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Enhancement of Micro-Entrepreneurs' Access to Official Information in Tanzania

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Background to micro-entrepreneurs' access to official information

In today's world, information is considered as one of the most important resources in such that its accessibility is mentioned as a constitutional right in many countries' constitutions. Information is this much emphasized, because it is of paramount importance as a driver of nearly everything in life. In Tanzania, access to information is mentioned in Article 18 (1) and 18 (2) of the constitution which states that:

Without prejudice to expression the laws of the land, every person has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and to seek, receive and impart or disseminate information and ideas through any media regardless of national frontiers, and also has the right of freedom from interference with his communications. Every citizen has the right to be informed at all times of various events in the country and in the world at large which are of importance to the lives and activities of the people and also of issues of importance to society (URT 1998).

Internationally, access to information is recognized in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 as a basic human right (<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>). Similarly, access to information is enshrined as a human right in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, which states that:

“Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference and everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression, this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers either orally, in writing or in print in the form of art, or through any other reduce of his choice.”(ICCPR, 1966)

Tanzania recognizes the role and importance of access to information and other human rights and has demonstrated this by being a signatory to these international human rights instruments. However, there is still significant discrepancy between theory and practice as the reality on ground is different, since many people are still facing big challenges in accessing information of different kinds.

Generally, there have been several problems affecting citizens' access to information, such as lack of awareness of sources of information, ignorance of the importance of information, reluctance of some government offices to provide information and lack of funds, which are some of the barriers affecting information accessibility. This situation has to a great extent affected human development processes in many ways including business endeavors.

In a study about the information need of women in small scale business in Dar es Salaam, Ndenje (2004) ascertains that access to business information is receiving little attention, to such an extent that there is a vacuum of studies that focus on the subject. On such grounds, understanding of entrepreneurs' information needs and the problems they face when seeking and using information is critically impaired. This implies that the majority of entrepreneurs are operating without appropriate information that would equip them with power

to access the right information at the right time from the right source and consequently decide in an informed manner. The IRIS project, through one of its objectives, intended to find out the status of micro-entrepreneurs' access to official information, identified the gap and made an intervention through designing a service.

Design thinking framework

The design thinking framework was adopted to guide the service designing process. This is an integrative approach where the process of problem solving is considered together with its framework condition. Analysis of a problem and solution development are considered systematically and holistically in a form of a process. It basically focuses on thorough customer understanding and customers' needs and problems. The design thinking process includes understanding, observing, point of view (define the problem), ideating (finding and selecting idea), prototyping (developing prototype) and testing the idea (Mueller-Roterberg 2018). The framework allows designers to have a clear and deeper understanding of the problems and enables them to reframe in a more human-centric way, as it focuses on thinking and reasoning outside the box in a more creative and innovative way.

Mapping of information services for micro-entrepreneurs

In order to address a problem, it is important to have a clear understanding of its nature and extent. Mapping of information services for entrepreneurs was of critical importance as it formed the basis for effective understanding of the nature and extent of micro-entrepreneurs' access to official information and how it subsequently influences their business growth. Through mapping, information services of various types and subjects were identified, located, analyzed and eventually matched against entrepreneurs' needs, perceptions and preferences. In so doing, the gaps were identified, and new services designed in collaboration with potential customers to cover the identified gaps.

Design Thinking Framework

PROBLEM SPACE What and Why?

divergent thinking

convergent thinking

UNDER-
STAND

OBSERVE

POINT OF
VIEW

- Identify, clarify, analyse and understand the problem
- Observing
- Determine framework conditions and goals
- Define the target group
- Describe the customer problem/needs

SOLUTION SPACE How?

divergent thinking

convergent thinking

IDEATE

PROTO-
TYPE

TEST

- Create ideas
- Evaluate and select ideas
- Select appropriate visualization/prototype-techniques
- Develop prototypes
- Test the idea
- Analyse and reflect on results

Figure 1. Design Thinking Framework (Mueller-Design Roterberg 2018)

Mapping approach

A standardized questionnaire with both open and close-ended questions for data collection was collaboratively developed by 15 students and two facilitators. The whole process started by a seminar whereby a presentation regarding the concept of information for micro-entrepreneurs was given and thereafter the students set in groups of five for discussion that ended in setting up questions for data collection. Later the questionnaire was tested and refined accordingly. Coverage of the questions included information about organization type and status of micro-entrepreneurs' information provision and information services designated for micro-entrepreneurs.

