Public Libraries and Community Information Services: An Experience in Blocks of Sundarban Region, South 24 Parganas

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Abstract

Public libraries are called people's university. The objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between public library and Community Information Services (CIS) in various blocks of Sundarban region, of South 24 Parganas district. Community Information Services is one through which a public library provides community information to members of the community it serves. This paper also discusses Community Library cum Information Centres (CLICs). Examining the librarians' as well as users' perspectives, an effort has been made to offer some suggestions.

Keywords: Community Information Service, Community Library cum Information Centres (CLICs), Public Libraries, West Bengal

1. Introduction

"Bad libraries build collections, Good libraries build services, Great libraries build communities."
– R. David Lankes

These words from the famous library professional R. David Lankes (ALA Ken Haycock award winner for promoting librarianship) emphasize the importance of libraries, especially the public library, in building a community. Out of 28 states and 7 union territories in India, only 20 states have enacted public library legislation (Ramaiah & Sankara, 2010). Public libraries play the role of an essential academic and socio-cultural organization for the community. In West Bengal public libraries are part of the State Government in terms of administration and finances. Most of the in West Bengal population lives in rural regions. In this context, the public library can play an important role in the advancement of society through education and other community services. It can be effectively carried out with well-structured and planned library system and services. An important issue related to public libraries is community information service, the specific information which is mostly desired by a specific community. Community information refers to the types and range of information needed by the members of the community for their day-to-day problem solving. Library Association provided a comprehensive definition of Community Information Services: "Community Information Services are those, which assist individual and groups with daily problem solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights" (Library Association, 1980). The main object and interest of this study is to examine the present status of community information services provided by public libraries and how far it satisfied users of Sundarban regions, South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, India.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine Community Information Services through public libraries and CLICs in the Blocks of Sudarban region, South 24 Parganas,

2. To identify the challenges users face regarding Community Information Services from the public libraries,

3. To find out the availability of ICT infrastructure of selected libraries, and

4. To suggest measures for the improvement of Community Information Services in public libraries.

3. Scope and Limitation

According to website of Mass Education Extension and Library Services Department, Government of West Bengal, there are 180 public libraries in the five sub-divisions of South 24 Parganas. Out of 180 public libraries, twenty-six (26) public libraries and Eleven (11) CLICs were selected from blocks of Sundarban regions. In case of users 60 users were selected from different areas of that region. The present study was conducted in the selected public libraries.

4. Methodology

Survey method was employed for data collection and data were collected from librarians and users using questionnaires by physically visiting the libraries and in a few cases via telephonic conversation. The collected data were analyzed and tabulated keeping in view the objectives of the study.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

The selected public libraries for this study - Sub-division and block-wise are listed in the Table 1.

Table 1. List of selected libraries and CLICs from thirteen blocks of sundarban regions of south 24 Pages

Block	Library Name	Type of Library
Joynagar-I	Bandhab Library, Jaynagar I	TL
	Baharu Shyamsundar Public Library, Jaynagar I	TL
	Jangalia Janagranthagar O Tathyakendra	CLIC

Joynagar-II	Milan Sangha Pathagar, Phutigoda, Joynagar II	RL
	KalimataPathagar, Joynagar II	RL
	Nalgora Janagranthagar Tathyakendra	CLIC
Kultali	Kachimara Netaji Library, Kultali	RL
	Jalaberia Rural Library	RL
	Kundakhali-Godabor Janagranthagar	CLIC
Gosaba	Bali Palli Unnayan Pathagar, Gosaba	RL
	Chhoto Mollakhali Public Library, Gosaba	RL
	Sambhunaga Janagranthagar O Tathyakendra	CLIC
Basanti	Netaji Pathagar, Basanti	RL
	Sonakhali Tarun Tirtha Pathagar, Basanti	RL
	Baratgarh Janagranthagar O Tathyakendra	CLIC
Canning-I	Canning Public Library, Canning I	TL
	Taldi Netaji Pathagar, Canning I	RL
	Deuli II G.P. Janagranthagar O Tathyakendra	CLIC
Canning-II	Matherdighi Udayan Pathagar, Canning II	RL
	MallickkatiSadharanPathagar, Canning II	RL
	Matla II Janagranthagar O Tathyakendra	CLIC
Sagar	Sree Sree Ramkrishna Sadharan Pathagar, sagar	RL
	Sagar Town Libaray, Sagar	TL
	Gangasagar GP Jana Granthagar O tathyakendra	CLIC
Pathar Pratima	Daksin Sundarban Sanhati Sansad, Pathar Pratima	RL
	Paschim Surendra Nagar Young Public Library,	RL

