



Research Article

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FUNCTIONING OF COMMON SERVICES CENTRES (CSCs) IN THOUBAL DISTRICT OF MANIPUR

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Abstract: The study was conducted so as to understand the status and functions of Common Service Centres (CSCs), Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) and their customers. And it was found that mobile recharge, online result, Aadhar seeding and Aadhar prints were mostly delivered and demanded services in the CSCs. Most of the VLEs have gain benefit in their income, enhanced experience and also improved their social status. Customers also gain benefits saving cost & time and easy access to internet services. Most of the VLEs faced certain challenges due to less support from government officials and slow update of new services and customer respondents also mention of lack of knowledge and technical skill was the constraints they faced at CSCs. It can be suggests that active monitoring team should form to evaluate the role and functions of all stakeholders for better performance of CSCs and also need training and proper awareness programme for the customers to exploit more services from the CSCs.

Keywords: Village Level Entrepreneurs, Common Services Centres, Services, Skills, Knowledge, training, customers

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Introduction

Over the past decade, there have been numerous e-Governance initiatives in the country. To speed up the e-Governance throughout all the levels of Government, there must be a programme approach which must be guided by a common vision, strategy and approach that would add advantage of enabling huge savings in costs, in terms of sharing the core and support. The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) has vision of providing all government services at an affordable cost, and integrated manner at the doorstep of the citizen. With focus to the development of rural areas across the country, the Government of India started planning for rollout of over 100,000 Common Services Centres (CSCs) in 2011 [1].

Common Services Centres

The Common Services Centres (CSCs) Scheme is one of the three (State Wide Area Network, SWAN; Skill Development Centre, SDC and CSC) important intended to serve as front- end delivery points for government, private and social sector services in an integrated manner to rural citizens of India. The project is being carried out by a joint collaborative approach between government and private sectors under Public- Private Partnership Model (PPP) [2]. VLE is the driver to the success of the CSC operation. They would not be one who has financial muscle only, but somebody who has entrepreneurial traits, strong social commitment as well as respect within the community. Prudent selection and proper training of the VLE therefore would play a vital role in making the CSC a success.

Status of CSCs in Manipur

In Manipur, the CSC scheme was initiated in 2008. Implementation of CSCs in the state was done on phase wise (phase I & Phase II) and numbers of CSCs rolled out reach 680 among which 342 CSCs are actively functioning remaining 338 CSCs are deactivate[3]. Manipur State IT Society (MSITS) is the designated Agency. As the state comprised of hilly terrains it was not easy to implement the project and towards successful operations of these CSCs, Government of Manipur

has provided VSATs and Solar Power Packs to resolve the internet connectivity and power issue [3].

Methodology

The study was conducted in Thoubal district of Manipur, which is deemed to have a higher successful implementation of VSAT [4]. At present the district has 71 numbers of active CSCs [3]. In 2016 during which the study was conducted, only 17 active CSCs were reported in the district (<http://thoubal.nic.in/csc.htm>). The study has covered the 17 actively existing CSCs. The VLEs were contacted through e-mails as well as telephone of which only 13 responded. Data were collected using well structured questionnaires. For understanding the customers view about the CSCs, 25 frequent customers of two CSCs viz, CSC Pangaltabi (13 customers) and CSC Waikhong (12 customers) were randomly selected and interviewed. Primary data used in the paper were collected during October to December 2016.

Results & discussion

Profile of VLEs

Out of the 13 VLEs studied, most of the VLEs were Graduates (38.46%) or had completed higher secondary school (38.46%). Only one of them was female. Their monthly incomes ranged from ₹ 10,000 to above ₹ 25000. An average increase in monthly income by 65.47% was found since the time they started CSCs. Some of the VLEs (38.46%) were running the CSCs for more than 7 years, few (23.08%) for only 1-3 years and remaining (38.46%) had not even crossed 1 year of experience as VLE. VLEs with more experiences earned more than those with less experience as monthly income of the VLEs and their working experience was worked out to be positively correlated ($r=0.017$). Majority of the Most VLEs (92.31%) expressed that they are satisfied with the trainings provided to them, Half of them reported high work proficiency while the other half (46.15%) that the they require more guidance and training to exhibit their role as VLE proficiently.

need for more hands on training was emphasised. But nevertheless all of them expressed high interest in their work and want to continue their work as VLEs (92.31%). Similar finding was also reported in Maharashtra by Directorate of Information Technology [5] that VLEs were very satisfied with CSC business and would like to continue their work.

