Huduma Centres Revolutionizing Service Provision in Kenya: Lessons for the Information Profession

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1. Introduction

The public service sector in Kenya has been grappling with the need to offer efficient services for several years. Some of the changes in the last 20 years include "employee rationalization leading to wage bill reduction, performance improvement, structural adjustment programme and the institutionalization of results-based management" (Abdalla, et al., 2015). Huduma Kenya was established in 2013under the Devolution ministry to provide government services to the Kenyan citizens."Huduma" is a Swahili word meaning service. The Huduma Kenya model seeks to use technology to allow people to access a range of self-service counters linked to government databases (Ng'aru & Wafula, 2015). It is an effort to automate government services across the country. The main goal of establishing such centres was to enable quick and efficient government services to Kenyan citizens. It is viewed that the success of such centres propels the Vision 2030 aim of achieving a people-centred, transparent and accountable public service that responds to public needs and provides public services that meet global standards and best practice in the early 21st century (www.kenyamoja.com).The focus was on transforming public service delivery through building partnerships. The efforts were boosted after the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya in 2010 (Abdallah et al., 2015). Chapter two (6[3]) of the constitution states that "a national state organ shall ensure reasonable access to its services in all parts of the Republic, so far as it is appropriate to do so having regard to the nature of the service". The centres use the operating model of Integrated Service Delivery (ISD), operating a "one-stop-shop" for government services. This model has been adopted by a number of developed and developing countries such as Canada, Singapore, South Africa, Australia, Brazil and India (www.industrialization.go.ke). The services are provided online through the Huduma Web Portal and on mobile phones through the Huduma Mobile Platform, the Huduma Call Centre and the Huduma Payment Gateway (*Africa Review*, 2013). The brains behind the formulation and implementation of thisconcept has been attributed to the University of Nairobi's Enterprises Ltd. (UNES), working with the Ministry of Devolution and Planning (Mokaya, 2015).

The first Huduma Centre was therefore launched by President Uhuru Kenyatta at GPO, Nairobi in October, 2013. The President described the old bureaucratic system as inefficient, bred corruption, wasted time and cost billions of shillings (Lubanga, 2016). Since then, over 40 more centres have been established around Nairobi and in various towns in Kenya. These include Nairobi (GPO, City Square, Makadara, Eastleigh, Kibra), GPO Mombasa, Bungoma, Siaya, Kitui, Embu, Kisumu, Kisii, Kakaega, Kajiado, Machakos, Meru, Isiolo, Wajir, Turkana, Nyeri, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kwale, Makueni, Nyamira and Thika (www.industrialization.go.ke). Huduma Kenya is targeting to create at least one centre in all the 47 counties (www.Kenyamoja.com). This will later be followed by the sub-county level, through partnership with the private sector. There are about60 government services offered at the centres.

These include:
- Assessment and Payment of Stamp Duty
- Community Policing
- Duplicate National Identity Card
- EACC Clearance Certificate
- Issuance of Seasonal NCC tickets
- Kenya Police Abstract
- Nairobi City Single Business Permit
- NHIF Member Statements and accredited Institutions
- NHIF Registration and Claims
- NSSF Member Statements and Benefits
- NSSF Registration
- PPOA Filing reviews and or addressing complaints in procurement and disposal
- Public Complaints through the Commission on Administrative Justice
- Registration of Welfare Groups
- Renewal of Drivers licenses and Status check
- Reporting Corruption
- Search and Registration of Business Names
- Status of Pension Claims
- Student Loan Application
- Student Loan Repayment Services

Awards
The service has won several awards including Kenya Ombudsman Award for the best provision of public service delivery. International awards include:
- United Nations Public Service Award in the category Improving the
  Delivery of Public Services-June 2015
- African Public Service Awards in the Special Recognition Category-June 2015
- Africa in Innovative Management of Public Service, Awards by the
  African Association for Public Administration and Management-February 2015

