



## **Full Length Research Article**

### **COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRES: A STEP TO DEVELOP THE RURAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Improved communication and easy information access are directly related to the social and economic development of a country. Access to telephony and ICTs world, development has become more widespread in developing countries like India. This study aims to identify the information facilities of rural communities in India and understand the challenges and opportunities. It also explores how CIC can be strap up to promote development rural communities in India. Questionnaire, documentary sources, regional planning and observations are the major methods of this study. The study identifies that CIC will make easier community peoples life to enter information arena with an easy environment and help them to increase their skills, expertization in their respective fields. Different problems are also appears for establishing CIC and it also suggests some suitable suggestions for further improvement of CIC in India.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of a society largely depends on the access to information. At present age, information is a power and a piece of information is not any individual's, but a national resource. It becomes common property resulting in an increased usage of information. More the utilisation more is the production of information. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) greatly facilitate the flow of information and knowledge offering the socially marginalised and unaware community unprecedented opportunities to attain their own entitlements. ICT is a critical tool to tackle development issues in developing countries (Ulrich, 2004). Despite ICTs massive potential, the world is becoming increasingly divided into the information-rich and the information-poor, the haves and have-nots of the digital age. In rapidly changing society, difficulty in obtaining and exploiting information is increasing. It is true that the information gap between the source of information and the recipient has been widened (Dilli, 1997). At one end is the complex universe of information and the other end is the population of users various needs and, requirements.

These two elements are to be bridged and interlinked. India is one such country rolling within the vicious circle of deprivation and obstacles of getting ICT facilities. Hence, a centre which acquires, organises and distributes information to the user community and brings the benefits of ICT to the rural people is very much needed. With the Internet speed is getting increased year by year and since the inception of 4G by the new telecom operator, it will be easy to implement the CIC model in rural India.

#### **Problem statement**

The access to the information to the people for villages is not adequate specially the policies and schemes that is being created by the central and state governments, there is a long gap between government and rural people. There is also problem in the process of creating new policies. There has never been a regional planning of particular village or cluster and creation of the new policies according to the data of a village. For example there are several policies for crop insurance but there are many regions where there is very less probability of damaging the crops, so there are many policies which are implemented into those places where there is no need of it. So the problem is the data collection and analysing of the data to do better planning of each village.

