
BOOK REVIEW

Towards Sustainable Development

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R. Raman Nair, Ed. *Sustainable University Library Development*.
New Delhi : Ess Ess Publications, n.d. Pp. 145. Rs. 250/-.

In the present scenario of information deluge the increasing role of information in every human activity has led to the establishment and development of various information systems. The applications of the tools and techniques of new information technologies have made these information systems and centres useful for scientific research and development activities. As scientists, social scientists and humanist scholars became increasingly demanding, the traditional information providing systems (such as libraries) could not match the new pace of work though they wanted to improve their system of information delivery. In the process a time has arrived when their hitherto strong edifice is invaded by those with expertise in the new information technologies.

As a result, a question was raised about the sustainability of such systems. These librarians wanted a sustainable development of their libraries and information centres for the sake of human progress. The importance of sustainable development has been realised by ensuring continued growth of stock, staff and services. This subject has generated some interest among the librarians and information scientists resulting in some literature on it, and also a national level seminar organised by the Indian Library Association at its

43rd Conference held in Chandigarh in November 1997.

The present volume is another attempt to continue the debate and discussion, and generate more literature on sustainable librarianship. In order to make librarianship sustainable in the present times the librarians would be required to work according to the dictum 'better, not more', and work towards reducing their dependence on donations etc and rather work for participation in networks to enhance their resource base.

In this collection of essays stress has been made in almost all the writings, on development with concern for technology and needs of future generations of library users. The volume begins, quite appropriately, with an article on sustainable librarianship (by A.R. Sethi) which serves as an introductory paper defining the concept of sustainable development and its application to librarianship. It explains some premises of sustainable librarianship which are deep-rooted in the philosophy of Five Laws of Library Science propounded by S.R. Ranganathan. In an article on management of university libraries (by R.K. Rout) the emphasis is on sustainable library management techniques which should be based on theory of management, principles of scientific management by applying management techniques for achieving high performance in university library system. It reveals the malfunctioning of some Indian university libraries by identifying spe-

cific reasons. It is suggested that for the sustainability of these libraries standards should be followed and outlook of university libraries be made business-like in the times to come.

There are three papers on staffing policies (by Rajasekaran; Kanakachary; and Francis) which discuss the staffing levels, methodologies, policies, existing staffing structure, new educational needs in view of the information technology applications and so on. It is pointed out in these papers that there is need to change the existing staffing policies to enable the sustainable development of manpower. In two papers on collection development (by Neela Jagannathan, and Sankara Reddy) it is highlighted that the role of users is increasing in the entire process, and efforts be made to make collection development as effective and vast through resource sharing as possible. At the same time there is also need for specialisation in collection development so that preserving the indigenous knowledge and culture for posterity becomes possible.

Of the three articles on library services, one is on readers services (by Kumar), another on document retrieval (by N. Satish and Yadagiri Reddy) and, the third on reprography (by Thomas Aituff). These articles describe various kinds of services as available in Indian university libraries and point out the urgent need towards user satisfaction for which motivated and committed staff is the basic requirement. The article on library budget (by Sharma and Prasad) based on a case study, mentions the norms given by expert committee, but concludes that the available finance do not present a commendable situation. In the paper on library building (by Betty Ifidon) a case for a modular design building

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has been made so that better physical facilities could be provided in the libraries of tomorrow.

Though the essays included represent a line of thinking and touch the interesting topics of concern to librarians, yet it seems that the pulse of sustainable development in librarianship is not well felt at places. While some essays have been well written, others lack the needed depth in treatment of the subject in hand. In all the articles included an explicit suggestion should have been made for the basic issue of the survival of the tradition bound libraries in the present context of changing societal outlook. Also, in the volume could have been included more articles on other important aspects as the relevance of cataloguing, classification in the automated environment; the need of marketing of information services and products in order to garner more money and strengthen the financial position for sustainability. Although all the university libraries do not feel the pinch as much of the financial crunch, yet there are many state university libraries which suffer unsustainable development for want of adequate funds. The volume also misses some other important aspects such as resource sharing, networking, LIS education and curriculum, etc.

In this volume 15 articles have been contributed by 17 authors of which three are from Nigeria, and the remaining from India. Most of the Indian authors are from Kerala (four) and Hyderabad (four), with one each from Nagpur, Varanasi, New Delhi and Chandigarh. There are only two female authors — one each from Nigeria and New Delhi; while only four authors are teachers, all others are working librarians in different university environments.

The four-page Index (pp. 142-145) is neither detailed nor relative. Many entries like that of 'Andhra Pradesh', 'Orissa', etc are without

any context. There is no entry for many concepts and terms e.g. 'audio-visual' (p. 96), or 'PSTUL' (pp 100-103), or 'network' (p. 81+), or 'sustainability' (passim), or 'use of library' of 'library use' (p. 105+); and so on. Many entries are not given complete coverage from the entire text, e.g., 'users' shown at p. 116 only, whereas it also occurs at p. 90, 91; and so on. There are also mistakes in the 'References' (p. 44, 52) which were avoidable; but maybe

because of the printer's devil, they are there.

However, these shortcomings notwithstanding, the volume as a whole is a welcome addition to the existing body of literature on the subject, and could prove useful to the working librarians who must take a leaf or two from the book and work for sustainable development of their respective libraries at the turn of the new century and a new millennium.



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