

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF DONORS IN THREE
TELECENTRE PROJECTS IN AFRICA**

Ken Dennis Chisa

BTh (Natal), BTh. Hons (Natal)

SUPERVISOR: Mr. Athol Leach.

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of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, except where due reference has been made, is my original work. I further declare that I have not submitted this thesis for any other degree or examination at any other University or institution of learning.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Ken Dennis Chisa

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres in Africa. This was achieved by looking at success factors and reasons of failure at three donor-funded telecentres across three countries on the continent. The projects in question were Nakaseke Telecentre in Uganda, Bhamshela Telecentre in South Africa and the Malawi Rural Telecentre Project (MRTP) which, in the end, was never implemented in Malawi. To achieve the objectives of the study, both secondary and primary sources of data were used. The population of the study consisted of senior officers within the organisations that pledged financial and technical support for the MRTP and those that funded the Bhamshela and Nakaseke Telecentres. However, since there was no response from the donors of the Nakaseke Telecentre, all the data relating to the case was solely sourced from the literature (both print and on-line). Data collected dealt with various aspects of telecentre establishment, implementation and sustainability.

The study found that Africa depends heavily on external finance and expertise to establish and implement telecentres due to financial incapacity, lack of expertise and poor infrastructure. The various experiences from the three cases have also demonstrated that donors cannot apply a single model of implementation uniformly across the region due to various political and socio-economic factors existing in different areas of the continent. Finally, the study highlighted the fact that if project sustainability is to be achieved, donors need to constantly improve the training and management component of telecentres. Therefore, rather than trying to draw a standard blueprint for project success, donors need to be ingenious and learn from shared experiences in the field, creatively adapting the solutions that work in one context to others.

In conclusion, the findings identified in the present study potentially open up a window for the possibility of future research in terms of the success of donor-funded telecentres in Africa.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the following people: My parents William and Anne, my wife Ethel, my daughter Anne and all my brothers and sisters both living and deceased. These have all been a source of inspiration and encouragement to me, each in his or her special way. The thesis is also dedicated to all the digitally divided people of the world.

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List of acronyms

ANC:	African National Congress
AISI:	African Information Society Initiative
CD-ROM:	Compact Disc Read Only Memory
DVD:	Digital Video Decoder
GCIS:	Government Communication Information Services
HITD:	Harnessing Information Technology for Development
IBA:	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICASA:	Independent Communication Authority of South Africa
ICT:	Information Communication Technology
IDRC:	International Development Research Centre
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
ISRDP:	Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Program.
ITU:	International Telecommunication Union
LSEN:	Learners with Special Educational Needs
MACRA:	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
MCT:	Multipurpose Community Telecentre
MPC	Malawi Posts Corporation
MPCC:	Multi-Purpose Community Centre
MRTP:	Malawi Rural Telecentre Project
MTL:	Malawi Telecommunications Limited
OEF:	Overseas Education Fund
PSTN:	Public Switched Telephone Networks
RGC:	Rural Growth Centre
RRA:	Rapid Rural Appraisal

SATRA:	South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
SDP:	Sustainable Development Programme
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UN:	United Nations
UNESCAP:	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO:	United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIDO:	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
USA:	Universal Service Agency
USF:	Universal Service Fund

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A number of issues are discussed in this Chapter. Section 1.1 introduces the study. Section 1.2 defines key concepts of the study in order to acquaint the reader with the research. Section 1.3 briefly discusses why telecentres are important for rural areas. The problem of the study and the research objectives and questions are discussed in Section 1.4. Section 1.5 provides the justification of the study while Section 1.6 lays out its methodology. Section 1.7 then provides the background information regarding the three case studies under review. Section 1.8 provides the scope and limitation of the study, while the thesis outline is presented in Section 1.9. Section 1.10 concludes the Chapter.

1.1 Introduction

The primary strategic objective of donor-funded telecentres in Africa is to meet the marginal and rural communities' huge demand for information and communication. This demand is brought about by high levels of illiteracy, poverty and the slow and uneven pace of development found in most of the continent's rural areas. Thus, the existing donor-funded telecentres in Africa require appropriate support from donors and optimal policy regulation from national governments to ensure their growth and evolution (Molner and Karvalics 2002: 327; Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 170). This is evident in various studies that were carried out to evaluate the operation of some telecentres. For example, a 2003 study funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), examined the challenges around the setting up, operations, and the effects of 36 telecentres in 5 African countries. The study found that the general performance of these telecentres was hardly encouraging and most of the centres were not likely to continue operating into the future (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 151). Nevertheless, the relative success of some of the telecentres, as noted in the study, is a clear indication that telecentre initiatives can succeed under appropriate conditions. Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu (2003: 166-7) recommend that the minimum conditions that can ensure the telecentres' success in Africa should be "ownership and management models different from the common 'trustee' one that appears to be the most plagued by poor performance". Donor-funded telecentres, the focus of this study, fall under the trusteeship

model referred to by the two researchers. The different telecentre models will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Thus, a number of questions pertaining to the role of donors in donor-funded telecentres were raised in this study. The questions posed revolved around the role of donors in the establishment, sustainability and the environment within which three donor-funded telecentres arose in three African countries. The projects, which have, interestingly, demonstrated different levels of success, are Nakaseke in Uganda, Bhamshela in South Africa and the Malawi Rural Telecentre Project (MRTP) in Malawi, which was, unfortunately, never implemented. While the main criteria used for selecting the telecentres will be explained in Chapter 3 when describing the methodology of the study, details concerning the telecentre projects themselves and the environment in which they arose will be given later in this Chapter (see Section 1.7). However, before discussing the background and context of the study and the research problem, it is necessary to define key concepts used in the study. This is because the telecentre initiative is a relatively new concept in Africa and, thus, terms and definitions are sometimes contested.

1.2 Definition of key terms

This section briefly defines important terms that are used repeatedly in the thesis. The definition of key terms is necessary because it enables the reader to gain a clear understanding of the nature of the research (Aitchson 1998: 6).

Donor

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (Wehmeier 2000: 34), the term “donor” refers to a person, an organisation or a country, which contributes something to a cause. This definition of “donor” is broad and, therefore, can have a general application. For the purposes of this study, however, a “donor” will refer to an organisation which provides financial or technical support to African communities in their developmental

endeavours in general but specifically in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of rural telecentre projects.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu (2003: 12), define ICTs as all “instruments, modes, and means both old and new through which information and data are transmitted or communicated from one person to another or from place to place”. In terms of the present study, ICTs will refer to such modern technologies as telephone, facsimile, video, television, radio and computer-based or computer mediated modes (for example email, chat and news groups, list serves, electronic conferencing and CD-ROMs) which may be found in Multipurpose Community Telecentres (MCTs).

Telecentres

There is currently no single and generally accepted definition for the term “telecentre”. A number of different names are given to these facilities such as Telecottage (Europe), Community Technology Center (US), MCT (Africa) and Public Internet Cabin (Cuba) (Menou 2003: 631). For the purposes of this study, however, a telecentre is defined as:

An integrated information and communication facility that houses a combination of both new and not-so-new ICTs (e.g., television, video, facsimile, telephone, computers with Internet connectivity, and sometimes books). This type of facility in which a number of different information and communication technologies are housed and used in integrated manner is seen as the modern telecentre and is called a multipurpose community telecentre (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 13).

Policy

The definition of “policy” is subject to debate amongst experts. However, Colebatch (2002: 23) says that there are “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions of policy and he defines the vertical dimension of policy as a “rule...concerned with the transmission downwards of authorized decisions”. Policy in this regard encapsulates a top-down relationship in which “authorized decision makers select courses of action which will

maximize the values they hold, and transmit these to subordinate officials to implement” (Colebatch 2002: 23). However, it is Colebatch’s horizontal dimension of policy which defines policy as “a process of structured interaction” that this study finds most helpful:

It is concerned with relationships among policy participants in different organisations-that is outside of the line of hierarchical authority. It recognises that policy work takes place across organisational boundaries as well as within them, and consists in the structure of understandings and commitments among participants in different organisations as well as the hierarchical transmission of authorised decisions within any one organisation (Colebatch 2002: 23).

1.3 The importance of telecentres for rural areas in Africa: an overview

The uneven global distribution of access to ICTs, alluded to earlier in this Chapter, has highlighted a digital divide that separates individuals who are able to gain access to ICTs from those who have no opportunity of doing so (Chisenga 2001; Kiplang’at 2002: 347). The United Nations (UN) in its statement on Universal Access to Basic Communication and Information Services notes that:

The information and technology gap and related inequities between industrialized and developing nations are widening: a new type of poverty, information poverty, looms. Most developing countries, especially the least developing countries are not sharing in the communications revolution... (United Nations 1998).

The following statistics will serve to highlight the alarming differences at either end of the digital divide:

- All the developing countries of the world own a mere 4% of the world computers.
- Tokyo alone has more telephones than the entire African continent.
- There are more Web hosts in New York than in continental Africa.
- 75% of the world’s 700 million telephone sets can be found in the nine richest countries.
- Out of the 605.60 million Internet users in the world, only 6.31 million (1.04%) are in Africa.

- South Africa accounts for 3,068,000 (48.62%) of the online users in Africa and its Internet user community accounts for only 7.03% of the South African population (Nua Internet survey 2004; Da Costa 2002: 41).

Similarly, Table 1 below shows the gap in Internet access between the industrialised and developing worlds. More than 85 per cent of the world's Internet users are in developed countries, which account for only about 22 per cent of the world's population (Nua Internet survey 2004).

Table 1. Internet access by region

Region	People connected (Millions)	Global percentage of People connected	Percentage of global population
Canada and USA	97.0	56.6	5.1
Europe	40.1	23.4	13.7
Asia and the Pacific including Japan and Australia	27.0	15.8	56.2
Africa	6.3	1.1	12.9
Middle East	0.9	0.5	3.6
Latin America	5.3	5.3	8.4

Source: Nua Internet survey 2004

Unsurprisingly, this digital divide mirrors divides in other resources that have a more insidious effect, for example, access to education, health care, capital, shelter, employment, clean water and food (Harris 2001: 73). That is, the digital divide can be seen more as an absence of access to information than as an absence of access to technology. Harris (2001: 73) argues that these other divides should arguably be seen more as the result of an imbalance in access to information than its cause. Arguably,

information is critical to the social and economic activities that comprise the development process. If information is critical to development, then ICTs, as a means of sharing information, are a link in the chain of the development process itself (ILO 2001).

Thus, one of the answers to the problem of the digital divide on the continent has been the introduction of donor-funded telecentres commonly known MCTs. According to Harris (2001: 74), telecentres provide an alternative to the model of one-to-one individual access to a computer that is common in the developed world. As community resources, MCTs offer opportunities for development that are based on improved access to information for whole communities. Since the mid 1990s, MCTs have been introduced in many communities throughout Africa. A significant example is the IDRC funded Acacia Project that aims to empower Sub-Saharan African countries with the ability to apply ICTs to their own social and economic development. Acacia works in Mocambique, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda mainly with rural and disadvantaged communities, which often find themselves isolated from the ICT networks which their urban counterparts increasingly have access to (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003).

The introduction of a telecentre into a typical rural community in Africa represents a substantial innovation for that community. For many rural dwellers in Africa, a telecentre will be their first encounter with a computer. However, telecentres that seek to overcome the barriers to accessing ICTs in rural areas in Africa are mostly experimental. Currently, the impact of such centres in rural and remote areas has been minimal and there are many questions that need to be answered before embarking on ambitious and costly programmes at a national level (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003; Ernberg 1998).

Due to the novelty of access to ICTs and the shortage of guidelines for establishing and implementing telecentres in Africa, many questions remain unanswered as to how this innovation can bring about equitable and sustainable access to information resources amongst the most disadvantaged sections of Africa's population. Underpinning the

researcher's perspective on telecentres (and one which informs this study) is the view that telecentres can, to a greater extent, bridge the digital divide and generate or support development in disadvantaged rural areas (Snyman and Snyman 2003:105). However, the researcher is also aware that telecentres are not the only solution available for communities to better their living conditions. In this regard, Menou's emphasis (in Snyman and Snyman 2003:105) that "the ICT aspect is only one amongst many other instruments that a community could use in its development endeavours" is both acknowledged and agreed with.

1.4 Research problem

The typology, sociology and politics of MCTs suggest that they are established and operated to meet the needs of the "geographically disadvantaged, economically weak and infrastructurally poor majority" (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 153). This group of people is not only culturally and ethnically diverse but is also common all over the continent. The first issue then is to determine the actual role of donors in the process of establishing and implementing MCTs in such adverse conditions. It is evident from the empirical studies, so far, that serious problems have plagued MCT services in Uganda, South Africa, Senegal and Mali and many other countries in Africa (Benjamin 2000; Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 55, 69, 91, 138).

Another important issue to note is that although donor assistance has acted as a seedbed for the diffusion of telecentres in Africa, future use and development will largely depend on whether the donors themselves have embraced policies that guarantee the future sustainability of these donor-funded telecentres. As will be seen later in Chapter 2, donor support is always time bound and limited. Thus, the study intended to determine the role of donors in creating a dynamic sustainability mechanism that would ensure continued and effective service delivery after the termination of donor support. Based on the above-mentioned observations, the study looked at the following issues:

- Telecentre context (technical, social, economic and political).

- Telecentre establishment (conceptualisation, planning).
- Telecentre implementation (setting-up).
- Telecentre sustainability (ownership, management and evaluation).

These issues were addressed in this study with the intention to identify key areas of success or failure in setting up sustainable MCTs on the continent and determining the role of donors in the entire process.

1.4.1 Purpose of the study

This study presents the results of three case studies on three African countries where MCTs were established. The study was an exploratory research contributing towards “illuminating the situation of ICT and development in the continent” (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 5-6).

1.4.2 Research objectives

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- a. To determine the role of donor policies in telecentre projects in Africa by looking at the key areas of success and reasons for failures (if any) of the three case studies under review.
- b. To explore whether donor-funded telecentres provide a sustainable way of providing universal access to ICTs and determine the conditions that must be met to make them sustainable.
- c. To determine the extent to which the donor-funded telecentre model can engender community ownership and the moulding of local champions.
- d. To explore the dynamics of strategic partnerships between the project donors, the project proposers and local community actors and assess how this collaboration, or lack thereof, affects the management of the telecentre.

- e. Based on the findings of the study, to recommend key success factors for sustainable donor-funded telecentres in Africa.

1.4.3 Research questions

Drawing on the above research objectives, the study asked the following questions:

- a. What is the role of donor policies in telecentre projects in Africa specifically in terms of the key areas of success and reasons for failures (if any) of the three case studies?
- b. How can donor-funded telecentres provide a sustainable way of providing universal access to ICTs and what are the conditions that must be met to make them sustainable?
- c. To what extent does the donor-funded telecentre model engender community ownership and mould donor champions?
- d. What are the dynamics of strategic partnerships between the project donors, the project proposers and the local community actors and how does this collaboration, or lack thereof, affect the management of the telecentre?
- e. What are the key success factors for a sustainable community telecentre?

1.5 Justification for the study

The rationale of this research was to contribute to the findings and vision encapsulated in the 2003 IDRC study by consolidating knowledge regarding future donor-funded telecentre projects “in order to share this knowledge widely and contribute to the growing understanding of the issues and prospects on the continent of Africa” (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 6).

Whereas recent telecentre studies in Africa (Schreiner 1998; Benjamin and Dahms 1999; Benjamin 2000; Benjamin et al 2000; Dagron 2001; Harris 2001; Kiplang’at 2002; Etta

and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003; Burton 2002) have investigated the nature of use, equipment, services, relevance, ownership, management and sustainability of a whole range of telecentres including private cyber cafes, it is clear that they have not specifically examined the critical role that donors play in the setting up and operations of MCTs in rural areas. It is this gap in the literature that this study sought to fill. Thus, the study investigated the whole process of establishment, implementation and sustainability of telecentres in Nakaseke, Bhamshela and Malawi from a donor perspective. The results of the research will be useful for researchers, policy and decision makers and development practitioners with an interest in ICT development in general and telecentre development in particular.

1.6 Methodology

This study was based on applied research, which emphasises the provision of information that can be used to solve actual problems. The study used the descriptive research design utilising the case study approach. Data was collected from the literature (both online and print), via an email questionnaire and by conducting interviews with various role players of the MRTP. The methodology used does not allow results to be generalised but it provides an in-depth insight into the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of MCTs.

1.7 Context of the case studies

The continent's entry and participation in the "information society" is believed to have started as recently as the mid-1990s and is currently hampered by a weak infrastructure, lack of local expertise, budgetary constraints and a glaring lack of enabling national policies (Etta and Paravyn- Wamahiu 2003:7). This section discusses the social, political, economic and technological environment in which the three cases under review can be placed. The analysis will provide the backdrop against which the three projects can be understood and from which inferences concerning their success or failure can be drawn.

As noted earlier in this Chapter, the reasons behind the choice of these telecentres are explained in detail in Chapter 3.

1.7.1 Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Telecentre (Uganda)

Uganda has a population of 21 million, of which 88% live in rural areas and largely, depend on subsistence farming (Mayanja 2001). Nakaseke MCT is located in the 254 square kilometres rural Nakaseke sub-region in the Luweero district of Uganda. It is about 50 kilometres north of the Capital City, Kampala and 16 kilometres from the nearest town Wobulenzi. At the time of establishment, the MCT served not only the local people but also the 24 neighbouring primary schools, four secondary schools, a primary teacher's college and the nearby hospital (Dagron 2001: 332).

The Nakaseke MCT is part of the broader MCT pilot programme launched at the coordination meeting for the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) in Addis Ababa in 1996. The programme was a major component of the Harnessing Information Technology for Development (HITD), an element of the United Nations (UN) system-wide Special Initiative for Africa. Three international sponsors, namely IDRC, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), with support from the Danish donor agency DANIDA, subsequently undertook a study into the feasibility of MCT pilot projects and recommended Uganda as one of the participating countries. Uganda was then invited to develop a plan to set up a single pilot MCT (Mayanja 2001).

The establishment of the MCT was also facilitated by the enactment of the 1997 Uganda Communications Act, which among other issues provided for the liberalisation of the communications sector. Nakaseke was seen as an excellent site for a pilot programme because its telecommunications sector and other infrastructure had been severely affected by the civil unrest between 1980 and 1986 and the sub-region was in the process of reconstruction. It was also seen as an ideal community because it was sufficiently close to

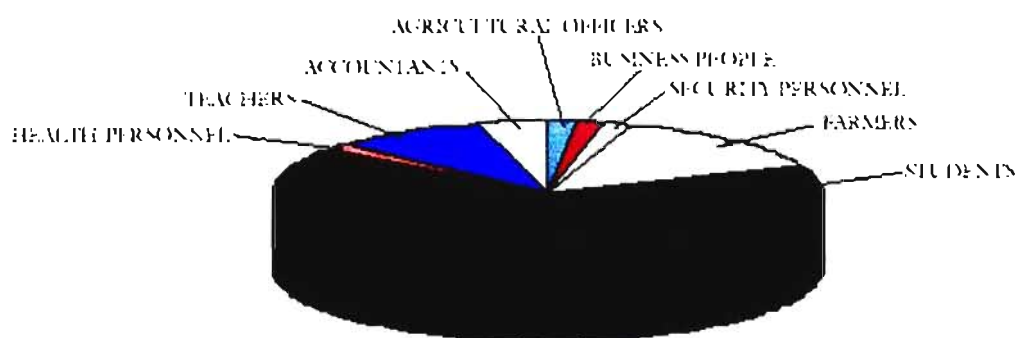
Kampala to allow for monitoring and technical support and because the rural community showed great commitment and enthusiasm for owning and participating in the project (Mayanja 2001). Uganda was, therefore, able to put forward a sound and comprehensive proposal and received international funding to initiate this three-year pilot project in early 1998. In that sense, Nakaseke became part of a chain of five UNESCO/ IDRC / ITU-supported telecentre projects initiated in Africa, the others being Benin, Mali, Mocambique and Tanzania (Dagron 2001: 332; Benjamin and Dahms 1999). The local partners were Uganda Telecommunications Limited and the Public Libraries Board of Uganda.

