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Information Communication Technologies and Governance: The Gyandoot Experiment in Dhar District of Madhya Pradesh, India

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and Shashi Shrivastava

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of Madhya Pradesh, India**

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Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	vi
Local terminologies	vi
Summary	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction to the Gyandoot Project	1
2. Framework of the Study	4
2.1 Rationale	4
2.2 Study objectives	4
2.3 Project profile	5
2.4 Profile of the study area	5
2.5 Limitations of the study	6
2.6 Study framework	6
3. Methodology of the Study	7
3.1 Description of the stakeholders	7
3.2 Sampling design	7
3.3 Selection of the blocks	8
3.4 Selection of the <i>Soochanalaya</i>	8
3.5 Selection of villages	8
3.6 Selection of households	9
3.7 Data collection	9
3.8 Pilot study	10
4. Comprehensive Analysis of Data	11
4.1 Analysis of sample data	11
4.2 Analysis of aware (non-users) and unaware	13
4.3 Analysis of users	18
5. Analysis of <i>Soochanalayas</i> – Private and Gram Panchayat	24
5.1 General details of the <i>Soochanalayas</i>	24
5.2 Start and mode of introduction of the Gyandoot <i>Soochanalaya</i>	25
5.3 Training received by the <i>Soochak</i>	25
5.4 Uses of Gyandoot	26
5.5 Additional uses of Gyandoot <i>Soochanalaya</i>	26
5.6 Progress and extension of the <i>Soochanalaya</i>	26
5.7 Motivational level and main interests of the <i>Soochak</i>	26
5.8 Qualities for a successful <i>Soochak</i>	27
5.9 Reasons for the success of the <i>Soochanalaya</i>	28
5.10 Sustainability	29
5.11 Quality of service of Gyandoot	30
5.12 User details	30
5.13 Gyandoot as a medium of complaints against the administration	30
5.14 Perceptions of the <i>Soochak</i>	31
5.15 Technology and software	31
5.16 Desired improvements	31
5.17 Publicity of Gyandoot	32
5.18 Effect of the location of the <i>Soochanalayas</i> in the Panchayat	32
5.19 Future growth	33

6. Impact Assessment	34
6.1 Social impacts	34
6.2 Economic impacts	34
7. Discussions with District Officials	36
7.1 Questions and responses	36
8. Conclusion	41
8.1 Conclusion and recommendations	41
8.2 Points for further study	42

List of Tables and Boxes

Table 1 Geographic and demographic details	5
Table 2 Literacy percentages	5
Table 3 Administrative subdivisions (<i>Tehsil</i>)	6
Table 4 Gyandoot stakeholders	7
Table 5 Categorisation of sample according to educational level	11
Table 6 Social categorisation of sample	11
Table 7 Economic categorisation of sample	12
Table 8 Economic and social categorisation of the total sample	12
Table 9 Educational level classification of social categories	12
Table 10 Gender and caste-wise classification of aware and unaware respondents	13
Table 11 Educational classification of respondents	13
Table 12 Distance-wise variation in awareness of Gyandoot	14
Table 13 Comparison of awareness of Gyandoot with government schemes	14
Table 14 Awareness in different economic categories	15
Table 15 Aware non-users' source of information about Gyandoot	15
Table 16 Opinion about the usefulness of different services	15
Table 17 Awareness about services of Gyandoot	16
Table 18 Opinion about the overall usefulness of Gyandoot	16
Table 19 Trend of use of Gyandoot	17
Table 20 Opinion about the cost of Gyandoot services	17
Table 21 Comparison of awareness of Gyandoot with computers	17
Table 22 Awareness about different means of publicity	17
Table 23 Opinion about the effectiveness of publicity	18
Table 24 Suggested methods of publicity	18
Table 25 Reasons for non-use of Gyandoot services	18
Table 26 Gender-wise usage pattern	18
Table 27 Economic categorisation of users	19
Table 28 Classification of users education, social and economic categories	19
Table 29 Age-wise classification of users	20
Table 30 Usage pattern of different services	20
Table 31 Repetition of use	20
Table 32 User response about satisfaction of use	20
Table 33 Time taken for action	21
Table 34 Benefits of Gyandoot	21
Table 35 Opinion about service charges	22
Table 36 Opinion about usefulness of Gyandoot for villages	22
Table 37 Suggested improvements and additions in the existing Gyandoot services	22
Table 38 Knowledge of means of publicity	23
Table 39 Opinion about <i>Soochak</i> behaviour	23
Table 40 Name and ownership of the studied <i>Soochanalaya</i>	24
Table 41 General details of the <i>Soochaks</i>	25

Table 42 Types of gain	27
Table 43 Reasons for the successful working of <i>Soochanalayas</i>	28
Table 44 Sustainability of the <i>Soochanalaya</i>	29
Box 1 Water	3
Box 2 Better deals	3

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CEO (ZP)	Chief Executive Officer (<i>Zila Parishad</i>)
CSI-TCS	Computer Society of India – Tata Consultancy Services
DRDA	District Rural Development Authority
IT	Information Technology
NIC	National Informatics Centre
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PCO	Public Call Office
PHE	Public Health Engineering
RAS	Remote Access Server
Rs	Rupees
SC	Scheduled Caste, as per article 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India
ST	Scheduled Tribe, as per article 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India
STD	State Trunk Dialling
WiLL	Wireless in Local Loop

Local terminologies

<i>Aay Pramanpatra</i>	Income certificate
<i>Avedan Patra</i>	Application form
<i>Bhawan</i>	Building
<i>Bhilalas</i>	Name of a tribal caste
<i>Bhils</i>	Name of a tribal caste
<i>Gaon ka Akhbaar</i>	Rural newspaper
<i>Gram Daak</i>	Rural Hindi email
<i>Gram Haat</i>	Weekly village market
<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	A body of elected representatives for governance at village level
<i>Jaati Pramanpatra</i>	Caste certificate
<i>Janpad</i>	An administrative subdivision of the district
<i>Jansabha</i>	Public meeting
<i>Khasra Nakal</i>	Copy of land record
<i>Mandi</i>	Organised setup where grains, vegetables and fruits are bought/sold
<i>Mandi Bhaav</i>	Marketing information system
<i>Mool Niwasi Pramanpatra</i>	Domicile certificate
<i>Panchayati Raj</i>	The local self-government
<i>Patleiyas</i>	Name of a tribal caste
<i>Raj Nidhi</i>	Administration fund
<i>Rozgar Samachar</i>	Employment news
<i>Samiti</i>	Committee
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Village Headman
<i>Shikayat Nivaran</i>	Public grievance redressal
<i>Shiksha Gyandoot</i>	E-education
<i>Soochak</i>	Gyandoot cyber kiosk operator
<i>Soochanalaya</i>	Rural Intranet Gyandoot cyber kiosk
<i>Soochana Kosh</i>	Store of information
<i>Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana</i>	A rural self-employment scheme
<i>Swastha Salahkar</i>	Advisory module
<i>Tehsil</i>	An administrative subdivision of the district
<i>Vaivahiki</i>	Rural matrimonial
<i>Zila Panchayat</i>	A body of elected representatives for governance at district level

Summary

The Gyandoot project was initiated in January 2000 in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, as an e-commerce and e-governance activity, with the objective of providing useful information to people in rural areas, and also to act as an interface between the district government and ordinary people.

This study was conducted with the objective of assessing the overall impact of the Gyandoot project in its area of operation. To achieve this the study was carried out at three levels: firstly at village level, where responses were studied from various categories of users; secondly at the level of the service providing kiosk operators who are in direct touch with the users; and finally at the level of the administration of Gyandoot, where policies were made, mechanisms evolved and the project implemented.

The sample taken for the survey was probabilistic, multi-staged and independent in each domain of the study. Gyandoot services have been implemented in eight of the thirteen development blocks of Dhar. Three staged sampling was carried out to choose a sample at the levels of blocks, kiosks (*Soochanalaya*) and villages.

Within a village, stratified random or convenience sampling was used to collect a sample population and in all, a total of 481 responses were recorded. Questionnaire method was used for data collection at village and *Soochanalaya* levels while from the administrative level information was gathered through informal interaction.

The study categorised the whole population into unaware, aware non-user and aware user categories. It focussed on the effect, if any, Gyandoot has on the rural environment, taking into consideration socio-economic factors such as caste, gender, economic category and educational level.

Overall awareness of Gyandoot in the villages surveyed was found to be slightly greater than 50%, which is a considerable achievement given the short time since its establishment. However, this also leaves room for targeted measures to enhance awareness where it is currently lowest, i.e. among women, in the more remote areas, and among those of lower educational and socio-economic status. Of the total sampled, 8% had used Gyandoot services (approximately 16% of those aware of the existence of these services). Of those who had not used Gyandoot, the vast majority had seen no reason for using it since its inception (though this finding has to be viewed in the light of their very limited knowledge of the range of services available).

Users of Gyandoot services are overwhelmingly male, in the higher socio-economic categories and in the young to middle age grouping. The main services used were to obtain government records or certificates of various kinds, to make complaints about the quality of government service and to obtain market information. Almost 80% of users were satisfied with the service obtained – for example over 60% of complaints were acted upon within one week. Charges for the services were predominantly seen to be reasonable. Opinions from within the district administration suggested that the mere fact that officials were aware that complaints could be made through Gyandoot had had a powerful effect on improving their performance – so that efficiency improvements were likely to be much higher than might be suggested by the currently sparse use of the complaints service.

Twenty Gyandoot kiosks were initially opened in Village Committee Offices (*Gram Panchayat*) and a further fifteen were subsequently added to existing private telephone booths already providing a range of other services. It is difficult to come to a clear view on the likely economic sustainability of the service from the viewpoint of kiosk owners. There is some uncertainty over the revenue obtained purely from Gyandoot – if it is as low as around Rs300 per month as some of the evidence

suggests, then this is unlikely to represent a viable rate of return, and either use-levels would have to rise, or fees for usage introduced, or both. Certainly, a short to medium-term priority is to enhance the range and quality of services and so increase levels of use. Questions of sustainability would become even more acute if operators had to meet the full investment costs of hardware, software and servicing for Gyandoot, which is currently provided free of charge by the government.

There are some economies of location and Gyandoot along with related services offer considerable potential for expansion. For example, those coming to use private facilities such as long-distance telephone services might take advantage of their visit to use Gyandoot. Similarly, there appeared to be some synergy between the operation of *Panchayat* services and those of Gyandoot located there, and the latter, although initially only a Gyandoot service, had begun to invest in other services in demand, such as long distance telephones and CD writing. Gyandoot services established in this way might therefore form a basis for small business development, though (as in the Dhar example) if this is to happen the selection of candidates must be geared towards entrepreneurial qualities.

There are a number of ways in which the service could be made more reliable and expanded:

- Connectivity to the main server needs to be improved, possibly by using Wireless in Local Loop (WiLL) technology;
- Publicity campaigns on the services provided by Gyandoot need to focus on categories currently under-represented, that is women, those in remote locations and in the lower social and economic categories;
- The range of services might be expanded to include those relevant to such categories, for example, women and child health care;
- Local enterprise should be encouraged to promote services such as advertisements for marriage partners;
- Full connectivity to the Internet is an obvious next step for Gyandoot kiosks and much importance attaches to investment in the infrastructure necessary for rapid and reliable access.

