

# Measuring Channel Dependency Rate (CDR) in Obtaining Community Information by Rural Citizens in Sri Lanka

Wathmanel Seneviratne  
Open University of Sri Lanka  
Sri Lanka



**Abstract:** *The paper is based on a research study conducted in 10 districts among rural communities of Sri Lanka. The study investigated the community information needs and the way they consult channels and the status of information provision within the rural sector in Sri Lanka. The research study was able to coin a tool to identify rate of dependency over information channels, which is named as Channel Dependency Rate -CDR. The study deals with behavioural patterns of rural people in looking for information and its influence in selecting a particular information channel in the process of information seeking. The study indicates that there is an information flow at; Institutional level and Community level (Village level). There are two main categories of information providers identified at the rural setting; a) Institutions and b) Individuals. Under these two categories there were sub categories and which were separately analysed in the study. Recognizing the information providers paved the way to identify how ordinary rural citizens depend upon or consults different channels in looking for information. According to the responses received regarding the channel consulted in obtaining a certain category of information, a 'Channel Dependency Rate' was able to determine against each information need.*

**Keywords:** Community Information, Information Provision, Rural Citizens, Channel Dependency Rate, CDR

**Received:** 18 January 2015, Revised 17 February 2015, Accepted 24 February 2015

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## 1. Introduction

Information is identified as a necessary link in the development effort by researchers such as Narayan[1], Dissanayake[2] and by many others, and also compulsory mean to maintain standard lifestyle according to the modern terms as asserted by Mchombu [3]. According to the modern citizenship rights access to information is a basic right of a citizen[4]. The traditional information provision system operated through a verbal information transfer system known as verbal communication. Information provision in the modern context, is about access to information and knowledge through highly versatile technology and communication systems that make people, organizations and society more productive, knowledgeable and more creative. As have been observed by Moores [5] and also by Lipton [6] either information provision is not efficient and effective or provision was under utilized by the communities, especially in remote rural areas.

The present study is based on a study conducted in ten rural districts in Sri Lanka in 2006 which focused to examine the information needs of rural citizens and their information behaviour and characteristics of information providers who operate in the rural sector, both in formal and informal settings. The study was further strengthened by revisiting the selected five survey areas in 2013, selected out of ten districts surveyed for the first study. The adhoc surveys were conducted to confirm the actual situation after seven years of the previous study and results were incorporated into the data analysis of the present paper.

## **2. Research Design and Methodology**

Main objective of this section of the research study is to explore the Community Information provision and its impact over the information behaviour over the rural citizens in Sri Lanka when searching for information. The study was based on two sample surveys carried in 2006, where 10 Divisional Secretaries divisions and 10 villages were selected using 'Multistage Cluster Sampling' method. A complementary sample survey was carried out in 2013 in 05 villages to see whether there are any changes occurred in the community information sector.

Two populations were considered for the first study; 1) Rural Communities and 2) Information providers. Information providers were considered for the present paper and were stratified into two main categories viz; 1) Institutions/Organizations 2) Officers/other Individuals. The discussion below has been carried out in terms of their position and information supply status.

Data collection tool used was 'structured interview' and in addition focus group discussions were also carried out. For this paper information gathered from the 2nd sample was considered.

### **2.1 Theoretical Frame Selected for the Study**

The theoretical framework selected for the paper was from few studies conducted previously covering different situations and rural communities. According to Riemen & Bonan[7], information provision contains knowledge or information. Information Highway Advisory Council [8], Canada asserts that information provision is delivery channels of information and means of information delivery. According to Correa<sup>9</sup>, Esman & Uphoff [10] modern information provision hopes to use;

- a) Information providers (established organizational frames or individuals )
- b) Relevant information processed and stored, and
- c) Suitable delivery methods.

## **3. Analytical Frame**

Upon the above theoretical base following analytical frame for the study was drawn.

### **3.1 Information Providers and Categories Handled**

There were two main categories of information providers considered in the study;

- Institutions – established organizational frames
- Individuals – formally assigned officers and other community based individuals

### **3.2 Information categories handled by them** -Relevant information base available ( processed and stored)

### **3.3 Delivery methods by providers** – Format, medium and style

### **3.4 Channels consulted by citizens** – formal and informal channels

### **3.5 Level of dependency over the channels by the citizen**

Analysis in this paper attempted to adhere to this analytical frame from the provider's side and channel dependency rate (CDR) from citizen perspective. It should be mentioned that in the following analysis sections CDR is calculated and analysed then and there and no separate analytical section devoted for analyzing the channel dependency.

## **4. Measuring Information Provision**

### **Information Providers and Categories Handled**

There were two main categories of information providers considered in the study;

- 1) Institutions
- 2) Individuals

#### 4.1 Institutions

Under the institutional category there are subcategories viz., government offices and other institutions and the provision status of them is discussed under each category below.

##### 4.1.1 Government Offices

The data showed that information provision by the government sector was expedited at two levels; 1) Institutional level and 2.) Community level. Information provision at Institutional level is discussed under Government and Other Institutions section and Community level provision is discussed under Individuals.

According to the civil administrative system established in Sri Lanka, every area in the country belongs to a Divisional Secretary's Division (DS division) and the DS is the agent appointed by the government and leads the administrative hierarchy in a division. Other government services like agriculture, health, environment, industry, labour related services etc. are also in operation at the divisional level and their functions are performed in collaboration with the Divisional Secretary's Office. Nevertheless, these functions though essential, report separately to the line ministries to which they belong.

