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Information Needs and Requirements of the Rural Population of Tamilnadu and Relevance of Common Service Centers: A Study

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Abstract

The basic needs of citizens, such as information, education, entertainment and health services, may be addressed through the establishment of Community Service Centres. The CSC Network will serve as a significant connectivity backbone to provide e-government, e-learning and other IT-enabled platforms. In this paper, the investigator attempts to analyse the information needs of rural people in Tamilnadu and to identify the relevance of the Community Service Centers.

Keywords: - Information requirements, Rural people, Common Service centers, E- Sevai centers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian society is predominantly rural. It is characterised by a variety of structural disadvantages and disparities that exist in Indian society, such as analphabetism, malnutrition, poverty and caste complications. Consequently, the needs of rural areas for information relating to necessities, economic, educational or recreational needs are not adequately assessed or met. There are information needs, and rural people are looking for where to find what, who is who in their town, and services available in the village for utilities in the nearest town.

Simultaneously with highly visible and immediately penetrable citizen-centric projects, IT implementation in government recommended adopting an administrative reform-based computerisation strategy. Citizen interface approach was based on the assumption that all direct government-citizen interactions can be IT-enabled and can be categorised as payment, entitlements, redress information, grievance, etc. ICT and internet penetration in Tamilnadu

was comparatively small, despite the right social and digital infrastructure. Some early grass-root level ICT applications attempt made little headway.

The Common Service Center Project is IT-enabled government services should be accessible by efficient, open, reliable and affordable means to the common man in his / her village. The Common Services Centers (CSCs), implemented under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), are ICT-enabled front-end service delivery points at village level for the provision of government, financial , social and private sector services in agriculture, education , banking, utility payments, etc.

The scope of the programme is to cover the maximum number of government services and, through the use of ICT, to provide all high-quality and cost-effective e-government services under one umbrella. A highlight of the CSCs is that it will give web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity bills, telephone and water.

1.1 Benefits:

- The citizen can avail all the Services at their doorstep.
- The citizen can monitor their application status at any point in time.
- The time taken to deliver the services is drastically reduced from 15 days to 2 days.
- The CSC programme provides employment opportunity to village entrepreneurs (VLEs), lucrative business to People's organisations such as PACCS, VPRCs, IFAD and PSUs such as TACTV.

Tamil Nadu Arasu Cable TV Corporation (TACTV) and Tamil Nadu Limited's Electronics Corporation (ELCOT) have been authorised to establish CSC (E-Sevai Centers) in all District Headquarters, Taluk offices, and Corporations and Municipalities. The Primary Agriculture Cooperative Credit Society (PACCS), Village Poverty Reduction Committees (VPRCs), supported by the Pudhu Vaazhvu Project, was allowed to start the E-Sevai centres in the rural

areas of their jurisdiction throughout the State. In the coastal/remote areas, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was authorised to start E-Sevai centres. Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLE) has been allowed to commence the E-Sevai centres in the Village Panchayats.

1.2 E-Sevai

The government is working through Arasu E-Sevai centres to deliver all services online to citizens even in the most remote corner of the State. The Arasu E-Sevai centres aim to provide unified access to the e-Services of the various government departments on a common platform across the State.

Agencies such as Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies (PACCS), Village Poverty Reduction Committee (VPRC), Tamil Nadu Arasu Cable TV Corporation Ltd (TACTV), TACTV Franchise and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) run the Arasu E-Sevai Centres. Currently, 12,649 centres are operating across the State with 13,088 counters.

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

B et al. (2012). Reliable access to modern energy services is essential to growth. In addition to rising energy demand, India also faces several challenges in providing energy services to its masses. Innovative approaches that incorporate effective technology and distribution platforms are essential to solving these challenges. This paper explores one such solution where, based on a revenue model, the Popular Service Centers (CSCs) use solar applications to provide lighting opportunities for the communities they represent, in addition to supplementing their power requirements.

Uthaman & Vasanthagopal (2017) E-governance is a modern way of life where ITC (Information Technology and Communications) is believed to improve connectivity and government services. It has reduced the expense and time of availability and delivery of

services to people and restricted corruption relative to the conventional method of delivering government services. Current systematic and descriptive research is being conducted with two main objectives: the study of significant e-governance service quality models and the evaluation of critical dimensions for the development of a rigorous multidimensional e-governance service quality model for CSCs in India. The study found that information quality, system quality, quality of institution-service, trust, usability, citizen (user) satisfaction and net benefit are vital dimensions for assessing the quality of CSCs service.

