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RURAL DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION SOURCES OF DIGITAL ILLITERATES: A STUDY OF KANGPOKPI, MANIPUR, INDIA.

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Abstract

Rural development focuses on improving the living condition of people living in relatively isolated, sparsely populated areas by providing minimum basic needs to the rural people through the implementation of various developmental programs. For successful implementation of development programs, active participation of the people is needed at every stage of the development process. However, these areas have very less chances of connection from the rest of the country and have no or poor means of getting information of the outside world. Therefore, there is a need to find out the preferred and effective information communication sources and channels of the rural people for their active participation and successful implementation of the various development schemes and programs. The rural development program implemented in the study area is **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**.

Keywords

Rural Development Programs, Rural Development Schemes, Information Sources, Rural Information Sources, Rural Information Channels, Rural Information Sources and Channels, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Rural Studies, Digital Illiterates, India.

Introduction

Rural development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural Development is concerned with economic growth and social justice, improvement in the living standard of the rural people by providing adequate and quality social services and minimum basic needs becomes essential. Rural development has traditionally centred

on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. However, changes in global production networks and increased urbanization have changed the character of rural areas. Rural development actions mainly and mostly aim at the social and economic development of the areas (*Rural development*, 2012). Various sources and mediums are created to assist in disseminating information of various rural development programmes. But in countries where the gap between the digital haves and have-nots are wide, the sources of rural development information rarely reach the benefactors who are mostly digital illiterates.

Need for information on rural development

Information and communication are two interlinked terms in the sense that without information, communication is not possible and without communicating information on the proposed development the rural population seldom knows the existence of such developmental schemes. For successful implementation of development programmes, active participation of the people is needed at every stage of the development process. Rural development cannot take place without changes in attitudes and behaviour among the people concerned. Development programmes can only realise their full potential if knowledge and technology are shared effectively, and if populations are motivated and committed to achieve success. Therefore, the need for information in rural development is immensely necessary.

Digital literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to locate, organize, understand, evaluate, and analyze information using digital technology. It involves a working knowledge of current high-technology, and an understanding of how it can be used. Further, digital literacy involves a consciousness of the technological forces that affect culture and human behaviour. Digitally literate people can communicate and work more efficiently, especially with those who possess the same knowledge and skills. Research around digital literacy is concerned with wider aspects associated with learning how to effectively find, use, summarize, evaluate, create, and communicate information while using digital technologies, not just being literate at using a computer. Digital literacy encompasses all digital devices, such as computer hardware, software, the Internet, and cell phones. A person using these skills to interact with society may be called a digital citizen. (*Digital literacy*, 2012)

RATIONALE

Deprivation of information among digital illiterates

“To be literate today involves more than the "three Rs" of reading, writing and arithmetic. It requires skills to navigate a connected world, a world that is both much smaller geographically and – at the same time – much bigger, in pure information terms, than the one we knew BG (Before Google).” (Dudeney, 2011). Due to advancement in technology, use of digital technologies such as computer, internet, mobile phone, etc. have become more popular and important for disseminating and accessing information in today’s age. In fact, information through these technologies is more current, cheaper than the print information sources. Having the skill to operate computer, mobile phones alone is not a digital literacy. It means that people should be efficient in using these technologies in accessing the right information which is helpful to them. As we know that information is vital for development, the rural people need to be digitally literate to keep themselves informed or to enable themselves to access information for their development or to carry out their developmental activities in an effective way. Therefore, it can be said that digitally illiterates are information deprived.

Problems caused by infrastructural deprivation among the rural areas

Rural areas are mainly located in far flung areas from the cities. In most cases these areas are situated in hilly regions with poor transport and communication systems and are cut off from the rest of the country. These areas are also sparsely populated and inhabited mostly by poor people. Because of all these reasons the rural areas are mostly neglected and have no infrastructure or poor infrastructure such as irregular power supply, poor road conditions, etc. Therefore, these areas have very less chances of connection from the rest of the country and have no or poor means of getting information of the outside world. Bad roads and lack of necessary health materials also constitute a major obstacle to preventive health in rural areas. For instance, health education, periodical visits, immunisation, and chlorination of wells in rural areas by health officials were hindered by bad road conditions. McNeil (1993) shows that adequate infrastructure reduces the costs of production, which affects profitability, levels of output, and employment. When infrastructure works, productivity and labour increase. When it does not work, citizens suffer, particularly the poor.

