

**INFORMATION SUPPORT SERVICES OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT
LIBRARIES IN BANGLADESH**

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ABSTRACT

Explores the major information systems and services of rural development libraries in Dhaka, Comilla and Bogra districts in Bangladesh. Discusses the situation of these rural development libraries due to the revolution and the advancement made in the information communication technology. Identifies the tools and techniques used in different functional unit of these libraries in order to meet the growing information needs of the rural Bangladeshis. Presents the various problems encountered by these libraries during the period of providing their services and recommends ways for their further development.

Keywords: Rural development libraries; Library services; Information services; Bangladesh

BACKGROUND

In a country with an agro-based rural economy such as Bangladesh, the rural development can play a major role in expanding the economic base of the nation. Information is considered as an important component in the strategy for the promotion of economic and social development and for the improvement of the economic and social life of the rural community in Bangladesh (Uddin, 1999). As information is vital in strategic planning for rural economic development, having quick and easy access to this information is considered very important. In order to provide information quickly and timely, the rural development libraries are playing an important role in the different areas of Bangladesh. These libraries are such as the Bangladesh Agricultural University Library, in Mymensingh; Akhter Hammeed Khan Library of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), in Comilla; the Rural Development Training Institute Library, Sylhet; Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) Library, Dhaka; the Rural Development Academy (RDA) Library, Bogra; the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) Library; Centre for International Rural Development Advanced Programme

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(CIRDAP) Library; the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Library; the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) Library; and the Social Science Research Council Library. The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) libraries such as Grameen Trust Library and the Community Development Library (CDL) as well as the Rural Information Resource Centre (RIRC), Ayesa Abed Library of BRAC Centre or BRAC University Library, Proshika Library, Gono Shahajja Sangstha Library, and Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS) Library have also become major providers of information and they have a crucial role in the process of rural development by providing appropriate information for the majority who reside in rural areas.

OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

The basic objectives of the study are to: a) explore the functions and activities of major rural development libraries in Bangladesh; b) identify the tools and techniques used for the information services; and c) highlight the obstacles or problems for better services of the libraries surveyed.

Since the study was aimed to explore the diverse service delivery patterns, six libraries were selected from the existing structures of library and information services to rural communities in Bangladesh. As most of the rural information institutions and libraries are based in Dhaka city, four libraries in Dhaka city, and another two from Comilla and Bogra district were sampled in this study. The libraries are as follows:

1. Akhter Hameed Khan Library of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Comilla
2. Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) Library
3. Rural Development Academy (RDA) library, Bogra
4. Community Development Library (CDL)
5. Ayesa Abed Library of BRAC Center/BRAC University
6. Grameen Trust Library

A structured questionnaire was used to collect information on the existing functions, activities, facilities, use and applications of Information Communication Technology (ICT), as well as the staff, collections, users groups, subject area and library financial support. The questionnaire was distributed to the librarians or the Documentation or Information Officers of the libraries.

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THE LIBRARIES

Akhter Hameed Khan Library of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD)

BARD was established in 1959 and is situated in Comilla, about 90 km from the capital city. The library started off as a documentation section in 1965 with a view to collect and organize materials produced by the Academy's research and other divisions. The library was subsequently renamed as Akhter Hameed Khan Library (Ahmed, 1994). The library provides services mostly to teachers, students, development workers, NGO activists, Union Parishad (UP) Members, UP Chairman, United Nations Organization (UNO), and government officers.

Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) Library

BRDB is the largest government organization for developing socio-economic condition and living standard of the rural mass. To reduce the poverty level of the rural poor and bring a total development, it organizes these people through formal and informal organizations, and encourages them to accumulate their own capital through small deposits. It conducts training on human development education, health, sanitation, family planning, and environmental pollution. It also creates self-employment opportunities for the poor and assetless people by providing them with micro-credits to invest in productive activities (Annual Report 2001-2002). BRDB Library was established in 1973 with a view to provide information services on rural development, human development, education, health, environment, and employment opportunities for the rural poor.