Saxena (2013) aims to fill this void by shedding light on the benefits gained from the CSC project and some of the main bottlenecks of the project. The study concludes with crucial recommendations to address these bottlenecks to maximise the effect on e-government and entrepreneurship.

(Shewale & Laturkar, 2019) emphasises that understanding governance is the first step toward e-governance. E-governance is said to be the pill for all governmental ills. In governance, the more technology we infuse, the better it is for India. The growth of any nation in today's time depends on the use and penetration of e-Governance. It has led to transparency in the governing process; time savings due to service delivery through a single-window; corruption, convenience and empowerment reduction. This paper discusses the various services provided by the Government of India at the state level. This paper highlights the successful implementation of the CSC in the State of Maharashtra and the contribution it has rendered to the suppliers and government directly and indirectly to society. This paper sheds some light on key challenges and advantages of e-governance.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To come across the different perceptives on the information needs of rural people in Tamilnadu
- To find out the relevance of Common Service Centers

- To identify what extent CSC's penetrate to the ordinary people
- To analyses the degree of satisfaction of rural people
- And to identify barriers regarding the effective implementation of Common Service Centers.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Rural people always depend on E-Sevai centres to avail various citizen-centric services of a government department to the public. This identifies the factors influencing the use of e- Seva centres and to find the level of satisfaction among the rural population of Tamilnadu and hence the question for this study is entitled " Information needs and requirements of the rural population of Tamilnadu and relevance of Common Service Centers: A study."

5. METHODOLOGY

The investigator has selected Sivaganga district of Tamilnadu for collecting data. Based on the classificatory variables, the investigator has collected data from three town panchayats such as Thiruppathur, Nattarasankottai and Nerkuppai based on the lower and higher distribution of population, and literacy. The investigator has used a stratified random sampling method for sample selection. The study variable is the general public (professionals, students, housewives, and labours). The study variables consist of the visit of common Service Centers by the rural people; computer training attained, level of satisfaction on the training and services offered by CSC's and opinion regarding the E-Sevai centres by the ordinary people.

The approach used for this study was focused on qualitative methods, including questionnaire surveys on users of E-Sevai Centers in selected town panchayaths. The questionnaire consists of both open-ended and closed-ended questions—data for this research derived from both primary and secondary sources. The goal was to collect qualified surveys from users to have a clear understanding of the influence of E-Sevai centres among rural people.

Random sampling techniques chose a total of 1000 rural people. The proportional sampling method is used to ensure unbiased representation. The questionnaire was designed in such a way to confirm the measurement of all relevant variables. The questionnaires were circulated to 1000 respondents. Of these, 803 completed questionnaires were received. It represents 80.03 % of the total response (803/1000).

6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study was restricted to the population of three town panchayats of Sivagangai District of Tamilnadu State. The research was also limited to the use of citizen-centred services offered by the E-Sevai centres. Urban population is also excluded from the study.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Eight hundred or more measurements/surveys are needed to have a confidence level of 90% that the real value is within $\pm 7\%$ of the measured/surveyed value and more likely to get a correct answer than from a large sample where only a small percentage of the selection responds to the survey.

7.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

A thousand questionnaires were distributed and of which 803 were received back as properly completed questionnaires. It reflects a compliance rate of 80.03 per cent of the total respondents, of which 274 (34.12%) were from Thiruppathur, while 263 (32.75%) were from Nattarasankottai and 266 (33.13%) from Nerkuppai town panchayaths respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender wise Population Distribution

Demographic Information		Gender					
		Male		Female		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	Col %
Town	Thiruppathur	171	21.3%	103	12.83%	274	34.12%
	Nattarasankottai	157	19.55%	106	13.2%	263	32.75%
	Nerkuppai	155	19.3%	111	13.82%	266	33.13%
Panchayaths	Total	483	60.15%	320	39.85%	803	100%

Table 1 indicates the gender-wise representation of respondents of the town panchayats under study. The majority of respondents (60.15%) out of the total 803 respondents are male, while the remaining (39.85%) are female. It can observe that the numbers of male respondents are higher than that of female respondents.