Namkhana	Narayanpur Sree Durga Pathagar, Namkhana	RL
	Frezerganj Bijoli Club & Library, Namkhana	RL
	Shibrampur Community Library/Information Cnt.	CLIC
Kakdwip	Vidhasagar Sadharan Pathagar. Kakdwip	RL
	Agradut Pathagar, Kakdwip	RL
Mathurapur-I	Vivekananda Seva Sangha Library, Mathurapur I	RL
	Anirban Pathagar	RL
	Lakshinarayanpur Dakhin Jana granthagar O Thatya kendra	CLIC
Mathurapur-II	Chakratirtha Sadharan Pathagar, Raidighi	RL
	Dr. Usha Ranjan Memorial Public Librar	RL
	Raidighi GP Janagranthagar O Tathyakendra	CLIC

TL=Town Library, RL=Rural Library

The availability of various basic Community Information Services as per library records and librarians' statement in these public libraries and CLICs is shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Availability of common type of community information services within selected libraries

Types of CIS	No. of Providing Libraries (Out of 37 Libraries)
Agriculture & related	14
Fishing & related	4
Forestry & related	2
Education related	7
Employment related	6
Health Information	9
Animal husbandry	0
Govt. Program	31
Financial assistance	0
Local political News	0
Legal aids	0

Social Welfare	4
Art and Culture	10
Consumer Information	14

The Table 2 indicates that common types of CIS are provided only in a small number of public libraries. The situation in rural and primary unit libraries and CLICs is not satisfactory compared to town /Sub-division libraries.

Table 3 shows the positive and negative responses of users to the question "Can you fulfill your need from CIS"?

Table 3. Can the users fulfill their need from Community Information Services provided by libraries/CLICs?

	Say Yes	Say No
Number of users	11	49
Percentage of users	18.33%	81.67%

Table 3 reveals that only 18.33% of total users agreed that Community Information Services satisfied their needs and the remaining 81.67% indicated that their needs were not met.

Table 4 indicates users' perceptions about issues related to provision of Community Information Services through public libraries and CLICs.

Table 4. Users' perceptions regarding issues in community information services through public libraries and CLICs

SL. No.	Perception	Yes	Not Clear	No
1.	Lack of Planning and infrastructure	29	22	9
2.	Lack of proper staff to assist me	39	10	11
3.	Lack of knowledge of area profile among library representatives	31	7	22
4.	Attitude of authority and librarian(s) not being user friendly	23	19	18
5.	Lack of proper information resources / collection base	26	17	17

Above table shows users' views about problems of Community Information Services reflected through responses to various questions. Table 5 it is seen that most of the users thought that there are problems.

Table 5. Probable solutions for better and effective community information service (As suggested by users)

Probable Solutions	Yes	Not Clear	No
Identification of needs of community	47	6	7
Improve public relations	43	15	2
Librarians should be user friendly	46	14	0
Information literacy and user education	27	19	14
Collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge	39	15	6
Computer awareness programmes and training about Internet	24	21	15
Preparation of area profile	37	9	14

According to Table 5 (probable solution), 47 respondents suggested that there must be a provision of community need identification, 46 users thought that librarian should be user friendly and 43 users suggested that library should have a way to improve public relations. 27 users suggested that library must provide user education and information literacy programmes for better achievement. 39 users suggested building indigenous knowledge collection and preservation to assist the community. 24 people suggested that implementation of Computer awareness programmes and training programmes about Internet is essential and 37 users mentioned that there must be an option for area profile preparation.

6. Findings of the Study

The study reveals that:

- Most of the libraries and CLICs are not prepared at all for providing community information services,
- There are no proper plans and programmes regarding preparation of area profile, preparation of collection base, user education, and infrastructure development,
- Staff attitude towards users is discouraging,
- Except town libraries other libraries lack computers and Internet connection. Some library staff are also not familiar with digital environment, and
- CLICs are present according to official paper but do not satisfy community needs.

7. Conclusion

This study is very much relevant to the present situation when the number of users of public libraries is decreasing day by day. The development of public library services in West Bengal is not satisfactory, especially when compared with the situation in many other countries of the world. A CIS-based public library service is an effective way of meeting information needs of urban and rural communities. It is a challenge for librarians of public libraries to work in this context. Public library may act as a Community Information Centre and collect information to meet the information need of the people of the community, who are unaware of the sources of the information, the process of collecting and applying the same. Librarians must play an active role in providing appropriate guidance and services to the members of the community. They must interact with communities to find their real needs. Also Governments must have some initiatives towards CLICs for community information service, especially for the rural community.

8. References

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