



EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH MULTI MEDIA VILLAGE INFORMATION CENTERS

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture including Crop husbandry, Animal husbandry, Fisheries, Forestry, Agro-forestry and Agro-industries provides livelihoods to over 70 per cent of rural Indian population. Developing appropriate ICTs for sustainable development and livelihood is, therefore, essential at grass roots level, i.e., at community level. A study was performed for determining the information needs of different communities and designing system for linking the groups to relevant information and training resources ultimately to enable rural people to have information access for rural development. Data of two years period from July 2001-2002 to July 2002-2003 were collected from the beneficiaries of multimedia village information centers established by Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University in India. The users of village information centers who accessed different information technology tools during the study period were classified as users of Electronic media, Audio media, Video media, Print media and others. 28.97 per cent of the beneficiaries were accessed the electronic media during the second year with an increase of 8.98 per cent when compared to the first year which was only 19.99 per cent. The 8.98 per cent increased access shows the awareness, knowledge gain towards the electronic media access and overall built up of computer literacy and capacity in accessing information and communication technologies for information access and development, sense of ownership and empowerment.

Keywords: Information centers, village, electronic media, information and communication technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Many of the Indian villagers are poor in utilizing information technologies for communication and information needs. To make information technology and electronic communication network more accessible to rural population to collect and disseminate information beyond national boundaries, more emphasis should be given in the development of information technologies, especially in the remote rural areas. It is often expressed by the scientists of the extension centres that they have difficulty in reaching large number of people owing to limited manpower, transport facility, high cost and lack of sufficient time. As it is natural for any organization to shine for excellence in all its sphere of activity, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University is also in constant search for newer, faster and economic methods of technology transfer systems. The flow of information in the recent years is so tremendous that we are actually drawing in the vast pool of information but we lack sufficient system to transfer the same to the needy people. By providing timely information access to the rural mass expected that there will be improvement in their knowledge and there by their economy.

Based on this concept, Multi media Village Information Centres are established in determining the information needs of different communities and designing system for linking the groups to relevant information and training resources ultimately to enable rural people to have information access for rural development.

METHODOLOGY

Three different villages of 3 major districts of Tamil Nadu were identified for the study based on the selection criteria and a baseline survey tool and the villages selected are chitteri from Vellore District, Kuzhumani from Tiruchirapalli District, Pudhuthamaraipatti from Madurai District of Tamil Nadu. The Veterinary University Training and Research Centres of Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University viz., Vellore, Tiruchirapalli and Madurai which are the hub centres responsible for providing basic computer training, providing information details, revenue accounting, organizing committees and meetings and for micro level planning over a period of 2 years from July 2001-2002 to July 2002-2003.

The beneficiaries of the Village Information Centres were considered as the respondents for the study. Interview method was followed for data collection. An interview schedule incorporating items pertaining to objective of the study was constituted, pre-tested and finalized for the data collection. The data were collected during the period 2001-2003 and were coded, tabulated and necessary analytical techniques were used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Number of people who were used different Information Technology tools during the initial one year i.e., from July 2001 to July 2002 is given in the Table-1.



Table-1.

S. No.	Community users trend	From July 2001 to July 2002			Total	%
		Chitteri	Kuzhumani	Pudhu thamaraipatti		
I	Electronic media					
1.	Internet browsing	11	40	30	81	19.99
2.	E-mail	0	50	6	56	
3.	Access to www.tanuv.ac.in	12	26	0	38	
4.	Exam results	0	23	0	23	
5.	Computer basics	130	257	9	396	
6.	Hard copies	0	0	1	1	
7.	Scanning	0	0	0	0	
II	Audio Media					
1.	Telephone	0	224	49	273	13.77
2.	Radio	8	128	1	137	
III	Video Media					
1.	Learning Animal Husbandry Lessons through Audio / Video Cassettes/CDs	0	30	1	31	1.04
	Total	161	778	97	1036	34.80
IV	Print media					
1.	Daily Newspaper-Tamil	111	1027	112	1250	64.70
2.	Daily Newspaper-English	0	343	73	416	
3.	TANUVAS booklets / books /Magazines	0	191	0	191	
4.	Employment Newspaper	0	69	0	69	
V	Others					
1.	Technical advises about computer and treatment and advise for their livestock	0	15	0	15	0.50
	Total	111	1645	185	1941	65.2
	Grand total	272	2423	282	2977	100%

Number of people who were used different Information Technology Tools during the next one year i.e., from July 2002 to July 2003 are given in the Table-2.



Table-2.

S. No.	Community users trend	July 2002 to July 2003			Total	%
		Chitteri	Kuzhumani	Pudhu thamaraipatti		
I	Electronic media					
1.	Internet browsing	319	80	495	894	28.97
2.	E-mail	133	81	74	288	
3.	Access to www.tanuv.ac.in	5	96	113	214	
4.	Exam results	0	41	82	123	
5.	Computer basics	1942	270	435	2647	
6.	Hard copies	5	75	19	99	
7.	Scanning	0	5	18	23	
II	Audio Media					
1.	Telephone	246	237	527	1010	10.11
2.	Radio	257	139	90	486	
III	Video Media					
1.	Learning Animal Husbandry Lessons through Audio / Video Cassettes/CDs	0	31	140	171	1.16
	Total	2907	1055	1993	5955	40.24
IV	Print media					
1.	Daily Newspaper-Tamil	3010	1431	979	5420	58.19
2.	Daily Newspaper-English	0	465	535	1000	
3.	TANUVAS booklets / books/Magazines	249	529	782	1561	
4.	Employment Newspaper	74	432	128	643	
V	Others					
1.	Technical advises about computer and treatment and advise for their livestock	0	233	0	233	1.57
	Total	3333	3090	2425	8848	59.76
	Grand total	6240	4145	4418	14803	100%

It could be observed from the Table-1, that during the first year, 19.99 per cent of the beneficiaries started accessing the electronic media which includes internet browsing, e-mails and learning of basics of computer. And it has been noticed that there is decreased access in other media like Audio 13.77 per cent, Video 1.04 per cent and others 0.5 per cent except print media where in 64.70 per cent were accessed the print media for their information needs.

From Table-2, it could be observed that 28.97 per cent of the beneficiaries accessed the electronic media during the second year of the study and other media showing similar trend as that of year one. Increase of about 8.98 per cent in electronic media and decrease of about 6.5 per cent in the print media access was observed. This is a clear indicative that there is a gain and interest towards the electronic media access. These village

information centres act as 'hubs' where different social networks can intersect. Participation in ICT centres builds the confidence and skills to deal with new people and situations. Thus ICTs as a tool have potential for enabling democratic participation and for open information sharing.

CONCLUSIONS

The rural mass who has not been much aware of e-mail, internet and website are started using the Information Technology tools after implementation of this scheme. Engaging the community helps to make ICT interventions an economic and social choice and not something they are compelled to adopt and accept. The computer literacy rate has increased. Previously information access which was something beyond the reach of villagers has become a part of their daily life. The public awareness and intention has improved to approach



village information centre to fill the gap of information needs. These village information centres definitely has its unique way of improving the standard of living of villages and the overall built up of capacity.

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