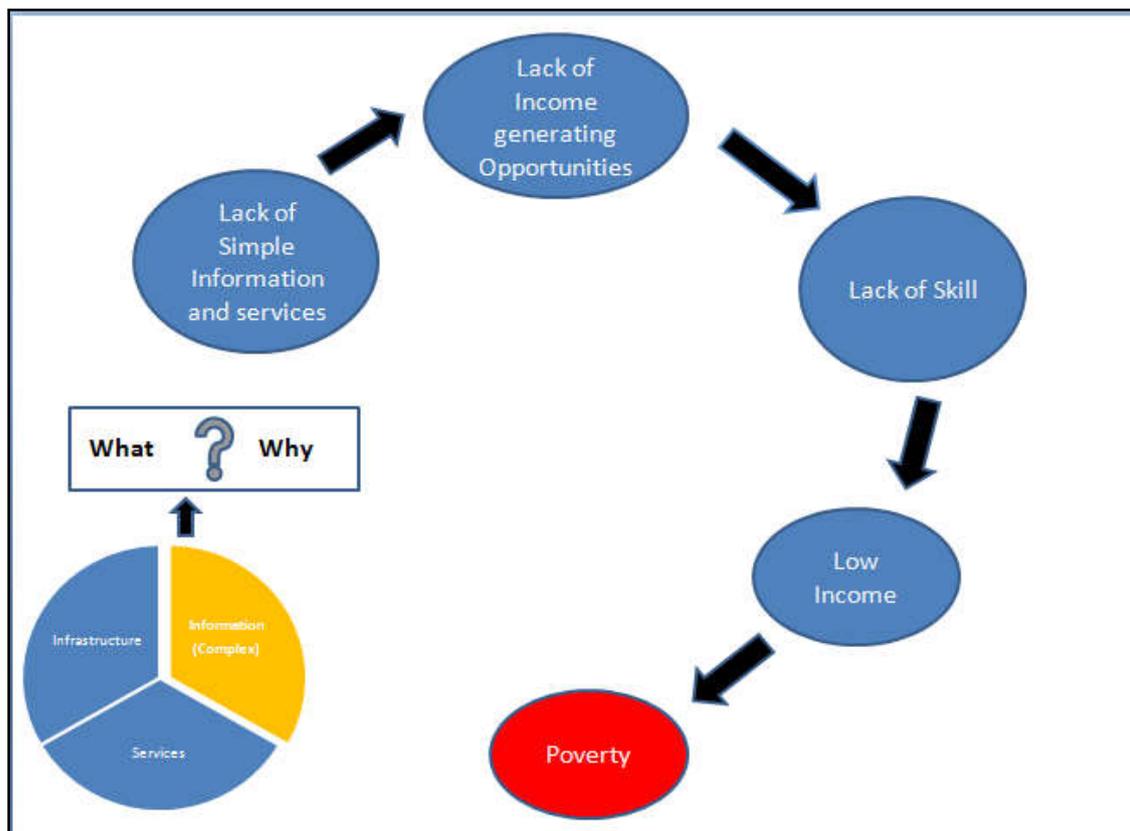


Fig. 1. Cycle for Cause of poverty due to lack of information

#### There are three component of rural development

- Basic infrastructure
- Services
- Information

*Lack of access of information can lead to the poverty. Information is there, but it is not precise and easy to understand*

#### Objective

- To show the initiatives by the state government and its features.
- Target beneficiaries in Rural community.
- Features lacking in the current model and solution as per rural community.
- Working of the new age CIC centre both offline and online, and revenue generation model.
- Assess how Community Information Centre (CIC) creates awareness and giving information services to the community people in India.
- Discussion and recommendation

#### Initiatives for Providing Information in Rural Areas

ICTs are no longer a luxury for many remote villages in India, thanks to a handful of initiatives following different Rural Information Centres (RIC) models. However, followings are some attempts that taken different times to access ICT world for the rural people of India. Rajasthan State - E-Mitra is an ambitious E-governance initiative of the government of Rajasthan which is being implemented in all the 33 districts of the state using public-private partnerships model for convenience and transparency to citizens in availing various services of the government and private sectors under a single

roof at their door steps using e-platform. The services are delivered via counters known as CSC (Common service counter) in rural areas and e-Mitra kiosks in urban areas and also online via [www.emitra.gov.in](http://www.emitra.gov.in). Hence, these counters provide services related to various departments in an integrated and easily accessible manner to people residing rural as well as urban areas without any need for running around government offices. The projects has been in operational since 2005. Initially it was functioning through a client server based application software developed by department of IT&C. in 2010, the old client sever application was migrated to web-based on-line e-Mitra application across all the 33 districts. Recently, a new generic modulus has been added to e-Mitra portal which allows end to end application and delivery of digitally signed certificates such as bonafide, caste, Income, solvency etc.

#### Target beneficiaries

##### Usually there are four kinds of people in the a small village

- **Mahila(Women) Mandal** - A group of women who used to work at both home and farms. Also some of them are highly engaged in small scale enterprise.
- **2.Kissan(Farmers Mandal** - A group of a people who are the senior most people of the village, these people are the one who used to take some of the decision of the village, they make new rules in their own domain.
- **Bal(Childern)panchayat** - A group of children which are united in their own way and help the other young people and hence give a sense of empowerment.
- **Yuva(Youth) Mandal** - A group of young boys and girls mostly consist of students of college.

All these group of people have their own problems on the ground level and need to consider while making any policies for that area or region.

\*Mandal - Group of people, Panchayat - Official of village

### Features lacking in current model and solution in rural community

#### Adopting an orientation where the user is given priority

The CIC should adopt for user –oriented or user friendly approach, such as the user’s convenience, more practical rules and regulations, communication practices that inform and raise awareness, affordable fees and user participation in the planning and developing of information system and services. The user- friendly interfaces whether computerized or non-computerized, are essential in facilitating the use of information systems and enabling the systems to adapt different user patterns and information literacy levels.