The Nakaseke MCT became operational in March 1999. The general concept was to provide, in the face of scarce resources, a centre where the rural community could access information and communication resources (print, video, CD-ROM, telephone, fax, email and the Internet) and where it could be shown whether providing ICTs to rural communities could catalyse their development and improve the quality of their lives. The effectiveness of the MCT strategy was to be measured against the level to which the community had received increased access to ICTs, local content and its participation in documenting and using indigenous knowledge (Mayanja 1999).

Community members were first asked to approve the selection of 24 people for a free-of-charge training programme to ensure that a core group of selected trainees would in turn train the rest of their community on the use of computer programmes. The trainers were a group of young people from Uganda Connectivity, a group concerned with Internet access. The language of instruction was a combination of the local Lugandan and English. The Telecentre's aim was to serve the entire communities of Nakaseke and Kasangombe but most particularly the following core user groups: women, youth, children, the medical community, workers, teachers, students, farmers and local leaders. The content and programming for the Telecentre was, therefore, primarily tailored towards meeting the needs and aspirations of its core target groups (Mayanja 1999). For example, a CD-ROM offering direct access to information for women was developed.

The CD-ROM's content offers a wealth of information on "best practices" of successful entrepreneurial women, and the "Small business training manual and marketing strategies", developed by the Overseas Education Fund (OEF) and field-tested extensively among low-income women in Africa. The CD-ROM is currently available in English and Luganda language versions (Women of Uganda Network 2002). The MCT has been used quite extensively by different groups of people. Figure 1 below shows different user groups at Nakaseke MCT.

Figure 1: User groups of the Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Telecentre.



Source: Mayanja (2001).

According to Benjamin and Dahms (1999), the services offered by the Nakaseke Telecentre include computer applications, training, Internet, email, photocopying (the most popular), telephony, fax, a library, video shows, newspapers, audio recordings and community listening areas. The building was donated by the community and renovated to meet the project's requirements. When the Telecentre became operational in 1999, there was only one fixed telephone line in the entire Nakaseke neighbourhood. However, by 2001, telecommunication infrastructure in the area had expanded to 250 lines and two public phones in the sub-region in addition to the two in the Telecentre. Mobile telephony had also started creeping in (Etta and Parvyn-Wamihau 2003: 77). It is interesting to note that, relative to other telecentres in the country, 61.1% of the people in Nakaseke used the Telecentre as compared to 33.3% of the population around Bugolobi Telecentre and only

30.0% of those around Nabweru Telecentre (Etta and Parvyn-Wamihau 2003: 83). Table 2 below presents the percentage of user groups at Nakaseke MCT in terms of gender while Table 3 presents the user group percentage in terms of age.

Table 2: User groups of the Nakaseke MCT in terms of gender.

Gender	Percentage
Female	25.8%
Male	74.2%

Source: Mayanja (2001).

Table 3: User groups of the Nakaseke MCT in terms of age.

Age	Percentage
Under 15 years	4.88%
15–20 years	54.47%
21–30 years	22.76%
Over 30 years	17.89%

Source: Mayanja (2001)

Despite its popularity and usage however, Nakaseke MCT has experienced a number of problems. Firstly, Webb (2002) notes that frequent power cuts were a constant problem at the Centre. Moreover, while the Telecentre was, at the time of its opening in 1999, just about covering costs subsidised by the community, Benjamin and Dahms (1999) warned that there was no expectation that it could generate enough income to replace obsolete equipment, let alone repaying the major capital investment from donors. They noted that the Telecentre required great donor support and so was unlikely to be a model that could be replicated everywhere in Africa. While Etta and Parvyn-Wamihau (2003: 108) found that the Telecentre was no longer donor supported, they noted that “the relative success of the Nakaseke telecentre had depended a lot on the good will and commitment of local

political leaders". According to Etta and Parvyn-Wamihau (2003: 108), "these leaders had made tremendous contributions toward community mobilisation, particularly during the initial stages of the project". In other words, these leaders were instrumental in selling the telecentre concept to the local community. They can, thus, be seen as heroes or champions of the project without whom the strides that the MCT has made since its inception could, arguably, have been impossible.

Secondly, telephone connection was another problematic component. The landline telephone system at the time of inception was 16 kilometres away from the Telecentre site. Although the project plans provided for a special telecommunication system, it could not be achieved in a short period. It was later decided, therefore, that a landline be established to run 16 kilometres to the Telecentre. The plan provided limited voice connection to the Telecentre, but accessing the Internet has remained difficult due to the poor quality of the telephone line (Dagron 2001: 333-335). Huge telephone bills have also been a constant worry (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 84).

Finally, Internet and email services were disappointingly the least utilised services at the Telecentre. Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu (2003: 83) attributed this to poor electricity supply and expensive connectivity. Another reason could have been that people did not use the Internet because it was not yet relevant to their daily lives, thus raising a critical need to develop content that is specifically relevant for the local community. Thus, despite its relative success, the general opinion in Nakaseke was that the management model presently at the Telecentre would not ensure sustainability (Benjamin and Dahms 1999; Dagron 2001: 333-335; Etta and Parvyn-Wamihau 2003: 108).

1.7.2 Bhamshela Telecentre (South Africa)

South Africa occupies 1.2 million square kilometres at the southern end of the continent. According to the 2003 study by IDRC, the country still remains a divided society, with the white community (11% of the total population) generally living affluently, whereas

most of the black African population (72% of the total population) lives in poverty (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 115). The study reveals that 58% of households in South Africa have electricity, 45% have water taps inside their homes, and 34% of the households have a telephone (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 115). The IDRC study further shows that South Africa has by far the largest number of fixed line (estimated to be 4.9 million in 2002) and mobile connections in Africa. The country also has the most advanced ICT sector on the continent with nearly three million Internet accounts in 2001. However, access to ICTs in the country tends to follow lines of existing inequalities, which are quite wide because of the legacy of apartheid (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 115).

The main telecommunications operator is a former state-owned giant Telkom, which still has a monopoly on fixed lines. The Telecommunications Amendment Act of 2001 made way for the introduction of a second network operator. The government has introduced special licenses to small, medium and micro enterprises to operate Public Switched Telephone Networks (PSTN) in rural areas. The cellular phone share of the market has also grown rapidly in the last few years, with three providers, namely: Vodacom, MTN, and the recently established Cell C. There are currently more mobile than fixed lines in South Africa, a situation similar to that in Uganda, Malawi and most parts of the continent (BMI-Technologies 2002: 403).

Since the democratically elected government led by the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994, it has attempted to share and spread the riches of the country to a wider majority of the people. For example, the Telecommunications Act in the country was enacted in 1996 and the government declared universal access to telephony as the cornerstone of this policy. The Telecommunications Act created the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) in July 2000 as the telecommunications regulator after merging the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA) and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). The Act also established the Universal Service Agency (USA) as the primary mechanism for

the provision of ICT access throughout the country. The USA has largely focused on setting up MCTs and cyberlabs (commercially operated telecentre models which charge clients for services) in South Africa (Burton 2002: 44; Benjamin et al 2000). Benjamin et al (2000) add that twelve of the telecentres set up by USA in the country have been with assistance from IDRC. One example of the USA/IDRC funded telecentres in South Africa is the Bhamshela MCT.

Bhamshela is a small town about 90 km east of Pietermaritzburg in an area called Ozwathini. According to Burton (2002: 45), the process of establishing the Bhamshela MCT arose from a call of expressions of interest by the USA to which the community responded by forming an organisation to take the initiative forward. The building housing the Telecentre was donated by the local community. Two community groups owned the Telecentre namely, the Bhamshela Arts and Cultural Group and the Open Window Network, which was a Cape Town based NGO with a chapter in Bhamshela. It was expected that the Centre would work as a small business enterprise whereby clients would pay for the use of telephone and fax, photocopying, computing, email and Internet facilities at a rate that would generate income for the Telecentre (Burton 2002: 45). It was predicted that this income would enable the Telecentre to become viable after a year, and that any profits would be ploughed back into the Telecentre to upgrade and develop resources. The Centre opened in April 1998, to much fanfare and celebration. It boasted of six telephone lines, a fax machine, a photocopier, a printer, six state-of-the-art Pentium computers and a scanner. Its two managers (one of whom was a woman) were trained in computing and management by the USA (Schreiner 1998: 66).

However, what had began as a potential income-generating resource shortly became an operational nightmare and financial burden to the community. The Internet facility was only successfully installed at the end of 1999; one year after the MCT had opened. The printer stopped working after the first day, and until 1999, managers had to walk a long distance to print at a different facility since they were unable to raise enough capital from the Telecentre income to buy a new printer (Schreiner 1998: 67). Schreiner (1998) adds

that services such as scanning, email and the Internet were underutilised. Moreover, the Telecentre was unable to generate enough income to keep prices at a rate affordable to all. The telephone was the largest source of revenue due to problems with the other services. Yet, the revenue realised by the phones was not sufficient to ensure financial security. By March 1999, prices for telephone services had increased by 150 percent since the Telecentre's opening, rising from 40 cents per phone call unit to one Rand per unit (Schreiner 1998: 67). Local demand for phone services persisted, though, and a Vodacom shop and Telkom container were opened alongside the MCT the following year, the latter by a former staff member of the Telecentre.

Meanwhile, the Telecentre decided to curb spiralling operational costs by beginning to offer basic computer training courses. Seemingly, there was demand for such courses due to the high priority many people placed on finding employment and the perceived importance of computer skills in formal-sector jobs. However, many students defaulted on their tuition payments because they could not afford them. Furthermore, very few graduands from the Telecentre found jobs (IDRC 2002). As time went on, Bhamshela MCT declined in popularity. Schreiner (1998: 67) notes that managers had an uphill task in encouraging the community to reclaim the MCT for themselves and for them to be interested in what it had to offer. The Centre shared electricity with a nearby bottle store with the hope of getting its own electricity in the future (Schreiner 2006). However, that never materialized during Schreiner's two-year involvement with the Telecentre. The Telecentre was temporarily closed in late 2001 after experiencing problems with Telkom resulting from a large bill it could not pay and problems with the phone metering system (Burton 2002: 45).

Although the MCT resumed operations, it was still hampered by many problems and most blame has been laid squarely on the donors. For example, Benjamin (2001), Burton (2005) and Schreiner (2006) all observe that the USA has for some time been compromised by a poor reputation, internal management difficulties and poor relationships with other key organizations such as Telkom. According to Benjamin

(2001), the USA “was unable to get crucial information from operators that would allow it to map telecom provision and thus effectively monitor progress”. It also “never developed definitions, indicators or benchmark of key terms that would allow it to strategize effectively”. In addition, the Agency, “partly in response to political pressure”, moved quickly towards implementing the project without other supporting institutions such as schools, hospitals and other government departments which could have formed a strong supporting base (Burton 2005). Most worrying, though, is the claim by Schreiner (2006) that a community needs assessment that could have reconciled the demands of the community with the services offered by the MCT was not carried out by the USA.

Khumalo (2001), a former senior employee of the USA, has also raised concerns over the shortcomings of the USA. Commenting on the evaluation he conducted on some USA supported telecentres, Khumalo (2001) cites the underutilisation of the Internet and email services and attributes this to three things. He observes that: “First the operators' competence in using Internet/email is lacking. So are most users. Second, most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) do not have local points of presence (POPs) and access is relatively expensive. Thirdly the software installed on most computers is inappropriate...” Khumalo (2001) also points to the lack of understanding of the responsibilities and obligations between the operators and the donors, which could have affected morale. For example, some telecentre operators thought that the USA had to pay their salaries. Yet, according to Khumalo (2001) this could have been against the USA's own policy, a situation that reveals lack of adequate communication between the USA and the telecentre operators who were all trained by the USA. Other issues that the USA failed to explain more clearly to user communities, according to Khumalo (2001), related to ownership of the telecentre business, tariff and pricing guidelines, the equipment, stocks and payment of expenses.

Thus, in the recent past, some critics have argued that with an ever-increasing budget and bureaucracy “the ad-hoc projects and impact delivered by the USA...is unacceptable and a rethink of South Africa's approach to universal service is required” (Gedye 2006: 8).

According to Gedye (2006: 8), the USA receives R100-million annually from telecoms operators to increase telecommunications access for poorer communities and more than R15-million from the Department of Communications for operational costs. He notes, however, that despite “its inability to deliver affordable communication to under-serviced areas” and damaging conflict of interest allegations within its ranks (it was recently revealed that the organization’s chairperson was also head of regulatory affairs at Microsoft South Africa), the USA’s mandate is still valid today (Gedye 2006: 8). The Agency is currently working more closely with the Government Communication Information Services (GCIS) and the Department of Communications (Burton 2005).

1.7.3 The Malawi Rural Telecentre Project

Malawi is a small landlocked and highly populated country of about 11 million people bordering Tanzania in the north, Zambia in the west and Mozambique to the west and south. Over 80% of the population live in rural areas. An average of 126 people per square kilometre makes Malawi’s population density amongst the highest in Africa. The majority of the rural population are poor with low literacy levels. Literacy levels in indigenous tongues are higher than literacy in English (World Vision International 2003).

The majority of rural communities in Malawi do not have access to any form of ICTs. Many rural people must travel long distances in order to access a telephone. There is also an absence of ICT applications in their activities, which restricts national inclusion and limits the growth and potential of rural economic activities (ITU 2002a). Thus, the Government of Malawi, through the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), developed a strategy to support public access to ICTs in rural areas. These efforts have been taking place within the context of “Universal Service” goals being supported by the Government’s Rural Telecommunication Policy and the National ICT Policy (ITU 2002a). Both goals, however, still need cabinet approval according to the Government official the researcher talked to.

ICT infrastructure in Malawi is mostly unreliable, sometimes even in major towns. For instance, telephone lines are poor and most businesses dependent on electricity operate generators. According to ITU (2002a), the combination of restrictive telecommunications policies, an unsupportive political framework and financial constraints has also meant that growth in the telecommunications sector in Malawi has been below the average for Africa (4.1% compound annual increases in teledensity between 1995 and 2001, compared to 6.9% for Africa as whole). Although the situation has substantially improved recently, with 59 000 fixed lines and 83 000 mobile subscribers in 2002, at most about 1.3% of the total population on average has direct access to either a mobile or fixed network (Esselaar 2002). The position of Malawi in relation to selected African countries on a number of key ICT indicators is shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Selected African Countries – Key ICT Indicators (2001)

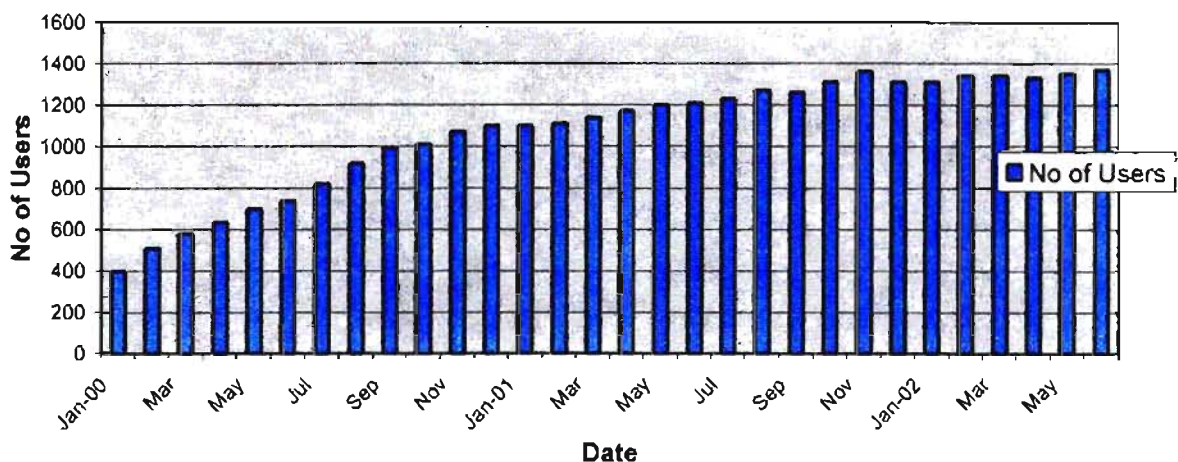
Country	Total Internet Hosts	Hosts/10 000 people	Internet users	Internet users/ 10 000 people	Estimated PC's/ 1000 people
Botswana	1273	7.62	25	154.13	3.89
Ghana	235	0.11	40.5	19.36	0.33
Kenya	2702	0.86	500	159.78	0.56
Madagascar	234	0.14	35	21.29	0.24
Malawi	22	0.02	20	17.28	0.35
Mozambique	16	0.01	15	7.43	0.35
Namibia	4632	25.91	45	251.68	3.64
Tanzania	1478	0.41	300	83.41	0.33
Zambia	1095	1.03	25	23.48	0.7

Source: Esselaar (2002)

From January 2000 to June 2002, the number of Internet users in the country grew from 400 to nearly 1400 (see Figure 5 below). In a country with a population of over 11 million people, this represents a slow growth indeed. However, as Esselaar (2002) rightly notes, market penetration was itself constrained by affordability issues, where the small market size, a monopolistic telecommunications regime and concomitant high prices made individual access very expensive. In addition to the low penetration of telephones, the ICT environment was particularly hostile to private sector investment. According to Esselaar (2002), some of the relevant conditions prevailing in the market at that time were:

- Import duties on fully assembled PCs were high.
- Malawi was operating store-and-forward electronic mail systems, with the first Internet Service Provider (MalawiNet) licensed only in 1997.
- Electricity supply was unreliable and there was limited access in rural areas.
- Fixed line telecommunications and the postal services were government monopolies managed through one department.
- There was no telecentre policy in the country.

Figure 2: User Growth of Internet users in Malawi from 2000-2002



Source: Esselaar (2002)

Since 2000, the telecommunications sector in Malawi has been regulated by MACRA, which falls under the Ministry of Information. MACRA is responsible for regulating all forms of communication services including broadcasting and courier services, but not print media, which are still unregulated. The Malawi Telecommunications Limited (MTL), which was recently separated from the Malawi Posts Corporation (MPC), has always been the sole operator of fixed line telecommunication in the country (ITU 2002a).

Based on the above profile, the need to expand the availability of ICTs in Malawi is high. This is why in 2002, the Government came up with the Malawi Rural Telecentre Project (MRTP). In line with this concept, MACRA requested the ITU to provide technical assistance to undertake a feasibility study to establish a pilot network of public access to ICT facilities in rural areas in Malawi. This included the development of an MCT licensing and promotion strategy that could be established in the country. The MCTs would provide an appropriate range of services to respond to the local needs of the public and its institutions, such as schools, hospitals, libraries and NGOs. Two ITU experts undertook the study and site visits between 8-18 October 2002 and produced the initial project proposal. This was done in collaboration with MACRA staff and other Malawian and International agencies, in particular: The Ministry of Information, MPC, MTL, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) (ITU 2002a).

Subsequent discussions between the government and all the donor agencies resulted in an agreement to cooperate on the jointly supported project that would establish a range of five to seven pilot projects in rural Malawi by 2003. The idea was that, with the maturing of the pilots, the information provided would allow the donor agencies and MACRA to evaluate the project so as to improve universal access in the country (ITU 2002a). However, without any proper explanation at all, the project was never implemented and up to now there are no community telecentres in the country. It is mainly after reading this sad progression of events that this study was initiated.