Methodology:

The selected site, Kangpokpi town is located about 46 kilometers from the state capital, Imphal. It is a hill area inhabited mostly by various communities like Nepalese, Biharis, Punjabis, Nagas, Meiteis and Kukis are in majority. The Asian Highway 1 passes through the town. The town is divided into 17 wards with the total number of 1234 (one thousand two hundred thirty-four) Job Card holders. The site is selected on the basis of the researcher's familiarity with the people in terms of familiarity with the place, knowledge of the mother tongue, and accessibility.

Sample:

Among the total seventeen wards, two wards inhabited by mixture of various communities speaking different mother tongues are left out due to the difficulty in translating the questionnaire in their respective mother tongues. From the rest of the fifteen wards, 150 Job Card holders are selected randomly and adopted for the study. The sample size taken for conducting the study is about 13 percent of the total population.

Data Collection:

The data collection method used in this study is questionnaire method.

Brief introduction to MGNREGA and reason for using the scheme for the present study

The present study area is a rural area inhabited mostly by rural poor people. For the purpose of poverty alleviation and providing better livelihood opportunities to these people, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programs of wage and self-employment is required. Such facilities can be provided in the form of Rural Development Programs implemented by the State Government or Central Government or other Implementing Agencies. The rural development program implemented in the study area for the betterment of the living condition of the people is **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** (MGNREGA). The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage of ₹120 (US\$2.39) per day in 2009 prices. The main reason for choosing this scheme for the present study is that this scheme covers the maximum number of people in the study area as compared to other schemes. (*The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2012*)

Table 1: Age group of respondents

Age group	No. of persons	%
< 30	17	11.3
31-40	48	32
41-50	46	30.7
51-60	36	24
>60	3	2
Total	150	100

N=150

The table shows that majority of the respondents are in between the age of 31-40 years. There are 46 persons in between 41-50 years and 36 persons in between 51-60 years of age. And there are only three persons above 60 years of age. This shows that majority of the Job Card holders are middle-aged, that is, in between the age of 31-60.

Table 2: No. of male and female respondents

Gender	No. of persons	%
Male	105	70
Female	45	30
Total	150	100

N=150

The table shows the actual numbers of male and female respondents. It is seen that out of the total 150 respondents, the number of male respondents is 105 and the number of female respondents is just 45, which means that majority of the respondents is male.

Table 3: Marital status of the respondents

Marital Status	No.of persons	Male	%	Female	%
Married	135	103	68.7	32	21.3
Unmarried	05	02	1.3	03	02
Divorcee	02	0	0	02	1.3
Widow	08	NA	NA	08	5.4
Widower	0	0	0	NA	NA
Total	150	105	70	45	30

N=150

In table 3, the marital status of the respondents is shown. It is seen that 135 of the respondents are married, 05 were unmarried, and two of them were divorced and 8 widows. The table shows that majority of the respondents are married.

Table 4: Highest Education Qualification of the respondents

Qualification	No. of persons	%
Below Class VIII	18	12
Class IX to XII	57	38
Graduation	74	49.3
Above Graduation	1	0.7
Total	150	100

N=150

In this table, the highest education qualification of each and every respondent is taken and the total is placed under certain groups. It is found that 18 of the respondents studied till or below Class VIII. 74 of the respondents have education qualification of B.A/B.Sc. And only one of them has Master's Degree.

Communication Channels

Table 5: Computer literacy of the respondents

Computer literacy	No. of persons	%
Literate	19	12.7
Illiterate	126	84
Total	145*	96.7

N=150

*5 persons do not respond

The table shows that out of total 145 respondents, only 19 persons know how to use computers and the rest 126 persons are ignorant about computers. This shows that computer literacy level of the respondents is very low.