Overall, the Gyandoot experiment in Dhar district is an important and prestigious exercise in both citizenship and enterprise development, and appears to have had a positive effect on public sector service delivery well beyond that suggested by the current, rather limited, usage levels. It merits consolidation and expansion, with particular effort to promote it among potential users in the lower economic and social categories. Essential to such consolidation and expansion is the continuing commitment of enlightened government at the highest levels.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Gyandoot Project

The Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh is located on the south-western corner of central India and has a population of 1.7 million. 54% of the population is tribal (*Bhils, Bhilalas, Patleiyas*) and 60% live below the poverty line. In January 2000, an Intranet network was developed whereby computers were installed in twenty village *Panchayat* centres in five blocks of the district. These were wired through an Intranet network and connected to the District Rural Development Authority (DRDA) at Dhar town. This Intranet system was named Gyandoot, a Hindi term meaning Purveyor of Knowledge. Local rural youths were selected to operate the initial twenty cyber kiosks, without a fixed salary or stipend. The computers in the network were established in *Gram Panchayats* (Village Committee Offices) and called *Soochanalayas* (Information Kiosks), with operators known as *Soochaks*. Latterly, fifteen *Soochanalayas* were opened as private enterprises. The *Soochanalayas* provide user-charge-based services to the rural people.

Concept development and implementation

The Gyandoot project is based on a computer network project called the Wired Villages Project in Warna village in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. Chief Executive Officer *Zila Parishad* (CEO ZP) of Dhar district and the then IT secretary of Madhya Pradesh began to conceptualise the Gyandoot project in November 1999 and within just two months a pilot project was started. Before the actual implementation of the project, discussions took place with village leaders as to the nature of services such a project should provide and a list of services then prepared. The services were to be provided on payment to make the system economically sustainable.

Soochanalayas

A total of thirty-five Gyandoot cyber kiosks operate in the entire Dhar district. Of these, the *Gram Panchayat* opened twenty and fifteen are privately owned. Each *Soochanalaya* aims to cover twenty-five to thirty villages with total population of 20,000 to 30,000. The Gyandoot Intranet covers eight of the thirteen blocks in the district, consequently a total population of over half a million is covered by this network.

Every *Soochanalaya* has telephone connectivity. The *Gram Panchayat* provided the building, telephone, electricity connection and furniture in the *Soochanalaya* they opened. The *Soochanalayas* act as information centres in the villages and provide a whole range of facilities under the Gyandoot network. The majority of the private *Soochanalaya* also house facilities such as State Trunk Dialling (STD), photocopying and Internet connectivity, in order to make the centre more economically sustainable. The server or hub of the Gyandoot Intranet network is called *Soochana Kosh* (Store of Information) and is a Remote Access Server (RAS), placed in the *Zila Panchayat* (District headquarters).

Soochak

The person responsible for running the Gyandoot kiosk is known as the *Soochak*. For the first twenty centres opened by the *Gram Panchayat*, the *Soochaks* were selected by village committees and the local community, with an initial agreement of one year. A three member panel was selected

for each *Soochanalaya* and sent for training at the District Council. On completion of the training, the best trainees were selected as *Soochaks*. The *Soochak* needs maintenance and numeric data entry skills, but only limited typing skills are necessary as most of the Gyandoot software is menu-driven. The only essential prerequisite for a *Soochak* is to have completed high school. The *Soochak* also acts as entrepreneur and is unsalaried. 10% of the income from the *Soochanalaya* is paid as commission to the District Council for maintenance. In the fifteen private enterprise centres, the centre owner is the *Soochak* and a yearly license fee of Rs5,000 is paid to the District Council.

Services and facilities

The services offered under the Gyandoot network are:

- Commodity marketing information system (*Mandi Bhaav*), where grain prices are updated on a daily basis;
- Income certificate (*Aay Pramanpatra*);
- Domicile certificate (*Mool Niwasi Pramanpatra*);
- Caste certificate (*Jaati Pramanpatra*);¹
- Landholder's passbook of land rights and loans (*Bhoo adhikar evam rin pustika/Khasra Nakal*);²
- Rural Hindi email (*Gram Daak*);
- Public grievance redressal (*Shikayat Nivaran*);
- Forms for various government schemes (*Avedan Patra*);
- Below poverty line family list;
- Employment news (*Rozgar Samachar*);
- Rural matrimonial (*Vaivahiki*);
- Rural market (*Gram Haat*);
- Rural newspaper (*Gaon ka Akhbaar*);
- Advisory module (*Swastha Salahkar, Krishi Salahkar, Kanooni Salahkar*);
- E-education (*Shiksha Gyandoot*);

Finance

The funds for the *Gyandoot* network came from the untied funds available within the *Panchayats*. The sources of this funding were:

- The revenues of *Gram Panchayats* deposited in *Zila Panchayat Raj Nidhi* (District *Panchayat State Funds*);
- Annual State Finance Commission share of revenues of *Gram Panchayats*;

¹ Caste certificates provided to persons of SC, ST or OBC so that they can make use of the reserved quota of seats kept aside for them in government jobs or for studies in schools and colleges.

² This service was stopped, due to certain technical and administrative problems, a few months after the Gyandoot project started. However it was restored in June 2001. One difficulty is keeping the database of land records updated. Another is that individual printouts of land records are not acceptable in a court of law since digital signature authorisation has not yet been agreed.

- NSAP administrative allotment of *Zila* and *Janpad Panchayats*;
- Advertisements on pre-printed stationery and website (Rs78,000).

Since the entire expenditure had come from the *Panchayats*, the system was set up at very low cost to the government. The cost of each additional centre was a mere Rs75,000. The option of opening more *Soochanalayas* through funds mobilised from *Panchayats*, private investors or people acquiring bank loans were kept open. Even the District Level Coordination Committee of bankers approved a loan unit for setting up *Soochanalayas* under the *Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana* (a rural self-employment scheme). Thus the entire scheme was conceptualised to be financially self-sustainable and viable, as well as economically independent of the government.

Awards

Gyandoot has been the recipient of several awards, including The Stockholm Challenge Award 2000 and the Computer Society of India – Tata Consultancy Services (CSI-TCS) National IT award. The Stockholm Challenge IT Award 2000 was awarded to the Gyandoot project of Dhar district on 6th June 2000. Gyandoot was declared winner in the Public Service and Democracy category from a total of 109 IT projects from all over the world. The Gyandoot project was the only Indian project to receive the award in any category in last four years. The project was awarded CSI-TCS National IT Award for best IT usage for the year 2000, instituted by the Computer Society of India.

Box 1 Water

A complaint costing Rs10 brought drinking water to a tribal hamlet of thirty-nine households: The villagers' previous complaint to local authorities did not yield results for six months. To the surprise of the villagers, their complaint filed through the Gyandoot kiosk brought a hand pump mechanic to the hamlet within two days and he repaired the hand pump within three hours.

Box 2 Better deals

Access to market rates leads to better deals: Farmers in Bagadi village were quoted a rate of Rs300 per quintal from local traders for their potato crop. The kiosk was used to obtain the prevailing market rate in a town 100 miles away, which paid 100 rupees more. Consequently, their potato produce was sold in the distant town. The prices paid to farmers have increased approximately 3 to 5%, keeping about Rs200 million from the pockets of middlemen and traders.

2. Framework of the Study

2.1 Rationale

In India both the central and many state governments have embarked upon the promotion of information technology (IT) in various sectors. Madhya Pradesh alone claims to have taken steps towards securing the well being of the common people through the application of IT.

The Gyandoot project, initiated in January 2000, was proposed as a low-cost, self-sustainable and community owned rural Intranet project. Gyandoot operates through thirty-five cyber kiosks, established in villages, serving as both a centre for disseminating information about useful services and an interface between the district administration and the rural masses. The project aims to give marginalised tribal citizens a chance to access knowledge with minimum investment.

In view of the fundamental project objectives and the variety of services offered, an in-depth understanding of the nature of the project was necessary and this study has been undertaken to assess the actual impact it makes on the lives of the people in its area of operation.

Local government in India at district and lower levels is known to suffer from various systemic and administrative points of view. Furthermore, information about development schemes and the processing of files is hard to come by in developing countries. Gyandoot, as a project trying to deal with some of these problems in an ambitious manner, is of great interest to all those with interest in rural development.

2.2 Study objectives

Gyandoot Intranet promises a unique form of Government-to-citizen e-commerce activity. It aims to provide half a million rural villagers access to various government services and marketing information at affordable prices. The concept was to apply the principles of e-governance, thereby empowering people living in remote and disadvantaged areas. The implementation and successful working of this ambitious project has been a challenge for the district administration and the implementing agency, partly due to the fact that there are numerous stakeholders in this project. This leads to a need to assess and understand the attitudes of the stakeholders.

This study looks at the following issues:

- Identifying the stakes of the different groups involved – the *Soochak*, the people, the administration;
- Understanding the objectives of the implementing agency;
- Determining the extent and spread of Gyandoot by analysing the awareness and user patterns;
- User analysis to know the benefits obtained and the nature of the benefits;
- Gyandoot as an opportunity of self-employment;
- Sustainability of the *Soochanalaya* as a business enterprise;
- Effect of Gyandoot on the functioning of various departments.

2.3 Project profile

Taking the benefits of new technologies to economically and socially disadvantaged sections of the rural population is a prerequisite for promoting a new paradigm of rural development based on concurrent and integrated attention to the imperatives of economics, employment and equity.

The Gyandoot project envisioned this and gained worldwide recognition with the Stockholm Challenge 2000 Award generating interest amongst students of development in Asian countries.

The objective of this study was to determine the extent of impact the service has had on the rural areas, in order to study the effects of such an initiative on rural lifestyle in general and to determine the possibility of replication in other parts of the state and country.

2.4 Profile of the study area

Dhar is a tribal dominated district in Malwa region in the western part of Madhya Pradesh. It is the soya and cotton belt of Malwa and Nimar and boasts a rich wealth of arts and culture. Agriculture and industry are the mainstays of business here. Pithampura in Dhar is the third largest industrial belt in Asia and large automobile centre, Mandu is a huge ancient abandoned city and the 1500 years old Bagh caves date back to the glorious past of the district. More than 60% of the population live below the poverty line. In such a backdrop the goal of Gyandoot had been to establish a community owned network of sustainable information kiosks in the poverty-stricken, tribal dominated rural area.

Table 1 Geographic and demographic details

Latitude	22°.00 to 22°.49 N
Longitude	75°.06 to 75°.42 E
Total population	1,128,399
Male	577,384
Female	550,340
Total Scheduled Caste (SC) population	81,100 (7.2% of the total population)
Total Scheduled Tribe (ST) population	920,412 (81.5% of the total population)

Literacy

Table 2 Literacy percentages

Percentage literacy								
Rural			Urban			Total		
Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
29.4	42.5	15.6	67.4	78.9	54.3	34.5	47.6	20.7

Literacy levels in Dhar are given in terms of the percentage of literate among the population in rural areas, urban areas and total population, as the statistics show in Table 2.

Administrative subdivisions

The study area was formed of the eight blocks where the Gyandoot project has been implemented, out of the total thirteen development blocks. Dhar district has 669 *Gram Panchayats* and 1,479 villages and seven *Tehsil*.

Table 3 Administrative subdivisions (*Tehsil*)

Subdivision number	Tehsil	Development Block
1	Badnawar	Badnawar, Bagh, Dahi
2	Dhar	Dhar
3	Dharampuri	Dharampuri
4	Gandhwani	Gandhwani
5	Kukshi	Kukshi
6	Manawar	Manawar, Nalchha, Nisarpur
7	Sardarpur	Sardarpur, Tirla, Umarban

2.5 Limitations of the study

During the course of the study certain limitations were faced, which to some extent may have affected the overall outcome of the study. They can be summarised as follows:

- Non-availability of latest data – the last census data is ten years old and the new census data is still not available;
- The respondents in villages were sometimes hesitant in disclosing information regarding their economic status;
- The study was carried out in Dhar district during a drought year, which may have produced some special circumstances. The government was gearing up to face this situation and there were plans to build water-harvesting structures on a large scale;
- Some of the services relate to issues that have a seasonal relevance, such as grain prices and working condition of hand pumps. Use of such services should preferably be observed over the year for an exhaustive study.

