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**IMPACT OF MEDIA AND ICT IN RURAL LIFE OF INDIA WITH  
SPECIAL REFERNCE TO SOUTH ASSAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the key driving forces, in the 21st century. It transforms the way we live, learn, work, and play. Advances in computing and communication technology have created a new infrastructure for business, scientific research, and social interaction. This expanding infrastructure is providing us with new tools for communicating throughout the world and for acquiring knowledge and insight from information. ICT provides a vehicle for economic growth. Information and Communication Technology penetrated all activities of human life. It acts as a link to the development of the society. The management of developmental activities and government programs require generating, collecting, storing and retrieval of a large volume of data. The ICT has been employed for the effective manipulation of data and information. ICT started to play a crucial role in increasing the overall efficiency of the economy and its own growth. Application of knowledge or information and its production-processes has brought change in socio-economic cultural progress, in any part of the world. But what about rural development? Can the application of ICT help to improve the conditions of the rural people? Well, one of the major components and driving force of rural development is communication and information. Right information to be made available to the right person at the right time at low cost is possible only through the new communication technology. Information and Communication technology is a device which is used to accelerate the process of the development and expected to bring maximum social advantage for the benefit of the society in rural India. Conventionally, communication includes media, human communication & now information technology (IT). All these forms of communications have tremendous potential to influence the development scene of rural areas, by communicating the required information necessary for bringing about desirable*

*social and behavioural change among the most vulnerable rural poor and women. The role of communication technology for development must be viewed in this context. IT and ICT programmes (panchayati raj institutions) have a vital role in bringing awareness and disseminating information for the upliftment of the rural people.*

*In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the application of Information and Communication Technologies in rural areas of South Assam, and its impact on the progressive and professional life of the people of rural areas.*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The closing decade of twentieth century was the opening of historic information and communication technology interventions for development. This period has witnessed enormous and unprecedented changes in every aspect of communications, technologies, policies, infrastructure development and services. Application of Information and Communication Technology policies by the Government have played a big role in redefining, reshaping and providing telecommunication, broadcasting and information services for national development. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the key driving forces, in the 21st century. It transforms the way we live, learn, work, and play. Advances in computing and communication technology have created a new infrastructure for business, scientific research, and social interaction. This expanding infrastructure is providing us with new tools for communicating throughout the world and for acquiring knowledge and insight from information. ICT provides a vehicle for economic growth. Information and Communication Technology penetrated all activities of human life. It acts as a link to the development of the society. The management of developmental activities and government programs require generating, collecting, storing and retrieval of a large volume of data. The ICT has been employed for the effective manipulation of data and information. ICT started to play a crucial role in increasing the overall efficiency of the economy and its own growth. Application of knowledge or information and its production processes has brought change in socio-economic cultural progress, in any part of the world. But what about rural development? Can the application of ICT help to improve the conditions of the rural people? Well, one of the major components and driving force of rural development is communication and information. Right information to be made available to the right person at the right time at low cost is possible only through the new information technology. Information technology is a device which is used to accelerate the process of the development and expected to bring maximum social advantage for the benefit of the society in rural India. Conventionally, communication includes media, human communication & now information technology (IT). All these forms of communications have tremendous potential to influence the development scene of rural areas, by communicating the required information necessary for bringing about desirable social and behavioural change among the most vulnerable rural poor and women. The role of communication technology for development must be viewed in this context. IT and ICT programmes (panchayati raj institutions) have a vital role in bringing awareness and disseminating information for the upliftment of the rural people.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the application of Information and Communication Technologies in rural areas of South Assam, and its impact on the progressive and professional life of the people of rural areas.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**

The role and application of Information Technology has expanded tremendously during the last decade in rural areas. Information technology is a device which has the maximum potential to accelerate the process of development and to bring maximum social advantage for the benefit of the society. In view of the magnitude of the task of reaching out to rural poor with information, various rural development programmes have been formulated by the government for wide application of IT and Telecommunications in rural area for the upliftment of the socio-economic conditions of the rural people. In Assam the rural areas cover about 85 % of the total area. Many initiatives on rural development of this region have been taken up by the government, but still it remains an illusive goal and could not do much to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. So the development of rural sector has become the need of the hour and requires re-look with different approaches in this region. In this regard an attempt has been made to portray the impact and assessment of IT applications in the rural areas of this region.

