The sustainability of Health Information Systems and especially mHealth systems in developing countries is daunting even though they are enthusiastically presented to revolutionize health service delivery. Tremendous efforts are directed towards their development. mHealth initiatives are often implemented by external players with a supply-driven and top-down approach that does not allow for a proper consideration of existing contexts, users and their practices. The result of this, is that mHealth systems are misaligned with existing realities and caught in a continuous cycle of unsustainability especially when external support ceases.

Well as research has acknowledge the relevance of users in the sustainability efforts of ICT initiatives, there’s yet to be a detailed unravelling of how this can be actualized. The thesis argues that user-based work practices are necessary for the sustainability of mHealth systems. Drawing on two mHealth initiatives to facilitate maternal and child health services in Uganda and Malawi, the study makes theoretical and practical insights.

The cases are analyzed using structuration theory by Giddens and the affordance concept from Gibson to investigate the relation between micro-work practices and sustainability. The findings indicate that work practices are an important phenomenon that can unravel concomitant work transformations when technologies are introduced. It is in the work transformations that we realize demands, technology modifications and local sustainability efforts at the level of work. The findings also indicate that local sustainability needs to be matched with corresponding broader organizational structures. The thesis thus describes an alternative approach to understanding sustainability by matching micro-dynamics to macro-structures.