2.6 Study framework

The study was carried out in the following four phases:

- The preliminary phase consisting of:
 - Analysis of the project profile
 - Area analysis
 - Study of preliminary data and literature on Gyandoot
 - Identification of issues
- Secondary data collection phase:
 - Census data (1991) was collected and analysed with reference to each unit under consideration
 - Preparation of checklist of issues
- Primary data collection phase:
 - Pilot study 1
 - Pilot study 2
 - Main data collection phase
- Analysis and report writing.

3. Methodology of the Study

3.1 Description of the stakeholders

A description of the stakeholders in the Gyandoot project is given in Table 4.

Table 4 Gyandoot stakeholders

	Organisation name	Role in the project
1.	District Council (<i>Zila Parishad</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualisation of the project • Bringing together the financial resources • Management of the server room
2.	District Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualisation of the project • Coordination of the project • Commanding the back-end human system • Liaising with the state government
3.	State Government of Madhya Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing vision to use IT for the masses
4.	District Planning Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation
5.	National Informatics Centre (NIC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software maintenance and all required technical support
6.	Gyandoot <i>Samiti</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrichment and expansion of the project • Software development • Induction of new technology, capacity building
7.	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each <i>Soochanalaya</i> covers approx 25–30 villages • Village people can use any of the services by paying a small charge
8.	<i>Soochak</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An entrepreneur not an employee • The <i>Soochanalaya</i> started initially were <i>Panchayat</i> sponsored and set up in the <i>Panchayat Bhawan</i>. The operators were selected through written exams and then trained. Afterwards, private entrepreneurs were also encouraged to set up private <i>Soochanalaya</i> and 11 started as private enterprises

3.2 Sampling design

Three-staged stratified sampling was used for the study. First, three blocks were selected, based on certain criteria (discussed in next section), from which three *Soochanalayas* were selected for survey purposes in each block. Lastly, three villages were selected for each *Soochanalaya*, based on characteristics such as population and distance from the *Soochanalaya*. For the selection of households to be surveyed within a village, stratified random sampling was carried out, the stratifying factor being the caste.

Stratified random sampling has the inherent advantages of being more representative, have greater accuracy and administrative convenience. Compared with simple random samples, the stratified samples are geographically more concentrated, therefore the resources required for data collection and interviewing individuals are considerably reduced.

While assessing the impact of Gyandoot on the rural people, it is necessary to consider factors that could possibly hinder the growth and spread of the Gyandoot concept. Such factors include absence of supporting infrastructure, lack of awareness about the scheme and remoteness from such an establishment. The stratification of samples at each level was based on considerations of this kind and is discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.3 Selection of the blocks

Dhar district is divided into seven *Tehsils* and further into thirteen development blocks. Gyandoot covers six of the seven *Tehsils* and eight of the thirteen blocks. For survey purposes, three of the eight blocks were chosen. This selection took into consideration five development indicators:

- Percentage of scheduled tribals living in the block (as a percentage of total population);
- Literacy percentage;
- Forest coverage (as a percentage of the area under forest);
- Area of cultivated land (irrigated land plus unirrigated land as a percentage of total area under villages);
- Extent of industrial development.

Taking into account these factors, the blocks were ranked from most to least developed. The blocks chosen for the study were the most developed block, the least developed block³ and one block with an average value for all the development indicators.

3.4 Selection of the *Soochanalaya*

The *Soochanalayas* are located on the roadside in central villages to which most people travel. From an average of four or five *Soochanalayas* in each block, three *Soochanalayas* per block were selected.⁴ This selection took into consideration the distance from the main town and ownership of the *Soochanalaya* as private or *Panchayat* owned.

The distance from the main town was taken into consideration to ensure *Soochanalayas* situated in different economic and social environments were included in the sample. The earliest *Soochanalayas* were all funded by *Panchayat* and set up in *Panchayat* office buildings, but later private entrepreneurs were motivated and encouraged to see Gyandoot as a profitable venture and set up private kiosks with their own investment. The study also aimed to compare the performance and sustainability factors of the private kiosk with the *Panchayat* kiosks.

3.5 Selection of villages

Each *Soochanalaya* provides services to about fifteen *Gram Panchayats*, twenty-five to thirty villages with a total population of about 20,000 to 30,000. Out of these villages per *Soochanalaya*, three were selected for the survey. The villages to be surveyed were selected keeping in mind the criteria of their distance from the *Soochanalaya* village and the population of the village.

First the village where the *Soochanalaya* is located was selected as the nodal village; the second village was one lying in the distance range of 0 to 6 km; and third a peripheral village in a distance range of more than 6 km was selected. The second and third villages were chosen keeping in mind the population of the nodal village – if the nodal village had a high population, the second village selected had a low population and the third village a high population.

³ While selecting the least developed block, a problem arose when it was discovered that the least developed block (Gandhwani) had a *Soochanalaya* that had been non-functional since the beginning of the project. Thus Tirla block (second from the bottom of the list) was chosen for the survey.

⁴ While following the criteria for selecting three *Soochanalaya* from each block, a problem occurred when Tirla block, chosen due to the sampling criteria for blocks, had only two *Soochanalaya*. Thus for the survey, only two *Soochanalaya* could be chosen from this block, giving a total of eight *Soochanalaya* from three blocks.

3.6 Selection of households

Stratified random sampling was followed to select the households from the selected villages. The surveyors first identified a few knowledgeable people with information about the village, such as the schoolmaster or *Sarpanch* and a complete village profile was taken with their assistance. The village profile included details about the population, caste classifications and land ownership patterns among other factors. A random selection of the households was then made considering the following points:

- The number of total households sampled in a village was between fifteen and thirty depending on the total population;
- The number of households of each caste category in the village was selected proportional to the total households in that caste category in that village;
- It was ensured that the samples selected in each category represented people from different economic classes by using rule of thumb assessments such as home size and type.

3.7 Data collection

The study was carried out at the three levels of villagers, *Soochak* and administration of Gyandoot. For data collection at the villagers and *Soochak* levels, first issues were identified and then a questionnaire prepared. The issue identification process was necessary to decide what information was to be obtained by the survey. For each issue, questions were formulated to address the issue concerned.

The general public were divided into two possible categories of aware and unaware, on the basis of their knowledge about Gyandoot. The aware category was further subdivided into users and non-users depending on whether they had used the Gyandoot facility. Separate questionnaires were prepared for each of these three categories. People were interviewed for each category and their responses noted. For the administration of Gyandoot, including the DRDA and Gyandoot *Samiti*, information was gathered through informal interaction.

While conducting the village survey, a village survey list was completed through interaction with the local teacher, the *Sarpanch* or some educated villagers. This survey list contained detailed information about the village in terms of:

- Population;
- Household;
- Distance from the main town;
- Caste composition (by number of families in each);
- Land holding by each caste;
- Basic facilities available, such as primary health centre, school, bus stop and bank.

3.8 Pilot study

Objectives

The objectives of conducting a pilot study were to:

- Observe the working of the Gyandoot project in the field;
- Identify the constraints at work in the implementation of the Gyandoot project;
- Interview the *Soochaks*, users, non-users, implementing agency members, administrative officials;
- Formulate a sampling plan to make an assessment;
- Check the preliminary questionnaires and their validity in the field;
- Make a field visit to a few *Soochanalayas* and observe their working;
- Study the social dynamics at work in the villages visited.

The pilot study was divided in two phases.

Phase 1

During this phase the first visit to Dhar city was made to familiarise the surveyors with the study area. A few *Soochanalayas* near the main city were visited and the *Soochaks* of these *Soochanalayas* were interviewed informally. The aim of this was to gain familiarity with the working of Gyandoot in the field. A visit to the Gyandoot *Samiti* office was also made to observe the internal working and the organisational set-up of Gyandoot.

After this first phase checklists for different issues were drawn up and based on these preliminary questionnaires were compiled for each category of the population surveyed – the users, the nonusers (aware and unaware) and the *Soochak*.

Phase 2

For the second phase, a survey team was formed of local students to assist with the fieldwork and a schedule was drawn up for each member of the group. Visits were made to the selected *Soochanalayas* and the *Soochaks* were interviewed. Visits were also made to the villages and different categories of the population were sampled and interviewed. In this phase the preliminary questionnaires were tested and finalised.

Outcome

The two pilot phases fulfilled their objectives of helping the surveyors to know the study area better and also observe the working of Gyandoot in the field. As a result of the pilot survey an entire range of issues could be identified which was necessary in drawing up the final questionnaires. Interaction with the general public and the *Soochak* gave insights on their attitudes and helped to sharpen the questions.

4. Comprehensive Analysis of Data

4.1 Analysis of sample data

Composition of the sample

The sample was made up of a total of 481 respondents. 437 of these were male and 44 were female. The first classification of the population was made in two categories:

- Unaware: 244 (51%) of the respondents expressed a complete lack of awareness of the Gyandoot project;
- Aware: 237 (49%) of the respondents were aware of the Gyandoot project.

The aware respondents were further classified into users – 40 (8%) and non-users – 197 (41%).

Categorisation of the total population surveyed was made on the basis of education, social grouping, economic category, educational level and gender and caste awareness of Gyandoot.

Education

Table 5 Categorisation of sample according to educational level

Educational level	Total respondents	%
Illiterate	114	23.7
Literate/2 nd standard pass	57	11.8
3 rd to 5 th pass	101	21.0
5 th to 8 th pass	79	16.4
10 th pass	43	9.0
12 th pass	56	11.6
Graduate	21	4.4
Post-graduate	9	2.0
Others (Diploma etc.)	1	0.2

The caste-wise random sample comprised of mostly illiterate people (23.7%), and people with only primary education. It can be seen that, with a few exceptions, the number of respondents in each category decreases moving towards higher education levels.

Social grouping

Table 6 Social categorisation of sample

Caste	Total	%
SC	68	14.0
ST	113	23.5
OBC	178	37.0
Other	122	25.5

The surveyed villages had a major composition of OBC (Other Backward Castes) classes. Hence in the overall sample, their number was higher than any other social category, as the village samples were drawn proportionate to the caste composition of the total population.

Economic category

In addition, personal information was taken from the respondents under the following headings:

- Ownership of house (private or rented);
- Type of house;
- Drinking water source;
- Land holding (if any);
- Main occupation;
- Side occupation;
- Capital assets owned.

This information was used to classify respondents' economic category. The resulting economic categorisation of the sample is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Economic categorisation of sample

Category	Number of people	%
Poor	221	46
Medium	192	40
Rich	68	14

Table 8 Economic and social categorisation of the total sample

Social Category	Total	%	Economic category					
			Poor		Medium		Rich	
			Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
SC	68	14	50	73.5	18	26.5	0	0
ST	113	23.5	85	63.9	24	28.2	4	3.6
OBC	178	37	55	30.9	91	51.1	32	17.9
Other	122	25.5	31	25.4	59	48.4	32	26.2

Educational level

Within the various social groups surveyed further classifications can be made on the basis of educational level. It is interesting to note that educational qualification is lowest among the scheduled castes (lowest caste groups) and tribal groups.

Table 9 Educational level classification of social categories

Social category	Educational level (%)*								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SC	9.8	4.8	5.0	2.5	1.2	1.5	-	-	-
ST	11.6	3.7	6.0	4.0	2.5	1.7	0.6	-	-
OBC	2.0	2.9	6.7	6.9	2.9	3.7	1.5	1.0	-
Other	0.2	0.4	3.8	2.9	2.3	4.8	2.3	0.8	0.2

* Codes for Educational Level: 1 – Illiterate; 2 – Literate/2nd standard pass; 3 – up to 5th standard pass; 4 – up to 8th standard pass; 5 – 10th standard pass; 6 – 12th standard pass; 7 – Graduate; 8 – Post graduate; 9 – others e.g. Diploma holders.

Gender and caste-wise awareness

Table 10 shows the gender and caste-wise awareness levels of Gyandoot in the total population surveyed.