In order to get a sample, the students identified broad key areas where official business information can be obtained. The identified areas included government offices and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) providing micro-entrepreneurs information, libraries and business centers, academic institutions, research institutions, financial institutions and business incubators. From these broad areas, specific organizations were listed and considered as samples for mapping business information services for micro-entrepreneurs.

The three teams of five students each administered the questionnaire to the identified organizations from March to April 2018 by visiting the organizations. These students were randomly allocated to the organization to collect data. However, prior to commencement of data collection, permission had to be solicited from office of the Directorate of Postgraduate Research and Consultancy. The data collected were compiled and analyzed to derive conclusions.

Nature and types of the service provision

The specific objectives of mapping business information services for micro-entrepreneurs were to identify organizations providing business-oriented information services, their location, nature of the service and type of business information they provide. The ultimate goal was to establish business information services which would eventually be linked with the identified information need.

A total of 25 organizations were surveyed. Most of the organizations surveyed, 14 (60.8%), were government-owned organizations. This was deliberately done because official information and documentations are mostly channeled through government institutions. However, it was also important to include some Non-Governmental organizations because most of them support the government initiatives and are therefore considered as a formal channel for official information.

The nature and type of information resources in most of the surveyed organizations indicates that 17 (74%) organizations falls under the category of information centers, because the type of materials they provide specializes in one field or related fields as opposed to libraries which provide material to many subjects. A few organizations 3(13%) do not even have a room which can be referred as an information center; instead they have information or customer service desks where general customers' inquiries are attended to by the designated officers. Examples of such organizations are Districts and Municipal councils. The other 3 (17%) in the list of the surveyed organizations are libraries that provide generic type of business information to members in their respective communities. These include Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB), College of Business Education Library (CBE) and Dar es Salaam University School of Business (UDBS).

Nature and type of users of information services

Almost all information centers in the above listed organizations serves insiders rather than outside customers. That is to say, information centers are mostly used by staff of the respective organizations for references than they are used by entrepreneurs. Most of the entrepreneurs' queries are handled by the customer service department and they are hardly referred to the information centers. In the information centers visited, it was difficult to find more than five readers. The interview findings show that entrepreneurs in most cases want quick answers for solving instantaneous problems. There are very few who engage themselves into in-depth searching and understanding the problems and challenges they encounter. That being the case, the most preferred materials are fliers and brochures because they are brief and straight to the point. Since these materials are found

at the customer service desk, one sees no need to go to the library/information center. In cases where users need technical know-how of doing or performing various things, they prefer trainings over studying by themselves. SIDO is the most popular organization in the country in the provision of trainings to micro-entrepreneurs. It is an organization with a countrywide network operating incubation services.

The missing link between information services and the demand/needs

Most of the surveyed information centers use the conventional information services such as reference, selective dissemination of information, current awareness, reader services, indexing and abstracting, just to mention a few. Nearly all the services in these information centers are non-outreach services and therefore serve only users who regularly visit the centers. The survey found out that the outreach services available in these organizations are organized and conducted by technical people with the support of public relations and marketing officers. Information officers are hardly involved. A librarian in one of the information centers said:

“In the next financial year, we will start doing outreach services alongside with the technical and other staff because our budget for that was eventually approved. This is after many years of waiting.”