### **THE STUDY HAS BEEN CONDUCTED TO FIND OUT THE FOLLOWING**

- Information Needs of the Rural Community
- Sources of Information
- Impact of Media among the Rural Masses
- Use of IT facilities by the Rural Masses
- Effectiveness of ICT among the Rural Masses
- IT Literacy
- Constraints and Suggestions

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

It is not practical to study the whole population to arrive at generalizations, though the result of the research is to have universal application. The process of sampling makes it possible to draw valid inferences or generalizations on the basis of careful observation of variables within a relatively small proportion of population. Hence a representative part of this population has been taken up to conduct the study. For this purpose out of the three districts of South Assam , Cachar district has been selected as the area of study, as this being the largest and the oldest of the three districts. The rural subsystem of Cachar district consists of 15 number of Development Blocks with 161 nos. of Gaon Panchayats and 997 nos. of Villages.

The technique adopted in the present study is the questionnaire method. In this study, a total of one hundred and ten questionnaires were distributed randomly to the inhabitants of the fifteen Development Blocks of the selected district under study.

#### 4.0 ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

The collection of data for the present study is being done by distributing a total of 110 questionnaires in the villages of the fifteen Blocks under the Cachar district. Out of 110, 50 questionnaires were received back, duly filled in, which shows that the percentage of response is 45%.

Category-wise distribution of the respondents reveals that out of 50 respondents, 26 of them are professionals (52%), which is followed by 18 (36%) respondents who are students and only 6 (12%) belonging to the category of housewives who form the lowest group of respondents.

**TABLE 1: CATEGORY -WISE CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS**

Sl.No.	Category	No. of responses (Frequency)	Percentage of response
1	Professionals	26	52
2	Students	18	36
3	Housewives	6	12

#### 4.1 BASIC INFORMATION NEEDS

The information needs of rural people vary distinctly depending upon the purpose for which they need information. The purpose may vary from simple day-to-day activities, health, learning, etc, to complex information in diverse fields of their profession to which they belong. Hence to know about specific purpose of information search, respondents were asked to indicate or tick from among the six options as mentioned in the questionnaire. In addition, an extra option has also been provided in order to enable them to specify any other purpose for which they search information, other than the six as mentioned in the questionnaire. The analysis of the data is as shown in Table 2 which succeeds the discussion of the findings.

**TABLE 2 : BASIC INFORMATION NEED**

Sl.No.	Fields in which information is sought	Frequency	Percentage
1	Health	47	94
2	Education	47	94
3	Profession	42	84
4	Agriculture	40	80
5	Animal Husbandry	23	46
6	Business	20	40

The data analyzed in this table shows the relevant purpose for which the users are in need of information. It indicates that majority of the respondents need information for health and education related matters, thereby accounting for a high response of 94% each. While they also need information for their professional purpose accounting for 84% response followed by agricultural information needs as stated by 80 % of the respondents. It is to be noted here that information for animal husbandry, poultry farming, etc and business-related matters are sought only by 46% and 40% of the rural masses respectively as reported in the study.

#### 4.2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION COLLECTION

Rural communities face new challenges of information needs for their betterment of lives and their occupation, but they are not much aware of the various sources and avenues through which they can collect information. Hence to know about the specific sources of information they find useful for them, respondents were asked to indicate or tick from among the six options as mentioned in the questionnaire about their source of information.

**TABLE 3: SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Sl No.	Sources through which information is collected	Frequency	Percentage
1	Media	47	94
2	Library	20	40
3	Friends/Acquaintances	50	100
4	Community Inf. Centre (CIC)	5	10
5	Panchayat Office	45	90
6	Internet	5	10

From the above analysis, it is found that acquiring the desired information through a friend or a reliable acquaintance seems to be the most common avenue of information collection among the rural masses, accounting for 100 % of responses. It is also found that the role of media in rural life, and the influence it has on various social, economic and political processes of the rural people is quite interesting. About 94 % of them are using the various media sources like newspaper, radio and television for their information needs, followed by information from Panchayat Offices in their locality accounting for 90 % of responses, while use of library is reported by 40% of the respondents. It is noted that use of CIC, and Internet for the purpose of information acquisition is reported by only 10 % of the respondents.

