Library Landscape Assessment of Bangladesh  
Brief Report  | May 2015

The Library Landscape Assessment of Bangladesh is the most comprehensive and in-depth study of Library and Information Services (LIS) ever undertaken in Bangladesh. The study was commissioned by the British Council, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, BRAC and the Bengal Foundation. The Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) carried out the research and analysis tasks of the study.

Public libraries are at a turning point. The way we access and consume information has changed dramatically in the 21st century, and this presents major challenges and opportunities for public library systems across the world. Public libraries, a long-established source of knowledge, continue to be left behind in both government and non-government initiatives to promote access and the right to information.

However, innovative global and local library initiatives and their positive impact have reemphasized the need for more investment in public libraries. In this context, this study explores both the information needs of the people of Bangladesh and the current LIS provision within the country. The ultimate aim is to identify the opportunities and challenges that exist within the sector, and recommend how to make radical improvements to the situation across the country.

Objectives of the study

a) To explore the information needs of the people of Bangladesh; to assess the current effectiveness of public libraries and information centres in providing public access to meet those needs; to assess current perceptions about public libraries; and to identify what is needed to improve the libraries.

b) To assess the current status and capacity of LIS in Bangladesh; to assess the effectiveness of library staff in facilitating public access; and to understand government’s policies and prioritization in effecting improvement.

c) To assess the current availability of information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support access to information in LIS; to survey government and non-government initiatives for ICT development, connectivity and access to information through LIS; and to indicate prospects for further expansion of public access.

Scope of the study

The focus of the study is to improve public libraries. However, to take lessons from the wide range of public information sources, the definition of LIS for this study goes beyond the 68 government public libraries that exist in Bangladesh. This study uses a definition of LIS that includes public venues for accessing books and other print and digital contents, whether physically or virtually. Venues explored in this study include government as well as community, private and NGO-run public libraries, information centers, cybercafés and rural telecenters.

Research design

This study has undertaken a multifaceted yet inter-connected research approach, using the following methods: desk research and literature review; key informant interviews (KII); exploratory research using grounded theory approach; survey of households, and users, operators and librarians of LIS; online campaign; and case studies of best practice.
Everyone needs information

However, only
1 to 2% of people find this information in libraries

Library usage is increasing
84% of libraries are now used at least monthly.

Libraries have positive impact
99% of library users find libraries useful for daily life or study.
60% of libraries are essential.
30% of libraries are very important.

Libraries are useful for female users
71% of female users think libraries help in daily living.
74% think libraries are important.
69% think libraries help in making better life choices.

Libraries lack ICT facilities for the public
78% of libraries have computers.
44% of libraries have Internet connections.
51% of libraries are interested in the public.
64% of libraries need better ICT facilities.

Modernization needs to be ICT-based
63% of libraries think libraries need to be technologically modern.
86% of libraries want improved computer facilities.
85% of libraries want better Internet connectivity.
43% of libraries need to modern ICT facilities for serious challenges.

There is a demand for non-traditional services
25% of library users want Library computers.
13% of library users wantLibrary Internet.
28% of library users want to use computers in a library.
14% of library users want to browse Internet in a library.
44% of library users want to use Library computers.
38% of library users want more bookshelves.

Librarians prefer multipurpose library
64% of librarians want to extend community services.
60% of librarians want to make food available.

Children’s corner needs improvement
59% of librarians think the space is too small.
65% of librarians feel the space is too small.
74% of librarians think libraries do not have enough facilities.
75% of librarians think libraries should have more bookshelves.

Libraries are convenient
88% of library users think libraries are convenient.
20% of library users think they are easy.

Libraries are easily identifiable
70% of libraries have branches.
83% of libraries are located in the center of the town.
73% of libraries have well-known names.

In general, libraries do not have Wi-Fi
75% of library users think they are very important for libraries.
64% of libraries do not have Wi-Fi.
41% of libraries have LCD TVs.
59% of libraries do not have windows.

49% of libraries are not satisfied with their services.
59% of libraries are satisfied with their services.

Availability of books is an issue
44% of libraries do not have sufficient books.
41% of libraries have a variety of books.
59% of libraries do not have enough books.
21% of libraries do not have books at all.

25% of libraries think the lack of space is a major obstacle.
75% of libraries are seriously disappointed with their services.

5% of libraries think the lack of space is a minor obstacle.
25% of libraries think the lack of space is not a problem.

20% of libraries think they have enough books.
70% of libraries have branches.
83% of libraries are located in the center of the town.
73% of libraries have well-known names.

49% of libraries are not satisfied with their services.
59% of libraries are satisfied with their services.

Available resources

Libraries are not yet to serve everyone
6% of household respondents use libraries.
73% of library users are students.
65% of library users are compliant at least high school education.
60% of library users have access to public libraries.

43% of library users think libraries are not technologically modern.
86% of libraries want improved computer facilities.
85% of libraries want better Internet connectivity.
43% of libraries need more ICT facilities for serious challenges.