- Customer Service Excellence in Public Sector, Awards by the
  Institute of Customer Service Kenya
- And best in use of ICT in the Public Service, Awards by the
  Information Communication Technology Association of Kenya

Source: www.kenyamoja.com

2. Impact of Huduma Kenya

The former Youth and Gender Affairs Cabinet Secretary, Sicily Kariuki indicated that the centres serve at least 30,000 customers daily, and have a turnaround time of 10 minutes (Lubanga, 2016). The 2016 statistics indicated that the centres had served over three million people and generated over six billion shillings in revenue collection from services that require payments (www.kenyamoja.com). The myriad of services are offered under one roof thereby making it convenient for citizens to access the services in real time without the need to travel to multiple service points. Any necessary payments are also made at the same point. Customer satisfaction levels are reasonably high, with Teleposta centre in Nairobi recording a 93 satisfaction (www.kenyamoja.com).

The success of the centres was visible. It attracted visits by delegations from across Africa for the purpose of sharing experiences and lessons learnt. These include South Africa, Tanzania, Nigeria, Mali, Swaziland, Uganda, Gambia, Rwanda, Togo, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, and Papua New Guinea (Ng'aru & Wafula, 2015).

3. Lessons for the Information Profession

The concept of Huduma Kenya through its implementation did not originate from the field of information sciences despite the fact that it bears similarity in its approach to service provision. On one hand, the services being sought are necessitated by statutory requirements and Kenyan citizens have no option but to comply. On the other hand, the approach to the service provision is a transformation of a previously cumbersome and inefficient one. This is not to imply that Huduma Kenya is free from operational problems. Rather, it is an imperfect system that has made an attempt to bring about a revolution in service delivery to the society. A number of lessons for information services can be derived from the Huduma Kenya experience. These are not new expectations in the profession. They are however intended to rekindle the focus on the basic ingredients for successful information services. Seven of these have been highlighted below.

The fruit of research efforts: The success of Huduma Kenya is considered as a contribution of the research efforts of an institution of higher learning – University of Nairobi in this case. It is an example of a disruptive technology (Mokaya, 2015).The services made the most commonly sought services by citizens possible within the least time possible and at the possible individual convenience. Its customer-centred approach fulfils the ultimate purpose of a service oriented business.

The conception and success of Huduma Kenya is an indication that universities in Kenya are capable of providing solutions to everyday societal problems through research and innovation. Much of the useful research done in these universities have not been translated into community development efforts. The field of information sciences has enormous opportunities toimpact on the society. The national library services for example is an already established service that has the potential of transforming lives when blended with research. Their establishment is an opportunity. Their mode of operation determines the impact made on the society it serves. The continued use of the internet and continuous improvement of its effectiveness is one memorable breakthrough for the information science profession. This is not to say that it is not being used. Rather, information service providers can achieve more by using it in innovative and transformative ways. Otieno & Omwenga (2015) stress that e-government is not just about building websites and using the internet but it is about transforming ways of service delivery and fundamental relationship between government and citizens. This relates to information services where the provision of the internet as a service only is not adequate. Information professionals should continually seek innovative ways of utilizing the internet to totally transform the provision of information services. Technological solutions should also aim at bringing down the cost and enhance the efficiency and convenience of accessing information products.

Role of user studies: The customer is always the centre of focus in the establishment of any successful service. The customer experience determines the success of the service.It was evident that user perception and ratings were considered right from the onset through surveys and soliciting of customer feedback. The services gained wide acceptance from the users. A number of user studies were done at the early stage of the implementation of the project. For instance, Abdalla, et al. (2015) carried out a case study of Mombasa Huduma Centre on the effect in service delivery to the public. The findings suggested that the centre has significantly enhanced transparency, reliability and customer satisfaction in service delivery. Information services aim at making an impact on respective users. In some cases, user satisfaction is not determined probably due to the assumption that the user will have reasons for using the services in place. This is common for instance in academic libraries where academic achievement is linked to the use of the library resources. A number of public library services have not customized their services based on the local community needs. Some of the information materials are acquired by way of donations or centralized acquisitions and do not make meaningful impact to the community. May times, school children utilize the reading spaces during vacations. There is little evidence that these visits translate to the reasonable use of information resources in the library.

