

Full Length Research Paper

The role of community libraries in the alleviation of information poverty for sustainable development

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This literature review focused on the role of rural community libraries in minimizing information poverty. The potentials of rural community libraries in promoting sustainable development are discussed in this article. The necessity of information poverty alleviation for sustainable development is also discussed. The study found that information poverty is an obstacle whereas information is a key to achieving sustainable development. The study also found that community library is not only a library of few shelves of books but also a hub of the local communities, particularly of the rural and disadvantaged communities offering a continuously changeable information resource for the community. It empowers individuals and communities to help them reach their goals. It lays down the foundation stone for sustainable development.

Key words: Community library, information poverty, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a global major agenda in recent years. It is a procedure of developing society so that it may exist in the long term. According to WCED (1987), sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is conceived as a socio-economic system that confirms the ability to sustain with the advancement of economy, education, health and the every spheres of life (Pearce et al., 1989). In a word, 'development with sustainability' is called sustainable development. Sustainable development is not possible without building knowledge-based society of which, information is regarded as life -blood. Information is a

very urgent element for every step of development (Okuy, 2003). Thus, information poverty alleviation is very crucial for sustainable development.

Information poverty is defined as, no entrance to needed information for survival and development (Marcella and Chowdhury, 2018). Britz (2004) states that information poverty is that situation in which individuals and communities within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or materials means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately. Later, it is characterized by a deficit of necessary information and poor information infrastructure. Actually, information poverty is more than just a lack of information or technology; it is also a lack of

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utilizing, accessing, producing and realizing the value of information (Strand, 2016a).

According to Cruz-Cunha et al. (2013), information poverty can be defined as, the users of information in depressed circumstances which is caused by social inequity, users inability to define the need of information, lack of ICT and knowledge for using such technology and information resources. In general, information poor can be defined as groups and individuals who do not have adequate and equal access to quality and quantity information (Shen, 2013).

Moore (2007) stated that the opportunity in access to information is not the same for all parts of the society. The wealthy city dwellers have many opportunities to access various sources of information. On the other hand, the poor rural dwellers are often neglected in access to essential information which could improve their lives. This condition is extremely critical in a large number of villages of low and middle income countries otherwise called, developing countries. A lot of people in developing countries live in villages. The village people are not conscious of the role of information for growth and development (Mansoor and Kamba, 2010). They have no proper idea about the application of information for development (Stone, 1993). In fact, many rural communities of developing countries have poor understanding of the value of information for development. It is important to note that they have to be fully conscious of the significance of information to keep pace with the present knowledge-based economy. People in these communities do not realize their demand of information. They also do not know from where and how they can satisfy their information demand (Islam, 2010). They suffer from a lack of useful information, low levels of literacy and skill, meager use of technology or ICT, a low level sense of participation and a low standard living (Ahmed et al., 1997). All these factors conspire to exclude them from the world of information. People in these villages are always the last to receive anything. They are always excluded from update information, technological advances and any plan of economic action or implementation agenda. The rural development rate infects other sectors that strike national development and thereby sustainable development. Sustainable development is impossible keeping aloof the large sections of rural people of developing countries from the world of information.

In fact, information poverty is a burning question in developing countries (OECD, 2017). The dilemma of low and middle income countries of the world is not only economic poverty but also information poverty. We must give priority to elucidate the problem (Islam and Islam, 2010). Chester and Neelameghan (2006) states that information experts and their agents should make an effort to help community members to get rid of information poverty which is a major obstacle of achieving sustainable development.

By empowering rural people with appropriate information access, skills, infrastructure and understanding, rural community library can assist in the alleviation of information poverty as well as the sustainable development throughout the world. Iqbal (2004) stated information as a means of community development. Though there is much information dissemination centers in the villages, rural people are not always satisfied with the services of these centers because; the services are always not related and suitable for them. It is obvious to state that there are many other information sources and suppliers working in the villages at present but a rural community library is increasingly regarded as the hub of the rural community for delivering essential information that could empower them to achieve sustainable development.