The picture of the three cases delineated above is clear. Whereas, on the one extreme of the spectrum there is Nakaseke Telecentre, which has been hailed as a relative success story on the continent, Bhamshela, hampered by chronic management and operational problems right from the outset is nestled somewhere in the middle. The MRTP, which never even materialised, is at the other extreme end. The literature shows that the

unbalanced status of the three cases presented above is a microcosm of the general picture of donor-funded telecentres in Africa.

1.8 Scope and limitations of the study

The perspective adopted in this research is very much that of donors. As has been stated, the study looked at three donor-funded telecentre projects from Uganda, South Africa and Malawi. Included in the study also are, understandably, the views of other role players involved in the projects, such as government departments and agencies especially in Malawi. However, while representatives of these other role players were approached (as mentioned, in Malawi) for additional information, these role players were not the focus of this study.

1.9 Outline of the remainder of the thesis

The remainder of the thesis has four Chapters:

Chapter 2 presents a review of the theory of donor aid in Africa in terms of its emergence and approaches. To begin with, the Chapter discusses and analyses available research on the concept of donor aid in Africa in its broadest sense before focusing on donor-funded telecentre projects in the continent. The progress, or lack thereof, of the three projects under review will also be discussed in this Chapter.

Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology underpinning the study and explains the basis upon which it was chosen. The criteria for choosing the case studies are also explained. The Chapter provides detailed information about the population used in the study, as well as the instrumentation used to gather information from the population. A description of the data collection and analysis procedures will be given in the Chapter.

Chapter 4 presents, interprets and discusses the results of the study with reference to the contextual background information regarding the three case studies discussed in Chapter

1, and with reference to literature review in Chapter 2. Key themes such as telecentre establishment, implementation and sustainability will be used in the interpretation of the results.

Chapter 5 summarises the main aspects of the research and draws conclusions. It makes recommendations and points out directions for future research work.

1.10 Summary

This Chapter has identified and defined the problem of the study, namely an investigation into the role of donors in donor-funded telecentre projects in Africa. It provided a detailed account of what the study would cover and how it would approach the research problem. Key concepts were defined in order to acquaint the reader with the research. The Chapter provided contextual background information regarding the three telecentres under review. The Chapter also presented the research objectives and questions. Finally, the Chapter established the justification, scope and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The structure of this Chapter will be as follows: Section 2.1 introduces the Chapter while Section 2.2 traces the historical origins of donor aid. Section 2.3 provides the background to the development of telecentres in Africa, while Section 2.4 looks at different telecentre models. Section 2.5 then explores the origins of donor-aided telecentres in Africa. Section 2.6 looks at the role of donors in telecentre projects and Section 2.7 concludes the Chapter.

2.1 Introduction

The review of literature examines issues raised by related studies on the concept of donor-funded development in developing countries. It looks specifically at the origin of the concept and its application to donor-funded telecentre projects in Africa. Issues that are raised include donor policies and the merits and demerits of those policies from an African perspective. It is not clear from the literature whether the policies relating to donor aid are specifically applicable to donor-funded telecentre projects in Africa. However, this discussion is necessary as it allows us to understand the broader context within which donor-funded projects such as MCTs are placed and how they can be influenced by external factors.

2.2 Donor aid: its historical origins

For much of the last fifty years, development aid simultaneously fulfilled two roles which are the financing of projects in poor countries which lacked access to world capital markets and in raising returns to investment through the donor's role in project selection, design and implementation (Gunning 2000: 2). Over the last two decades, however, the role of aid has become less clear, partly because these traditional roles have come under scrutiny. The rationale of receiving aid became further blurred when structural adjustment lending introduced a third role: the attempt to use aid to buy policy reform in developing countries (Gunning 2000: 2).

However, a fairly recent critique of donor aid to developing countries is found in a 1998 World Bank report entitled *Assessing Aid* (World Bank 1998). The report's argument is built around two propositions. These are that aid can only be effective in a good policy environment and that aid cannot buy such an environment. The following section looks at these two propositions in more detail.

2.2.1 Donor aid and national policy in Africa

Given that the establishment of MCTs in Africa has largely been dependent on donors (Benjamin and Dahms 1999), a brief background to policy issues regarding donor supported development projects in Africa becomes necessary for this study. International donor organizations, such as the United Nations agencies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) play an important role in shaping national government policies. They provide the fora, where member states can share development experience and jointly identify good practice, based on research done in other member states (Gunning 2000; Ernberg 2002). Moreover, international donor organisations often assume the responsibility of disseminating “Best Practice” experiences and success stories. International donors also develop guidelines and standards, which are intended to help member states to develop their national government policies and to harmonize these policies globally, when required. To enhance the probability that these guidelines eventually get used by less developed countries, international donor organizations invest heavily in awareness and capacity building programmes, including the training of policy and decision makers in less developed countries (Ernberg 2002). According to Ernberg (2002), this is usually backed by a huge disbursement of funds.

Morger (1999: 7) argues, however, that this process of policy-making based on international “consensus” enables economically powerful nations to “persuade” less developed countries to adopt policies that suit the former's interests and culture but are not necessarily the best for all nations. Morger (1999) notes further that policy guidelines associated with donor aid need to be reworked so that they become flexible and adaptable to different social, economic and cultural conditions. For example, African countries

which adopt national government developmental policies in exchange for huge financial inducements provided by donors (a practice commonly known as conditionality) should, ideally, be allowed to test these policies in their own environment first as pilots to see their effects and subsequently adapt them to suit the local needs.

It should also be borne in mind that what may be “Best Practice” in a specific country may not be the best in another country. This again underscores the fact that policy guidelines should be flexible so that they can accommodate new ideas and technologies in a rapidly changing world. That said, the question that needs to be answered now is whether the use of donor aid in reforming national policy (Conditionality) has achieved its intended goal in Africa. This will be the subject of discussion in the next section.

2.2.2 The conditionality of national policy reform to donor aid

The effectiveness of donor conditionality, which is the use of donor aid to “buy” policy reforms from unwilling client governments, has long been questioned (Morger 1999). One line of criticism arising out of the literature stresses that since donor aid is temporary, then conditionality can be effective in changing policies only temporarily. In other words, it may well be possible to use aid to “buy” policy reforms but those reforms will not be sustained if aid is temporary as it usually is (World Bank 1998). For example, a government which prefers state controlled trade over free trade may be induced by an offer of aid to liberalise its trade policy but it would then have no qualms to reverse that reform once the aid runs out (Rodrik 1995; Collier and Gunning 1992; Killick 1999). To explain why policy reversals frequently occur, Killick (1999) argues that donor threat to punish policy reversals by denying future access to funding is not effective given that there are incentives for donor agencies to continue lending to developing countries.

Policy reversals are, however, a central concern in the empirical literature. It was noted earlier that the second proposition in the World Bank’s *Assessing Aid* report (1998) was that aid cannot buy policy reform. In assessing this proposition, it should be noted that for

conditionality to be effective, it is necessary, but not sufficient that the recipient government changes its policies in a way deemed desirable by the donor. This may be seen by noting that when a donor tries to buy policy reforms through conditionality, there are four conceivable outcomes (Gunning 2000). In the first case, the recipient government refuses to reform, meaning that conditionality fails. In the second case, the reforms are adopted but this cannot be credited to the donor's use of conditionality: the reform would also have been attained in the absence of aid. The third possibility is that reforms are adopted and would indeed not have been adopted if no aid had been offered but that the effect is temporary: the reforms are reversed after some time. The final possibility is one of sustained reform, which would not have occurred without aid (Gunning 2000).

Gunning (2000) argues that conditionality is truly effective only in the last case. He notes that it achieves nothing in the first and the second case while in the third case it is temporarily effective. If the evidence that conditionality does not work is accepted, the donor can either redesign the aid contract to improve it or abandon the approach in favour of a different form of conditionality commonly known as "selectivity" (see below). Redesigning the aid contract weakens project ownership while abandoning it seems to reinforce it. However, Gunning (2000) notes that the problem with conditionality goes beyond feasibility as one may well question its desirability as well. Inevitably, if donors are to succeed in achieving objectives which are not fully shared by the national government, then the government's accountability to its people may be undermined. In that sense, conditionality is effective in the same way as colonialism was and hence suffers from the same objection. Stiglitz (1998) describes the debilitating effect of conditionality:

Rather than learning how to reason and develop analytical capabilities, the process of imposing conditionality undermines both the incentives to acquire those capacities and confidence in the ability to use them. Rather than involving larger segments of the population in a process of discussing change, thereby changing their ways of thinking, it reinforces traditional hierarchical relationships. Rather than empowering those who could serve as catalysts for change within these societies, it demonstrates their impotence. Rather than promoting the kind of

open dialogue that is central to democracy, it argues at best that such dialogue is unnecessary, at worst that it is counterproductive.

In summary then, donor conditionality has proved to be ineffective. It may well be possible to make it more effective. However, this would simply reinforce the undesirable effects stressed by Stiglitz (1998) above. The alternative, therefore, is “selectivity”.

2.2.3 Selectivity

If aid effectiveness depends crucially on the quality of the policy environment and donors are powerless to change policies with aid, then all they can do is improve efficiency through what is known as *selectivity* in the allocation of aid. This means that donors would bias the allocation of aid in favour of countries with good policy environments. Some bilateral donors, notably, the Nordic countries, are rapidly moving in this direction (World Bank 1998). Selectivity can be seen as the most radical reform of conditionality since it abandons all pretence that aid can buy policy change. However, the selectivity proposal has encountered at least two objections.

The first objection has been that selectivity unfairly punishes poor people living under bad governments with bad policies by denying them development aid (Collier *et al* 1997). According to Collier *et al* (1997), this objection is difficult to understand as aid to such governments is unlikely to benefit the poor anyway and may well harm them by financing the continuation of a bad policy regime. Conversely, selectivity does not rule out the possibility that aid can be channelled directly to poor people rather than to their governments (Collier *et al* 1997).

However, the most serious objection to selectivity in aid allocations is that it may run into the same problems as conditionality, especially if it leads to the donor-recipient bargaining over the quality of the policy environment. Selectivity ties a country’s aid allocation to an assessment of its policies. Some aspects of a “good policy environment” can be defined unambiguously in objective terms, but in many cases an element of

judgement by the donor will be inevitable (Collier *et al* 1997). The donor's judgement may sometimes be challenged by the recipient government. In that case, the national government and the donor would return to haggling, which usually characterises conditionality. Selectivity would then conflict with project ownership in the sense that the donors would try to impose their preferences on the various aspects of the policy regime (Collier *et al* 1997). The issues discussed above are very significant as they are relevant to the success of donor-funded telecentre initiatives in Africa.

As noted in Chapter 1, donor-funded telecentres are also known as MCTs (the two terms will be used interchangeably in this study). This means they are intended for all members of a rural community or a deprived urban area. It also means, as we shall see in more detail later in this Chapter, that MCTs can provide a wide range of ICT - based services ranging from simple information services to e-learning, e-commerce and telemedicine besides user training and support. In addition, they may provide many other services such as library services, business support and a forum for all those involved in community development which is not necessarily ICT - based. Thus, MCT projects are inherently cross-sectoral and, as such, provide a test bed for the development of policies regarding practically all the issues that need to be addressed in a comprehensive set of national and communication policies (Ernberg 2002).

In these projects, different types of policies can be tested, both national (by government) and international (by donors). These projects can also provide opportunities to identify possible harmful effects and remedies of unsuitable policies. This can help donors as well as local decision makers to develop development policies adapted to the country's economic, social and cultural environment.

2.3 Background to telecentres in Africa

While ICT's have become widespread in the North, with Internet and email facilities available at work, in schools and even in most private homes, this is far from the case in

the South. For example, most Africans have never made a phone call, let alone used a computer or searched the World Wide Web for information. Most African communities do not have Internet access as access is found only in the major cities and towns (see Section 1.3). The need to expand the availability of ICTs in the African continent is therefore, high. The challenge is how to make ICTs available in African communities or communities in the South in general (Christiansen 2002).

As noted in Chapter 1, the answer to this limitation has been the establishment of telecentres. While there is no single definition of telecentres to satisfy everyone (see Section 1.2.3), a common characteristic is that a telecentre is a physical space that provides public access to ICTs for educational, personal, social, and economic development (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 13). However, the available technologies vary greatly from one telecentre to another. A well-equipped telecentre will include a public pay phone and fax (for receiving and sending) as well as a photocopying machine. However, more advanced telecentres will provide several phone lines and more computers with 24 hour high-speed broad bandwidth Internet connection. The use of multi-media computers, with speakers and microphones, if possible, will offer the possibility of using CD-ROMs and DVDs. A scanner, a colour printer, a video camera and perhaps even a digital camera could be included. The type of equipment available and the service offered is often determined by available funds, community needs and imagination (Christiansen 2002).

2.4 Telecentres and the Internet

Telecentres that employ ICTs are a relatively recent phenomenon. The first ones were built in Denmark and Sweden between 1983 and 1985. The idea has been taken up quite widely in Europe, notably in the United Kingdom (Simmins 1997). More recently, and on a limited scale, they have been established in developing countries. As noted in Chapter 1, such facilities are called a number of names, including “virtual village halls,” “tele-

learning centres,” and “telecottages”. Telecentres are also a venue in which the Internet can interface with conventional ICTs (print, radio and video) (Anderson et al 1998).

The Internet is relatively cheap, powerful, decentralized and potentially an ideal platform to build a flexible and powerful environment for sharing and learning. It is also the first communication tool that allows every user to be a sender, receiver and broadcaster in a global sphere (Richardson 1997). Richardson (1997) adds that the nature of the Internet suggests that it can be an effective tool for development, and the success of telecentres in Europe suggests that telecentres may be an effective mechanism for making the Internet and other ICTs available to rural communities. This explains the recent initiation of a number of telecentre pilot projects in many African countries.

2.5 Telecentre models

Careful reading of the literature reveals that discussion of telecentres is always clouded by the fact that the word covers different types of projects while alternative terms can be used interchangeably to describe them (Menou 2003: 631). Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu note that there are currently three main ownership models regarding telecentres, which are: private (individual) owned, NGO owned and trusteeship owned. MCTs, which are the focus of this study, fall under the category of trusteeship. In this arrangement, the telecentre project “is... held in trust by the executing agency for a specified period until the owner, i.e., the community is ready to take over” (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 163). As can be seen from Table 5 below, there are key variables which inform different telecentre models. These variables will usually determine the suitability of different telecentre models in different contexts.

Table 5. Key variables associated with telecentres

<p>Narrow focus Provides access to technology only.</p>	<p>Multipurpose Provides services, e.g. training, development information.</p>
<p>Community-based Represents a broad constituency.</p>	<p>Establishment Top-down government or business organisation based.</p>
<p>Stand alone Not associated with another institution.</p>	<p>Attached Operates as part of another institution, e.g. school, government units.</p>
<p>Thematic Specific to theme, e.g. education, health.</p>	<p>Universal Whole community needs.</p>
<p>Independent Operates alone.</p>	<p>Networked Works with other telecentres.</p>
<p>Profit oriented Operates as a business.</p>	<p>Service oriented Operates as a service.</p>
<p>Public funded Funded by public funds.</p>	<p>Privately funded Obtains funds privately.</p>

Source: Colle (2000).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will differentiate the bigger donor-funded MCT model from the largely small private sector model. In brief, private sector telecentres provide services at a price and are, therefore, profit oriented while the donor supported MCT model “seeks to meet social needs beyond the market place” (Benjamin et al 2000). Benjamin et al (2000) have looked at what the experience of each of these two models can tell us.

2.5.1 Private sector telecentres

Benjamin et al (2000) note that the last few years have seen a multiplication of privately owned telecentres in Africa. Also known as phone shops, these centres are primarily run

by small entrepreneurs and are generally quite successful. The centres start off by offering basic telephone services, but gradually move into fax and even Internet services as the market develops. In Africa, Senegal is believed to have the largest number of privately owned telecentres (estimated to be over 9,000 in 2000), which have been supported by Sonatel, the national telecommunications company (Webb 2002). Since starting in 1992, there were well over 6,000 private telecentres in Dakar by 2000 and by 2002 they were increasingly spreading towards the rural areas. While telephony is the main service, other services such as fax and photocopying are offered, with 1% of revenue coming from Internet use (Webb 2002).

A different private sector model has been offered by Africa Online (Webb 2002). Africa Online is an Internet company, which by 2002 had established up to 261 so called E-Touch centres in Kenya, predominantly in Nairobi. These centres offer email, Internet, fax, photocopying, printing and telecommunication services. According to Webb (2002), the E-Touch centres are reasonably successful businesses in Kenya but their costs make their services out of reach for most Kenyans. Webb (2002) adds that Africa Online was also launched in Ghana in 1997. However, after much initial enthusiasm, most of the centres closed down due to poor telephone line quality in most parts of the country.

In South Africa, Vodacom had by 2000 established 1,800 phone shops housed in metal shipping containers and costing about R25, 000 each (Benjamin et al 2000). Most of these telecentres are successful and financially profitable. All are privately owned and they do not claim to be offering any social service. Like similar models in Senegal and Kenya, Vodacom phone shops offer telephony and a few are experimenting with fax and computer facilities (Benjamin et al 2000).

Therefore, privately owned telecentres are generally profitable and successful. The owner's investment is often an important motivation to successful management. In fact, Webb (2002) notes that in Senegal, privately owned telecentres were generating a

monthly income of approximately US\$200 per line while also contributing around 0.5% of the country's GDP.

2.5.2 Donor-funded telecentres

Very different from the small-scale, private sector facilities discussed above are donor-funded telecentres. The main programmes in Africa have been a partnership between ITU, UNDP, IDRC and other donors. This partnership has seen the establishment of telecentres in Mali, Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa and other African countries (Benjamin and Dahms 1999). Donor-funded telecentres tend to be more expensive, costing as much as US\$250,000 each, and can offer a range of telephony, computing, Internet and e-mail services. Moreover, donor-funded telecentres stress community participation and sustainability, which is why they are also known as MCTs. According to Benjamin et al (2000), however, none in Africa had at that time shown that they could be self-sustaining after the external funding had ceased.

At best, MCTs have so far only covered operating costs, sometimes not including phone bills and salaries. According to Benjamin et al (2000), no major donor-funded telecentre has been able to set aside funds for depreciation of equipment, let alone generate enough money to repay the initial capital. In most cases, there have been greater technical problems than anticipated (see Chapter 1). Many of the donor-funded telecentres have been top-down projects, certainly with some community participation, but within the guidelines of the external funders (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003; Jensen and Esterhuysen: 2001). As a result, Benjamin et al (2000) warned that whilst there was some evidence at that time regarding the usefulness of ICTs in development, none of the existing donor-funded telecentres in Africa could be rolled out on any large scale as they did not represent a model that was suitable for universal access as opposed to individual projects.

2. 6 Origins of donor-funded telecentre projects in Africa

As noted earlier in this Chapter, most rural communities in African countries are likely to access modern ICTs through MCTs. This is meant to ensure that development is as effective, efficient, sustainable and equitable as possible.

The very first of the donor-funded telecentres in Africa was established in Timbuktu in Mali in May 1998. Sotelma, the national telecommunications company, was the main local implementer, with the main partners being the ITU, Television Mali, UNESCO and IDRC. Most of the funding of around US\$200,000 came from the donors (Webb 1999). After the Mali project, there has been a growing interest on the part of African governments, the private sector, international donors and community organisations towards the use of MCTs to provide access to ICTs. In Africa, MCTs have mainly been seen as a means of addressing the lack of ICTs and providing universal access to both telephony and other forms of ICTs (Etta and Parvyn-Wamaihu 2003). MCTs can also facilitate an efficient and cost-effective flow of information, products and capital across national and regional boundaries. Yet, as earlier noted in Chapter 1, telecentres should not be seen as a panacea for rural development problems. Rather, they have the potential to help the rural poor to overcome some of the traditional barriers to development, by improving access to information, expanding their market base, enhancing employment opportunities and making government services work better (Snyman and Snyman 2003: 105; UNESCAP 2002).