#### 4.3 FREQUENCY OF USE

It is quite important to find out the frequency of the use of information sources as reported by them in the above analysis, because it is an important factor which can throw an elucidating light on the study of impacts and prospects of ICT in rural life. Let us see the following data, as have come-up from the study:

**TABLE 4: FREQUENCY OF USE OF INFORMATION SOURCES**

Sl No.	Sources used	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	As & when reqd.
1	Media	47(94%)	3(6%)	-	-	-
2	Library	10(20%)	5(10%)	-	15(30%)	20(40%)
3	Friends	10(20%)	-	-	-	40(80%)
4	CIC	-	-	-	-	-
5	Panchayat Off.	-	10(20%)	20(40%)	5(10%)	15(30%)
6	Internet	-	2(4%)	7(14%)	9(18%)	32(64%)

The above table clearly shows the analysis of their frequency of information use. It is evident that newspaper, TV, etc. are the most widely used source on a daily basis in the rural areas (94%), while information through friends also showed a high response of 80% among the respondents. While use of library for their information query is not very common among them; they only visit it only when a requirement arises, as reported by only 20 % of the respondents. Ofcourse, Panchayat Office and Internet are used by them quite frequently, if not daily, but one important drawback as noticed in the analysis is the absence of any sort of reliability on CIC offices for their information needs, probably because of the existence of very small numbers of such centres in these areas.

#### 4.4 RURAL LIBRARY

A rural library is an integral part of mass education programme and its main aim is rural development. The prime objective is to take forward the backward community, the neglected and the suppress people of the society through various programmes and to preserve the literary heritage of the local social life. It organizes, communicates and distributes information to the public of that area. Hence to know about the presence of such a library in their village, respondents were asked to tick the option of Yes or No. and also to indicate the services rendered by the library, if one such existing in their village. The result of the query shows the following:

**TABLE 5: RURAL LIBRARY AND ITS SERVICES**

SI No.	Presence of Rural Library	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	7	14
2	No	43	86
	<b>Rural Library Services</b>		
1	Loan of books on rural information	2	4
2	Reference services	2	4
3	Current awareness	3	6
4	Adult education	-	-
5	CD/Audio-visuals	-	-
6	Reprographic service	-	-
7	Computer facility	-	-

This table shows that presence of rural library is very rare in this region; only 14% of the respondents reported about presence of such a library in their locality. And out of this, information on current awareness has been reported by 6% of them as the service provided by the library in their area, followed by book lending and reference service only stated by 4% of the respondents for each.

#### 4.5 COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRE (CIC)

The establishment of Community Information Centres (CICs) has been envisaged as a means to use the benefits of Information Technology (IT) to raise the socio-economic conditions of the people of India particularly those in the remote areas of the North Eastern states. This proposal is planned as a major initiative from the government to utilize IT as a cutting edge tool of

development for rural areas by providing IT-oriented facilities and information to the people of rural areas. Let us examine the data as derived from this particular query.

**TABLE 6: COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRE (CIC)**

Sl No.	Presence of CIC	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	23	46
2	No	27	54
	<b>CIC Facilities</b>		
1	Local and National News	16	32
2	Rural Development Progs.	15	30
3	Educational/Training Progs.	19	38
4	Career and Job Information	16	32
5	Inf. on Govt. Schemes & Loans	17	34
6	Agricultural and Health Information	16	32
7	Internet facility	20	40

Thus it shows that establishment of Community Information Centres (CICs) has been reported by 46% people, who say that internet service is the most enabled facility availed by them from their respective CICs (40%), followed by training and computer education programmes as reported by 38% of the local people. They also avail the facility of collecting recent information on Government schemes and loans from this centre as stated by 34% of them. Other facilities like Rural Development Programmes. and Career and Job Information Programmes are also availed by them to some extent(32%).However it is important to mention here that they reported presence of such CICs only in their respective blocks, and not in every village.

#### **4.6 IMPACT OF MEDIA**

Different forms of mass media such as print media, radio, television, traditional media and the internet are used to disseminate information. Mass media is a tremendous source of information for individuals as well as society. The play the role of acting as a bridge between the government and the rural people. It plays an important role in the development of a region by projecting in the right perspective, The media not only inform the people about it but also explain the effect of that decision taken by the government on the people. Media provide news and information



required by the people and can educate the public towards development of their socio-economic conditions. In this regard it was felt necessary to enquire about the media sources the rural people have access to in their locality. The result of their response is as shown in the table below.