Convergence of services: As already noted, Huduma centres have attempted to provide a 'one-stop-shop' for many government services. It is a shift from the traditional approach of visiting various ministry offices in different geographical locations.The basic idea is that a client would only have to be in contact with one single entity to obtain all the necessary paperwork in one streamlined and coordinated

process, rather than having to go through a labyrinth of different other bodies.Many of the library and information services have been designed in a traditional manner. Libraries have been segmented into sections based on the tasks performed and services offered, such as cataloguing, reference, binding, photocopying, technological support, acquisitions and circulation. In most cases, these sections are located in various parts of the building. Some libraries also have branches to serve various users. This paper does not suggest the eradication of these sections as they are based on the logical operations of tasks and services. However, the proximity of these services to the user – whether physically or online – makes a difference. The dynamism of service provision with regards to technological infrastructure demands that wastage in terms of time, resources and irretrievability be minimised. It is there for incumbent that a convergence of service provision be the only way out in streamlining the efficiency in information delivery.

Simplicity of operation: Users are not interested in the complexity of a system or the expense incurred to have it running. It is much about how a system solves their needs, especially the immediate ones. Importance is attached to the way these needs are satisfied in the most efficient manner. This end could be achieved at relatively high or low cost, depending on the nature of service requirements. Huduma centres eliminated the need for citizens to travel to various service centres that were scattered around a town or in many locations in the country. In a worse scenario, citizens were forced to travel from the countryside to major towns to access government services. Apart from the cost incurred, the long queues made the experience undesirable. Information services gain user acceptance by allowing the user to get what he or she needs with the least effort, time and cost.

The achievement of simplified operations is not an easy task. Despite the fact that users have commented favourably about service provisions at the centres, issues were raised concerning the poor link between the Huduma Centres, which act as front offices, and the government departments that undertake back office operations (Kariuki, 2016). This was prevalent with government departments that had not computerized their operations. Delays were experienced and at times forced some applicants to travel all the way to Nairobi for services at parent ministry headquarters (Kariuki, 2016). The most affected were the issuance of identity cards, birth certificates and processing of pension claims.

ICT as the vehicle for service transformation: The harnessing of ICT in the provision of desirable services is the way to go. Manual methods in the public services in Kenya have proved to be slow, cumbersome and prone to abuse by some civil servants. The country is experiencing an increase in the rate of adoption of ICT by its citizens. The government's decision to initiate the Huduma centre was also fuelled by the emergence of a more educated and technologically savvy generation in the country (Awuor, 2016).Statistics from the Communications Authority of Kenya show that by September 2015, there were 36.8 million mobile phone subscribers. Furthermore, the number of internet users reached 31.9 million during the same period. Kenya is also credited for the wide usage of mobile phone money transfer service that provides an alternative method for the payment of services. Thetotal population of the country in February 2017 as per the estimates of the United Nations was 47.9 million (www.worldometers.info).

It is therefore more likely that ICT usage in solving the day to day problems will continually form part of the lifestyle of the current and upcoming generations. Many sectors such as finance, agriculture, health, education and government are embracing ICT for competitive advantage and as a vehicle for obtaining the desired results. Information services, and libraries in particular initially utilized ICT mainly to handle the manual and repetitive tasks previously being undertaken by staff in a more efficient manner. This approach freed the staff to undertake other important assignments and allowed the users to access and transact personalized services among other benefits. It brought the kind of revolution that was considered appropriate at the time. The current expectation however is that ICT should provide the platform for users to access diversified information services more conveniently. Libraries are expected to facilitate the process and act more as a 'technology' department. The use of technology will be aimed at revolutionizing the delivery of services as opposed to bringing on board technologies to improve the traditional service provision. The focus shifts to the end product rather than the processes. Government services were provided in separate units across major cities, nearly reflecting the division of libraries into sections. At present, Huduma centres take the layout of a banking hall, bringing various services under one roof. However, as technology use permeates into the government sector, a technology-enabled platform will dominate the services. The libraries of the future may reflect less of the traditional sections and user areas and embrace technological solutions that will overhaul the design of services and structures. The publishing industry may reach out to the consumers by technological means and have less traditional outlets such as bookshops and magazine vendors. The transformation in the government sector suggests that it does not matter for how long certain information services may have struggled to enhance its performance. Revolutionary measures can be undertaken at an opportune time.

