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The Role of Public Libraries in Local Economic Development in West Bengal

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Abstract:

This paper highlighted on the public library's role in the society as a focal point for local economic development, adapted to the West Bengal. It proposes a re-focusing of public libraries towards the idea of an information centre, to contribute towards local economic development by satisfying the information needs of citizens, small businesses, new entrepreneurs and community institution. This new vision of the public library as an information centre creates greater links and integration between the public library and its local community.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Economic Development, Community Development, Community Information Centre, Information Services etc.

Introduction:

The relationship of public libraries and economic development seems a difficult subject to discuss but a number of studies have proved strong relationship between these two. There are different views about role of public libraries in local economic development of any locality, region or country. Public libraries are lifelong learning institutions which provided information about the community. A larger debate regarding the new model of the public library needed by our society has been taking place over the last few years in international and national meetings in an effort to define the public library's role and to integrate it into the information sector as a main component.

Public libraries and economic development seem an unlikely topic. Some question whether public libraries have a role to play in the economic development of their community. At the same time, there are many views regarding how a public library can contribute towards economic development. In the study of McClure and Bertot (1998), they state that the public

libraries provide a range of economic support in that they bolster the economic prosperity of their communities, contribute to the economic well being of the businesses that surround them, improve the market worth of their communities, support their local economies, benefit local businesses, and they offer highly skilled and often highly technical jobs in an automated environment¹. According to Okiy (2003), this study of the rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in development process². Deshpande (2000) conducted the study the importance of public libraries in developing countries and has pointed out the salient characteristics of a public library and grass root services³. Almeida Junior (1997), state that to makes clear,public libraries needed to demonstrate their social usefulness in order to increase their share in the distribution of funds set aside for culture, which for economic and political reasons, were not growing at the same rate as cultural institutions' needs⁴.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study were to:

- To understand the relationship between public libraries and local economic development;
- To describe the role of public libraries in local economic development;
- Describe the role of public libraries in Community Development; and
- Find out future role of public libraries local economic development.

Methodology:

Methodology is a way to systematically solve the problem. It is a science of studying how research is done scientifically. Researches notonly need to know the techniques which have,are to apply but also they need to know whichof these techniques or methods should beadopted. In recent years several studies havebeen made to find out the use of documentsby the users, and to assess their informationneeds. The data for this study have been collected by adopting two techniques namely, Questionnaire Method and Interview Method. To collect the necessary data, the researchers have visited 5public libraries and observethe library situation. The researchers

¹Public library use in Pennsylvania: identifying uses benefits and impacts

²Information for rural development: Challenge for Nigerian rural public libraries

³Public libraries: Community fountain of information, education and culture

⁴Bibliotecaspúblicas e bibliotecasalternativas

got necessary data from librarian such aseconomic benefits to community, job and career resources,educational support for the community, businesses resources etc was got through questionnaire.

Public libraries in West Bengal:

We want to concentrate on the usage or implementation of local economic development in public libraries of West Bengal basically concentrating in north 24 parganas district. West Bengal is divided into 19 districts though two more districts are formed, but still I will consider the 19 districts of West Bengal. Table 1 shows 19 districts of West Bengal with their respective Public libraries out of total public libraries.

Table-1 District wise Public libraries in West Bengal

Districts of West Bengal	Total public libraries
Bankura	130
Birbhum	124
Burdwan	212
Coochbehar	109
Daksindinajpur	57
Darjeeling	99
Hoogly	158
Howrah	136
Jalpaiguri	110
Kolkata	96
Maldah	105
Murshidabad	145
Nadia	110
North 24 parganas	221
Paschimmedinipur	158
Purbamedinipur	121
Purulia	117
South 24 parganas	156
Uttar dinajpur	54

Source: Dept. of Mass Education Extension and Library Services, Govt. of West Bengal

Public libraries in North 24 Parganas:

In this paper we will concentrate in the district of North 24 Parganas with the main focus on 5 town libraries in detail. In table-2 we can see that the name of 5 town libraries with their respective address, year of establishment and collection of books.

Table-2:

Public libraries in North 24 Parganas

Sl. No.	Name of Library	Name of Library Address	Established year	Total collection
1	Kancharapara Municipal Town Library (KMTL)	NetajiSubhas Path, P.O.-Kancharapara, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Pin. - 743145	1981	11153
2	TaraguniaBinapaniPathagar(TBP)	Vill. + P.O.-Taragunia, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Pin. - 743401	1957	19422
3	NaihatiBamkimPathagar(NBP)	5, AtalBihariSarkar Road, P.O.-Naihati, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Pin. - 743165	1935	24424
4	ChanakPathagar(CL)	P.O.- Talpukur, Dist.: North 24 Parganas , Kolkata - 700123	1938	11727
5	Ramprasad Town Library (RTL)	3/3/3, Shibergali, Ghosh Para Road, P.O.-Halishahar, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Pin. 743134	1961	20000