**TABLE 7: IMPACT OF MEDIA**

SI No.	Access to Media Sources	Frequency	Percentage
1	Newspaper	42	84
2	Radio	48	96
3	Television	46	92
4	Magazines/Bulletins	13	26

Thus the above analysis shows that radio and television are the most common media sources accessed by the rural people accounting for 96% and 92% responses respectively, which is followed by newspaper as accessed by 84% of the people. While it is noticed that Magazines are not much used by the rural masses (26%), but some of them have mentioned about other facilities like cinema and books as well, which are available only to a small extent.

#### 4.7 IMPACT OF POSTAL AND TELEGRAPH SERVICES

Postal and Telegraph services are the most wide-spread and cheapest means of communication in rural areas. Owing to its far-flung reach and its presence in remote areas, the Indian postal service is satisfyingly serving the rural people with various services for communication of information and delivery of messages to remote areas of the country. The matter of the study demands that an analysis be made so as to ascertain the extent of rural post office and telegraph offices existing in the rural areas of South Assam. The analysis is as show below:

**TABLE8: AVAILABILITY OF POST AND TELEGRAPH SERVICES**

SI No.	Presence of Post & Telegraph Offices	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	50	100
2	No	0	0

This study positively shows the presence of Post and Telegraph office, and thus availing of various postal services in every village of South Assam accounting for 100% response .Thus it shows that various saving and financial services of Post Offices along with delivery and communication of information is easily availed by the rural people in this area.

#### 4.8 COMPUTER LEARNING CENTRE

Computer literacy has become increasingly important in rural areas and the purpose of computer utility in the socio-economic life of the rural people is on the rise. The advantages achieved through computer knowledge in their professional life have been significantly noticed. It has also influenced the application of ICT in their routine activities and finding information through internet. Hence it is very important to have a Computer Learning Centre in every village so as to educate the rural people about use of computer and its implications in their daily life. The analysis shows the following:

**TABLE 9: COMPUTER LEARNING CENTRE**

SI No.	Presence of Computer Learning Centre	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	44	88
2	No	6	12

This analysis shows that 88% of the respondents reported about existing of such a learning centre in their area, while 12% of them have denied existence of such a facility in their area. Here again it may be mentioned that Computer Learning Centres are mostly located in their respective development blocks rather in the individual villages.

#### 4.9 ICT FACILITIES

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) encompasses all those technologies that enable handling of information and facilitate different forms of communication between the masses and the information systems. Thus it is the new asset and the new source of power in today's world. ICT can immensely contribute to empowerment of rural people in all aspects and can facilitate them with various amenities. Let us examine the implications of ICT in the various amenities provided in the rural region.

**TABLE 10: ICT FACILITIES AVAILABLE**

SI No.	Access to IT facilities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Telephone Exchange	35	70
2	Satellite/ Cable TV Networking	38	76
3	Mobile Phone Services	48	96
4	ATM Services	3	6
5	Broadband Internet Services	26	52
6	Internet Cafe/PCOs	25	50

The above table shows that Mobile Phone Service has been reported by 96% of the people, along with a Telephone Exchange being reported by 70% of the people. Also it is seen that Internet facilities are being made available in the rural areas of South Assam, responded by 52% of the villagers, though the facility is being basically made available only in their respective development block under which their village falls. Some of the villagers also made their responses for Satellite TV and Internet Café accounting for 76% and 50% responses respectively.

#### 4.10 IT-ORIENTED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

IT and Infrastructure in this region is yet to strengthen and spread widely, thereby reaching the far-flung areas of the rural region. IT-oriented rural development programmes provides a vehicle for economic growth. It can make the work condition of the rural inhabitants more rewarding, improve the quality of health care and make the government more responsive and accessible to our citizens with more facilities and better technologies of agriculture and allied fields. Thus this type of development programmes can positively influence all activities of rural life. Hence this study genuinely demands to examine whether such programmes are being availed by the rural people of this region and what are those. The result of the study is analysed in Table 11.