Community library means a distinct type of public library or an alternative to public library that is established and governed by local people with or without public funding normally in disadvantaged areas to supply miscellaneous studying facilities and community information services for the growth of the community and raising their quality of life. Harrod's Librarian's Glossary and Reference Book (2005) stated, it is normally a section or part library (though may be a central or mobile service) designed to produce advice-center functions and community information for the whole of its population, rather than only presenting a book store to learners. According to Feather and Sturges (2003) in the International Encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science (2003), community librarianship is the distribution of library and information services for a particular community. It provides information mainly on social, domestic, health or educational affairs, local cultural activities, clubs and local authority or governmental services. Public libraries have also the same responsibility- providing community information and meeting facilities. But, it may also be provided via a special unit set up by local authority, a voluntary agency or an advice group and this is called community library. Having a great contribution to solve the problems of social exclusion community librarianship is recently a powerful tool for the advancement of the community or society.

Community library is an extension of existing practices of public libraries which heavily relies on community participation. It empowers the entire community through information services. It is regarded as an important basis for rural development. Rural community library, as a vital information supplier, have a very significant role to play in diminishing information poverty by giving suitable information assistance in village areas. By providing information to rural areas, rural community libraries can make the rural dwellers aware of what is happening in the country, what their rights and responsibilities are and how can they get information services. Thus, rural community libraries may directly contribute in good governance, social progress and economic development through

eradicating information poverty needed for sustainable development.

The purposes of the study were to: (1) define the necessity of information poverty alleviation for sustainable development; (2) highlight the role of rural community library in alleviating information poverty; (3) explore the potentials of rural community library in promoting sustainable development and (4) study the core concept of community library, information poverty, sustainable development and link among them; (5) draw more attention of the stakeholders and user communities to the rural community library.

METHODOLOGY

This study applied literature review methodology along with narrative and integrative approach. Relevant literatures available on sustainable development and the community libraries in diminishing information poverty were consulted. Secondary sources of information like books, journal articles, conference proceedings, official reports were used for collecting information. Internet websites were also used for collecting data.

RESULTS

Information poverty alleviation for sustainable development

A) Information for development

Information can be called key to development. It is regarded as a prime resource that plays very significant role in the overall development of a country or nation. Moore (2007) states, information are a necessary precondition for the improvement of a particular person or groups. People require information to improve their capability through knowledge and education, to succeed in business, to flourish their culture and civilization and for controlling their lives. Information in a well-organized character that can increase desire and expectation, by turning people from fatalism and fear of change to a desire for a better life and the determination to work for it. Information can assist man to observe their present status and to make future development plan. Ideally, information brings about knowledge, and a community can only become knowledgeable by information as tool for development. Information can remove the darkness of ignorance and help to achieve goal in every spheres of community life (Mansoor and Kamba, 2010). According to Muhamed et al. (2010), information within the realm of the 'knowledge-based economy' is essential for the socio-economic and socio-technical development, because it begets knowledge that is essential for sustainable development. In fact, information is a prerequisite for knowledge production or coproduction. It helps in research, innovation, and communication. It helps to make good decision, policy and plan. Information

and knowledge protect us for making mistake. It decreases uncertainty but increases efficiency. It is a power of solving problem. Chen et al. (2011) has rightly said, somebody who can obtain more information will occupy the dominant position in the social competition.

Babalola et al. (2012) state, information is an important factor for political participation and social inclusion and the foundation for developing at all levels of human life. Ogar et al. (2018) indicates information is needed for effective success at all levels of good governance. According to Harande (2009), information is compared as blood of social life and crucial for governmental and private activities. He also showed information as basic materials for the progress of the society- urban or rural community and the progress of any nation is greatly dependent on information. Hoq (2012) states, rural people applying information and knowledge in agriculture, health, human rights, education, employment, market and finance, disaster management can ensure socio-economic advancement for sustainable rural development. Kari (2007) states, information are a fundamental need like air, water, food and shelter for human being. Information enables people to utilize the factors of production such as land, labor and capital resources into meaningful and productive use. Actually, every dimension of development has information and knowledge implication. Information scientists and scholars have defined information as an empowering agent, in terms of the ways in which access to and use of information can assist individuals to overcome obstacles, take advantage of the opportunities available to them and improve their lives. Mchombu and Mchombu (2014) stated that information can play stirring role by encouraging and motivating people for the economical and cultural evolution essential for sustainable development.

B) Information poverty restrains sustainable development

Realizing the value of information for development, it can be said that information poverty restrains sustainable development. Sustainable development is a technique to develop by balancing different, and competing for the needs against an awareness of the environment, social and economic limitations we face as a society. Sustainable development is largely based on the acquisition, dissemination and utilization of knowledge and information (World Bank, 1998; Asian Development Bank, 2011). Truly, information is considered as the most vital element essential for facilitating the potentiality to satisfy all human needs. Without access to information, people cannot develop and cannot fulfill their demands. So, information poverty is one of the greatest impediments to development.

