

## **ABSTRACT**

Significant interest is witnessed in the context of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) mediated interventions for development and empowerment of people living in Rural India since the turn of the century. An objective evaluation of impact of such initiatives is important for enrichment of these initiatives as well as potential scaling up and replication. Despite a large number of such initiatives and their subsequent scrutiny in the literature, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies to establish the potential and scope of ICT mediated interventions on empowerment and the role of participation. The present study focuses on bridging this gap. The study is undertaken in three phases- (1) Longitudinal observation, (2) Intensive analysis of ongoing ICT mediated interventions to study stages of empowerment and their measurement and (3) Analytical modelling of the processes and outcomes of empowerment.

In the first phase, a longitudinal observation using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach was undertaken in Sirsa, Haryana over two years to explore the relevance of ICT mediation through various communication devices. In the second phase, mobile phone based interventions, involving dissemination of information, were intensively studied. Nine PRA studies were undertaken at eight locations from three states representing diverse agriculture and allied contexts. A Knowledge Gap Analysis (KGA) was undertaken in which a participant was assessed at three different stages – (a) awareness, (b) knowledge and (c) internalization. A specimen based approach based on PRA techniques was adopted, to assess their retention and internalization. A ‘Knowledge Gap Indicator (KGI)’ approach was used to assess and compare retention between people who were part of the intervention with those who did not have exposure to it. In the third phase, the process of empowerment was conceptually modeled as ‘The Participation based ICT Mediated Empowerment Cycle (PICTEC)’. The conceptual model – PICTEC was empirically tested using data obtained from seven locations from three states based on a survey using structured audio-enabled questionnaire. The structural model of PICTEC based on the factors that influence the empowerment cycle was studied using Generalized Partial Least Square (PLS) techniques.

The research points to the utility of understanding empowerment through the three distinct approaches adopted in the three phases. The other main contributions include design and development of a methodology to assess empowerment at various stages using Knowledge Gap Analysis (KGA), measurement of empowerment using Knowledge Gap Indicators (KGI) and data collection approaches in the spirit of PRA techniques based on specimen based approach and audio enabled questionnaires which are amenable to rigorous analysis. The results indicate evidence for positive impact of technology mediation in achieving the overall objectives of empowerment in the rural India context. The enabling role of participation is also observed. The results show that the stages of manifestation of empowerment and the internal processes can be studied simultaneously which has positive implications for designing effective interventions. The outcome of the present study are expected to contribute to existing literature on the subject and have relevance for policy makers, managers, designers and administrators of ICT based interventions targeting empowerment.