Profile of Customers

In the study, majority of the respondents were at the age of 21 to 26 years (52.00%). Most of the respondents were male (68.00%), similar statement reported in a study at Maharashtra as majority visitor were male [5] but contrary to this female visitors were found more than male in the study off [6] at Tripura. Majority of the customer respondents were found to be student (92.00%) of which 44 per cent were in 12th standard followed by college students (28.00%) and high school students (28.00%). Average incomes of the respondents' family were found of around ₹ 27,000 per month. It was reported that awareness of the existence of the CSCs were received from the awareness and training programmes conducted by the VLEs (60.00%) and friends & relatives (44.00%)

Services utilised at the CSCs

According to the response provided by the VLEs, most utilised services in the CSCs were mobile recharging (92.30%) and checking exam and other results online (92.30%), CSC travel i.e., Air ticket booking (84.61%), Aadhar related services like seeding, printing etc. (76.92%), DTH recharge (69.23%) etc.

Services accessed by Customers

Majority of the customer respondents reported visiting CSCs for getting Printout and Xerox copies of documents (92%), Aadhar related services like seeding, printing etc (68%), for mobile recharge (68%), booking air travel ticket (52%) and for online result on internet (44%) etc. Details of the services utilised and accessed are provided in table 1. It can be observed that there are not many differences in the responses provided by the service providers and customers. However, it may be noted that there are numerous services that a CSC should provide (<http://apna.csc.gov.in/>) but only a handful of services are available to them. Some of the services which the CSCs should provide but are either not available in the CSCs or not utilised by the customers are election services, Financial inclusion, educational services, Health, services on agriculture, income tax filling, etc. This lack of efficiency in service provision may be attributed due to poor functions of CSCs, low awareness about CSCs services and its potential benefits to the rural people and lack of support from the state government offices. [7] in their study in Kerala also reported on similar lines and they added that misunderstanding and lack of awareness about the necessity and ultimate benefits of e-governance system to be the reasons of low efficiency in services of CSCs.

Benefits gained by VLEs

Respondent VLEs report of being benefits in several ways. Majority of them mention of increase in their income (92.30%), enhanced their experience in working (92.30%), developed in their technical skills (92.30%), improved in social status and responsibilities (92.30%) and also increase the level of cosmopolitanism (69.23%). The benefits gained by the VLEs after working at CSCs are present in table 2. VLEs mentioned of not having good status job or services before becoming VLE, they were of jobless and earning were of very less as they don't have good earning works. Some were student and join the centre so they don't have good income. But after becoming VLE, the centre makes their way for earning and they earn enough income from the services provided. As they were working at the centres for years their experience of work increases and they become competent at their services. Using the technologies everyday for long, developed their technical skill and easy handling of equipment's in the centres. People far and nearby starts recognized them and shows respect them and their profession that improves their status in the society. They used to attend training programmes and also conduct programmes and awareness at different locations, these makes VLEs more cosmopolite and familiar to many people.

Benefits of CSCs gained by Customers

Not only the VLEs but the customers also reported certain benefits of utilization of CSC services. Some benefits mentioned by CSCs customers that they gained visiting CSCs were present in table 3 below.

Table-1 Most utilised services of CSCs

Most utilised services at CSCs (n=13)	Percent (%)	Most accessed services by customers (n=25)	Percent (%)
Mobile recharge	92.3	Printing and Photocopying	92
Online Result	92.3	Aadhar related (seeding, printing etc)	68
CSC travel (Air)	84.61	Mobile recharge	68
Aadhar related (seeding, printing, etc)	76.92	Booking of travel ticket (AIR)	52
DTH recharge	69.23	Online result	44

Table-2 Benefits gain by the VLEs

Aspect	Percent (%)
Increased income	92.3
Enhanced experience	92.3
Developed technical skills	92.3
Improved Social status	92.3
Cosmopolitanism	69.23

Customers were found saved cost and time (72%), easy access to internet (68%) and also helped improving their technical skill (36%). Customers also expressed satisfied with the services offer at their nearby CSCs (88%), giving reasonable service charges (76%) and favorable attitudes of the VLEs (92%). Being the centres located at the local area makes the users save time for accessing the services; service charges were lesser as compare to other kiosks centres this makes customers pay less and save money. Internet connectivity and accessibility was easily availed to the customer and being majority were youth, they mention of improved their technical skills as the centres have facility to access the services by customer themselves.