Collaboration for success: Successful firms at some point in their life seek collaboration with other relevant organizations. Much of the success of Huduma centres was achieved through concerted efforts of various government departments. One efficient department could not make an outstanding impact through a single or only a few services. It was noted that some departments that were slow in digitizing their services frustrated Huduma centres' efforts to provide efficient services. Libraries worldwide have embraced co-operative efforts. The Kenya Libraries and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) is an example of a success story in Kenya. It facilitated access to electronic resources that could not be made possible by individual libraries. Some years ago, some campuses in the United States combined library and information technology divisions due to concerns about responsibilities and funding priorities (Wood & Walther, 2000). Accordingly, the staff then became "public services" staff. Perceived 'competitors' of libraries and information services such as search technology providers become partners in the revolutionary

efforts. The financial sector took this approach when banks were faced with competition from firms offering mobile money transfers. Attempts to suppress the new innovation that proved cheaper to the consumer through a legal process proved futile. Banks took a collaborative approach by embracing the new innovation into their service provision and won the attention of customers. This became a win-win situation.

Improvement as a lifestyle: No matter how well an information service appears to be progressing, the establishment should always look for innovative ways to make improvements. Participants suggested through the survey carried out by Abdalla, et al. (2015) that more centres and personnel were required to improve on the effectiveness of Huduma centres. A possible way of reducing the need for physical visits to the centres is enhancing the online services. Information service providers may have a defined goal, but may need to adjust the approach from time to time. The increased enrolment of online students for example is an opportunity for libraries, publishers and vendors to re-package information and modify access channels.