However, this requires a good infrastructure and an enabling policy environment. Effective ICT policies are necessary to provide the basic infrastructure for connectivity and access, develop human capacity, offer affordable demand-driven ICT services and involve local stakeholders and beneficiaries in project design, implementation and management. Secondly, special attention needs to be given to disadvantaged members of the community such as women, youth and persons with disabilities during project development and implementation. Finally, the liberalisation of the telecommunication

sector by national governments can dramatically expand connectivity and reduce costs (UNESCAP 2002). What follows are the benefits of MCTs in rural communities.

2.7 Benefits of telecentres to rural communities

As noted in the introduction to the study, poverty in Africa is concentrated in rural areas. By their very nature, many rural areas are remote from industrial zones, urban markets and urban employment opportunities, thus making it difficult for them to achieve economic growth. The major economic activity in most rural areas is agriculture, which is generally less productive than industry. Rural infrastructure lags far behind that in urban areas. In addition, rural areas are disadvantaged due to poor education and health service provision (Molner and Karvalics 2002: 327; Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 170). Thus, enabling rural areas to overcome these disadvantages is a major policy challenge for governments and civil societies in Africa.

This section suggests that MCT services can be effectively used to overcome some of these obstacles to social development in rural areas and empower the rural poor. Some of the benefits that telecentres can provide to these marginalised communities are as follows:

2.7.1 Information service

Modern ICTs found in telecentres make it easy and cheap to provide customized information systems for the poor. The Internet offers more flexibility in the collection, retrieval, updating and presentation of information than traditional electronic media, such as radio and television (Martin and McKeown 1993: 145; Gomez and Ospina 2001).

There are many telecentre initiatives aimed primarily at improving the availability of market and other information likely to improve the livelihood of the poor. A good example is the Bhamshela Telecentre in South Africa. The Telecentre provides public

access to telecommunications (telephone, facsimile and Internet) and information services (health, education, market data, technology and livelihood) to a disadvantaged community (Schreiner 1998: 66). Similarly, Nakaseke Telecentre in Uganda provides the rural community with data on agricultural practices, the cost and availability of farm inputs (pesticides, fertilizers and seeds), health, welfare opportunities and other useful information (Benjamin and Dahms 1999).

Elsewhere, initiatives such as the Warana Telecentre in India's Maharashtra State, enables villagers to access agricultural, medical and educational information through the Internet. Many farmers visit the Telecentre daily to access information on crop cultivation practices and schedules, quantities harvested and sold, net income due to them, pest and disease control, and marketing. Significantly, all information is provided in the local language. Farmers consider the Internet service at the Telecentre a better source of information than traditional sources such as traders, field officers, television, radio and the print media. By providing neutral information, this Telecentre service also minimizes cheating by unscrupulous traders when quoting the prices of farm products (UNESCAP 2002).

2.7.2 E-commerce

Electronic commerce, or e-commerce, involves the sale or purchase of goods or services over computer-mediated networks, particularly the Internet. Such goods and services may be ordered over the Internet, but payment and ultimate delivery may be online or offline (Robinson 2000). African countries can benefit from e-commerce through easier access to markets in developed countries and higher incomes resulting from these new trading opportunities.

E-commerce has already found a niche in some rural areas in Africa. The Rural Women's Association in Sekhukhuneland, Northern Province, South Africa, which sells its agricultural products to buyers all over the world through a telecentre put up by USA

in 1998 is a good example (Rhodes 2003). However, e-commerce applications in African countries encounter several serious barriers. Shemi and Magembe (2003) warn that issues related to taxation, consumer protection and intellectual property rights have yet to be resolved at the national and international levels. They add that the infrastructure to provide the physical delivery of goods is still very incipient, and costly for small businesses in Africa.

2.7.3 Employment generation

The emergence of telecentre services in rural areas can also generate new business enterprises such as selling of ICT equipment and accessories; provision of ICT services such as Internet access, word-processing and telephone operations; provision of training and educational support; as well as repairing and maintaining of ICT equipment (Benjamin and Dahms 1999; Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003). Such enterprises provide direct job opportunities for traders, teachers, computer operators, technicians and administrative and secretarial support staff.

Telecentres can also offer innumerable indirect employment opportunities by improving the business prospects of rural-based enterprises through a better access to market information, improved production technology and more efficient marketing systems (Rhodes 2003). For example, telecentre services in Pondicherry, India, have inspired villagers to utilize their considerable knowledge of local herbs for the establishment of a herb-processing centre. The villagers have learned how to package and market the herbs by using the services of the telecentre. Around 300 rural women are currently engaged in the herb-processing project (UNESCAP 2002).

However, the ILO (2001) notes that illiteracy, poor infrastructure and general lack of access to ICTs undermines the quality of the e-jobs in Africa and consequently, their ability to improve the living conditions of rural communities. In addition, the number of

workers doing these kinds of jobs remains very limited on the continent, where training and education have yet to be improved and expanded to all sectors of the population.

2.7.4 Education and training

Perhaps the most tangible benefit, so far derived by developing countries from the telecentre initiatives, is access to vast resources that enhance education and training at minimal or no cost. The Internet currently hosts thousands of distance-learning and training programmes on virtually any conceivable subject (Gomez and Ospina 2001). Distance learning has been particularly useful in Africa, where affordability and geography are real barriers to access to education.

Efforts have been made in recent years to develop ICT-based education and training tools at the community level through telecentres. One notable example is the NetTel@Africa project. A core activity of the project is the development of learning modules that are hosted on the website. These modules are developed through partnerships between seven African universities: Universities of Zambia, Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Western Cape, South Africa, Fort Hare, and Witwatersrand and three American Universities: Universities of Colorado-Boulder, Florida-Gainesville, and Michigan State. The modules can be accessed by students all over Africa (NetTel@Africa 2005).

Thus far, Internet based education in Africa has only benefited a minority of privileged students who can afford and have access to online educational opportunities (Lax 2001: 107). The inclusiveness of digital education is, in fact, still very limited, especially taking into account the great disparities that still prevail between urban and rural communities in Africa, as well as the structural lack of access and training opportunities for the majority of the African population (Robinson 2000). MCTs can, thus, play a big role in overcoming these barriers.

2.7.5 Health and medical information

The exchange of information constitutes a major aspect of medical care. Some medical web sites offer doctors and health workers venues for the exchange of professional information and experiences on illnesses and treatments. Thanks to MCTs, rural hospitals in India are making use of such web sites to access medical information from more developed countries (UNESCAP 2002). In addition, health workers in some developing countries are obtaining medical training through telecentres. Several new Internet sites provide innovative “teach and test” self-assessment modules on diseases such as malaria. Furthermore, centralized data repositories connected to telecentre networks enable remote health-care professionals to keep abreast of the rapidly evolving stock of medical knowledge (UNESCAP 2002).

However, although the Internet contains volumes of information on health and medical care, this information resource is of little use to the rural poor if there are no intermediaries who can simplify, translate, repackage and disseminate information at these telecentres. If health information services are to have a direct impact on the rural poor, they must be both comprehensible and accessible to the target users. Instructions have to be simplified, well illustrated and adapted to local conditions. Advice on treatments should consider indigenous, inexpensive and locally available materials (Gomez and Ospina 2001).

2.7.6 Good governance

National governments in Africa can use ICTs in MCTs to improve the quality and efficiency of public services, strengthen intra-government information flows, promote accountability and transparency, procure goods and services fairly and efficiently, encourage citizens’ participation in decision-making processes and inform citizens about government operations and services (Heeks 2001). Through electronic forums, bulletin boards and email provided by telecentres, national governments could enable their citizens to participate in public discussions, report any malpractices by government

officials and voice their complaints about government service irregularities (Heeks 2001). Heeks (2001) adds that telecentres could be of great relevance to marginalized communities and groups, such as women, youth and ethnic minorities, by enabling them to share and exchange information of mutual interest, strengthen their collective power and find their own development solutions. He concludes that good governance is a crucial element in rural poverty alleviation because delays and corruption in government services affect the poor people more than any others.

However, while the potential opportunities offered by e-government via telecentres are numerous, African governments need to be cautious. Gomez and Ospina (2001) advise that before allocating large sums for investments or undertaking large-scale telecentre projects, they should ensure that lower-level government organizations and citizens are ready to accept change and are capable of financially supporting the required infrastructure.

2.7.7 Social empowerment of women

Due to the entrenchment of patriarchy, many of the positive aspects of the information and communications revolution in Africa have bypassed poor women (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003). As a result, women have thus far benefited less from ICTs found in telecentres (Schreiner 1998; Ochieng and Radloff 2001). Women, therefore, need to be actively involved in the definition, design and development of new technologies, which may be available in telecentres. Otherwise the information revolution in Africa might simply bypass them.

In recent years, a number of telecentre-related initiatives aimed at the social empowerment of women have emerged. Most of these initiatives are relevant to women across the rural-urban divide, but some specifically address the needs of rural women. For example, the aforementioned Rural Women's Association in Sekhukhuneland, Northern Province, South Africa (Rhodes 2003), and village herb-processing operations

in India (UNESCAP 2002) have used telecentres as a tool for women empowerment through e-commerce. Still in rural India, the ILO (2001: 58) reports that telecentres and fax booths had by 2001 created 250,000 jobs, mainly for women through women-owned businesses. Experience has shown that women-owned businesses, such as these, generate a higher rate of female patronage than male-owned businesses (ILO 2001: 58).

Another example comes from Nakaseke Telecentre, where Joyce Namayanja, who specialized in designing school badges, banners and signposts, had this to say:

Before I attended computer lessons at the telecentre, I was using the freehand style to design my work. This was taking a lot of time and was not very neat. When the Telecentre opened, I enrolled for computer lessons in word processing, Excel and other packages. With this knowledge, I can now design using the computer. Computer knowledge has helped me improve on the quality of my work, making it faster and easier. This has also increased my clientele base. These days we also just call (our suppliers in Kampala using the telecentre phone) and give them specifications of the goods we need. The suppliers collect the money from our local taxi drivers whom they give the goods. This has saved the business money and time, which would have been incurred on transport (ITU 2002b).

These examples demonstrate that Internet services in telecentres can be instrumental in the empowerment of women in Africa. Women scholars, activists and practitioners believe that these tools have also enabled women to forward their concerns to the global community, thus raising awareness and chance to advocate for their rights and hence reduce their marginalisation within their communities (Ochieng and Radloff 2001).

In conclusion, this section has shown that MCT services can be effectively used to overcome some obstacles to social development in rural areas and empower the rural poor. However, as noted earlier in this Chapter, MCTs are expensive and require a huge infusion of donor funds to establish, implement and sustain. What follows is a discussion of the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of these projects.

2. 8 The role of donors in telecentre projects

Even though there appears to be a general agreement on the basic function of donor-funded telecentres in Africa (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 10), there seems, as alluded to earlier in the rationale of the study, to be very little understanding about the role of donors regarding the establishment, implementation and sustainability of these projects. This could be due to the general lack of literature on this subject. However, it has been suggested that the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres evolve over time. Furthermore, Fuchs (in Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003: 31) makes reference to three stages, namely: the investment stage, contract stage and user fee stage, which donors are usually interested in.

- The **investment stage** is seen as characterising the early stages of the project. This is where donors form partnerships with local stakeholders in an attempt to build community capacity by encouraging them to participate in the project. At this stage, the donor organisation finances the project, as well as providing equipment and training for local partners, key persons and staff.
- In the **contract stage** the telecentre has gained autonomy from the “parent” donor organisation. It then starts to make contractual agreements with other agencies and government organisations such as hospitals or schools and the building up of clientele to which it provides services and support.
- By the time the telecentre gets to the **user fee stage** donor dependency is a thing of the past. By this time the communities are well aware of the products and benefits of the telecentre and are, therefore, willing to pay for the services.

The implication of an evolutionary view is that it is only a matter of time before telecentres become independent and self-sustaining. However, Dagron (2001) and Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu (2003) are of the opinion that this is a dangerous oversimplification. According to the three researchers, the evolutionary thesis gives scant attention to the political, economic and social realities that inform all donor-funded projects. Dagron (2001) adds that very few examples at the **user fee stage** have been described in the literature and this is perhaps proof that very few projects have advanced to this stage. Dagron (2001) argues further that the evolutionary paradigm ignores

important factors, which often define the role of donors at different levels of a telecentre project. The following section looks broadly at some of these factors:

2.8.1 Role of donor policies in the management, ownership and sustainability of telecentre projects

The concept of ownership must begin the moment donors establish dialogue with beneficiaries of a telecentre project and along the process of conceiving, planning and implementing the project. Donors now understand that beneficiaries of MCTs need to be involved in the activities leading up to the social and economic development of their community. This is critical for the sustainability of the project once the external funding has ended as it always does (Dagron 2001: 10; Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003: 162-3).

In that sense, donors have realised that ownership cannot be promoted if the beneficiaries do not contribute to the decisions made before the telecentre project started. For example, in the 2003 IDRC funded study, Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu (2003:163) note that community ownership of telecentres “was implied and vocally affirmed by key informants” in all of the five African countries in which they conducted the study. This was evidenced by the fact that local community members were involved in some aspects of management in all of the five telecentres studied (Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003:163).

However, the two researchers caution that “the extent of involvement of the local committees was not always clear and their level of responsibility often did not extend beyond supporting fundraising and mobilisation for the MCTs” (Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003: 163). They argue that ownership by its very nature ought to confer ultimate control but they concluded in their study that local communities in Mocambique, Senegal, Uganda, South Africa and Mali were not in control of “their” projects. In fact, they pointed out that telecentre managers, who were employees of the donor agencies, often had more decision-making authority over the telecentres than members of the local

management committees. This was evident where decisions affecting day-to-day management of the telecentres had to be continuously vetted by representatives of donor agencies even when the decisions had already been endorsed by the local management committees (Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003: 163). For example, the local communities, generally, could not recruit staff or set prices without the approval of donor agencies (Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003: 109). At Nabweru Telecentre (Uganda), the printer could not be used because cartridges had run out and the telecentre had to wait for a long time for the overseeing agency to authorise the purchase and eventual supply of the cartridges. At Buwama Telecentre (Uganda), the researchers also report a pattern of prolonged power struggle between the local management committee and the telecentre staff, which affected the operations of the centre (Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003: 159).

Based on the above factors, Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu (2003: 163) observe that “it is... masking the truth to say that the communities owned the telecentres”. Whilst ownership presupposes control, the two researchers saw no evidence that local communities were in control of the projects. Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu (2003: 163), however, are unsure whether the local communities’ lack of control over the projects was a deliberate exclusionary ploy by the donors and the executing agencies so that they could retain control over activities and budgets or whether it was borne out of a genuine lack of experience by the local communities themselves. What they were sure about, however, was the enthusiasm of local community members to be involved in the management of the MCTs. This scenario is significant especially in the face of poor, unresponsive or mediocre management, which has characterised donor-funded telecentres on the continent (Benjamin 2000).

2.8.2 Role of donors in the scale of the telecentre project.

Another important element in understanding the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres is the donors’ need for “scale”. According to Dagron (2001: 11), donors’ decisions regarding the scale of telecentre projects in Africa have in the past either paralysed cooperation between

stakeholders or led to “gigantic and artificial projects” resulting in resounding project failures. Dagon (2001: 11) adds that the issue of scale is often related to the donors’ political agenda and internal administrative regulations rather than to community development. The requirements of proving “success” in the short term or measuring a project in numbers of beneficiaries (the higher the better), while excluding long-term benefits and sustainability, have led to telecentre projects which are only “successful” while funding is available (Dagon 2001: 11; Benjamin 2001; Benjamin and Dahms 1999).

Thus, various experts in the field (Dagon 2001: 11; Benjamin 2001; Benjamin and Dahms 1999; Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003) have argued that donors’ interest with the scale of the project is not always the right long-term solution since macro-level telecentre projects cannot replace bottom-up networking. They add that the international donor community is still reluctant to acknowledge many years of failures and millions of dollars worth of wasted resources due to ill planned macro programmes. This means that the donors’ eagerness to show short-term results and extend ICT coverage to large numbers of people on the continent has not been a major success.

2.8.3 Role of donors in telecentre evaluation

Anderson et al (1998) argues that the evaluation of telecentre projects in Africa is still a donor driven exercise, which remains external to the beneficiaries. He notes that even if institutions specialised in doing evaluations represent a different industry, the fact of the matter is that by contracting private evaluators, donors keep control over telecentre evaluations.

Some experts (Anderson et al 1998; Dagon 2001; Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu 2003; Webb 2002) have also highlighted contradictions in the manner in which most telecentre evaluations are done. The main contradiction is that beneficiaries are cut off from the entire exercise and are seen only as the objects of the study and not subjects that can

contribute to the evaluation process. Other aspects that compromise the results of donor funded telecentre evaluations in Africa are:

Firstly, the fact that donors sponsor the evaluation of their own projects has an impact on the quality of results. Experts warn that evaluators are likely to be biased since they depend on future contracts with the same or similar organisations (Anderson et al 1998; Dagron 2001: 12).

Secondly, telecentre evaluations are often done by experts with little knowledge about the cultural, political and social context of the local community. In most cases they do not speak their language and the consultants are usually from private companies based in the United States and Europe. Very few telecentre projects hire national consultants with a background that facilitates a higher understanding of local culture (Anderson et al 1998; Dagron 2001: 12).

Thirdly, the evaluation instrument is usually taken from already existing models. That is, donors simply adapt it for a particular project without sufficient consultation with the grassroots communities and with little consideration of existing cultural aspects (Dagron 2001: 13).

Fourthly, Dagron (2001: 13) and Etta and Paravyn-Wamahiu (2003) note that for statistical purposes, most telecentre evaluations avoid open questions and concentrate on checklist type formats that aim at obtaining numbers and percentages as opposed to qualitative assessments.

Finally, Dagron (2001: 13) argues that the timing of evaluations is habitually donor driven and has no relevance to an evaluation of the project benefits to the community. He argues furthermore that evaluations are often done so that a picture of the development

process is captured at its best moment. On the strength of these factors, it may be inferred that any information that an evaluation may bring is often of more use to the donors than to the beneficiaries.

2.9 Summary

This Chapter has focused on two functions of aid, which are: (1) providing finance and (2) changing policies in recipient countries. In reviewing this debate, the Chapter has stressed the ineffectiveness of aid in the second of these roles and the desirability of redefining the first role more clearly. This Chapter has shown that rather than redesigning the aid package to make conditionality more effective, donors sometimes switch to selectivity. Under selectivity, the allocation of aid is tied to success. The Chapter also commented on the donor induced policy environment within which the donor-funded telecentre initiative has unfolded in Africa. The Chapter then looked at the benefits of these initiatives to rural communities in Africa before analysing the role played by donors in these projects.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This Chapter has been structured in the following manner: Section 3.1 introduces the Chapter while Section 3.2 presents the research methodology used in the study. The Chapter then presents the research population in Section 3.3, discusses data collection methods in Section 3.4 and presents the actual data the study collected in Section 3.5. Data analysis procedures appear in Section 3.6, while the evaluation of research methodology used for this study is done in Section 3.7. Section 3.8 summarises the Chapter.

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter details the research design and methodology underpinning the study. The purpose of the study was to examine the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres in Africa. The nature of this study is applied research, meaning that emphasis was placed on providing information that can be used in addressing actual telecentre establishment, implementation and sustainability issues on the continent. To answer the research questions posed in the study and attain the objectives stated in Chapter 1, section 1.4.2, the exploratory research design, utilising the case study methodology, was employed to gather data. This Chapter contains detailed information about the population of the study, data collection methods and data analysis procedures.

