
ACCESS TO WEB-BASED COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt is being made here to highlight the access to web-based community information services of the Community Information Centres (CICs) in North East India. Emphasis has been given on the objectives, specific purposes, infrastructure, and major facilities and services. Points out the need for assessing the impact of the CICs to the people of the region. Concludes that such services can be used for the development of the region.

Keywords: Web-based Access; Community Information Service; North East India

1. Introduction

Due to digital divide there has been unequal and disproportionate pace of development in the society. There is a wide division between those who have real access to ICT and are using it effectively and those who don't [1]. But according to World Bank Report [2], the digital divide between rich and poor nations is narrowing fast. Every one all over the world, thus, is expected to become e-literate. In fact, in this information era one requires to adapt with the changes taking place in the information environment so as to enjoy with the e-based information services. This will certainly play a key role in the all round development of the society. In this context, an attempt is being made here to understand the access to web-based community information services provided through Community Information Centres (CICs) in North East India.

2. Community Information Centres (CICs): A Boon for North East India

There has been a vital need to extend the reach of modern technology to the region in order to enable rapid socio-economic development and bring the same more closer to the national mainstream. Keeping this in view, within a total project cost of Rs. 240 crores, in April, 2000 Ministry of Information Technology launched a project to establish CICs in all the 487 blocks of the region with the objectives to:

- establish IT infrastructure at the block level;
- create IT awareness amongst the local populace;
- provide internet services such as e-mail, web access, etc;
- conduct computer based training programmes;
- provide citizen centric services;

- provide access to socio-economic databases;
- facilitate distance education;
- use of IT tools for sustainable regional development.

Under this project, the following CICs in all 487 blocks of the region were setup[3] :

Table 1: Community Information Centres in North East India

State	CICs set up in the pilot project	CICs set up in the main project	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	2	54	56
Assam	15	204	219
Manipur	2	31	33
Meghalaya	2	30	32
Mizoram	2	24	26
Nagaland	2	50	52
Sikkim	2	38	40
Tripura	3	26	29
Total	30	457	487

The CIC is a unique scheme which plays a vital role to change our lives for the better if used carefully and cleverly. The following specific purposes are expected to fulfill by the CICs of the region [4]:

- Interface between citizen and government;
- Connectivity to Internet through NICNET, inter-alia, enabling web browsing and e-mail facilities;
- Distance learning programmes;
- Familiarizing use of computer systems, especially amongst school children;
- Enabling IT enabled services as are relevant for needs of local community;
- Generation of employment opportunities;
- Facilitating public related services;
- Dissemination of information on plan initiatives, national programmes, disaster management system, public health awareness, etc.

3. User Community

The user community of the CICs will comprise of the following:

- Panchayat representatives;
- Student community;
- Youths;

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- NGOs;
 - Entrepreneurs;
 - Educational institutions;
 - General public.

4. Major Web-based Services and Facilities

The following are the major services and facilities of the CICs:

- IT promotion and its awareness;
- IT training programme;
- Access to internet;
- E-mailing facilities;
- Content creation;
- Advertisement on career and job opportunities.
- NIC video conferencing;
- Examination results;
- Common Government forms;
- Tender Notices;
- E-governance initiatives;
- Information generation etc.

5. Community Information Services

The e-based community information services provided by the CICs are of varied type. Such services are mainly related to the following areas:

5.1 Agricultural Information

The agricultural information services provided are on weather, seeds, implements, new methods, instruments, equipments, technology, pests, pesticides, animal husbandry, etc.

5.2 Educational Information

The educational information disseminated by the CICs includes:

- List of educational institutions;
- Programmes of studies offered by the institutions;
- Advertisement/announcement for admission, etc.

5.3 Employment Information

The employment information services include information regarding competitive examinations of various organizations, institutions, etc.

5.4 Health Care Information

Information on health care and public hygiene on various aspects:

- Addresses, reference centres, etc. of different hospitals, health centers, institutions and other specialties with their respective location details.
- Hand-outs on family planning, child health, mother health care, etc.
- Preventive medicine and public hygiene for prevention of epidemics, diseases, etc.
- Government health policies, programmes, initiatives, etc.

5.5 Information on Local History

Account on local history of different aspects.

5.6 Public Information

Information related to various products and services.

5.7 Public Policy Information

Such information mainly consists of:

- Government programmes, schemes, initiatives, etc.
- Public grievances as well as various government departments which can be approached.
- Address with location details of various government departments.
- Details on civil rights and duties.

5.8 Other Information

In addition to the above Community information Services, CICs in the region also provide other information services.

6. Need for Assessment: Accessibility

One requires to look at the functioning of the CICs so far in existence in the region. A detail study on the impact of the CIC to the community towards e-based services is essential to carry out so as to assess the situation. The entire North Eastern Region has lacked in economic development in comparison with other regions of the country, mainly due to its remote geographical location. Satellite technology has broken down geographical barriers today and the internet connects people to every corner of the earth linked to the internet. Now the CICs of the region has constituted a unique opportunity to avail of cutting edge ICT to give a fillip to the development of the region. They enable the community to link up to the international network for communication, education, business, career and job opportunities, public health care, hygiene, agriculture, etc. to benefit from the internet for socio-economic development in a new way. The CICs give the community of the region a chance to be a part of the ICT revolution. However, a detail assessment on how far the people of the region have been benefited accessing the CICs still needs to be done.

6. Conclusion

The State governments of the entire North East India have realized and shown their e-governance mission to serve the community of the region through CICs equipped with all the new ICT infrastructure. The respective governments of the states are making efforts to provide citizen centric e-governance through the uses of these centers. The IT literacy rate of the people of the region is expected to increase through the IT literacy programmes of the CICs. The provision of the e-based community information services are also, thus, expected to be enhanced in the near future. Productive, effective and more meaningful community information services of the CICs are very much essential in the region. ICT must be used for the benefit of the ruralites and the disadvantaged to bring them at par with urbanites and the elite end-users. The web-based information services of these CICs can be used by different ethnic communities for the development of the region.

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