**TABLE 11: IT-ORIENTED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

SI No.	Rural Dev Progs (IT-based)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Infrastructure & Communication	26	52
2	Media & Telecommunications	42	84
3	Mod. Agricultural Methods	22	44
4	Health Progs. & Telemedicine	21	42
5	Computer Training	44	88
6	E-Learning	22	44
7	E-Business	21	42

The above analysis shows that media facilities of newspaper, radio, TV etc, and telecommunication facilities of telephone and mobile, along with the facility of computer education are the two common amenities reported by 84% and 88% of the respondents respectively. About infrastructural facilities of road, power, health, etc, in their village, only 52% of the respondents reported the presence of such facilities in their area, followed by e-methods of agriculture and learning reported by 44% (both) and e- business by 42% of the respondents respectively.

#### 4.11 CONSTRAINTS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the above analyses, it is seen that rural people of this region face some problems in collecting information in their field and also regarding various infrastructural facilities and rural development programmes in their region, which deserve consideration and which needs to be discussed. Hence it was felt necessary to ask the villagers to state clearly their problems and difficulties as faced by them and also to opine possible suggestions, which they feel would help in improving their socio-economic condition in the daily life. The analysis of the data has indicated the following constraints and suggestions as the common ones, which have been expressed by quite a few of them. These are discussed as follows:

i)Regarding infrastructural facilities like communication, transport and power, majority of the respondents expressed their difficulty and disappointment in having very poor facilities of road, transport etc. Also the electricity supply is not available in many of the villages which stands as a hurdle in the development of the region.

ii)About presence of Community Information Centre, it is noted that such centres exist only in the development blocks of the districts, because of which it cannot be availed from the remote areas of the region. It is necessary that such centres are established in every village of the blocks, so that its facilities may be availed by every rural people.

iii)It is opined by quite a few of the respondents that internet facilities are not easily available to them. They have to move to the nearest urban centre or to the development blocks for retrieving any information on net.

iv)Since good health is the basic need of a human being and health centres are the basic element for the public health, it is very essential to improve the physical facilities of the public health centres by adapting new technological devices and facilities of Telemedicine.

v)Since agriculture is the sole mode of occupation in these areas, they want to know about the methods as to how to modernize the agricultural productivity.

vi)The analysis of the study shows that the residents of rural Assam(South) are not much aware of the various schemes and facilities as generated by the government for their welfare and development, and the only source of information in this regard are the Panchayat Offices for them. Hence more avenues on information regarding such schemes should be introduced for them.

vii) Some of the respondents wanted to know more about E-Learning and E-Business methods and how they can be benefitted by such methods.

viii)Regarding facilities of Banks and ATM services, the rural people face a lot of problem as they have to move to the nearest urban centres for any transaction. Hence they have opined for setting up of ATM services in villages for their basic financial needs.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the scene of IT development in rural areas of South Assam is not satisfactory and the impact of media and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in this region is poor. Though the Govt. have formulated strategies for wide application of IT and Telecommunications in rural areas for the upliftment of the socio-economic conditions of the rural people, but the study shows that ICT and allied infrastructures are yet to strengthen and spread widely in this part of Assam. Though we know that infrastructural facilities like road, power, health, education etc are key ingredients for facilitating rural development in any part of the country and for the establishment of IT-oriented facilities, this region largely remains backward in respect of such infrastructural systems, with only minimal percentage of the respondents reporting the presence of such facilities in their area. Lack of awareness has also been one of the major obstacles in securing people's participation in the development process, in view of which, the ICT activities assume particular significance since they make systematic, coordinated and effective use of information for the education of the people and communicate such information in a manner that makes it 'empowering knowledge'. No policy of the region will be successful unless the people of the region are well conscious about their position in the society and hence to upgrade their quality of life. The government also should announce for special packages for more IT ventures in the rural areas and establish requisite mechanism and avenues which can positively influence the socio-economic condition of the rural people. The study explicitly indicates the problems of the rural people in collecting necessary information for their professional and progressive life, and the shortcomings of the IT facilities in their area. The opportunities for acquiring computer literacy and use of Internet is very limited; Community Information Centres (CIC) exists but not in every village. Facilities of rural library is also poor in the region and the scope and prospects of E-Learning, E-Business, Telemedicine and scientific agricultural methods are yet to develop in the rural areas of South Assam. Hence the government should come up with concrete plans for rural infrastructure to overcome these shortcomings and for better equipment of ICT and IT facilities for the development of the region.

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