Since information officers rarely engage themselves in outreach services and users do not come to libraries/information centers to seek for information, it implies that the services in information centers are inadequately used, because there are just few users physically visiting the centers. The following gaps were identified:



1. Lack of one stop center for accessing micro-entrepreneurs' information.

Each organization responsible for entrepreneurship welfare is working independently and as a result, entrepreneurs must move from one office to another seeking for basic working information for their business. Unlike macro-entrepreneurs who have a one-stop center for accessing information, which is Tanzania Investment Centre (TIC), micro-entrepreneurs have none. This calls for a countrywide network of such services to ensure micro-entrepreneurs' accessibility to the right information from the right source. This counter-acts the existing trends of relying on peers for information that would have been accessed through the official channels.



2. Information centers are hardly used by micro-entrepreneurs.

Even though many of the government institutions have information focal points or centers, the fact is they are rarely used by outsiders. According to the interviews, most micro-entrepreneurs are looking for quick responses to their queries which are mostly handled by the customer care departments. As noted earlier, this is because most micro-entrepreneurs are not interested in searching in-depth knowledge about their business such that they end up getting satisfied with mere handout and fliers.



3. Micro-Entrepreneurs are not used to using library services.

A trend in the use of libraries in Tanzania just like in many other African countries is low (Muneja 2013). This is affecting many aspects of life, including developments in business, because most micro-entrepreneurs are not used to using libraries where they could get a lot of business information necessary for opportunities and development their business.



Picture 1. Service design co-creation workshop.

Service Designing

Service design is an activity that involves planning and organizing resources such as people, infrastructure and other materials of a service for the purpose of improving quality of the service and the interaction between the service provider and customer. It may involve slight changes in the existing service or new creation of an entire service. The process involves an analysis of the existing services to find out how well they meet user needs and streamline them accordingly so that they do. To ensure that entrepreneurs and other stakeholders improve their access to official information as one of the IRIS project objectives, service design was considered as an important approach.

According to Fritsche (2010), service design addresses services from the perspective of the user and it must ensure that the service interfaces are useful, usable and desirable for client's point of view and effective and distinctive from the supplier's point of view.

Co-creation of the service

The service design of library services was collaboratively done by different stakeholders and it went through several stages. It started with a co-creation workshop. This was an important stakeholders' workshop which intended to analyze micro-entrepreneurs' situation, needs, wants and challenges and propose solutions. Over 50

participants of different cadres from government and non-government organizations that provide information and other services to micro-entrepreneurs in Tanzania participated. Such organizations are, for example, Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB), Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA), Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS), School of Library, Archives and Documentation Studies (SLADS), Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF), Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), College of Business Education (CBE), Mzumbe University and Tumaini University Dar es Salaam College (TUDARCo). These stakeholders were identified during the mapping of library and information services which took place prior to the workshop.

As noted earlier, the purpose of the workshop was to gain an in-depth understanding of the micro-entrepreneurs in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and their operating environment. Understanding customers included knowing their situation, needs, problems/challenges and wishes in as far as accessing information related to their business is concerned. Based on the analysis of the information gathered from stakeholders who work closely with micro-entrepreneurs and the micro-entrepreneurs themselves, the following were identified as the situation of most micro-entrepreneurs in the city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

- » They mostly rely on their peers as sources of information
- » They have limited information on how to best operate their business
- » Some of them are not registered (i.e. they are not formal)
- » They lack innovation and because of that you may find a large group doing the same business in the same area
- » Their business is on and off or does not grow mostly because they lack adequate capital
- » Some of them are mobile. These are famously known as “Machinga”
- » They dodge paying tax
- » Some of them do not have fixed places for their business as official places for business are limited.

This kind of information formed the basis for a shared understanding of the micro-entrepreneurs’ situation which was an important step in designing the service that would effectively interface between service provider and customer. On top of that, micro-entrepreneurs were further analyzed by identifying their needs and wants. This also was done to share understand of what is known about micro-entrepreneurs needs and wants as input to the service design. The following needs and wants were identified:

- » Markets for their products and services
- » Marketing support
- » Business management support
- » Quality and standards of products and services
- » Information on how to access a loan from a financial institution for boosting their business capital
- » Knowledge on how to manage finances
- » Getting places for conducting their business
- » Business networking
- » Knowledge on how to process/manufacture and packaging goods.

