

Stakeholder Influence on Malawi's Digital Economy Strategy Execution

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Abstract: *This article explored the influence of key stakeholders on the execution of Malawi's Digital Economy Strategy. Government of Malawi introduced the 2021 - 2026 Malawi Digital Economy Strategy (MDES) in February, 2021 through the National Planning Commission of Malawi (NPCM). The main objective of the MDES is to create inclusive wealth which offers Malawians access to a prosperous economy. The five years strategy aims at improving connectivity and improves internet access from 14% to 80% by the year 2026. In addition, the strategy aims at providing affordable internet by cutting out taxes. In the article, a qualitative approach was used, under the guidance of the Stakeholder theory. The researcher purposively sampled five (5) Senior Public Officers from the E-government Department, four (4) Senior Public Officers from Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) and three (3) Senior Public Officers from the Ministry of Information (MoI). Data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and secondary sources. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the results. The results show that the key stakeholders play a very significance role in implementation of the MDES because they help in the achievement of the intended goals and objectives. However, this is somehow affected due to challenges such as: a lack of proper coordination and collaboration among the key stakeholders. The study results are of great significance in creating new knowledge which will assist in the effective implementation of the MDES.*

Keywords: Stakeholder Influence, Digital Transformation, Strategy Execution, Malawi Digital Economy, Public Administration

1. Introduction

The Malawi Government developed 2021 - 2026 Digital Economy Strategy (DES) in February, 2021. This was an attempt to transform the Malawi economy through digital technologies thereby achieving an inclusive economic growth (Malawi Digital Economy Strategy, 2021). The DES has helped to enhance competitiveness and created economic value for the well-being of their citizenry. In line with the Malawi 2063 agenda, the DES stresses on digital inclusion through sharing of public Information Communication Technology (ICT) resources and infrastructure, capacity development and other key factors for helping improve public-service delivery in Malawi (Malawi Digital Economy Strategy, 2021). This has assisted in facilitating interaction and closing the gap between ordinary citizens and the Government.

Although DES is a very important tool for the transformation of Malawi, there is limited literature on the effective implementation of the DES. A few studies have examined the role of the key stakeholders in the implementation of the DES in Malawi (Makoza, 2022). As such, this study attempts to address this knowledge gap. The study on the role of key stakeholders is very important to help understand the improvements which can be made in the implementation of the DES. The researcher examined the relationship and role among different key stakeholders and how they contribute towards the successful implementation of the DES.

The study was guided by Stakeholder theory. This theory advocates for the need to address the role of all key stakeholders in an organization for the successful implementation of programs. The role of key stakeholders is very important for successful implementation of the DES (Flak et al., 2005). Stakeholders' theory explains that an organization is a social construction which is made of the interaction between and among various key stakeholders. Organizations are envisioned as the centre of a network of various stakeholders in a complex system of exchanging information, services and other resources (Mori, 2010). It is therefore very crucial for all stakeholders to take part in the implementation of the DES for the achievement of full and sustainable digitization. A coordinated approach amongst the key stakeholders can help in the achievement of the common goal of the DES.

2. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted in the month of July 2022, at the E - Government Department, Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) and the Ministry of Information (MoI). A case study design was used to help describe the phenomenon in detail, in context, and holistically. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real - life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2014). Similarly, a case study is defined as the development of a detailed, intensive knowledge about a single case or a small number of related cases (Stake, 1995). The case study design helped to allow an in-depth investigation and detailed analysis of how the key stakeholders help in the implementation of the Malawi Digital Economy Strategy.

Based on the purpose and objectives of this study the researcher used qualitative approach to understand the concepts and opinions in the research problem gather in-depth insights and generate new ideas. This qualitative approach falls within the interpretive paradigm which is based on assumption that social reality is subjective to experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2014).

Purposive sampling was used to collect data in the above mentioned organizations. The researcher purposively sampled a total of twelve (12) study participants for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The intention to utilize purposive sampling method was to select participants in a strategic manner based on the research questions and aims (Bryman, 2016).

Data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and secondary sources. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the results. Since this study was cross-sectional and explorative in nature, it did not attempt to sample all the key stakeholders due to limited time and financial constraints. However, within the purposively sampled study participants, the researcher was able to obtain the required information.

3. Results and Discussion

Characteristics of study participants

In this section, a brief profile of the study participants has been provided. This includes the number of participants that were interviewed at E - Government department, PSRMD and MoI. This also includes gender and job positions for the participants as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Study participants

Number	Study participants	Total Number
1	E - Government Department	5
2	PSRMD	4
3	Ministry of Information	3
Total		13

As shown in Table 1, the total number of study participants was 12. Although the tentative sample was 20, the researcher collected data from 12 participants because the data had reached its saturation point. The researcher felt that there were no new themes emerging. As such, the sample size was guided by the data saturation limit (Creswell 2016). In terms of gender, the researcher interviewed 9 males and 3 females. The females only accounted for 25% of the total sample. This explains the fact that many organizations in Malawi, lag behind, in terms of gender mainstreaming (UN Women report, 2021). As a Country, we need more of the well qualified women to be considered in the decision making positions. Although the researcher was particularly interested in the Top and Senior Managers for the research participants, the researcher included the Middle Managers. This helped the researcher to get views from both sexes thereby, being gender sensitive.