4. Information service delivery model

The numerous similarities and experiences shared by information services and Huduma Kenya is reflected by the following model.
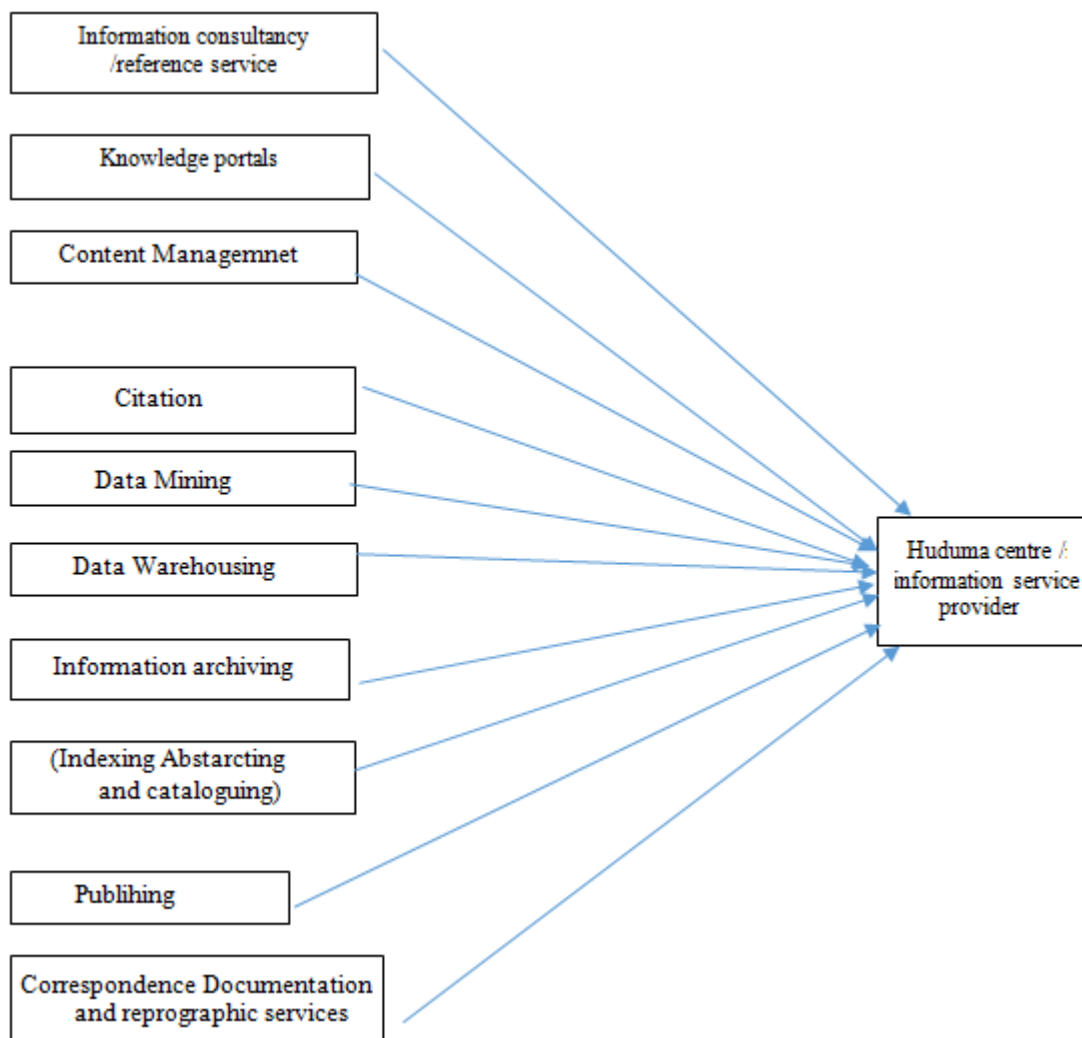

Figure 1: Information service delivery model

Source: research

This model encompasses a conglomeration of information services and activities that are anticipated by the patrons. These services spans from basic information like personal inquiry to more complex information service that requires consultation. Most of these services are majorly techno-centric and therefore much emphasis are accorded to ICT infrastructure to facilitate provision of information services for instance; creation (electronic publishing), processing (metadata standards), storage and retrieval (content management, data mining and warehousing, information archiving and knowledge portals) and dissemination (correspondence and reprographic service)

5. Criticism of Huduma centre

The idea of One Stop Shop as a way to improve service delivery has been tried out with several degrees of success and failure in various countries. Promoting innovations in the public sector reforms was one of the recommendations in the Vienna Declaration on Building Trust in Government. Information professionals may find the wholesome

implementation of huduma centre model foreign as it may be perceives as a "government to citizen bonding" as opposed to "patron information provider bonding"

Public sector has since been restructured in attempts to introduce results-based approaches to service delivery. It is clear that challenges in the public service delivery are still immense, hence the need for more innovations. Strategies for improving service delivery are customer centred, connected government, capacity-building, modelling and innovation limiting the emphasis on the service providers who are cardinal in this entire equation of service delivery. This model is based on goodwill and customer satisfaction besides enormous human financial and infrastructural resources plays important role in actualizing the service delivery which might actually turn up to be expensive.

6. Conclusion

The challenges in the public service delivery are far from over. Innovative ways are required in order to make improvements. Information services have a lot to learn from the experience of Huduma Kenya. Huduma Kenya was established to transform public service delivery which had for a long time been considered inefficient, riddled with corruption and costly to the Kenyan citizens. This kind of transformation is reflective of the paradigm shift in information service provision, where user orientation and technological advancements are ushering in revolutionized approaches. Information professionals can reflect on these experiences while working towards taking information services in the country to another level.

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