Table 10 Gender and caste-wise classification of aware and unaware respondents

Gender	Social category	Total surveyed	Unaware		Aware non-user		Aware user	
			Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	SC	61	43	70	13	22	5	8
	ST	94	59	63	30	32	5	5
	OBC	168	73	43	83	50	12	7
	Other	114	40	35	59	52	15	13
	Total	437	215	49	185	42	37	9
Female	SC	7	7	10	0	0	0	0
	ST	19	11	58	5	27	3	15
	OBC	10	7	70	3	30	0	0
	Other	8	4	50	4	50	0	0
	Total	44	29	65	12	27	3	8
Total		481	244	51	197	41	40	8

As is evident from the table, awareness increases moving from SC towards Other category of respondents. Awareness is low in the sections considered economically and socially backward (SC and ST category) and there is not much disparity between these two categories. Similarly there is not much difference between the OBC and Other categories, though the difference between the first two caste groups (SC and ST) and the last two groups (OBC and Other) is quite significant. Women are generally less aware of Gyandoot than men.

4.2 Analysis of aware (non-users) and unaware

Education-wise awareness level of Gyandoot among the respondents

Table 11 shows a direct and very strong relationship between the educational status of a person with their knowledge of the scheme. Therefore extension activities directed at spreading awareness about Gyandoot need to be designed in such a way that there is greater focus on the less educated, so as to provide them an equal opportunity.

Table 11 Educational classification of respondents

Educational level	Number of respondents	Unaware		Aware	
		Number	%	Number	%
Uneducated	114	96	84	18	16
Literate/2 nd standard pass	57	43	75.5	14	24.5
Up to 5 th pass	101	45	44.5	56	55.5
Up to 8 th pass	79	31	39	48	61
10 th pass	43	24	55.8	27	44.2
12 th pass	56	10	18	46	82
Graduate	21	3	14	18	86
Post-graduate	9	0	0	9	100
Others (diploma etc.)	1	0	0	1	100

Distance-wise variations in awareness

Table 12 shows a variation in awareness about Gyandoot relative to the distance from the *Soochanalaya* village. In the nodal villages, the high awareness can be justified by better publicity campaigns and proximity to the *Soochanalaya*. The average awareness level is 68.5% in nodal villages.

Table 12 Distance-wise variation in awareness of Gyandoot

Village	Distance (kms) from <i>Soochanalaya</i>	Aware (users plus non-users)	Unaware	% awareness
Delmi	Nodal	10	11	48
Dehri sarai	Nodal	16	6	73
Kesoor	Nodal	17	4	81
Tirla	Nodal	24	6	80
Aahu	Nodal	26	3	90
Dhamnodb	Nodal	9	13	41
Dharampuri	Nodal	15	5	75
Khalghat	Nodal	9	10	47
Total		126	58	68
Dharawara	4	6	14	30
Ahir khedi	5	9	10	47
Sangesra	5	5	13	28
Raipuria	5	7	9	44
Chandwada	1.5	10	5	67
Jetapur	4	4	18	18
Gulati	4	2	14	12.5
Sala	1.5	4	16	20
Total		47	99	32.2
Dedla	8	7	9	44
Sukheda	8	8	7	53
Antrai	10	9	11	45
Chiloor	10	12	7	63
Dhamanda	6	13	8	62
Bhavnya bzg.	6	8	12	40
Mundla	10	4	16	20
Balwada	6	3	17	15
Total		64	87	42.9

Awareness of Gyandoot compared with Government Schemes

A comparison of awareness about Gyandoot in relation to other government schemes can be made from the sample. Table 13 shows that awareness of the Gyandoot services is considerably less than that of other government schemes. This can be attributed to the fact that the Gyandoot scheme is considerably more recent than most other government schemes in rural areas.

Table 13 Comparison of awareness of Gyandoot with government schemes

	Number	%
Total awareness of other Government schemes	295	61.3
Total awareness of Gyandoot in the sample	237	49.0
People having some level of awareness apart from just the name of Gyandoot	133	27.6
Aware about Gyandoot but unaware about other Government schemes	45	9.4
Aware about Government schemes but unaware about Gyandoot	143	29.8

Note: Comparison among the aware non-users and the unaware respondents only, i.e. sample size of 441

Status of awareness about Gyandoot by the economic category

Table 14 Awareness in different economic categories

%	Poor	Medium	Rich
Unaware	153/221 = 69.2%	75/192 = 39.1%	16/68 = 23.5%
Aware	68/221 = 30.8%	117/192 = 60.9%	52/68 = 76.5%

As can be expected, awareness is lowest amongst poor and highest amongst the rich. However, if the objective of Gyandoot is to benefit the poor, then this trend needs to be addressed.

Source of information about Gyandoot among aware non-users

A significant amount of information is spread informally. Table 15 shows that to a major degree Gyandoot publicity has been through informal interaction between friends, relatives and acquaintances. Another important source of publicity has been through public meetings, either conducted by government officials or the *Panchayat* members.

Table 15 Aware non-users' source of information about Gyandoot

Source of information about Gyandoot	Number of respondents
<i>Soochak</i>	10
<i>Panchayat</i>	24
Newspapers	26
Friends/relatives	55
Pamphlets	14
Meetings/ <i>jansabha</i>	38
Saw board	21
TV	5
Heard from some official	13
Others	10

Useful services

Table 16 shows aware users' perceptions of about the usefulness of the services in the Gyandoot project.

Table 16 Opinion about the usefulness of different services

Useful service	% of respondents
<i>Khasra nakal</i>	17.5%
<i>Mandi</i>	22.5%
Complaints	21.5%
Certificate	14.5%
Others	11.0%
None	13.0%

The table shows that *Mandi* price and complaints have been the major uses among the Gyandoot services. Among those who were aware of the complaint module, more than 95% felt that it was useful for making a complaint to the administration. The land records copy service was introduced initially but withdrawn later due to technical problems.

In view of a considerable percentage (13%) of the aware users who do not regard Gyandoot as useful, more effort needs to be made to promote understanding and publicise the usefulness of the Gyandoot services for the common people.

An important factor to be kept in mind is the effect of the educational qualifications of the respondents on services such as certificates, and ultimately the implication of the varying numbers in the different categories in the overall sample. The need for special services may be very high in specific categories of people.

Gyandoot Services

Amongst the aware non-users the degree of awareness about Gyandoot was assessed by asking about the specific services of which they knew. The awareness levels of various respondents were categorised as shown in Table 17.

Table 17 Awareness about services of Gyandoot

Number of services known	Number of respondents (aware non-user)	%
0	64	32.5
1 or 2	62	31.5
3 or 4	61	31
5 or 6	10	5
7 and above	0	0

Within the aware non-users category it was found that levels of awareness are quite low. Most people are just aware about the name of Gyandoot but are not aware of any of the services it provides. More than 31% of the respondents are aware of just one or two services and only 5% of respondents were aware of more than 4 services. This stresses the issue of undertaking better publicity of the project to disseminate the usefulness of all the varied services it provides.

Perceived usefulness of Gyandoot services

Table 18 Opinion about the overall usefulness of Gyandoot

Response	Useful for own community	Useful for other communities
Yes	111	117
No	17	1
No idea	69	79

It is interesting here to note that just 34 of the 197 aware (non-users) surveyed have visited the *Soochanalaya*. Extension activities need to be designed to develop inquisitiveness among the aware category to encourage them to begin to use the Gyandoot services.

Opinion about usage pattern of Gyandoot

The responses received from the aware respondents about how they thought the use of Gyandoot was changing is shown in Table 19. Most of the aware (non-user) respondents have no idea about the spread of Gyandoot and the usage trend over the period. This is also an indicator towards the low level of awareness about specific features of Gyandoot and their actual use by the public. This

is either due to a lack of publicity or lack of interest shown by the public towards Gyandoot services.

Table 19 Trend of use of Gyandoot

Usage pattern	Number of responses	%
No idea	120	60.9
Increasing	47	23.9
Decreasing	19	9.6
Constant	11	5.6

Cost of the Gyandoot services

Opinions among the 237 aware respondents about the charges for Gyandoot services are shown in Table 20. Just 1.7% of respondents feel that Gyandoot services are expensive. The overwhelming majority is of the opinion that the services have been appropriately priced considering the economically weak status of Dhar.

Table 20 Opinion about the cost of Gyandoot services

Charges of services	Number of respondents
Expensive	4
Inexpensive	108
No idea	125

Gyandoot awareness relative to computer awareness

The awareness of Gyandoot among all aware users corresponds closely with their awareness of computer services more generally (Table 21). 67 respondents agreed that the popularity of computers has increased due to Gyandoot, while 170 respondents felt that Gyandoot has not contributed to the spread of computers in anyway.

Table 21 Comparison of awareness of Gyandoot with computers

Awareness	Aware	Aware (number of services known >0)	Aware (number of services known >2)
Gyandoot	237	173	29
Computers	237	176	60

Publicity

197 aware respondents provided information about sources of publicity for Gyandoot, their effectiveness and ideas for improved publicity in the future. These are presented in Tables 22 to 24.

Table 22 Awareness about different means of publicity

Publicity method	Number of respondents	%
Jansabha/meetings	42	18.7
Newspapers	8	3.6
Pamphlets/posters	33	14.7
Soochak	7	3.1
Others	19	8.4
No publicity	73	32.4
No idea	43	19.1

Table 23 Opinion about the effectiveness of publicity

Effectiveness	Number of respondents	%
Very effective	19	9.7
Less effective	47	23.9
Not effective	70	35.5
No idea	61	30.9

Table 24 Suggested methods of publicity

Suggested ways	Number of respondents	%*
Electronic media (radio, TV)	21	10.7
Print media	28	14.2
<i>Jansabha</i> /meetings	61	30.9
Door to door publicity	59	29.9
Others	21	10.6
No idea	70	35.5

* Multiple responses from some respondents

The majority of respondents stressed *Jansabha* and meetings as a better method of publicity for the future. Most of the responses in the 'others' category suggested door-to-door publicity.

Reasons for non-use of Gyandoot

This was asked of people who were aware of Gyandoot but had never used its services. The vast majority had perceived no need to use it. Gyandoot was started to provide information and services to village people to help them in their daily life. Responses analysed in this section illustrate substantial scope for raising awareness among people of the types of service that Gyandoot provides.

Table 25 Reasons for non-use of Gyandoot services

Reasons for non-use	Number of respondents	%
No need arose	121	61.4
<i>Soochanalaya</i> closed	0	0
Negative feedback about <i>Soochanalaya</i>	5	2.6
Others (including those who had no idea about Gyandoot except the name)	71	36

4.3 Analysis of users

Table 26 Gender-wise usage pattern

	Number surveyed	Users	% of each gender who are users
Male	437	37	8.5
Female	44	3	6.8
Total	481	40	8.3

Of the population surveyed, over 90% of the users of Gyandoot services are male. Considering the living patterns of people in Indian villages this gender ratio is not unexpected. The factor responsible for this is that in a rural set up, women are mostly confined to their homes and lack awareness about business or public affairs. Although more appropriate extension activities might be

designed to promote awareness among women folk, it has to be recognised that social conditions permitting women to use the services more fully will only change over the long term.

Another question needing attention is whether the services currently being provided are useful for women. *Mandi* rates and land records, for example, are services that are important for men folk who look after the economic affairs of the family. Facilities need to be introduced and popularised which could be of special use to women. Services such as women and child welfare and health also need to be encouraged, even if the current trend of use of these services is low.

Classification of users on the basis of economic category

Table 27 Economic categorisation of users

	Number surveyed	Users	%
Rich	68	9	13.2
Medium	92	22	23.9
Poor	221	9	4.1
Total	481	40	8.3

As previously shown with a total of 40 users in 481 persons surveyed, the average of 8% of population making use of Gyandoot is not very high. Table 27 shows that a higher percentage of use is made by the rich and medium categories, while amongst the poor only 8.3% of those surveyed had made use of Gyandoot.