There are other government offices that operate independently from the civil administration system in the division such as the police department, education, youth services etc. Apart from that, very few organizations play an important role in providing information to citizens. Out of the examples given the Postal Department and the National Youth Services Council (NYSC) are prominently seen handling information related to the services they provide yet the latter does not reach every corner of the community as the postal services do. Therefore the post office closest to the community surveyed was included in the sample.

##### 4.1.2 Divisional Secretary's Office

The DS office covers the total civil service structure in an area assigned to a DS division. To enable service provision, DS office employs a series of functional officers reporting to Divisional Secretary. Grama Niladhari, Colonization officer, Statistics officer, Social Service officer, Samurdhi Officer, Youth Service officer, Sports officer, Cultural officer, Development officer, Rural Development officers, Tea Instructor are some of the officers in the cadre. These officers operate at the office level as well as at the community (village) level. Out of them Grama Sevaka/Niladhari (GN) is the most important, who has direct access to each individual in the village. Villagers in turn conveniently approach the GS for every sort of problems, mostly to obtain reliable information regarding numerous government information and services. Out of all the information provided by the GS, government information is the most important as he is the rightful representative of the government at village level.

The other officers also handle dissemination of information to citizens related to the duties they are responsible for. There is some level of overlapping observed, and this overlapping of information provision does not occur in providing services, so that information handled by other officers are mostly in a 'referral' (directional) capacity. Some officers are appointed to handle specific economic activities in the area, such as Tea Instructors, Coconut and Rubber Instructors and they also handle information relating to the same activity.

Some people in the community do not know about the categories of government information provided from the DS office, instead they obtained the same information from other sources elsewhere even though the DS office is the rightful service provider in government services. Some information categories provided through the DS office were not demanded by the rural people, i.e. Irrigation related information, Public health topics, Wild animal problems (wild elephants, wild boar, monkeys etc.), Government notifications, Statistical information and Religion related information. The situation was caused either by not knowing the availability / provision, due to a lack of awareness programmes, or the habit of consulting only one or two channels, which have been convenient or trustworthy to them. This habit made these information blocks to become 'dead blocks' (not being utilized).

Figure 1. indicates the main information categories handled by DS office. Frequency of looking for information and channels consulted by people depicts the situation.

When handling information by the providers, a certain degree of overlapping of provision was noted in some information categories. This is especially visible between government information providers and other organizations exist in rural areas.

According to the data obtained, DS Offices are officially bound to provide government related information as mentioned in the Figure 1. When compared with the information needs demanded by the community, information categories available with the DS

office were more in number than demanded. But it was seen that the ordinary rural citizen is not aware about the availability of such information unless a specific need arises. Information on crown lands, social security systems, statistical information, irrigation systems, alternative employment etc. are some of such categories.

It was seen that people obtain information from specified channels. Irrigation related information is obtained only from the APRO or from the Govijana Seva office and the people do not understand that irrigation policies are associated with the land usage policy controlled by the DS office. The same behaviour was seen with regard to the health issues. Some health issues are remedied through the involvement of DS office in a division though people normally go to the PHI or MOH office in fulfilling health needs.

It was a policy requirement for every DS office to maintain a 'monitoring unit' equipped with a databank, which contains statistical information compiled on physical geography, economic geography, socio-economic and socio-cultural data relating to the division. Unfortunately this useful resource was used by a few user categories like high school students, researchers and by the policy makers at divisional level. It was also seen that there was a considerable overlap in providing information on government services with the other agencies that operated in the area. Figure 6.1 indicates how the information supply overlaps within institutional provision.

It was also tried to determine the 'Dependency Rate on Channels' in obtaining information. Table 1 depicts the channels that rural people consulted in obtaining different kinds of government information. It was seen that most people sought government information from the GS (Grama Niladhari) of the Wasam (GS division) or from the DS office. GS and the DS office were treated as one category because most people in villages contacted the GS for the government information requirements that they should obtain from particular DS office. Several reasons such as distance from the village to DS office, etc. make them reluctant to visit the office. The GS dutifully undertakes to supply much of the information requirements requested by a villager and contacts the DS office on behalf of them. GS in the village can be treated as the nearest source of first hand government information provider and also as a referral channel (directional).

The responses in Table 1 indicates that 65 per cent of the respondents seek government information through channel 1 (GS/DS office), resulting a Channel Dependency Rate (CDR) of 65 per cent. The second highest option was the local government authority, (Pradesheeya Sabha Secretary) in most of the cases, with a CDR of 17 per cent.

Other government officers that operate at village level like APRO, SSO, SO were also contacted by the villagers to obtain government information, but the responses do not show a strong dependency on those channels. A similar situation was also seen with the priest, mcommunity leader and with rural elite as channels.

#### **4.1.3 Divisional Agricultural Office**

The Divisional Agricultural Office commonly known as 'Govijanaseva Service Centre', was seen as the center for inquiries relating to agriculture by rural farmers and other persons. Authority of the office was divided between Agricultural Officer (AO) appointed for the division and Agricultural Inspector (AI) appointed by the Department of Agriculture. AO is supposed to handle all the administration of the agricultural policies plus activities in the division in collaboration with the DS of the division, while AI handles technical issues relating to agricultural activities in the division. This two-fold responsibility of the Agrarian Services Office sometimes created disputes when providing information. But the agro workers and farmers depend very much upon the Office for information and agrarian services.

Information categories demanded and categories provided were almost the same in the agricultural information provision. According to the information collected from focus group discussions, the following channels indicated in Figure 2. were consulted by rural people to obtain agriculture related information.