The process continued by outlining challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs when doing their business. This was also targeted to enrich the understanding of environment in which micro-entrepreneurs are working. The challenges identified are listed here under:

- » Lack of enough capital
- » Lack of adequate information about markets for their products and services
- » Limited knowledge on how to best operate their business
- » Lack of innovation in their business as most of them are doing the same business in the same area
- » They are less networked.

After analysis of the situation, needs and challenges and/or problems of micro-entrepreneurs, the time came to devise workable solutions. The proposed solutions are summarized below:

- » Analyzing their need to ensure that the provision of information face their information needs
- » Repackage information according to their needs
- » Improve their skills on designing and branding their products
- » Improve communication network system of information to facilitate effective reach of the information
- » Networking to allow them to support each other
- » Improve their marketing skills particularly through social media (i.e. help them to effectively use social media such Facebook and Twitter to market their products and services)
- » Provide them with spaces for business (e.g. market places, incubators and industrial packs)
- » Train them on how to process, manufacture and package their products
- » Improve library services to attract micro-entrepreneurs to visit libraries and read books and other sources of information related to their business
- » Link micro-entrepreneurs with organizations which are ready to support them
- » Create a one stop center for accessing business information for micro-entrepreneurs

All these findings from micro-entrepreneurs (i.e. Customer) had to be evaluated and checked against the available services. So, there was a need to survey the available services with a view of finding out the way they perform in relation to the findings above.

Service Safari

Service safari was an organized trip made to visit information centers for a purpose of observing or experiencing the service provision in genuine context. Unlike the previous sections where all ideas and views were generated in a workshop, in this section the comments and views are findings of the observations and interviews made during the visits. From the available list of organizations, a random sampling was made to get three organizations to be surveyed. The safari included interviews and observations on the services provided and the general customer attendance and use of the services available. General observation from the service safari are noted below.

- » The visited information centers were noted to have very low number of users at the particular time of the visit. One of the centers was actually locked and there was not even a single user.
- » Most of the materials are not friendly to illiterate users (i.e. most of them are in text format and some cases big books). Few audio-visual materials were observed.
- » Some of them are not visible (i.e. located in hidden places with no or invisible directions; in one of the centers there was not even a sign to identify the place).
- » It was noted that centers have few staff, which can be an impediment when the demand for service is high.
- » It was also observed that centers are well equipped with facilities; for example, at one of the centers, there were many computers but there was nobody to use them.

Regarding the interviews, the following were noted as key issues featured in the discussions.

- » Overlapping of roles and responsibilities between information officers, marketing officers, communication officers and public relations officers.
- » Limited budget affects implement programs and services designed to meet user needs.

- » Poor reading habit hinders effective utilization of the available services, because most of them are text-based and thus requires reading skills.
- » The value of information centers is undermined because of the negative perceptions of some staff caused by lack of knowledge regarding contribution of information developments of the core functions of organizations.
- » Poor marketing of the available services. Only few people are aware of the existence of information centers which are attached to these organizations. In some cases, you may find even some of the staff are not aware of what these centers are doing.
- » Users are interested with training that involves more action/ hands-on than theory. They like to be told rather than reading by themselves.

Design Drivers and Goals of Service Design

Design drivers are summaries and definitions of the identified design goals based on customer insights. This was done to build a bridge between understanding the customer situation, needs and challenges and solution ideation. Key issues gathered from micro-entrepreneurs' situation, needs and challenges are listed below:

- » They need access to information on issues such as where and how to access low interest loans, where to find a market for their products, how to market/advertise their products, how to effectively conduct business, how to manage finances, access prices and tax issues, raw materials etc.
- » They need technical knowledge on how process/manufacture and package their products.
- » They need to be incubated and thereafter hosted in industrial packs for market purposes, networking and ease assistance or support.
- » They need to have a legal and regulatory policy framework for smooth running of their business activities.