According to Britz (2007, 2010), information poverty is

one of the main forms of poverty today. It relates to an individual's or communities inability, not only to access essential information but also to benefit from it in order to meet their basic needs for survival and development. Information poverty is closely linked to economic poverty and it has negative effect on every facade of people's life (Britz 2007; Strand, 2016b). Joselin and Panneerselvam (2015) indicate, information poor do not have equal opportunities to access the necessary information. Information poor are victimized with insufficiency of resources, lack of essential infrastructures, lack of needed skills to access and use the information and financial limitation. So, information poverty can narrow opportunities to access in employment, business, capitalization, creative and social networks, and the capacity to grow the skill needed for global citizenship. In addition, information poverty is a problem of polarizing between the rich and the poor and widening the socio-economic disparity. As a result of information poverty, societies are at a risk of being left behind.

Access to information does not in itself gives people power over their lives but lack of access to information can render a person powerless in the sense of being unable to exercise intelligent life options (Buddy, 1977). Lack of access to information is one of the most serious obstacles for building a better community. Access to information guides to move forward for a standard life. Besides, lack of access to governmental information makes barrier to participate in governmental agenda which hindrances the development process of a community and nation.

C) Information poverty alleviation- a matter of urgency

Inequality in access to information causes information poverty. This inequality is caused by various factors like political, cultural, economical, educational, moral, geographical, technological and technical (Britz, 2004). Britz (2004) also stated, the most critical issue of the present world is information poverty which has a bad impact on the socio- economic, political and cultural development. He further stated, information poverty is chronic and long term. In reality, the world still faces the problems of information poverty. So, whatever the causes of information poverty is not matter, the most urgent thing is that information poverty alleviation is a crying need for achieving sustainable development goals of today's world. Scheeder (2018) stated, sustainable development is totally impossible without access to information. In fact, access to information is an urgent need for the development of the society. Access to information helps in the war of achieving an inclusive society. As we are living in an age of globalization, equal access to information is the most urgent need for growing world information economy.

According to, Vargas and Lee (2018), information poverty is a one form of poverty which is related to economic and social poverty. With a view to achieving sustainable development, they emphasize to address information poverty. Information is the pre-condition for any kind of development and it influences all dimensions of life. They also say information poverty is closely linked to communication poverty, because information is the most important component of communication. Sustainable development consists of socio-economic development that saves and enriches the natural environment and ensures social equity (Diesendorf, 2000). It is true that sustainable development comprises of various dimensions of development and its all dimensions are interrelated. Hence, addressing development challenges requires addressing all types of rights-social, economic, cultural, political, civil and informational (Garrido and Wyber, 2017).

Chowdhury and Koya (2017) indicate about 30 information-related matters which are included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guidelines, identifying the role of information in building stronger economies. According to the Development and Access to Information Report (2017), access to information is a catalyst for developing worldwide. It enables us to place the basic foundations for equality, sustainability and prosperity. The Lyon Declaration (2014) sets out the principles behind access to information and development. These bedrock principles state that access to information empowers people to:

1. Apply their all kinds of rights
 2. Acquire and employ new skills.
 3. Decide and attend in active and engaged civil society.
 4. Make community-based solutions to development challenges.
 5. Confirm accountability, transparency, good governance and empowerment.
 6. Estimate prosperity on public and private communities on sustainable development.
- Therefore, it is very clear that information poverty alleviation is a matter of urgency for sustainable development.

Rural community library's role in the alleviation of information poverty

Rural community library plays various important roles in the reduction of information poverty. A rural community library is established to deliver advice centre functions and community information centre for the people of the community rather than only offering a volume of books and study materials to learners. Rural community library provides information to address the real needs of the people. Different communities have different information needs. Rural community library is actually established on the basis of considering the real information needs of the

community. People's demand of information is changed on the basis of changing communities. A rural community library is always active to meet the changing needs of the community.