It was seen that the Agrarian Services Office both at institutional level and individual level, played a prominent role regarding agriculture. Nevertheless the boutique owners and materials suppliers also cannot be ignored regarding information provision in rural areas. This category has some influence over the agro-based information provision especially regarding the usage of insecticides, pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals. Though the service performed by the sellers was a strategic approach for marketing the merchandise, they provide a highly useful community service to the villagers.

<b>Information Category Handled</b>	<b>Community response received ( % Multiple Responses)</b>	<b>Official Channels of Provision</b>
Personal Identification	83	Through GS, DS office and mobile secretariats
Residence Information /Land Ownership	26	Through GS, DS office and mobile secretariats and Presidential Secretariats
Taxes and other Revenue	28	Through GS and DS Office
Employment and Youth Service related	31	Through SSO/YSO and DS Office Youth Services Council/ NGOs/ Projects
Law, Environmental/ Wild life/ Wild Animal Menace etc.		DS Office, Associations, Societies, Public Library, NGOs
Other Government related services/ Government Notifications etc.		Through GS and DS Office
Infrastructure related information		DS Office, Post Office, Water Board, Ceylon Electricity Board, Sri Lanka Telecom, Pradesheeya Sabhas, NGOs
Social Service/Senior Pension Scheme /Bursaries/ Samurdhi facilities		Through GS and DS Office, SSO/SO
Statistical Information	0	DS Office
Agriculture/ Irrigation related	0	DS Office, Agrarian Services Dept./ Gov. based projects/ NGOs
Public Health / Infec./Commun. Diseases	1	Public Health inspector, MOH, DS Office, Rural Hospital, NGOs
Public Health inspector, MOH, DS Office, Rural Hospital, NGOs	4	Through GS and DS Office

Key:	
DS = Divisional Secretary	SO = Samurdhi Officer
GS = Grama Sewaka	SSO = Social Service Officer
MOH = Medical Officer of Health	YSO = Youth Services Officer

Figure 1. Provision of Government Information categories

Channel consulted	Responses	Rate of Response CDR %
Grama Niladhari/DS Office	265	65
APRO/ SSO/SO etc.	24	6
Pradesheeya Sabha/Secretary	69	17
Post Office	8	2
Public Library	0	0
Neighbour/ Friend	11	3
Priest/Community Leader+/Elite	20	5
Mobile /Presidential Secretariat	12	3
Other NGO etc.	0	0
<b>Total MRR</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>100</b>

APRO = Agricultural research officer Officer	SO = Samurdhi Officer
SSO = Social Service Officer Responses Received	MRR = Multiple

Table 1. Channels Consulted for Government Information (CDR for GI)

Table 2 indicates the information provision channels consulted in obtaining agro based information. The figures prove the fact that category numbers 2,3,4 and 5 have taken prominence in providing agriculture related information.

Information Category Handled	Official Channels of Provision
Crops related-crop selection for the season, crop rotation, selection/ buying of seeds, etc.	APRO, AO, AGSO,
Fertilizers/IP Control	APRO, AO, AGSO
Diseases – identification, control, remedies, Trouble shooting etc.	APRO, AO, AGSO, GS
Soil related Irrigation systems and planning	APRO, AO, AGSO, GS, Social Mobilisers

Post Harvest Issues – preservation, packaging etc.	APRO, AO, AGSO
Animal husbandry, Cattle/Fowl /Goats/ Pigs breeding related/ Fish/Prawns farming etc.	APRO, AO, AGSO, DVO, GS
Agri- machinery – introduction, training, new models	APRO, AO, AGSO, GS
Key: APRO = Agri. Research officer GS = Grama Niladhari AGSO = Agrarian Service Office	DVO = Div.I Veterinary Off. AO = Agriculture Officer

Figure 2. Main Information Categories Handled by the Agrarian Service Office

Need Category	Responses	CDR %
Grama Niladhari	13	5
Agri. Produce Res. Officer	79	28
Govijana Seva Office	53	19
Agricultural Extension Services	38	13
Seller of Agri. Chemicals	41	14
Neighbour/Friend	13	5
Pradesheeya Sabha/DDS	16	6
Radio/Tv/News Papers /Mass Media	5	2
Boutique/supplies seller etc.	25	9
<b>Total MRR</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2. Information Channels (CDR for AI) in Agricultural Information Provision

The total percentage for all four categories was 74 per cent when added together to form Channel Dependency Rate (CDR) for channels consulted. Other channels indicated a very low response when compared with the four categories mentioned above.

#### 4.1.4 The Office of the Medical Officer of Health

The government of Sri Lanka provides free health care to all citizens through the Ministry of Health. In 1992 Divisional Directors of Health were appointed to coordinate preventive and curative services with health promotional activities. The Medical Officer of Health (MOH) with the divisional authority reports to the District Secretary of Health and to the Ministry of Health. There is another health administrative functionary that operates at the DS level that is the Public Health Inspector (PHI) who handles public health administration within the Division. MOH handles most of the health related information and PHI handles public sanitary and health issues. Activities of MOH overlap with the activities of PHI and therefore, PHI was not included in the sample. According to the pilot study, people are not in the habit of going to the PHI regarding ailments, nutrition, communicable diseases and other personal health matters, but consult the MOH office and hospitals directly or through the Family Health Worker (FHW).