7.2 INFORMATION NEEDS OF RURAL COMMUNITY IN TAMILNADU

Information is a vital resource and is essential for the progress of an individual and a nation. Information transfer and information revolution through which culture change and socio-economic development of a country are possible. Information is the basic need of life, which helps in fulfilment of other requirements such as food, shelter etc. without information, the growth and development of any community, is impossible. Information needs of rural people are different from urban people. In the present study, the investigator tries to analyse and identifies the information needs of rural people from different perspectives.

7.2.1 Visit of E –Sevai Centers

Common Service Centers are social and economic catalyst focusing on the various facets of e-learning, e-transaction, e-governance, information and communication. In this circumstance, the rural people are requested to specify whether they are visiting E-Sevai centres for any purpose. The answers collected from them are analysed in Table 2.

Table2: Visit of E- Sevai Centers

Status	Professionals	Students	Housewives	Labours	Total
Visiting	91 46.19%	134 66.67%	114 57.87%	99 47.6%	438 54.4%
Not visiting	106 53.81%	67 33.33%	83 43.13%	109 52.4%	365 45.45%
Total	197	201	197	208	803

It is evident from Table 2 that a good number (45.45%) of the people under study are not visiting E-Sevai centres for any purpose. Table 2 shows that students (66.67%) in rural areas of Tamilnadu are the most benefited category of CSC's. There is only 46.19 per cent of the

professionals, and 47.6 per cent of the labours under study are visiting e- sevai centres.

7.2.2 Purpose of Visiting E-Sevai Centers

E-Sevai project is launched to provide computer literacy to at least one person in every family. Besides that E- Sevai offers a lot of services including internet in different areas like E-governance, E-Krishi, E-learning, E-transaction, etc. The rural people under study are requested to specify their purpose of visiting E-Sevai centres and the details are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Purpose of Visiting E- Sevai Centers

Aims	Professionals	Students	Housewives	Labours	Total
Aadhar enrolment	81 (89.01%)	111 (82.84%)	101 (88.6%)	90 (90.91%)	383 (87.44%)
Education-related Services	4 (4.34%)	127 (94.78%)	88 (77.13%)	8 (8.08%)	227 (51.83%)
Government Services	54 (59.34%)	76 (56.72%)	91 (79.82%)	87 (87.88%)	308 (70.32%)
Health-related Services	21 (23.08%)	10 (7.46%)	43 (37.72%)	34 (34.34%)	108 (24.66%)
Insurance-related Services	46 (50.55%)	11 (8.21%)	110 (96.49%)	91 (91.92%)	258 (58.90%)
Financial related services (E-pay, Recharge, benefits from Govt.)	37 (40.66%)	4 (2.99%)	78 (68.42%)	41 (41.41%)	160 (36.53%)

(Multiple Answers were invited)

It can be clear from Table 3 that a substantial portion (87.44%) of the rural people understudy is visiting E-Sevai centres for Aadhar enrolment and related issues. There is a small portion of the (24.66%) people visiting for health-related information purpose. Besides these, the rural people are visiting E-Sevai centres for payment of government bills and fees for various government services. A large majority of the rural people are taking advantages of such services provided by E-Sevai centres, housewives (68.42%) and labours (41.41%) are the primary beneficiaries of such facilities.

E-Sevai info-kiosks offer computer education, e-learning modules designed on the school curriculum, local content, internet services, e-governance services like utility bill payment etc. They also provide commercial services like digital photography, desktop

publishing, data entry, financial services like banking and insurance and courier services. Activities like community health and bio-diversity mapping are also undertaken.

It can be clear from the study that a substantial portion of the rural people under study is visiting E-Sevai Centers payment of government bills, sending an online application for medical/engineering admission etc. Majority of the rural people are taking advantages of such services provided by E-Sevai centres, homemakers and labours are the primary beneficiaries of such facilities.

