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Information And Role Of Library

—Alauddin Talukder

"406090".

"What?"

"I said 406090".

"What do you mean?"

"I mean 406090".

"Rubbish, I don't understand".

"It is the telephone number of Mr. Azizur Rahman".

"Oh! of course, yes I am sorry, thank you very much".

So you see, 406090 by itself does not mean anything yet it carries information that one may need.

It is difficult to define information. So far no clear-cut definition is known. In the following, however, an attempt is made only to give an idea of what information is all about.

"Information is an aggregate of facts so organized or a datum so utilized as to be knowledge or intelligence. Information is meaningful data whereas data as such have no intrinsic meaning or significance". And again what is information for one, may not be an information for the other.

So far so good for the concept of information. But why do we need information? In simple words we need correct information for taking correct decisions at various levels of our socio-economic activities with the objective of overall socio-economic development. Information is an essential part of a nation's resources and access to it is one of the basic human rights.

The State tasks of planning decision-making and administration are increasingly dependent on the availability of reliable information which can only be obtained through the systematic organization of this resource. Every State needs short-medium and long-term plans to achieve coordination and cooperation of activities and resources to strengthen the national infrastructures for the benefit of all.

Information is not only a national resource vital for scientific and economic progress but also the medium of social communication. The personal vocational and social development of the individual depends on

the amount, quality and accessibility of information.

INFORMATION POLICY

"A national information policy reflecting the needs of all sectors of the community and of the national community as a whole, should be formulated to guide the establishment of a national information plan whose elements should be fully incorporated in the national development plans"—recommended by the Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures held in Paris from September 23 to September 27 1974.

The formulation and implementation of a national information policy is the only way to ensure that all who are engaged in administrative, educational, scientific, agricultural, population, health and cultural activities have access to the information they need. The policy should cover information needs of both literates and illiterates. In fact more emphasis should be given to the needs of illiterate rural farmers who constitute more than 80 per cent of our population.

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION: Where can we get information? It is another difficult question to answer. There are innumerable sources of getting various types of information. Information exists in many forms; e.g., there is information gained verbally at conferences, that picked up during discussions with colleagues 'know how' i.e. the experience gained during a particular job as well as in the form of books and documents in libraries.

Besides these there are unwritten 'languages' of signs, symbols, signals etc. which also stand for information. In general however information is recorded on written pages of books, magazines, newspapers and documents. The organized collections of these materials are therefore the major sources of information and it is embodied in the library documentation, and archives infrastructures of a country.

DISSEMINATION OF IN-

FORMATION: No matter how the information is obtained, to be useful, however it must be communicated. It is the question of dissemination of the right information to the right person at the right time. Amongst 'mass media' newspaper, television and radio are most important for dissemination of information. But their impact upon our rural poor illiterate people have been very little. Newspaper drops out mainly because of illiteracy while television is limited to the rich and where electric connections are available. Transistor radio is by far the most important mass medium for the dissemination of information in Bangladesh.

But the fact is that even the transistor radios failed to create the desired impact upon our people. A Radio Bangladesh survey in four remote villages shows that out of 2100 respondents of various categories, 91.24% who are mostly farmers have no radio sets of their own. Only 8.76% of them owned radio sets. In our social set up sources of mass media communication like radio appeared to be ineffective in the diffusion of innovations, as there is no significant percentage of people who use radio as a source of information. Formal (government) and informal sources like Field Assistant and fellow villagers respectively are the most important sources of information. In short it can be safely argued that in our social set up government agency sources and personalised communication channels are more effective than the mass media and commercial sources of information. Surprisingly enough, radio tops the mass communication media in Bangladesh. This can perhaps shed a little light on the quality and quantity of information received through this medium. This also gives us an idea how ill informed our people are. Our radio has been campaigning for the family planning and population control for years, but its impact has been almost nil!

In the developed Western countries a network of public

libraries performs a great deal in disseminating information among the general public. But the Western types traditional public libraries may not be suitable for our illiterate masses. It is not that we do not want the traditional public libraries in our country. We do want them and perhaps we will have them ultimately. To enable us have a sound foundation of a library system in the country we perhaps need something else, to begin with, as a prelude to that. To be more specific about the point that I am trying to make a national network of Western type traditional public libraries upto thana/village level is I think, neither desirable (economically) nor wanted at this moment. Because illiterate population will not be able to use them. A time will perhaps come when such traditional libraries will be needed which should be established then according to the needs of the reading community. The relevant matters in this respect may be at this stage, to discuss and study on the potential needs and plan now for the future. Let me add one point here that unless the objectives of the public libraries are fulfilled according to the needs of our people, they (the libraries) will not be able to impress upon our people and it is for this reason I think the vast majority of our population never raised a voice for the public libraries in our country. Why should they? Public libraries ought to be useful for the public in general, but collections of books, journals and magazines in cities and towns only, can never be useful to illiterate village population. Again the irony of the fate is that it is these general public who are in the majority, contribute most towards the establishment and running such 'public libraries' in cities and towns, where neither they live nor use them. The educated citizens who contribute the least use them most. So why should the general public raise a voice for a thing that is not useful for them? And, if a pub-

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