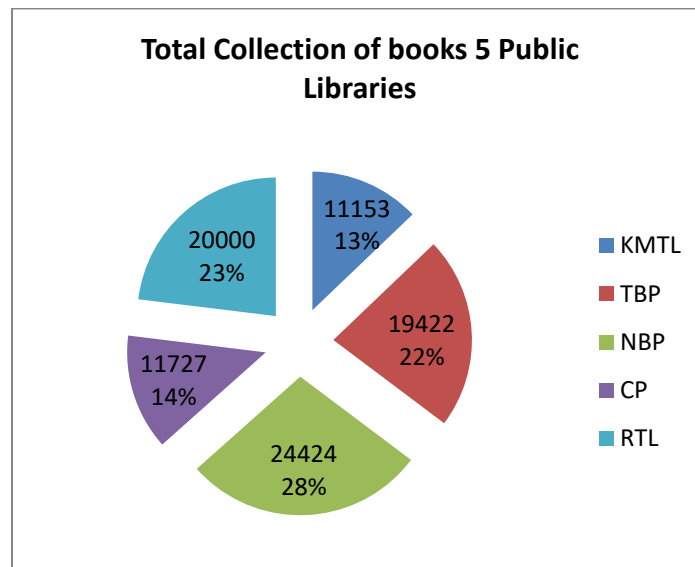


Figure-1 Percentage of collection of books

Needs of Information:

Information needs of people require assistance for the following types of information:

- Education
- Employment
- Health
- Self-Employment
- Financial assistance
- Government programmes
- Legal aids
- Social welfare
- Cottage industries
- Housing
- Local and political news

These information needs may vary from one to another in their daily life.

The Role of Public Libraries

Public libraries are providing information, advice and guidance to job seekers and other in the local community. The study enclosed three areas of library activity that directly or indirectly contributes to economic activity:

- Learning and skills
- Enterprise
- Economic 'well-being'

Learning and Skills

- **ICT learning:**

Public libraries provide for people who want to learn basic IT skills. Receiving the ICT training they will flourish their economic development in future. In this era skill training is very essential for the learner.

- **Young people's learning:**

It is closely related with the local various types of educational institution and community enterprises. Due to these their job facilities increased day after day.

Enterprise

- **Basic business information**

It is the dominant factor of the term. The public libraries deliver the job seeking community appropriate information of the job market. Giving the apt information of the skill world all the learners will benefited with the worldwide.

- **Value-added services**

It is an important service of the public library is used to expand the knowledge which is not available in the contemporary period. All the new aspects of the modern ITC are delivered to the learners and they will be enriched to the world which was not presented in the information bank.

- **Invention and entrepreneurship**

Public libraries provide a cherished space for supporting inventions that could, with the right support, lead to economically important innovations. Public library and non-commercial, neutral environment of the library helps to give inventors the assurance that their ideas will not be oppressed.

Economic Well-being

Economic well-being is the third arena of public libraries. It contributes to economic activity – provision of information about issues and services that inspired the quality of life in the locality. In this area, libraries act as ‘information hubs’ providing information on health issues, crime, the environment and the local area.

- **Health:**

The public libraries information supports the health and hygiene of the local community.

- **Crime prevention:**

A collection of library and library information's are provided about the exiting crime system which is reducing and preventing crime factor in the community. Consequently free power of thinking and activities will be increased as the community will be developed.

- **Environmental improvement:**

Public libraries are demonstrated and make the people awaken about the environmental factors of the learners such as agriculture, industry, education and the professionals due to the information.

- **Marketing:**

In terms of the place marketing, public libraries are providing information to tourists, local attractions and accommodation and finally for people or businesses considering relocating in the locality.

Problems and Prospects

1. Funding is a major impediment for public libraries.
2. The people the public libraries are meant to serve are generally not fully aware of the importance of having a public library in the community.
3. Most reading materials in public libraries are outdated.
4. It is vital for library staff to receive constant training. It is important for them to build capacity that will increase their productivity.

Regardless of all these challenges faced by public libraries in West Bengal, there is still bright at the end of the tunnel. This brings a hint of hope that very soon public libraries will receive the much desired attention they deserve to serve their communities more effectively.

Findings:

- I. Public libraries believe they contribute to the economic activity of their localities.
- II. Public libraries are motivated about their future role in the economy and want to do more over the next few years.
- III. Public libraries are the 'information hubs' of the local community providing a wide range of information and services to promote the quality of life in the locality.
- IV. The public libraries' role in all these locality of economic significance is undervalued.

Conclusion:

The public library plays an important strong contribution to develop the wealth of the community. The public libraries performed the different economic activities to develop the community. Dissemination of knowledge maintained the sustained able development of the learner. Public library's health is directly attached to the economic success of the community; the library may be motivated by self-interest as well as an interest in community service.

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