#### Lack of track of user needs on a regular basis and determining how the information provided is used:

The user needs are essential for the existence of any information services. Such a view, however, requires a conviction that the user needs can be clearly identified, and a commitment to identifying the kinds of information people need. In the case of rural information services, providing reference and referral services in the rural setting, to help identify the user’s needs and direct them to the needed information from appropriate sources. There should be guideline for research needs, setting up services, and evaluating performance.

#### Three stages in researching information needs

- *Creating the community profile*
- *The information provider’s profile*
- *The information needs profile.*

The participatory or grassroots approach is needed to get the community involved in the design and conduct of the research.

#### Lack of the relevance and the utility of the products and services (which must be designed to suit the user needs) and of the information system

The issue of relevance is widely discussed in the area of information for development, both at the level of local and international levels. (Tocatlian, 1981; Dosa, 1985; Saracevic, 1980, 1986). Through experiences with the information transfer process (which include hardware transfer, information transfer, and knowledge transfer), both developed and developing countries came to realize that the value of information does not lie only in its availability and accessibility, but also in its acceptance and utility. Relevance of information products and services will increase chances for their acceptance and use (Dosa, 1985; Saracevic, 1986). The same judgment is applicable to information services in local level. A major explanation for the failure of libraries to serve the general publics is that libraries are not able to provide information that is relevant to the needs of its users, (Cheunwattanna, 1998). As Skov (1979: 79) explains “... the fact that resource-poor groups do not use public libraries... has

happened because of the provision of largely irrelevant and non-responsive services on the part of the library”. In her discussion on the role of community information services Kempson, (1986: 182) stated that “Dissemination of information is primarily through printed materials which are often unreadable, written in the languages of the ruling elite and do not relate to the needs of ordinary people”. Closely related to the issue of relevance is the concept of appropriate information. Saracevic (1980: 214) writing in the context of developing countries, suggests that appropriate information “should be problem oriented, self contained, directly applicable, scaled for local use, able to reach the disadvantaged and communicable through traditional channels”. This has implications for the provision of information services for rural communities. Information provided should not only be relevant to the needs and contexts of rural communities, but also processed in a way that will facilitate its use, assimilation, and recall, such as packaging and repackaging (of information) which involves appropriate media choices and formatting. In addition, information should be disseminated through the appropriate channels which will enhance user access (Saracevic, 1986).

#### Lack of Promoting and marketing of an information system to existing and potential users in order to enhance awareness and use of its products and services

Marketing of information is “an aggregate of activities directed at satisfying human needs and wants through exchange processes. Marketing involve viewing the whole information service or product from the point of view of the final result, i.e. from the user’s point of view”. They further explained that marketing involves the following activities.

**Marketing research:** analysis of user, identification of characteristics, needs, wants, similarities constraints and economics.

**Product:** development of a product or services in congruence with the findings of market research; targeting; testing of products; consideration of alternative products and adaptation if necessary.

**Communication:** information to users about benefits, usage, uses, user education and promotion.

**Economics:** determination of cost factors; pricing decisions; analysis of economic factors (e.g. cost benefits).

#### Problems in effective management practices to ensure formulations of an efficient policy and its effective implementation

There are several factors that are vital for effective management: strong leadership, participative management, team building, effective human resources management, and appropriate organizational structures. For organizational capacity building, it is also essential to develop information centres for management to support policy planners, administrators, and practitioners at all levels to make informed decisions and effectively handle their jobs in a decentralized fashion. A culture of information emerges from value and norms held by participants in a system in relation to the development, validation, and utilization of information in decision-making; patterns of social and organizational

relationships within which information is held, withheld, and used; and tools used for acquiring, organizing, storing, and retrieving information. After the culture of information is created, it will make it visible, current, accurate and dynamic through its utilization.

### **Lack of high levels of professionalism**

In the contexts of developing countries, in general, and of rural information services, in particular, the issue of human resources development is a serious one. For example, the inadequacy of staff, both in quantity and quality, and the inappropriate roles of information personnel. The need to develop an aggressive attitude and to participate fully in the social struggle for national development. In a context of poverty, the education and training of information personnel should focus on producing technicians rather than librarians, and having well trained personnel train staff who are under them. However, lack of academically trained staff has been the most crucial problem in the development of rural library and information services. Information personnel should play a more visible role as contributors to societies. They should strive to respond effectively to the information needs of users. They should study the various modes in which information is used, and its potentials benefit to users. Such study would enable them to track information needs and use, to better understand the role of information, to identify effective methods of disseminating relevant information, and to educate potential users and society at large about the benefits of and need for effective information management and use.

