobile phone technology to enhance the quality of service delivery?
- What are the benefits of implementing m-government services and applications over e-government?
- Can m-government make a difference in the way government services are delivered at a local/national level?
- What difference has the implementation of m-government made in the developed countries where it has been implemented?
- Why have m-government services and applications not been fully implemented in South Africa?
- What are the factors preventing the implementation of



Service Delivery Platform

- m-government in South Africa?
- Should service delivery typology be taken into consideration in m-government implementation?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An interpretive research methodology has been adopted as the research method for this study. An interpretive research methodology, in conjunction with data collection strategy, will allow for the gathering and analysis of empirical material that are critical to investigating the research question asked in this study.

Furthermore, this method is chosen for the following reasons:

- To understand a social phenomenon (i.e. the challenges of scalability and sustainability of mobile phone-based application of government services delivery) in the context of developing countries i.e. South Africa
- There is no need to prove or disprove any hypotheses
- There are no predefined factors that need to be associated with the complexities of scalability and sustainability in mobile phone-based application of government services delivery to the citizens.

EXPECTED RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through this research, we hope to acquire knowledge in understanding the dynamics of mobile-supported society and change. Therefore, this study should be able to make recommendations on how the change and implementation should be supported and institutionalised in a way that the change and mobile-supported society is most effective and becomes a continual process. Due to this, this study is expected to identify:

- Ways in which governments can effectively deliver services through the use of mobile technologies
- The various strategies in support of mobile phone technology implementation for the delivery of government services
- How best to develop, deploy and provide an open and inter-operable framework that can be shared by different and relevant authorities in delivering government service to South African citizens through mobile devices.

EXPECTED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

A communication platform which is developed for ICT4D service delivery. This platform can be accessed through various protocols such as SMS, E-mail, Instant Messaging (IM) and USSD.

The potential contribution of this research will be both practical and theoretical in terms of the direct and indirect benefits, as well as possible long-term contribution.

Practically, this research study will be relevant that it will contribute to the development of a better understanding of issues regarding the implementation of m-government for improved service delivery in the context of developing countries where mobile phones are the computers of the citizens, and the common means by which the internet is easily accessed to communicate with the government.

Theoretically, this study will contribute to the development of a framework that will help the sustainability of m-government.

Please scan this QR code to watch a short video clip explaining this research or visit <http://bit.ly/QpwKyT>