Distribution of users on the basis of education, social and economic categories

Table 28 shows the distribution of different categories of people in different educational levels. The majority of the users (82.5%) are literate. This can also be seen caste-wise – all the users in SC, OBC and Other categories are literate, with the exception of ST where all except one are illiterate.

Table 28 Classification of users education, social and economic categories

Social category	Economic Category		Educational level *									
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
SC	Poor	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
	Medium	4	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	
	Rich	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ST	Poor	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Medium	3	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Rich	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OBC	Poor	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Medium	6	-	-	1	1	1	1	2	-	-	
	Rich	5	-	-	1	1	1	-	2	-	-	
Other	Poor	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Medium	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	1	-
	Rich	4	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	1

* Codes for Educational Level: 1 – Illiterate; 2 – Literate/2nd standard pass; 3 – up to 5th standard pass; 4 – up to 8th standard pass; 5 – 10th standard pass; 6 – 12th standard pass; 7 – Graduate; 8 – Post graduate; 9 – others e.g. Diploma holders.

Age-wise analysis of the users

Table 29 shows the number of respondents in each age category. Middle-aged people use the service more freely, despite the fact that the less than 25 years group might be expected to have greater familiarity with computers. This strongly suggests that the types of service offered are predominantly of relevance to the middle-aged.

Table 29 Age-wise classification of users

Age group	% surveyed	Number of users
Less than 25 years	19.8	7
25 to 39 years	42.1	22
40 to 54 years	24.5	6
Greater than 55 years	13.6	5
Total	100.0	40

Percentage use of different services

At the time of survey the area was facing drought and hence the complaint module was one of the frequently used services. The same reason brought the *Mandi* prices service was down. However, the most used service was certificates, including permanent caste certificate. Official data collected over a longer period suggest the use priorities given in Table 30. The somewhat atypical conditions during the survey period may have biased responses towards complaints.

Table 30 Usage pattern of different services

Services	Survey users	%	Official record (%)
Complaint	10	25	30.6
<i>Khasra</i>	6	15	4
Certificate	15	37.5	-
<i>Mandi</i>	6	15	31
Others	11	27.5	-

Usage pattern

Table 31 Repetition of use

Used more than once	Yes	Used for same service	Used for different service
Number of users	17	6	11
Percentage	43	35	65

The majority of the users had used Gyandoot just once, but 43% had used it more than once. Of these seventeen repeat users, 65% had used different services. This reflects upon the knowledge and usefulness of the various services for the masses. The fact should not be overlooked that even users of multiple services only alternated between the most popular services of complaints, certificates and *Mandi* rates.

Service quality

Table 32 User response about satisfaction of use

Purpose met	Yes	No
Number of users	31	9
Percentage	77.5	22.5

Table 32 shows that the vast majority of the surveyed users were satisfied with the services. Of the unsatisfied users, the reasons behind their dissatisfaction were varied. Two users had made complaints about services not included in the complaint module and two others had tried to obtain land record copies but found this facility no longer in operation. One of the users had tried the *Gram Haat* facility for selling his bullocks online, but did not find an interested buyer. Two people had tried obtaining employment opportunities information, but during that period no relevant vacancies were posted and one could not get his job done because of electricity problems. In one case there had been a complaint about setting up a primary health centre, which was not addressed for six months.

Time taken for action

Some of the requests such as *Mandi* rates or land records can be dealt with immediately, as long as there are no technical problems. Such requests account for the ‘dealt with immediately’ category. In most cases, action was taken within the stipulated time limit. The reasons behind the ‘no reply’ category varied between non-availability of that particular service, such as the land record copy facility, complaints being out of the set module or external problems with electricity or server connectivity.

Table 33 Time taken for action

Time taken for action	Number of users	%
Immediately	16	40
Within a week	10	25
Within 15 days	4	10
Up to a month	1	2.5
Greater than a month	1	2.5
No reply	8	20

Benefits of Gyandoot

One of the initial Gyandoot objectives was to bring about transparency in the working of various departments and village administration. A significant success has been achieved with 47.5% of people having work done from the *Soochanalaya* within a village, instead of going to the Block or *Tehsil* headquarters, saving both time and money. Nearly all of the respondents feel Gyandoot is beneficial to them. Table 34 shows how many people see the given benefits of the services.

Table 34 Benefits of Gyandoot

Benefits	Number of users	%*
Time efficient	21	53
Immediate action taken	8	20
Cost efficient	16	40
Information at one place	8	20
Others	20	50

* Multiple responses from one respondent.

Service charges

More than 90% of the users felt that the costs of Gyandoot services were justified. 15% of the users reported that they had to pay extra charges over and above what was prescribed. One reason for this could be a lack of knowledge. Some reported that the *Soochak* charged extra for the forms involved

with some services. This shows that Gyandoot, like other services, is open to exploitative practices by unscrupulous *Soochaks*.

Table 35 Opinion about service charges

	Yes	No	No idea
Are charges justified?	37	2	1
Did you pay extra?	6	33	1

Usefulness of the Gyandoot services

According to their needs, different people found different services useful. Over 95% of respondents from all groups in the user category felt that Gyandoot services would be useful for their village and would be useful across all categories of households.

Table 36 Opinion about usefulness of Gyandoot for villages

Social category	Usefulness of Gyandoot for village	
	Yes	No
SC	5	0
ST	7	1
OBC	12	0
Other	14	1

Improvements in the service

The majority of users gave no suggestions regarding facilities that could be useful for the villagers but that are not presently available at the *Soochanalaya*. Of those who did make suggestions, most recommended an increase in the type of complaints possible in the complaint module and there were also suggestions to include complaints about all the government departments. For instance, it had initially been possible to make complaints against the police, but this was withdrawn, ostensibly on the grounds that some complaints could not be justified and because of its potentially demoralising influence. However, consideration is being given to re-instituting some aspects of a police complaints service, together with the possibility of filing a first information report electronically. The Madhya Pradesh police have also recently opened their own website (www.mppolice.nic.in). Another interesting suggestion was regarding introduction of Internet facilities at the *Soochanalaya*. The large number of users who offered no suggestions regarding improvements shows that understanding and involvement with the objectives of Gyandoot has been very limited.

Table 37 Suggested improvements and additions in the existing Gyandoot services

Suggestions	Number of users	% users
Police department complaints should be introduced	2	5
Electricity department complaints should be introduced	0	0
Complaints for all departments should be possible via Gyandoot	4	10
Internet facilities should be available at <i>Soochanalaya</i>	4	10
Others suggestions	8	20
No idea	23	58

Effect on administration

Three-quarters of the respondents said that the complaint facility has effected the administration in terms of it becoming more responsible, active and timely. This is very positive feedback especially

when viewed in the context of the basic objectives of the Gyandoot scheme. However, the departments in the government that were seen to be directly affected were limited in number, e.g. Education, Health, Public Health Engineering (PHE).

Publicity of Gyandoot

Amongst the users, nearly 82% were aware that some publicity work had been carried out for Gyandoot. The remaining 18% had no knowledge of any promotional work. Among those who were aware about publicity, 42% had no idea as to how it had been carried out. Table 38 shows the different means of publicity about which people were aware.

Table 38 Knowledge of means of publicity

Means of publicity	Number of users	%
No idea	17	42.5
<i>Jansabha</i>	11	27.5
Newspapers	1	2.5
Pamphlets	2	5
Others	15	37.5

Of the forty users surveyed, twenty-seven had told their friends and relatives about Gyandoot and in half of these cases, the others had then made use of Gyandoot.

Opinion about Soochak

Opinions of users were elicited regarding the *Soochaks* and their behaviour with users, especially those from the poorer categories. The majority of people said that the *Soochak* does not discriminate. Cases in which the response about the *Soochak* was negative need further investigation to gain understanding of the reasons behind the user's feelings. Table 39 does not reveal discrimination by *Soochak* against any particular category.

Table 39 Opinion about *Soochak* behaviour

<i>Soochak's</i> behaviour	SC	ST	OBC	Other
Discriminates	1	1	1	1
Does not discriminate	2	1	9	11
Don't know about others or not with me	2	0	0	1
No idea	0	6	2	2
Total	5	8	12	15

5. Analysis of *Soochanalayas* – Private and *Gram Panchayat*

A total of eight *Soochanalayas* in three blocks of the district were selected to study their functioning. Half of the kiosks selected were private and the *Gram Panchayat* owned the rest. Table 40 gives the details of the selected *Soochanalayas*. For the purpose of analysis, issues were first identified related to the *Soochanalayas* and their functioning through discussion with three *Soochaks* and then a detailed questionnaire was drawn up. On the basis of this questionnaire, a structured interview was held with the *Soochaks*.

The following issues were kept in mind during preparation of the questionnaire for the *Soochanalaya*:

1. General information about the *Soochak*;
2. Start and mode of introduction of the Gyandoot *Soochanalaya*;
3. Training received by the *Soochak*;
4. Uses of Gyandoot according to the *Soochak*;
5. Additional uses of Gyandoot *Soochanalaya*;
6. Progress and extension of the *Soochanalaya*;
7. Motivational level and main interests of the *Soochak*;
8. Qualities required for becoming a successful *Soochak*;
9. Reasons for success of the *Soochanalaya*;
10. Sustainability;
11. Quality of service of Gyandoot;
12. User details;
13. Gyandoot as a medium of complaints about the administration;
14. Perceptions of the *Soochak*;
15. Technology and software;
16. Desired improvements;
17. Publicity of Gyandoot;
18. Effect of the location of the *Soochanalayas* in the *Panchayat*;
19. Future growth and possibilities.

Table 40 Name and ownership of the studied *Soochanalaya*

<i>Soochanalaya</i> owned by <i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Private <i>Soochanalayas</i>
1. Aahu	5. Dhar
2. Dehri sarai	6. Dhamnod
3. Kesoor	7. Dharampuri
4. Tirla	8. Khalghat

5.1 General details of the *Soochanalayas*

General details of the four *Gram Panchayat Soochanalaya* and four privately owned *Soochanalayas* are given in Table 41.

Table 41 General details of the *Soochaks*

<i>Soochanalaya</i>	Started	<i>Soochak</i>	Age	Caste	Education
Gram Panchayat					
Aahu	January 2000	Thakur Lal Patidar	20	OBC	B.A.
Dehri sarai	January 2000	Govardhan Angare	22	ST	Xii th
Kesoor	October 2000	Aneesh Makwane	22	OBC	Xii th
Tirla	January 2000	Deepak Sharma	25	OBC	B.A.
Private					
Dhar	March 2001	Malay Desai	21	Other	B.Sc., Hdse
Dhamnood	January 2001	Swami Sen	21	Other	M. Com.
Dharampuri	October 2000	Nitin Jain	19	Other	B. Com.
Khalghat	September 2000	Avinash Verma	21	OBC	B.A.

The average age of the *Soochaks* in the *Panchayat* owned and private *Soochanalayas* is the same. However, their caste and educational backgrounds are quite different with the private owners belonging to higher castes and on an average with a better education. In addition, the private *Soochaks* come from an economically stronger background and in most cases they have raised resources of Rs100,000 or more.

5.2 Start and mode of introduction of the Gyandoot *Soochanalaya*

All *Soochanalayas* under the ownership of the *Gram Panchayat* were opened in January 2000, although in one instance, the *Soochak* took charge in October 2000. For the selection of the operators, applications were invited through a newspaper advertisement. From the applications received, three applicants were shortlisted per *Soochanalaya* and provided training at the DRDA. After completion of the training the final candidate was selected on the basis of an interview and practical examination. Most of the *Soochaks* applied for the job because they were interested in computers and also because they saw a potential for growth of Gyandoot in the future.

The private *Soochanalayas* opened much later than the *Gram Panchayat Soochanalayas*, at around seven to eight months later. Mostly in the cases of the private *Soochanalayas*, the *Soochaks* had some acquaintance with Gyandoot officials and were asked by them to venture into such a project. All the private *Soochaks* see a lot of scope and potential for growth in the future for Gyandoot.