7.2.3 Satisfaction level of the Services of E-Savai

E-Sevai centre is envisaged as a one-stop information centre. All kinds of information will be made available through the centres. Content has been already generated in five core areas including, Health, Agriculture, Career, Education and Laws and regulations. Govt. also digitised all applications forms, Govt. schemes and delivered through E-Sevai network. Encouragement for digitising and updating locally relevant content is also given to E-Sevai centres. The rural people under study are requested to disclose their opinion on the services provided by the E-Sevai centres in their panchayats. The responses are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Satisfaction Level of the Services of E-Sevai Centers

Level of satisfaction	Thiruppathur	Nattarasankottai	Nerkuppai	Total
Satisfied	104 (37.96%)	99 (37.64%)	103 (38.72%)	306 (38.11%)
Partially satisfied	98 (35.77%)	94 (35.74%)	89 (33.46%)	281 (35%)
Not satisfied	72 (26.28%)	70 (26.62%)	74 (27.82%)	216 (26.9%)
Total	274	263	266	803

Panchayat wise analysis of the Table 4 shows that 35.77 per cent of the respondents in Thiruppathur 35.74 per cent of the people in Nattarasankottai and 33.46 per cent of people from Nerkuppai town panchayats are opined that they are partially satisfied with the services provided by E-Sevai centres. On the other hand 37.96 per cent of the rural people in Thiruppathur, 37.64 per cent of the people in Nattarasankottai and 38.72 per cent of rural

people from Nerkuppai have a favourable opinion about the services provided by E-Sevai centres.

The general analysis of Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents under study have a reasonable opinion about the services of E-Sevai centres.

7.2.4 Perception of Penetration of E-Sevai to the Common People

The project E-Sevai aims to bridge the digital divide by enabling tens of thousands of ordinary state citizens to access relevant information in the local language over the internet. E-Sevai centres will develop a comprehensive digital network. In the first phase, the project will impart E-literacy to at least one member each from 6.4 million families in the State. In this context, the investigator tries to evaluate what extent E-Sevai reach to the ordinary people. The information elicited from the respondents is furnished in Table 5.

Table 5: Perception of Penetration of E-Sevai to the Common People

Perception	Professionals	Students	Housewives	Labours	Total
Not responded	15 (07.61%)	9 (4.48%)	47 (23.86%)	69 (33.17%)	140 (17.43%)
Agreed	64 (32.49 %)	66 (32.84%)	56 (28.43%)	49 (23.56%)	232 (28.89%)
Partially agreed	116 (58.88%)	118 (58.71%)	86 (43.65%)	82 (39.42%)	410 (51.06%)
Not agreed	2 (1.03%)	8 (3.98%)	11 (5.58%)	8 (3.85%)	21 (2.62%)
Total	197	201	197	208	803

Category wise analysis of the data presented in Table 5 shows that the majority (51.06%) of the rural community under study is partially agreed with the concept. It includes 58.88 per cent of professionals, 58.71 per cent of students, 43.65 per cent of homemakers and 39.42 per cent of Labours. There are around 2.89 per cent of the rural people accepted the capability of E-Sevai to reach the ordinary people, i.e. 32.49 per cent of professionals, 32.84 per cent of students, 28.43 per cent of homemakers and finally 23.56 per cent of Labours.

8. Barriers identified by the study for the effective implementation of E-Sevai centres

The panchayath authorities involved in the study have a lot of suggestions regarding

the effective implementation of Common Service Centers. They are as follows:

- ⤴ Proper vision seems to be lacking in conceiving and implementing the E-governance project in the State.
- ⤴ Delivery-end structures (access infrastructure) were created, but content and interface were not created. This was a significant weakness of the project. Since delivery is through the private-sector structure, little content about governance resulted in meagre revenue for private entrepreneurs, and hence most of them are unviable.
- ⤴ The project failed in building the required IT infrastructure at district administration and local bodies etc. and integrating them with a single web interface for all public services.
- ⤴ Very little content was developed for the project. It was originally proposed to create content in the local language. But that did not happen.
- ⤴ Administrative reforms and changes in rules and regulations were not carried out. Changes in-laws were not identified and attempted at adequately.
- ⤴ There was a need to ensure an adequate return to private entrepreneurs. Hence, the focus shifted from services delivery to providing acceptable business to ensuring sufficient business for entrepreneurs.

9. Conclusion

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has the potential to realise the dreams of an ideal state where the citizen-government relationship is functional and efficient, oriented towards pertinent socio-economic concerns of the society. With the use of ICT, one can bridge the gap between urban and rural India and also develop the whole community. It is reckoning on the power of ICT based governance and its ability to integrate across departments and offices, and it's potential to provide a level of convenience, accessibility, and transparency. Common Service Centers are committed to implementing

citizen and service-oriented E-governance projects in the State. It would be the dissemination points of such services to the public.

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