During the survey it was observed that health information dissemination network in Sri Lanka is well established using



the divisional structure around the country. When compared with other sectors like industry, agriculture, finance etc. health information information system is in a satisfactory condition. Information on health related topics were delivered door to door in the MOH division through FHW, the community level worker for health and nutrition information. FHW is commonly known as the 'midwife. This 'door-step available' family health worker was trained to deliver information especially on maternity, family planning and adolescent health topics. It was seen that the older people also consult FHW on different personal health issues.

Channel	Male	%	Female	%	Total Multiple responses	CDR %
Family Health Worker	44	22	107	41	151	33
Rural Hospital	64	32	45	17	109	24
District Hospital	70	35	67	26	137	30
Public Library	1	1	0	0	1	0
Public Health Inspector	35	18	9	3	44	10
Grama Niladhari	4	2	2	1	6	1
Village Physician	1	1	5	2	6	1
Boutique etc.	5	3	0	0	5	1
Total MRR	198	100	261	100	459	100

MMR = Multiple Responses Received

Table 3. Channels Dependency Rate ( CDR for HI) for Health Information

Table 3 indicates the level of dependency upon the health channels available in the rural areas by the rural citizens. The data indicates that there was a higher dependency on FHW than on other channels, i.e. hospitals and PHI. The FHW was also shown to have more influence over the women than men, as the response rates indicate 41 per cent as against 22 per cent. Reason for this was seen in the study as a result of the FHWs' frequently visiting the households with pregnant women or newborn and young children and for being closely associated with the women in the households. It was found that rural women were quite comfortable to disclose many a health problem to the FHW than to unknown parties at other health service points, including traditional physicians, gynecologists in hospital clinics.

According to focus group discussions conducted with the community groups, rural people generally trust the information received from the government sources than from the other sources. But they consult indigenous physicians on selected health topics like general ailments such as colds and flu, wheeze, migraine, fracture treatment, treatments for snake bites, etc.

#### 4.1.5 Public Library

The public library system was established in Sri Lanka with a view to providing reading facilities to the ordinary citizen. Even though the commencement of public library system dates back to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, proper establishment of the public library system started during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Public library system operates solely in the hands of local government authorities. At present almost every Municipal, Town and Pradesheeya Sabha (earlier the Village Council) have their own public library. In recent years, the role of the public library has changed into the challenging role of an information provider. It was observed during the pilot study conducted in Lankatilaka GS division in Udunuwara, that the public library played an important role in the information provision on different aspects relating to education, governmental, industry, self-employment, recreation, religion, history and politics etc.

Therefore the study investigated into the role of public libraries in information provision in the communities studied. Contrary to the findings of the pilot survey, it was seen that all public libraries surveyed were not in a position to cater to the community concerned as strong information providers. It was gathered that, the public library had been consulted by the people for information needs as indicated in Figure 3 with the dependency rates of the channels calculated.



According to the analysis, Public Library is approached by the community mainly for recreational, infrastructure related and educational purposes. When the dependency on this channel is considered, it was seen that there is no strong dependency on it as people are used to consult other channels as well for many information needs.

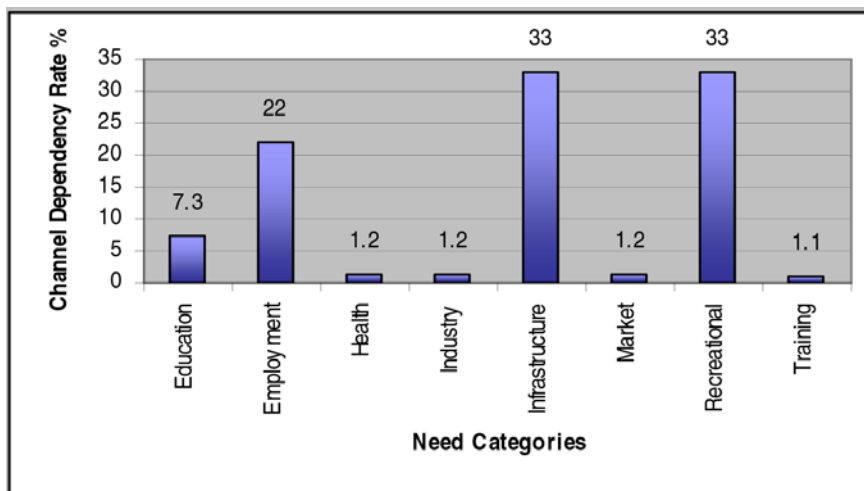


Figure 3. Channel Dependency Rate(CDR) for the Public Library

According to the discussions conducted with librarians, 100 per cent of them were of the view that the information provision is a main part of their duty, but added that they were not trained and did not know how to organize the service systematically. Another point they highlighted was that, lack of suitable and timely materials in their collections. Low budget allocation and the interference by the local government authorities for library book selection were pointed out as the main reasons for this situation.

Lack of support from the local authorities to follow professional courses and necessary training in library science also seen as a drawback in providing better service to the communities. Nevertheless the distribution, organizational structure, and potential with community participation of present public library structure are seen as a strength and an opportunity to develop community information centres at remote levels.

#### 4.1.6 Post Office

The Sri Lankan postal service existed since 18<sup>th</sup> century through colonial times and was established in larger towns as well as in small villages. The office had been active not only as the mail handling authority of the country, but as a banker, handling savings and pensions, as a telephone network controller and as a provider of government notifications to the general public. The post office, though it now keeps only the responsibility of state mail service, still acts as the provider of government notifications by providing the government gazette for public reading.

The survey revealed that none of the post offices surveyed had an inquiry service counter or a window established especially to entertain public inquiries, but the post master in many cases (the only officer at village post offices) does referral service for the inquiries received at the post office. The actual information provision of the post office was confined to government, employment, educational and other state related information. Figure 4 indicates the rate of dependency on the post office as a channel.