Rural Development Academy (RDA) Library, Bogra

The Rural Development Academy (RDA), Bogra was established in June 1974 as a specialized national institution for training, research and action research related to rural development. It is located 16 kilometers away from Bogra town by the Asian Highway towards Dhaka City. It is an autonomous institution governed by a Board of Governors. The Minister for Rural Development and Co-operatives Division of the Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development (M/O LGRD) & Co-operatives is the Chairman, and the Director General is the Member Secretary of the Board. Since rural development is multi-disciplinary in nature, the faculty of RDA is composed of different academic disciplines. The Library was also established in June 1974 in order to provide library and information services among the officers, staff, faculty members, researchers and the trainees of the Academy. The Library serves the Academy members, officers, staff, trainees, and researchers; as well as

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NGO activists, development workers, government officers and students of the Independent University Bangladesh (IUB).

Community Development Library (CDL)

CDL is a non-government development organization, established in 1980 with the mission of delivering development information to activists and organizations who are committed to promoting sustainable development, gender equity, social justice, human rights and community education. CDL was founded to cater to the need of the development agencies and the social workers. Its main thrusts are to:

- a) provide development literature to concerned persons and organizations;
- b) facilitate social research on wide ranging issues by arranging information and reference materials;
- c) develop information communication through a network of urban and rural resources / information centers using both print and audio-visuals methods;
- d) carry out investigative reports/action research in order to provide input to planners and policy makers;
- e) raise information awareness through publications, workshops, seminars, study circles and networking activities;
- f) promote development initiative of different grassroots groups and organizations through advisory service, training and logistic support and introducing those initiatives to the larger audience through publications / videos;
- g) work as a clearing house for all non-governmental initiatives through information sale centre.

Ayasa Abed Library of BRAC Center / BRAC University

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Center Library in Dhaka City was established in 1983 to disseminate information among the users who are interested to work for rural development, and help people who are directly or indirectly involved in BRAC. BRAC Centre library has been transformed into the BRAC University Library and named as Ayasa Abed Library of BRAC University.

Grameen Trust Library

Grameen Trust conducts research programmes on poverty alleviation, and is committed to research aimed at transforming the lives of the poor and the powerless. The Grameen Trust Library was established in 1995 aiming at developing creative ways of communicating research findings directly to the poor, and disseminating research findings to the policy makers and the broader academic community. The specific objectives of the program include:

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- a) defining a research agenda for Bangladesh, that is relevant to the socially excluded, in terms of their problems and constraints;
- b) funding research that contributes to and understand the lives of the marginalized and which promotes poverty alleviation and empowerment of sub-ordinate groups.

FINDINGS

In general, the rural development libraries' collection consists of materials agriculture, economics, rural development, and the specific subject coverage corresponds to each parent organization's missions and unique programmes. Akhter Hameed Khan Library of BARD, being the oldest library, has the largest collection among the others (Table 1)

Table 1: Subject Coverage and the Total Collection of the Libraries

Library	Total Collection	Subject Coverage
Akhter Hameed Khan Library of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD)	60,700	Agriculture, Women & Gender, Rural development, Poverty, Credit and micro-credit, Social Science, Education.
Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) Library	7,000	Rural development. Economics, Agriculture, Management, Administration, Poverty alleviation, Women's empowerment, Literature
Rural Development Academy (RDA) library	22,300	Rural development, Agriculture, Local government, Economics, Women in Development, Sociology, Anthropology, Human Rights, Statistics, Education, Social Welfare, Literature of English and Bengali.
Community Development Library (CDL)	25,000	Rural development, Women, Environment, Children, Health, Agriculture, Disable Person, Floods, Human Rights, Trade and commerce
Ayesa Abed Library of BRAC Center/BRAC University	12,500	Computer Science, Business Studies, Economics, Economics, Development Studies, Bangladesh Studies, English Language and Literature, Law, Mathematics, Architecture, Rural Development, Human Resource Development.
Grameen Trust Library	6,000	Gender and women development, Health and Nutrition, Environment, Economics, Micro Credit, Arsenic, Poverty and Poverty Alleviation

When asked on the adequacy of collection, in terms of size and content, three libraries considered that their library resources were almost adequate; on the other hand, another three respondents indicated the library resources as inadequate (Table 2). While the survey shows a reasonable level of adequacy with the library collection, survey responses demonstrate a need for ongoing collection development in terms of size and content to meet users' information needs.