Table 6: Internet usage of the respondents

Internet usage	No. of persons	%
Used	16	10.7
Never used	129	86
Total	145*	96.7

N=150

*5 persons do not respond

The table shows that only 16 respondents out of 145 respondents use internet and the remaining 129 respondents never used the internet.

This shows that the use of internet, which is one of the best sources of information, is not known to 89% of the respondents.

Table 7: Assistance sought for accessing internet

Assistance	No. of persons	%
Assistance sought	0	0
Assistance not sought	16	10.7
Total	16*	10.7

N=150

*Only 16 out of 150 persons responded

The table shows whether the respondents take help of others while using the internet. Only 16 persons out of 150 respondents respond because the rest never used the internet. So, it is seen that all the 16 respondents do not take assistance from others while accessing the internet.

Table 8: Place of internet access of the respondents

Place of access	No. of persons	%
Home	0	0
Cyber café	0	0
Friends' computer	0	0
Library	0	0

Mobile phone	16	10.7
Other	0	0
Total	16*	10.7

N=150

*Only 16 persons responded

The table shows that all the 16 respondents who responded access internet through mobile phones only. This is because there are no other places from where they can access the internet. There are no cyber cafés and no private internet connection facilities are available.

Table 9: Awareness of information availability in internet

Awareness	No. of persons	%
Aware	5	3.3
Not aware	145	96.7
Total	150	100

N=150

Table 10: Radio ownership of the respondents

Ownership	No. of persons	%
Own	21	14
Do not own	129	86
Total	150	100

The table shows out of the total 150 respondents, only 21 of them, that is, 14% owns radio. This shows that radio is not an option for effective dissemination of information.

Table 11: Frequency of listening to Radio programs

Frequency	No. of persons	%
Everyday	3	2
Occasionally	5	3.3
Rarely	0	0

Never	142	94.7
Total (N)	150	100

N=150

This table shows how often the respondents listen to the radio. It is seen that just 3 respondents out of the total 150 listen to radio regularly. 5 of the respondents listen occasionally, while the rest 142 never listen to the radio. This shows that majority of the respondents do not use radio as a means of information communication.

Table 12: Radio programs the respondents listen to

Program	No. of persons	%
Mother tongue (Thadou-Kuki dialect)	8	5.3
State language	5*	3.3
Total (N)	8**	5.3

N=150

*Among the 8 persons who listen to program in mother tongue, 5 of them also listen to program in State language.

**Only 8 persons responded

The table shows the type of radio programs the respondents listen to. Only 8 respondents responded because the rest of them do not listen to radio or they do not own one. It is seen that all the eight respondents listen to program in Mother tongue and among these eight; five of them also listen to programs in State language.

Table 13: Ownership of Mobile phone

Ownership	No. of persons	%
Own	140	93.3
Do not own	10	6.7
Total	150	100

N=150

The table shows the total number of respondents who own mobile phones. It is shown that 140 out of total 150 respondents own mobile phones and only ten of them do not. This

implies that mobile phones are can serve as an important information communication tool to the Job Card holders.

Table 14: Usage of Mobile phones by respondents

Usage	No. of persons	%
Taking pictures	76	50.7
Voice recording	9	6
Video recording	12	8
SMS	99	66
e-mail	0	0
Internet	16	10.6
Chatting	21	14
Gaming	35	23.3
Editing	0	0
Listening songs	70	46.7
Video viewing	34	22.6
Calls	140	100
Calls and SMS	30	20
Others	0	0

N=150

This table shows the usage of mobile phones by respondents. It is seen that highest usage is for Calls and SMS. And only ten persons use for accessing internet and no one use for e-mails or editing works. This shows that majority of the respondents lack awareness and skills of using mobile phones for other purposes other than making and receiving calls and sending and reading SMSs

Table 15: Ownership of Television set

Ownership	No. of persons	%
Own	104	69.3
Do not own	46	30.7
Total	150	100

N=150

The table shows the percentage of ownership of television sets where 104 out of the total 150 respondents own at least one at home. And the rest 46 of them do not own.