During the survey it was observed that the main post offices in postal divisions are converted into 'public telecommunication centres' (Sannivedana Piyasa) following a concept introduced by the Minister of Telecommunication (2002) and village youth have awareness through the village post offices, about the possibility to access to Internet through the Sannivedana Piyasas.

#### 4.1.7 Pradesheeya Sabha

The Pradesheeya Sabhas (PS) belong to local government structure and were established at the AGA division level which secured the inclusion of a few GS wasams. Nature of formation of Pradesheeya Sabha structure is completely political. In addition to the traditional local government functions, PSs are equipped with a range of activities, which relate to public

thorough fares, public health services and public utility services and Leitan<sup>4</sup> also supports the fact. This empowerment of PSs placed them on an important place in the provision of necessary information to the communities and providing services entrusted to them.

Permanent officers and the elected members of PS provide information on a variety of issues relating to local governance and do not target a special category of information. Response rates received for PSs are indicated in Table 4. According to the values derived, a higher dependency rate for the PS was indicated for local government information. It was quite obvious that being the local authority, PS is the rightful provider of this category of information. There were other information categories such as, industry related information, which deals mostly with areas such as starting a business, business/industrial premises, relevant taxes and registration to be paid, land use for industry etc.

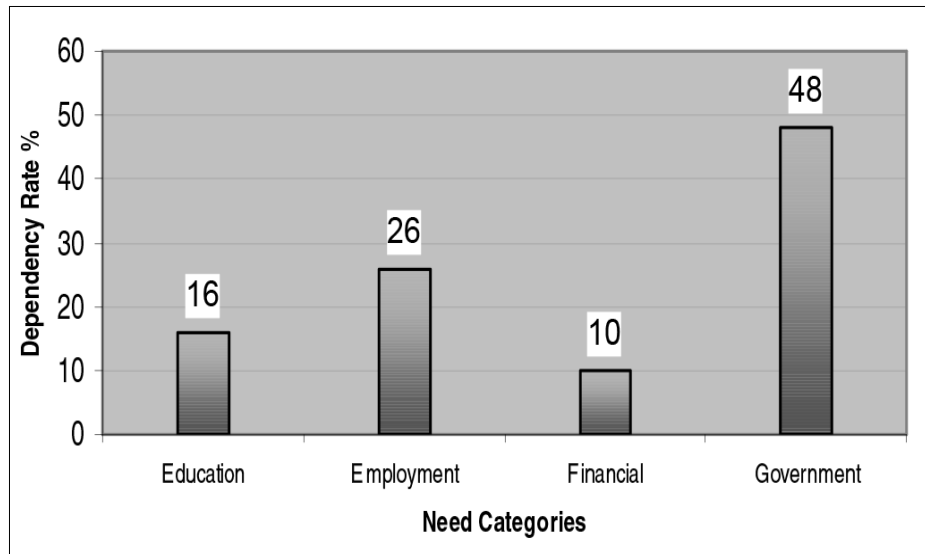


Figure 4. Channel Dependency rate (CDR) over the Post Office

Need Category	Total MRR for the channel	CDR %
Government	19	4
Local Government	280	57
Employment	6	1
Training	3	1
Agriculture	25	5
Industry related	9	2
Legal matters	10	2
Infrastructure	40	8
Political	95	20
<b>Total MRR</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>100</b>

MRR = Multiple Responses Received

Table 4. Channel Dependency Rate (CDR) over Pradesheeya Sabha

Legal matters that PSs handle were mostly related to infrastructure issues such as roads, water, electricity, commercial land building, land usage on infrastructure, etc. that come under the purview of local government authorities.

#### 4.1.8 Other Organizations/Agencies

The agencies commonly available across the clusters were selected for the sample as 'Other Organizations'.

The organizations selected were;

- Financial Institutions
- Non- Governmental Organizations

Out of the financial institutions, one commercial bank and one savings institution were selected. Apart from those, there are other private organizations which operated in the areas under study and were seen operating mainly as commercial establishments with motive of profit making. Their prime motive was not community service or information provision. Instead some of non-governmental organizations (NGO) were seen as active in providing services plus information. Therefore it was attempted to collect two samples from each cluster. The basis used to select NGOs was the 06 month visibility of active operations within the communities selected. It was observed that most of the NGOs were not operating for a long time except for a very well established few. Therefore data on only 05 NGOs could be collected.

#### 4.1.9 Financial/Savings Institutions

Under financial institutions, data from two banks from each cluster were collected. The banks were selected upon the higher two choices given by the community of the particular sample. Figure 5 indicates responses received for the banks. There were four banks selected on the basis of the responses and the distribution across the samples was described in Chapter 5, under research methodology.

