

INFORMATION SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The human resources in India need to be harnessed and made productive. Lack of information to the masses is impeding this effort. This paper discusses the role of public libraries in creating knowledge awareness in rural areas. There is a need to provide information to individuals and groups, almost at their doorstep and in a language understandable to them. For instance, rural folk needs to be appraised of the policies and programmes of the government. Rural libraries can be dynamic centers of knowledge and information playing a crucial role in the development plan, if information like health care services, sanitation, inputs for agriculture crop production, dairying, market information, literacy programmes etc., are readily and easily available. Dissemination of social information relating to unhealthy and unsocial practices in society is likely to bring out the issues into the open, and rally the people to face them boldly and profitably. Some, such issues relate to child marriage, atrocities on women, widow marriage, dowry deaths, corruption in public offices, drinking and gambling.

KEYWORDS: Rural Libraries, Human Resources, Information, Society, Government & Programs

INTRODUCTION

It is Universally accepted that information is the core of all the development activities. Therefore, providing vital information to the rural population plays a significant role. Considering 60% of the population live in rural areas, the information requirements of rural population relate to their day to day like agriculture, fishing, education, health-care, weather, loan facilities, land registration, fees related to various Government services, etc. In order to get these services, it becomes necessary for the villagers to travel for long distance which is very difficult. The information required through the rural libraries will help them to save a lot of time as well as money.

The rural information system will have to provide modern amenities and facilities to develop manpower and acquisition of skills. Careful planning and effective, implementation of rural library service can be achieved by availing the benefits and facilities of the Raja Ram Library Foundation (RRLF) which constitutes the state and national level library network, of which rural libraries have become an integral part. The RRLF can provide the much needed funds as well as inter-linking facilities for rural libraries.

Rural library plays a vital role in providing information services. A Rural library is defined as a library providing information services in Rural Areas. A Rural library is one of the most effective ways of disseminating information to the rural people.

Rural libraries are the part of the public Library system. The types of public libraries available in the state are: State Central Libraries, District central libraries and Taluk Panchayat or Rural libraries. The Public Libraries are mainly

supported by State, Central and non-Governmental Organizations and private trusts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To know the role of rural libraries in providing rural information services.
- To identify the problems hindering in providing rural information services.
- To provide suggestions and recommendations for the development of rural libraries in India.

Role of Rural Libraries in Providing Information

Rural Libraries help the village people to refresh their knowledge. They can supply reading material relating to various fields of rural development. Most of the rural libraries in the rural areas are like reading rooms and are suffering with lack of proper financial support. The ICT brought a greater revolution in providing information seekers and has a greater impact in improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural people. The advancements of ICT can provide cost-effective and efficient solutions to these issues. The success of any Agricultural Program depends upon the extent of awareness and use of information sources by the small and marginal farmers who form the large majority of the farming population. Several ICT projects are implemented in this regard. Some of them are mentioned here under (Devraj and stanly, 2010)

- Village Knowledge Centre (VKC) launched by the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in 1998 at Pondichery, in collaboration with IDRC(Canada)
- Agro-climate Planning & Information bank (APIB) located at Regional Remote Sensing Service Centre (RRSSC) at Bangalore under ISRO.
- Kisan Call Centers (KCC) launched by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Government of India in January 2004
- Gyandoot Project launched by the Government of India in Madhya Pradesh by establishing information centres.
- Bhoomi Project of Karnataka Government includes computerized land records throughout the state.
- Agricultural Marketing Informaton Network (AGMARKET), a joint venture of Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (DMI) and National Information Centre (NIC)

The village knowledge centre project of Swaminathan Foundation has survived one of the most important challenges of electric supply by establishing self-reliant solar powered network connectivity. The TeNet group in India brought more adaptable and affordable access technology. Besides this, the Rural libraries must have big charts illustrating development schemes i.e photo graphs of construction of various dams, maps of villages etc., Weekly wall papers to keep the villages posted with daily new, Documentary films related on widow marriages, dowry deaths, atrocities on women etc. Rural libraries have to be further strengthened with IT facilities to meet the challenges in various fields pertaining to rural development.

Problems of Rural Libraries

- Absence of a National Information Policy

- Lack of Professional attitudes and skilled man power
- Lack of Funds to buy books, provide services and to automate rural library services.
- Low priority is given to rural libraries in Planning and management.
- Lack of adequate infrastructure support
- Lack of well developed transportation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations should be carefully considered for on priority basis for providing rural information services through the rural libraries.

- The rural people should be served with appropriate information suitable to their requirements, so that their information needs and interests are best served. To facilitate this rural library should be established in every village.
- The state Government should create a web-site and provide access to the rural community. The state should continuously update the information on the net for the benefit of people.
- The State Government should provide Audio-Visual aids to every rural library.
- The Government should allocate sufficient funds to support the purchasing and maintenance of books, journals.
- NGO's can take a vigorous and integrated programme jointly with the Government to establish and maintain rural libraries.
- The rural library should be entrusted with the responsibility of creating reading habits and habits of information use among the rural people.
- The library personnel should be trained with the latest ICT technologies.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the rural libraries, various people like farmers, businessmen, women, youth, etc., could continuously build up their skills and knowledge bases. Library and information professionals should develop appropriate library and information system and services for the rural community.

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