Table 16: Type of Television Connectivity

Connectivity	No. of persons	%
Local cable	85	56.7
Paid satellite	14	9.3
Free satellite	0	0
Watching movies	5	3.3
Listening songs	0	0
Others	0	0
Total (N)	104*	69.3

N=150

*Out of total 150 respondents, 46 of them do not own TV

The table shows the type of T.V Connectivity the respondents have. It is found that 81.7% subscribe to local cable, 13.5% use paid satellite and 4.8% use their televisions for watching movies only.

Table 17: How often the respondents watch T.V

Frequency	No. of persons	%
When electricity allows	61	40.7
Everyday	10	6.7
Occasionally	14	9.3
Rarely	40	26.7
Never	25	16.6
Others	0	0
Total (N)	150	100

N=150

The table shows how often the respondents watch T.V. 61 respondents (40.7%) watch whenever there is electricity. Only 10 (6.7%) of the respondents watch every day, 14 (9.3%) of them watch occasionally, 40 respondents (26.7%) watch T.V. rarely. And the rest 25 respondents (16.6%) never watch T.V.

Table 18: Most preferred source/s of accessing information about MGNREGA

Source	No. of persons	%
Village Chief / ward chairman	150	100
Neighbors	150	100
Church	150	100
Mobile phone	132	88
Printed documents in mother tongue	120	80
Town Committee	91	60.5
Television (T.V)	46	30.7
Word of mouth	40	26.7
Trainings	40	26.7

N= 150

In the study area, each individual ward elects a Ward Chairman to supervise the works, manage the funds and to look after the interests and difficulties or the well-being of the ward members. He is like a leader or a representative of the people of that individual ward. It is also the responsibility of the Ward Chairman to notify or inform all the ward members on important information. The Ward Chairman takes the ultimate decision on various matters concerning his ward. The Ward Chairman along with his colleagues from all other wards communicates with the implementing agencies regarding the interests or difficulties of the people. The implementing agencies give information to the ward chairmen and these Ward chairmen in turn inform their respective wards. In this way the Ward Chairmen play a very important role in dissemination of information about MGNREGA.

The table shows the different information sources that the respondents think useful for getting information about MGNREGA. The most preferred sources are church, village chief, neighbours, where 100% of the respondents had chosen. 132(88%) of them chose mobile phones and 120 (80%) of them chose documents printed in mother tongue. 91 (60.5%) of the respondents chose Town Committee. Other sources such as Radio, Internet, Meetings, Local Festivals, Music Concerts, printed documents other than mother tongue, etc. are given in the option but none of the respondents choose them. In other words, they are not preferred sources of accessing information about MGNREGA.

This shows that the church can play an important role in communicating information about MGNREGA.

Table 19: Sources from which the respondents get information about MGNREGA till date

Source	No. of persons	%
Word of mouth	150	100
Village Chief / ward chairman	150	100
Neighbors	140	93.3
Town Committee	109	72.7
Block/District office	54	36
Mobile phone	50	33.3
Church	12	8
Radio	5	3.3

N= 150

The table shows the different sources of information through which the respondents got MGNREGA information till the time of questionnaire distribution. It shows that 100% of the respondents agreed to have received the information from the village chief and through word of mouth. 140 (93.3%) of them got the information from neighbours and 109 (72.7%) respondents got the information from the Town Committee. Though all the respondents prefer Church as a source of accessing information about MGNREGA, only 8% of them accessed the information from Church. This shows that the Church does not play much role in disseminating information about MGNREGA so far. Other sources such as Radio, Internet, Meetings, Local Festivals, Music Concerts, printed documents in mother tongue, printed documents other than mother tongue, TV, Trainings, Village Council are given none of them got the information through these sources.

Table 20: Most preferred information communication medium / media of the respondents

Medium	No. of persons	%
Radio	3	2
Television	46	30.7
Mobile Phones	132	88
Internet	16	10.7

N= 150

The table shows that the most preferred medium of information communication of the respondents is mobile phones, in which 132 persons (88%) have chosen it. This means that even though mobile phone is the most preferred medium, it cannot reach 100% of the respondents since only 132 persons out of 150 had chosen it. In this case, the remaining 18 persons, that is, 12% of the respondents can be reached through the pamphlet.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Findings

The study has shown that 70% of the respondents are male and just 30% are female. It is also found that majority of the respondents (62.7%) are in the age group of 31 to 50 years. The study also leads to the findings that 49.3% of the respondents are Graduates. And 38% of them are Class XII passed. This shows that there is a high percentage of unemployed educated youths in the study area.