### **Lack of using appropriate information technologies to effectively manage information**

The intelligent use of information technology increases the already tremendous potential of information systems and services. e.g. vast information storage capability, fast and inexpensive transmission of information to an entire region, links between different types of media, networking capacity, and provision of other means of communication other than face-to-face. However, there has been a great deal of concern about the applications of information technology in developing countries. Information technology transfer from developed to developing countries, has sometimes led to disappointment, disillusionment, and many problems or even failures e.g.

- Differences in the information environment between developed and developing countries, particularly cultural contexts.
- Poor information infrastructure in developing countries.
- Lack of information expertise as well as of trained and qualified personnel lack of financial resources.
- The absence of or inadequate selection, control, reproduction, and adaptation of technology obtained.
- Others are problems of hardware maintenance
- Difficulty of adapting software to local conditions and requirement lack of awareness of the value of information and a low demand for information services.

In the area of rural development the potential of information technology for the effective transfer and use of agricultural information, "Like water and electricity, information technology can be made readily available to rural communities, due to increasing cost off hardware and the availability of "information utility". However, to make this

possible, a software is also required which is tailored to different users, along with the establishment of community information centres, the investment in telecommunication systems and enhancement of awareness and skills through information dissemination and training. Some of the examples of how information technology can be used to serve rural development are described as follow:

- Farmers and other rural groups can easily use powerful multimedia training programmes with touch screens, even if they are illiterates.
- Farmers can get information about daily market prices on the radio or through e-mail notices posted at a local centre before taking products to a market.
- Rural midwives can get immediate information about particular health problems from microcomputer at a local clinic.
- Rural people can get high quality, consistent training at low cost via distance education or interactive training technologies.

### **Lack of encouragement among staff an outlook of self reliance, resourcefulness and other positive attitudes to minimize the use of existing resources**

Information professionals in developing countries may suffer from low morale, attitudes of hopelessness, and even depression, due to limited resources and lack of support. There should be some mechanisms encourage "a self-reinforcing upward spiral of professional achievement and incremental developments". Capacity building is a strategy aimed at improving the ability of information personnel to provide need-based services and maximize the use of existing resources. Training of information personnel in needed areas should be accorded the highest priority. Institutional strengthening, continuing education, exchange programmes, consultancy and advisory services and research are examples of capacity building activities in developing countries.

### **Lack of participation in cooperatives schemes and resource sharing programmes**

Information services to rural communities should enable rural people to participate in an interactive dialogue on issues important to them. It can help the government or other agencies in reinforcing specific directives affecting the lives of rural people through constant provision of information. On the other hand, it should also enable the people to inform the government about the impact of the policies and services. Participation in and cooperation with other programs, institutions, organizations and network at local, regional and international levels, should be enhanced to ensure maximum utilization of all resources and services, as well as to provide useful exchange of information, ideas, and experiences.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Lack of Regulation and Framework:** The regulatory framework in rural India has not yet been modernized to accommodate the growing needs of the electronic world. Still, in government offices, an e-mail has no official value and cannot be legally considered an acceptable mode of communication. As CIC is establishing across the country, it is the time to give emphasis on public and private offices for ICT based services so that people avail their desire services easily.

