

Understanding the Role of Rural Entrepreneurs in Telecentre Sustainability: A Comparative Study of the Akshaya and eSeva Projects in India

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“We all of us need assistance. Those who sustain others themselves want to be sustained.”

Maurice Le Sage d'Hauteroche d'Hulst (1841–1896)

Priest, writer, and orator

In *The Way of the Heart*



In rural areas of India, telecentres provide access to computers and other digital technologies and have been utilized as a delivery channel for various government services. Following a public–private partnership (PPP) model, there is a general belief among policy makers that the revenue from government-to-consumer (G2C) services would be sufficient to cover the village-level entrepreneurs' cash flow requirements and therefore provide financial sustainability. Also, the literature suggests that telecentres have a large enough market for public-access businesses to be commercially viable. In India, around 100,000 telecentres are being set up to serve 600,000 villages – one telecentre for every six villages – to provide one-window access to government services. In the literature, a lack of government services is often quoted as a reason for telecentre failure. This study, using an exploratory approach, aims to understand the parameters that relate to the sustainability of telecentres across a number of common, government-related services. It is observed that some telecentres perform better than the others even though they have the same number of government-related services. Reasons for such differences are explored and the learnings from this research will benefit the stakeholders who are engaged in providing telecentre-based services in other developing countries. In addition, a theoretical framework is suggested to understand the dynamics between different types of sustainability parameters such as financial, social, staff, technology, and institutional. The findings of this research have policy implications in terms of the way services are designed and delivered through telecentres in developing countries such as India.