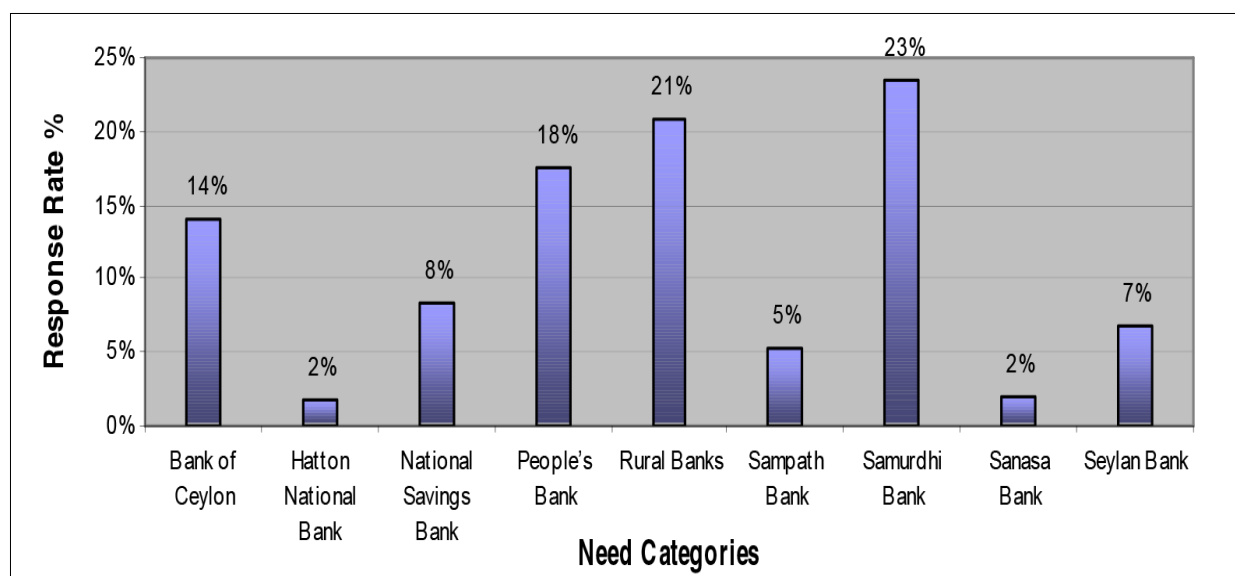


Figure 5. Selection of the Banks by Community

The four banks selected were, Peoples' Bank, Bank of Ceylon, Rural Bank and the Samurdhi Bank. It should be noted that these institutions belong to different grades and also vary upon the type and volume of the business.

It was observed that most of the people in the community obtain financial information from established banking institutions and a few consult other sources perhaps due to many difficulties (such as, transport, unawareness about the services, social distance etc.,) they experience in approaching the institutions. In addition to the banks, rural people consult Agrarian Office or the APRO in obtaining agricultural loans and subsidies as well as the Samurdhi Officer for Samurdhi loans and other financial benefits (Table 5). NGOs also intervene in supplying financial information, according to the findings.

It was observed that, the commercial/savings bank had received the highest score in response, provide all information categories that were requested by the community. These were provided especially related to the business scope of the institution; i.e. current accounts, savings account types and related benefits and services, fixed deposits, loan facilities and related liabilities,

pawning facilities, property and gold article redemption schemes, loan repayment schemes etc.

Channel consulted	Rate of Response	CDR %
Agri. Prod. Res. Officer/Govi	30	9.0
Jana Seva		
Banks and Advertising campaigns	159	48.0
Grama Niladhari	2	0.6
Neighbour/Friend/Rural Elite	1	0.3
NGO/ Private Organizations	36	11.0
Post Office	11	3.1
Radio/TV/News Papers	3	1.0
Samurdhi Officer	89	27.0
<b>Total MRR</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>100.0</b>

MRR = Multiple Responses Received

Table 5. Channel Dependency Rate (CDR for FI) on Financial Information

Regardless of the grade of the agency and the level, all these institutions do a considerable amount of referral and advisory service to the village community as a service.

Data reveals that the banking institutions receive queries on a 'daily basis' regarding the services, upon calling to the office 'in person'. Other than the above organizations and agencies selected, community clubs, associations, government sponsored councils were in operation in providing information relating to vocational training, counseling, initiating industrial projects etc. However these agencies were not available or not in effective operation in every cluster surveyed.

#### 4.1.10 Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs were seen to be in operation across the sample and 07 NGOs were selected from clusters depending on their visibility within 6 months (during the time of survey) in activities involved in the area. List of NGOs were obtained from the DS office and their scale of activities were also detected through the DS office and from the community. NGOs contacted are given in Figure 6.

It is noteworthy that information delivered though these agencies were limited to their scope of activities; hence the content strength was specific.

#### 4.2 Individuals

The pilot study identified a number of individuals who act as information providers in the rural information scenario. These providers were categorized into two main types to draw a clear stratification as follows;

1. Government Officers
2. Other Individuals

##### 4.2.1 Government Officers

The government officers selected for the sample, who were assigned by the Divisional Secretary's Office, to work at grass roots level with the community were; Grama Niladhari (GN), Family Health Worker (FHW), Agrarian Produce Research Officer (APRO), Samurdhi Officer (SO) and Social Services Officer (SSO).

<b>Name</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Scope of activities</b>
World Vision	Lunugamveh era	Child care, Community development
Seva Lanka Padanama	Welimada	Sanitary facilities, environmental protection, Advisory service
North East Irrigation & Agriculture Project	Monaragala	Irrigation management, Advisory service
Naula Grameeya Sanwardana Sangamaya	Na-Ula	Development of micro industries and related training
Lunugamvehera Janatha Suwaya Sandaha Padanama	Lunugamveh era	Health and Nutrition
Monaragala Thirasara Sanwardene Padanama	Monaragala	Assistance for small scale industries
Welimada Sanwardena Padanama	Welimada	Assistance for small scale industries, vocational training

Figure 6. NGOs surveyed and their scope of activities

These officers generally maintain a higher profile among rural citizens due to their capacity in providing credible government information apart from the official duties and functions they perform. Grama Niladhari is the representative of the Divisional Secretary at the village level and is expected to act as an information provider, coordinator, and mediator of government information. He directly provides information and also plays a referral role (directional capacity). Samurdhi Officer (SO) has to handle all the activities related to 'Samurdhi' financial assistance scheme, but plays another role as a social advisory and a referral role. Social Services Officer (SSO) handles social development activities, but provides other information categories is done by the SO. Nevertheless, an overlap of activities and collaborative working between SO and SSO was seen to some considerable extent. However, the rural citizen very much depends upon these officers for reliable information provision basically because of their affiliation to the government.