Leonard and Ngula (2013) stated, community libraries are very important to provide information and fulfilling the information demands of the people in respective communities. Community libraries are considered as the critical interface between the communities and nation's information services, and are therefore mandated to serve as:

1. Community study centers for promoting education, building awareness among community members to use information and supporting for lifelong education.
2. Centers for upgrading the participatory status of living culture.
3. Centers for circulating information in all aspects of life with particular emphasis of information essential for participating in democratic decision making and further successful implementation of national development plan.
4. Centers for leisure learning. Thus, a rural community library is a lifelong learning, information and recreational reading centre. According to the famous Russian bibliopsychologist and educator named Rubakin (1968), library is not only a bookshop where various books are to be had, but also it is an adviser, a guide, a friend. It must go out to reader, bring him in rather than wait for him to come of his own accord. A rural community library is, like an adviser, a guide, a friend for the people of a community. It reaches to the community members to solve their problems of information. Rural community librarians work as educator, facilitators and advocates for local culture and they use their expertise to enable local people to make sense of and utilize the increasingly complex and systematic global information environment.

Rural community library plays a major role in accumulating, processing, preserving and circulating the community information which is necessary for everyday life of people in respective community. Childers (1975), stated 'information poverty' is the scarcity of basic survival information experienced by a large number of people. Actually, information poor do not have equal opportunities to access the necessary information. Distributing community information services in community libraries are an effective mechanism to face the challenges of information poverty. Coleman (in Barnes 1994:79) describes, community library services are highly political in nature in the sense that every person must have equitable access of information and society's resources. Rural community libraries have the huge potentials and opportunities to ensure equal access of information to all. It is the local information center for providing information, opportunities for lifelong learning to everybody of a community without any discrimination regardless of sex, cast, religion and social status.

Mostert and Vermeulen (1998) states that, community

library mainly provides two kinds of information:

1. Survival information on health and family affairs, housing, finance etc.
2. Citizens' action information on social, political and legal rights.

So, a rural community library is an important local gateway of knowledge. It links directly between information creator and information users especially for government-related information. It is an indispensable tool in the creation of informed society. Alemna (1995) argued that a community library is better than public library to meeting the community information needs of the rural people. Mostert (1997) stated, community libraries are more popular because of their dedication to empowerment of the whole community through their information services. He further said, community library plays a major role by providing information and educational resources for meeting the community information needs as well as helping in the operation of brightening these communities (Mostert, 1998).

In developing countries, huge numbers of the population are disadvantaged with latest development of ICT, information resources and the lack of basic skills needed to access the necessary information (Joselin and Panneerselvam, 2015). Community library always gives opportunities of the library services and collections based on the finding of the specific needs of the information users, particularly those coming from underprivileged section of the society. A community library always responds to the critical community information needs of the rural and non-literate communities through its functions, services and collections (Alemna, 1995; Stillwell, 1989; Mostert, 1998). The rural community library, being a dynamic social institution is capable of serving accurate information at the accurate time to solve the problem of information poverty. The rural community library plays an effective role in the dissemination of information to a wide range of user community through its free facilities of access to ICT and information resources, the delivery of outreach, partnerships with other local information centers, production and preservation of local culture, cultivating reading habit among the villagers, literacy program, information and digital literacy training, active interaction between the librarian and users to answer the user's questions, develop trustworthy community partnerships. All these roles are fundamental to alleviate information poverty in the community broadly in society or country.

Rural community library promotes sustainable development

Rural community library plays very significant role for sustainable development. The role of rural community libraries can be explained as to qualify people from the

underprivileged communities to develop their quality of lives. Namhila and Niskala (2013) stated that community libraries are established with a view to developing the quality of life for the people in their respective community. According to Legoabe (1995), community library provides information that covers every spheres of life to assist all members of a community to overcome the daily problems for better quality of life. Community information services of community libraries are managed with an aim to supply information to the community to help members cope with their designated roles within the community. Leonard and Ngula (2013) stated community library plays a vital role in the community development with regard to education and social well-being.

