

Chapter 14

Harnessing Technology for Providing Knowledge for Development: New Role for Libraries

M. Ishwara Bhatt

Birla Institute of Technology and Science, India

ABSTRACT

Rural poor people particularly in developing countries do not get the knowledge and information which they need for their day to day living. Yet, there are no mechanisms for making this knowledge available. This marginalized sector includes small farmers, fishermen, micro-entrepreneurs, small businessmen, unemployed youth etc. They need information for day to day life, such as daily weather forecast, market prices of agricultural produce, how to treat a crop disease, where to get application for the policemen's vacancies, addresses of local masonry persons, etc. Local content is what is most important. Many times, such information is available freely, but the needy person does not get it because of lack of awareness. Such information has to be collected on daily basis from the right sources such as agricultural departments, meteorology offices, bank branches, primary health centers or wholesale markets. The information has to be disseminated through the fastest media such as Internet, community radio, loudspeakers, community newspapers or interactive meetings. Libraries need to work closely with the various agencies, both in government and private sectors and the civil society in order to find out the knowledge requirements of the poor and research into how to package it and deliver efficiently. The chapter gives examples of successful knowledge initiatives for the poor in five countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Nepal, and Malawi.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-767-1.ch014

INTRODUCTION

Importance of knowledge for development is increasingly being stressed for the past more than a decade. One of the first comprehensive publications to appear on this subject was *Knowledge for Development* brought out by World Bank in the year 1999 (World Bank, 1999). The theme of the book is that the major cause of poverty in the present day is lack of access to knowledge by the poor. The book gives numerous examples of how the lives of millions of poor people changed with improved access to knowledge.

This paper is about knowledge needs of rural poor and how libraries can play an effective role. I have given a few case studies to illustrate the point. I have selected this topic because South Asia is home to a half of the world's poor and about 70% of South Asians live in rural areas (World Bank, 2009; "SAARC Regional Poverty Profile (RPP)," 2003).

In this context it is relevant to describe the Millennium Development Goals set by UN and how libraries can play an active role in this. Millennium Development Goals are spelt out below:

- i. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- ii. Achieve universal primary education;
- iii. Promote gender equality and empower women;
- iv. Reduce child mortality;
- v. Improve maternal health;
- vi. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- vii. Ensure environmental sustainability;

- viii. Develop a global partnership for development.

(United Nations, 2005)

The UN has set specific and measurable objectives for each of the above objectives which are to be achieved by 2015.

LIBRARIES VIS-À-VIS DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Though libraries provide knowledge to the people, their role in the development process is in the indirect way. The primary role of our libraries in socio economic development of a country is through literacy advancement and therefore, the effect is in the long run. This is because the libraries are planned to meet the needs of literate population whereas the knowledge and information needs of illiterate and poor sector are not integrated in the library setup. Libraries contain generic information which are mainly used by students, academics, professionals or general public. Our libraries do not contain dynamic information which are required by the poor people of developing countries. Let us take for instance, the information requirements of a farmer.

These are the kinds of information which a poor person needs for his/her day to day living. The information changes on day to day basis (sometimes even on hourly basis) and therefore, it is dynamic. A poor farmer's or fisherman's or laborer's earning for the day is decided by the above kind of information. Though there are many agencies in the governmental/non governmental sector which

Table 1.

<p>Information requirements of farmers - examples Meteorological information relating to local area; Market prices for produces; Government schemes for the poor; Cattle and feeds; Agricultural information (Disease control; Paddy cultivation methods); Availability of vaccines and medicines in health centers; Wages fixed by government; Rules and regulations of employment exchanges; Yellow pages (addresses of doctors, government officials, carpenters, masonry people etc); Bus timings; Availability of food grains in the fair price shop; Fish segregation over the coast etc .</p>

11 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/harnessing-technology-providing-knowledge-development/42747

Related Content

Multimedia Digital Library as Intellectual Property

Hideyasu Sasaki and Yasushi Kiyoki (2005). *Design and Usability of Digital Libraries: Case Studies in the Asia Pacific* (pp. 238-253).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/multimedia-digital-library-intellectual-property/8141

The Issue of 'Orphan' Works in Digital Libraries, Especially as Treated by the Directive 2012/28

Maria-Daphne Papadopoulou (2012). *International Journal of Digital Library Systems* (pp. 26-53).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-issue-of-orphan-works-in-digital-libraries-especially-as-treated-by-the-directive-201228/99593

A Unified Algorithm for Identification of Various Tabular Structures from Document Images

Sekhar Mandal, Amit K. Das, Partha Bhowmick and Bhabatosh Chanda (2011). *International Journal of Digital Library Systems* (pp. 27-54).

www.irma-international.org/article/unified-algorithm-identification-various-tabular/54186

Information Literacy Skills Among Students of Higher Education Institutions With Special Reference to Tamil Nadu

A. Alagu and S. Thanuskodi (2020). *Challenges and Opportunities of Open Educational Resources Management* (pp. 40-62).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/information-literacy-skills-among-students-of-higher-education-institutions-with-special-reference-to-tamil-nadu/258127

Word Segmentation in Indo-China Languages for Digital Libraries

Jin-Cheon Na, Tun Thura Thet, Dion Hoe-Lian Goh, Yin-Leng Theng and Schubert Foo (2009). *Handbook of Research on Digital Libraries: Design, Development, and Impact* (pp. 243-250).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/word-segmentation-indo-china-languages/19887