Librarians demand training and higher investment
25% of librarians think training is a challenge.
25% of librarians think the lack of funds is a challenge.
92% of librarians think lack of training is a challenge.
40% of librarians think lack of training is a challenge.
52% of librarians want more modern facilities.
62% of librarians want more training.
66% of librarians want more funds.
25% of librarians think lack of funds is a challenge.

64% of libraries do not have proper equipment.
41% of libraries have LCD TVs.
59% of libraries do not have windows.
21% of libraries do not have books.

25% of libraries think lack of space is a major obstacle.
75% of libraries are seriously disappointed with their services.

49% of libraries are not satisfied with their services.
59% of libraries are satisfied with their services.

Vision for libraries in Bangladesh

For the people
In order to make libraries truly public, libraries need to target beyond the educated middle-class. Service and resource planning need to address the information needs of all groups of people - irrespective of gender, age, education, or other socially constructed classes.

Diversified services like early literacy programs for children, multicultural festivals, youth cultural events, learning workshops, book fairs, writing or art competitions, art exhibitions, etc. should be organized.

ICT integrated
ICT and libraries play a complementary role in the information services ecology. Proper ICT-integration can make all aspects of library services and management - from resource sharing to service delivery, and from marketing to internal management - more efficient and popular. Public libraries need to take into account the ICT induced changes in people’s information seeking behavior. ICT facilities need to be improved through increasing the number of computers for public use, better internet connectivity, services automation, digitization, digital content management, inter and intra-library networking and resource sharing with other libraries.

Demand driven
Rather than a supply driven access to information, library services must be designed according to the information demand of the people.

Information needs - both of those at the bottom of the information hierarchy (information for basic survival, skills development, livelihood opportunities) and those at the top (community living, governance and accountability) need to be addressed by information services of libraries.

To facilitate a two-way knowledge transfer between libraries and communities, libraries need to host community events.

Modern infrastructure
The most significant milestone in the changing library landscape is the innovative use of the library as a multipurpose center facilitating various community needs.

A modern library infrastructure thus needs to house various kinds of spaces, beyond just space for reading, for storing books and for staff. A modern and multipurpose library needs to have spaces for exhibitions, spaces for cultural events, facilities that support activities such as conferences and concerts, lively lounges with café, etc.

The modern day library infrastructure, in order to support all these community activities, needs to encourage people to stay longer by making them feel more comfortable through proper lighting, ventilation, refreshment facilities, etc.

Motivated librarians
The challenges facing libraries to comply with modern day demand for multifaceted community services and technical upgradation are critically linked with library staff. Therefore, addressing these challenges will require training them in ICTs as well as in serving the need of diverse user groups, including women and children and those with special needs. Motivating the staff also requires decent financial incentives which is a significant barrier to quality service delivery at present and needs urgent attention.

Gender sensitive
Libraries must keep separate toilet facilities for female users. To encourage female users, reduced membership fees and other service fees, and flexibilities in borrowing and returning resources may be introduced. More importantly, safety of women in public places needs to be ensured.

Mainstreamed
Resource constraints in a least developed country like Bangladesh have long kept libraries outside public investment priorities. Nevertheless, the government aims to build a modern society facilitated by ICT services. From this strategic position, ICT, access to information and education are the current priority investment areas which are very well linked with libraries.

Given the links between these sectors, libraries need to be integrated and mainstreamed into the government’s flagship campaign “Digital Bangladesh” and should be a part of a comprehensive budgetary framework comprising all these sectors.
A Geospatial Survey

The survey was conducted with GPS-enabled tablet computers with real-time online data update. Some of the benefits to this method were:

**Authenticity**: Geo-location monitoring of GPS-enabled tablets ensured enumerators’ actual presence in the venues and households.

**Error free data**: Survey software omitted common and logical errors that happen during data-input, compilation and editing of paper-based survey.

**Geospatial analysis**: Mapping geo-tagged data opened vast potentials of geospatial analysis.

**Enabling micro-level analysis**: Geo-tagged data makes it easier to produce region-specific reports, and can provide venue-specific findings for development programs.

**Key facts about the field survey**

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<th><strong>136 libraries</strong></th>
<th><strong>315 e-centers</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>34 Govt. Public Libraries</td>
<td>32 Cybercafés</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Non-govt. public libraries</td>
<td>59 Other telecenters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 NGO libraries</td>
<td>224 Union Information Service Centers (UISCs)</td>
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- 47 in urban
- 14 in semi-urban
- 75 in rural areas

- 53 in urban
- 85 in semi-urban
- 177 in rural areas

- **136 librarians**: 54 males, 82 females
- **315 e-center operators**: 294 males, 21 females
- **769 library users**: 562 males, 207 females
- **1,280 e-center users**: 1,009 males, 271 females

- **4,585 members of the public** (household survey respondents)
  - > 2,222 males; 2,362 females; 1 other