Table-3 Benefits of CSCs gain by Customers

Aspects	Percent (%)
Save cost and time	72
Easy access to internet	68
Help in improving technical skill	36

Challenges faced by VLEs at CSCs

Table 4 below depicts the challenges that arises at CSCs and problems faced by the VLEs. Lack of support from government official (84.61%) was found as major challenges to the VLEs. [9] reported the same challenges of unwilling of government official to cooperate the CSCs program. VLEs expressed of no coordination and support from the district officials on timely issuing of certificates (birth certificate, date certificates, etc) applied through the CSCs. Due to slow process in the CSCs, customer preferred to go direct to the government offices. Other challenges were slow and lack of regularity in updating new services (76.92%) and insufficient equipment and technologies in the centre (61.59%). Though equipment's and technologies are provided from the government, it took time to reach the CSCs, sometimes VLEs have to manage it of their own. Other challenges that the VLEs mentioned were lack of G2C services and less awareness of rural people about the CSCs. [9] also mentioned the challenge of lack of G2C services in their study at Jharkhand and lack of awareness among citizens regarding IT and CSC in their study at Uttar Pradesh. The upgrading of services and updating were also found slow in the CSCs of the district. Despite of successful implementation of VSAT to maximum CSCs, VLEs still faced interrupted, slow and low connectivity of internet, which were also found mentioned in the studies of [9] at Jharkhand and Meghalaya.

Table-4 Challenges faced by VLEs

Items	Percent (%)
Less support from the government official	84.61
Slow to update new services	76.92
Insufficient equipment in the centre	61.59
Low internet connectivity	53.84

Constraints faced by Customers

Respondent customers shared few constraints faced by them visiting CSCs were lack of knowledge about the CSCs and poor technical skills of customers (44%), poor and slow connectivity (40%) and few of them mentioned of high service charge at CSCs (32%). The service charges at the CSCs under study were found not same, in few services like Aadhar seeding, printing documents, etc., VLE of Waikhong charges more and make feel of unreasonable payment by the customers. Lack of knowledge and awareness of people regarding CSC were also mentioned as constraints in the studies of [7,9]. And slow connectivity was mentioned as constraints in the studies of [5, 9].

Conclusion:

The importance of CSCs as a medium for making the ICTs and e-Governance facilities available to the relatively unreached and underprivileged rural population cannot be argued. This study is of limited scope considering it was carried out on a limited number of CSCs and customers. However, a clear benefit of the initiative on both respondent categories is visible in the findings of the study. At the same time certain lacunae and challenges in the functioning of the CSCs is also pointed out in the study important being lack of support from government officials and slow updates of new services and lack of awareness on part of both the VLEs and customers regarding the potential and scope of CSCs. A successful and efficient CSC requires well trained and devoted VLEs as well as proper support and cooperation from all the concerned public and private service providers. This call for proper identification and analysis of stakeholders initiated by concerned Government department in consultation with VLEs and the action plan derived should be properly communicated to all actors. This can be a major step in improving the performance of the CSCs.

Application of Research: The study can be conducted at other CSCs throughout the country so as to detect the gap and find out scope to improve the working of VLEs and services to the customers. Being determined for rural development, incorporation of Agricultural technologies and services can be done in the services delivered by CSCs so as to boost in the Agriculture sector and for development in Agriculture.

Research Category: Agricultural Extension

Abbreviations:

CSCs	Common Service Centres
DIT	Department of Information Technology
G2C	Government to Citizen
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MSITS	Manipur State Information Technology Society
NeGP	National e-Governance Plan
PPP	Public- Private Partnership
VLE	Village Level Entrepreneurs
VSATs	Very Small Aperture Terminal

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