3.2 Exploratory research design

The research design is the logical plan of how the study is conducted (Yin 1989). The role of a research design is to connect questions to data. An exploratory research design “is often conducted because a problem has not been clearly defined as yet or its real scope is still unclear” (Cilliberti 2004). Cilliberti (2004) adds that this method focuses on gathering information in depth and “will probe to explore feelings, motivation...behaviour and so on”. Furthermore, Ngulube (2005) notes that exploratory research examines the WHY and not just the WHAT in the data. In this study,

exploratory research was used to gain an in-depth insight into the key success factors and failures of donor-funded telecentres in Africa. The exploratory research method was chosen for this study because of the nature of the problem and the data needed. There are many different forms of exploratory research, such as case studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis and observation to mention but a few (Ngulube 2002). For the purpose of this research, the case study methodology was used.

3.2.1 Case study approach

Case studies are in-depth studies of particular events, circumstances or situations that offer the prospect of revealing understandings of a kind which might escape other research methodologies (Yin 1984). A case study is an empirical enquiry that:

Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used... (Yin 1984: 23).

Case studies can either involve single or multiple cases and numerous levels of analysis (Yin 1989). Case studies can be used to provide descriptions or test hypotheses (Gomm, Hammarsley and Foster 2000). Tellis (1997) also points out that case studies provide an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. For the purpose of this study, the case study approach was used to investigate the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of MCTs in Africa. This was achieved by conducting an in-depth investigation of the management and support structures of the three cases under review. This involved identifying key areas of success and failure in the three cases.

Although the case study approach has a number of drawbacks, it also has some distinctive advantages. One of the disadvantages is that the case study methodology provides no ground for generalisation of results (Soy 1996). Tellis (1997), adds that another problem with case studies is the difficulty in separating meaning from location. In other words, it is difficult to determine whether or not the performance of the phenomenon is directly linked to the nature of its context. However, the case study

method's strength lies in its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence such as documents, questionnaires, artifacts, interviews and observation (Yin 1989).

3.2.2 Criteria for selecting the cases

As noted above, this study will be based on three case studies, namely Nakaseke MCT in Uganda, Bahamshela MCT in South Africa and the MRTP which was never implemented in Malawi. This mix of the cases was chosen deliberately to make comparisons and to ensure that a variety of experiences may be captured. The primary criteria for selecting the cases included: evidence of donor funding, rural context, the multiplicity of services and community ownership. All the three projects listed above satisfy these requirements (see Chapter 1). However, there are also more profound reasons why these projects were chosen.

Nakaseke MCT is generally seen as a relative success story by many observers in this field (Benjamin and Dahms 1999; Mayanja 1999; Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 70-83). In that sense, it tends to support the view that telecentres can be useful for development in a rural setting (Mayanja 1999). The researcher, therefore, deemed it an ideal and compelling case especially given the comparative nature of this study.

Bhamshela caught the attention of the researcher, firstly, because other researchers who conducted their studies at the telecentre in the past also live within the vicinity of UKZN. For instance, Schreiner (1998) and Burton (2002) used Bhamshela as a research case and both of them still live in the Pietermaritzburg area. This encouraged this researcher to follow their lead. Secondly, Bhamshela's lacklustre performance over the years made it an interesting case for the researcher, as it also suited the comparative purposes of the study.

Regarding the MRTP, the project was chosen, first and foremost, because it is close to the researcher's heart. As a concerned Malawian who appreciates that modern ICTs can

provide solutions to local development problems, the researcher was eager to find out why the project simply fizzled out without explanation after it had been announced with a lot of hype and fanfare by the Government in 2002. Secondly, the researcher hoped that the results of the study would assist him to understand why there were still no donor-funded telecentres in Malawi while all its neighbours had these facilities. Finally, the researcher believed that the results of the study would provide critical information that would be helpful for future telecentre implementation initiatives in Malawi.

3.3 Research population

The research population is considered a critical part of any research, including an exploratory one. A “population” consists of all elements or units about whom the study’s information is collected (Leedy 1980: 98). Busha and Harter (1980: 55-57) add that a population comprises any set of persons or objects that possess at least one common characteristic and that “a population can be very large or small, depending upon the size of persons or objects from which the researcher plans to make inference”.

The population of this study was selected purposively mainly because the individuals would be knowledgeable about the research questions. The population, therefore, consisted of senior officers within the organisations that pledged financial and technical support for the MRTP and those that funded the Bhamshela and Nakaseke MCTs. However, as will be explained in more detail later in the Chapter, donor representatives for the Nakaseke MCT never responded to the questionnaires emailed to them by the researcher even after numerous reminders. Thus, in the end, the population of this study consisted of three individuals. These were two senior officials from UNDP in Malawi for the MRTP case and a senior official from USA in South Africa for the Bhamshela case.

However, given that the researcher spent some time in Malawi, other local role players who were directly involved with the MRTP case were approached for their perspectives on the role their organisations played in the project. These role players included a senior

government official from the Ministry of Information, a representative of MACRA, the executing agency for the MRTP case and a representative of a local ICT firm that conducted the feasibility study for the MRTP case on behalf of the donors. By virtue of their high-ranking positions, these individuals were able to answer questions concerning their organisation's involvement with the project (Locke et al 1998: 21). However, these local role players were not part of the population for this study. The researcher also had the privilege of personal communication with Burton (2005) and Schreiner (2006) in light of their previous involvement with the Bhamshela case (see Section 3.2.2 above). The two researchers, too, were not part of the population of the study.

3.4 Data collection methods

Data for the MRTP case was collected using in-depth interviews as well as from the literature whereas information for the Bhamshela case was gathered through an email questionnaire and from the literature. However, since donors for the Nakaseke case did not respond to the questionnaire which the researcher had emailed them, information for the case was solely sourced from the literature. A protocol of questions was also used as a guide to interview local partners of the MRTP case. Thus, the researcher interviewed both the representative from government and the representative from MACRA. Due to time constraints, however, the representative of the organisation which conducted the MRTP feasibility study chose to provide the final report of the feasibility study instead of answering questions from the researcher. A summary of this final report appears in Chapter 4 of this study. Informal interviews were also conducted with Burton (2005) and Schreiner (2006) in which the two researchers were asked to comment on various issues concerning Bhamshela MCT based on their previous experience of the case. This use of more than one data gathering instrument, commonly known as triangulation, was considered vital for this study especially given the under-researched and unique nature of this study (Ngulube 2002).

The above explanation means that two main research instruments were developed for this study. The first one, (Appendix C) was an email questionnaire, focusing on the Nakaseke

and Bhamshela cases whose donors could not be reached in person while the second one, an interview schedule (Appendix D), was used for the face-to-face interviews for donor representatives of the MRTP case. However, the researcher decided to design a third minor protocol of questions (Appendix E), targeting local role players of the MRTP during the research trip to Malawi, as indicated earlier. In an attempt to simplify the survey and possibly increase the response rate, only six broad questions were asked in Appendix C, four in Appendix D and four in Appendix E. The instruments were developed using the literature focusing on the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres in rural communities. The instruments targeted different aspects of the above-mentioned process and they included the following:

- Telecentre establishment: aimed at determining how the cases were conceived and planned.
- Telecentre implementation: focused on the elements that informed the establishment of the three case studies.
- Telecentre sustainability: examined the whole process of ownership, management and evaluation of the three case studies.

3.4.1 Face-to-face interviews

Also known as in-depth interviews, face-to-face interviews are usually designed to collect qualitative information from a small sized sample. According to the World Bank Group (2000), “in-depth interviewing entails asking questions, listening to and recording the answers and then posing additional questions to clarify or expand on a particular issue”.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher in Malawi with two resident representatives from UNDP, one of the donor organisations which pledged financial and technical support for the MRTP, using the main interview schedule (Appendix D). The rest of the organisations which pledged support for the project, namely UNIDO, UNEP and ITU, did not have resident representatives in the country which meant that the researcher was unable to get their perspective (the researcher later emailed Appendix C to the three

organisations but to no avail). The minor interview protocol (Appendix E) was used to pose questions to local role-players of the project. These were a senior representative from the Government department directly involved with the MRTP and a senior representative from MACRA. As noted earlier, the representative from the firm which conducted the feasibility study for the project waived her right to be interviewed and instead provided the researcher with a copy of the final report of the feasibility study. All respondents were key informants with senior positions in their respective institutions. Since all the questions were open-ended, it meant the answers were extensive and writing them down could have taken a lot of time. Thus, the interviews were all tape-recorded and later transcribed. The advantages of using interviews are that they are flexible and also offer a detailed amount of data (Doyle 2001). In addition, the interviewer can build a healthy rapport with respondents and the nature of the response is not limited. However, interviews have their own disadvantages. Turban (1997), for example, notes that open-ended interviews are more like a conversation dominated by one person (informant). The information from the informant may be vast, sometimes irrelevant and, thus, difficult for the interviewer to unravel.

3.4.2 Email questionnaire

The questionnaires for this study were emailed to senior representatives of the donor organisations, which funded both the Nakaseke and Bhamshela Telecentres. Despite its notoriety for a poor response rate (Salant and Dillman 1994), a questionnaire was deemed both convenient and cost-effective for this study in terms of time and money.

Six questionnaires were emailed to senior representatives of the donor institutions that had financed the Nakaseke Telecentre, namely IDRC, UNESCO and ITU. The contact details and rank of these initial contacts were determined from the respective organisation's website. Thus, two questionnaires were emailed to two senior representatives from ITU, two to UNESCO and two to IDRC. With regard to Bhamshela Telecentre, established with the financial assistance of IDRC and USA, three questionnaires were emailed to senior USA representatives in South Africa, while two

were sent to IDRC. The initial questionnaire was emailed with the individual personal addresses apparent to all, but the questionnaire was not addressed to the individual contacts by personal names. After a week, one of the six donor representatives associated with the Nakaseke Telecentre, specifically, UNESCO replied that his organisation was not a donor institution and in that sense he was not competent to respond to the questionnaire (see Appendix G). Surprisingly, senior representatives from UNDP in Malawi, another UN specialized agency, were very willing to take questions from the researcher regarding the funding of the MRTP case (see Section 4.2.1). Only one contact from USA had acknowledged receipt of the questionnaire within the first week and asked for more time to respond comprehensively to it. Sometime later, two more contacts from ITU also promised to come back to the researcher at a later date. With the passage of time, however, nothing more came forth from any of the contacts. Reminders were then sent to all the initial contacts and two more names for the Nakaseke donor group were added to the list. This time the email survey went out separately to each individual and each was addressed personally by name in an attempt to boost the response rate.

The process continued over a period of nearly twelve weeks but, in the end, only one response from USA for the Bhamshela case was received and none for the Nakaseke Telecentre. Due to the limited time available to the researcher, a decision was made to proceed with the study, despite the non-response for the Nakaseke case. This explains why more premium has been put on the literature to understand the circumstances around this particular case. It should be emphasised that the email survey continued for so long because the researcher wanted to give as much time as possible to the respective donor organisations to respond to the questionnaire. As noted earlier, the response rate was dismal and reminder emails went out continuously (see Appendix F). Thus, it was frustrating for the researcher to find that contacts that had shown initial interest seemed reluctant to either respond to the questionnaire or give out other people's email addresses. Eventually, the study proceeded with the sole response received from USA and the tabulation of the information began.

3.5 Actual data collection

As noted above, no response was received from the email questionnaires for the Nakaseke case and only one was received for the Bhamshela case despite waiting and sending reminders for a period of nearly twelve weeks. As noted earlier, the waiting period continued for so long because some contacts kept on promising that they would respond to the questionnaire in due course. However, all the promises never came to any fruition except for the one response cited above. The email questionnaire was broken into themes to capture various aspects of telecentre establishment, implementation and sustainability (See appendix C). This use of themes helped to obtain in-depth information about the management and support structures of the Bhamshela case. As indicated above, since there was no response from the donors of the Nakaseke Telecentre, all the data relating to the case was solely sourced from the literature (both print and on-line).

On the other hand, the main interview schedule (Appendix D), as well as the minor protocol of questions (Appendix E), were used to source information for MRTP over and above any other information obtained from the literature. All the interview questions were open - ended in nature, which allowed the respondents to express their views on the role their organisations played in the conceptualisation and lack of implementation of the MRTP. Follow-up questions were used to get an in-depth response to particular questions where necessary. The questions were loosely phrased in such a way that they captured various aspects of telecentre establishment, implementation and sustainability. This helped the researcher to obtain in-depth information about the management and support structures of the case.

3.6 Data analysis procedures

Data from the interviews and the questionnaire was qualitative in nature. After transcribing the tapes and compiling notes from the questionnaire, data was organised by themes. In this study, content analysis was used to analyse data collected on the cases. Content analysis involves the systematic collection and organisation of information in a

standard format that allows analysts to draw conclusions about the characteristics and meaning of recorded material (Alreck and Settle 1995: 271). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001: 383), the technique can be applied to any form of communication. In this study, the first step in content analysis entailed the construction of categories (Sarantakos 1998: 281). In that light, data was analysed according to themes such as donor policies, telecentre sustainability, community ownership and strategic partnerships. Categories were coded and dominant themes and trends were identified. In order to satisfy the criteria of reliability regarding the field data, the tape recordings were listened to while notes were made from the questionnaire information in order to find commonality on the themes or patterns emerging from the data.

3.7 Evaluation of research methodology

The study employed the exploratory research design, utilising the case study approach. This research design was deemed appropriate in the examination of the role of donors in the three case studies. Although the methodology used in this study does not allow the results to be generalised, the study still gives an in-depth analysis into the phenomenon under investigation. The problems associated with this methodology have revealed some important insights, which researchers in this field need to bear in mind.

Firstly, the dismal response rate and the amount of time taken to conduct a successful email survey might not make it the best option for investigating the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of telecentre projects in Africa. This is not to suggest that the potential respondents for this study would have responded positively to a more traditional questionnaire posted via “snail” mail. However, although it is more time consuming and even expensive, this study has shown that face-to-face interviews remain a viable option for conducting a research of this nature. Owing to the high costs involved, though, this option was not a consideration in this study.

Secondly, the study has shown that the expenditure of time used during a face-to-face interview session can be viewed as an entirely productive use of that time. In contrast, time spent conducting the email survey was spent on survey reminders and solicitation of email addresses that probably could have been resolved more quickly by direct face-to-face contact with the potential respondent.

Finally, the study also showed that the benefit of a comprehensive explanation is a clear advantage of face-to-face interviews that cannot be overlooked. Respondents to the email survey simply provided empty promises to the reminders sent by the researcher. Although follow-up emails were continuously sent to the contacts, the communication was always brief and abstract. In sum, using email to gather information proved to be the most time consuming and frustrating activity for this study. Even participants who showed initial enthusiasm and interest were often reluctant to give out another person's email address. It would be useful for future research to examine that tendency, but the present study has clearly shown that conducting a survey using an email questionnaire can be an arduous and protracted exercise and may be not worth the effort. Perhaps respondents feel more comfortable giving out another person's name in a verbal, face-to-face meeting rather than sending it over electronically. Thus, based on the two surveys, a face-to-face interview appears to be the better value when taking the time to conduct a study of this nature than the email survey.

3.8 Summary

This Chapter presented the methodology that was used to examine the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of MCTs in Africa, with special reference to the three case studies under review. An exploratory research design was considered appropriate for this study. Two senior representatives from the UNDP in Malawi, one of the organisations which pledged support for the MRTP case and one senior officer from USA in South Africa, financiers of the Bhamshela MCT, constituted the population of this study. The Chapter then discussed the data collection methods, data analysis procedures before evaluating the research methodology.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The structure of this Chapter is as follows: Section 4.1 introduces the Chapter. Section 4.2 presents the research results of the Bhamshela and MRTTP cases while Section 4.3 presents the results of the Nakaseke case. Analysis of the research results is done in Section 4.4. Section 4.5 summarises the Chapter

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is to present the research results and to analyse the issues that emerged in the course of conducting open-ended interviews and the email survey. The nature of this study is qualitative and although the results may not be generalized statistically, they do raise a better understanding of the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of telecentres in the three case studies which were the focus of the study. The research questions were as follows:

- a. What is the role of donor policies in telecentre projects in Africa, specifically in terms of the key areas of success and reasons of failure (if any), for the three case studies?
- b. How can donor-funded telecentres provide a sustainable way of providing universal access to ICTs and what are the conditions that must be met to make them sustainable?
- c. To what extent does the donor-funded telecentre model engender community ownership and the moulding of local champions?
- d. What are the dynamics of collaborative local needs and skills assessment between the project donors, the project proposers and the local community actors and how does this collaboration or lack thereof, affect the management of the telecentre?
- e. What are the key success factors for a sustainable donor-funded telecentre?

Based upon these five research questions, three research instruments were devised with a view to providing answers to these questions (see Section 3.4). This Chapter, therefore, is

organised into two sections. The first section presents research results of both the face-to-face interviews and email questionnaire. An abridged version of the final report of the feasibility study for the MRTP case will also be presented. This will be followed by the researcher's own comments to the presented results. The second section will then interpret and make further comments on the research results (see Section 4.4).

4.2 Presentation of results

In this section, face-to-face interview results will be presented and they will be followed by email questionnaire results.

4.2.1 Face-to-face interview results

The main interview schedule (Appendix D) was used to conduct face-to-face interviews with two senior representatives from UNDP, one of the donor organisations which pledged financial and technical support for the MRTP. Interviews were also conducted with one senior official from the Ministry of Information and with one senior official from MACRA, the implementing agency on the ground using the minor protocol of questions (Appendix E). Representatives from three other co-donors for the project, namely UNIDO, UNEP and ITU, were unavailable because they have no resident representation in the country. The purpose of conducting these interviews was based on the assumption that the respondents were knowledgeable of the dynamics that informed the conceptualization and lack of implementation of the MRTP case.

The following, therefore, are the results of the face-to-face interviews that the researcher conducted:

4.2.1.1 Role of donors and local stakeholders in the MRTP

Respondents were asked to explain their organisation's role in the MRTP.

The two respondents from the UNDP explained that their organisation has, over the years, always been one of the institutions promoting ideas, which have great potential for sustainable human development. They noted that back in the 1990s, their organisation and other agencies introduced the Sustainable Development Programme (SDP) in a number of countries. That programme involves countries, which do not have, or are seen to be lagging behind, in the field of Internet services and Malawi was identified as one of them. The idea then, was that Malawi should have means to access information on environmental issues and in other areas of development. Hence, a global fund was established by the organization to initiate such activities in various developing countries targeted by the SDP.

In early 2000, Malawi presented a project proposal to the organization through the Ministry of Information and MACRA. The proposal requested the organization to assist the Malawian Government to promote communication between the rural areas and the urban centers through MCTs. According to the respondents, Internet connectivity was identified as one of the core mediums of communication needing exploration (other media were radio, newspapers and television). The idea was to identify centres in the rural areas where the project would introduce these tools of communication and let these technologies assist in the promotion of business, health, civic education and other social aspects. It was on the basis of this proposal that the organization, in partnership with other donor organizations, pledged both financial and technical support to the Government for the MRTP initiative.

The respondent from MACRA explained that his organisation assisted the Ministry of Information in proposing for the MRTP and helped to seek financial and technical assistance from ITU and UNIDO. UNIDO was also asked to fund the feasibility study for the project. MACRA was, thus, the local executing agency of the MRTP. The respondent explained that in 2002, a pre-feasibility study was done in seven Rural Growth Centres (RGCs) out of which three were identified for further study. The three RGCs were in Mwanza, Kasungu and Karonga districts. A Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) was done in

the three districts and identified the following project locations: Mwanza-Kanduku, Kasungu-Mphepo and Karonga-Lupaso. Comprehensive market research was later conducted in the above-mentioned areas. Thereafter, a complete project document was released which was used in seeking funds for implementation of the project.