Computer literacy of the respondents is found to be very low, which is only 12.7%. This means that the rest 87.3% are computer illiterates. It is also found that the level of internet usage among the respondents is just 10.7%. The rest 89.3% had never used the internet. The reason behind this may be due to lack of computer training programs in the study area, and/or lack of awareness of internet as a useful information source, and/or lack of skills.

Apart from the Mother tongue, that is Thadou-Kuki dialect, the other language known by majority of the respondents is English, whereby about 71.6% of them know how to read and write the language. This means that information published in English can be accessed by this 71.6%. However, the information about MGNREGA which is available in English in the internet is not accessed by them. One of the reasons is due to lack of awareness of the respondents about the availability of information in the internet. It may also be due to unavailability of internet connection and due to lack of skills in using the internet.

Among the different types of communication channels used by the respondents, namely, mobile phones, radio, T.V., internet, it is found that the most preferred communication channel is mobile phones, whereby, 93.3% of them own at least one, and 88% of them chose it to be the best source of information. However, maximum usage of mobile phones is on calls and SMSs and only 10.7% used for accessing the internet, that too not for the purpose of accessing information about MGNREGA. This can also be due to lack of awareness and due to unavailability of internet connection. Even though

ownership of television set is 69.3%, just 06.7% watch every day and 40.7% of them watch when electricity allows. This shows that electricity is irregular in the study area. The ownership of Radio is found to be 14%, out of which only 2% listen to it every day. The reason behind this may be due availability of new, better technologies such as Television sets, mobile phones, computers, etc.

It is found that the most common sources of information from which the respondents get information about MGNREGA till the time of questionnaire distribution are found to be through word of mouth, village chief / ward chairman, neighbors, Town Committee. None of the respondents got the information through meetings, through print documents or T.V. or the internet. This shows that the respondents are highly unaware of the availability of information through different media and different sources.

None of the studies had so far mentioned the role of church, neighbors as important sources of information to the rural people. But the present study has found that 100% of the respondents chose church, neighbors, and ward chair persons as the most preferred sources of information about MGNREGA.

Suggestions

Based on the analysis of the study and the feedbacks received from the respondents either orally or through written form in the space provided for feedback in the questionnaires, some suggestions are made which are considered to be helpful in the better implementation of MGNREGA. Those suggestions are given as follows:

1. Trainings and MGNREGA related meetings should be held from time to time.
2. Since there is a low computer and internet literacy levels, free basic computer courses should be provided and they should be taught about the importance of internet as an information communication tool and give trainings on how to use the internet.
3. The Government should provide regular electricity since it is a basic requirement for smooth functioning of the information communication tools such as mobile phones, T.V., computers, etc.
4. Proper public awareness campaigns should be conducted by the implementing agency.

5. Since 100% of the respondents chose the church as the most preferred source of information, it should play the role of disseminating information about MGNREGA to its members in the form of announcements, notices, etc.
6. People should be encouraged and taught to use the information communication technologies such as T.V, mobile phone, internet, etc. in a purposeful way.
7. More information should be available in vernacular, that is, Thadou-Kuki dialect.

CONCLUSION

The study has been conducted for the purpose of increasing the awareness of the Job Card holders in Kangpokpi town of Manipur, and for better implementation of the MGNREGA scheme. It is found that most of the Job Card holders were ignorant of their rights about MGNREGA. All they knew was that they could work whenever they are informed by those persons in authority and get some wages for their work. Their knowledge about the MGNREGA was very limited. Some of the reasons behind this are due to lack of proper information communication system, lack of awareness program, most of them are illiterates or just barely literates and have no skills and knowledge of using the information technologies such as mobile phone, computer, internet, etc. in acquiring the important information about MGNREGA.

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