5.3 Training received by the *Soochak*

During the induction phase of the *Soochaks* for the *Panchayat* owned *Soochanalayas*, the *Soochak* candidates were provided eight days training in basic computing and working knowledge of computers. However, three of the four *Soochaks* who were interviewed had prior knowledge of computers through previous computer courses. All of them felt that Gyandoot was a good way of further increasing their knowledge about computers and some were also considering taking advanced courses in computers for training purpose.

None of the *Soochaks* of the private *Soochanalayas* were given the training given at the District Council to the earlier *Soochaks*, however all of them already had good working knowledge of computers. A few of the *Soochaks* were adept at solving all their hardware and certain software problems. Most of them plan to take advanced courses so that they can advance their *Soochanalayas* as training centres for computer courses.

5.4 Uses of Gyandoot

According to the *Soochaks* interviewed, the most popular services were those of *Mandi* rates, Complaints and Certificates. In addition, they reported that public responses were mostly in favour of increasing the number of complaints in the complaint module and also to provide more information about a variety of issues.

According to the private *Soochaks* interviewed the most popular services were those of *Khasra Nakal*, *Mandi* rates, Complaints, Certificates, and *Avedan Patra*. The *Soochaks* were also of the opinion that more complaints needed to be added to the complaint module to make Gyandoot more useful and also to increase the popularity and usage of the Gyandoot services.

5.5 Additional uses of Gyandoot *Soochanalaya*

In the *Gram Panchayat* owned *Soochanalayas*, the major focus is on the Gyandoot service. Yet some *Soochaks* have started other services such as STD, typing documents, photocopying, lamination work and computer training on the *Panchayat* premises. These act as an additional source of income for the *Soochaks*. All of them, however, are of the view that in the future Gyandoot would emerge as the most used service among those available at the *Soochanalaya*.

Apart from serving as information kiosks, the private Gyandoot *Soochanalayas* also house certain other services. Some places also serve as centres for jobwork, computer training, photocopying and Public Call Offices (PCOs). None of the private *Soochanalayas* visited are planning to introduce any additional services at present. The *Soochaks* are of the view that over time the Gyandoot services could become more popular than the other services available at the *Soochanalayas*.

5.6 Progress and extension of the *Soochanalaya*

According to the *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* the total number of users has increased over the months, although seasonal variation occurs due to factors such as drought, a good agricultural season and climate. However records of the receipts did not seem to show any marked increase in the number of users.

There has not been much change in the number of Gyandoot users coming to the private *Soochanalayas* over the months. The *Soochaks* have also not been able to identify proper trends because in most cases the *Soochanalayas* opened relatively recently, so a trend in the usage pattern is not yet visible. The *Soochaks* have not been able to give any answers regarding the seasonal variations, however all of the *Soochaks* interviewed felt that the dry season had effected the *Mandi* rates service. The post-harvest period is the season for more queries.

5.7 Motivational level and main interests of the *Soochak*

The *Soochaks* were questioned on business, economic and social gains, as well as political connections. Table 42 shows their responses. It is interesting to note the clear contrast of business and economic prospects between the *Gram Panchayat* owned and the private *Soochanalayas*. While all the *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* see Gyandoot as a source of economic benefit, the private *Soochaks* do not see Gyandoot as currently economically beneficial. This could be due to the more modest background of the *Panchayat Soochaks* compared with the richer backgrounds of the private *Soochaks*.

It is also interesting to note here that despite no current economic gain from the Gyandoot *Soochanalaya*, all the private *Soochaks* plan to continue with it as a business venture. They are of the view that although there is not much profit in it at present, there is great scope for improvement and the Gyandoot services could become a big success in the future.

Table 42 Types of gain

	Business	Economic	Social	Political
<i>Gram Panchayat Soochanalayas</i>				
Aahu	Helps in increasing business	Source of income	Prestige in the society has increased	Better terms with politicians and officials
Dehri sarai	Helpful specially for side business	Source of income	Social recognition	No gain
Kesoor	Helpful specially for side business	Source of income	Beneficial for social relationships	No gain
Tirla	Helpful	Source of income	Recognition in all classes of the society	Better terms with officials
<i>Private Soochanalayas</i>				
Dhar	No gains	No gains	People have started knowing me by name	No gains
Dhamnood	Business has improved	No gains	Social terms with people have improved	Have developed contact with high officials
Dharampuri	No gains	No gains	Prestige has improved as <i>Soochak</i>	Have developed contact with high officials
Khalghat	Previous business has helped Gyandoot	No gains	No gains	Have developed connections with high officials

5.8 Qualities for a successful *Soochak*

The *Soochaks* at the *Gram Panchayat* owned *Soochanalayas* listed the following main qualities as desirable in the *Soochak's* behaviour in order for them to be successful:

- Good behaviour with customers;
- Prior knowledge of computers;
- Sincerity in working;
- Should not discriminate among users.

Every *Soochak* at the private *Soochanalayas* felt that there were some qualities that must be present for a *Soochak* to become successful. The main qualities mentioned by them were:

- Good dealing and behaviour with customers;
- Punctuality (should open the *Soochanalaya* on time daily);
- Hardworking;
- Good education and knowledge of computers.

These views of the *Soochaks* also highlight the importance of *Soochak* training that was given by the administration. Whereas the private *Soochaks* had taken computers training at urban centres

such as Indore, and some were planning to go for advanced training, the *Panchayat Sookhaks* were dependent on training provided locally by the administration.

5.9 Reasons for the success of the *Soochanalaya*

The *Sookhaks*' responses regarding the perceived reasons for the success of the *Soochanalaya* are shown in Table 43.

Table 43 Reasons for the successful working of *Soochanalayas*

<i>Soochanalayas</i>	Suggested reasons for success
Gram Panchayat	
Aahu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central location of the <i>Soochanalaya</i> • High population density in the area surrounding the <i>Soochanalaya</i> • The <i>Soochanalaya</i> should be easily accessible • Facilities present at <i>Soochanalayas</i> should be available at all times • Continuous improvements in the quality of services offered
Dehri sarai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location of the <i>Soochanalaya</i> on the main road • Knowledge of the <i>Sookhak</i>
Kesoor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location of the <i>Soochanalaya</i> in a developed area • <i>Soochanalaya</i> should be easily accessible by road
Tirla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The facilities that people demand should be added since the existing services are limited in number • Prompt action should be taken by the administration at the district level
Private	
Dhar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of all information • Central location of the <i>Soochanalaya</i> • Knowledge of the <i>Sookhak</i> • Availability of additional facilities • Ability to complete work in the time limit given
Dhamnood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of more facilities at the <i>Soochanalayas</i> • Availability of application forms at the <i>Soochanalaya</i>
Dharampuri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction should be catered to • Central location of the <i>Soochanalaya</i> • Uninterrupted power supply • Sufficient power back up in case of power failure
Khalghat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness among the common people • Provision of all relevant services

A list of nine suggested factors was given to the *Gram Panchayat Sookhaks* to rank in order of importance. The following reasons were the most commonly suggested:

- Central location of the *Soochanalaya*;
- Accessibility of the *Soochanalaya*;
- Availability of additional facilities (STD, Xerox, etc.);
- Skills of the *Sookhak*;
- Higher number of literate people.

Availability of information and customer satisfaction appeared as most important factors for success amongst the private *Sookhaks*. A list of suggested factors was also provided to them to rank in order of importance. This was to gain insight into the limitations faced by different *Soochanalayas*. Of the nine given factors, the following were the top four reasons:

- Awareness among the people;
- Availability of additional services;
- Skills of the *Soochak*;
- Proper functioning of existing facilities.

5.10 Sustainability

The issue of sustainability was dealt by questioning the *Soochaks* about their income, investment, expenses, percentage share of income from Gyandoot from the total kiosk income and future plans for expansion. An analysis on sustainability of the *Soochanalayas* is shown in Table 44.

In case of the *Soochanalayas* owned by the *Gram Panchayat*, the set up costs were borne by the *Gram Panchayat*. This included the space provided for the *Soochanalaya*, electricity and telephone connection, computer system, printer and the furniture.

Table 44 Sustainability of the *Soochanalaya*

<i>Soochanalaya</i>	Income from Gyandoot (Rs/mnth)	Initial investment (Rupees)	Overhead expenses plus maintenance charges (Rs/month)	Total income from Gyandoot kiosk (Rs/month)	% share of income from Gyandoot
<i>Gram Panchayat Soochanalaya</i>					
Aahu	1,500	Nil (for Gyandoot) 800 plus 50 p.m. (for STD)	500	3,500	43
Dehri sarai	1,500	Nil (for Gyandoot) 3,000 (loan for CD recorder)	400	2,000	75
Kesoor	200	Nil (for Gyandoot) 3,000 (for CD recorder)	400	1,200	17
Tirla	1,000	Nil (for Gyandoot) 90,000 (loan for Xerox machine)	1,600	6,000	17
<i>Private Soochanalaya</i>					
Dhar	200	13,000	2,000	7,000	3
Dhamnood	300	100,000 (bought the entire centre with 6 systems, modem and furniture)	2,400	6,000	5
Dharampuri	400	50,000 (for computer, printer and software)	1,200	4,000	10
Khalghat	400	125,000 (for computer, modem, phone, photocopier, laser printer)	7,000	Undisclosed	-

The earnings from the Gyandoot services as quoted by three of the four *Panchayat Soochaks* were between Rs1,000 and Rs1,500. However, observation of their receipt books and our discussions

seem to suggest a lower income of around Rs300 per month. This seems similar to the figures quoted by the private *Soochaks*.

An important point to be noted in the case of the private *Soochanalayas* is that none are relying solely on the Gyandoot services. They are running some other business besides the Gyandoot services and so even if the kiosk did not earn sufficient income from the Gyandoot services, it could be run as a non-profit venture. Training in the use of computers seems to be in demand and the private *Soochaks* are catering to this. However amongst the four *Panchayat Soochaks* only one is providing training.

5.11 Quality of service of Gyandoot

According to the *Panchayat Soochaks* the quality of service provided by Gyandoot on the administration side was quite good. Most of the complaints made were redressed within a week of being lodged, especially if the complaint was one within the module. As such, the users were quite satisfied with the quality of service.

The private *Soochaks* view the quality of service of Gyandoot as good, but that much improvement is still desirable. The time taken for both the complaints and certificates facility is between one and two weeks, a time-span that could be reduced. However, according to the *Soochaks*, the grievance redressal by the authorities is quite satisfactory and most people are satisfied with the handling of their complaints.

One problem commonly faced by the *Soochaks* was that people would ask for services that are no longer available, such as the services of *Khasra Nakal*. The *Soochaks* suggested the restoration of all the services that Gyandoot claims to offer.

5.12 User details

The *Soochaks* of the *Gram Panchayat* owned *Soochanalayas* were of the opinion that most of the users were from the middle class. The percentage of users from the poor and backward categories was very low. The reasons given for this was the apparently low level of awareness. According to the *Soochaks* the poorer people seem to have no use for most of the services on offer by Gyandoot and their understanding about the services of Gyandoot was limited.

According to the private *Soochaks* more than half of the users belong to the lower middle and lower economic categories. One reason could be the availability of cheap services at the *Soochanalayas*.

From these responses of the *Gram Panchayat* and the private *Soochaks*, it is interesting to note that while the former categorised most of their users as middle class, the latter categorised most of them as lower class. It seems that due to the differences in their own economic background, the *Gram Panchayat Soochaks*, who belong to a lower economic and caste status than the private *Soochaks*, perceive the economic status of the users as being higher.