The Family Health Worker was an exception. FHW is always a female worker whose activities were described under the section 6.1.1.3, Office of the Medical Officer of Health. FHW's intervention in providing other government and community information, is seen low. But her influence on providing health and nutrition information and services to pregnant women and new born was remarkable. It is also noteworthy to mention that the success of the health service implemented in the rural sector and the strength of the health information provided is attributed to the untiring service of these health workers 'on foot'. The FHW can also be described as a door-to-door information specialist in health in the information science perspective.

#### 4.2.2 Other Individuals

There are many other persons who provide information at the village level. Any person, it is said, is a source of information, but the survey sample consisted of individuals who have high social acceptance in the village community in obtaining advice regarding information needs. The persons were initially selected with higher ranks according to the Occupational Prestige Scale presented by Gunawardena [11]. After the pilot study the Ayurvedic physician and government employer/pensioner were replaced with Community Leader/ Rural Elite (CL) and Boutique owner/Supplier of provisions (BS).

It was observed that these individuals play an important role in communicating necessary information to rural citizens as they have social contacts external to the community. The Buddhist/ Christian/ Muslim/ Hindu priest (PR) in the community, the School Principal (PL), Community Leader (CL) have an important influence over the people. They play information brokering

role, advisory role, communicator role, coordinator role regarding information provision in the community.

The boutique owner or material/ equipment supplier handles different function. He provides product related information specifically and communicates news on the outside world as he listens to the radio channels through out the day while working in the boutique. As the villagers engaged in routine economic activities during the daytime, they use the boutique as a place of entertainment and meeting. The villagers listen to the radio and listen to the news while exchanging ideas and information. The seller communicates much commercial information to the villagers, such as information on fertilizers, pesticides, equipment etc. as the commercial producers of the products initially create awareness among sellers of the same. It is evident that the sellers and boutique owners supply information to the customers as a marketing strategy. In addition, as these sellers have connections with the outside parties they have more awareness than an ordinary rural citizen. Thus he plays a dual role as an information provider and as a referee to the correct source (Referral role).

It was observed through the study that information categories provided by the individuals display a bias to the jobs/ functions they engaged in. Especially the government appointed officers displays this characteristic providing more government related and local government information than the other categories. Training related information and financial information was seen being handled by the government sector officers. The APRO and SO definitely were to provide information on agricultural loans / subsidies and Samurdhi loans/ allowances. The priest handles basically religious education and the principal handles information and plays an advisory role in the case of general education.

The Dependency Rate on Channels (CDR) of the people on the individual information providers show a similar sort of picture relating to the government agencies. For example, rural people placed higher value on GS for government information, on FHW for health related information, on APRO and seller of insecticides/ fertilizers/supplies etc. as mentioned above.

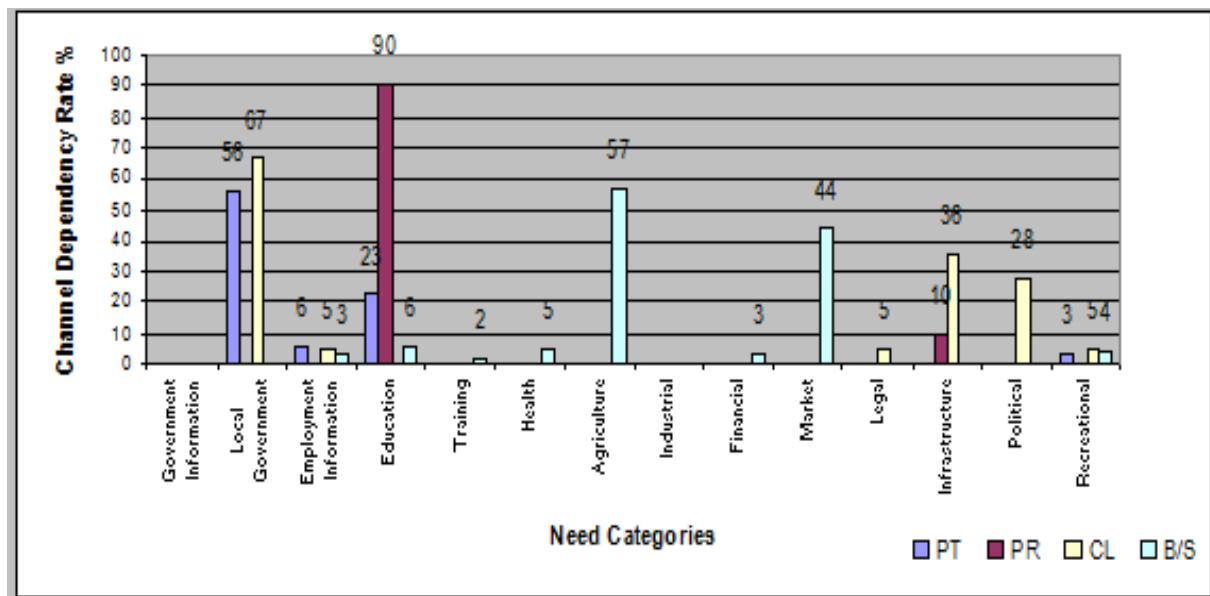


Figure 9. Channel Dependency Rate (CDR) placed on Other Individuals

There are other individuals, entities and media who act as information providers but it was found that do not exist in every community. Therefore, four categories of persons mentioned above were selected due to their existence in every cluster surveyed. Some channels emerge prominently in providing some information categories within a specific community (for example, political information and labour related issues in tea estates was mostly provided by the 'Thalawar', the community leader of the estate community but were not seen as common across the clusters [12].