Picture 2: Interview in one of the visited information centers

- » The service design goals were developed based on key issues number 1 and 2 as follows:
- » To design a service that consolidates various micro-entrepreneurs' official information and makes them accessible under one roof
- » To design a service that provides for acquisition of skills required by Micro-Entrepreneurs in production of goods and services and management of their business
- » To design a service that reaches out to micro-entrepreneurs as they are not used to visiting libraries/information centers

Solution ideation and testing

This chapter deals with ideation of a new solution based on the acquired knowledge and insights. It is basically a process which deals with idea generation with regard to what will work best as a solution to the identified problems. Ideation is in fact a basis for building a prototype and getting the innovative solutions to users.

Ideation workshop

An ideation workshop brought together stakeholders from organizations dealing with micro-entrepreneurs, municipal council staff and academicians for co-creation of the solution. Organizations such as SIDO, TFDA, BRELA, TWCC, TBS and KMC participated. The target was to brainstorm about the previously identified problems and challenges regarding micro-entrepreneurs' access to official information and other related issues and finally suggested ideas for possible solutions. Several ideas were proposed, and they were all matched against a list of criteria such as ease of access, ease of use, affordability, inclusiveness, resources available and sustainability. Evaluation of the proposed ideas was done and the idea for consolidated micro-entrepreneurs' information help desk was accepted as the idea to be prototyped and tested.

Prototyping and testing of the help desk

The ecology of the micro-entrepreneurs' help desk was set in the co-creation workshop. The setup took into consideration the criteria identified at the ideation level and it includes a network of organizations providing information services to micro-entrepreneurs, a network of entrepreneurs' technical support institutions, Tanzania Library Services Board, Lecturers and students and Tumaini University Dar es Salaam College Library as a host. According to the setup, organizations dealing with micro-entrepreneurs have the role of supplying information to the centralized portal (i.e. the help desk). This was purposely designed to restrain the current practice that requires micro-entrepreneurs to move from one organization to another seeking for information. Based on the findings, it was also necessary to include technical support for

micro-entrepreneurs since most of the micro-entrepreneurs seemed to prefer hands-on training rather than theories from literature. In addition, the trend shows that reading culture is low, thus hands-on activities can work better to fill the gap. Most of the activities of the help desk are designed to be run by students under supervision of their lecturers. This is the reason why lecturers and students are forming part of the ecology of the help desk. For prospects of scaling up the service, Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB) was opted to be part of the service. The idea behind this is that the countrywide network of TLSB can be appropriate for making the help desk accessible to as many people as possible in the country.

As noted earlier, the service is hosted in the library of Tumaini University Dar es Salaam College. The materials acquired for the micro-entrepreneurs are displayed in a designated place within the library and there is a library attendant to attend queries from users of the service. Repackaging of the information is done when there is a need. The launching of the service was attended by micro-entrepreneurs, students, academic staff and other stakeholders like SIDO.

Interviews made about the suitability of the service revealed that most of those who used the service accepted the idea and the services. However, most of them recommended outreach services as many needy people do not have a tendency of going to the library for information searching. One of the outreach services recommended is the mobile micro-entrepreneurs' information help desk. According to this recommendation, the help desk can have wider access if it will go out and meet micro-entrepreneurs in their workplaces and have live conversations on various matters of their concern. On the other hand, there were views that other means of communication that reach many people easily and widely, such as radio and television, may be deployed to get the intended impact. Others recommended that the service should be mainstreamed in the government through district or municipal councils where focal points for micro-entrepreneurs to access information will be developed and funded by the government. All the recommendations made suggest that there is a critical problem in terms of access to official information, but also tells that the majority of the people are not proactive in terms of information.

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