5.13 Gyandoot as a medium of complaints against the administration

All the *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* interviewed agreed that Gyandoot is a very effective medium for complaining against the administration as it had succeeded in putting some pressure on the officials. They felt that officials had become more efficient in their working. The *Soochaks* felt that the

complaints covered in the existing module were sufficient and there was no need to include more complaints. With a limited number of complaints to handle, the administration succeeded in redressing nearly all of the complaints made.

The private *Soochaks* also view Gyandoot as a very effective method by which the people could voice their grievances against the administration. According to them, there has been a major effect on the officials, who have become more responsible and efficient in their working. This system has empowered even the most disadvantaged people to approach the highest authorities and thus shorten the traditional routes of grievance making. These *Soochaks* were of the opinion that all sorts of complaints, including those currently outside the module, should be allowed.

5.14 Perceptions of the *Soochak*

Both the *Gram Panachayat* and private *Soochaks* agreed that there was the possibility of false complaints being made through Gyandoot, as there is no means of verification at the time the complaints are lodged. It is believed that the Gyandoot services are of immense use to all, but especially the poor, as various services have become accessible to them at affordable prices and as it can also be used for a variety of grievances. However, the *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* also realised usage was limited since very few of the poor actually understood about Gyandoot. Unless their awareness is increased, there is little hope that the service would be utilised to its fullest. The *Soochaks* also consider that Gyandoot has greatly helped in bringing about awareness of computers and popularised their use.

The *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* believe that competition from private *Soochanalayas* would be good although it might affect their incomes. Generally the competition that a *Soochanalaya* gets from other similar centres such as computer training institutes and other *Soochanalayas* was considered healthy by the private *Soochaks*.

5.15 Technology and software

The systems and other peripherals at the *Gram Panchayat* owned *Soochanalayas* were installed by an Indore based firm, who are also responsible for the maintenance of the machines. Generally there have been no problems regarding the hardware and for software related problems the *Soochaks* can approach DRDA for prompt assistance. All the *Soochaks* who were interviewed were satisfied with the quality of maintenance.

The private *Soochanalayas* obtained the computers and other peripherals on their own from private vendors. The firms concerned are responsible for the maintenance of equipment and also take care of routine hardware related problems associated with printers and hard disks. In case of software problems, the *Soochak* can approach DRDA for help.

5.16 Desired improvements

Although the *Soochaks* of the *Gram Panchayat* owned *Soochanalayas* were slightly hesitant to make suggestions regarding improvements (as they felt that they were not competent enough), a number of suggestions did emerge regarding improvements in the existing services of the Gyandoot:

- More facilities need to be added to the existing ones;
- Proper connectivity needs to be provided to all the *Soochanalayas*;
- More complaints need to be accepted by the administration;
- People should be made more aware about the Gyandoot services;
- Emphasis should be given to the publicity of Gyandoot.

The private *Soochaks* came up with a number of suggestions regarding improvements. The most notable ones were:

- The implementing agency should be active and helpful;
- Problems and complaints should be solved quickly;
- Maximum facilities (at least those that have been claimed by the Gyandoot *Samiti*) should be available, for example, the *Khasra Nakal* facility which was stopped soon after inception;
- Even complaints outside the complaint module should be accepted, although all *Soochaks* agreed upon leaving the complaint module untouched;
- WiLL technology should be implemented with immediate effect to improve connectivity;
- More efforts should be put in the publicity of Gyandoot.

5.17 Publicity of Gyandoot

At the outset the administration made very active efforts with publicity. Public meetings, distributed pamphlets, wall posters, announcements and advertisements in the newspapers and television had all publicised the services of Gyandoot. However, the awareness among people still was lacking. The *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* believed that barely half the population knew about Gyandoot services and an even lower amount knows about the nature of the services. The *Gram Panchayat Soochaks* in different locations had also made an effort on their own behalf to publicise Gyandoot through meetings, pamphlets, banners, posters and by word of mouth.

The private *Soochaks* were also of the view that the various methods of publicity have not had the desired effect as awareness among people is still very low. They too have taken certain measures to publicise it, such as through posters, banners, pamphlets, advertisements on the local cable network. A few innovative extension strategies have also been suggested such as popularising the Gyandoot services through skits and announcements in the *Gram Haat* for example.

5.18 Effect of the location of the Soochanalayas in the Panchayat

The *Soochaks* interviewed in the *Gram Panchayat* category were of the view that they enjoyed many advantages due to the *Soochanalayas* location inside the *Panchayat*. Firstly, there was no investment required and the *Gram Panchayat* even carried out the maintenance of the *Soochanalaya*. Nearly everyone who visited the *Panchayat* also came to visit the *Soochanalaya*, which improved awareness among the people. The *Panchayat* members also took an interest in the working of computers. The *Panchayat* had much of its work done through the *Soochanalaya*. In the cases observed, Gyandoot and the *Panchayat* office were mutually reinforcing, for instance, in the issuing of documents and accessibility of information (though it is recognised that, under unfavourably disposed officers, they could reinforce each other to the disadvantage of users). Senior government officials visiting the *Panchayat* or the Gyandoot kiosk would automatically visit both.

However the *Soochaks* agreed that the location of the *Soochanalaya* brought about no changes in the way in which the *Panchayat* members worked. The only drawback pointed out was that complaints about the *Panchayat* were difficult to make when the *Soochanalayas* were located inside the *Panchayat*.

All of the private *Soochaks* regarded it as advantageous for a *Soochanalaya* to be located in the *Gram Panchayat*. Since more people were connected with the *Panchayat* and made frequent visits to the *Panchayat*, it was natural that they would feel curious about the *Soochanalaya* and visit it to satisfy their curiosity. Additionally, the *Soochak* has no need to make investments in the *Soochanalaya* or in publicity for it. The one major disadvantage also perceived here was that making complaints against members of the *Panchayat* would become difficult. The *Soochaks* did not see any effect on the working of the *Panchayat* members by the presence of Gyandoot *Soochanalaya* in *Panchayat* campus.

5.19 Future growth

The *Soochaks* who were interviewed in the *Gram Panchayat* category see excellent growth prospects for Gyandoot. They were of the view that Gyandoot has greatly improved awareness of computers. They believed that as the use of Internet related services increase, more and more people would use its services, and services like Gyandoot would become indispensable.

All the private *Soochaks* agreed on the huge potential that they believed Gyandoot had in the future. They had no doubts about the potential of the scheme, if all the services claimed by Gyandoot were made available and worked properly.

6. Impact Assessment

The concept behind Gyandoot was to provide access to information to villagers regarding useful services and to provide links between the people and the administration. Although this service was only started in January 2000, it has already managed to generate a considerable amount of interest among the rural people. According to the findings of the study, nearly half the population surveyed is aware about the Gyandoot project. Furthermore over one-third of the people are aware of one or more of the services provided by Gyandoot. Gyandoot has, in its short span of activity, managed to have an impact on the rural people. These impacts can be measured on several parameters as discussed in the following sections.

6.1 Social impacts

The district of Dhar is a tribal dominated area and in such a setting where people are deprived of even the basic necessities of life, Gyandoot has served as a medium for empowerment and direct access to the administration. The major issues here are how to create greater awareness about Gyandoot, especially among poor people and to exploit its potential.

- The online village newspaper informs the villagers about the happening in and around their village increasing their awareness;
- The advisory modules help the villagers find easy and expert advice on various legal and social problems;
- With services such as online matrimonial and advertising facilities, Gyandoot has introduced previously unknown choices and interesting options to people in villages;
- Gyandoot can help people become more aware of their rights by providing them information about government fund allocation and schemes etc.;
- Promise of grievance redressal by the administration has encouraged the rural population to become interested in better management of government services and, to a certain extent, curbed corruption.

A gradual shift from complete ignorance to cognisance has been an interesting feature to note in this poverty-stricken, tribal dominated rural region.

6.2 Economic impacts

An assessment of economic impact in monetary terms has not been possible in this study as there is no available data for the period before the Gyandoot project started. However, the project has had some definite effects on the economic set-up in the following ways:

- The funds of *Panchayats* that had been lying idle have been put into effective use by the opening of Gyandoot *Soochanalayas*. The *Panchayats* also receive timely and good quality office support;
- It has provided the rural youth with an opportunity for self-employment and helped to enhance their entrepreneurial skills;
- Timely and useful information such as that of *Mandi* prices and local market transactions are available to ordinary farmers;

- The services provided by Gyandoot are affordable to the middle classes and the poor, and also save time and overhead expenses;
- In all the earlier development schemes, the main problems for the villagers were the accessibility of such centres in terms of distance, bureaucracy involved and cost of accessing the service. These centres are easily accessible and provide direct access to senior government staff at the district level.

Despite Gyandoot having such potential in the area, the advantages are often not easily discernible as the actual use of Gyandoot has been very limited, especially by the poorest section. However, Gyandoot is definitely an ambitious project, which, when all the technical and administrative gaps are filled, is capable of making deep impressions in the long run on the lives of the rural population.

On the basis of the analysis discussed here and in the preceding sections, the following SLOT analysis has been prepared.

Strengths	Limitations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convergence of e-governance, e-commerce and e-education; 2. No burden on Government exchequer as the <i>Panchayat</i> arranges the money from existing resources; 3. Opportunity for self-employment; 4. Alternative to the vertical hierarchy of supervision of delivery systems by different government agencies; 5. Tripartite partnership between Government, private sector and community; 6. Availability of useful information on government and market services; 7. Low service charge; 8. Use of service does not require prior knowledge of computers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The complaints service restricted to a limited number of departments; 2. The low literacy level among the villagers impedes widespread usage; 3. A few services are seasonal and therefore of limited use; 4. Frequent power cuts in the area; 5. Poor connectivity.
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Replication of the idea in rural/urban areas; 2. Increasing the number of <i>Soochanalayas</i> and having better networking facilities; 3. Better extension activities can help increase Gyandoot awareness; 4. Wider range of services can be provided; 5. Widening the scope of the complaints module; 6. Better integration between various Government departments resulting in a better coordination; 7. Upgrading to link it to national and international databases; 8. Links of <i>Panchayats</i> to block and district offices for better communication. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem of sustainability in the initial period after establishment; 2. Risk of Gyandoot service becoming secondary to additional services being provided at private <i>Soochanalayas</i>; 3. Difference in interest levels of the <i>Soochak</i>, a reason for success or failure; 4. Profit motive in the private <i>Soochanalayas</i> might overshadow the social cause; 5. Change in administrative set up and loss of interest; 6. Threat from other similar schemes offering better facilities.

7. Discussions with District Officials

This section is drawn from a report of the discussions held with the Dhar district officials regarding their views on the Gyandoot project and the potential that they see in it as a medium for improving administrative functioning. The discussions were also to find out how sensitive the officials are to the evolving nature of such a programme, catering to public needs and requiring continuous updating and modifications based on lessons from practical experience.

One difficulty faced was the fact that the top district officials, including the District Collector, the Chief Executive Officer and the *Sarpanch* had all changed recently, so that the original pioneers of the project were no longer in place. However, this did give us the added insight into how deeply interested a new group of officials, who may not have been personally involved in originating the programme, are in taking it forward.

Discussions were held with around a dozen district level government functionaries on the following issues and questions:

1. What were the expectations from Gyandoot when it was initiated?
2. What changes or additions have been made to Gyandoot since its inception?
3. What do you find are the main strengths and what are the major weaknesses of the Gyandoot scheme today?
4. It seems that the Gyandoot programme tends to centralise rather than decentralise the process of solving administrative problems. This is through the encouragement to approach the Collector of the district directly through the Gyandoot linkage, rather than go to the local authority or representative such as the village *Sarpanch* or block level functionaries. What is your opinion in this regard?
5. Why was Gyandoot introduced only in a rural area and not in urban areas?
6. Is it planned to extend Gyandoot to other parts of Madhya Pradesh?
7. Does Gyandoot exert pressure on Government functionaries? If so, what is the effect of this pressure?
8. What are the main difficulties faced by the Gyandoot programme in its functioning?