However at the community level, information provision operates at two functionality levels that carry equal importance in operation, i.e. Directional capacity and Information supply capacity. Directional Capacity refers to the directing or referring the information seeker to the correct place or channel while Information Supply refers to the provision of information needed by information seeker on the spot.

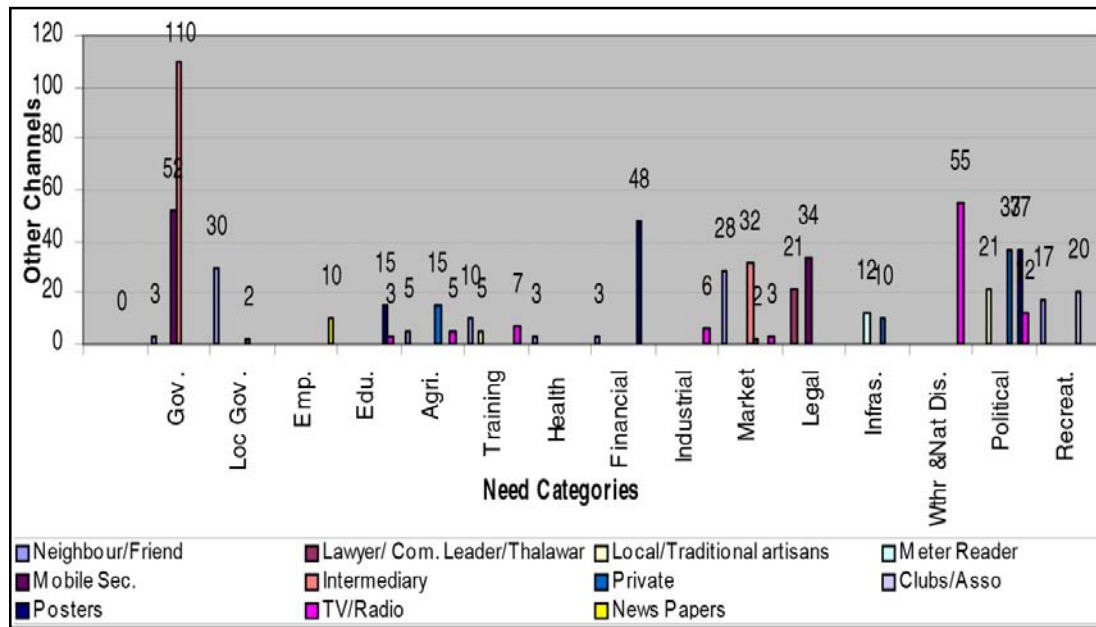


Figure 10. Other Channels Operated in Providing Information Categories

Other than the provider channels discussed above, there are mass media (television, radio) news papers and public advertisements (posters for education, banking, insurance etc.), which play an important role in providing some need categories (news, services, education, weather etc.). These are treated more as mediums than channels and hence, are treated under delivery methods in the present study.

## 5. Conclusion

The present paper concentrated on information provision to rural citizens and the behaviour of citizens in obtaining the same and its impact to measure the dependency over the different channels. The study tried to establish a Channel Dependency Rate for each information category under study by citizens in searching information. Information provision in the rural areas was handled by different provider categories and the study tried to represent those categories in the sample strata as much as possible

As was seen through the study, it was seen that government information providers play a prominent role in providing authentic information even though the delivery mechanisms are not efficient enough to cater to the growing information needs of rural citizens. On the other hand it was also seen that information delivery through some individuals were seen prominent within rural communities both formally and informally, especially the government appointed officers at community level.

The study also measured how the users of the information behave when an information need had arisen. It was gathered from the study that the citizens sought different avenues to obtain information. These avenues are named as 'Channels' in the study. In the analytical frame the dependency over the channels by the users is measured from user perspective, indicating how the demand for information is materialized through information channels the user choose. The rate of channeling is calculated using Channel Dependency Rate (CDR). The CDR is the measurement used throughout against each and every channel observed in the study.

There were many channels that the rural people had contacts with when looking for information but found these channels do not provide that particular information suitably to match with the citizens' expectations (the CDR proves the situation). Therefore a clearly visible 'Information Gap' was identified between the real demand for information and the information supply through provision channels which are not properly organized or tailored for the citizens' needs.

Hence the low level of 'attainment of information' creates a stagnated low knowledge level. Low knowledge level again causes non-attainment of information due to personal and other barriers, which leads to low fulfillment level of information needs and



the citizen is trapped in an 'information poverty cycle'. The existing information behaviour indicates how a citizen could be trapped in a cycle of information poverty from which he has no escape without a diversion strategy. The situation demands a strategic approach to divert the citizen from the so called vicious cycle of information poverty, to a more efficient and comfortable 'information access line' to obtain desired information in a systematic and in an authenticated way by providing them with established provision channels. The main study suggested to establish 'Community Information Centers' at grassroots level to bridge this information gap and to route the citizens to a proper information access channel.

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