

Evaluation of the Role of Rural ICT offices in providing services to the Rural Areas of Isfahan province (Case Study: Seen, Mehregan, Mediseh and Kabutar Abad villages)

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Extended abstract

1- Introduction

Many scholars have called the present era as the era of information and communication technology. The effective roles and functions of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as the centerpiece of many today's developments is something undeniable. Undoubtedly, the impact of this technology is not limited to urban areas but it covers even the most remote rural areas as well. ICT expansion without special attention to the rural areas and deprived regions can cause some negative effects such as increased rural-urban gap, the rural-urban migration, loss of native industries, loss of local markets, and so on. So this technology is considered as one of the tools and infrastructures for a comprehensive development.

Iran's country, along with many advanced countries, has taken steps to develop ICT rural areas, and put effort to provide public services in the most remote areas of the country. To that end many actions have been taken, that one of the most important ones is the performing of project: "The equipping of ten thousands country's villages with ICT offices". In this connection the province of Isfahan since the project started in 2005, has established, equipped, and operated more than 400 rural ICT offices. Present work evaluates the role of ICT offices in providing services to rural areas.

2- Methodology

Present research is among the applied researches and the dominant method used in this work is documentary and descriptive-analytical. In this study for the section of theoretical bases of the research, documentary method, and for obtaining the data and information, field methods were employed. For data

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analyses and results presentation Excel, SPSS and Arcview softwares were used.

3- Discussion

Two questions that have been raised and tried to be answered in this work are:

1-What is the potential of the rural ICT offices in providing services to rural areas, and 2-What are the factors that affect the performance of the offices. Also two hypotheses: 1-Economic effects of the offices are more than their social and cultural effects, and 2-Success of the offices depends on the number of people living in the regions, are brought up and studied in this work. The region under study is the villages of Seen, Mehrgan, Mediseh and KabutarAbad in Isfahan province, with a population of 6139 of 16 to 65 years old ages, and based on that the number of statistical sample was chosen 236.

4- Conclusion

The results of the study showed that despite having high potentials for giving various services in ICT offices, such as educational, health, agriculture, post, and bank services, the activities of the offices are mainly restricted to providing post and post-bank services, and from the villagers' point of view the offices are just established for these two services. Even though these services are very important, other potentials of the offices in social and cultural dimensions which are mainly related to the use of internet in various activities are not still employed. Some factors like people's knowledge of other possible services that can be provided in the offices, people's point of

views towards the role of the offices, and the managements have effect on the success of the offices. Also physical infrastructure, including the speed of internet and the required equipment has main effect on the performance of the offices. The results showed that the number of population has little impact on the ICT office success. The success was largely depends on the interest and knowledge of the people who work in the offices. Based on the results obtained in this work, using SWOT model, some proposals and strategies have been presented for improving and enhancement of offices performance.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Rural ICT offices, Digital divide, Economic impacts

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