Table 2: Adequacy of Collection (n=6)

Responses	No. of Libraries
Almost adequate	3
Inadequate	3
Poor	-
Total	6

Table 3 reveals that all rural development libraries in this survey provide reference services; five libraries offer Current Awareness Services (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and reprographic services respectively; four libraries render inter-library loan, and indexing and abstracting services; two libraries provide newspaper clipping services; and only one library provides content-page services, bibliographical services and computerized information services. In terms the extent of service utilization, four libraries reported that the services they provide are completely being utilized and another two libraries said that their services are partially being utilized.

Table 3: Services Provided by the Rural Development Libraries (n=6)

Services	No. of libraries providing the services
Reference Services	6
Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) Services	5
Current Awareness Services (CAS)	5
Inter-library Loan services	4
Indexing and abstracting services	4
Reprographic Services	5
Bibliographical services	1
Newspaper clipping Services	2
Content-page services	1
Computerized services	1

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The libraries also reported that none of the services they provide are fully automated. Most libraries indicated that their services are partly computer-based. One library reported that its services are still manually operated. The study reveals that only five libraries have computer facilities and they use the computer for information storage and retrieval functions, and clerical and administrative works (Table 4). Only one library automates its reference services.

Table 4: Present Usage of Computers

Purpose	No. of Libraries Utilizing Computers for this Purpose
Storage and retrieval of rural information	5
Reference Services	1
Clerical and administrative works	5

There are a few ways by which materials are acquired by a library. However, the main method used by the rural development libraries in this study are direct purchase from local bookshops (3), followed by inviting vendors' quotations (2) and appointing vendors (1) (Table 5).

Table 5: Methods of Acquisition of Library Resources (n=6)

Main Method	No. of Libraries
By inviting quotations	2
Appointing vendors	1
Purchase from local bookshop	3

Periodicals are an important source of information for the patrons of the rural development libraries as they are often the most current source of information on a topic. All the libraries subscribe to both local and foreign periodicals; four libraries make their subscription through agents, one library subscribes direct from publishers and another library subscribes from both publishers and through agents (Table 6). As periodicals subscriptions represent an ongoing budgetary commitment, that each decision to subscribe to a periodical is carefully evaluated by the libraries and it was reported that the number of periodicals acquired by the rural development libraries in Bangladesh mostly depends upon the:

- a) Financial resources of the library.
- b) Research and teaching activities carried out by the institution.
- c) Demand of rural information from the library users.

Table 6: Methods of Subscription to Local and Foreign Periodicals

Main Method	No. of Libraries
Direct from publishers	1
Through agents	4
Both from and through agents	1

The director of the Library or the Chief Librarian is responsible for requesting library funding each fiscal year. A specific amount is requested for each library's budget. Three libraries in this study receive money financial support from the Government of Bangladesh. Another three libraries receive grants from international and national donors and they also allocate the funds from their own budget (Table 7). It is also worth noting that these libraries are facing the problems of inadequate funding. Due to the increasing cost of information resources and the low level of library financial support makes it difficult for the individual library to provide better service based solely on its own collection.

Table 7: Financial Support and Sources for the Rural Development Libraries

Library	International Agency	Government	Donors	Own Budget
Akhter Hameed Khan library of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD)	√	√	X	√
Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) Library	X	√	X	√
Rural Development Academy (RDA) library	X	√	X	√
Community Development Library (CDL)	√	X	√	√
Ayesa Abed Library of BRAC Center/BRAC University	X	X	X	√
Grameen Trust Library	√	X	√	√

To locate and find out the information easily, a proper classification of library resources is essential, as a systematic arrangement will lead to a maximum use of the library collections. The findings on the usage of classification tools reveal that five libraries use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) scheme and one particular library does not utilize any classification scheme at all to manage its library

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collections. However, all rural development libraries surveyed adhere to the Anglo American Cataloguing Rules 2nd edition (AACR2) to catalogue their library resources. To efficiently charge out and keep track of all items in circulation, four libraries still manually issue library materials through the register / card system; and two libraries have been using an automated library system.