Working of CIC and revenue generation

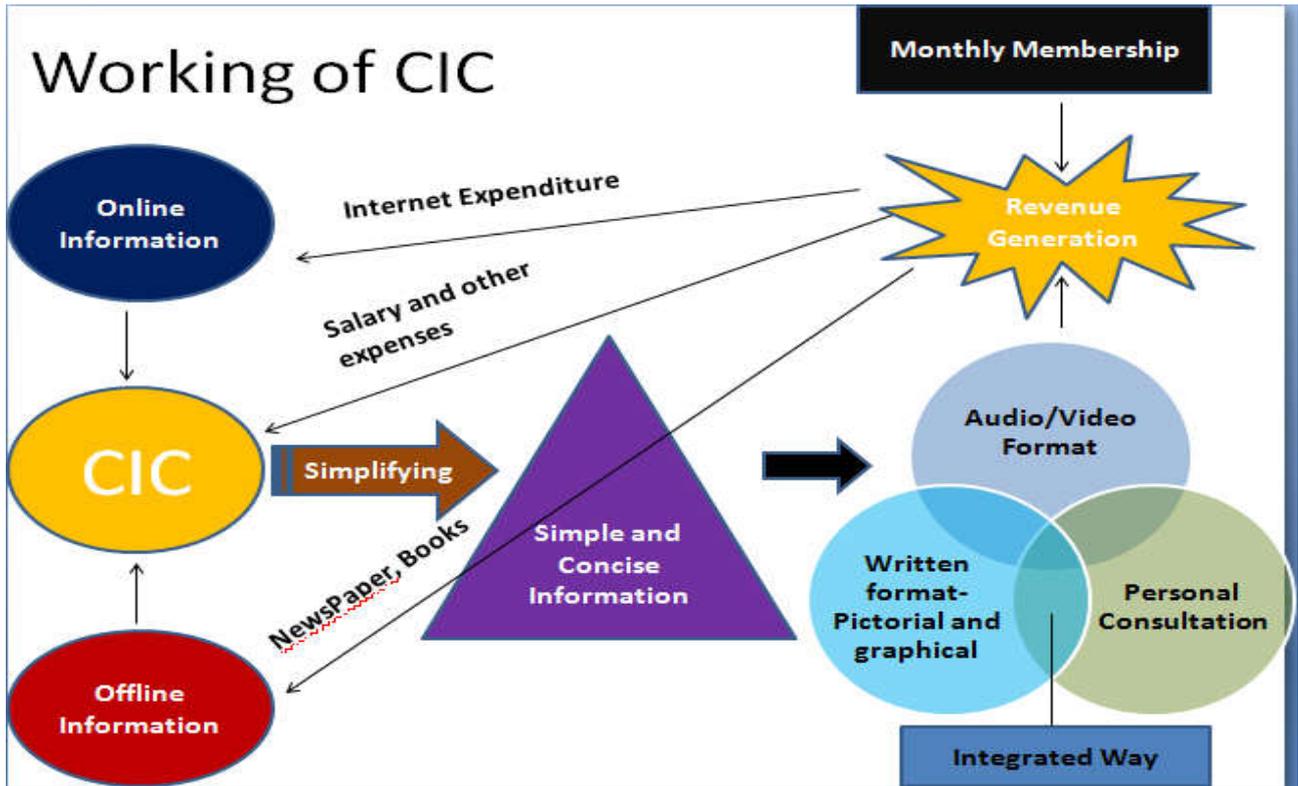


Fig. 2. Working of CIC and revenue generation and expenditure model

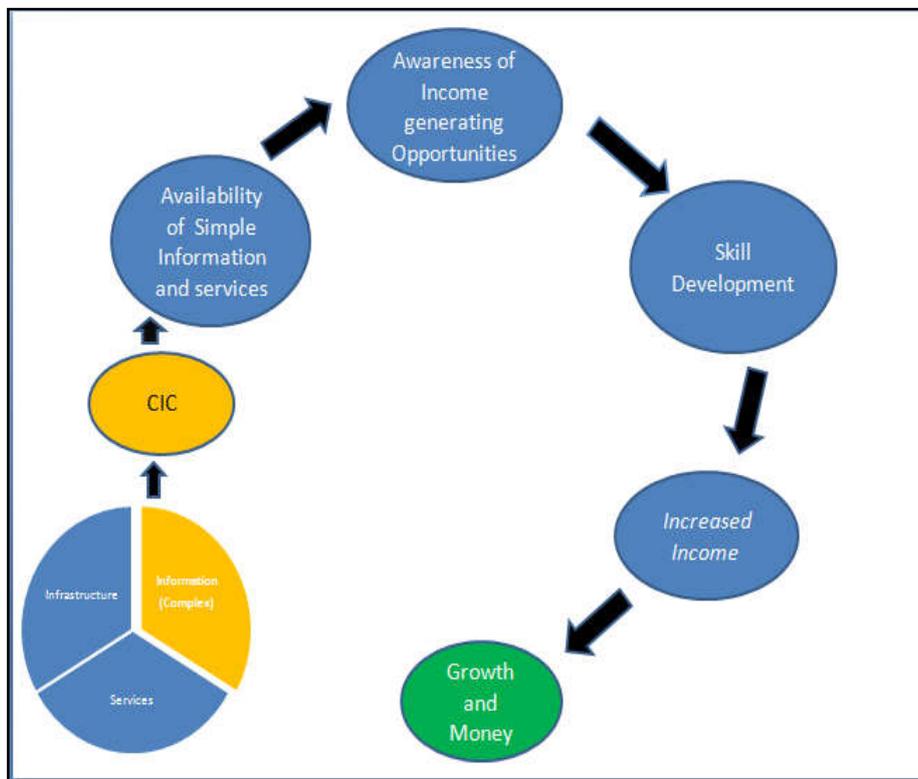


Fig. 3. Advantage of CIC in village

**Regarding Services:** Findings arrived that services and facilities of CIC are extremely essential to the rural people in India, but they are also expressing their opinions for improving services. Therefore, it is essential to improve services of centres.

**To Arranges Training Programmes:** As most of the CIC is situated in rural areas and people of these areas are not familiar with the ICT, So authority should arrange some training programme. This will help naïve people acquit with new technology and create more awareness of using the CICs.

**National Policy:** Private telecommunication companies along with other partners is trying to spread out Internet facilities in most rural areas in India. Government should come forward and provide all facilities to run the project. Besides these, government should build national policy to spread ICT facilities in the rural areas.

**Fostering Rural Development Projects:** ICT development pilot projects CIC, need to be fostered and to follow different business models for sustainability.

**Lack of Local languages:** Currently, there is no standardization for use of Local languages in the electronic format. Therefore, the CIC management should give more emphasis on these issues as most of the people in rural areas are not well educated.

**Governing Using the Internet:** Bring governance to the people via the Internet, and enhance transparency in the decision making process so the fruits of democracy can be enjoyed by the masses.

**Supply of Electricity Across the Nation:** With about majority of the population of rural India, have no access to electricity for 24 hours. The issue of electricity has to be solved before a widespread dissemination of CIC.

**High-cost, Low-Reliability of Internet Access:** In these issues, CIC offers edge modem wireless connection which speed capacity is 128kbps, but most of the time user faces slow network experiences that hampered daily activities. So speeds have to be up and other broad band facilities have to open with low cost.