The senior official from the Ministry of Information stated that Government's principal role in the MRTP was to address the issue of the Rural Telecommunications Policy which would provide the regulatory framework for the project. According to the respondent, this policy would also provide a conducive environment for the implementation of the Universal Access Fund (UAF) whose main purpose was to fund telecommunication development in marginalized communities through MACRA. The official explained that MACRA would source the money for the fund from the penalties it charged national telecommunication operators who were in breach of the Communications Act.

4.2.1.2 Non implementation of the MRTP

Respondents were asked to identify the main issues that prevented the implementation of the MRTP.

The donor representatives answered that the most important reason was a lack of finance. They noted that the initiative was not backed by immediate financial resources due to a number of reasons. The respondents explained that there was some hesitation on the part of donors to immediately invest in the MRTP due to the poor infrastructure that existed in Malawi at that time. The respondents noted further that their organisation was not certain about the long-term sustainability of the project. They noted that it was risky to put telecentres in rural settings where poverty and illiteracy were pervasive. So while the donors were convinced of the need for the telecentres in those areas, they were still not sure whether there were adequate mechanisms in place, which could have helped the user communities to support the project on a viable basis.

Surprisingly, the respondent from MACRA, the executing agency on the ground, answered that the MRTP has not yet reached the implementation stage. According to the respondent, the project is still work in progress and an agreement with donors is expected to be reached within the first half of 2006. Thereafter, the project is expected to be implemented.

The respondent from the Ministry of Information had a different take on the matter. He noted that no one had a clear idea on how to implement the project. According to him, the main donor organization, UNDP, expressed its disinterest to fund the project in 2002 and advised government to rather seek funding from the private sector. The other donor organizations, namely UNIDO and UNEP, immediately followed suit, citing poor infrastructure and lack of appropriate policy as some of the factors that would make the project unviable. He noted, however, that Government found the donors' excuses unconvincing since there were other infrastructure intensive projects, funded by similar multilateral donors that were running parallel to the MRTP initiative. He was of the opinion that the reasons why donors had withdrawn from the project had to do with allegations of corruption leveled against the then Government.

The respondent conceded, however, that while Malawi has a Communications Act to regulate telecommunication operations in the country, there was no rural telecommunications policy that could guide the development of donor funded telecentre projects in rural communities. He explained that the 1998 Communications Act was indeed inadequate since it was developed at a time when the telecentre phenomenon was relatively unknown in Africa. He added that it was for this reason that the draft Rural Telecommunications Policy, meant to comprehensively cover all telecentre matters especially in rural areas, was already at the cabinet level for appraisal and possible approval.

4.2.1.3 Lessons learned from MRTTP

Respondents were asked to point out lessons that emerged from the project. These focused on implementation issues that could be useful in similar future projects in the country.

Respondents from the donor organization replied that a reliable infrastructure in the country is essential if any future telecentre project is to be viable. They also noted that Malawi does not have a clear telecentre policy, something, which they felt, should be addressed quickly. They added that project ownership ought to be prioritized and this would be achieved by involving the target communities at every stage of the project. Lastly, they noted that mechanisms to ensure project sustainability, once external funding has stopped, should be clearly spelt out in the implementation plans of the project.

The respondent from MACRA noted that critical lessons had been learnt from the UNIDO funded feasibility study to the extent that the organisation had identified another potential area for a pilot telecenter project in the Goliati area, Thyolo district. According to the respondent, MACRA was doing a feasibility study in the area and market research had already been conducted.

According to the respondent from Government, the way forward for telecentres in the country would be to move away from donor-funded telecentres. He was of the opinion that Government should rather provide subsidies to private entrepreneurs to run telecentres in marginalized communities on a commercial basis. The respondent explained that this scenario envisaged a situation where, for example, an interested businessman/woman would get a loan from a bank at special rates subsidised by the Government. The entrepreneur would then invest in telephone lines in a specific area at lower than market prices and some of these lines would go into a telecentre. Government subsidies would then cover the difference to ensure profitability to the telecommunication operator. According to the respondent, the Government's principal role in this

arrangement would be either to pay the subsidies to the telecommunications operator or as guarantor to the loans from the banks taken by entrepreneurs investing in telecentres.

4.2.1.4 Additional issues

Respondents were asked to raise any other issues concerning the concept of telecentre initiatives in Malawi.

Respondents from the donor organisation observed that new information and communications technologies, in particular the Internet, offer a potentially powerful tool for contributing to rural development. However, they noted that the introduction of these technologies into rural settings through telecentres in Malawi would inevitably be hampered by many of the same constraints and difficulties experienced with previous technology transfer attempts if proper planning is not put in place. They advised that the experiences of the MRTP should be applied to future telecentre investments in the country.

On the other hand, the respondent from MACRA observed that the telecenter initiative had received an overwhelming positive response and welcome in most of the rural areas of Malawi. According to the respondent, people were eagerly looking forward to the implementation of telecenter projects in their areas. He added that the telecenter concept is also being advanced through the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and various donor organisations. He noted, for example, that there is a proposed project called “Renewable Energy Promotion through Information and Communication Technology Introduction in Off-grid Rural Communities”. The project aims at establishing telecenters in off-grid teacher training development centres.

Asked if he had any additional issues to raise on the MRTP case, the respondent from Government reserved further comment and referred the researcher to MACRA.

4.2.2 An abridged version of the MRTP feasibility study results (September 2002)

In 2002, a feasibility study for the MRTP was carried out by a reputable local ICT consulting firm, which was contracted by the project donors. During his research tour to Malawi, a representative of the firm was approached by the researcher to have her insights on the MRTP case. However, due to time constraints, she chose only to provide the feasibility assessment report of the case (Mbvundula 2004). What follows is an abridged version of the results of the study, which, according to the respondent, was presented to all stakeholders:

4.2.2.1 Malawi Country Status

According to the report, the study found that:

- Malawi was one of the least developed countries in the world with a population of eleven million.
- The country was divided into 29 administrative districts, twenty-five of which were rural.
- 85% of the population lived in the rural areas and in abject poverty.
- The majority of the rural population traveled great distances to access the few phones available in the rural areas.
- There were minimal ICTs in the rural areas.
- Low literacy levels were prevalent across the country.
- Literacy levels in indigenous tongues were higher than literacy in English.

4.2.2.2 The Malawi Rural Telecentre Project

The project was a collaboration between government and international donors. Thus, the study endorsed the donors' objectives to:

- Establish seven pilot rural MCTs in the country.

- Identify local partners to operate the MCTs to reduce operational and startup costs.
- Identify secure premises.
- Facilitate a competitive public tender for the provision of ICT infrastructure, technical support and telecentre management system.
- Market the concept and services to the community to ensure project ownership and sustainability.

4.2.2.3 Telecommunications sector

The feasibility report shows that:

- Telecommunications growth at that time had been below average for Malawi (4.1% versus 6.9% for Africa).
- There were 59,000 fixed subscribers compared to 83,000 mobile subscribers.
- 1.3% of the population had access to a fixed/mobile phone. 45% of fixed lines were in urban areas.
- MTL was the sole fixed line telecommunications operator.

4.2.2.4 ICT Policies in Malawi

At the time of the preparation of the report, the study found that:

- The telecommunications sector in the country was being regulated by the Telecommunications Act of 1998.
- The Rural Telecommunications Policy (RTP) was still awaiting final Government approval at the time the report was being prepared. Its goal was to enable 80% of the population to access a phone within 5km.
- The national ICT Policy, meant to review the socio-economic impact of ICTs in the country, was still awaiting final Government approval.

4.2.2.5 Key Issues

The study identified three key issues necessary to underpin the project which were:

1. Donors should provide a minimum set of ICT services for the project and ensure scalability and sustainability after project funds had ended.
2. Donors should ensure appropriate content is available. Appropriate content in this regard meant information, which was relevant to the needs of the communities.
3. Donors should encourage cross gender involvement in all aspects of the telecentre.

4.2.2.6 How success would be guaranteed

According to the study, project success would, among other things, be guaranteed if donors could install a full range of ICTs and services such as:

- Telephones.
- Faxes.
- Photocopiers.
- Computers.
- Community radios.
- Television.
- Internet connectivity.

4.2.2.7 Relevant Content

The need for relevant content was emphasized in the feasibility study. According to the study, relevant content for the community would, ideally, be in local language. This would include:

- Government information.
- Employment advertisements.

- Information on social issues.
- Agricultural and economic information.
- Civic education.
- Business information.
- Health Information.
- Educational information.
- Content in indigenous languages.
- NGO information.

4.2.2.8 Information Services

The study advised that the telecentre should, among other things, offer the following information services:

- Make Government documentation easily available and accessible to the target communities.
- Micro-finance information.
- HIV/AIDS awareness messages.
- Educational material.
- Agricultural produce prices.
- Make provisions to use the MCT to support the requirements of the communities.
- Analysis of user information needs.

4.2.2.9 Beneficiaries of the project

Finally, the target user groups for the MRTP would be:

- Local governments.
- Educational facilities.

- Health facilities.
- Transporters.
- Farmers.
- Students and the youth.
- Entrepreneurs.

It needs to be emphasised that the feasibility study was fully funded by donors and was finalized and presented to all stakeholders in September 2002.

As noted in the opening Chapter of this study, the announcement of the MRTP was met with great expectations from both the government and target communities, although its non-implementation was never fully explained to Malawians. However, careful analysis of the data gathered for this case reveals that the MRTP could have been hampered, right from the outset, by the following factors:

- An un-enabling policy environment (see Sections 1.7.3 and 4.2.2.4).
- Poor telecommunications infrastructure (Sections 1.7.3 and 4.2.2.3).
- Erratic power supply (Section 1.7.3).
- Widespread poverty especially in rural areas due to high unemployment levels (Sections 1.7.3 and 4.2.2.1).
- High illiteracy levels (Sections 1.7.3 and 4.2.2.1).

It is safe to infer, therefore, that the above mentioned factors, common threads in all the collected data for the MRTP case, must have alerted the project donors to the reality that, while providing phone services could be done within the market, providing Internet services could not. It must also have been clear to the project donors, possibly on the basis of the results of the feasibility study, that other ICT-related services such as CV typing and faxing needed to be combined with other services, whether ICT-related or not, to make them sustainable.

Secondly, it is clear from the data collected for the MRTP case that finding employment would be the first priority for most people in Malawi, especially in rural areas, and a gap between skill levels and the requirements of formal-sector jobs could be a large contributing factor to unemployment (see Section 4.2.2.1). Yet there are relatively few services in place to address this. Thus, the lack of implementation of the MRTP by its donors, a project which could have potentially addressed the local need for ICT training in rural areas and possibly harness ICTs for local entrepreneurial opportunities and employment, is understandable. The donors quickly noted the unviability of the project owing to the high costs of telecommunication services which could have been unaffordable to the rural masses suffering from the dual scourges of unemployment and poverty (See 1.7.3 and 4.2.2.1).

4.2.3 Email questionnaire results

The following are the results of the email questionnaire that the researcher received from the single respondent on the Bhamshela case:

4.2.3.1 The role of the donor in the establishment of Bhamshela Telecentre

The respondent was asked to explain the role of the USA in the establishment of Bhamshela Telecentre.

The respondent explained that her organisation was established in accordance with the 1996 Telecommunications Act No 103 as amended in 2001. It was established to promote the goals of universal access and services in under-serviced areas where 60% of the South African population resides. The respondent stated that under-serviced and impoverished communities live mainly in rural and peri-urban areas where levels of poverty are high, infrastructure is poor, and access to basic services is limited.

According to the respondent, the same Telecommunications Act mandated her organisation to establish a Universal Service Fund (USF). The telecommunications operators – namely Telkom, Vodacom, MTN and Cell C, contribute to this fund. The respondent explained that the USF is meant to be used exclusively for the following:

- i. Assist needy persons towards the cost of the provision of telecommunications services.
- ii. Finance extensions of telecommunications services to areas and communities that are underserved or unserved.
- iii. Procure Internet services and equipment necessary to access the Internet for public schools.
- iv. Establish centres where access can be obtained to telecommunications facilities.
- v. Assist small business and cooperatives to acquire and construct infrastructure to provide telecommunications services to areas that are unserved and underserved.
- vi. Facilitate the provision of multimedia services.
- vii. Establish public information terminals.

Thus, from 1998, the organisation has been involved in establishing telecentres nationwide including the Bhamshela Telecentre. The respondent concluded that this mandate still continues which is to fund and establish telecentres in communities, and cyberlabs for schools so that they may all gain access to ICTs and the Internet.

4.2.3.2 The role of donors in the scope of Bhamshela Telecentre

The respondent was asked to define the donor's role in the scope of the Telecentre project.

The respondent replied that at the time of establishment, the Telecentre aimed at providing the following services:

- Computer services.
- Voice (telephones).
- Data (fax machines, Internet, and email).
- Video (CD – Rom).
- Typing, printing and photocopying facilities.

The respondent noted further that Bhamshela is what is known as a Multi-Purpose Community Telecentre, which is a telecentre that provides ICT facilities within a Multi-Purpose Community Centre (MPCC). MPCCs are rolled out by the Government Communication Information Services (GCIS) as part of a “one stop development service” within a community. Telecentres are, in this case, part of a wider service offered within the facility some of which can include a clinic, postal agency, and Home Affairs office and social services, and access to other government services and information.

4.2.3.3 The role of donors in site identification

The respondent was asked to explain the role of the donors in the identification of Bhamshela as a site for this project.

The respondent explained that her organisation has Provincial Coordinators nationwide who are individually responsible for their respective provinces, and enable the organisation to keep abreast with all that is happening across the country. Currently there are six established Provincial Offices – KwaZulu-Natal (Durban), Free State and Northern Cape (Bloemfontein), Eastern Cape (Bisho), Gauteng, Mpumalanga and North West (Johannesburg), Limpopo (Polokwane), and one established in the Western Cape. These Provincial Coordinators are integral to the site identification process. The

respondent added that Provincial Coordinators do site visits based on the following criteria:

- Historically under-serviced areas (based on teledensity and Geographic Information Systems), and rural communities.
- Areas identified in line with the Government's policy thrust known as the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Program (ISRDP).
- Other rural areas in general including peri-urban areas.
- Priority in urban areas is given to facilities for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN). These would include facilities for people with diminished mental capacity or other physical disabilities.
- Sites for disabled people, women and youth.

The respondent noted that once a site has been identified, the research section of the organisation embarks on a community profiling and needs assessment takes place. With regard to community profiling, information is gathered on resources available within the community. A meeting of the key stakeholders in the community is then set up. According to the respondent, the community leaders in Bhamshela were involved in the whole process mentioned above so that the donors could ensure the community's co-operation. The unique needs of the community were assessed on the following basis:

- Poverty levels.
- Literacy levels.
- Availability of existing structures to house the telecentre (privately owned buildings are not acceptable).
- What other programs and initiatives were running in the area.
- Whether these initiatives could be enhanced by a telecentre.
- Telecommunication facilities already existing in the community.
- Identification of Not for Profit Organisations and key stakeholders in the community.

- Identification of proposed champions.

4.2.3.4 The role of the donors in preparing the community for the project

The respondent was asked to explain the role of the donors in preparing the community for the project.

The respondent noted that it is an integral part to the future success of a telecentre that the future recipients declare their commitment to the spirit and vision of the project. She added that in most of the identified areas, where her organisation has been involved in, there was no prior knowledge of the USA or its mandates and programs. The Provincial Coordinators, therefore, arrange community awareness and mobilisation campaigns in the target areas. According to the respondent, this can be done by several means:

- Public meetings by the community stakeholders.
- The distribution of flyers and pamphlets.
- Slots on local radio stations.

With regard to Bhamshela, the respondent noted that a public meeting of key identified stakeholders was set up to introduce her organisation and its activities to the community. The same meeting also outlined what the proposed plans were for the community. This was meant to achieve the following objectives:

- To raise the community awareness.
- To outline the process, clarify the roles and expectations of different stakeholders from start to finish of the rollout.
- To obtain relevant input from the community about its specific needs and concerns.
- To identify feedback mechanisms.

- To get the “buy-in” and ownership by all the people.

4.2.3.5 The role of the donors in the identification and preparation of champions

The respondent was asked to explain the role donors played in the identification and preparation of project champions.

The respondent replied that the following guidelines are followed for the preparation of champions at each site:

- Invitation and selection of community organisations.
- Validation of champions to be done after confirmation with stakeholders.
- Champions awareness and education which would include:
 - Information about the funding organisation (its mandates, programs and objectives).
 - Explaining the role of ICTs in addressing the development challenges of the community and specifically the experience of the funding organisation in establishing telecentres.
 - Outlining of the expectations, role and responsibilities of the champions both in the pre and post rollout periods.
- Establishment of the formal structures of governance:
 - Election of the board.
 - Registration of the telecentre.
 - Induction of the board.
- Profile of the champions.
- Training and development for the champions.
- Business plan for the telecentre.

- Daily operation plan of the telecentre.
 - Services
 - Pricing.
 - Daily entries.
 - Banking.
 - Business hours.
 - Housekeeping.
 - Relationship with the board.
- Roles and responsibilities of the manager, assistant and volunteers (if any).

4.2.3.6 Strategic partnerships

The respondent was asked whether the organisation had any partners that assisted in its rollout of the telecentre.

The respondent answered that the organisation had adopted a strategic “partnership” approach for the successful implementation of its rollouts for telecentres. These partnerships incorporated the following broad categories:

- Government departments / State enterprises.
- Provincial and Local governments.
- Service providers.
- Private and business sector.
- International donors.

4.2.3.7 Any other issues

The respondent was asked to raise any other issues that would enhance the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres in Africa.

The respondent replied that it is vital for the success of future donor-funded telecentre initiatives in Africa that ongoing support and communication channels are maintained between the donors and the community way beyond the implementation stage. According to the respondent, further dissemination of information and feedback to the community is necessary to achieve the following:

- To inform the community of the progress at each stage and the challenges faced and met.
- To inform all parties involved about the anticipated rollout timeframes and deliverables.
- To inform all parties about the anticipated launch date and procedures.
- To inform the community about the post rollout support and roles.
- To familiarize the community with post rollout problem solving.

Based on the collected data for this case, the researcher is not convinced that the donors' decision to introduce an assortment of services at Bhamshela MCT was the best for this community (see Sections 1.7.2 and 4.2.3.2). Thus, the following problems associated with the project were identified:

Firstly, the donors should have ensured that the Telecentre was either explicitly wider in scope to meet its community development services mandate (which would have required more external funding other than user fees), or it should have simply focused on locally relevant ICT services. For example, a thorough needs assessment, which the donors claim was carried out (see Section 4.2.3.3), could easily have shown the high demand for telephony and the lack of capacity for job-related computer skills which the Telecentre had subsequently introduced (see Section 1.7.2). What was happening instead was that

uneconomical services offered by the Telecentre were being subsidized by services in demand such as telephony, which in turn affected pricing. Since telephony was the service most in demand, the increased cost on the service became a limiting factor in terms of accessibility by the community (see Section 1.7.2). Fundamental flaws like these tend to confirm Schreiner's (2006) claim that, in fact, no needs assessment was ever carried out at Bhamshela by the donors (see Section 1.7.2).