Role of key stakeholders in implementation of Malawi Digital Economy Strategy.

Based on the study objectives, the researcher examined the role of key stakeholders in the implementation of DES in

Malawi, by finding out how they help in the implementation process. According to the responses from the key informants, the key stakeholders have great relevance and they play a very significant role in the effective implementation of the DES.

In Malawi, there are so many key stakeholders who play a key role in the DES implementation. However, due to limited time, the researcher only purposively selected and interviewed key stakeholders from the MoI, PSRMD and E - Government Department. As such, the study results are for the above mentioned organizations. The researcher has also provided some information for some other purposively selected key stakeholders based on secondary data sources. Table 2 shows the roles played by various stakeholders in the implementation of the DES in Malawi (Malawi Digital Economy Strategy, 2021).

Table 2: Roles of Key Stakeholders

Key Stakeholders (Organizations) and their roles

1) PSRMD

- Coordinate and monitor implementation of various reforms that form part of the implementation of the E government strategy.
- Facilitate and coordinate the development of reform areas reviewing the mandate and structure of department of E- Government.
- Drafting of the data protection bill and digital government legislations.
- Encouraging MDAs to include establishment of websites as an information sharing tool.

2) MoI

- Responsible for the National ICT and Digitalization Policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Responsible for setting government policy and strategy within the sector.
- Plays an oversight role for MACRA.
- Address national priorities for economic growth and poverty reduction through the development and coordination of national policies related to Information & Communication Technology policies.

3) E - Government Department

- Responsible for setting government IT policy
- Providing IT services to all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)

4) Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA)

- A regulatory body on ICTs

5) National Commission for Science & Technology

- Advise the Government and other stakeholders on all science and technology matters in order to achieve a science and technology led development

- 6) **Malawi Internet Service Providers Association (MISPA)**
 - Acting in the interests of Internet Service providers in Malawi
- 7) **Civil Society**
 - Implement various different ICT capacity building and advocacy initiatives to strengthen Malawi human resources in the area of ICT
- 8) **National ICT Steering Committee**
 - Provide oversight and leadership role on Sector ICT Strategy formulation and implementation.
- 9) **Cabinet Committee on Media and Communications**
 - Provision of ICT strategic direction and oversight for Malawi's ICT sector
 - Ensure that ICT is integrated in national development National ICT Steering Committee
- 10) **District ICT Committees**
 - Responsible for determination of ICT utilization for rural development and service delivery
 - Monitoring of ICT utilization among sectors and communities.
- 11) **Community ICT Committees**
 - To determine utilization of ICT in demanding and accessing services from relevant authorities
 - Contribute towards identification of the needs for ICT centers.
- 12) **The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD)**
 - Responsible for formulating economic and fiscal policy
 - Managing financial and material resources of the Government of Malawi in order to realize balanced and sustainable economic growth for poverty reduction.
- 13) **Academia**
 - Provide education at various different levels, to create new generations of skilled personnel (ICT education provided from primary to Post Graduate level)
- 14) **National Planning Commission**
 - Coordinate the development of long- and medium-term plans
 - Oversee their implementation by coordinating with various stakeholders.
- 15) **Telecommunications Operators**
 - Provide voice data, and various value added (including financial) services

According to the study participants, the key stakeholders help in the implementation of the DES through coordination and collaboration of responsibilities. For example a key informant from the E - Government Department said:

“As key stakeholders, we make sure that we work in collaboration with all the Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), in the preparation of the government IT policy.”

In a mutual benefit, the key stakeholders work in coordination and collaboration to help in the achievement of the DES intended goals. Effective implementation of the DES demands effective collaboration among the stakeholders. Similarly, coordination among the key stakeholders helps in the achievement of the mutually desired outcomes (Klessova et al., 2022). This is affirmed in a study: “*Inter-organizational collaboration challenges and preconditions in industrial engineering projects*”, whose findings indicated that collaborative relationships help in the achievement of mutual benefits (Saukko, 2020). This is in line with the stakeholder theory which emphasize on the need for collaboration from all the key stakeholders, for the successful implementation of programs. Lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders affects the effective implementation of the DES in Malawi (Malanga, 2020). All the roles played by the above mentioned key stakeholders need to be well collaborated and coordinated for the effective implementation of the DES in Malawi.

4. Conclusion

The study underscores the pivotal role that key stakeholders play in the successful implementation of the Digital Economy Strategy in Malawi. Their collaborative and coordinated efforts are instrumental in achieving the strategy's objectives. However, the study identifies a need for improved coordination among stakeholders to ensure optimal outcomes. The five-year digital strategy offers a comprehensive roadmap for transforming Malawi into a prosperous and self-reliant nation through integrated and inclusive ICT and digital systems. While the World Bank has been a significant financier of the strategy's implementation, it is crucial for the Government of Malawi to continue providing financial support to key stakeholders, particularly the E-Government department. This will ensure the successful execution of the strategy and the realization of its intended benefits.

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