**Project Sustainability:** In order to sustainability of this project, it needs joint collaboration of government and other operators. In earlier many projects fails and these things will never happens ensures the CIC management members. If the Indian policy makers extend the CIC project to more remote and poorer rural areas, the result could be more striking.

**Patronization of Government:** In the part of government, there are a lot of responsibilities. CICs can't sustain without guardianship and help of the government. First, government of the country has to come forward and make a policy with joint collaboration to further implementation of CIC.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion it appears that Rural community development is the back borne of a country's development, if implemented properly will opened a new vista for the rural people in rural India and will serve as a panacea to the problems that long time exist and hindered them from exploiting their potentialities Effective utilization of ICT has the potential to make the rural communities in India prosperous. Further, no single agency can deliver all these critical inputs. Besides the private sector, the need for a proactive participation by the government sector, NGOs, government agencies and other civil society organization is also important. The project CIC aims to make maximum usage of ICT and the latest technology available in the most developed countries to reap the results into the rural community. Access to information by rural communities in India, ignoring rural communities for not providing them with

basics needs and access to information infrastructures will basically lead them to migrate from rural communities to concentrate in the urban areas which will not augur well for Indian development. The Idea of having network of CIC in every village connected together into a Village Community web-portal, and complemented by Intelligent, Real-Time Governance will lead to reduced information asymmetry between administration and the citizens. The tools and technology in the forms of CICs, the Community web-portals, intelligent and Real-Time e-Governance are at hand. The choice of transforming or ignoring Rural India is in our hands.

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