

Role and importance of public libraries in sharing the cooperative activity of managing indigenous knowledge with special reference to Sri Lanka: A framework for the advancement

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Abstract

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is the knowledge, experience derived and existed upon for the wellbeing of a particular community or culture, and its special characteristics are the sustainability, environmental friendliness and the practical validity. Indigenous knowledge contained in palm leaf manuscripts, with aural traditions, practices, belief systems, printed and non-printed sources, folk norms and virtues. It is diverse in the areas of religion, indigenous medicine, myths, agriculture and farming, language and literature, art and crafts, rite and rituals. The principal objective of this paper is to study the role and importance of public libraries in sharing the cooperative activity of managing indigenous knowledge with special reference to Sri Lanka and to suggest a framework the advancement of this subject. Managing indigenous knowledge is a cumbersome and multiparty task which need more cooperation within the stakeholder communities like the government, ministries, universities, relevant government and private organizations, expert persons, bureaucrats, policy makers and policy planers, the communities involving IK, educational establishments. However, the libraries specially the public libraries can be a stakeholder in the sense of managing IK particularly the selection, collection, organization, packaging and the dissemination of information. In this respect, public libraries have a leading role to play and to serve as the center of excellence of sharing a cooperative role in managing IK.

Method used was a mix approach with participatory observation, literature review, and expert group discussions. IK is not available island wide. It is located in certain places in the country. Since there is a good public library system in Sri Lanka, it is much suitable if the librarians in concerned libraries where IK is situated amply can involve with managing IK with other stakeholders. The concerned Public Librarians can identify the type of IKs available and should take the direct and indirect support from the Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabha's. The Library development Committee and the Readers' Club or Society can play a leading role in this context. With the support of Grama Sevaka Niladharis and Community Development Officers the Librarians can do a very cooperative role in this context. It is much better to identify what are the most essential and fitting type of IK for the region at first and secondarily the other types of IKs.

In this respect, the Librarians can maintain a list of IKs in the area, list of local IK owned persons like indigenous medicinal practioners and so on. The possible framework should consist with the National Library of Sri Lanka (NLS), relevant ministries, government and NGOs all concerned public libraries. The NLS should be the central coordinating agency of this framework.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Public Libraries, Information Management, Library services, National Libraries