The fact that donors failed to conduct a thorough community needs assessment at Bhamshela immediately spawned the second problem: the provision of irrelevant services such as computer skills training for the formal employment sector. To begin with, computer classes were never part of the original services envisaged by the Telecentre planners (see Section 4.2.3.2). This is because the staff did not have the required training to deliver them and the community could not afford them due to the existing high unemployment and poverty levels (Section 1.7.2). Thus, resorting to this training service was not only disingenuous but also a desperate survival strategy on the part of the donors as they tried to save the telecentre from a downward spiral. The result was that many students defaulted on their tuition payments because they could not afford them. Again, this does not appear to have served the community in the best manner. A clear needs assessment and targeting of resources by the donors (for example, on staff training), where necessary, could have been better than setting up a clearly unsustainable and unaffordable service.

Thirdly, the donors only created a further strain on the overall viability of the Telecentre by offering expensive Internet services where local demand was absent. At the very best, it was a symbolic gesture and a service to just a handful of people. The IDRC (2002) suggests two basic solutions to the difficult situation in which Bhamshela found itself in: Bhamshela had to either introduce a different pricing structure on the Internet service so that local demand could be accommodated and increased over time (implying subsidisation over the medium term from an external source), or it had to focus the Telecentre's efforts in areas likely to yield better results which in this case was telephony.

In conclusion, Bhamshela Telecentre could have been viable and had the potential to be self-sufficient but it has seemingly been let down by inadequate training and poor management by the USA (see Section 1.7.2).

4.3 Status of Nakaseke Telecentre based on data from the literature

As noted earlier, information concerning the Nakaseke case was gleaned solely from the literature (see Chapter 3) since the donor representatives of the case, namely UNDP, ITU and IDRC did not respond to the email questionnaires sent to them by the researcher. Hence, it is the literature that provides the basis for the following discussion:

The fact that the Nakaseke MCT hosts a multiplicity of modern ICTs apparently turned out to be a double edged sword for its donors especially at the early stages. While it inspired a lot of enthusiasm amongst many members of the community, partly out of sheer curiosity, the MCT also deterred some illiterate members of the community who could have regarded the initiative as highly esoteric (Section 1.7.1). However, the donor initiative allowing the localisation of the applications of the MCT to a level understandable by all community members helped immensely to sell the idea of the Centre. The identification and moulding of champions within the community also helped immensely in terms of community ownership and the long-term sustainability of the project. In brief, this study has shown that the MCT has been positively influenced by the following factors:

- The zeal and interest of the local champions and the community in general in making the MCT a sustainable reality (see Section 1.7.1).
- The development of ICT applications in local languages (see Sections 1.7.1 and 2.5.1.7).
- The role of donors in facilitating financial and technical partnerships that have been forged both at local and international levels which have brought in a lot of useful support and experience (Section 1.7.1).

- The creativity and dedication of the staff and stakeholders (Section 1.7.1).

However, the MCT seems to have been constrained by the following factors:

- Poor telecommunications infrastructure (Section 1.7.1).
- Unreliable power supply (Section 1.7.1).
- The high rate of illiteracy in the community (Section 1.7.1).
- The scale of the project.

In the final analysis though, the project donors will have been greatly encouraged by the relatively positive feedback from users as manifested by Joyce Namayanja's testimony of what the MCT has done for the community (see Section 2.5.1.7).

4.4 Analysis and comment

What follows is the researcher's analysis and comments on the data collected from the three cases in relation to the objectives of the study. It should be noted that the broad headings used in this analysis have been derived from the research questions of the study.

4.4.1 Role of donor policies on telecentre projects

Besides providing funding and an administrative push, donor policies can also be instrumental in producing the human resources that are vital to a telecentre initiative in rural areas. This can happen at international, regional, national and community levels (see Section 2.2.1).

For example, at an international level, the MRTTP donor representatives in this study disclosed that since the 1990's, their organisation and other related agencies introduced the SDP initiative in a number of developing countries across the globe. The programme

targeted countries, which did not have well developed ICT infrastructure that could support an ICT mediated information exchange across the digital divide. In Malawi, the organisation's brief was to investigate the possibility of helping the government to promote communication between the rural areas and the urban centres through MCTs. The SDP drive, in the end, became the precursor to the MRTP concept (see 4.2.1.1). Similarly, both the Nakaseke and Bhamshela MCTs were borne out of policy formulations, especially at the international donor level, that sought to bridge the international information and knowledge divide between the information rich and the information poor (see Sections 1.7.1; 1.7.2 and 4.2.3.1).

At the continental level, the African Information Society Initiative launched in Addis Ababa by various multilateral donors in 1996, as discussed in Section 1.7.1, is a good example of a regional donor commitment which augers well for the diffusion of ICT mediated development in Africa through telecentres. Ten years on, however, we are yet to see any significant follow-up support from donors that would actualise the Addis Ababa declarations across the continent.

On the national level, donor policies have been influential as well. In Uganda, for example, various donor organisations have provided expertise and funding to make the Internet affordable both in rural and urban communities across the nation. This arose in the wake of the 1997 Ugandan Communication Act, which provided for the liberalisation of the communication sector country. One of the fruits of this national donor commitment was the establishment of the Nakaseke MCT (see Section 1.7.1). In South Africa, international organisations, such as IDRC, have collaborated with the USA, which has been the key actor in establishing and funding telecenters in under-served and unserved rural areas across the country (see Section 1.7.2).

However donor policies can also have a negative influence. For example, the chronic problems at Bhamshela Telecentre have pushed USA policies under the microscope. As

noted in Section 1.7.2, the USA had for some time been compromised by a poor reputation, internal management difficulties and poor relationships with other key organisations. This, among other things, resulted in a large telephone bill that the Telecentre could not afford to pay, forcing Telkom to disconnect all telephone lines at the Telecentre in 2001 (Section 1.7.2). Benjamin (2001), further points out that the USA “never developed definitions, indicators or benchmarks for any key terms that would allow it to strategize effectively”. In addition, the Agency, “partly in response to political pressure”, moved quickly towards implementing Bhamshela Telecentre without due regard to any supporting institutions that would provide a clientele base (see section 1.7.2).

In Malawi, one of the major challenges faced by the MRTP was the lack of clear donor implementation policies regarding the project (see Section 4.2.1.2). This confusion is borne out by the different reasons given by respondents as to why the project was never implemented (Section 4.2.1.2). To be fair to the donors, however, there was general consensus from the respondents of the MRTP case that there was no regulatory policy that could have facilitated the implementation of telecentres during that period. It did not help matters that the Rural Telecommunications Policy, which would have assisted donors in their efforts to develop MCTs in marginalised areas, was still awaiting government approval (see sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.2.4).

There is no doubt, therefore, that good donor policies can give visibility and help mobilize resources that can promote access and use of ICTs in Africa while poor donor policies can achieve the opposite.

4.4.2 The role of donors in community ownership and moulding of local champions

The role of donors in identifying and moulding local “champions” or what Everett Rogers (1995) calls “innovators”, who can mobilize others in the community to accept the vision of the telecentre initiative cannot be over emphasized. This is critical for the

project's sustainability once the external funding has ended. This study has shown that ownership can be promoted if the beneficiary communities contribute to the decisions made before the telecentre project started (see Section 2.6.1).

As noted in Section 1.7.1, the main reason “for the extraordinary reputation of the Nakaseke Telecentre as one of the most active and vibrant in the continent has depended a lot on the good will and commitment of local political leaders” (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 108). The two researchers explain that “these leaders had made tremendous contributions toward community mobilisation, particularly during the initial stages of the project” (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 108). Thus, community leaders in Nakaseke, with the encouragement of the project donors, have proved to be true champions for the cause of the Telecentre. As noted further in Section 1.7.1, these champions have not only been fighting for the survival of the Telecenter, but they have also been entertaining new ideas to better serve their community through the use of new ICTs.

Similarly, in Bhamshela, the respondent from USA indicated that laid down guidelines were followed for the preparation of champions at the site. These included invitation and selection of community organisations, validation of the champions after confirmation had been done with stakeholders and champions' awareness and education. The respondent added that the outlining of the expectations, roles and responsibilities of the champions during both the pre and post rollout periods were part of the champion identification and moulding process in order to encourage community ownership of the project (see Section 4.2.3.5).

Based on the above examples, the study has shown that “the obscurity and abstractness of the Information Society” (Mayanja 2001) requires the zeal of individuals who can translate and demonstrate the relevance and application of these kinds of concepts to the realities of the community. Mayanja (2001) further adds that for the innovators to be

from the community itself increases the credibility of the telecentre initiative. The professional literature on the diffusion of innovations also underlines the importance of the innovator. “The innovator,” says Rogers, “plays an important role in the diffusion process: that of launching the new idea in the system by importing the innovation from outside the system’s boundaries and igniting early adopters” (Rogers 1995).

4.4.3 Role of donors in ensuring project sustainability

This study has shown that when selecting locations, donors take into account the level of potential demand for communication and information services from a large number and a wide range of users and the viability of the project in the particular area (see Chapter 1). This ensures maximum utilisation of the facility and through cost sharing, reduces the expense to individuals (Ernberg 1998). In this regard, the location of the Nakaseke MCT has proved to be spot on. Relative to other telecentres in the country, 61.1% of the people in Nakaseke used the Telecentre in 2003 compared to 33.3% of the population around Bugolobi Telecentre and only 30.0% of those around Nabweru Telecentre (see Section 1.7.2). On the other hand, while the MRTP donors were convinced of the need and demand for telecentres in rural areas, they were not sure whether there were adequate infrastructural mechanisms in place that could have helped the user communities to support the project on a viable basis (see Section 4.2.1.2). The Bhamshela MCT donor explained that the organisation has Provincial Coordinators nationwide who are individually responsible for their respective provinces, and enable the organisation to keep abreast with all that is happening in various provinces across the country (see Section 4.2.3.3). The implication is that, based on the expert advice of its Provincial Coordinator, the organisation was satisfied with the user demand, the surrounding infrastructure and the viability level of the Bhamshela project before they set it up in the community. Yet, evidence from the literature as well as comments from both Burton (2005) and Schreiner (2006) suggest otherwise. In fact, the cumulative evidence suggests that the Telecentre faced various problems right from the start, ranging from poor management, lack of community needs assessment, inadequate training, unserviceable equipment to the introduction of irrelevant services (see Section 1.7.2). This suggests

laxity in the pre-feasibility assessment procedures on the part of the USA's Provincial Coordinators, a factor that can adversely affect project sustainability.

The study has also shown that to ensure sustainability, donors usually consider the proximity of other organizations and institutions that can play roles in using, supporting, maintaining or operating the telecentre. Such organizations might include: health centres, schools/colleges/universities, community and cultural centres, religious centres, libraries, organizations of farmers/fishermen/craftsmen, post offices, local/national government administration offices, radio and television stations, NGOs and community-based organizations, among others (see Sections 1.7.1 and 1.7.2). Nakaseke MCT, for example, served not only the local people, but also twenty-four neighbouring primary schools, four secondary schools, a primary teacher's college and the nearby hospital (Section 1.7.1). However, this was not the case with Bhamshela MCT which did not have the benefit of these organizations in its vicinity due to its isolated position. As a stand alone, the Telecentre had a very narrow clientele base, which meant donors had to raise the cost of the services quite high to try to keep it on its feet (Section 1.7.2).

Other donor infrastructural considerations that can enhance sustainability that are highlighted in this study include: a location that is easily accessible to potential users (for example, near public transport or within walking distance); the availability of an existing structure (for example a school building, library, extension office and so on) or a new structure which is suited to use as a telecentre (appropriate layout, secure); access to electricity; and connection to telephone lines and the Internet (see Chapter 1). At both the Nakaseke and Bhamshela MCTs, the buildings housing the ICTs were donated by the communities and renovated to an acceptable level for the project to work in keeping with the above-mentioned point (see Sections 1.7.1 and 1.7.2).

However, evidence from the collected data shows that problems regarding telephone connectivity and electricity supply severely affected both projects. In Nakaseke, for

example, accessing the Internet was difficult due to the poor quality of the telephone line. Huge telephone bills were also a constant worry (see 1.7.1). The problem of connectivity can be identified at Bhamshela as well, where the Telecentre was temporarily closed in late 2001 due to the disconnection of the phone lines by Telkom owing to a huge unpaid bill (Section 1.7.2). These problems suggest that in some situations, the development of MCTs may be inappropriate, and other types of communication solutions, electronic or otherwise, should be explored by the donors.

Finally, the study has shown that, to ensure project success, donors need to consider the socio-cultural aspects that may affect the utilisation of the telecentre (see Chapter 1). This is important because, to be effective, telecentres need to be integrated into communities so that they lessen, instead of widen the communication gaps between the information rich and the information poor (Ernberg 1998; Subedi and Garforth 2001). Donors have seemingly realised that in the face of widespread interest in the “digital divide” debate, broad-based community participation should become part of the telecenters’ mandate. This is important in order to reach out to ethnic minorities, women, children and the elderly who are often on the wrong side of that divide especially in Africa. Experts argue that sometimes the technology or the staffing at a telecentre, or its location may intimidate those who might benefit from the services (Ernberg 1998). In this context, it is significant to note that one of the two managers at Bhamshela MCT was a woman (see Section 1.7.2). Thus, Bhamshela donors paid attention to the communication gaps based on gender, that often exist and sought to incorporate into the Telecentre management the different communication patterns that exist between men and women, especially in rural patriarchal communities. Similarly, the Nakaseke MCT donors sought to give women recognition by identifying them as one of the Telecentre’s core target group (see 1.7.1) although, as Table 2 shows, its 25.8% female user rate is way below expectations. There are other factors which can assist donors to ensure project sustainability as discussed below:

4.4.3.1 Community awareness building

Just like in many parts in Africa, telecentres were a relatively new phenomenon to many people in the rural areas that the cases for this study were contextualised. Thus, in a bid to assist rural people to identify the technological applications, services and content they may need, donors tend to familiarize the target communities with the uses of the telecentres, potential applications and the content appropriate for their situations (see Chapter 4). Ways to accomplish this may include study tours, whereby donors take rural people to where ICTs already exist. Alternatively, demonstrations of and training with the technologies in rural areas may be organised (Subedi and Garforth 2001).

Thus, at Nakaseke Telecentre, donors sought to demystify computer communications to some extent, through training and general awareness programmes organised in collaboration with a local ICT company. This was partly achieved when donors trained 60 community members in computer communication services at the MCT leading to the growth of a core group of skilled people within the local community (see Section 1.7.1). This core group would later teach other members of the community in ICT usage. Similarly, at Bhamshela MCT, the respondent noted that a public meeting of key identified stakeholders was set up to introduce her organisation and its activities to the community, and also to outline the proposed plans for their community (see Section 4.2.3.4). According to her, ICT usage was covered. Yet, this is at odds with evidence from the literature, where it is reported that ICTs such as the scanner and the printer always remained idle whereas email and Internet services were disappointingly underutilized (see Section 1.7.2).

As Subedi and Garforth (2001) rightly observe, one of the greatest risks in telecentre development is that the technology chosen by donors may remain “alien” to the local community, thus, affecting the community’s sense of ownership of the telecentre. This of course limits the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative. However, this can be addressed if donors engage the local community in all stages of the development of the project and through capacity building, which develops the skills of local people to take

responsibility for the organisation, maintenance and operation of the telecentre once the external funding has stopped (Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003).

4.4.3.2 Choice of computer applications

Some of the applications that were implemented in the Nakaseke and Bhamshela MCTs included “generic” content. This would be content found on the Internet and generally developed outside the community (Mbvundula 2002). However, as the MRTP feasibility study rightly points out, the most important applications are likely to be those developed specifically for and by the local users (see 4.2.2.7). This is especially true given the high levels of illiteracy reported in all the three cases (see Sections 1.7.1; 1.7.2 and 1.7.3). Thus, this study has shown that donors are increasingly trying to include many segments of the community, including youth and women, in the development of specialised applications.

A good example is at Nakaseke MCT where a donor/local community collaboration came up with a CD-ROM that offers direct access to information for women who are among the most marginalized in development. The content of the CD-ROM offers a wealth of information on “best practices” of successful entrepreneurial women, as well as the “Small business training manual and marketing strategies”, developed by OEF and field-tested extensively among low-income women in Africa. The CD-ROM is currently available in English and Luganda language versions (see Section 1.7.1). The issue of “appropriate content” was also emphasized in the feasibility study for the MRTP in which donors were called upon to ensure that information that is relevant to the target communities would be made available (Section 4.2.2.7). However, from the data collected on the Bhamshela case, there is no evidence to suggest that local content was ever debated or used at the Telecentre.

Yet, as Ernberg (1998) notes, telecentres are not just technology centres; they can also be “living laboratories”, which facilitate local sharing of information and ideas as the

Nakaseke experience discussed above shows. A telecentre can take full advantage of expert information from donors as well as facilitate the creation of a common local development vision. Ernberg (1998) concludes that donor-funded telecentres are not only a means for donors to provide simple, single-point access to external information and services, but also a facility for local residents and groups to organize village meetings, video conferences and technology training to address their development needs.

4.4.3.3 The training of telecentre staff and users

Another critical factor that can ensure telecentre sustainability is the issue of training. Both at the Nakaseke and Bhamshela MCTs, donors rightly incorporated training as a central component in the management of the projects (see 1.7.1 and 1.7.2). This is because training is necessary at all stages of telecentre projects. Yet some of the problems experienced by the Bhamshela MCT clearly point to inadequate training both for the Telecentre operators and its users. This is confirmed by Khumalo's (2001) evaluation of the Telecentre, reported in Section 1.7.2 of this study:

operators cannot accurately record transactions. This is clearly a function of their training that they received from the USA. For example, they are not able to generate a shift report neither from the telephone management system nor from the fax machine. The training was good, but very general. It did not prepare them for the day-to-day activities of running a telecentre.

In fact, one of the reasons why computer classes failed at the Bhamshela MCT was that its operators did not have the necessary skills to offer this service (see Sections 1.7.2). There was also a lack of understanding on responsibilities and obligations by the Telecentre operators as some of the operators thought that the USA was obliged to pay their salaries. This confusion could be blamed on poor administrative training by the donors. There is also evidence, as noted earlier, that most of the equipment at Bhamshela MCT was standing idle because both the operators and the community did not have the skills to use them (see Section 1.7.2).

The sad scenario at Bhamshela MCT highlights the fact that the provision of ongoing training by donors for the users of the telecentres and training on an as-needed basis to

upgrade staff skills is required to meet the changing technology and content requirements of the telecentres.

4.4.4 Collaborative local needs and skills assessment

A participatory needs assessment between the project donors, the project proposers and local community actors can help to identify the information and training requirements of the local population. At the same time, it is important to uncover local skills and knowledge. These two items help guide donors in the selection and development of applications and in identifying the technology, which is useful and appropriate for local people (Mayanja 2001).

Based on the available data, this study cannot say with finality whether or not needs and skills assessment was actually carried out at the Nakaseke Telecentre. However, the study can safely infer that no community needs assessment was carried at the Bhamshela case. This inference is apparent when one notes that a collaborative needs assessment at the Telecentre could easily have identified the lack of demand for some services which the MCT was offering (see 1.7.2). The result was that the uneconomical services offered at the Telecentre (computer classes and Internet) were being subsidised by a service very much in demand (telephony), which in turn affected the pricing of the latter. However, even though low Internet and email usage is also reported at Nakaseke MCT (Section 1.7.1), collaborative efforts were made by the donors and the local community to improve the situation by coming up with applications that are in the local Luganda language (see Sections 1.7.1; 2.5.1.7).

Ernberg (1998) says that good techniques for needs assessment can be easily developed and used according to specific situations. The time required for the assessment will vary depending on factors such as the availability of existing information about the proposed telecentre location, the depth of information required in the planning stage of the telecentre, and the level of use of ICTs at the proposed location (Ernberg 1998).