7.1 Questions and responses

1. *What were the expectations from Gyandoot when it was initiated?*

The understanding of the government functionaries on this issue showed a fairly wide spectrum. The senior district administration, including the collector, the police superintendent and the CEO were all fairly new to the district, and had not been present when the Gyandoot scheme was introduced. These officials tended to concentrate on future plans for Gyandoot, rather than an analysis of its performance against initial expectations.

Other responses included the following points as initial expectations from the scheme:

- Taking information technology to the people;
- Improvement in the functioning of Government departments. Making the government functionaries more responsive and answerable to the public;

- Increasing awareness and information amongst the public. This covers information about government schemes, awareness about governance issues and the rights of the common people.

2. *What changes or additions have been made to Gyandoot since its inception?*

Starting with some focussed objectives, the Gyandoot scheme has become a multipurpose programme combining e-commerce with e-governance. Within the government run programmes Gyandoot also includes activities related to education in schools.

3. *What do you find are the main strengths and what are the major weaknesses of the Gyandoot scheme today?*

The main strengths cited were:

- People are gaining from the Gyandoot scheme;
- Information is available and is being used widely;
- Gyandoot is a great convenience for people in terms of savings in time and money.

The main weaknesses of Gyandoot mentioned were:

- Problems of connectivity to the main server, so that the Gyandoot services may not always be available;
- Validity of the certificates or papers available from Gyandoot is limited and not complete. This means that the certificates received at the Gyandoot kiosk, whilst being acceptable in government departments, were not acceptable in courts of law or by banks for purposes of loans etc;
- There is a low level of awareness among people so that they are not able to fully utilise the services of Gyandoot.

A middle level government functionary in the district administration, who has been closely associated with the Gyandoot scheme since its inception, gave a detailed account of the benefits as he saw them:

- Awareness of common people has improved because of Gyandoot in general;
- IT and computer awareness has increased amongst rural people, due to the Gyandoot kiosks in interior villages;
- Government functioning has improved, due to the complaints service offered by Gyandoot. For example, the functioning of government schools has improved – they are more regular and start on time. Repair and maintenance of hand-pumps, the responsibility of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department has improved in its quality. In fact, the very process of making complaints is now much faster. Previously, a complaint could arrive by a post-card from a remote village and take up to a week. Through Gyandoot the department would receive the complaint the same evening and the pump could be repaired within a few days;
- Farmers are getting better rates for their produce. Some farmers are reported to have gone as far as Ahmedabad to sell produce. (Our feeling is that this could be true only for some big farmers.);
- Training in the use of computers, as a commercial activity, has become rather popular in the area. For example, in the village of Naalcha six computers have been set up to provide training to the local youth;

- Since the setting up of Gyandoot, expectations of the government to perform better and faster have increased. The functionary being interviewed cited an example wherein a user issued a writ against the district collector in the local consumer court, when he did not get a response to his query within a week. (However, this particular user was not identifiable.)

4. *It seems that the Gyandoot programme tends to centralise rather than decentralise the process of solving administrative problems. This seems to be done through encouragement to approach the Collector of the district directly through the Gyandoot linkage, rather than go to the local authority or representative such as the village Sarpanch or block level functionaries. What is your opinion in this regard? Does it not go against the spirit of the Panchayati Raj – the local self-government?*

There was a range of responses to this issue of centralisation versus decentralisation:

Official A: ‘Since the *Panchayats* are not able to help the people, where will they go? Complaints to the *Panchayats* are not looked into, so people come to the block or district offices.’

The Collector of the district felt that through Gyandoot the people have an option or alternative. ‘This is democracy in process, and this takes time. People come to me with small complaints, and I send them to the concerned department.’

Official B: ‘Gyandoot improves the speed of working. This is not centralisation. Previously a person would go to the *Tehsil* (subdistrict administrative headquarters) to meet the *Tehsildar* (local officer) for a certificate, and spend considerable time. Now he can get this certificate made at the Gyandoot kiosk in his own or nearby village. How is this centralisation? Complaints can also be made at the village level.’

Official C: ‘There is a technical reason why this process seems centralised. In future if regional centres are set up at subdistrict levels to deal with the complaints and requests, then everything need not go up to the district level.’

Official D: ‘Through Gyandoot we are only acting as facilitators. We are only sending information through Gyandoot. We are not centralising.’

Official E: ‘*Panchayats* do not have power to put pressure on departments, that is why action has to be taken from collector level downwards.’

5. *Why was Gyandoot introduced only in a rural area and not in urban areas?*

Official A: ‘In urban areas there will be too many complaints and the government will not be able to deal with all these.’

Official B: ‘Larger cities have many facilities. Gyandoot was mainly for villages since we had limited funds.’

Official C: ‘Initiative has not been taken on the urban front. A number of services in urban areas such as the municipal ward office, water supply and transport office could be linked through a Gyandoot type programme. In the case of Gyandoot the funds came from *Zila Panchayat* (district government) on request from the government.’

Official D: ‘The cities have Internet facilities, Gyandoot was for the villages. We may need a separate design to provide facilities to the cities.’

Official E: ‘In cities the officials are close at hand and there are other alternatives. However, the municipal facilities can be linked as services on the Gyandoot.’

6. Is it planned to extend Gyandoot to other parts of Madhya Pradesh?

All the officials interviewed were of the opinion that the Gyandoot scheme should be extended over the whole of the state. However, a number of qualifications were made to this viewpoint:

- Regional conditions are different in different areas. Each region may have its own requirements. The present Gyandoot was designed for Dhar, therefore modifications or additions may be required for other regions;
- It would not be good if Gyandoot were to offer a large number of services but not be able to provide adequate and timely responses. Therefore not too many services should be added;
- The district administration may not be keen to spread the services of Gyandoot over all the departments;
- If the scheme is extended further, there will be need for better technical inputs;
- Extension of Gyandoot will require a committed team in each district, will power and customisation to local conditions;
- The Gyandoot scheme puts extra pressure on government functionaries, so they may not be keen to go in this direction.

7. Does Gyandoot exert pressure on Government functionaries? If so, what is the effect of this pressure?

There was a common feeling that Gyandoot does put pressure on government functionaries to be more responsive and perform better. The respondents felt that schools and the midday meal scheme have improved. Health workers, veterinary field workers and PHE functionaries have become more regular in their fieldwork and visits.

8. What are the main difficulties faced by the Gyandoot programme in its functioning?

On the technical side respondents talked about problems with connectivity. A respondent working with the district information services said that until now the telephone department has not been particularly responsive to the needs of the Gyandoot and has been treating it like any other customer. District representatives of the telephone department need to be included in the committees running and planning the Gyandoot services. It seems the district administration is thinking along these lines.

Another respondent to this question tried to focus on the achievements of Gyandoot. ‘Although the area covered by this scheme is not very large, it is important that it is functioning and standing on its feet. This is our strength. The system is sustainable at the *Soochak* level. The initiators of the scheme are now serving in other regions and a new team is running things here. This shows that the scheme was not dependent on a single person.’

Government staff drew attention to plans for the expansion of Gyandoot. All districts have been asked to set up autonomous district level organisations, under the chairmanship of the collector to initiate Gyandoot like services. There is initial progress in about half the districts on this front, where such organisations seem to have been set up.

The approach seems to be fairly open ended at the moment. This includes making the Gyandoot software available to each district and leaving it to the district to further innovate and customise etc. This may now depend on the initiative of the local leadership. Even the Dhar committee on Gyandoot seems to have been left to itself to a large extent to raise funds from various agencies.

There are going to be many problems of access and connectivity in a number of districts, where many block level connections are still not functional, but the Madhya Pradesh Government is moving ahead with the scheme.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Conclusion and recommendations

While IT professes to solve the problems of access, time, cost and inconvenience and also lays claim to creating a democratic global village, access to IT is inherently biased towards the richer segments of society. This digital divide is antithetical to democratic principles. Gyandoot aimed to bridge the contradictions between these two basic traits of IT. The project attempted to pilot a low cost replicable strategy for taking IT services to rural areas in a people-centric, self-reliant fashion. Gyandoot was, therefore, about rural ‘netizens’ – ascertaining their role and existence in the global village. The Gyandoot project introduced an alternative to the vertical hierarchy of supervision of delivery systems by different government agencies. It helped to interface with citizens quickly, transparently and with reliable feedback.

In view of the immense potential of which the project boasts, this study aimed to assess the impact that Gyandoot has had on a cross-section of the rural population. So far, the impact has been limited, especially on the poorer groups. There are a number of ways in which the project could be made more successful.

- At present the connectivity at the *Soochanalayas* is poor and the Gyandoot service stands largely under-utilised. This could be rectified by implementing the WiLL (Wireless in Local Loop) as soon as possible for the entire district. This would ensure the availability of facilities at all times;⁵
- Despite the attractiveness and utility of the Gyandoot project, there is not great awareness about it among the villagers. This is probably due to insufficient and limited publicity. Publicity campaigns need to be designed keeping in mind certain factors such as:
 - Time of the campaign. They should not be carried out in daytime when most villagers are away on work;
 - Medium of publicity. Since the majority of the population is illiterate or poorly educated, any sophisticated publicity would not have the desired effect and simplified methods should be focussed on, such as street plays, colourful banners, meetings, door to door contact etc;
- Gyandoot would find more popularity and acceptance among the rural poor if village level workers and other volunteers convinced them about its use. For this purpose, all rural agencies and their workers need to be trained and asked to spread the use of Gyandoot;
- More facilities could be added to the existing ones to increase Gyandoot's versatility. Some services that cater specifically to women, such as women and child health care, could be added. Presently the services available through Gyandoot are of limited use to women;
- More kiosks could be opened in villages and the service made more widely available;
- In the long run to increase awareness of Gyandoot, the usual publicity methods need to be supported by more basic strategies in all social spheres, including an increase in literacy levels;
- The project was started with much hype by an earlier administration, but it faces a major threat if the interest is lost due to possible negligence by the successive administration;
- The district level organisation adopted for Gyandoot, i.e. the registration of an independent society, has many advantages and allows freedom to innovate and evolve. However, the elected

⁵ The service was ‘down’ for extended periods at all kiosks. This limited access to information held on the system, but outgoing messages could still be entered, stored and transmitted later. WiLL has been installed for 4 of the kiosks.

representatives need to be involved more directly and the feedback through Gyandoot should give them a better sense of their responsibility to the people.

The recommendations of the present study are important in view of the fact that the service is now being expanded in all the districts of Madhya Pradesh.

8.2 Points for further study

This study of impact assessment of the Gyandoot project forms a basis for carrying out further supplementary studies on the following issues:

- During the time of the survey, Dhar was facing a water crisis. This had a serious effect on the agriculture in the area and in turn deeply affected Gyandoot usage. Since the agricultural production had been adversely affected, usage of the *Mandi* rates facility was very low. However, due to the drought conditions the complaint module usage had risen (in the form of complaints about non-functioning handpumps) thereby skewing the data. Hence another study under more normal conditions could be carried out to remove this problem;
- One important fact emerging from the study was that most respondents found the Gyandoot service charges justified and inexpensive. A 'Willingness to Pay' study could be conducted to determine a possible increase in charges in order to make the *Soochanalaya* more sustainable;
- A separate study could be conducted to find out what alternative extension strategies can be used to publicise Gyandoot among all the socio-economic classes. Such a study could make a total assessment of all the strategies currently in use and then suggest specific methods to advertise Gyandoot among the people;
- In the present situation Gyandoot is functioning as a separate unit. A study can be carried out to devise a strategy such that developmental activities can be integrated to produce a better focus;
- A study could be carried out dealing specifically with the sustainability aspect of the *Soochanalaya* and suggest effective measures to make it a successful business enterprise;
- There is a need to study how the Gyandoot *Soochanalayas* could provide additional support to *Panchayats* and improve their functioning and reach.