Rural community library is closely related to daily life of community members. Providing knowledge and information, community library creates a space for community people to contribute on a wide range of development initiatives. It also helps to cope with the problems in their daily lives. It teaches the users to become self-dependent and self-sufficient. Community libraries being empowering agents are proactive to fulfill the social progress and sustainability. Dent (2006) states in the African context, community libraries are established to:

1. Assist the villagers to maintain knowledge gained from their education.
2. Assist the rural people to realize the country's social, political, and economic endeavours and nation building efforts.
3. Help the improvement of wholesome family life, producing materials about social, economic and health care development and No nation can develop without the development of its human resource. Human resources of a country can make a good contribution to the progress of the country (Okiy, 2003). A rural community library can serve meaningfully for the purpose of human resource development and thereby national development. Again, there is no development anywhere in the world without the impact of education. Education is regarded as the tool for development. Without education, there will be no innovation and, without innovation, there will be no transformation. Jubair (2009) states, a community library is not merely a library, It is also a village educative institute, outside the traditional education system in villages, that provides different studying facilities for community improvement and better quality of life. A community library having an important role in the advancement of people's knowledge is a community education center. Community libraries develop sound reading habits among local people. They deliver various learning elements to meet the interests of all aged people. Local people can develop their literacy and skills using easy access to the library facilities, technology and information. This turns villages into viable places to live by creating jobs and access to modern technology, civic engagement and partnership, community networks and

cultural arisen, thus balancing the urban- rural gap. Sustainable social improvement depends on a partnership between state, civil society and locality. Rural community libraries are very potential national resources for developing individuals and groups. Therefore, it is a vehicle of development to undertake various other developmental initiatives toward sustainable development in the country.

The librarian of a rural community library is an advocate for rural community development. Rural community library serves as a focus for local activity and culture. Rural community library can contribute a lot for the rural economical, social and cultural development. It actually, works in order to develop the socio-economic status of the community. Sultana (2014) states, the advancement of any community are an index like a positive signal for the development of a nation. So, the development of a community is the most important method of prompting total national development that will further stimulate sustainable development. Lahti (2015) states, community library are an important tool for national as well as local development. Community libraries contribute effectively in different spheres of community success. Studies done by scholars such as, Hamilton-Pennell (2008), Jones (2009), Abu et al. (2011), Strand (2016b) indicated, libraries play very significant role in education, social policy, information, cultural enrichment and economic development. In fact, rural community libraries make an outstanding contribution in the society and their impact in social and economic development should not be underestimated (Leonard and Ngula, 2013). The role of the rural community library for all round development of the society is unquestionable.

DISCUSSION

The review of the literature proves with the previous findings that rural community libraries have an active role to play in diminishing information poverty. The analysis suggests that alleviating information poverty is the prerequisite of sustainable development. Besides, rural community library can promote sustainable development. Although, several of the findings discussed in this article are on community library in general (Stillwell, 1989; Moster, 1998; Leonard and Ngula, 2013; Lahti 2015), others are on mainly focused rural community library in particular (Dent, 2006; Jones, 2009; Jubair, 2009). A few studies have also been consulted with an aim to link between information poverty and sustainable development. In addition, there is a wide range of studies that reported the needs of alleviating information poverty for sustainable development (Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, 2014; UN, 2015 Sustainable Development Goals; Development and Access to Information Report, 2017; Scheeder, 2018; Vargas and Lee, 2018). All these studies, however, conclusively stated that the successful implementation of

sustainable development largely depends on an efficient information service to all parts of the society or community. Community library can serve very well for this purpose.

Sustainable development is a multidimensional process and its all dimensions are relevant to each other. Addressing the development challenges needs to address all types of rights- social, political, economical, cultural, civil and informational. The investigation disclosed in this literature review identify the need for further research into others dimension of sustainable development addressing by community library. Though the studies reviewed in this paper identified few areas of development addressed by community library, overall, they paid less attention to address sustainable rural development challenges through community library. The present study mainly focused on the rural community library, the future research may be undertaken on the community library in general.

Conclusion

Information is a key enabler of achieving sustainable development goal. Information poverty is a barrier on the way of promoting sustainable development. Thus, information poverty alleviation is badly needed for sustainable development. Reducing information poverty, rural community library can contribute a lot for sustainable development. Sustainable development is impossible without alleviating of information poverty and effective alleviation of information poverty is about impossible without community library. Rural community libraries play very vital role in reducing social exclusion around the world. Rural community library is truly the hub of the rural and disadvantaged community for providing necessary information and knowledge that could enable them to promote sustainable development.

Significance of the study

The study will encourage the stakeholders to give more emphasis on the rural community library's development throughout the world. It will also encourage the user communities to utilize the potentials of rural community libraries in their information needs and sustainable development. It is expected that the study will contribute to add a literature in the Library and Information Science field. Although there are a number of studies regarding this, this is the first one of its kind in Bangladesh.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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