The importance of library staff is demonstrated in that library users usually make high use of library staff for assistance in finding information. Despite somewhat mixed views on the ambience and services of the libraries, it is generally agreed that library staff play a key role in creating a favourable impressions on library users. Without skilled and qualified staff, it is not possible to disseminate information properly and to run the library efficiently. Table 8 presents the status of the library staff at the rural development libraries. Staffing is an acute problem in rural development libraries in Bangladesh. Only two libraries expressed that their present staff is sufficient to meet the information needs of their users and to efficiently run the library. The majority of the rural development libraries have no sufficient staff due to lack of funds and proper initiative of the concerned authority.

Table 8: Status of the Library Staff at the Rural Development Libraries

Library	Professional	Semi-professional	Non professional	Total
Akhter Hameed Khan library of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD)	2	1	11	14
Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) Library	1	0	2	3
Rural Development Academy (RDA) library	4	0	8	12
Community Development Library (CDL)	3	53	0	56
Ayesa Abed Library of BRAC Center/BRAC University	1	0	5	6
Grameen Trust Library	1	0	0	1
Total	12	54	26	92

Enthusiasm to Build a Resource Sharing Network

Networking is very much essential to meet the present demand and requirements of information users. Most of the rural development libraries have realized this truth. The majority of these libraries (5) are very much enthusiastic to build and connect an information network of rural development libraries, which they feel should be able to disseminate and share information resources among different rural development libraries, government and non-government organizations, training institutes and academies and exchanging of network organizations' publications among the rural development libraries. Only one library is not willing to do so because as the respondent has a vague idea about the benefits of information network.

Problems Identified

During the study, it is observed that these rural development libraries have been facing some common obstacles in providing information services to their stakeholders. The major problems are as follows:

- a) Lack of professional and adequate staff: Most of the staff of the libraries surveyed is non-professional. A librarian to them, is also considered as a non-professional.
- b) Lack of adequate ICT facilities and information resources: All of the rural development libraries have no adequate ICT facilities and adequate resources for proper information services to the users.
- c) Lack of proper authoritative initiative: The Government and the concerned authorities are not taking proper initiative, efforts and plan to develop the rural development libraries in Bangladesh.
- d) Lack of infrastructural facility: This is the common problem of all the rural development libraries in Bangladesh, and very much noticeable among the samples in this the study.
- e) Lack of indigenous software: Only the Ayesa Abed Library is using in-house software; others are using the CDS/ISIS software. So these libraries have also obstacles of indigenous software that should be available to all of the libraries.
- f) Social dignity of the profession: In general, not only the library staff of the rural development library but also all the staff of the library profession in Bangladesh, are regarded as a negligible profession. So the proper dignity of the profession should be provided from the heart of the library users and the society.

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Programmes of Actions

Considering the existing situation of the rural development libraries in Bangladesh, the following recommendations are put forwarded which call for changes in the provision of library and information services:

- a) Professional staff should be appointed and those who are semi and non-professional should be trained up.
- b) The library staffs who are already working in those libraries should improve their ideas, thoughts and knowledge about ICT.
- c) Social dignity of the library professionals should be established.
- d) Proper infrastructural facilities should be provided for the better information services of the rural community.
- e) The Government and the concerned authority should pay proper attention and allocate sufficient funds to support and develop the information services of rural development libraries, and should establish plans to make IT resources and other library materials available to the rural development libraries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Information for rural development can be synonymously termed as information for rural people. The rural development information systems and services in Bangladesh are playing a vital role at providing rural information support services to develop the rural community. Moreover, these systems and services have improved the socio-economic status of the rural poor, as well as the rural society. So the quality of rural information systems and services should continually be upgraded and the library professions should adopt themselves to ICT. In this regard, the rural development libraries and information systems will need maximum support from the government and the community in order to be well-equipped with the modern technology and to solve the existing problems easily. If proper facilities, adequate IT resources and special training are provided for them, they will serve the rural society more effectively and efficiently. So the government, the community and the authority concerned should take proper initiative for the overall development of the rural development information systems so that the system can be regarded as an indispensable agency for improving the life style of the rural community and as an important apparatus in building a good nation.

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