4.4.5 Participatory monitoring and evaluation

Finally, it is also important for donors, in collaboration with all stakeholders and the local community, to monitor and evaluate the process of telecentre development and implementation. The elements monitored should not only include the number of users and the telecentre services that are most utilised, but also the impact of the telecentre on the quality of life in rural areas (see Section 2.6.3).

An evaluation carried by Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu (2003: 83) at Nakaseke Telecentre, for example, reveals that Internet and email services were the least utilised services at the Center (see Section 1.7.1). The two evaluators attributed this to poor electricity and expensive connectivity while Dagron (2001) believed at the time that the Internet was still not relevant to the people's daily lives. Dagron's (2001) argument seems more plausible given that the subsequent establishment of content specifically designed for local users at the telecentre was embraced with great enthusiasm (see Sections 1.7.1; 2.5.1.7.).

At Bhamshela, an internal evaluation carried out by Khumalo (2001) also cites the underutilisation of the Internet and email services. Khumalo attributes this to three things: firstly, the operators' and users' incompetence in using Internet/email; secondly, most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) did not have local points of presence (POPs) and thirdly, access was relatively expensive and the software installed on most computers was inappropriate (see Section 1.7.2). The evaluation also revealed the lack of understanding of the responsibilities and obligations between the operators and the donors, which could have affected morale. For example, as mentioned in Section 1.7.2, some operators at the Telecentre thought that the USA had to pay their salaries. Yet, according to Khumalo (2001) this could have been against the USA's own policy, a situation that reveals lack of adequate communication between the USA and the representatives of the telecentre organisation (see Section 1.7.2).

The experience of Nakaseke, as cited above, shows that donors can make modifications in the mode of operation, content, the services provided and the technology used at the telecentre since these will evolve over time. Although this is true for many donor projects, it is particularly pertinent to donor-funded telecentres, which usually employ new and rapidly changing ICTs.

4.5 Summary

This Chapter presented and analysed the data collected by the two main research instruments, namely an email questionnaire for the Nakaseke and Bhamshela cases (Appendix C) and an interview schedule for the MRTP case (Appendix D), as well as a third minor protocol of questions (Appendix E) used to collect data from local role players of the MRTP. An abridged version of the feasibility report for the MRTP case was also presented and analysed.

It should be emphasized, however, that while the face-to-face interviews progressed relatively smoothly to collect constructive and valuable data, the email questionnaire yielded only one response from a representative from USA, the donor of the Bhamshela MCT. This means that a productive and exhaustive dialogue about the role of donors in the Nakaseke case could not be achieved using email forcing the researcher to rely solely on literature (see Chapter 3).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Chapter is laid out as follows: Section 5.1 reviews the research purpose and objectives. An overview of the study follows in Section 5.2 while key findings are presented in Section 5.3. Section 5.4 will give the main conclusions drawn from the study followed by recommendations in Section 5.5. Finally, Section 5.6 will come up with suggestions for further research.

5.1 Review of research purpose and objectives

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentres in Africa. This was achieved by looking at success factors and reasons of failure at three donor-funded telecentres across three countries on the continent. The projects in question were Nakaseke Telecentre in Uganda, Bhamshela Telecentre in South Africa and the MRTTP in Malawi. The objectives of the study were:

- To determine the role of donor policies in telecentre projects in Africa by looking at the key areas of success and reasons for failure (if any) at the three case studies under review.
- To explore whether donor-funded telecentres provide a sustainable way of providing universal access to ICTs and determine the conditions that must be met to make them sustainable.
- To determine the extent to which the donor-funded telecentre model can engender community ownership and the moulding of local heroes.
- To explore the dynamics of strategic partnerships between the project donors, the project proposers and local community actors and assess how this partnership, or lack thereof, affects the management of the telecentre.
- Based on the findings of the study, to recommend key success factors for sustainable donor-funded telecentres in Africa.

5.2 Overview of the study

Chapter 1 identified and defined the problem of the study, namely investigating the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability of donor-funded telecentre projects in Africa. It provided a detailed account of what the study would cover and how it would approach the research problem. Key concepts were defined in order to acquaint the reader with the research. The Chapter then presented the research objectives and questions. The Chapter also provided the background information regarding the three donor-funded telecentres which were the focus of this study. Finally, the Chapter established the justification, scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 presented a review of the theory of donor aid in Africa in terms of its emergence and approaches. The Chapter then discussed and analysed available research on the concept of donor aid in Africa in its broadest sense before focusing on donor-funded telecentre projects on the continent. The role played by the donors in the actual establishment and management of these projects was also examined.

Chapter 3 detailed the research design and methodology underpinning the study and explained the basis upon which it was chosen. The criteria for choosing the case studies were also explained. The Chapter then provided detailed information about the population used in the study, as well as the research instruments used to gather information from the population. Finally, the Chapter provided the data analysis procedures before evaluating the research methodology.

Chapter 4 presented, interpreted and discussed the results of the study with reference to the background information regarding the three case studies discussed in Chapter 1, with reference to literature review in Chapter 2 and the objectives outlined in Chapter 1.

5.3 Key findings

The key findings for this study were as follows:

- Africa depends heavily on external finance and expertise to establish MCTs because of its lack of financial capacity, technical know-how and infrastructure to establish and implement such expensive projects (see Section 1.3). Consequently, African countries have sometimes tended to bear the full burden of bad planning due to top – down management policies used by donors (see Section 4.4.1). Problems at Bhamshela Telecentre can be largely ascribed to such poor management policies by the donors. However, the Nakaseke donors can be credited for their foresight and proactive management policies both of which have ensured the relative success of the Telecentre (see Section 3.2.2). Meanwhile, MRTP donors can, partly, be held responsible for the non-implementation of the project due to their lack of clarity regarding their project implementation policies (see 4.2.1.2).
- The various experiences from the three cases clearly demonstrate that donors cannot apply a single model of implementation uniformly across the region due to varying political and socio-economic realities. On the contrary, relative success stories, like those from Nakaseke Telecentre, have largely been based on factors such as collaborative and participatory mechanisms. These enabled the community and other role players to have a strong input into the establishment and management of the Telecentre and as a result project heroes were identified and incorporated by the donors. This type of community involvement corresponds with, and contributes to the achievement of the social goal of donor-funded telecentres, namely to address the needs of the community, and to undertake actions based on the use of ICTs to improve the quality of life of the population.
- Finally, the study has also highlighted the fact that if project sustainability is to be achieved, donors need to constantly improve the training and management

component of telecentres. The study has shown that the training of operators, both at Nakaseke and Bhamshela Telecentres, was essential not only for the general management of the Telecentres but also for the transfer of knowledge and information to the community. Similarly, the training of users was also necessary to ensure the effective appropriation of that knowledge and the purposeful use of technologies such as the Internet. In fact, the relative success of Nakaseke Telecentre has shown that telecentres can play a key role in promoting the use of the Internet, and in allowing the community to benefit fully from the electronic exchange of ideas, experiences, knowledge or technology, that can be applied to their daily activities.

5.4 Concluding remarks

The overall conclusion for this study is that the potential for institutional development of donor-funded telecentres exists in Africa. Evidence from the literature and from the data collected for this study, shows that telecentre management is also improving at community, government and donor levels by way of policy formulation, planning, management, evaluation and monitoring. Despite the noted progress, the study has revealed that donor-funded telecentres remain fragile across the continent. Funding remains the main Achilles' heel as evidenced by the non-implementation of the MRTP case. After a decade of donor-funded telecentre experimentation in Africa, this study submits that time has come for the consolidation of appropriate implementation strategies. However, this cannot take place without sustainable funding. The sole reliance on external donors is not a long-term solution for the continent. As Africans, we need to “jump out of the box” and use the resources that we have at our disposal. Thus, a thorough evaluation of all potential domestic funding sources and mechanisms might be one option. However, this will require an unshakeable resolve, strong political leadership and an aggressive resource mobilization.

5.5 Recommendations

Experience gained from the examination of the three case studies and pointers from the literature, allowed the researcher to make the following recommendations to those who wish to fund telecentres in Africa:

- The development of open and proactive donor policies is critical as they can make telecentres avoid basic problems like those experienced by the Bhamshela and MRTTP cases. These policies can also inspire a considerable expansion of telecentre services across Africa. However, donor policies need to drive this expansion within a social accountability context and in awareness of the needs of the deprived communities. In turn, there is a need for donor policies to stimulate local demand, thereby reducing investment risk for telecentres in rural areas. This could include, for example, enabling the potential of e-commerce for rural producers to flourish (see Section 2.5.1.2).
- Another critical factor that has emerged from this study is the need for donors to court the community at large and make them aware of the different benefits from the telecentre services. Thus, identifying and training local champions who will nurture the telecentre project in the long term can make or break the success of such a service. It is advisable for donors to have local stakeholders from areas such as health clinics, municipalities, political parties and teacher training colleges. People from these institutions are most likely to become the core users of the services and will most likely diffuse the technologies widely. As the study has shown, communities will often be involved in providing rent-free facilities to accommodate a telecentre or in building new ones (see Sections 1.7.1 and 1.7.2). Thus, whether individuals, institutions or both, having champions will create the initial impetus and support for the MCT and form an invaluable stakeholder group and initial client base that no outsiders can ever achieve.

- Based on data collected for this study, a range of important issues are linked to the operation and success of telecentres. These include: community relevance, government and donor policies, infrastructure, community partnerships and participation and the scope of the telecentre objectives. However, donors need to recognize that buildings constructed and the technology provided should not be a measure of project success. Success must be measured by the project results delivered to the telecentre users and the sustainability of the telecentre itself (see Section 2.8.2). Donors should also note that an abrupt ending of donor assistance is often detrimental to the sustainability of the project. Small financial support in a transitional phase should, therefore, be viewed as a valuable way to phase out the project. The most successful assistance instances are achieved when the project continues to run smoothly after external funding has stopped. In other words, a phasing out mechanism should be built-in when establishing (designing) the project.
- Donors should also ensure that greater attention is given to the training and management components of the project, as was the case at the Nakaseke Telecentre. Thus, village seminars, workshops and training programmes for both the user community and the telecentre personnel must be integrated in the implementation strategy and should be followed up periodically. For example, ongoing training will be necessary for the users of the telecentres and periodical training will be required on an as-needed basis to upgrade staff skills as the technology and content requirements change. Moreover, rural colleges and schools, as well as extension services, can use telecentres for professional training, and as a facility for distance learning and for farmer tele-training. Thus, when designing training programmes, donors should consider the users' requirements and learning preferences, which means that the content and method of delivery should be developed in collaboration with the community. In addition, training-of-trainers (for example, the telecentre staff) will be necessary to ensure

that the training methods and the content of the training sessions conducted are current and appropriate.

- The assessment of user needs and their translation into services and content was probably a key consideration in determining the telecentre model the people of Nakaseke wanted and therefore its relative success. The opposite was clearly the case at Bhamshela (Section 4.4.4). It is important at the earliest stage, therefore, to articulate the core service (that which is most critical to the community or will most quickly attract users) and then structure the other services around it. Thus, the study recommends that donors need to develop telecentre strategies and investments for rural areas while taking into consideration differences in languages, culture, socio-economic conditions and infrastructure. This should be reflected in participatory needs assessment and the development of both the telecentre itself and the forms taken by information content and linkages to more conventional communication media such as radio.
- It is clear from this study that “telecentres and other grassroots technology initiatives can only scale up through partnership,” (Roman and Colle 2000: 35). This study has shown that partnerships will offer two things to grassroots telecentre networks: social investments and support services. Social investments include funding the development of the telecentre network, workshops, training programs, online information sharing services, and innovative new community services (see Sections 1.7.1 and 1.7.2). Support services include business planning, which was conspicuously lacking in all the three cases, facilitation, and an online community platform, all of which are designed to help telecentre networks succeed quickly. Strategic partnerships can also facilitate networking, content creation, applications and the mobilization of users.

5.6 Suggestions for further research

This study makes three recommendations for further research:

- Research is clearly needed to assess how countries in Africa are improving telecentre policies and regulations and whether they are achieving success in expanding telecentre initiatives in rural areas. While the literature provides some broad indicators, serious discussion on what is required to overcome obstacles to policy and regulatory improvement is limited. The importance of this discussion cannot be stressed enough: available tactical knowledge must be shared more widely than it is today. Just as research is needed from the perspective of the policy makers and telecentre donors, information is also required from the private sector telecentre operators. Understanding how private sector telecentre operators are able to work with cumbersome national regulators to successfully start new operations or expand existing ones is crucial if more prospective donors are to enter the market and invest in rural telecentre initiatives.
- There is need for research into the impact of telecentres on rural African societies and cultures. African societies are rich in traditional cultures that date back many centuries. Though these societies have evolved and continue to evolve in response to the changes occurring around them, they are still able to maintain their own unique cultures, characteristics, individualities and originality. The introduction of telecentres in rural Africa is bound to affect the way in which these rural communities operate. Consequently, more research needs to be done to better understand the impact that telecentres will have on traditional rural African society and culture.
- Research is also required to identify effective approaches to telecentre awareness building at the local level. Local people should be made aware of what these new and effective ICTs can provide for them in terms of information and communication cost savings; having greater access to information sources; and enabling the contribution of local knowledge to the wider global community via

the Internet. However, there is no technology template available with which to provide a “one size fits all” approach to telecentres. People from different cultural backgrounds will not necessarily accept the same methods and approaches taken in introducing telecentres, nor will these initiatives produce the same results. Issues such as the choice of language used to convey information to rural people become key in determining the extent to which rural African people will accept and adapt to the ICTs, which are provided to them via telecentres. Therefore, more research is required to identify the most appropriate means and approaches of making the diverse peoples in rural and remote parts of Africa aware of telecentres, the possibilities that such initiatives offer them through increased access to information, and the impact that the ICT applications found in telecentres can have on their lives.

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APPENDIX A

Covering letter of questionnaire to gather information on the role of donors in the establishment, implementation and sustainability telecentres in Africa

Dear respondent,

I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal on the Pietermaritzburg Campus. I am seeking your assistance in my research project, which is being done in partial fulfilment of my Masters in Information Studies (MIS) degree. The aim of this study is to determine the role of donors in telecentre projects in Africa by looking at the success factors and reasons for failures (if any) of three donor funded telecentre projects in Africa. The telecentre projects in question are: Nakaseke in Uganda, Bhamshela in South Africa and the Malawi Rural Telecentre Project (MRTP), which failed to materialise. You have been identified as someone who could contribute to the study as your organisation funded one or two of the three projects mentioned above.

Thanks in advance for your time and effort in completing the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Ken Chisa

APPENDIX B



22 November 2005

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Assistance with research project

Ken Dennis Chisa (Student number 200270479) is registered for his Master of Information Studies (MIS) degree with the Information Studies Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. He is presently completing the short dissertation component of the degree.

Ken is researching the role of donors in various telecentre projects in Africa and in doing so he is interviewing various role players including both government and donor agency officials. I would be most grateful if you could support Ken in his research by allowing him to interview you.

We do believe that Ken's research will be of interest and use to those involved in telecentre initiatives on the continent and elsewhere. Your cooperation would thus be much appreciated. If you have any queries I can be contacted either by phone or by email:

Phone: 27 33 2605098

Email: leach@ukzn.ac.za

Sincerely

Athol Leach
(MIS Programme Coordinator and Supervisor)

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for collecting data on the role of donors in three telecentre projects in Africa

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- a. Please answer the questions from the perspective of the donor organization you represent.
- b. Please try to be as objective as possible.
- c. Please use the spaces provided to record your answers.

1 Project establishment

1.1 Please name the project your organization was involved in. (If your organization was involved in more than one of the projects please base your answers below on the project which necessitated the most involvement).

1.2 What is your organization's present policy towards the establishment of telecentre projects in Africa?

1.3 Was this policy different in the past (in what way?) and is it likely to change in the future?

2 Project implementation

2.1 What were the main implementation arrangements put in place for the telecentre project? (e.g. scope needs analysis, site identification, consultation with stakeholders etc).

2.2 What main lessons have emerged from the project in terms of implementation that could be useful for similar projects in Africa?

3 Strategic partnerships

3.1 Who were the key stakeholders involved in the project?

3.2 What approaches were used to promote the collaboration of these different stakeholders under the project?

3.3 How were elements to ensure project ownership (if any) integrated into the design of the project?

3.4 What main lessons have emerged from this project in terms of project ownership and collaboration that could be applicable to similar projects in Africa?

4 Sustainability

4.1 What were the key steps actually taken to help ensure sustainability of project outcomes (e.g. managerial skills training, entrepreneurship etc)?

4.2 How would you rate the progress of the project presently in terms of its sustainability? Please elaborate.

4.3 What main lessons have emerged from the project with regard to telecentre sustainability that could be useful for similar projects in Africa?

5 Monitoring and evaluation

5.1 What monitoring and evaluation arrangements were planned and implemented as part of the project?

5.2 What main lessons have emerged from the project in terms of monitoring and evaluation that could be applicable to similar projects in Africa?

6 General

6.1 Any other issue you would like to add concerning what has been said?

6.2 Could you direct me to other individuals who might wish to answer these questions and give me their input?

Many thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. If you would like an electronic copy of my study once it is completed please indicate so.

Contact details:

Ken Chisa (Student number 200270479)

Information Studies Programme

SASS

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

P/Bag X01

Scottsville

3209

South Africa.

E-mail: 200270479@ukzn.ac.za; kenchisa@hotmail.com

APPENDIX D

An interview schedule for collecting data on the role of donors in three telecentre projects in Africa

1. Could you please describe your organisation's role in the MRTP?
2. What were the main issues that prevented the implementation of the MRTP?
3. What main lessons have emerged from the project in terms of donor participation that could be applicable to similar projects in the continent?
4. Any other issue you would like to add concerning what has been discussed?

Many thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. You are welcome to have an electronic copy of my study once it is completed.

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS ASKED TO LOCAL

ROLE PLAYERS OF THE MRTP

1. To what extent were you involved in decisions on different aspects of the Malawi Rural Telecentre Project especially with regard to:
 - a. The planning and establishment of the project?
 - b. Implementation of the project?
2. What were the main factors that prevented the implementation of the MRTP?
3. What main lessons have emerged from the project in terms of donor participation that could be applicable to similar projects in the continent?
4. Any other issue you would like to add concerning what has been discussed?

Many thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. You are welcome to have an electronic copy of my study once it is completed.

APPENDIX F: Reminder email to an official representing USA

From: "Khosl Mahlangu" <khoslm@usa.org.za>
To: "Ken Chlsa" <200270479@ukzn.ac.za>
Date: 2006/01/11 11:34:43 AM
Subject: RE: Masters questionnaire

Hi,

Please resend the questionnaire I will go through it and respond by next week Wednesday.

Khosl

-----Original Message-----

From: Ken Chlsa [mailto:200270479@ukzn.ac.za]
Sent: Thursday, January 05, 2006 10:15 AM
To: Khosl Mahlangu
Subject: RE: Masters questionnaire

Compliments of the new year!! May you kindly advise whether I should still look forward to your response to the questionnaire. Its just that time is no longer on my side and and if you are not in a position to answer the questionnaire please inform me so that I can make the necessary adjustments to the research while I still have the time.

Warmest regards
Ken Chlsa

>> "Khosl Mahlangu" <khoslm@usa.org.za> 11/23/05 12:43 PM >>>
Thandi sent me a message but not the questionnaire I will look at it and send it back to you. I have been out of office for over a week and am back only today

-----Original Message-----

From: Ken Chlsa [mailto:200270479@ukzn.ac.za]
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2005 12:02 PM
To: Khosl Mahlangu
Subject: Masters Questionnaire

Dear Madam,
I would like to confirm whether you are in receipt of a Masters research questionnaire from me forwarded to you by Miss Thandi Mbakwane. If you are madam, could I be kindly assured of a response?

at your earliest convenience?

Kind regards,
Ken Chlsa.